
Culturally Responsive Standards-Based Teaching

All the evidence shows that unless we change the culture of schools, nothing changes. That is—no matter what curriculum we introduce, or how many structural changes we make to the organization—if we do not transform the beliefs, the norms, and the relationships . . . nothing will change.

—Pedro A. Noguera (2003)

The nature and quality of public education in the United States is currently one of the hottest topics in our nation. It sparks scorching headlines in local and national media, such as “Calling Out America’s Worst Schools,” “NAACP Protests Strategies to Close Achievement Gap,” and “In Search of Educational Leaders.” It has the power to ignite so much blame, shame, anger, and disagreement within and between its diverse constituents that on some days the heat generated seems literal. The issue—one that entwines the American dream with social challenges such as privilege, generational poverty, immigration, economic inequality, and 200 years of racial and social inequities—is so confounding and compelling it has been on our nation’s front burner for more than two decades.

During the past 20 years, U.S. school districts of all sizes have experienced unprecedented increases in cultural and linguistic diversity. Walk into almost any school or classroom in the nation and you will experience a cross cultural zone where ethnicity, class, gender, language, national origin, and other cultural factors are vibrant and alive in the sights, sounds, smells, and textures of the building and its occupants. Even if students, families, and the school staff look similar to each other

on the outside, districts are experiencing newly expanded perceptions of diversity. “Invisible” diversity—such as socioeconomic status, family structure, citizenship, sexual orientation, spirituality, learning styles, and family histories—bubbles just beneath the surface. Take, for example, the Community Unit School District 200, just west of Chicago. The majority of its 14,000 students are Caucasian, yet students served by the district’s ELL program speak more than 35 languages.

The increased diversity found in U.S. public schools mirrors the changing “face” of America, and can be experienced as a benefit or as a challenge. Unfortunately, most districts—with limited financial, human, and other resources—struggle to meet the needs of their increasingly diverse learners. As a result, schools across our nation are faced with a persistent “academic achievement gap.”

The U.S. Department of Education defines “achievement gap” as the difference in academic performance between different ethnic groups. Glen Singleton, coauthor of *Courageous Conversations About Race: A Field Guide for Achieving Equity in Schools*, (2006) intentionally defines the gap as “a racial achievement gap that exists between Black and Brown students and their White and Asian counterparts.” Other experts may factor in gender or socioeconomic discrepancies, or focus on the difference between what a student is capable of achieving and his or her actual level of performance.

The causes for the achievement gap are profoundly complex (Chubb & Loveless, 2002; Haycock, 2001; Johnston & Viadero, 2000; McCombs, 2000). Poverty, mobility, language, homelessness, institutional racism, unequal distribution of resources, low expectations for students from culturally diverse backgrounds, teacher quality, and cultural incongruence between home and school are all contributing factors.

The complex root causes that underlie our nation’s achievement gap require multifaceted strategies and diverse key stakeholders working effectively together. Fortunately, culturally responsive standards-based (CRSB) teaching utilizes many of the strategies that researchers say are necessary to teach students with diverse needs who are from diverse backgrounds.

Many community organizations, districts, and state departments of education across the United States—including Boston Public Schools, Partners in School Innovation (San Francisco), the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, the National Center for Culturally Responsive Educational Systems (Phoenix), and the Center for Culturally Responsive Urban Education (Denver)—are adopting CRSB teaching as a research-based strategy to raise the academic achievement of culturally and linguistically diverse students.

Check out how policy makers and educators across the country are implementing CRSB teaching as a powerful strategy to “close the achievement gap”!

- Boston Public Schools <http://www.bostonpublicschools.org/files/GapPolicy.pdf>
- Partners in School Innovation <http://www.partnersinschools.org/program/theory.html>
- North Carolina Department of Public Instruction <http://www.ncpublicschools.org/schooltransformation/community>
- The National Center for Culturally Responsive Educational Systems <http://nccrest.org/>
- Center for Culturally Responsive Urban Education <http://cruecenter.org>

LEARNING FROM STUDENTS' LIVES

The way to improve education and society is to make schooling more central to family and community, while making family and community more central to schooling.

—Urie Bronfenbrenner (1985)

Fourth-grader Danika reflects on a poem she has just written:

*I am from Lea-bo and Mercachoo,
Fur balls with big ears and paws.
Noses always moving,
In tag they're always zooming
There's never a dull moment.
. . . I am from Harry Potter and Agatha Christie,
Battered broomsticks and little gray cells.
I am from music,
My fingers dancing on black and white keys,
Bach, Beethoven, and Mozart.
. . . I am from the forest.
Rain beading evergreen branches with dew like jewels,
Great trees shielding me from the rain.
The everlasting peace that can cure any sickness.
. . . I am from sushi, charsiubau and Jolly Ranchers
Camping at Wallowa Lake among the deer,
Playing Honeydukes candy store with Misha, Trillium, Alexis, and Maya
And speaking Mohawk, "Sekon!," with my dad.
. . . I am from life.*

A swirl of metaphor, simile, and meaningful descriptions of personal experiences and family personalities passes through her mind, inviting a deeper understanding of her world. Danika will recite her poem to her class, and her classmates will think about and write down suggestions for titles for her poem—part of the “Where I’m From” process. The suggestions may reflect a particular line or idea from the poem that caught their attention. They’ll soon have a chance to share their own “Where I’m From” poems and family stories that ultimately will be bound in a beautiful hand-crafted book. In the writing and editing process, the students develop a sense of pride about their lives and learn more about their personal histories and cultures, as well as those of their classmates—many of whose families are recent immigrants from all over the world. (More information on the Family Story Book project at Atkinson Elementary is found in Snapshot 3.1 on page 52 “Family Story Book.”)

