

Culturally Responsive Education: Connections and Applications to Rural Northern British
Columbia Communities

Olivia Bruce

Queen's University

S2022 GDE/PME 820-002 Indigenous Leadership / Knowledge Stephanie Roy

August 21, 2022

Introduction

My topic is culturally responsive education as pedagogy relevant to educators in Northern British Columbia. I chose this topic because my goal as an educator is to develop a culturally responsive pedagogy that is sophisticated enough to become a resource for both myself and my colleagues within our classrooms. Living and working in a rural part of British Columbia I am hyper aware of the strain on the relationship between local Indigenous peoples and mainstream society. Students with Indigenous heritage tend to be more vulnerable in our community and struggle to utilize resources with the obstacle of accessibility. When learning about culturally responsive education in module 5, the discussion post responding to articles written by Castagno & Brayboy (2008) and Kanu (2006), I was inspired to consider how my educational pedagogy compared. I believe that schools are the catalyst of change for Indigenous members in our community. The best way to equip our schools with the knowledge to help and improve Indigenous peoples support systems is to revamp our practice as teachers to guide and support our students. By developing a well informed pedagogy of culturally responsive education, I can help educate others to implement related strategies in their classroom that will be both effective and efficient (Castagno & Brayboy, 2008).

Background Information

The concept of Culturally Responsive Education (CRE) has been recycled and revamped over time. It has a rich literature base with a wealth of theory available for research. For the purpose of this paper, I will be focusing on Culturally Responsive Education relevant to teaching in Northern British Columbia. Teachers implementing this concept in their classrooms are responsible for implementing their own self-efficacy regarding Indigenizing their practice. CRE is more than just a concept that is taught in the classroom. CRE is a practice oriented approach that uses Indigenous ways of knowing, learning, and doing as a guide to navigate the issue of gaps of equity in education. (Stembridge, 2020.) This is important to consider because students with Indigenous heritage make up a large part of our vulnerable community. Community awareness is a necessity when dealing with CRE; It is adaptive, rigorous, and inclusive (Nieto, 2002.). When developing community awareness, teachers can ensure that their education is directly targeted towards their intended audience by investigating their community and it's needs.

Importance of Topic

With the wealth of information available on this topic, it is important to review the literature available to determine best practices for modern education. Education changes quickly and the research that supports educational models in classrooms needs to be critically analyzed for its effectiveness and relevance to modern education. The models for Culturally Responsive Education (CRE) have been developed and revised numerous times in Canadian education in the past 20 years with the considerations of intergenerational trauma and implications of residential

schools. By providing a critical analysis, I can narrow some of the research to provide educators with a narrowed focus to what they should be considering when approaching CRE in their classrooms.

Intention of Investigation

I intend to investigate specific models and strategies that can be implemented for my whole class in education in Northern British Columbia. As this focus is directly related to where I am practicing professionally, I will be able to provide a relevant perspective on this topic. I will be researching information to influence how I teach rather than what I teach. By revamping how I teach, my practice will transform into a holistic model that seeks to teach the whole child. The logical sequence that will compose this literature review are as follows: adaptability, knowing and cherishing your community, and teacher efficacy.

Research

Willingness to Adapt

The first group of literature is focused on educators' willingness to adapt in their pedagogical approach. This is an important component to CRE because it is the foundation of developing both educational programs and educators to have a pedagogy that is aligned with the constraints of CRE. Students are all unique and a one-size fits all approach will not work for everyone. Adaptations make classroom cultures inclusive and relevant to the success of students. This is done by analyzing the community of students, getting to know them and their families, and responding with culturally relevant teaching practices and content.

Being relevant to your students is the most important part of creating a culturally responsive classroom. To do this you must constantly be reflecting on your practice, how it affects and relates to your students, and adapting as necessary. As an educator it is important to educate all of your students with respect and dignity. By understanding and recognizing who each child is and where they come from, teachers can adapt their practice to support each student in an informed way to help them become successful. It is important to create a climate for learning that is culturally responsive with a willingness to adapt to individual student needs. Gay (2018) argues that adaptability is necessary to CRE. Students need to learn realistic life skills to develop their knowledge so they can apply concepts to real life scenarios. By adapting your teaching practice to your current selection of students, you as an educator are considering each student and their needs. This challenges the idea of westernized practice of standardized educational programs and their success. By implementing a CRE model, teachers are required to examine their students' cultural orientations. Treating students differently based on their cultural orientations is not the same as racial discrimination. Building a relationship with students and becoming informed on who each student is and where they come from will inform educators on

the level of support that each student will need at school. By adapting to a students' needs, we as educators, can provide an equitable environment in which each student is able to achieve success in a thriving manner.

