

**Impact of Culturally Responsive Teaching Workshop  
on Preservice Teachers: How to Teach Columbus  
from Multiple Perspectives**

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**Abstract**

This qualitative case study examines the impact of a workshop on culturally responsive teaching on preservice elementary teacher candidates' ability to conceptualize and apply culturally responsive instruction. The *Rethinking Columbus* workshop teaches students to read critically as text detectives, asking questions such as, "Whose voices are being heard, and whose are not, and what are the hidden messages in the text and illustrations?" Overall, it appears that preservice teachers who participated in the workshop were able to generate numerous culturally relevant instructional strategies that directly aligned with the conceptual framework presented in the workshop. Students were also able to extend their learning by creating new and innovative strategies to engage elementary students in learning that were not discussed during the workshop. This paper describes the workshop model for teaching preservice teachers to be culturally responsive educators and includes numerous participant-generated examples of how to teach with a culturally responsive lens.

In the United States, P–12 schools are becoming more diverse, and our teaching practices must adapt to meet the needs of our culturally rich student population. Teacher preparation programs must do more to prepare culturally competent teachers to better serve our students. According to the U.S. Department of Education (2005, 2015), the White student population decreased from 58% in 2004 to 50% in 2014, and it is projected to further decrease to 45% by 2026. In contrast, the Hispanic/Latino student population increased from 19% in 2004 to 25% in 2014, and it is projected to further increase to 29% in 2026. Despite these changing demographics, the teacher population has remained a steady contrast at around 82% White, 7% Black, and 7% Latino (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). This demographic disparity is unfortunate given that research shows that there are academic benefits for students who are educated by teachers who look like them. For instance, Egalite, Kisida, and Winters (2015) analyzed data from the Florida Department of Education for Grades 3 to 10 and found significant positive effects in reading and math when students had teachers that looked like themselves.

This discrepancy in teacher-student demographics is also pervasive in higher education, and the impact is reflected in a survey of 100,000 higher education students by Times Higher Education (Harris, 2013). The survey measured student perceptions of the institution's inclusion of students from poorer backgrounds, with a possible score of 100 that indicated students believed their institution was highly inclusive of students from poorer backgrounds. In comparing liberal arts and non-liberal arts universities, it was found that liberal arts colleges averaged a score of 24 points out of 100 possible points, while non-liberal arts universities averaged a score of 45 points out of 100 possible points. Student participant comments regarding their perceptions of their university's inclusion of students from diverse backgrounds included, "It is very White and kind of a bubble" and "There is so little diversity and it makes me sad to think that some of the other students may have never been around people different from themselves" (para. 6). This lack of inclusion is doubly important when preparing preservice

teachers, who need not only role models of inclusive practices but strategies for how to provide culturally responsive instruction to diverse classrooms. While increasing the diversity of both the student and teacher populations remains a high priority at liberal arts colleges and universities, changes to curriculum and instruction are also essential for building inclusive classrooms. Changes must be made in the way we prepare teachers, no matter their backgrounds, for diverse classrooms.

### **Culturally Responsive Pedagogy**

One way to improve inclusivity and continue to promote equity in Teacher Preparation Programs (TPPs) that may lack racial diversity in their student and faculty populations is to diversify the curriculum and integrate multiple perspectives in course readings and materials. A growing research base shows Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (CRP) positively impacts student learning (e.g., Ladson-Billings, 2009; Sleeter & Cornbleth, 2011). Siwatu (2007) calls on TPPs not only to prepare future teachers to *be* culturally responsive educators but also to ensure teachers *believe in* the positive outcomes of teaching with culturally responsive practices. Further, Paris and Alim (2017) call for critiquing the White-gaze that accommodates attempts at culturally responsive practices that may still marginalize students of color as 'other.' If teachers lack the belief in the value of CRP and view students of color within a deficit pedagogy, then they may not use these practices in their classrooms (Bandura, 1997; Paris & Alim, 2017; Siwatu, 2007).

