How Pedagogy Makes the Difference in U.S. Schools

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Emerging from the modern U.S. civil rights era, scholars have promoted ethnic and multicultural studies as strategies for improving the educational performance of students who have traditionally been marginalized in classrooms nationwide. Among the most marginalized are students who have experienced historic discrimination because of their racial, ethnic, linguistic, and immigrant status. The student population of United States comprises diverse groups. Marginalization and school failure are highest among African American, Latine, Indigenous, and some Asian students. In this essay, I speak to the necessity of more than curricular changes and explore the more than thirty years of research that addresses the demand to employ pedagogical philosophies and strategies that meet the needs of marginalized students. I conclude by describing the impact of COVID-19 on teaching and learning in underserved communities.

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As far back as the 1930s, scholars recognized the need to address the curriculum distortions, omissions, and misinformation that rendered invisible students who were outside of the so-called mainstream. Historian Carter G. Woodson argued that the school curriculum has an impact on students. In his words,

> The same educational process which inspires and stimulates the oppressor with the thought that he is everything and has accomplished everything worthwhile, depresses and crushes at the same time the spark of genius in the Negro [*sic*] by making him feel that his race does not amount to much and never will measure up to the standards of other peoples.[1]

One of the first parts of the school that activists and civil rights champions attacked was what they called the "Eurocentric curriculum." Even a cursory examination of the U.S. curriculum in the 1960s revealed an erasure of peoples other than mainstream and middle-class whites. Indigenous peoples were rendered invisible after the infamous Trail of Tears, the forced removal of the peoples of the Cherokee, Muskogee, Choctaw, Chickasaw, and Seminole nations from their lands east of the Mississippi River to present-day Oklahoma in 1838 and 1939.

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Black people only made appearances as powerless, voiceless, and enslaved people. People of East Asian descent were described briefly in the context of their arrival to the U.S. west coast through Angel Island in the 1910s, and as the "Yellow Peril" when Japanese Americans were rounded up and interred during World War II. There was virtually no mention of Latine peoples except to discuss the Battle of the Alamo and the Bracero Program that brought them across the U.S. border during the labor shortages that developed during and after World War II.[2]

One of the school-based results of the civil rights era was a broadening of curriculum offerings with the development of programs in Afro-American or Black studies, Chicano studies, Native American or American Indian studies, and Asian American studies. The inclusion of these ethnic studies courses represented hard-fought battles in state and local school districts over curricula. For the most part, these courses were included as electives at the secondary level and sometimes as standalone units of study in both elementary and secondary schools. By the late 1970s and early 1980s, we began to see multi-ethnic and multicultural course offerings that represented a more integrated approach to the curriculum and to combat the trivializing of course content about diverse groups.

Pioneers in the work of multicultural education include scholars such as James A. Banks, Carl A. Grant, Geneva Gay, and Carlos E. Cortes, who published important foundational works about the content that was regularly omitted from most school courses in history, social studies, and literature.[3] Despite a growing number of titles and a seeming demand for multicultural content, this shift was not sufficient to help teachers who were prepared in conventional teacher education programs to weave new topics into their standard curriculum or to teach in ways different from how they taught the mainstream curriculum. Education scholar Larry Cuban argued that the students who struggled with conventional courses in U.S. history continued to struggle in ethnic studies courses that were taught in the same way.[4] Despite the change in curriculum content, students were still expected to read textbooks, listen to lectures, take tests, and write essays and reports.

In the early 1990s, Banks conceptualized what he termed, "the 5 dimensions of multicultural education" to combat the common misconception that multicultural education was something solely appropriate for social studies, English, art, and music classes, but had nothing to do with areas such as mathematics and the sciences.[5] This perception emanated from the idea that multicultural education was merely about content integration: adding content about diverse others into the dominant narrative. Banks went on to explore notions of knowledge construction, prejudice reduction, fostering an empowering school culture and social structure, and equity pedagogy.