In a different school, a high school English teacher works with students on a project that inspires them to do their best work: a document that adheres to demanding publishing parameters for an authentic audience. Students research, write, publish, and sell a book about a much-loved tradition in their rural community—the Thanksgiving Day football games between two rival high schools. They interview family and community members who graduated from both high schools between 1906 and 1973 about their days as a player, cheerleader, or fan. In all, the students collect 120 oral histories and supplement them with articles and photographs from old yearbooks and newspapers. Together, students create a valuable historical document and build community support and enthusiasm for the school. (For more information, see Snapshot 5.7 “Project of the Year Books.”)

These are just two examples of some of the powerful ways teachers are integrating culturally responsive teaching with a standards-based curriculum to engage all students in learning. This type of teaching looks slightly different in every setting because it is dependent on the children and youth you are working with—their lives, families, and communities. Because of this personalization, it can benefit all students.

CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE AND STANDARDS-BASED TOGETHER

CRSB teaching is the integration of two important aspects of education: culturally responsive teaching and standards-based teaching. Much has been written about culturally responsive teaching and standards-based teaching separately, but it is the integration of the approaches that is critical to the goal of high achievement for all students. Culturally responsive teaching addresses the needs of students by improving motivation and engagement (Ginsberg & Wlodkowski, 2000), and standards-based teaching provides all students with the opportunity for rigorous, high-level learning. CRSB teaching means doing both, together.

CRSB teaching values students’ culture, draws on that culture as a strength in their education, and challenges them with a rigorous, relevant curriculum. CRSB succeeds in part because it fosters deeper, stronger school–family–community partnerships; these partnerships have been shown to improve academic achievement (Boethel et al., 2003; Henderson & Mapp, 2002). CRSB teaching strategies foster such partnerships because they bring family and community culture into the classroom and school in meaningful ways. When curriculum content and methods incorporate local norms, behaviors, objects, and practices, students and families feel a direct link between home life and school life. When teachers value and use the strengths of local cultures, they send a positive message that can improve the school’s relationships with family and community members.

Snapshot 1.1 “Project FRESA” more fully illustrates how two teachers collaborated on a project that embodies all the important aspects of CRSB teaching. Project FRESA (*fresa* is Spanish for strawberry) focused on the local strawberry crop and its impact on students, who are primarily the children of immigrant farm workers. The project helped students meet state standards in language arts, math, geography, and technology, while at the same time developing their critical thinking skills and combating racism.

Snapshot 1.1

PROJECT FRESA

Mar Vista Elementary School, Oxnard, California

Grade levels: 3 and 5

Subject areas: Language arts, math, geography, and technology

Highlights: Project FRESA is an interdisciplinary, multimedia project created to help students meet standards by building on the relationship between their own lives and the strawberry fields that surround and sustain their local community.

“We believe that education can be used to transform lives in a positive way,” says Michelle Singer, a bilingual teacher at Mar Vista Elementary. That’s just what happened when Singer began using what was important in the lives of her students as a basis for her curriculum.

In one assignment, Singer asked students to find out how long their family members had worked in the neighboring strawberry fields, and then plot the data.

“I showed one of my students how to find the graphs and charts on the Internet that we had done in our math class. After school, the girl went home, got her grandfather, and took him to the public library to show him the chart . . . and his place on it. (He is the person listed on Figure 1.1 with the most years—35, to be exact!) In all his years, this man had never set foot in a library before. This is one of the things that we hoped would come from this project,” says Singer. “That people would do things they normally would not do . . . that they would value things they did not value before!”

Incredible transformations like this began in 1999 when Singer and fellow Mar Vista teacher Amada Irma H. Perez were selected to be part of the California Association for Bilingual Education’s Telementor Project. The training was designed to help teachers develop a technology project that included a standards-based curriculum, antiracist/

antibiased education, community learning, and second language acquisition.

Mar Vista Elementary is set in a rural area of Ventura County, just north of the Santa Monica/Malibu area. Of its 699 students, 77 percent receive free or reduced-price lunches, and 75 percent are limited English proficient.

