

Five Teacher Mindsets that Undermine CRT

by Zaretta Hammond | Jan 1, 2016



Well, 2015 was an exciting year. It was so exciting that it's kept me away from this space for a while. I know you thought I'd gone on some walkabout.

Well, I did, sort of.

This same time last year, my book, *Culturally Responsive Teaching and the Brain* had been out only six weeks. As more and more teachers began reading it, I wanted to find out what was going on in classrooms around CRT. So, I set out to learn what questions, misconceptions, and challenges teachers had related to it.

Over the 10 months that followed, I crisscrossed the country and listened as teachers talked about CRT.

Here are five things I learned about how they think about culturally responsive teaching that might be getting in the way.

1. Teachers still think of CRT as separate from “regular” teaching. On several occasions, a group of teachers would be talking and someone would say, “But when I go back to regular teaching...” When we think of culturally responsive teaching as different from our “regular” instructional routine, we reinforce the mindset that it’s an add-on set of strategies. Dr. Gloria Ladson-Billings reminds us that culturally responsive teaching is “**just good teaching.**”

2. Leaders still conceive of it as simply about social-emotional learning and not about cognitive development. I was talking with a teacher during a recent workshop. She was very interested in setting up more culturally responsive structures and routines that were focused on reducing stress before the main lesson began. When I asked her why she hadn’t, she said that her principal pushed back on the idea. “ He said he wants us to focus on getting test scores up, not on relationships or CRT.” Now, don’t get me wrong. I appreciate that there’s been a much needed focus on SEL in schools in the past few years. Yet, not understanding how the CRT and SEL are connected is short sighted.

Unfortunately, there’s still not enough effort to connect the dots between what neuroscience tells us about SEL, relational trust, and the student’s ability to do higher order thinking or deep learning. These are at the heart of what it means to be culturally responsive. It’s not either/or but both/and. If you want more information to help them connect the dots, check out [The Social Neuroscience of Education](#).

3. Teachers still confuse CRT with multicultural education.

Another mindset that keeps teachers from implementing culturally responsive teaching effectively is the fact that they confuse CRT with multicultural education. If we were to do a Venn diagram, I’m sure we’d see some overlap. But the truth is culturally responsive teaching and multicultural education each have very different purposes.

Multicultural education is focused on celebrating the diversity among students. It aims to expose children to different cultural traditions through literature and social experiences. On the other hand, culturally responsive teaching is focused not on celebrating diversity but on using culture as a cognitive scaffold for processing new content during learning.

Remember, each is important, but multicultural education doesn’t concern itself with cognitive development and increasing brainpower for culturally and linguistically diverse students like CRT does.

4. Teachers have a limited definition of what it means to be a warm demander.

It’s funny how many times I’d hear a teacher say, “Oh, I already do that,” when I talk about being a warm demander. Turns out they were usually talking about being a “no non-sense nurturer” as it relates to classroom management. It’s a pretty common stance these days thanks to Doug Lemov’s “warm/strict” technique made popular in his book, *Teach Like a Champion*.

But, that's just half the story. In culturally responsive teaching, the warm demander stance isn't about classroom management but about getting the student's permission to push him cognitively into his zone of proximal development (ZPD). The demanding part involves helping students stay focused and persevere through the hard parts of learning with care. (Oh yeah, another SEL connection: Relational trust is the key to getting students' permission to push them).

5. Most teachers can't figure out how to bridge the "knowing-doing" gap.

The last mindset I came across on a regular basis this year was the confusion many teachers have around how to move from understanding culturally responsive teaching conceptually and operationalizing it in their classrooms. To successfully implement CRT we have to consider some of the mundane things that go into effective teaching like time, routines, groupwork, formative assessments, and timely corrective feedback, to name a few.

Developing a CRT growth mindset in 2016.

Think about how these mindsets show up around culturally responsive teaching for you. This year, I'll be spending time thinking about how to support more teachers to implement elements of CRT in their classrooms and how to help them cultivate a growth-oriented mindset toward CRT so it doesn't seem so overwhelming.

Here's to a fruitful 2016.