Waly (2020) explains it is the educator's responsibility to inform themselves about each students' cultural background so they can be advocates for their students within the school. One component of this is being considerate of the content they are including in their classroom and ensuring that it is culturally responsive to the current group of students. The most important part to this is having a strong foundational knowledge of the audience in your classroom. This can only be achieved by getting to know each of your students holistically. The most critical aspect of adapting a classroom is to be authentic in each motion towards CRE. As much as it is important to adapt and include culturally responsive content, it is also important to incorporate adaptive teaching practices.

Getting to know your community

The second group of literature is focused on educators and their ability to get to know and understand their community. This is important when addressing CRE because this is how educators gain the necessary knowledge to inform their practice in a way that aligns with the community and its needs.

Educators need to be aware of challenges and different experiences because there may be trauma in students' and their families' past experiences that make it necessary for thoughtful navigation. In some cases the extent of the trauma makes it difficult for teachers to build relationships with students. When addressing the topic of CRE and encouraging educators to incorporate this concept into their practice, it is important to understand that the trauma students and their families may carry may mean that providing a culturally relevant experience for them will look different than for someone who is more willing to open up about who they are. As an educator in Quesnel, BC, one of the biggest challenges for approaching Waly's (2020) theory is the level of disconnect many Indigenous students and families are experiencing impacts the educator's ability to dive deeper into the aboriginal culture. For example, many families are aware of their Indigenous heritage and have identified as such on school forms as Indigenous but cannot trace their roots to name their heritage specifically. In some cases, students know they are Indigenous but cannot make the distinction between identifying as Métis, First Nations, or Inuit. This creates an additional obstacle for educators wishing to become informed to shape their practice accordingly.

Becoming culturally relevant with a local context can be difficult because of the experiences, heritage, and location of educators. The challenge that moving locations provides is getting to know your community as an educator and having to restart the process every time you move communities. Throughout my educational and professional journey I have had to move

communities 4 different times. Each time I relocated, I had to start from scratch to get to know the community that I live in to be culturally informed. Page et. al (2020) describes the benefits of local knowledge informing educational models. Localized methodology and frameworks can attempt to involve the community in creating a culturally relevant environment for schools that encourages student success. The article discusses the limitations to this theory when addressing the local community and understanding that not all of the locals who could benefit from this program will have access to providing their personal input. As an educator in Quesnel, I see the differences in local connections between various schools. For example, Lhtako Dené Red Bluff Elementary is located in close proximity to the Lhtako Dené band reserve and their band office, and Riverview Elementary is located in close proximity to the Longname Society which is a community Indigenous support program. Through the Longname Society, Riverview has a strong partnership which encourages participation with the school and the local Indigenous community. Lhtako Dené Red Bluff Elementary has close connections to the Lhtako Dené community by providing authentic cultural experiences. With the school's location being in close proximity to the Indigenous land, the school is easily able to plan field trips, invite elders to speak at the school, and provide culturally relevant experiences for students. The school I teach at (Barlow Creek Elementary) is located on the outskirts of the Quesnel community and is not in close proximity to Indigenous community resources. The lack of relationship between the school and the local Indigenous community makes collaborating increasingly difficult. Educators at this school have to develop new relationships with the obstacle of distance and limited access to try and incorporate the localized methodology that is discussed.

Teacher Efficacy

The third group of literature is focused on teacher efficacy. Teachers' level of self efficacy is a teacher's belief in their ability to effectively navigate components related to their profession (Caprara et al., 2006). The research below focuses on why this is a necessary component for teachers working to develop CRE as pedagogy.

In order to become a culturally relevant educator and advocate, teachers must take it upon themselves to do the work. This isn't something that administration, programs, or schools themselves can do for educators. Williams & Kanter (2019) argue that just teaching content is not enough to develop a culturally responsive pedagogy. Educators must take it upon themselves to do the research and examine how exactly to develop cultural relevance as pedagogy. Part of this is recognizing where you stand as an educator and understanding your own personal bias. By questioning yourself and where your practice currently stands, you can begin the process of breaking down the constructs of your current pedagogy to transform to one that is culturally responsive.

Teachers with low self-efficacy are likely to be hesitant to try new approaches to attempt CRE, argued Chu, & Garcia (2021). When examining self-efficacy and whether or not it is

important to incorporate in your practice as an educator, teachers need to consider the outcomes of their students. Students will be more successful when teachers are adapting their instruction to meet the needs of their students. To do this, teachers need to consider students' cultural backgrounds to help make learning meaningful. Although taking chances and trying new approaches puts teachers in vulnerable positions, this is the necessary process to developing a culturally responsive classroom and pedagogy.

