

## INTRODUCTION

Elementary teacher candidates (TCs) need to be prepared to teach students from diverse cultural, racial, and linguistic groups. TCs need to view their students' cultural backgrounds as assets, foster a positive classroom climate, and recognize that students' cultures are important aspects of their identity (Gay, 2014).

Multiple authors have described teacher behaviors essential for culturally responsive teaching (CRT). We have adopted Gay's 5 essential elements (Gay, 2014) as the theoretical framework for this study (Figure 1). We wondered how we could help TCs develop CRT practices during a semester when they could not be in classrooms due to COVID-19.

TCs need a voice in what they want to learn about CRT. They also need opportunities to focus on CRT in their own teaching and when observing others.

## PURPOSE

The purpose of this study was to investigate what beginning teacher candidates were interested in learning about culturally responsive teaching during a pandemic when they could not be in classrooms.

### Research Questions

- ◆ What do teacher candidates (TCs) say they want to learn about CRT when they can't be in a classroom?
- ◆ Do TCs comments and reflections during peer coaching align with their stated priorities for learning about CRT?



Figure 1. Geneva Gay's Five Essential Elements of Culturally Responsive Teaching

# Culturally Responsive Teaching: Teacher Candidates Identify What's Important

*Jeania Jones, Lindsay Gallon, & Dr. Kim Cheek •  
Department of Teaching, Learning, and Curriculum*

## METHOD

The study had two parts. In part 1, TCs completed an electronic survey in which they identified the five aspects of CRT they most wanted to learn during the semester. In part 2, they completed a peer coaching cycle as the teacher and another as the peer coach. TCs filled out a peer coaching form for the observed lesson and a reflection for their taught lesson which were submitted electronically for analysis. Both parts of the study were completed after TCs were introduced to CRT and peer coaching during field course seminars.

### Sample

Sixty-six junior TCs, enrolled in a remote introductory field course in Fall 2020, were invited to participate in the study, and 48% did so. Participants were primarily white (77%) and female (84%). TCs were offered a modest number of extra credit points for participation. TCs who chose not to participate could earn the same number of extra credit points in a different way.

### Instrumentation

The Culturally Responsive Teaching Self-Efficacy Scale (CRTSE) is a valid and reliable 40-item survey designed to measure self-efficacy for CRT (Siwatu, 2007). Instead of self-efficacy, we asked TCs to rate the five most important aspects of CRT for them to learn when they could not be in classrooms due to COVID-19. We aligned CRTSE items with Gay's essential elements because they are comprehensive and include caring, communication, and teacher knowledge development.

TCs taught a literacy lesson to their peers and were assigned to be a peer coach for a classmate's lesson. They completed a peer coaching form for the lesson they observed and a lesson reflection for the lesson they taught. Both forms were created by course instructors. Both forms were analyzed using a coding frame based upon Gay's 5 essential elements.

## RESULTS

Part 1: Table 1 lists the CRT items TCs were most interested in learning about from the CRTSE. TCs were most interested in learning *how to adapt instruction to meet the needs of students and build a sense of trust in students*. The TCs were least interested in *determining student preferences for group work, learning how to determine if students feel comfortable competing with others, and the ways in which standardized tests may be biased toward linguistically diverse students*.

Part 2: TCs mentioned cultural congruity as an area of both success and challenge in lesson reflections. Cultural congruity was named an area for professional growth as was caring and fostering learning communities. There was little overlap between what TCs said they wanted to learn in part 1 and identified areas for professional growth in part 2.

### Things TCs Want to Learn about CRT

Table 1

CRTSE Items Chosen by at Least 20% of Respondents as Things They Wanted to Learn about CRT When Field was Remote

Gay's Category	CRTSE Item	Frequency
Cultural caring and learning community	9. Build a sense of trust in students	43%
Cultural congruity in instruction	1. Adapt instruction to meet the needs of students.	43%
Cultural congruity in instruction	13. Use students' cultural background to help make learning meaningful.	32%
Cultural congruity in instruction	38. Use the interests of students to make learning meaningful to them.	32%
Designing culturally relevant curricula	19. Design a classroom environment using displays that reflect a variety of cultures (Gay's symbolic curriculum)	32%
Designing culturally relevant curricula	27. Revise instructional material to include a better representation of cultural groups.	25%
Culturally diverse knowledge base	5. Identify ways that the school culture (e.g., values, norms, and practices) is different from students' home culture.	21%
Culturally diverse knowledge base	8. Obtain information about students' home life.	21%
Other	40. Design instruction that matches students' developmental needs.	21%

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

TCs that are in their first semester of the elementary education program are not in agreement on what they should be learning about CRT during remote instruction. Because they taught lessons to their peers who were culturally and linguistically similar, a focus on CRT may have appeared more theoretical than practical.

TCs focused primarily on ELLs and not other types of diverse learners. This could be because students were also taking a TESOL course the same semester which meant the needs of ELLs were salient. They also saw CRT as mainly about lesson planning and delivery and not other aspects of CRT.

We plan to revise the part 1 instrument to ask TCs to provide rationales for their choices on the CRTSE. We would also like to survey a broad range of university supervisors to see if their priorities for CRT align with those of the TCs. We see the need to provide CRT and peer coaching professional learning and support to university supervisors around Gay's five essential elements. This will help both instructors and TCs develop common understandings about both CRT and peer coaching.

## LIMITATIONS

TCs were not asked to provide a rationale for survey responses, but this meant we cannot determine why they responded the way they did.

Only one field seminar each was devoted to CRT and peer coaching. Six university supervisors provided follow-up instruction, but we cannot be sure all received the same communication about CRT and peer coaching beyond the one seminar.

## REFERENCES

- Gay, G. (2014). Culturally responsive teaching principles, practices, and effects. In H.R. Milder & K. Lomotey (Eds.), *Handbook of Urban Education* (pp.391-410). Routledge.
- Siwatu, K.O. (2007). Preservice teachers' culturally responsive teaching self-efficacy and outcome expectancy beliefs. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 23*(7), 1086-1101.