Knowledge construction asks teachers to consider how the information they taught was built. For example, why is it that U.S. high school students can easily name the nations of Europe but struggle to recall more than a handful of African

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nations? All nations appear on a world map, but because the curriculum usually depicts Africa as a continent consumed by war, famine, and disease, students rarely consider the individual African nations and their various struggles for independence. Students are often unaware that the maps they use are drawn in ways that depict the United States as located squarely in the middle, even when that requires cartographers to split the nation of China. That rendering depicts the political nature of mapmaking and underscores beliefs about national superiority. The most frequent map projection found in U.S. geography and history textbooks exaggerates the Northern hemisphere, making Greenland inordinately large so that the United States also appears larger in relation to the continents of South America and Africa. The fact that the earth is a sphere means it is impossible to accurately represent it on a flat surface. The Mercator projection was created in the 1500s by cartographer Gerardus Mercator. Although it is widely used because it preserves the shape and directionality of landmasses, it represents Greenland and Africa as approximately the same size. In truth, Africa is about fourteen times the size of Greenland. Indeed, Africa is larger than the Unites States, Canada, and China combined.[6] How we construct the knowledge students learn shapes their understandings and worldviews. Ideas such as the Frontier Thesis, Manifest Destiny, and the Monroe Doctrine are constructed, not "naturally occurring" phenomena. The idea that learners might contest what was previously offered as truth is a part of what multicultural education offers.

Prejudice reduction is the idea that learning about a broad range of facts, concepts, and theoretical perspectives can reduce previously held notions of superiority and inferiority about certain groups. For example, students learning about astronomer and naturalist Benjamin Banneker's mathematics skills, or Shirley Jackson, the Black woman theoretical physicist and former head of the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission, may move away from stereotypes about who can engage in high-level science and mathematics. I have written elsewhere about a sixth-grade classroom where students using an outdated textbook read statements like "the peoples of Nigeria are primitive."[7] Determined to combat this inaccuracy and stereotype, the teacher shared a set of slides of modern-day Lagos, Nigeria, where students saw high-rise buildings, roads jammed with the latest automobiles, and life remarkably like what they experience in U.S. cities.

Another of Banks's dimensions is an empowering school culture. This dimension speaks to the need for multicultural education to transcend individual classrooms. He argued that having only a couple of teachers focus on multicultural education in their classrooms did little to change the messages that schools send about students who have been traditionally marginalized. For example, schools that never acknowledge the import of women, people of color, or immigrants through their assemblies and programs, school lunches, and hiring in strategic positions (that is, beyond janitors and cafeteria workers) keep the racial, ethnic, and

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linguistic hierarchies in place and render the content changes in classrooms less powerful. Students are cognizant of which students are chosen for special honors such as gifted or advanced placement classes, as well as those regularly assigned to discretionary special education programs and who are regularly suspended and expelled from school. In schools that do not foster an empowering school culture, students come to believe that there is something inherent in their racial, ethnic, or linguistic identity that suggests they are worthy (or not worthy) of school-based benefits and privileges.

Finally, Banks's dimensions include what he terms equity pedagogy. In his article with Cherry McGee Banks, they define equity pedagogy as "teaching strategies and classroom environments that help students from diverse racial, ethnic, and cultural groups attain the knowledge, skills, and attitudes needed to function effectively and help create and perpetuate a just, humane, and democratic society."[8] As multicultural education emerged, much of the energy went into correcting curriculum errors and distortions, as well as infusing the school content with broader information from perspectives beyond what was previously available. Curriculum developers and educators paid limited attention to the way we taught students, and how our pedagogical practices might disadvantage the students who were struggling with the older, more Eurocentric curriculum. It is this feature of multicultural education in K–12 schools that I will explore in the remainder of this essay.

I have been researching and writing about what I have termed *culturally relevant pedagogy* for more than thirty years.[9] The genesis for this inquiry came from my observation that, although teachers had access to increasingly diverse curriculum materials such as textbooks, trade books, curriculum units, classroom posters, and decorations, the students from marginalized racial and ethnic groups were continuing to struggle to achieve academic success. These materials were not changing the ways teachers approached teaching. Students as young as eight years old (that is, third graders) often experience lecturing as a dominant form of instruction. Teachers are "telling" students information rather than having them inquire, discuss, and grapple with ideas and concepts.

