



## **Branding Culturally Relevant Teaching: A Call for Remixes**

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### **Abstract**

What is in a name? This question is a quandary for culturally relevant teaching (CRT). As a way of grappling with the dilemma, this article raises three essential questions to address if CRT is being applied in name only, or has it evolved in ways that are beyond just terminology with distinguishable types of CRT? First, a historical accounting or literature review of various well-known brands of CRT is presented. Next, a survey of names used for CRT in some of California's teacher education programs and the meanings associated with those names are examined. Last, a current, successful brand of CRT is offered as an example of a specific name for CRT being aligned with a precise way of being culturally and linguistically responsive. The conclusion is a call for a collective reflection on the state of CRT in teacher education. Is it not time for more remixes?

### **Cultural Relevancy as a Brand**

Some time ago, I received an article to review for an online periodical. Without giving the full title of the article, it was dubbed "Culturally Relevant Leadership:

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What Does It Take?” I read the article twice looking for the “culturally relevant” aspects and then realized that they had been shrouded in a myriad of buzzwords like *equity*, *cultural sensitivity*, and *inclusivity*. I then realized that the article could have been entitled with any words, as long as culture and relevant appeared somewhere in the title. In other words, the name itself did not add significance because it was not tied to any specific type of cultural relevancy. It was not enough simply to state *culturally relevant* because the cultural relevance in the article was too generic. The “cultural relevance” did not stand out in any way. I was supposed to just see the words *culturally* and *relevant* and be content.

But to authentically and critically review the article for its cultural relevance, I needed the name to trigger a specific framing around the theoretical concept of relevancy. I wanted specific delineations that made this purported culturally relevant leadership unique from all the other culturally relevant leadership literature that I have read. I craved a brand or a type of culturally relevant teaching (CRT) that would be distinctive. That craving for a distinctive CRT in this article, which I did not end up reviewing after all, turned into a larger curiosity that then morphed into critical questions about CRT in teacher education, generally speaking. What brand of CRT have institutions invested in? What makes cultural relevancy in one program different from cultural relevancy in another program? What are the unique features that allow candidates to compare and contrast different approaches? How are the distinguishing characteristics of CRT tied to specific outcomes?

The aim of this article is to raise these questions and others, not so much for the goal of answering them as for the purpose of a collective, institutional reflection about them. Within that reflection is a call for a branding of cultural relevancy with the intent of creating or modifying variations of CRT, making each noteworthy. I will explore three essential questions:

1. What is the theoretical basis of a particular branding of CRT?
2. To what extent does the name used for CRT indicate a specific alignment to a brand?
3. How has the intentional use of a brand been tied to specific outcomes?

This reflection is presented in three parts. First is a discussion about what it means to vary CRT, based on the metaphor of a “remix” put forth by Gloria Ladson-Billings. She and other researchers have provided a historical context for “remixing,” and these variations have changed the dynamic around CRT from outdated to different, from theory to action, and from generalities to the particular. Thus they provide the theoretical grounding necessary for any remix. Second, a survey of the current landscape of culturally relevant branding in teacher education programs in California is explored. The survey of programs is not meant to be evaluative or a study of any kind. Simply put, I wanted to see what was currently out there in terms of names being used for CRT and, more importantly, the branding or remixing of

those names with varying philosophies. Third, using the three essential questions as a guide, a current remix known as *cultural and linguistic responsiveness* (CLR) is shown. In very concrete terms, CLR puts a focus on anthropology, not race; on pedagogy, not content; and on grassroots empowerment, not top-down mandates (Hollie, 2015). A theoretical framework, definition, and description of CLR as a brand are provided. This brand has resonated in professional development offerings for thousands of K–12 educators and hundreds of school districts across the United States and Canada.

## **Historical Context**

### ***Remixing Cultural Relevancy***

In the essay “Culturally Relevant Pedagogy 2.0: a.k.a. the Remix,” Ladson-Billings (2014) said that scholarship, like culture, is fluid, and the notion of a remix means that there was an original version and that there may be more versions to come, taking previously developed ideas and synthesizing them to create new and exciting forms. Ladson-Billings’s essay is a call for a remix of CRT, which was made popular 25 years ago with the publication of Ladson-Billings’s (1994) *The Dreamkeepers: Successful Teaching of African American Students*. This book is in effect the original version of CRT that, over the years, has been developed and synthesized to create new forms. Or has it created a new form, which is the point of the collective reflection?

Before delving into that point, though, what is a remix? According to the *Cambridge English Dictionary*, a *remix* is the use of a machine or a computer to change or improve the different parts of an existing music recording to make a new recording. *Urbandictionary.com* defines *remix* as a song that is a modified or new version of an original song. A way to look at branding or remixing in education is to ask to what extent teacher education programs have “remixed” their cultural relevancy over time. Are future teachers being taught the 2.0 version or even a 3.0 version of cultural relevancy, or are they receiving an original or even outdated version? Is it enough even to say “culturally relevant” anymore, or do the teachers of 21st-century learners deserve more than relevancy? Ladson-Billings’s (2014) piece clearly mandated for remixes of CRT in ways that build on what has been previously done. For that reason, it is worthwhile to look at CRT from a historical perspective.

For CRT, any type of remix has to include a sampling of the historical context of CRT. In music, sampling is the act of taking a portion, or sample, of one sound recording and reusing it as an instrument or element of a new recording. This is typically done with a sampler, which can be a piece of hardware or a computer program on a digital computer. Sampling is an art form, heavily utilized in hip-hop but dating back to the 1960s with groups like the Beatles, who sampled from the French national anthem for their all-time hit “All You Need Is Love.” Most samples

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that are taken from older songs are in effect borrowed from history. For creating a CRT remix, there are several oldies but goodies to pull from, starting with some classics and then moving to more contemporary versions.

