

Culturally Responsive School Reflection

Thomas Sauer

Colorado State University-Global Campus

Instructor: Dr. Jody Mimmack

November 30, 2025

Proposal for Creating a Culturally Responsive and Inclusionary School

Introduction

A culturally responsive school is one in which all students—regardless of race, language proficiency, ability, or socioeconomic background are not only welcomed but also supported to thrive academically, socially, and emotionally. These schools actively identify and dismantle systemic barriers that perpetuate inequity, ensuring that policies, instructional practices, and school structures reflect the diverse needs of their students (Theoharis, 2007). Within this framework, inclusionary practices foster belonging, agency, and equitable access to educational opportunities, whereas exclusionary practices—such as suspensions, biased disciplinary measures, or rigid curricula—remove students from essential learning environments and disproportionately affect marginalized populations (Gregory, Clawson, Davis, & Gerewitz, 2017; Losen & Martinez, 2020). Establishing a culturally responsive school requires intentional, systemic interventions that prioritize student voice, equity-driven data analysis, and proactive instructional design.

Recommendation 1: Implement Restorative Justice Practices

Rationale

Out-of-school suspensions remain a significant exclusionary practice in our middle school, often applied for behaviors such as minor disruptions, defiance, or noncompliance. While these behaviors require intervention, the removal of students from their learning environment has detrimental effects: students lose instructional time, experience diminished engagement, and their families face increased logistical and emotional burdens (American Psychological

Association Zero Tolerance Task Force, 2008; Gregory et al., 2017). Moreover, research demonstrates that these disciplinary measures disproportionately affect students of color, students with disabilities, and those from low-income families, perpetuating structural inequities and contributing to the school-to-prison pipeline (Losen & Martinez, 2020).

Restorative justice (RJ) practices provide an inclusionary alternative that emphasizes accountability, relationship-building, and skill development rather than punitive removal. RJ encourages students to reflect on their actions, repair harm, and engage in dialogue with peers and staff, fostering a sense of agency and belonging (Gregory et al., 2017).

Actionable Next Steps

1. Conduct a school-wide audit of current suspension data to identify patterns and inequities.
2. Provide professional development for teachers and staff on restorative circles, conflict mediation, and trauma-informed approaches.
3. Pilot restorative justice practices in one grade level before expanding school-wide.
4. Establish a monitoring and feedback system to assess impact on disciplinary outcomes and school climate.

Supporting Resource

Gregory, A., Clawson, K., Davis, A., & Gerewitz, J. (2017). *The promise of restorative practices to transform teacher-student relationships and achieve equity in school discipline*. Journal of Educational and Psychological Consultation, 26(4), 325–353.

Recommendation 2: Expand Professional Development in Culturally Responsive Pedagogy

Rationale

Culturally responsive pedagogy equips educators to recognize and address inequities embedded in curriculum, instruction, and classroom management. Teachers' self-reflection on implicit biases is crucial for disrupting systemic inequities and fostering environments where all students feel valued and capable (Shields, 2010). Providing targeted professional development enables educators to modify lessons for linguistic diversity, neurodivergent learners, and students navigating trauma, ensuring that instruction is both accessible and meaningful. Additionally, professional learning communities focused on culturally responsive practices can encourage ongoing collaboration, reflection, and accountability, supporting long-term systemic change (Khalifa, 2018).

Actionable Next Steps

1. Develop a multi-year professional development plan emphasizing culturally responsive pedagogy and equity-focused teaching strategies.
2. Establish monthly learning community sessions for teachers to collaboratively examine lessons, student work, and classroom practices for inclusivity.
3. Implement teacher self-assessment tools and reflection protocols to monitor growth in culturally responsive practices.
4. Incorporate student feedback to evaluate the effectiveness of instructional modifications.

Supporting Resource

Ladson-Billings, G. (1995). Toward a theory of culturally relevant pedagogy. *American Educational Research Journal*, 32(3), 465–491.

Recommendation 3: Create a Multicultural Collaborative Learning Hub

Rationale

A Multicultural Collaborative Learning Hub would provide a physical and instructional space where students from diverse backgrounds can engage in collaborative inquiry, mentorship, and targeted academic support. Such a hub would integrate culturally relevant materials, multilingual resources, and differentiated instruction to address variability in learning profiles (Theoharis, 2007). By creating a dedicated space for academic and social support, the hub would elevate students' cultural identities, amplify student voice, and strengthen peer and teacher relationships.

Beyond academics, the hub would foster cross-cultural understanding and community engagement, supporting the development of empathy, communication, and collaboration skills essential for success in increasingly diverse societies (Shields, 2010). Embedding such a structure into the school reflects a shift from reactive support responding to struggles after they occur to proactive inclusion, ensuring that all students have equitable access to learning opportunities from the start.

Actionable Next Steps

1. Identify a physical space within the school to serve as the hub and allocate necessary resources and staffing.

2. Develop a structured program that includes tutoring, mentorship, enrichment activities, and culturally responsive instructional support.
3. Collaborate with families and community organizations to ensure that the hub reflects and supports the diversity of the student population.
4. Evaluate the hub's impact on student engagement, academic performance, and sense of belonging through surveys and academic data.

Supporting Resource

Shields, C. (2010). *Transformative leadership: Working for equity in diverse contexts*.

Educational Administration Quarterly, 46(4), 558–589.

Part 2: Reflection

Engaging in this week's discussion and reviewing peer feedback deepened my understanding of operationalizing culturally responsive practices in a school setting. My peers highlighted how inequity often emerges subtly in curriculum design, lesson planning, and daily routines even when intentions are equitable. For example, designing lessons for a “neutral learner” centers dominant norms and marginalizes students whose experiences differ.

Reflecting on these insights reinforced that inclusionary practices require proactive planning, collaboration with students, families, and community stakeholders, and consistent data-informed monitoring (Losen & Martinez, 2020; Khalifa, 2018). Embedding equity must be the foundation of instructional design, disciplinary systems, and school culture not an afterthought. By integrating restorative justice, culturally responsive pedagogy, and a Multicultural Collaborative Learning Hub, schools can shift from exclusionary systems to inclusionary

environments that empower students, strengthen family partnerships, and foster authentic engagement (Theoharis, 2007; Shields, 2010). This approach exemplifies systemic, transformative leadership that prioritizes equity in practice.

References

American Psychological Association Zero Tolerance Task Force. (2008). Are zero tolerance policies effective in the schools? An evidentiary review and recommendations. *American Psychologist*, 63(9), 852–862.

Gregory, A., Clawson, K., Davis, A., & Gerewitz, J. (2017). The promise of restorative practices to transform teacher-student relationships and achieve equity in school discipline. *Journal of Educational and Psychological Consultation*, 26(4), 325–353.

Khalifa, M. (2018). *Culturally responsive school leadership*. Harvard Education Press.

Ladson-Billings, G. (1995). Toward a theory of culturally relevant pedagogy. *American Educational Research Journal*, 32(3), 465–491.

Losen, D. J., & Martinez, T. E. (2020). *Lost opportunities: How disparities in school discipline affect students' chances of graduating*. The Civil Rights Project.

Shields, C. (2010). Transformative leadership: Working for equity in diverse contexts. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 46(4), 558–589.

Theoharis, G. (2007). Social justice educational leaders and resistance: Toward a theory of social justice leadership. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 43(2), 221–258.