Despite what was seen in the 1960s and 1970s, curriculum- and instruction-revolution classrooms in the United States remain remarkably similar.[10] According to educator Martin Haberman, many teachers, especially those who work in schools serving the most marginalized students, practice what he termed "the pedagogy of poverty."[11] This teaching consists of a steady routine of "giving information, asking questions, giving directions, making assignments, monitoring seatwork, reviewing assignments, giving tests, reviewing tests, assigning homework, reviewing homework, settling disputes, punishing noncompliance, marking papers, and giving grades."[12]

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The objective of this form of teaching is not to stimulate thinking or produce active learners. Instead, its emphasis is on maintaining order and policing students' bodies. Unfortunately, far too many teachers are rewarded for implementing this strict control. They regularly hear that they are "good teachers" because their students are not out of order. In schools serving poor children of color or those whose first language is not English, this sense of order is prized over academic achievement or student learning, cultural competence, or critical consciousness that might allow students to question an inequitable classroom and social order.

Culturally relevant pedagogy is designed to ensure that students demonstrate academic knowledge, skills, and abilities or, more pointedly, learning, cultural competence, and sociopolitical or critical consciousness.[13] Culturally relevant pedagogy treats these three elements (student learning, cultural competence, and sociopolitical consciousness) as equal components of good teaching. Imagine each aspect as angles or sides of an equilateral triangle: no one side is greater than another, and without all three, there is no triangle.

Student learning is the "coin of the realm" in school-based instruction. We expect students to learn from a relationship with an experienced teacher in conjunction with other learners. Unfortunately, for too many students in the United States, "learning" has been reduced to performance on a yearly standardized achievement test. Often, poorly resourced schools in urban and rural areas produce low achievement test scores related to a variety of variables over which the students and their teachers may have little or no control: inexperienced teachers, inadequate facilities, inferior curriculum materials, poor leadership, high concentrations of poverty linked to housing policies that produce segregation, and the inability of parents and caregivers to fully engage with classrooms and schools. Thus, culturally relevant pedagogy focuses less on the external standards set by achievement tests and more on the growth of students over the course of a year. For example, a student might arrive in a fifth-grade class reading at a second-grade level. However, through the diligent and sometimes extraordinary work of the teacher, the student ends the year reading at the fourth-grade level. According to state-mandated tests, that student is still performing below level. However, the student has demonstrated two years of growth over the span of one academic year. It is difficult to argue that the student did not learn.

Learning in a culturally relevant pedagogy framework is more inclusive and comprehensive than test scores. For example, culturally relevant teachers are looking for not only academic growth, but also instances of developmental, social, and cultural growth among students. Seeing a student become more diligent when completing assignments, or in the organization of their personal items – backpack, notebook, and desk – might signal developmental growth that will be useful as the student progresses through subsequent grades. A student who learns to self-regulate his anger and uses words instead of physical aggression is another

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example of learning that a culturally relevant teacher looks for. Seeing a student persist after they began the year easily frustrated with difficult tasks is another example of growth that matters to a culturally relevant teacher. These individual markers are combined with external measures like test scores.

Culturally relevant pedagogy allows for a variety of evaluative measures. Students might create digital records of what they have accomplished and present a video, an electronic poster, or a multimedia presentation. Culturally relevant teachers will encourage students to use a wide range of subject areas to demonstrate their knowledge. Students might give a hip-hop presentation of a science concept or an artistic rendering of a mathematical idea. The culturally relevant teacher recognizes the strengths of neurodiversity and does not expect all students to display what they have learned in the same ways. The pedagogical knowledge to allow for this amount of variation is extensive. Teachers who are only able to teach what is in a textbook or curriculum guide may not have the depth of content knowledge to recognize subject matter mastery that is displayed in ways other than the paper and pencil exhibitions of tests, essays, and reports.