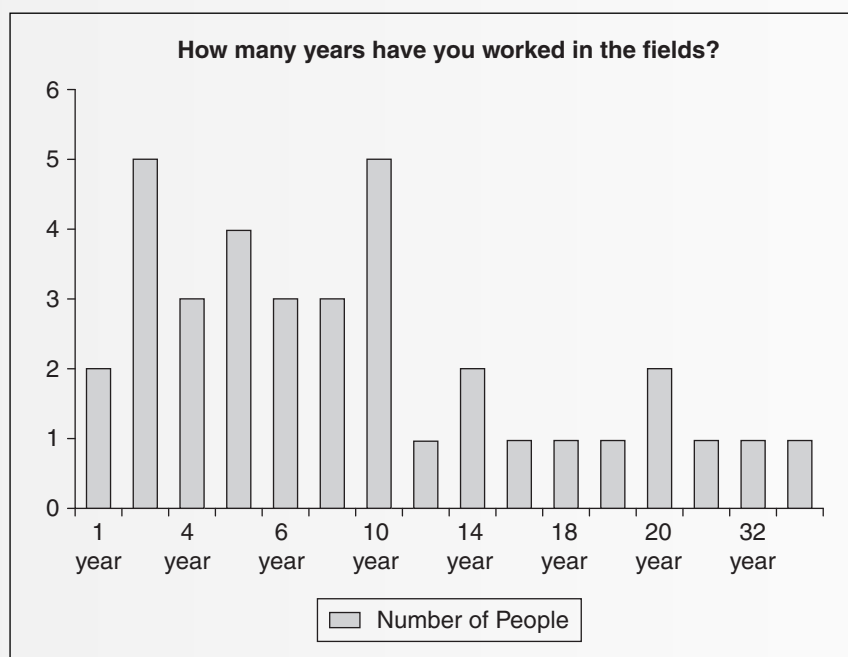
Perez and Singer designed Project FRESA around what was common in the lives of their students. The students are primarily immigrants from Mexico, and most speak both English and Spanish. The teachers knew that most of the students and their families had a personal connection to the strawberry fields that surround the school. In fact, all the students in Perez’s third-grade class and all but two of the students in Singer’s fifth-grade class had a friend or family member who was associated in some way with the fields.

To examine issues related to the strawberries and the implications of fieldwork for their families, environment, and local economy, students interviewed family members, conducted research, and collected historical and geographical information. They used technology to share their findings with their classmates, families, and community in stories, poems, graphs, charts, and drawings (such as Figure 1.2).

Long before Perez and Singer began Project FRESA, they practiced many of the strategies needed to make this project successful.

(Continued)

(Continued)

Figure 1.1 Graph Depicting the Number of Years Family Members Worked in the the Fields

Source: Information gathered by students and compiled by teachers Michelle Singer and Amada Perez.

Both teachers demonstrated respect and high expectations for their students, and reported that the students are all hardworking, intelligent, and dedicated. These teachers are driven by the belief that their teaching should honor students' lives; they believe that their role is not to be the one knowledgeable person who imparts wisdom to their students. Rather, they know that a classroom is filled with teachers and learners. They enjoy being the facilitator sometimes, but also appreciate the opportunity to learn from their students.

The administrative staff is completely supportive of Singer and Perez's work. This enables the teachers to incorporate numerous philosophies that are central to the project—such as critical pedagogy and antiracist education—into their teaching. From the beginning, their superintendent and special projects director were aware of the project and how it was linked to standards. The administrators were eager to see how Perez and Singer connected it to the lives of the students, and encouraged and celebrated their work. Also, the district,

in Singer's words, "encourages creative risk taking."

One of the teachers' concerns was finding time for the students to do the necessary project work while still covering all the standards that must be met. They rethought the way time was being used. For example, students had a regularly scheduled "buddy time" meant for peer mentoring. The teachers decided to use this time for cross-age collaborative work. Determined to do whatever was needed for the project to work, the teachers were available to the students before and after school, during lunch breaks, and at recess so students would have time to reflect, write, and respond.

Project FRESA also has been used as a curriculum example in a beginning education course at a university, showing teachers how to integrate the Internet into the classroom. Many teachers write to Perez and Singer to ask their advice about projects. Often the two teachers let their students answer the questions and guide others through the Project FRESA website.

The kids also give other teachers suggestions on how best to do this work with their students. For instance, they advised one kindergarten teacher to “be patient with the younger students. It may take a little more time for some of these younger students to grasp it.”

Project FRESA is an ongoing project, but each year students are engaged in different ways and the project has a different focus. One year the focus was on dialogue with other teachers and classrooms in the United States and abroad via e-mail. For example, the students shared information with a class in a part of India that grows strawberries; it was an exchange that opened up the world. Mar Vista students discovered many

differences between their lives and those of their peers:

- Students often work in the fields in India, while parents and other family members are the main workers in California.
- The strawberry fields in India are much smaller than the fields in California.
- The workers dress much nicer in India than they do in California.

The teachers believe that their classroom structure, combined with an engaging curriculum, leads to a higher percentage of students on task, motivated to be in class, and engaged in their own learning.

Figure 1.2 Student Drawing of a Strawberry Stand



Standards-Based Teaching

The primary drive behind the standards movement is to provide all students with the opportunity for rigorous, high-level learning. Federal requirements demand—and all educators expect—that students will achieve to their full potential. CRSB teaching is always grounded in state and local standards and the student achievement goals of the school and students. When discussing standards, we mean academic standards that are explicit learning expectations, usually written by the district or state. These are referred to as content standards, performance standards, or benchmarks.