#### **The Classics**

While Ladson-Billings may have put CRT on the national map, one would have to go back 20 years before her work to understand its roots. Ramírez and Castañeda (1974) are often cited as providing the earliest introduction to the concept of CRT. In their book *Cultural Democracy, Bi-cognitive Development, and Education*, they argued that schools force conformity onto children of minority groups through their “assimilationist philosophies.” The result was that the schools were not being culturally responsive to the Mexican American student, the context of the authors’ work at the time. Cultural democracy, as they dubbed it, was the beginning of challenging the school institutionally to be more responsive to its constituency and the community it serves, regardless of the culture or language of the students. One could say that Ramírez and Castañeda were ahead of the times. Nevertheless, if you were to ask educators today with whom they associate the origin of cultural relevancy, undoubtedly most would name Ladson-Billings’s (1994) groundbreaking book. Her book is the standard by which all other versions of cultural relevance are measured.

Her collective body of work has defined what many have come to know and to believe about the theory. In *The Dreamkeepers*, the salient and poignant descriptions of six culturally relevant teachers are a must-read for anyone interested in CRT. She provided what is now considered a classic definition of CRT: “A pedagogy that empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically by using cultural and historical referents to convey knowledge, to impart skills, and to change attitudes” (Ladson-Billings, 1994, p. 13). If an educator has been credentialed in the past 25 years or so, this definition is the reference point for practicing CRT and knowing how to support student learning by consciously creating social interactions that help them meet the criteria of academic success, cultural competence, and critical consciousness.

In almost the same breath as saying Gloria Ladson-Billings, one could easily say Lisa Delpit. In 1995, 1 year after Ladson-Billings’s (1994) *The Dreamkeepers*, came Delpit’s *Other People’s Children: Culture Conflict in the Classroom*. A MacArthur Genius Award recipient, Delpit made plain the importance of teaching students the “rules of the game,” so they are empowered to negotiate those rules and then make choices around those negotiations. Her way of looking at CRT resonated with many educators. This quote says it best:

We all interpret behaviors, information, and situations through our own cultural lenses; these lenses operate involuntarily, below the level of conscious awareness, making it seem that our own view is simply “the way it is.” Learning to interpret across cultures demands reflecting on our own experiences, analyzing our own

culture, examining and comparing varying perspectives. We must consciously and voluntarily make our cultural lenses apparent. Engaging in the hard work of seeing the world as others see it must be a fundamental goal for any move to reform the education of teachers and their assessment. (p. 151)

Delpit was unrelenting in her call for cultural relevancy for students but was also adept at putting that relevancy in the context of academic culture. She brilliantly said, “Education, at its best, hones and develops the knowledge and skills each student already possesses while at the same time adding new knowledge and skills to that base” (pp. 67–68).

Next in line, chronologically speaking, would be Geneva Gay’s (2000) *Culturally Responsive Teaching: Theory, Research, and Practice*, which by the numbers can be considered one of the most influential works on culturally responsive teaching. Gay’s contribution, her remix, if you will, is that she provided a degree of concreteness to CRT with the notion of pedagogy, building upon Ladson-Billings’s work. Gay defined culturally responsive pedagogy as

the use of cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning encounters more relevant to, and effective for them. This pedagogy teaches *to and through* the strengths of these students. It is culturally validating and affirming. (p. 31)

In addition to the focus on pedagogy, Gay provided actual positive student achievement data supporting CRT from districts and schools across the nation. The addition of result-based data was important, establishing credibility for CRT, which had been an easy target for critics of the approach because of the lack of data showing effectiveness.

Villegas and Lucas’s (2007) remix revolves around six “salient” qualities of a culturally responsive educator. These qualities provide one of the most utilized frameworks in teacher education, especially in the context of teacher preservice and in-service programs. The six qualities are (a) understanding how learners construct knowledge, (b) learning about students’ lives, (c) being socioculturally conscious, (d) holding affirming views about diversity, (e) using appropriate instructional strategies, and (f) advocating for all students. Said Villegas and Lucas,

Successfully teaching students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds—especially students from historically marginalized groups—involves more than just applying specialized teaching techniques. It demands a new way of looking at teaching that is grounded in an understanding of the role of culture and language in learning. (p. 28)

What stands out with their remix is the singular focus on what the teacher must do to be culturally responsive in a criterion-based way. The idea of the teacher knowing who he or she is culturally as a means to develop empathy for the cultures of students is powerful. Collectively, these six researchers and others (Hollins, 2008; Irvine, 1991) represent the past that in many ways foretold what we now see not

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only in the literature but in action with practicing teachers today. To what extent, though, do they simply represent a storied past for research in CRT, signifying what we have held on to for too long? Part of the answer lies in what is here now: What is the present and, consequently, the future for CRT research?

#### **The Contemporaries**

Zaretta Hammond's special remix was the marrying of culturally responsive teaching with brain-based teaching. Her book *Culturally Responsive Teaching and the Brain: Promoting Authentic Engagement and Rigor Among Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Students* (Hammond, 2015) masterfully mixed two seemingly unrelated areas by showing how they are aligned. Hammond said,

Just like our computers, all brains come with a default setting that acts as its prime directive regardless of race, class, language, or culture. Neuroscientists have long known that our brains are wired to keep us alive at all costs. Our deep cultural values program our brain on how to interpret the world around us—what a real threat looks like and what will bring a sense of security. (p. 37)

Hammond has examined in user-friendly language the connection between common culturally responsive activities, like call and response, and the stimulation of parts of the brain. This type of analysis builds on the foundations of CRT in a unique way. Oftentimes, there is an attempt to disassociate CRT from other aspects of learning that involve being sensitive to the needs of students, such as social-emotional learning or brain-based teaching. Hammond's work eliminates the disassociation and shows that CRT should be seen as a part of the holistic educational experience for all students. While Hammond focuses on the brain and CRT, Christopher Emdin looks at CRT through a specific cultural lens of youth culture.