Teaching future educators to use CRP brings its own challenges, as there are numerous characteristics and strategies associated with CRP. Culturally responsive teaching requires the teacher to possess the following: (a) awareness of self; (b) acknowledgement of the broader context of the community with whom she or he works; (c) key attitudes, such as empathy, caring, and connectedness; and (d) specific abilities and expertise (Applin, 2008; Howard, 1999; Ladson-Billings, 1995). These skills can include combating racism in schools (Bennett, 1995), advocating for students (Howard, 1999), engaging with outside perspectives (Noel, 1995),

and using culturally competent classroom management (Weinstein, Tomlinson-Clarke, & Curran, 2004). Gay (2010) further advocates for culturally responsive instruction that involves teaching to the learning styles of diverse students, providing ethnocentric instruction, engaging students in cooperative learning approaches, being knowledgeable and reflective as a teacher, understanding and studying the cultural nuances beyond your own, and actively engaging students from an affective domain.

Course content, in addition to pedagogical approaches, impacts the efficacy of CRP. One strategy to improve CRP is to examine textbooks and class materials for biases prior to teaching lessons (Wiggins, Follo, & Eberly, 2007). Furthermore, it is important to build relationships with students and seek to understand how our differences impact teaching and learning. It is also critical to seek an understanding of student perceptions of their teachers' cultural responsiveness for student engagement, teacher perceptions of student self-worth, and teacher expectations for student academic outcomes (Gregory, Bell, & Pollock, 2014; Griner & Stewart, 2012).

There is limited research on CRP related to TPPs. One empirical study (Wiggins, Follo, & Eberly, 2007) of preservice teacher candidates (n = 62) found targeted field placements, support from peers and teachers, and meaningful coursework led to significant increases in self-reported cultural responsiveness. The participants were mostly White female students from suburban areas, but even those who had little or no experience in diverse cultural settings prior to student teaching showed improvement.

Another study investigated the self-efficacy surrounding CRP with 275 preservice teachers at two teacher education programs in the Midwest (Siwatu, 2007). Teachers completed three surveys measuring their cultural competence and beliefs as they related to teaching. Results indicated that preservice teachers were more confident in their ability to make students feel like valued members of the learning community than they were at communicating effectively with English Language Learners, which is an element of CRP. This research again highlighted that preservice teachers need

effective models of *how* to implement CRP in their classrooms (Siwatu, 2007).

### **Challenges to CRP**

There are many potential challenges to implementing CRP. These can include a struggle with honest self-reflection and in becoming aware of assumptions and beliefs that impact behavior and teaching (Gregory et al., 2014). Additionally, it can be difficult to become familiar with the culture of students in your classroom and how students' backgrounds impact teaching and learning (Griner & Stewart, 2012).

Teachers must be committed to examining their own assumptions, beliefs, and values that may be different from those of the students they teach (Rudd, 2014; Wiggins et al., 2007). Furthermore, teachers must be aware of implicit biases towards culturally and linguistically diverse students and their families (Kirwan Institute Issue Brief, 2014). Finally, teachers must maintain high expectations for student learning, despite their differences in culture and/or linguistic backgrounds (Seidl, 2007). Emdin (2011) calls for advancing cultural and critical pedagogies to *reality pedagogy*, which “allows teachers to identify with and make connections to the experiences of oppressed youth despite the fact that teachers may not have experienced the same things as their students” (p. 287). Literary critiques of CRP surround racial and experiential challenges in the lived experiences of teachers and students from different backgrounds. The increasing diversity in the student population, combined with the lack of racial diversity among teachers, calls for more research to guide TPPs in helping teachers utilize diverse curricula and instruction to meet the needs of all students. This research study reveals one method for teaching culturally responsive pedagogy to undergraduate education students and utilizes qualitative data from preservice educators to illustrate the impact.