Project FRESA is based on state standards such as California’s fifth-grade history standard on immigration. The students trace their own family’s story—discussing why their family came to this country and what they found here. Besides meeting the standards, the students learn more about themselves and their families. They frequently find that their families came to the United States for a better life for their children.

TAKING ADVANTAGE OF TEACHABLE MOMENTS TO MEET STANDARDS

How well do you know the academic standards that your students need to meet this year? From the set of standards-based learning goals that are planned for the entire year, do you have flexibility about when certain learning goals are to be met? Sometimes, CRSB teaching means moving activities around to take advantage of teachable moments. Teachable moments happen all the time when incidents or events arise that capture students’ interest. Teachers need to make decisions about when to use these moments to teach something different from what they had originally planned.

At the beginning of the school year, the Project FRESA teachers had an opportunity to address the standard for writing a persuasive letter. After a guest speaker talked about the negative effects of the pesticides used in the fields where students’ parents worked, the students wanted to do something about the issue. The teachers rescheduled the curriculum and activities around writing persuasive letters, which had been planned for the end of the year. Students wrote letters to the governor asking him to look into the use of pesticides, as well as the harmful effects of pesticides, and to consider creating standards for their safe use. The timing of this activity made more sense at the beginning of the year because it was more relevant to the students at that point and was connected to something real in their lives.

Further information on using standards for curriculum planning can be found in Chapter 5; also see the standards section in the resources list on page 216.

Culturally Responsive Teaching

Culturally responsive teaching infuses family customs—as well as community culture and expectations—throughout the teaching and learning environment. By providing instruction in a context meaningful to students and in a way that values their culture, knowledge, and experiences, culturally responsive teaching fosters student motivation and engagement. In Project FRESA, students study statistics and probability, but instead of using generic charts and graphs, they create timelines and graphs with data they collect from their family members. This is an example of

standards-based mathematics that is hands-on, includes the students and their families, and connects them to meaningful learning.

Culturally responsive teaching is built on a foundation of knowledge and understanding of your own and your students' family and community culture, which is critical to the process of teaching and learning. Learning about all the cultures represented in the classroom can seem like a daunting challenge, but the success of many teachers shows that it is worth the effort. Becoming culturally responsive is an ongoing process that evolves as we learn more about ourselves, our world, and other cultures. To become culturally responsive, look at your own culture—especially if it is part of our country's dominant culture—from the worldview of others; have an open mind to what you don't understand; and be ready to learn new ways of looking at and doing things. (For tools designed to help you become more culturally responsive, see Chapter 3.)

What Is culture?

Culture can be defined as a way of life, especially as it relates to the socially transmitted habits, customs, traditions, and beliefs that characterize a particular group of people at a particular time. It includes the behaviors, actions, practices, attitudes, norms, values, communication styles, language, etiquette, spirituality, concepts of health and healing, beliefs, and institutions of a racial, ethnic, religious, or social group. Culture is the lens through which we look at the world. It is the context within which we operate and make sense of the world. Culture influences how we process learning, solve problems, and teach.

Everyone has a culture, though most of the time our own culture is invisible to us. It is frequently thought of as the way things are and becomes the norm by which we measure all others' behavior. In *The Diversity Kit: An Introductory Resource for Social Change in Education* (Ahearn et al., 2002), the authors write, "Nonetheless, one's beliefs and actions are not any more natural or biologically predetermined than any other group's set of beliefs and actions" (p. 5).

Cultural groups are not homogeneous. They represent different geographical locations, histories, and experiences. Minority cultures express varying degrees of assimilation to the dominant Anglo culture in this country. Cultures change over time, and vary across class and gender, even between families and individuals. The music we enjoy, how we spend our leisure time, what we talk about, and what we eat are examples of individual differences within the same cultural group. "Professionals who think of cultures as they were generations ago, who romanticize cultures, or who fail to see cultures as complex, dynamic, changing systems will quickly fall short of the goal of effective services," writes Cross (1995–1996).

This guide looks at culture very broadly. It includes all the aspects of students' lives that could engage and motivate them to learn and to do their best work; these aspects include—but are not limited to—family culture, community culture, youth culture, and pop culture. Teachers can start by thinking and learning about their students'

- differences in ways of thinking, feeling, and expressing pleasure, distress, and concern;
- similarities in the cares and concerns of an individual or her family;
- country of origin, history, practices, health, beliefs, and language; and
- frames of reference—religion, valid ways to express oneself, and acceptable and unacceptable behaviors.

KEY POINTS TO REMEMBER ABOUT CULTURE . . .

- Culture is complex, dynamic, and ever changing.
- All humans are cultural beings. We all have several primary cultural identities that “shape” us. Sometimes our culture is “invisible,” even to ourselves, and can be difficult to describe. Important cultural identities in U.S. culture are race (including skin color), class, gender, language, religion, and national origin.
- Culture, which includes values, beliefs, histories, stories, and traditions, shapes the lens with which we view the world, and moves and motivates us.
- When diverse cultures come together it creates a “cross-cultural zone” that is filled with a wide range of emotions, perspectives, values, beliefs, and history, both personal and community.
- Key elements and emotions in the cross-cultural zone include identity development, acculturation, acculturation stress, cultural privilege, historical mistrust, historical guilt, fear, anger, learning, and curiosity.
- Our ability to negotiate the dynamic in the cross-cultural zone can make or break relationships, and hinder or help learning.
- Since our culture moves and motivates us (“makes us tick”), it is central to our understanding of each other and to the learning process.