*For White Folks Who Teach in the Hood . . . and the Rest of Y'all Too: Reality Pedagogy and Urban Education* (Emdin, 2016) does not add a new name to the mix but addresses CRT directly to a specific audience—the urban educator. He also focuses on students through the lens of youth culture, particularly hip-hop culture, which is narrower in scope than what has been historically seen in CRT literature. Emdin said,

A fundamental step in this challenging of structures is to think about new ways for all education stakeholders—particularly those who are not from the communities in which they teach—to engage with urban youth of color. What new lenses or frameworks can we use to bring white folks who teach in the hood to consider that urban education is more complex than saving students and being a hero? I suggest a way forward is by making deep connections between the indigenous and urban youth of color. (p. 35)

By putting an emphasis on youth culture, Emdin brought fresh insight through the lens of youth culture, which is probably the most dominant “culture” in the classroom and yet is the least addressed or understood (Hollie, 2018).

Youth culture is defined as behaviors that students display related to their age, development, and maturity levels (Hollie, 2018). Sometimes students perform certain actions simply based on their age or developmental level and not based on their other cultural identities, such as economic status or even ethnic identity. Emdin's (2016) push to see youth culture as an integral part of any type of cultural responsiveness makes a specialized contribution to any mix. Likewise, the notion of culturally sustaining pedagogy pushes the thought process around CRT in a new direction.

Most recently, Paris and Alim (2018) offered an altogether new term, a true remix, with the theory of culturally sustaining pedagogy (CSP) in the text *Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy: Teaching and Learning for Justice in a Changing World*. CSP not only offers a name change but also goes beyond just acceptance or tolerance of students' cultures to move instead toward explicitly supporting aspects of their languages, literacies, and cultural traditions. CSP also encourages us to consider the term culture in a broader sense, including concepts such as popular, youth, and local culture alongside those associated with ethnicity (Machado, 2018). Similar to Villegas and Lucas, Paris and Alim offered a list of to-dos for educators to sustain the cultures of students in the context of school: (a) critical centering on dynamic community languages, valued practices, and knowledges; (b) student and community agency and community; (c) historicized content and instruction; (d) a capacity to contend with internalized oppression; and (e) an ability to curricularize these four features in learning settings. The pointed focus on key concepts like agency, internalized oppression, and community gives CSP a broad appeal that has not been traditionally addressed within the context of CRT, historically speaking.

In sum, when looking at what to sample from for creating a remix, there is no shortage of research. There is more than 40 years of research on CRT, and in no way are the selections presented here exhaustive. The ones highlighted offer a good sample of the past and the present. Overall, the literature on CRT is rich, thoughtful, and deep. Given this well-documented background, the second reflection or question is about the names currently being used for CRT by an institution or program. Does the use of CRT as a name or use of another name represent something unique or distinguishable? Or is it just in name only?

### ***Importance of Naming***

CRT has to be more than just a name, and there are plenty of names to choose from when it comes to CRT. They include, among others, culturally responsive pedagogy, culturally compatible teaching, CRT, culturally connected teaching, culturally competent, culturally responsive learning, culturally matched teaching, cultural proficiency, culturally sensitive teaching, culturally proficient, cultural competency, culturally appropriate teaching, and now CSP. The heart of the collective reflection here questions the assumption that all the names are synonymous,

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or are they like Coke and Pepsi, different brands but both colas, or like a Big Mac and a Whopper, which are both hamburgers but taste very differently?

Simply to have a name for CRT is necessary but not sufficient to know the type of CRT it is philosophically speaking because all brands are not the same. On an individual level, to be a culturally relevant educator, one must know not only the name but also the CRT brand being subscribed to in order to be effective, and on an institutional level, to prepare future culturally relevant educators means being precise and concrete in what is taught about CRT in teacher preparation programs. To use an idiom from African American Language (AAL), “everybody and they momma” is “culturally relevant” today. What that really means is they are carrying the name of cultural relevancy with little to no accountability for what it means in principle. Frankly, the name CRT has become too cliché and therefore has lost its meaning. By remixing CRT, the meaningfulness can be rebirthed, whereby the focus on CRT is less about the name and more about the disposition. The assumption then becomes that with a name comes a specialized meaning. The page then can be turned to look at the intended result of being culturally responsive for classroom teachers in the micro and for teacher education programs in the macro. The danger of just having CRT in “name only” is the lack of accountability to outcomes, whether they are high-stakes testing student achievement data, program enrollment numbers, or end-of-program surveys. Whether CRT is having a positive, significant impact, as intended, is the third collective reflection. Do we have an agreed upon, prescribed way of even knowing?

#### ***CRT and Results?***

In my work with school districts across the country, I find that many of them are stagnated in their work around equity and/or cultural responsiveness. I define *stagnation* for them as when progress does not match the pace and efforts being given to achieve a said goal. Plainly put, they keep doing professional learning, conducting meetings, and holding critical discussions, but “ain’t nothing changing.” For preK–12 schools, the overarching and persistent goal has been to close the racial achievement gap and to decrease disproportionality around discipline, particularly with African American male students. Why have we not progressed further given all that has been studied and written about CRT? Why do we not have more culturally responsive classrooms from school to school, from district to district? Goodwin (2018) explained that

after decades of test-driven reforms, a few students at the bottom perform a little bit better, but we have done very little to raise average student performance. The bottom line is that the educators in the United States appear to be working harder without much to show for it. (p. 6)

Whether one agrees with Goodwin or not, the question is worth exploring (I happen

to agree with the assertion based on my experience in almost 100 school districts in the past 10 years). Are we as teacher educators having a profound effect on what CRT looks like in schools today?