No matter which term is chosen, there is general agreement that a culturally responsive pedagogy is an approach to teaching and learning that (1) uses students' cultural knowledge (e.g., culturally familiar scenarios, examples, and vignettes) experiences, prior knowledge, and individual learning preferences as a conduit to facilitate the teaching-learning process (curriculum and instruction), (2) incorporates students' cultural orientations to design culturally compatible classroom environments (classroom management), (3) provides students with multiple opportunities to demonstrate what they have learned using a variety of assessment techniques (student assessment), and (4) provides students with the knowledge and skills needed to function in mainstream culture while simultaneously helping students maintain their cultural identity, native language, and connection to their culture (cultural enrichment and competence). (Siwatu, 2007, pp. 1086-1087.)

Siwatu's research suggests that you cannot just rely on prior knowledge from students. You must model and provide opportunities of self exploration to ensure students have the ability to express who they are and where they come from. This isn't always straightforward for every student because they may not have been exposed to their cultural background. Not only this, their family may be disconnected from their cultural heritage due to various reasons which could be influenced by intergenerational trauma. Educators must take into account learning practices that are not from Western culture such as is discussed in Miller's article (1996) *The 3 L's: looking, listening, and learning*. By incorporating Indigenized methods of teaching and learning, teachers can work towards designing a culturally compatible classroom environment as discussed in the quote above. By providing students with other opportunities for assessment, teachers can holistically assess their students. This can be done by recognizing the learning that occurs at home or within a cultural site to be relevant to the learning assessed. Within the classroom, this can be achieved by expanding assessments beyond tests and structured assignments. "Culturally inclusive assessments decrease the marginalization of students from historically underrepresented groups" (Montenegro & Jankowski, 2017.). This is because teachers are recognizing that the knowledge gained in the Indigenized format is also relevant which gives credit to learning that is non-westernized. Without doing this, education privileges and values certain types of learning over others which does not create an equitable environment. Without equitable formats of assessment, the methods of teaching to culturally responsive education are pointless because the assessment must align with the criteria. Teachers can assess holistically by looking at the students' entire educational experience and participation. Teachers

can do this by recognizing the learning that occurs in the classroom as well as outside of the classroom. One way to achieve this could be to have students co-create criteria for assignments to give the educator an idea of what students are capable of producing through assignments. Educators can help students to embrace their cultural backgrounds while teaching them skills necessary to function in mainstream society by encouraging cultural pride. This can be achieved by providing students with platforms to express themselves and give them voice. Teachers can achieve this within the classroom by providing assignment opportunities for self-expression and encourage this outside the classroom by challenging students to incorporate this strategy in their everyday life.

Conclusion

This research review's purpose is to help the reader understand necessary components of Culturally Responsive Education that are lacking in rural areas of Northern British Columbia. While Culturally Responsive Education is both necessary and relevant to modern education, many teachers don't have the foundation of knowledge or resources to begin to approach this topic. Teachers must take risks to develop a culturally responsive pedagogy that will require them to be vulnerable to their community. By examining their current practice and approaching the topics covered in this study, teachers can use this information to develop a culturally responsive pedagogy.

Teachers with flexibility and the willingness to adapt within their practice, will see success in developing a culturally responsive pedagogy because they have shown they are willing to learn and change. Developing a culturally responsive pedagogy isn't something that can be provided by anyone except the teacher themselves as it is a personal development.

Through building a relationship with local community members, teachers can begin to understand the individuals they are educating and get a sense of what exactly would be effective in providing a culturally responsive environment in the classroom. By developing relationships with community members, teachers can develop a relationship of trust in which community members may begin to confide in them what their needs are. Without the foundation of a relationship, teachers face the obstacle of a lack of connection and therefore a lack of communication. Getting to know your community and building the relationships necessary to become informed of others needs also includes opening up about who you are as an educator. By personalizing educational practice, connection will develop between the educators and the community itself.

Teachers require time to put in the effort to develop a culturally responsive pedagogy. This is an ongoing process which takes extended time and effort for it to be successful. Support

from administration, colleagues, and community is necessary for teachers to individually develop their pedagogies. As more information becomes available about local lands, knowledge, and connections to cultural development, teachers will have access to these tools to bring into their classrooms.

In the introduction of this research project, I mentioned the consideration of my own pedagogy in relation to CRE. My research has led me to realize that I am only at the very beginning of developing my pedagogy to becoming culturally responsive. I plan on continuing to investigate connections within my community to help my students develop their own cultural connections. With a better understanding of who they are and their heritage roots, students will be able to better communicate to me their needs. This will also increase my understanding of the local Indigenous community and the cultural knowledge it has to offer.