Generally, there is little argument over the need to ensure that students master subject matter knowledge, skills, and concepts. However, culturally relevant pedagogy also requires teachers who can help students develop cultural competence.[14] For decades, schools have treated the notion of culture as a static concept, making cultural competence the most misunderstood component of culturally relevant pedagogy. Most teacher education programs teach little or nothing about culture.[15] Teacher education is an area of study that relies heavily on the social science discipline of psychology and, to a lesser extent, sociology; candidates take coursework in educational psychology, child and/or adolescent development, and sociology of education. Few programs require or offer a course in educational anthropology.

Despite conversations about "multicultural education" or "diversity," teacher education candidates are not exposed to a systematic study of culture and its role in teaching and learning. The diversity courses students may be required to take often include discussions about "the other." Rarely in the teacher preparation sequence of courses are students required to explore how their own culture influences how they think about students, families, and communities. Consequently, most teacher education candidates continue to view and center their own experiences and perspectives as "correct" or "normal." Education scholar Yolanda Sealey-Ruiz argues that teachers who desire to be effective in teaching students from cultural backgrounds different from their own must do an archaeology of the self to understand why they believe the ways they think, act, and operate are the right ways to think, act, and operate.[16] By decentering oneself, it becomes possible to see that other perspectives and ways of thinking and being can be legiti-

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mate and make sense in the lives and experiences of others. This decentering can help teachers understand the importance of context. The field of anthropology often seeks to "make the familiar strange."[17] In 1956, anthropologist Horace Miner published the classic essay "Body Ritual Among the Nacirema," which describes seemingly barbaric and painful rituals among a group of people he identifies as the "Nacirema."[18] It is not until readers discover that "Nacirema" is "American" spelled backwards do they realize that Miner is describing dental practices among most people in the United States. Miner made the familiar strange.

The work of helping students develop cultural competence is not about teaching Black students static notions about Black culture or Latine students a homogenous set of concepts and ideas about Latine culture. Instead, cultural competence is about recognizing that students arrive in classrooms with a set of cultural practices that reflect aspects of both a larger racial, ethnic, or linguistic culture, and a local culture found in the neighborhoods and communities in which they live.[19] In addition to those cultural practices, the work of the culturally relevant teacher is to help students remain grounded in their home cultures while acquiring fluency and flexibility in at least one additional culture. For students who experience marginalization in the classroom, that additional culture is most likely what schools regard as mainstream culture. This approach also includes helping students who are members of the cultural mainstream acquire fluency in a culture beyond their own. In an ideal world, all students should leave PK–12 schooling multiculturally competent because they will be entering a culturally and linguistically global culture and will need to function well in it. Minimally, all students should leave school bi-cultural, well-grounded in the language, history, culture, customs, and traditions of their own culture and fluent in at least one other. This is what we mean by cultural competence.

An example of fostering cultural competence might be a music educator teaching students about the term "classical." A culturally relevant teacher recognizes that all cultures have traditions of classical music. Thus, it is important not to assume that "classical" is reserved for music and musicians from Europe. There is American classical music derived from African American music known as jazz. There is Chinese classical music. There is Mexican classical music. There is African classical music. Broadening the notion of classical is one example of helping students develop cultural fluency or competency. Another example might be helping students understand that all cultures have traditions of storytelling. Sharing literature across cultures can help students see and value the similarities and uniqueness found in storytelling cultures within and across nations.

The third component of the culturally relevant pedagogy equilateral triangle is perhaps the most ignored. This is the component identified as sociopolitical or critical consciousness. This is the aspect of school-based teaching and learning that answers students' often expressed question, "So what?" Students ask, "Why

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do we have to learn this?" Too often, teachers respond with pat answers such as "One day you're going to need this!" It does not take long for students to recognize the fallacy of this response. Most students know that they will probably not use the Pythagorean theorem outside of a geometry classroom or they will not find a workplace that will require them to conjugate French verbs. The sociopolitical or critical consciousness that culturally relevant teachers seek to foster is one that helps students find answers to problems they grapple with. The geometry lesson might be especially important if students' families are buying a carpet and want to make sure they are not overbuying. In a critical mathematics class in Chicago, I witnessed a teacher help students understand why having a command of the concept of compound interest was important in their everyday lives.[20] When students saw how paying higher interest rates impacted the cost of housing in their community versus what their upper middle-income peers were paying in a suburban community, they were incensed at the inequity. They wanted to know more about how to calculate interest so they could make better decisions about their own spending.

