

Equity-centered Pedagogies: An Overview of Terminology

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Conceptualizations of pedagogies designed to promote equity in teaching and learning for students of color can be traced back to the 1970s. As U.S. schools were legally required to equitably serve a more diverse student population, scholars began conceiving ideas about how to effectively teach students who had been historically undervalued. This early theorizing was rooted in the work of José A. Cárdenas (1974) who offered a “theory of incompatibilities” espousing that the cultures of racially and linguistically minoritized children were incompatible with “typical instructional programs,” a concept he further developed in a 1977 IDRA publication, *The Theory of Incompatibilities: A Conceptual Framework for Responding to the Educational Needs of Mexican American Children*. Said differently, the dominant (white) language, literacy, and cultural practices of schools were incompatible with the linguistic, literacy and cultural practices students of color used at home and in their communities (Paris, 2012). Much of the early theorizing around what I call equity-centered pedagogies attended to this incompatibility.

This still-evolving field continues to reflect a commitment to developing an understanding of ever-evolving cultures and how the contemporary socio-political educational landscape impacts student learning. Though the terms to describe pedagogical practices that aim to redress longstanding inequities resulting in gaps in opportunity between students of color and their white peers are often used interchangeably, an overview of this terminology allows for more precise conversations around this work and perhaps more effective application of the theories.

The chart below is designed to support these goals by providing a historical trajectory of equity-centered pedagogies but does not purport to be inclusive of all such terms. Instead of seeing a particular term as wrong or bad, it is perhaps more helpful to see it as useful or not useful to one’s needs and interests.

These 11 equity-centered pedagogies offer valuable insight to educators who aim to help students of color be academically successful. The premise underlying each pedagogy is the need to recognize and respect the distinct cultural backgrounds of ethnically and racially minoritized students in designing academic programming.

To go a step further, these pedagogy theories – some to greater extents than others – urge educators to disrupt the whiteness that still permeates schooling practices in favor of cultural pluralism that is characteristic of a true democracy. Other pedagogies offer a similar promise to make teaching and learning more equitable: hooks’ engaged pedagogy (1994), Emdin’s reality pedagogy (2017), Caldera’s woke pedagogy (2018), and Love’s abolitionist pedagogy (2019).

Here are three pointers to guide your selection of an appropriate term.

- Concretize your own philosophy about the purposes of education for students of color.
 - Decide if your intent is on bridging students’ home and school cultures, helping students maintain their home cultures, sustain and grow their cultural heritage, or something else.
 - Determine if your focus is mainly on developing students’ critical consciousness, cultural awareness, both, or something else.
- Consider your context and the distinct needs of your student population, i.e., language and literacy, cultural history and heritage, etc.
- When using a particular term, indicate which theory most aligns with your use of the term. For example, “I’m drawing upon culturally responsive pedagogy as theorized by _____.”
- Learning the differences between these equity-centered pedagogies can clarify educator commitments to students and positively impact educator (and advocate) practices. This chart is designed to assist you with this work.