The point is that a key component of any type of CRT remix should be a serious reconsideration of the overarching goals of CRT and its relationship to student success in preK–12 schools. A long-standing criticism of CRT is that it has been too theoretical at a time when it needed to be more practical for classroom teachers. Therefore with this call for remixes comes a focus on tangible results that clearly affect outcomes for marginalized students at the college and preK–12 levels. There is a need for several remixes or variations of CRT that demonstrate clear and significant changes that lead to evidence-based results. Now is the time for a third generation of CRT reiterations that will move the success needle as it applies to closing achievement gaps and lessening disproportionality around discipline for students of color. Before transitioning to looking at what is out there currently in teacher education in terms of names and uniqueness, I want to reiterate that the intent here is not to give the answers per se but to raise questions to be explored and studied collectively.

### **Survey of the Current Landscape**

In thinking about names and remixes, I wondered how teacher education programs are naming CRT today and whether there are unique aspects to these names aligned with varying approaches. To gain insight into names and remixes, I looked at 25 Web sites of teacher education programs in California. This was not an official study. My methods were simple: I randomly chose 25 programs. The sample was representative of northern and southern California as well as private and public institutions. My mind-set was as a prospective teacher education student in search of a program that touted itself as culturally responsive. Very simply, I looked to see what versions of cultural relevance the programs were promoting and teaching to future educators. For each program, Web sites or Web pages, course catalogs, and/or syllabi, when available, were analyzed for three elements:

1. Was there a mention of cultural relevance, responsiveness, or any word that indicated addressing the CRT approach?
2. If so, then what was the actual name used?
3. What was the approach in terms of the philosophical description or objectives?

Note that all names of the colleges and universities remain anonymous.

My most interesting finding was that of the 25 Web sites randomly reviewed, only 13 explicitly listed some naming of CRT in any form in the program catalog or on the program Web site. Surprisingly, this means that there are still some programs that are not even culturally relevant in name. In fairness, I want to acknowledge

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that what I was looking for may not have been where I was searching. That said, by only looking at programs with at least a name for CRT, the sample size went from 25 programs to 13 programs. With those 13 programs, I did find a name of some sort. Again, if there was any inkling of CRT in the program description, I counted it. Following are the names provided by each of the 13 programs, but in no particular order: Programs in California; Urban Learning/Urban Education; Cultural Sensitive Pedagogy; Urban Teacher Program; Linguistically and Culturally Responsive Teaching; Culturally Responsive Teaching; Cultural Sustainability and Educational Equity; Latinx/Chicanx Academic Excellence; Culturally Inclusive Instruction; Culturally Responsive Pedagogy; Equity Educator; Cultural and Curricular Studies; Critical Pedagogy; Social Constructivist Theory.

The range of names speaks for itself; however, the suggestion here is not that all programs must use similar names. Even given the small sample size here, there is some variation in that 8 of the 13 names use the word *culture*, *culturally*, or *cultural*. The other five names vary from the historic label of culture, showing the beginnings of a remix, which is what I hoped for. The unanswered question, though, is, How do these names signify differences in the programs? What are the fundamental philosophical differences, given the various names? In other words, are these truly remixes, or are these the same songs with different titles and, most importantly, with what result? A look beyond the names should reveal variations that would in effect equate with the desired result of differentiation.

Thus the next step was to look at each program's definition, description, or objective for CRT, in the context of the name. In this step, I was simply looking for an alignment with the name that demonstrated uniqueness that would cause me as a potential student to lean one way or the other. Only 6 of the 13 programs that had names associated with CRT also had descriptions and/or definitions linked directly to that name, which, again, was surprising. A possible take-away is that from the programs without descriptions, just a name is enough. Figure 1 shows the definitions, descriptions, and/or objectives associated with six programs that had conceptual connections to their names. These statements are not categorized or coded to maintain anonymity. Similar to the names given earlier, they are provided to show the potential range of differences in the branding from which a student who wants to be a culturally responsive educator would have to choose. A natural outcome of such a range is another critical question: What authenticates a type of cultural relevancy from school to school? Put another way, what are the essential ingredients of a true remix of CRT? I am not in a position to say or even to suggest it, but I do think the process of answering that question is more important than whatever the actual answer might be.

Looking at these descriptions and objectives, the tension is that the type of variation and, by extension, the quality of the variation is in the eye of the beholder. To be clear, I am not judging the quality of these descriptions or definitions and, by extension, the different programs. On the surface, they do appear different, some more

**Figure 1.**

**Definitions, descriptions, and objectives of the six teacher education programs.**

**Program 1**

There are four components which will encompass most issues of relevance:

1. Community Engagement,
2. Professional Development,
3. Parental Involvement, and
4. Youth Leadership.

These include, but are not limited to, the following strands:

- ◆ Schooling Conditions and Outcomes/Educational Pipeline
- ◆ Culture, Identity, and Diversity
- ◆ Immigration, Globalization, and Transnationalism
- ◆ Language Policies and Politics
- ◆ Early Childhood Latino Perspectives on School Reform
- ◆ Culturally Responsive Pedagogies and Effective Practices
- ◆ High-Stakes Testing and Accountability
- ◆ Community Activism and Advocacy
- ◆ Higher Education Eligibility, Enrollment, and Attainment

**Program 2**

Provide administrators, teachers, and staff an experience in broadening your understanding of the educational issues that impact Latinos, particularly students and families. The educational success of an individual is linked to many factors. Understanding those factors can create unprecedented success in the teaching and learning community,

**Program 3**

A transformational program that creates a sustainable teacher preparation residency pathway. An emphasis on preparing candidates who are trained to integrate STEM education into K–6 curriculum using the CCSS-Math and NGSS.