In another publication, I described a social studies classroom in which a student was upset about his school's "hat rule."[21] The hat rule stated that no students could wear a hat inside the building. The student, an African American male, arrived in the classroom visibly upset and his teacher asked what was wrong. "This school is racist!" he declared. "Why do you say that?" his teacher asked. The student relayed his observation that only Black boys were stopped and sanctioned for wearing a hat in the building. The teacher challenged him to produce evidence of his claim. When it was clear that the student only had anecdotes from himself and his friends, the teacher helped the class design a survey and data collection strategy to determine the validity of his claim. By dividing the class into fourths, there was a small team dispersed to survey each year – freshmen, sophomores, juniors, and seniors. The students collected demographic data from each student they surveyed and asked: "Have you ever been stopped for wearing a hat in the building? If yes, what happened after you were stopped?" Once the students compiled the data, they were able to affirm the student's initial observation. Black male students were heavily surveilled and sanctioned for wearing hats in the building. The students produced a report they shared with the school principal and the principal confronted the school staff saying, "Either we will have a hat rule, or we will not have a hat rule. What we won't have is a hat rule for certain students!" The teacher who helped the students design the study pointed out that learning mathematics, English, and social studies helped them to undertake the work that allowed them to solve a problem they identified.

In today's political climate, many teachers are afraid to take on what they see as highly charged topics and ideas related to race, diversity, and equity. Increasingly, states and local school districts are prohibiting teachers from focusing on equity

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issues related to race, class, gender, and sexuality. Instead of arguing that instruction related to diversity, equity, and inclusion helps make stronger and more active democratic citizens, some teachers are self-censoring because they are told teaching related to diversity, equity, and inclusion is indoctrination. The misinformation, distortions, and omissions of the past are making their way back into many classrooms. From the fractious fight over the African American studies advanced placement course to the banning of scores of children's and young adult books, we see a suppression of knowledge and information students need to be the kind of active and engaged citizens who can make important decisions in a democratic society.[22]

Taken together, student learning, cultural competence, and sociopolitical or critical consciousness provide a vision of culturally relevant pedagogy aimed at decreasing the educational disparities that students experience in schools. However, unless we recommit to two important promises that we have made to the nation's students decades ago, we will continue to struggle to narrow the outcome inequities that plague the United States. We have yet to live up to the mandate of the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision to desegregate our schools and the promise of *Serrano v. Priest* to equitably fund our schools.[23] All our concerns about teaching students in a fair, equitable, culturally relevant way came into sharp focus with the devastation of the COVID-19 pandemic.

By the beginning of 2020, it had become clear that the mysterious virus that first appeared in Wuhan, China, was spreading across Asia and into Europe. World health agencies recognized that we were amid a pandemic.[24] Unlike the situation with the Ebola virus in Africa, this pandemic would not be contained or confined to one continent. By late January or early February, the first COVID-19 cases were detected in Seattle, and later another in Chicago. In one area of New York City, there was a COVID-19 outbreak in a synagogue that forced the quarantining of that section of the city. However, the quarantine did not stop the spread. By early March, schools, churches, and workplaces were shutting down. Individuals were donning face masks and other protective coverings. Hospital emergency rooms were filling up, health care workers were scrambling for ventilators, and people were dying. In addition to the health destruction that COVID-19 wrought, the pandemic laid bare the economic, social, and educational disparities that characterize life in the United States. For the first time, many in the mainstream began to see what those on the margins have been experiencing for centuries: joblessness and underemployment, lack of access to health care, substandard or no housing, and inadequate and unequal schooling.

