Culturally Responsive-Sustaining Education:
Teaching Remotely on the Block Plan

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Although our classrooms are looking different during COVID-19, we acknowledge that this does not absolve us from our responsibility of providing equity-minded education. The following outlines ways that culturally responsive-sustaining (CR-S) education can be centered in a virtual college classroom during Block 8.

What is it?

Building on the concept of culturally responsive teaching (Ladson-Billings, 1994), "CR-S education is grounded in a cultural view of learning and human development in which multiple expressions of diversity are recognized and regarded as assets for teaching and learning" (NYSED, 2018).

How can I use CR-S in my classroom?

Taking a culturally responsive-sustaining approach to teaching means instead of viewing students' **differences** as deficits, they are leveraged as **assets** in learning.

The CR-S framework helps educators create student-centered learning environments that (NYSED, 2018):

- affirm racial, linguistic and cultural identities
- prepare students for rigor and independent learning
- develop students' abilities to connect across lines of difference
- elevate historically marginalized voices
- empower students as agents of social change

The framework is grounded in four principles (NYSED, 2018):

Welcoming and affirming environment

High expectations and rigorous instruction

Inclusive curriculum and assessment

Ongoing professional learning

How Can CR-S Manifest in Our Virtual Block Plan?

Welcoming and affirming environment

- Creating a block community online is a critical part of students' experiences. Online courses should be inclusive spaces understanding multiple identities of students and accommodating of those in different geographical, political, and social environments. All students should have the opportunity to participate in all aspects of the course.

- To do this, educators should get to know their students- Who are they? Where are they from? Where are they currently? What time zone are they in? What impact has this situation had on them? Ensure students know that although we span the globe, we are still a community of learners at Colorado College.

- Faculty should have "conversations with students— about what remote education is; about the politics and reality of the moment we are facing; about resources that students can contribute to the experience; with the building of virtual communities and spaces for sharing ideas, feelings, understandings, and other valuable assets people gain from being members of communities. [This work] plays with time and space, privileging a fluidity/flexibility that sequence synchronous and asynchronous activities in ways most responsive to the needs and capacities of students" (NYC Metro Center, 2020).

Inclusive curriculum and assessment

- By knowing their students, faculty can decide what is attainable within an online block course. Content and assessments should be tailored to each student's academic and linguistic abilities.

- Faculty may leverage the students as curriculum builders by asking students how they connect with the discipline or topic and what salient features they can invest in the course. Faculty should also allow for "flexibility that acknowledges the challenges students are facing with remote learning" (NYC Metro Center, 2020).

- Practice equitable grading strategies using a shared and co-constructed rubric to focus on course objectives and avoid cultural assumptions or linguistic differences

- Provide as much context as possible for students to situate their learning. Context is an especially important scaffold for CLD students because it aids in language comprehension (Cummins, 1981). Examples of context are graphics, charts, visual and auditory input, study guides, and video office hours.

High expectations and rigorous instruction

- Moving a block course from in-person to online may require a shift from typical pedagogical choices and expectations.

- Choose activities that require participation from students that can take various forms and allow for multiple points of engagement (e.g. video discussions, debates, message boards, chat rooms, etc.).

- Course objectives should remain the same for all students, but each student's path to complete that objective can be different. Academic and social integration are essential to learning (Shapiro et al., 2014). Students in different time zones should not be absolved from work, but should be offered varied ways of participating in the course. Use 1-on-1 discussions to gauge where a student is and then institute appropriate supports to aid the student to accomplish necessary work.

- Giving students a big picture of the block, its schedule, assignments, and learning arch can help students conceptualize their connection to the course. This may also help students prioritize their work in a less structured context.

- Experiment with the type of structure your students need to foster learning. Some may prefer a "hands off" approach or others might want more engagement to motivate their class experience.

- All virtual communication should be made accessible for students to use at any time, especially during asynchronous courses. Faculty should record and caption their lectures and transcribe class discussions, which is particularly helpful for CLD students.

Ongoing professional learning

- It is a critical time to acknowledge that COVID-19 has been racialized, perpetuating racist attacks on Asian and Asian American students. Faculty should "systematically communicat[e] that all forms of racial intolerance [are] unacceptable" (NYC Metro Center, 2020) to continue CC's mission of becoming an anti-racist institution.

- Faculty should continue to reflect on their CR-S instruction, drawing from student feedback and current CR-S research (see references below for more ways to continue learning).

- Additionally, NYC Metro Center (2020) encourages faculty to "identify their own biases and assumptions when it comes to remote learning and identifying how this might affect the learning experiences of students."

References

Cummins, J. (1981). *The role of primary language development in promoting educational success for language minority students.* In C.F. Jeyba (Ed.), Schooling and language minority students: A theoretical frame work (pp.3-49). Los Angeles: Evaluation, Dissemination and Assessment Center, CSULA.

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