Equity-Centered Pedagogies

Terminology	Definition / Description	Student Population Studied	Original and/or Seminal Source
i Culturally Responsive Education	Education that considers cognitive and affective aspects of how different children learn so that appropriate teaching styles and learning environments can be provided that will maximize their educational achievement. Education that is responsive to cultural differences.	Bilingual-bicultural students	Cazden, C.B., & Leggett, E.L. (1976). Culturally responsive education: A Response to LAU Remedies II. U.S. Department of Health, Education & Welfare. National Institute of Education.
i Culturally Congruent Instruction	Instruction in which teachers' language interaction patterns resembled students' home cultural patterns.	Native/ Indigenous students (Canada)	Mohatt, G., & Erickson, F. (1981). Cultural differences in teaching styles in an Odawa school: A sociolinguistic approach. In H. Trueba, G. Guthrie, & K. Au (Eds.), <i>Culture and the bilingual classroom: Studies in classroom ethnography</i> (pp. 105-119). Rowley, Mass.: Newbury House.
i Culturally Appropriate	Instruction in which teachers integrate aspects of students' cultural background into their reading instruction.	Native Hawaiian students	Au, K., & Jordan, C. (1981). Teaching Reading to Hawaiian children: Finding a Culturally Appropriate Solution. In H. Trueba, G., Guthrie, & K. Au (Eds.), <i>Culture and the Bilingual Classroom: Studies in Classroom Ethnography</i> . Rowley, Mass.: Newbury House, pp. 139-152.
i Culturally Responsive Pedagogy	Teaching that, among other things, demonstrates an understanding and appreciation of students' personal cultural knowledge and uses students' prior knowledge and culture in teaching. It helps students of color become multicultural and multilingual.	Not based on an empirical study with a student population	Jordan Irvine. J. (1990). Transforming teaching for the twenty-first century. <i>Educational Horizons</i> , 69(1), 16-21. Irvine, J.J. (1992). Making Teacher Education Culturally Responsive. In M. Dilworth (Ed.), <i>Diversity in Teacher Education</i> . San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, pp. 79-92.
i Culturally Relevant Pedagogy	Pedagogical practice that helps students become academically successful, cultivates cultural competence (helps students accept and affirm their cultural identities), and develops critical consciousness.	African American students	Ladson-Billings, G. (1995). Towards a Theory of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy, <i>American Educational Research Journal</i> , 32(3), 465-491.
i Culturally Compatible	Instructional practice, classroom organization, and motivation management that are compatible with students' culture and leads to academic achievement. Instruction that is specific to the culture.	Native Hawaiian students	Vogt, L., Jordan, C., & Tharp, R. (1987). Explaining School Failure, Producing School Success: Two Cases, <i>Anthropology and Education Quarterly</i> , 18, 276-286.
i Culturally Responsive Teaching	Culturally responsive teaching is defined as using the cultural characteristics, experiences, and perspectives of ethnically diverse students as conduits for teaching them more effectively. It is based on the assumption that when academic knowledge and skills are situated	Not based on an empirical study with	Gay, G. (2002). Preparing for Culturally Responsive Teaching, <i>Journal of Teacher Education</i> ,

	within the lived experiences and frames of reference of students, they are more personally meaningful, have higher interest appeal, and are learned more easily and thoroughly.	a student population	
i Culturally Responsive Teachers	<p>Six salient characteristics define the culturally responsive teacher:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • is socioculturally conscious, • has affirming views of students from diverse backgrounds, • sees self as both responsible for and capable of bringing about educational change that will make schools more responsive to all students; • understands how learners construct knowledge and is capable of promoting learners' knowledge construction; • knows about the lives of his or her students; and • uses his or her knowledge about students' lives to design instruction that builds on what they already know while stretching them beyond the familiar. 	No empirical study with a student population	Villegas, A.M., & Lucas, T. (2002). Preparing Culturally Responsive Teachers: Rethinking the Curriculum, <i>Journal of Teacher Education</i> 53(1), 20-32.
i Culturally Based Education	Connections to students' experiences and prior knowledge that originate and often reside outside of the traditional	American Indian and Alaskan Native students	Lipka, J., Hogan, M.P., Webster, J.P., Yanez, E., Adams, B., Clark, S., & Lacy, D. (2005). Math in a Cultural Context: Two Case Studies of a Successful Culturally Based Math Project, <i>Anthropological and Education Quarterly</i> 36(4), 367-385.
i Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy	Pedagogy that maintains heritage, values, cultural and linguistic pluralism. It has the explicit goal of sustaining and supporting bi-/multilingualism and multiculturalism.	Not based on an empirical study with a student population	Paris, D. (2012). Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy: A Needed Change in Stance, Terminology and Practice, <i>Educational Researcher</i> 41(3), 93-97.
i Critical Culturally Sustaining/Revitalizing Pedagogy	<p>An approach designed to address the sociohistorical and contemporary contexts of Native American schooling. It has three components:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • it attends to the asymmetrical power relations and the goal of transforming legacies of colonization; • recognizes the need to reclaim and revitalize what has been disrupted and displaced by colonization; and • recognizes the need for community-based accountability. 	Native American/Indigenous students	McCarty, T.L. & Lee, T.S. (2014). Critical Culturally Sustaining/Revitalizing Pedagogy, <i>Harvard Educational Review</i> 84(1), 101-124.
i Culturally Proactive Teaching	Teaching that anticipates students' needs in the context of 21 st century demands and adjusts teaching practice both preemptively and in the daily process of working with students in the classroom. It is teaching that requires an ongoing vigilance, a sense of intentionality and urgency and an awareness that this work must be initiated rather than prompted by others.	Not based on an empirical study with a student population	García, A., & O'Donnell-Allen, C. (2015). <i>Pose, Wobble, Flow: A Culturally Proactive Approach to Literacy Instruction</i> . Teachers College Press.

Note that "culturally responsive" appears in the chart several times because its theorizations differ slightly with each iteration.