This pandemic revealed that students in the United States who reside on society's margins were victimized by other social issues – systemic racism, economic vulnerability, and impending environmental catastrophe.[25] Despite the doom and

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gloom that COVID-19 created, there was a bit of a silver lining, as explained in novelist Arundhati Roy's powerful essay "The Pandemic Is a Portal":

> Historically, pandemics have forced humans to break with the past and imagine their world anew. This one is no different. It is a portal, a gateway between one world and the next. We can choose to walk through it, dragging the carcasses of our prejudice and hatred, our avarice, our data banks and dead ideas, our dead rivers and smoky skies behind us. Or we can walk through lightly, with little luggage, ready to imagine another world. And ready to fight for it.[26]

Roy's perspective suggests that the COVID-19 pandemic might be something more than a tragedy. It could also be an opportunity. As I have written elsewhere, the pandemic gave us an opportunity for a hard reset, a chance to start over. While most establishment educators and school administrators were clamoring for "getting back to normal," I have cautioned against "getting back to normal."[27] Returning to normal would mean that the same students who were failing before the pandemic would continue to fail. Students who were regularly suspended, expelled, and arbitrarily assigned to special education would end up in those same places. Returning to normal offers students on the margin no opportunity to improve and expand.

Instead of going back to what we have always done, what if we rethought what we do? Instead of assigning students to remediation that never truly remediates, we could move toward acceleration. The logic of remediation suggests that a student who is already behind will benefit from being placed in a classroom situation where she is made to slow down even more. How does slowing down help a student to catch up? Instead, the perspective of accelerating learning is that we should do our best to move students faster and farther. This is not a new concept. Economist and founder of the Accelerated Schools Project Henry Levin has been advocating this approach for decades.[28]

We could also reset how we think about cultural competence in this post-pandemic moment. From 1989 to the early 2000s, I considered cultural competence from the standpoint of adult manifestations of culture and cultural practices: history, language, customs, and traditions. Somewhere around 2004, I began exploring how youth culture might be an important vehicle for helping students develop cultural competence.[29] COVID-19 presented us with important opportunities for incorporating youth culture. In addition, there are at least four things we have learned from our COVID-19 experience.

First, we learned that relationships matter. Our students demonstrated that what they missed most when schools closed and they were participating in virtual classes was the face-to-face interactions with peers and caring adults. In elementary schools throughout the United States, teachers, administrators, and staff organized caravans that drove through neighborhoods to greet children and their

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families. Communities cherished those moments. In today's classrooms, adults must take advantage of students' need for relationships. Culturally relevant pedagogical approaches seek deeper student-to-student and teacher-to-student relationships because interpersonal relationships are crucial to student success. We need to organize schools around these relationships. The mental health challenges COVID-19 presented for our students have been substantial. At least 204,000 children and teens in the United States lost parents or in-house caregivers because of COVID-19.[30] Our students need more access to adults who can assist teachers, counselors, social workers, and school psychologists. This may mean making changes to staffing ratios to ensure that students (and their families) do not slip through the cracks.

Second, the COVID-19 pandemic has taught us that time is fungible. The insistence that school-based learning only takes place from about 8:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. Monday through Friday was challenged by the emergency precautions taken in 2020 and 2021. Educators in schools doing virtual/remote teaching and asynchronous learning soon realized that it was possible (and sometimes desirable) to assemble students at atypical hours. High school students were very amenable to meeting at times outside of conventional school hours, particularly those students who were working to help support their families. COVID-19 also helped us reconsider whether credit-hours is the best way to evaluate student academic progress. Perhaps we are now ready for systems with more focus on competency. We should seriously consider developing evaluation systems that allow students to demonstrate mastery of knowledge, skills, and abilities rather than merely counting how many hours students spend seated in a classroom.

Third, COVID-19 taught us that technology must move to the center of the teaching-learning experience. Before the pandemic, many schools had technology on the periphery of their classrooms. Educators consulted IT personnel when their wi-fi connections or email did not work. COVID-19 helped us understand that we could and should have more robust use of technology. Today, most classrooms can digitally record and archive lessons, and this may mean that student absences can become a thing of the past. Teachers and their students can create classroom webpages allowing students to log on and catch up on whatever they missed. These videos can also serve as an opportunity for students to review concepts and information they may not have understood in real time. The lessons we learned from teaching during the earliest years of the pandemic should bring technology into substantive conversations about curriculum and instruction, not just technical tasks. Educators should use technology to improve their management strategies for grading and other recordkeeping. They should also use technology as a communication device. Texting parents and caregivers, creating parent portals, and posting important information online are vehicles for giving students, parents, and caregivers ready access to what is transpiring in schools and classrooms.