**Program 4**

Support educators in transforming their schools into more effective spaces for educating culturally diverse students by developing their knowledge base around teaching and learning that is equity focused and culturally relevant, responsive, and sustaining. To work collaboratively with educators in examining the important connections between culture and teaching and learning. We work with schools and districts to engage them in identifying processes and strategies that push educators to reimagine relationships, policies, teaching, and learning through a cultural and equity lens. This co-constructed professional learning engages educators in challenging assumptions and to design actions that better serve their students and school community:

- ◆ unpacking identity and bias to recognize deficit thinking and actions
- ◆ redefining success and rethinking school practices that value students' cultural backgrounds
- ◆ centering the cultural agency of students in schools as the primary lens for instruction
- ◆ examining the historical context of schools and communities
- ◆ focusing on equity by questioning, analyzing and shifting current dominant norms and policies

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descriptive and detailed than others. Below the surface, though, what is the extent of the assumed qualitative differences in relation to the name of the program? In other words, if the program is called Culturally Sustaining, then what makes it different in its level of cultural relevancy to the program called Urban Educator? Or should it be different? Furthermore, hypothetically speaking, if a name was changed, would that mean a program's philosophy would change, such as adding more courses in CRT or exploring a different focus? For example, in one of the programs listed, a title of a specific student population is named. Does that mean that program only focuses on that student population, and what are the implications of that type of exclusionary focus? If years from now the program decides to focus on a different student population, how does that then change the philosophy of the program? Another program is using the term culturally sustaining, which is a fairly new theoretical concept. How has that program distinguished culturally sustaining from responsive from relevance? Based on the survey of all 13 programs, it was difficult to draw a conclusion that the name made a difference in what the programs were offering in terms of cultural relevancy, or put another way, a certain name could not be definitively associated with a certain brand of CRT. So, what might a brand connected to a specific name look like?

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**Figure 1.**  
***Definitions, descriptions, and objectives of the six teacher education programs.***

(continued)

- ◆ implementing culturally relevant content for authentic student learning
- ◆ enacting culturally sustaining teaching practices for increased student engagement

**Program 5**

Examine culture and cultural diversity and their relationship to academic achievement, development, implementation and evaluation of culturally inclusive instruction. Study topics such as cultural concepts and perspectives, cultural contact, cultural diversity in California and the United States, cross-cultural interaction: the roles of culture in the classroom and the school, culturally inclusive learning environments, family and community involvement, and culturally inclusive curriculum and instruction.

To promote and support effective learning for all students.

1. Maximize the possibility for courses to be positive and equitable learning experiences for students.
2. Increase the number of knowledgeable, inquisitive instructors that are reflective in their teaching practice.
3. Question, inform and influence internal and external programs and organizational structures to increase the value placed on teaching and learning.
4. Identify and promote opportunities for senior administrators to adjust resources, policies and expectations to maximize equitable outcomes in student learning.

**Program 6**

Improve instructional practice and educational outcomes for English Learners within Dual Language Immersion Programs. Analyze curriculum, pedagogy, and policy in diverse local and global communities. Build relationships with K–12 teachers, students, and communities.

## **The Brand of Cultural and Linguistic Responsiveness: A 3.0 Remix**

In 2013, I abandoned my tenured assistant professorship in teacher education. I had become disillusioned and jaded with teacher education for several reasons. The primary and most relevant reason for this article was I did not think I was having the positive impact on classroom teaching in general that I intended to have when I entered the profession 10 years prior. I wanted to proverbially feel like I was changing the world, and in my four teacher education courses semester after semester, it did not feel like I was changing the world. My students always rated my classes high and appreciated what I taught them, but I wanted what I was doing successfully for those students to happen on a larger scale. I felt that I was being called to do more. Consequently, I left academia and transferred what I developed through my own study, research, and experimentation in teacher education to the arena of professional development. I started writing books, which then led to becoming what I call a “professional” professional developer, something that I was doing informally even before I left the university entirely. I began to share my success with cultural responsiveness at the university with the world, so to speak. And 15 years later, I have taught hundreds of thousands of educators throughout the United States and in Canada in cultural responsiveness, exponentially more than I would have if I had remained at the university.

I created a remix named *cultural and linguistic responsiveness*, or CLR. It is offered as an example of a brand that has had success from a professional development perspective with substantial teacher buy-in and acceptance as a prescribed variety. Using the three essential reflective questions from the introduction, I am going to describe my brand and how I think it fits the mold that I am suggesting to teacher education in general. I am not suggesting my brand as the exemplar, however. It is simply one example. I am sharing what happens when a name or remix of CRT triggers a specific thought around a particular way of being culturally relevant, in the same way that a name of a religion immediately tells a participant the philosophy of the religion or the type of worship service for a religion. The overarching goal is to have well-established brands under the umbrella of CRT, originated by the researchers generations before, such as Ladson-Billings, Gay, and Delpit, that are associated with specific ways of doing CRT and that are clearly different in their conceptualizations of culturally relevancy. Future teachers trying to become culturally responsive can then choose the brand of CRT that fits with their specific audience, purpose, and outcomes.

### **Sampling in CLR: An Overview**

Whether in a very diverse school setting or in a homogenous student population, CLR is necessary for every classroom (Hollie, 2018). Traditional institutional

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knowledge would have educators believe that the need for cultural relevancy only applies to students of color. Despite this common thought, CLR is intended for every classroom and to benefit all students, with the focus beginning with the students who have been historically underserved. The main purpose of being culturally and linguistically responsive is to positively impact instructional practices and, by extension, student achievement.

The theoretical fiber or the sample of CLR is the work of Geneva Gay. The remix of CLR was sampled from Gay's definition of culturally responsive pedagogy given earlier. I particularly keyed on two aspects of the definition. One was the focus on pedagogy. The attention to instruction impacted my perspective because I was able to align CLR with the research that showed that instruction is the strongest variable linked to student achievement (Hattie, 2012). What matters the most is the how of the cultural responsiveness or pedagogy, not the what, meaning a focus on content. The second aspect of Gay's view that I sampled was the last line of her definition. She stated that culturally relevant pedagogy is culturally validating and affirming. From the very first time I read Geneva Gay, those two words, *validating* and *affirming*, resonated with me. My fundamental belief is that above all, pedagogy, the how of the classroom teaching, should first and foremost authenticate and support students' cultural and linguistic backgrounds and behaviors. The philosophical underpinning of CLR is therefore rooted in a construct called validate, affirm, build, and bridge (VABB), based originally on the work of Geneva Gay with a sprinkling of Lisa Delpit.