### **Case Study: Culturally Responsive Workshop**

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to investigate the

impact on undergraduate elementary preservice teacher candidates of a workshop on culturally responsive teaching practices, designed to demonstrate to future educators how to teach history from diverse perspectives. This workshop on culturally relevant pedagogy specifically focused on teaching about Christopher Columbus. The course was a Curriculum and Instruction class for preservice undergraduate juniors. The entire class (n = 18) self-identified as female. The self-identified ethnicity of the class included: 56% (n = 10) White, 22% (n = 4) bi-racial, 11% (n = 2) Hispanic/Latino, 6% (n = 1) Filipino, and 6% (n = 1) Unidentified.

### Demonstration of CRP

The workshop, titled “Rethinking Columbus,” involved an invited expert speaker, Bill Bigelow, who co-authored a book with the same title (Bigelow & Peterson, 1998) and also published an article titled *Once upon a Genocide: Christopher Columbus in Children’s Literature* (Bigelow, 1992). Bigelow taught high school social studies for nearly 30 years, and he is currently the curriculum editor of *Rethinking Schools* magazine and co-director of the Zinn Education Project. Bigelow’s work to create and critique school curriculum through a social justice lens is widely acclaimed.

**Workshop format.** Bigelow began the workshop with an overview of what he called the “Columbus Myth.” He provided an introduction to the politics and foreign policy of the time of Columbus, including an overview of the cultural, religious, and racial clashes of the time.

**Debunking the myths of children’s literature.** Next, Bigelow introduced the concept that children’s literature teaches students a “grammar of inequality,” which he then illustrated with numerous pictorial images from children’s texts and course textual excerpts that promoted inequities from the author’s perspective, specifically surrounding the history and mythologies of Christopher Columbus.

**Becoming text detectives.** Next, Bigelow engaged the class in the exercise of becoming *text detectives*, or critical readers who read between the lines. This hands-on learning experience engaged

the preservice teachers in the same type of learning experiences in which we want them to engage their students. As a text detective, there are several questions you can ask:

- What are the values that are being imparted?
- What is the conceptual or moral architecture you are getting from literature?
- According to this text, who is worth paying attention to and who is not?
- Who is talked about, and who gets to talk?
- Whose stories and whose voices are heard?
- What are the hidden messages in the text and the illustrations?

As text detectives, the reader reads for the silences and asks, what is not there? Bigelow encouraged us to read like an activist, not a consumer.

**Truth-tellers.** After students engaged in the investigative journey of being text detectives, they shared what they had discovered with each other in small groups. Then the class created a *collective text*, or a group critique of what the groups heard in common. With this new insight, the class was then able to be *truth-tellers*, rewriting history in a new, more authentic and honest way.

### Findings: Preservice Teacher Participant Feedback from Workshop

To investigate the effects of this demonstration of CRP, qualitative feedback from students regarding the impact of the experience on their ability to conceptualize culturally responsive instruction was analyzed. At the conclusion of the course, approximately one week following the workshop experience, students were given a scenario which asked them to apply the instructional strategies learned during the workshop. The prompt was:

You are responsible for covering a chapter in your elementary social studies textbook that discusses Christopher Columbus as the founder of the new world with no mention of the cultural challenges surrounding that time in history. What are two instructional strategies you might use to help your students be critical thinkers regarding this topic?

Student data were deductively coded based on the key elements of Bill Bigelow’s Rethinking Columbus workshop, including: 1) empower the voiceless, 2) pay attention to hidden messages, and 3) whose values are included, and whose are not?

**Empower the voiceless.** The most common theme from the participant data was “Empower the Voiceless,” as demonstrated in one student’s comment:

I would allow the students to read all the material and have them identify from which perspectives the story is being told and if they notice any information that is left out or not covered consistently through all the different accounts.

Students contributed numerous ideas about how to give voice to the Native American tribe, whose perspective was entirely absent from the texts that we read as a class. For instance, one student suggested writing about Columbus’s expedition from the perspective of the native people, and another suggested students write speeches about what the Taino people would say to Columbus if they had the chance to warn him about the consequences of his actions. This idea of discussing the unforeseen consequences of our choices would help students not only think critically but also think culturally about how different people may respond to or be impacted by our actions. Additional ideas within this same theme of empowering the voiceless can be seen in Table 1 (*facing page*).