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Fourth, COVID-19 has revealed that schools are an important site of support for students' and their families' personal needs. When schools closed in the United States during emergency protocols, one of the first responses of schools was to provide food for students and their families. The amount of food insecurity among our students is startling. Far too many public-school students are dependent on schools to provide ten meals per week: breakfast and lunch, Monday through Friday. Schools were required to provide mobile devices and wi-fi for many students. In cold weather climates, schools also must provide warm weather clothing: hats, gloves, scarfs, coats, and boots. These COVID-19 revelations can provide us with new ways to think about the work of the school in a democratic society aiming to become more egalitarian and just.

Culturally relevant pedagogy or equity pedagogy is an essential aspect of multicultural education. We know that curriculum developers and textbook publishers have been producing multicultural content for decades, but content cannot teach itself. As I examined the teachers who have been effective in teaching African American students, I noticed that curriculum was not the key element of their practice.[31] Yes, these teachers would love to have up-to-date curriculum that more accurately depicts the diversity that exists in the United States. But they were unafraid of critiquing poorly written and outdated materials and supplementing content with knowledge and information they sought out. They understood how important it was to give all students access to information and the ability to gain skills.

I conclude with two examples of how culturally relevant pedagogy can be key to student success. One example is in an elementary classroom and the other is in a college biology class. In the sixth-grade classroom, the teacher was following Henry Levin's notion of accelerated learning. Her school was poorly funded, serving predominately low- to moderate-income Black students. Instead of following the prescribed mathematics curriculum, she decided she wanted her students to get a head start on learning algebra. She scrounged some algebra-1 textbooks from her school district's curriculum stacks and found that she had enough of one set of books for every two students. She paired the students to share the books and found that the pairing was important in forcing them to cooperate and share information. One of her students was designated a special-needs student, but the teacher insisted on having him participate with the rest of the class for the mathematics lessons. One day, he was struggling to solve a problem and the teacher sat beside him and his partner. "Hey guys," she shouted, "we have a problem. Who can help?" Immediately, four or five students rushed over to their classmate and asked him to articulate what he thought the problem was. The students kept probing him and, before long, he was able to talk himself through the problem and into the correct solution. Several actions the teacher took made this outcome

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possible. First, she demonstrated confidence in the student to be able to do this work. Next, she indicated that *we* had a problem – not the student. Then, she allowed other students to assist. Because of the way she typically taught the class, the helping students knew it was not their role to tell the student the answer or even what he might be doing wrong. Their ability to ask the right questions allowed the student to see that he could do the work and that he belonged in that class. Nothing about the content of the class was inherently multicultural. However, the pedagogical strategies were.

In a second example, I was contacted by an African American college freshman who was interested in becoming a medical doctor. Although she was doing well in most of her classes, she was struggling in a large lecture biology class that was a prerequisite for getting on the premed track. She came to me distraught and declared her dream of becoming a doctor was over. I sent out a call to some of my graduate students in the sciences who often serve as teaching assistants in introductory level courses in biology, chemistry, and physics to see if one of them could help. I received an email response that said, "It's not the student, it's the way they teach that course. Give me her email and I will meet with her." Within three to four weeks, after meeting regularly with my graduate student, the freshman posted a remarkable turnaround and completed the course with a grade of B+. She has subsequently been working in the health sciences now for several years. Again, there was nothing inherently "multicultural" about the biology course. The problem the student experienced was linked to the pedagogy.

With more than thirty years of research on the issue of culturally relevant pedagogy, I am convinced that we can produce better educational outcomes when we pay closer attention to the pedagogies we employ in classrooms serving students who have traditionally been marginalized and underserved in our nation's schools. Culturally relevant pedagogy can be the difference that "difference" makes.

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ENDNOTES

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