#### **VABB Defined**

CLR is the validating and affirming of cultural and linguistic behaviors of all students and the building and bridging of those behaviors to success in the context of academia and mainstream culture (Hollie, 2015). To validate and affirm means making legitimate and positive that which the deficit research on student's behaviors, institutional knowledge, historically speaking, and mainstream media, corporately speaking, and social media have made illegitimate and negative about the cultures and languages of marginalized student populations. "These students'" cultural and linguistic behaviors are stereotyped or falsely labeled as bad, incorrect, insubordinate, disrespectful, and disruptive in the context of school culture. More poignantly, their cultural assets are turned into liabilities once they are in school. A culturally and linguistically responsive educator refutes this narrative by talking to the students differently, relating to the students differently, and teaching the students differently. These students are treated in a way that ensures them that they are not walking deficits but that they have been culturally and linguistically misunderstood by the institution.

In CLR, when students are being who they are culturally and linguistically, the teacher is not going to speak negatively, punitively, or consequentially to them. Words that demonstrate understanding, sensitivity, and empathy are going to be

used. Their cultural behaviors are validated. Teachers can use these opportunities to build rapport and relationships with the students. Most significantly, students will be taught in a way that responds to their cultural and linguistic behaviors (Hollie, 2018). The distinguishing aspect of the CLR remix is to teach to these cultural and linguistic behaviors to increase the teacher's understanding, awareness, and acceptance, meaning that teachers are asked to use instructional activities that specifically validate and affirm cultural and linguistic behaviors that school as an institution has historically invalidated and not affirmed.

For example, take the linguistic behavior of verbal overlapping, where it is socially acceptable to jump in the conversation while someone is talking. In many languages and cultures, verbal overlap is a required norm because it shows engagement in the conversation. In fact, the ability to "jump in" at the key time in the conversation is a skill that shows verbal agility. But at school, this linguistic asset becomes a liability, as students who verbally overlap at home or in their communities are deemed rude and interrupters at school. In CLR, however, verbal overlap is seen as a plus, so teachers learn how to validate and affirm the students by using activities that not only allow for verbal overlap but celebrate it.

An equal part of validating and affirming is building and bridging. This is where the focus on academic culture or traditional school behaviors occurs. These school cultural behaviors are reinforced with activities that require expected behaviors in traditional academic settings and in mainstream environments, such as turn taking, individualism (independent work), and written (vs. verbal) responding. In CLR, the goal is to have a balance of validating and affirming activities and building and bridging activities. Ultimately, the goal is for all students to learn situational appropriateness, which is defined as determining what is the most appropriate cultural and linguistic behavior for the situation, and to do so without losing one's cultural and linguistic self in the process (Hollie, 2018). Andy Molinsky (2013) called situational appropriateness *global dexterity*, which is about learning to adapt one's behavior across cultures. Situational appropriateness as a concept sounds like the axiomatic *codeswitching*, but it is not the same. Differently from codeswitching, situational appropriateness always requires the validation and affirmation of the student's culture and language first. The build and bridge component of the VABB construct only works when students are validated and affirmed first and are taught the importance of contextualization, meaning different cultural and linguistic behaviors are required depending on the context.

The main reason why CLR is needed in everyday teaching is because in every classroom, it can be anticipated without hesitation that there will be students who will need to be taught differently, depending on the context. CLR advocates for this differentiation for students. Simply put, the need for cultural responsiveness is to be diverse in the use of the methodology to increase the probability of reaching all students, no matter their race, gender, age, economic level, religion, orientation, or ethnic identity (Delpit, 1995; Hammond 2015). Culture and language, here, are

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used in the broadest terms and seen through an anthropological and linguistic lens with the criterion that race is not culture. Recognizing the multitude of behaviors as cultural and/or linguistic and then being responsive to those behaviors is the end goal of CLR for the educator. In effect, CLR activities tap into who the students are based on their youth culture (Emdin, 2016), their gender culture, their religion culture, and so on. In this way, students will be empowered to access and to explore the curricular content differently.

### ***The How-To of Cultural and Linguistic Responsiveness***

The how-to of CLR instruction is demonstrated through a specific formula, comprising three steps: quantity, quality, and strategy (Q + Q + S = CLR Success). *Quantity*, the first step in the formula, speaks to the teacher developing what I call a CLR toolbox. The CLR activities in the toolbox that are used on a frequent basis to create the quantity, which includes the names of the activities and the procedures or directions on how to use them. There are a multitude of CLR activities for teachers to use to create their toolboxes (Hollie, 2018). These activities are commonly used in the milieu of the CLR classroom, and many teachers already have an awareness of them from sources like Spencer Kagan (Kagan & Kagan, 2009). Many of the Kagan techniques are well known and vetted, so I have found in my professional developments that there tends to be a familiarity with activities such as “turn and talk,” “give one and get one,” “campfire discussion,” and “solo, pair, team,” to name a few (see Kagan’s work for a detailed description). With the regular use of the CLR activities, they eventually become staples in a teacher’s CLR toolbox. These activities are paired with four CLR instructional areas: classroom management, academic vocabulary, academic literacy, and academic language. Each instructional area represents what I deem “gatekeepers of success” for students as they matriculate through school. Meaning, if they are unable to manage themselves, increase their academic vocabulary as they progress, read on grade level or above, or write and speak academically (use of academic language), then they are unlikely to have academic success in school.

Under each instructional area are prescribed CLR categories, and for each category, there is a set of prescribed activities. For example, looking at the instructional area of classroom management, which focuses on what it means to be culturally responsive with classroom management and discipline, there are four CLR categories: use of attention signals, use of movement activities, protocols for responding and discussing, and extended collaboration opportunities. These four categories together are called engagement activities because they are meant to support teachers in increasing student engagement in their lessons, building upon the old adage that the best discipline plan is an engaging lesson plan.