Building bridges between teachers and students begins with simple questions: Who are these kids? What’s important to them? It takes time to learn the answers to those questions and to know how they understand themselves, each other, and you—their teacher. It takes practice to ask yourself and your students questions, and it requires a safe and secure space to explore those questions and to share the answers.

Why focus on culture?

The dominant U.S. culture is reflected in all aspects of most schools, from the curriculum to the way teachers interact with students to how teachers communicate with families. Many of the lowest-performing schools have a student-family population that differs culturally from that of the school, whether racially, ethnically, socioeconomically, or in some other way. For example, many classrooms emphasize individual responsibility and achievement, competition, and teacher-led learning. Some cultural groups, such as some Asian groups, Native Americans, and Alaska Natives, may be unaccustomed to this style of learning, and instead place a higher value on group work that fosters shared responsibility. Such differences may thwart learning in the typical American classroom.

Researchers have found that disparities between the cultural values and patterns of communication of the home and of the school may undermine children’s enthusiasm for learning and their belief in their own capacity to learn by the time they have reached the age of eight (Cummins, 1986; Entwistle, 1995). Some students believe that schooling can be detrimental to their own language, culture, and identity (Ogbu, 1993). This clash between a student’s home culture and school culture—which is often an unrecognized, hidden clash—can have a huge impact on that student’s ability to learn and achieve.

When youth, family, and community culture are included in the classroom, students feel a sense of belonging, see purpose in learning, and are motivated to do well. School relationships with families and communities improve. As Cleary and Peacock (1998) report, “Schools that acknowledge, accept, and teach a child’s cultural heritage have significantly better success in educating students” (p. 108).

ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS

CRSB teaching promotes six essential elements that are embedded in and woven throughout the teaching:

- It is always *student centered*.
- It has the power to *transform*.
- It is *connected and integrated*.
- It fosters *critical thinking*.
- It incorporates *assessment and reflection*.
- It builds *relationships and community*.

These elements are just good teaching practices that can be used by all teachers. Throughout this guide, we focus on these elements; they are described briefly here and in more depth in later chapters.

Becoming Student Centered

CRSB teaching is always student centered. Content is taught through individualized learning that is connected to goals and standards. CRSB practices promote authentic learning that is relevant and meaningful to students, and connect learning in the school to what the students know and are learning outside the classroom. Teaching becomes more student centered when

- students’ lives, interests, families, communities, and cultures are the basis for what is taught;
- students are involved in planning what they will learn and how they will learn it;
- the social, emotional, and cognitive strengths and needs of the students are recognized by their teachers and reflected in individualized learning plans; and
- instruction is built on the students’ personal and cultural strengths.

The teachers who created Project FRESA use a student-centered philosophy to inform every aspect of their teaching. They take the time at the beginning of the year to get to know the students and their families. The teachers then create activities that examine issues that are important to their students and that relate classroom lessons to their daily lives. Throughout the year, students are regularly encouraged to be active participants in their own learning and to make many decisions in the classroom. For instance, the class brainstorms rules at the beginning of the school year that serve as general rules for all students to follow. If a student finds it hard to stick to a rule, the class makes specific suggestions about the rule.

Other ways teachers can make lessons more student centered are to

- study family or community history, using it to study other historical ideas;
- relate lessons to students' personal, family, or community cultures;
- speak (and value) students' home languages;
- allow students to suggest topics that grow out of their interest in the community, as well as personal and group interests;
- invite students to write about their own lives, and about things and people who are important to them; and
- use literature written by people whose culture reflects that of the students.

See Chapter 3 for more information on student-centered teaching.

Promoting Transformational Teaching

CRSB practices can transform teaching and learning by valuing and building on the knowledge all students bring to class. Transformation happens in the following ways:

- The role of the teacher is transformed from instructor to facilitator by allowing students' experiences, perspectives, and interests to help shape the curriculum.
- The curriculum is transformed as the subject matter is examined from many different perspectives, in ways that promote growth and discovery.
- The participants' perspectives are transformed as they begin to value and respect things and people that they may not have valued or respected before.

For example, one goal of Project FRESA is to give students the opportunity and language skills to voice their daily reality. Discussing their collective experiences with farm labor gives students a new sense of value. Because of their dialogue and reflection, students often take social action that leads to positive changes throughout the school and community. Transformation happens as the students and school staff members alter their value systems and their behavior.

Other ways teachers can make their teaching transformational include

- helping students to recognize the strengths and significance of their culture, family, and community, and to see their own lives and perspectives as subjects worthy of study;
- studying curricular concepts from the point of view of students' cultures, comparing them with the way concepts are presented in textbooks;
- helping students to critically examine and challenge the knowledge and perspectives presented in the curriculum and textbooks, and to address inaccuracies, omissions, or distortions by bringing in multiple perspectives;
- encouraging students to take social action by doing things like contacting government representatives or educating the community on issues; and
- providing opportunities for community members to see students in a new and positive light—through meetings, presentations, and exhibitions—thus increasing their support for the school.

