

Getting Started with Culturally Responsive Teaching Five Presuppositions

1. **From its inception, the American public education system was intentionally designed to produce inequitable educational outcomes** between affluent and low-income children as well as between White and linguistically and racially diverse students. Schools were institutions of “social reproduction,” meaning they were structured to recreate society’s social economic, and racial stratifications. Without deliberate intervention and redesign, these mechanisms will continue to marginalize diverse students currently. Scholar John Powell terms this *racial structuralization*.
2. **The education system creates opportunity gaps, which in turn produce achievement gaps.** While a factor, implicit bias isn’t the sole source of opportunity gaps. Institutional practices and policies that under-develop diverse students’ information processing skills (limiting their ability to do higher-order thinking) create “actorless” inequity mechanisms by which the students’ inability to read and perform on grade level causes them to fall further and further behind at each grade level without active participation from teachers.
3. **All students begin school as dependent learners by virtue of their age and development, but a disproportionate number of racially and linguistically diverse students remain dependent indefinitely because of inequitable practices.** Disproportionately, diverse students remain dependent learners due to instructional decision-making that slows down instruction and waters down the curriculum. We often mistake their cultural and linguistic differences for intellectual deficits (Knapp, 1991). Their dependency is compounded with each successive grade as learning requires more independence beyond 4th grade.

4. **In-school practices contribute more to the achievement gap than the student's home life.** Home life may be a contributing factor but research is clear: the achievement gap (creating dependent learners) is created and maintained in schools. In 1997, Kati Haycock, founder of Education Trust documented that the achievement gap is created by in-school factors (51%) over at-home factors (49%). While at home support is necessary, it is beyond our immediate influence. Instead, educators must respect parents and communities as students' first teachers and re-imagine our relationship as a partnership (Mapp, 2014).

5. **Culturally responsive pedagogy is focused on counter-acting the system's effort to under-develop diverse students' cognitive skills, not simply "boost self-esteem."** The focus is on amplifying nascent strengths, tapping unacknowledged funds of knowledge, and leveraging unrecognized assets rather than focusing on fixing deficits or remediating weaknesses.