For the category use of attention signals, teachers are asked to use call-and-response activities as a way of validating and affirming students through use of

rhythm, providing a sense of community, and giving an opportunity for connectedness to the teaching. Call and response as an activity is a vocal interplay between the audience and speaker or the teacher and students in the classroom. The speaker or the teacher says or does something, and the audience or the students respond. To get the students' attention while they are working in collaborative groups, for instance, the teacher may say, "When I say listen, you say up," and the call is done in a rhythmic way, so the students respond accordingly, demonstrating not only the same rhythm but a connectedness to the teaching. Therefore the call and response "Listen, Up" as an activity becomes part of the teacher's CLR toolbox. The objective is for teacher to have as many CLR activities in his or her toolbox as possible that are both validating and affirming and building and bridging for the students.

The next step in the CLR formula is quality. *Quality* is the use of the CLR activity with fidelity and accuracy. The accurate use of the activities is the key to successful implementation of CLR. Adopting the CLR activities and using them regularly can be new learning for some teachers, regardless of their experience levels in teaching. Sometimes teachers are unwilling to give the CLR aspect of the lesson the benefit of the doubt when lessons do not go exactly as planned, so knowing how to do the activities accurately and in ways that authentically validate and affirm or build and bridge is critical. Otherwise, the CLR is blamed for not working. Sticking with the example of the call-and-response activities, oftentimes, upon first using call and response, teachers will mistakenly use them in a way that is more for the purpose of conduct or behavior than for validating and affirming. What occurs in this instance is that the teacher will say a call and response but then respond to the students as if he or she wanted them to simply be quiet immediately. This use is more traditional. In fact, the use of call and response should signal a coming to quiet for the students, technically in 3–5 seconds, as a way of being sensitive to the social and cultural dynamics of closing a conversation. This nuanced shift makes a significant difference in the qualitative use of call and response in a validating and affirming way versus using call and response while maintaining a traditional mind-set. Each CLR activity must be used with fidelity and accuracy to be considered quality.

The last step in the CLR formula of success is strategy. Note that the word *strategy* is used as a verb here to beg the question, What is the strategy in the use of the CLR activity? In other words, what is the intentional and purposeful use of an activity? Essentially, there are four decisions to make instructionally when teaching in a CLR way. Is the use of the activity validating and affirming to the cultural and linguistic behaviors of the students? If so, which cultural and linguistic behaviors in particular are being validated and affirmed? Is the use of the activity building and bridging the students' cultural behaviors to school cultural behaviors, and if so, which ones? Is there a balance of activities throughout the lesson that both validate and affirm and build and bridge? By creating as much balance as

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possible, situational appropriateness will be taught automatically because students will have to determine the most appropriate cultural and linguistic behavior for the learning situation. Some teachers mistakenly think that CLR is just “a bucket” of activities. It is not. The strategy step makes CLR much more than about simply using activities. Without strategy, there can be no CLR.

### **Learning the Students’ Cultural and Linguistic Behaviors**

Focusing on cultural and linguistic behaviors builds on the proactive approach of utilizing validating and affirming engagement activities to culturally and linguistically appeal to students. When these engagement activities are used regularly, students are then validated and affirmed based on certain behaviors, such as sociocentrism, kinesthetic learning, communalism, and verbal expression (Hollie, 2018). The *iceberg of culture* (Sussman, 2014) has been invaluable in looking at culture in a broad way by giving teachers a means to talk about culture without being stereotypical, fictitious, or random. There is a superficial perspective of culture, which is not the essence of CLR. For example, having an annual International Food Day where foods from various ethnic groups are served may not authentically validate and affirm students’ culture or make the teaching culturally responsive. While the students may enjoy tasting various ethnic foods, this type of activity normally does not actually help students achieve academic success by building and bridging to the culture of academia and mainstream culture. Thus the focus of CLR is on the deep cultural behaviors, or what are called *below-the-line behaviors*. It is these behaviors that will be ultimately linked to the relationship building with students and the instructional practices for the teacher. This link between the deeper cultural behaviors and the CLR activities is the heart of the brand of CLR. The most common cultural and linguistic behaviors to be expected in the classroom are listed and explained in the next pages (Boykin, 1983). The validation and affirmation of these behaviors will better engage students, and if they are better engaged, they will achieve more.

#### ***Common Cultural Behaviors***

The following behaviors build off the iceberg concept of culture, which is the anthropological basis for the focus on culture as opposed to race. The take-away lesson is that all of us exhibit these cultural behaviors depending on our heritage, upbringing, and where we were raised. These behaviors are *not* race based. Following the research of Wade Boykin (1983) and others, these behaviors are the most common and likely to occur in the milieu of classroom and school dynamics. Please note, however, that this is *not* an exhaustive list. Other culture behaviors can and do occur. *The CLR educator should know these behaviors*. It is important to conceptualize these behaviors without thinking about them in the context or comparison

of school or mainstream (Whiteness) culture. They are meant to stand alone, have value on their own, and be representative of who the students are culturally and linguistically for validating and affirming purposes. To fully understand them is to know them in their originality. To only see these behaviors in relation to school culture misses the point and treads on deficit thinking.

### **Common Cultural Behaviors List**

There are a total of 16 behaviors, and they are listed from the less nuanced (easier to grasp conceptually) to the more nuanced (harder to grasp conceptually). Noted in parentheses is the behavior in teacher-friendly language:

1. eye contact
2. proximity
3. kinesthetic (high movement context/orientation)
4. collaborative/cooperative (work and dependence on group)
5. spontaneous (impulsive, impromptu)
6. pragmatic language use (nonverbal expressiveness)
7. realness (authentic, direct)
8. conversational patterns (verbal overlap and nonlinear discourse pattern)
9. orality and verbal expressiveness (combination of 6 and 8 or verve)
10. sociocentrism (socializing to learn)
11. communalism (*we* is more important than *I*)
12. subjective (relativity)
13. concept of time (situation dictates use of time, relative)
14. dynamic attention span (varied ways to show attention)
15. field dependent (relevance of externally defined goals and reinforcements)
16. immediacy (sense of connectedness)

For a full explanation and description of the cultural behaviors, see Hollie (2018).