**Pay attention to hidden messages.** The next theme that aligned with the suggested culturally responsive instructional strategies was having students pay attention to hidden messages within the text or images. One student suggested having students do a research project to answer the question, “Is this text reliable?” Another stated:

I would want students to tell me what they already know about the story of Columbus, then I would ask questions like, ‘What were Indians named before they were called that? Did he discover the land or were there already people living there?’

This suggestion overlaps with the prior theme about whose voices are being highlighted. However, the nature of these questions the

Theme	Activities
Empower the Voiceless	First, I would have them ask and answer questions like “Whose side is this written by? Who do we not hear from? How would we feel if we were the Native Americans?” I would also make sure to have multiple types of texts for them to read so that they can observe and think about the differences on their own and form their own opinions.
	I would first assign reading about the Taino culture, so students start from the side of the silenced and perhaps affiliate more with this group. Then, I would introduce Columbus and his mission. Students would then be able to relate to both sides of the conversation and perhaps gain a sense of empathy.
	I would remind my students that they are text detectives! To this end, I would also remind them that even the history textbooks leave out some things, just like we do when we tell stories over and over again. I would challenge them to think about who has a voice or perspective in the story and who does not...why do they think that is?

preservice teacher planned to use with students helps guide students in discovering the first theme on their own.

**Awareness of whose values are portrayed.** The final pre-coded theme for the qualitative feedback was, ‘Whose values are included, and whose are not?’ One preservice teacher suggested having students read a text and highlight language used to describe both Columbus and the native people, then ask questions such as, “Is one more positive than the other? Why or why not?” Another student suggested a unique approach to teaching Columbus from a different perspective, focusing on cultural values and feelings:

I would start by providing scenarios...about ownership, possession, and theft. Students will be able to come to their own conclusions about how they feel about those topics, and then transfer their opinions of them to the topic of Columbus. This should help them to understand more about how the Taino people may have felt.

Another preservice teacher suggested asking students to identify who is missing from the text. Finally, one student suggested rereading the chapter but changing it to read from the perspective of the



Native Americans. Several students suggested providing multiple texts that offer different perspectives on the historical event and comparing and contrasting the examples.

**Instructional Strategies for Implementing Culturally Responsive Pedagogy**

The qualitative data from preservice teacher responses to the same final assessment prompt mentioned above were then coded into types of instructional strategies: group and individual activities. This coding method was used as a way to differentiate implementation strategies for culturally responsive instruction for practitioners. The outcomes of the activities were also identified, whether the outcome was mentioned directly by the preservice teacher participants or implied in the activity itself. Knowing the outcome of the strategy can aid teachers using measurable learning targets for instructional planning.

**Group activities.** Table 2 below summarizes the group work activities mentioned by the students. Activities included discussions and a mock trial. These types of activities can lead to critical reflection, critical thinking, and perspective-taking on the part of the elementary students, promoting inclusive conceptions of people from different cultures, such as the Taino tribe in the Columbus story.

Participant Identified Sample Activity	Potential Outcome
Have groups discuss a series of prompts like "What people were involved?" "How do you think that each party felt in this situation?" "Why do you think that this happened the way that it did?"	Critical Reflection
I would have them talk in small groups to look at the advantages and disadvantages of the trip.	Critical Thinking
I might allow my students to do an activity such as hold a trial to see who is responsible for the destruction Columbus caused, or rewrite books to explore both sides of the story so students become actively engaged with the knowledge and become critical thinkers.	Perspective-taking

**Individual activities.** Suggestions for individual activities promoted similar outcomes, including perspective-taking and empathy building. The individual instructional activities included both writing and research, such as writing a letter to Columbus from the Native American perspective or applying the scenario to a real-life situation that could happen to them. See Table 3 for specific ideas.