All three of the main topics discussed in this research project must be addressed together to develop an all encompassing CRE pedagogy. Teachers cannot develop a thorough pedagogy without addressing all 3 components. Understanding the community informs teachers of how they must adapt their pedagogy. Self efficacy is a necessary component to a teachers' confidence and interest in approaching CRE. Willingness to adapt means taking the information and knowledge gained about CRE and applying it in relevant ways in the classroom. By addressing each component discussed in this research project, teachers will have a thorough foundation in their culturally responsive pedagogy.

Further Research

As research continues to develop on the topic of Culturally Responsive Education, teachers will have increasing access to resources necessary to inform them on how to improve their practice. More research on CRE is necessary to help teachers fully understand specific strategies needed to develop their personal pedagogies and connection to local culture.

Areas that require further research

- Teachers require accessible strategies to help students become connected with their heritage so the students can communicate their cultural background and needs to their teacher.
- Increased academic research on the Interior and Northern Indigenous communities in British Columbia to provide educators with credible information to create culturally relevant classrooms and resources for education
- Ways to promote positive relationships between schools and Indigenous communities when accessibility to local resources and community are not readily available
- Strategies and frameworks for assessment in holistic formats that are culturally relevant and responsive

Relationship to my Professional Context

This research is relevant to my professional context because I am situated in a rural school which doesn't have a close connection to outside resources for Indigenous education. By researching these topics, I have gained a better understanding and knowledge of the beginning stages of developing a culturally responsive classroom. I have also gained a sense of direction on where to go in my professional development regarding Indigenizing my practice. Upon completion of this assignment in the course, and my professional masters of education program, I will be in a position to provide support, feedback, and knowledge to both my students and their families, as well as my professional colleagues within my school district.

List of Recommendations

- Create resources that are easily approached by educators who are new to CRE
- Create frameworks that are widely accessible to help educators adapt their practice
- Give resources, incentives, and time to educators who are interested in developing a culturally responsive pedagogy
- Encourage collaboration from educators who have strongly developed pedagogies to ones who do not and open this up to educators from rural areas

References:

- Caprara, Barbaranelli, C., Steca, P., & Malone, P. S. (2006). Teachers' self-efficacy beliefs as determinants of job satisfaction and students' academic achievement: A study at the school level. *Journal of School Psychology, 44*(6), 473–490. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jsp.2006.09.001>
- Castagno, A. E., & Brayboy, B. M. J. (2008). Culturally Responsive Schooling for Indigenous Youth: A Review of the Literature. *Review of Educational Research, 78*(4), 941–993. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40071151>
- Chu, & Garcia, S. B. (2021). Collective Teacher Efficacy and Culturally Responsive Teaching Efficacy of Inservice Special Education Teachers in the United States. *Urban Education (Beverly Hills, Calif.), 56*(9), 1520–1546. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0042085918770720>
- Gay. (2018). *Culturally responsive teaching : theory, research, and practice (Third edition.)*(pp. 28-56.). Teachers College Press.
- Miller, J. R. (1996). Shingwauk's Vision: A History of Native Residential Schools. *University of Toronto Press.* (pp. 15-38).
- Montenegro, & Jankowski, N. A. (2017). Bringing Equity into the Heart of Assessment. *Assessment Update, 29*(6), 10–11. <https://doi.org/10.1002/au.30117>
- Nieto, S. (2002). *Language, culture, and teaching: Critical perspectives for a new century.* Mahwah, NJ: L. Erlbaum.
- Page, Mavropoulou, S., & Harrington, I. (2022). Culturally Responsive Inclusive Education: The Value of the Local Context. *International Journal of Disability, Development, and Education, 69*(4), 1313–1326. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1034912X.2020.1757627>
- Stembridge. (2020). *Culturally responsive education in the classroom : an equity framework for pedagogy* (pp. 34-59). Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group.
- Waly, S. (2020). Culturally Responsive Education in Today's Schools: Application and Challenges. *International Journal of Pedagogy & Curriculum, 27*(2), 39–47. <https://doi-org.proxy.queensu.ca/10.18848/2327-7963/CGP/v27i02/39-47>
- Williams, Rosen, D. C., & Kanter, J. W. (2019). Eliminating race-based mental health disparities : promoting equity and culturally responsive care across settings (Williams, D. C. Rosen, & J. W. Kanter, Eds.). Context Press, an imprint of New Harbinger Publications, Inc.