The strategy of CLR is to align these cultural behaviors to specific CLR activities. The basic hypothesis is that the strategic use of a certain activity will equate with the validation and affirmation of a certain behavior. To reiterate, these activities come from a variety of sources and have been used in other contexts (Kagan & Kagan, 2009). Most of the Kagan activities are not introducing sliced bread by any means, but how the activities are strategically used is the difference. Using the example of the linguistic verbal overlap mentioned earlier, the first step requires an acceptance of the behavior as legitimate based on anthropological and linguistic research. In other words, the teacher must believe that verbal overlap is a legitimate linguistic behavior in order to then validate and affirm the behavior instructionally.

Next, the teacher matches certain activities to verbal overlap, which will allow the students to “jump in” on each other’s conversations without punishment or admonishment. In this case, there are two activities in particular that validate and affirm verbal overlap. One is called “Shout Out” (Hollie, 2018). Shout-outs allow students to spontaneously provide answers and responses to prompts. The

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rules are no screaming-out responses are permitted, only one-word responses can be given, and students may be asked to repeat their answers. Shout-outs have historically been viewed as “blurt outs,” and students are typically treated negatively for doing them. However, through CLR, this linguistic asset can remain an asset in the classroom. Another activity that validates and affirms verbal overlap is a read-aloud activity called “Jump-In Reading” (Hollie, 2018). With this activity, students are not prompted to read. They can simply “jump in” while others read, but there are parameters. Jump-ins can only occur at period stops, not other punctuation marks. If someone jumps in, he or she must read at least three sentences. Lastly, if two people jump in at the same time, one person must practice deference. By my observations and through teachers’ anecdotes, both of these CLR activities are very engaging for students as well as validating and affirming. In the same vein, there would be activities in place to build and bridge school cultural behaviors that might be juxtaposed to verbal overlap, such as taking turns. To build and bridge a student to taking turns, an activity such as “My Turn, Your Turn” would be used. This activity is just as it sounds. Students acknowledge explicitly whose turn it is to talk and when the turn is to occur. In sum, the strategy in CLR is the intentional and purposeful use of an activity when the teachers want to validate and affirm a specific cultural behavior. Strategy is the final and most important step in the CLR formula of success.

The practice of matching the CLR activities with specific cultural behaviors gives this brand of CLR its distinction from others. This is the remix. This is not to say that CLR is better or worse qualitatively speaking than any other version of CRT. It is to say that by using CLR, teachers have knowledge that is concretely connected to instructional methodology. Teachers have the opportunity for practical, research-based instructional practices that not only increase student engagement but also are culturally and linguistically responsive in intention and purpose (Hollie, 2018).

### ***Success with Cultural and Linguistic Responsiveness***

Tying the brand of CRT to evidenced academic success is an imperative final step. As mentioned before, through the work of Goodwin (2018) and others, tons of professional development and teacher education have been done around CRT, numerous texts have been written, initiative after initiative has been attempted by district after district, but not enough has changed in regard to CRT’s implementation in schools. There have been some gains, yet still there is a long way to go if the goal is that every classroom would be culturally responsive. With the CLR remix, a measure of success occurred in a laboratory school, which will be called the CLR school, that showed potential for larger success.

Centered on a positive mind-set about the students’ cultures and languages, CLR school became one of the few models in the nation to demonstrate what CLR looks like in practice and in which instruction has been transformed with the activities prescribed by this approach (Hollie, 2018). The positive impact of CLR

pedagogy was revealed in the school's standardized test results. According to the California Standards Test (CST) and the Academic Performance Index (2007), the CLR school maintained high achievement results specifically in English/language arts when compared to the local district and the state overall. The California State Report Card on schools showed that the CLR school scored 822 out of a possible 1000 in its elementary school and 728 for the middle school during 1 year on the API. Nearly 60% of the CLR school's students were advanced or proficient in reading/English language arts based on the CST, which was remarkable when compared to the other local district schools. These impressive results serve to inform those who had questioned the educational value and the effectiveness of the CLR pedagogy. When CLR is done appropriately, the evidence shows that teachers approach instruction differently and see the results for themselves, like what was seen at the CLR school and has been seen with thousands of teachers across the country currently (Hollie, 2018).

### **Final Thoughts**

In conclusion, as an answer to Gloria Ladson-Billings's call for a remix, there is another call to collectively reflect on what is in a name and a name's connection with a certain brand. I recommended three essential reflection questions to start the process of remixing:

1. What is the theoretical basis of a particular type of CRT?
2. To what extent does a name indicate a link to the brand?
3. How has the intentional use of the brand been tied to specific outcomes?

Given our current sociopolitical climate and what potentially looms for our current divide racially and politically, the time for culturally responsive teaching has never been more urgent. Now is the time to look at various remixes to ensure that, as an institution, we are having a positive and significant impact on teaching. Now is the time to look in the mirror. Steps for remixing involve a reassessment of names and the extent to which they are aligned with a particular philosophy; how the brand is different from other brands or what is distinctive about the brand; and, lastly, how the brand is making a difference or showing results.

CLR is an example of a remix with distinctive aspects and qualities that concretely separate it from other brands by focusing on specific activities aligned with cultural and linguistic behaviors that have been summarily dismissed by the tradition of school historically. CLR as a brand has had some success moving the needle for educators becoming culturally responsive. Teachers have been able to relate CLR to their students' academic success. This article is not a proposition for CLR but a response to Ladson-Billings's call for a remix. There are many more remixes to be heard because we know that the clichéd CRT as a one-size-fits-all or, in this case, one name and brand for all, will not work.

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