Participant Identified Sample Activity	Potential Outcome
I would have students pretend to be Native Americans and write Christopher Columbus an honest letter about how they felt.	Perspective-taking
One strategy I would use is to have the students try and find information on the Native Americans and Islanders that Columbus interacted with to see what their side of the story is. The kids will learn that there are always two sides to a story, but winners write the history books.	
Another strategy I would use is to ask my students to rewrite the story from another person's perspective. Asking them to rewrite the whole story seems a bit much, so I would probably ask them to rewrite a short passage of a Christopher Columbus text which paints him in the most positive light.	
I would also have them to think about if this happened today and someone came to take their house how would they feel/ react. Once they see how the other side might feel, read through it again, and see if there might be more stories to tell. Students can then create a project and change the story/create a story that they feel fits the events better.	Empathy-building

**Discussion and Implications**

Overall, it appears that preservice elementary teacher candidates who participated in the Rethinking Columbus workshop were able to generate numerous culturally relevant instructional strategies that directly aligned with the conceptual framework presented by the expert speaker. Students were also able to create new and innovative strategies that were not discussed during the workshop to engage elementary students in learning. In the course evaluations

from students who participated in the Rethinking Columbus workshop, student feedback was positive. One student said, “This class gave me many new strategies on how to be an inclusive teacher and support my students.” Another said, “I also loved the speakers you brought in! They were fantastic and it was nice to have multiple perspectives!” A final comment discusses the practical application of the learning content:

I think we all really benefited from the speakers who came to visit like Rethinking Columbus and I found all the information to connect nicely with my field experience and what I have been experiencing in the classroom! The environment was safe and welcoming to all ideas and opinions, and the tips and tricks I acquired will serve me well in the future.

The workshop model, including bringing in an outside expert voice whose experience was different than that of the classroom teacher (in this case, a White female instructor) also seemed to influence student learning with positive outcomes.

There are several limitations to this study that must be addressed. The limited time frame of the culturally responsive training and data collection, in addition to the lack of true classroom implementation, provide a lack of generalizability of the findings. Additionally, this strategy for helping preservice educators learn culturally responsive teaching practices through a hands-on workshop is only one method for increasing critical pedagogy. New teachers need a toolbox full of strategies, in addition to consistent self-reflective practices, to develop into implementers of critical pedagogies. Despite the limitations, however, this study reveals the impact on preservice teachers of diversifying curriculum, especially supporting values and ethical behaviors.

### **Future Research**

In the future, it would be useful to have the preservice teachers not only provide an example of a culturally responsive teaching strategy, but also identify the outcomes of the strategies they suggested. If they were asked to identify the learning outcomes, then

the critical thinking would go even deeper from both the teacher candidate and undergraduate student perspective, and learning targets and assessments would be more measurable. A follow-up study could also ask these teachers if and how they actually taught their students about Columbus when they were in-service teachers and whether they integrated text detective, truth-telling strategies regularly in their classrooms beyond lessons about Columbus.

Although limited in its scope due to a small sample size and the limited nature of the data collection, this study still provides a framework for teachers at all levels for integrating culturally responsive practices into their classrooms. We can all ask ourselves and our students, whose voices are being heard? Whose voices are being left out?

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## Racial Microaggressions: Stories of Black Candidates in a Teacher Preparation Program at a Predominately White Institution

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### Abstract

This qualitative study examined the perspectives and experiences of ten Black students at a predominantly White institution in order to understand if they were recipients of microaggressions, what impact microaggressions had on them, and how they coped with the microaggressions. Findings indicate that all but one of the participants experienced microaggressions that were perpetrated by peers, professors, and/or institutional cultures, with microinsults and microinvalidations being most frequent and microassaults less prevalent. Relationships with mentors, peers, and community organizations supported students and countered the experience of microaggressions. While participants rejected the role of spokesperson as it perpetuated their lack of individuality, they acknowledged the challenge of talking about race as the only Black student in a class. Findings highlight the need to develop and utilize civil discourse to stem the prevalence of microaggressions experienced by Black candidates in teacher preparation programs.