See Chapter 3 for more information on transformational teaching and learning.

Connecting and Integrating CRSB Practices

CRSB teaching should not be an “add-on” or separate activity, but rather an approach that is connected and integrated with what is happening in the rest of the classroom and school community. CRSB teaching is connected and integrated when

- learning is contextualized and builds on what students already know, allowing them to comprehend new information more easily;
- interdisciplinary work is used to illustrate the relationships among different subjects and their applicability; and
- the work encourages students and teachers to connect with other students, teachers, administrators, families, and community members.

For example, the interdisciplinary nature of Project FRESA means that lessons cross boundaries of language arts, math, geography, and technology. Consequently, students are better able to see how they can use different disciplines to help solve problems in the real world. The project’s design also ensures that the teachers work collaboratively and that the students in the two classes work as “buddies.”

Other ways teachers can connect and integrate the curriculum include

- discussing how subject matter is related to students’ lives and why the information is important to them;
- connecting projects with other activities that the school promotes;
- linking study to local issues and events by allowing students to investigate, measure, calculate, and write about those issues;
- incorporating a variety of standards to be learned within each task, from basic skills to cultural awareness and interpersonal skills; and
- sharing information with other students, teachers, classrooms, and parents.

See Chapters 5 and 7 for more discussion and examples of connected and integrated teaching and learning.

Fostering Critical Thinking

As you make the curriculum more relevant to students and draw in their families and community, you bring depth and breadth to learning. You also help students develop one of the most important abilities of a well-educated person: to think critically. Critical thinking is a fundamental part of learning, involving high-level thinking processes such as decision making, logical inquiry, reasoning, artistic creation, and problem solving. CRSB teaching creates opportunities for students to build critical thinking skills by using these skills in real-life situations and understanding how to apply them in other contexts.

Practices that promote critical thinking include these:

- Teachers pose questions that probe student thinking.
- Students monitor their own level of understanding and become self-directed, self-disciplined, and self-corrective.
- Teachers and students approach learning in different ways.

Project FRESA gives students the opportunity to ask questions, voice opinions, analyze information, and communicate their understanding of their reality in a

meaningful way. Students learn and use critical thinking skills to explore their role in society and to examine complex ideas about social and educational justice. These skills develop in concert with more-complex ways of writing and with higher-order reasoning. After Mar Vista Elementary students wrote a persuasive letter to the governor about the side effects of pesticide use, they used the governor's reply to further hone their thinking skills. They analyzed the governor's response, talked about his point of view and purpose, and discussed the politics they found in his letter.

Other ways to promote critical thinking skills are

- involving students in the planning of a project;
- asking students to reflect and report on why they chose their topic of interest, how they researched it, how they completed their task, what they found out about the topic, and how they liked studying the topic;
- persuading students to formulate, share, and debate their opinions;
- encouraging students to examine the perspective put forth in the text, question it, and discover any alternative perspectives (which also promotes transformational learning); and
- teaching students to recognize stereotypes.

See Chapter 5 for more information on fostering critical thinking.

Incorporating Assessment and Reflection

Assessment and reflection, for both the teacher and the student, should be ongoing and infused throughout the curriculum. In CRSB teaching, a variety of authentic assessment measures are used to monitor progress throughout the year and to make midcourse adjustments. In addition, students and teachers develop and pose rich questions to reflect critically on lessons learned. As students and teachers practice assessment and reflection, both groups better understand their own teaching and learning styles and make academic, personal, and cultural connections. They become more skillful in evaluating and improving their own performance and thinking.

Examples of how teachers can encourage assessment and reflection include

- having students define an identified need, then create a plan to address the problem;
- assessing students through multiple, authentic means—reports, portfolios, and presentations—and by a variety of people (teachers, students, and community members);
- helping students to create the rubric by which they will be assessed;
- encouraging students to use journals to set personal goals and reflect on what they have learned; and
- having students reflect on their progress and make adjustments as needed.

See Chapter 6 for more information on assessment and reflection.

Building Relationships and Community

CRSB teaching builds and supports relationships and community. When you recognize family and community members' knowledge and experiences as strengths

that are valuable to a child's education, you are valued and respected in turn by students, staff, families, and community members. CRSB teaching fosters partnerships because family and community members are reminded that they have something to offer the school and that they can have a significant positive impact on the quality of their children's education. CRSB teaching builds relationships between individuals and among groups as people learn what others have to contribute. They learn to rely on each other, work together on concrete tasks that take advantage of their collective and individual assets, and create promising futures for youth and the community.

Teachers can build relationships by

- getting to know their students, students' families, and the community they serve—using what they learn to help inform what is taught;
- communicating with parents about what they are teaching and how parents can be involved;
- helping students to meet and get to know other people in their community; and
- using multiple avenues to include families in what is done in the school.

As with all relationship building, it can take time to gain families' trust and participation, particularly when it is necessary to overcome decades of exclusion or poor school–community relations. When Project FRESA students first approached their family members, some encountered resistance. Families wanted to know why the students were asking questions and how the answers would be used. Once the parents understood the purpose of the project, they became very supportive and actively participated. New connections were established and bonds were strengthened among the students, parents, and community. Now that they see their work being viewed with a new understanding and respect, parents and other family members feel valued and seem more comfortable coming into the school and talking with the staff.

Other ways teachers can build relationships with families and community members include

- making an event that is extremely important (and exciting) to the community a subject of study;
- bringing outside resources into the school;
- inviting family and community members to speak to the class or share a special skill;
- involving students in making presentations to the community;
- talking to community leaders about what they consider appropriate and critical subjects to be taught; and
- learning about the students' cultures by spending time with people of that culture, reading books, attending community events, and learning the language.

See Chapter 3 for more information on building relationships.

Snapshot 1.1 "Project FRESA" tells the story of how two teachers worked together to bring CRSB teaching and the essential elements to two classrooms in their elementary school. Snapshot 1.2 "Listening to Community Voices" provides a picture of how one district worked on a comprehensive initiative over a long period of time in order to bring all the essential elements of CRSB teaching to their entire district.

Snapshot 1.2

LISTENING TO COMMUNITY VOICES: CREATING SCHOOL SUCCESS

Chugach School District, Prince William Sound, Alaska

Grade level: Pre-K–12

Subject areas: All

Highlights: This long-term, comprehensive, and very successful districtwide school reform effort, which was developed with the community, paid great attention to being culturally responsive and setting high standards.

How can a school district in crisis become one where student performance exceeds state and national norms? How can a school that once caused community discontent become a source of pride? How can an unstable district become a stable district that attracts and keeps quality staff?

For one school district, the journey began with a process of reinvention and two years of extensive preparatory work before they could implement a system of change that would provide performance-based, individualized education for all students. With the help of the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory (NWREL, now Education Northwest), the Chugach School District (CSD) took on the Alaska Onward to Excellence (AOTE) training as a way to provide their team members with the skills to build trust with community members, empower community engagement, and be supportive of the change. Bob Crumley, Chugach's superintendent, says, "Without the NWREL and their AOTE process, Chugach's education system as we know it today would not have happened."

In 1994, the CSD decided it was not adequately serving students nor preparing them for the future:

- Scores on the California Achievement Test were the lowest in the state.
- Only 10–20 percent of students were reading at grade level, with the average student reading three grades below grade level.

- Most students had difficulties experiencing any success after high school: in 25 years, only a few high school graduates completed a postsecondary education.

In order for students to succeed, district officials decided they had to tear down everything and rebuild a new school system that would improve the way they served students and their families.

District Realities

There are not many districts like the CSD. Although it has only 249 students, the students are geographically scattered over 22,000 square miles of south-central Alaska. Most students live in isolated and remote areas only reachable by plane. Half of the students in the district are Alaska Native from traditional Native communities.

There are only 40 faculty and staff members to serve the district's widely dispersed student population. Eighteen are based at three community schools, one manages a school-to-work program in Anchorage, and the rest are either visiting teachers or specialists who work with home-schooled children or who supply education support services. There is an average 14:1 student:teacher ratio—purposefully kept small because the district believes that is best for students.

Because the district's educational programs range from preschool to postsecondary

education—serving students up to age 21—all teachers work with students of various ages, and all teach multiple subjects. Education occurs 24 hours a day, seven days a week, with instruction taking place in the community, in the home, at school, and in many workplaces.

Building Relationships and Community

From the outset, the district's overhaul was undertaken collaboratively. Parents and family members, students (both past and present), staff members, community leaders, and business partners all joined in the effort. The CSD believed that the first step in the process was to find out what the community really wanted its schools to do, so they started by listening to and valuing everyone's voice. Their collaboration yielded a common mission and core vision that included their shared values and beliefs:

The students of CSD will grow to become successful healthy adults with all the necessary tools to make a good future for their lives.

In order to accomplish this vision, the stakeholders created the following list of goals based on their common values and beliefs:

1. Students will demonstrate effective written and verbal communication to a variety of audiences.
2. Students will effectively use critical thinking and problem-solving skills in making daily decisions.
3. Students will demonstrate a positive attitude that includes self-confidence, leadership, and a sense of humor (character development).
4. Students will learn to set priorities and achieve personal, family, and community goals.
5. Students will possess the skills and attitudes to adapt to an ever-changing environment.

6. Students will understand, preserve, and appreciate their own language and culture and the heritage of others.
7. Students and community will incorporate modern technology to enhance learning.
8. Students will develop the civic responsibilities and the social and academic skills necessary to make a successful transition to life after school, whether in a rural or in an urban environment.
9. Students will possess the work ethic that enables them to be self-directed, determined, dependable, and productive.

Throughout the process, everyone is empowered to be a leader. Students are encouraged to take responsibility for their own learning. Although students, faculty, and resources are widely dispersed, CSD achieves a unity of focus by holding quarterly stakeholder meetings and annually gathering community input on CSD performance and goals.

Basing Curriculum on Standards

From all the conversations at their meetings, the stakeholders realized they could not reach their vision within the regular school curriculum. Instead, a standards-based system of "whole-child education" that emphasizes real-life learning situations was pioneered. With the aim of helping students reach their full potential as individuals and as members of their communities, a continuum of performance-based standards was created for 10 content areas:

1. Mathematics
2. Reading
3. Writing
4. Social sciences

(Continued)

(Continued)

5. Science
6. Technology development
7. Personal/social/health development
8. Career development
9. Cultural awareness and expression
10. Service learning

Many of the basic academic skills are similar to the regular curriculum and statewide standards. Because the CSD listened to what its community members really wanted, though, it developed a system that goes above and beyond the state standards and focuses on “education for the whole child.” The district identified standards such as personal/social/health development as among the most important, because if the students don’t show improvement there, they won’t be successful academically.

Creating a Student-Centered/ Whole-Child Educational Approach

The CSD “threw away seat time” as the most appropriate means to educate the child, and implemented and refined an innovative standards-based system with an individualized, student-centered approach that has the flexibility to accommodate the personal learning styles and rates of all students. Within this system, students work at their own developmentally appropriate pace.

Through multiple means, each student is assessed to determine his current functioning, instructional learning styles or patterns, and strengths and weaknesses. For each child, a student learning profile (SLP) is developed from information gained and updated every three years. Teachers use the SLPs to determine such things as whether a student learns best through visual instruction, hearing, or physical aids that can be manipulated. SLPs are key inputs into

learning plans tailored to the strengths, weaknesses, developmental stage, and circumstances of each child. As teachers prepare these individualized instructional strategies, students and parents participate in setting goals for demonstrating mastery of the 10 content areas at the student’s level.

Building in Assessment and Reflection

From the beginning, all the stakeholders—especially business partners—emphasized that accountability should be built into the educational system and embedded in the district’s performance goals. Consequently, students must be able to demonstrate measurable proficiency in the 10 content areas.

CSD worked with the Alaska Department of Education and Early Development to secure a waiver so they did not have to use the traditional Carnegie units (or credit-based graduation requirements) and grade levels. CSD students still must meet the state benchmark testing requirements and pass the High School Graduation Qualifying Exam. Demonstrable proficiency with specific minimum graduation levels of mastery in each of the 10 content areas—and not the number of credit hours earned—was set as the essential condition for graduation. Students are evaluated through a variety of formal and informal assessments. These assessments are designed to determine whether students can apply skills and knowledge in real situations.

Keeping students and parents apprised of the educational process was very important to all stakeholders, so CSD created an assessment system that both parents and students can understand. Expectations are clear, and progress toward meeting them is documented in a running record of assessments completed in all content areas. Teachers, students, and parents regularly consult these student assessment binders. Upon graduation, students are given their assessment binders, which serve as proof of skill mastery.

Student assessment binders are but one of several CSD tools designed to accommodate individual differences in learning and to foster school system accountability. The Aligned Information Management System (AIMS) also helps students and parents to be aware of their progress. This online database has all the current information about the students. Parents and students can access secured information from home at their convenience. Through consistent communication among staff, students, and parents, all parties are involved in helping to set educational goals, implementing plans at home and in the community, and taking part in ongoing assessment. Because of this consistency, students, parents, and community members have a thorough understanding of the evaluation system.

Making It Connected and Integrated

Integrated learning and multisensory approaches to teaching are key elements of CSD's "whole-child" education. The aim of these approaches is to help students make real-life connections and recognize the value and usefulness of what they are learning. CSD uses a variety of districtwide tools for developing integrated-learning teaching units. Each year, the district staff meets to develop thematic units for the upcoming school year. Resulting lesson plans and student projects transcend content areas, so subjects are not taught in isolation.

CSD's Anchorage House epitomizes this approach to contextual learning. Students begin participation in this residential program starting at the junior high level; the program provides them with four distinct opportunities throughout their secondary education to apply their learning skills in an urban community. The students travel from their often-isolated communities to Anchorage, where they live in a house purchased by the district. With plenty of support and supervision, the students learn everything from how to use

mass transit and ATMs to what careers and educational opportunities are available in the city. During the last two phases, which may span from several weeks to 10 months, students participate in internships or other workplace programs as they take responsibility for managing their daily activities.

Transforming Lives

All the hard work continues to pay off for the students and staff of CSD. Transformations can be seen in all stakeholders. Students are proud of their achievements, and so are their families. Family and community members feel more connected to the schools, and teachers have pulled together like never before. Proof of these transformations can be seen in test scores and graduation rates:

- Dramatic increases in results on the California Achievement Test from 1995 to 1999.
 - Reading scores increased from the 28th to the 71st percentile.
 - Math scores increased from the 54th to the 78th percentile.
 - Language arts scores increased from the 26th to the 72nd percentile.
- Scores surpassed the state average in the four subject areas tested in Alaska's High School Graduation Qualifying Examination.
- Thirty-one of seventy-five graduates have gone on to postsecondary educational institutions from 1995 to the present.

What this transformation has meant for staff has also been tremendous. Staff turnover averaged 55 percent from 1975 to 1994, but since the implementation of the new system, faculty turnover rate has fallen to an average of 7.5 percent. The district offers 30 days of faculty training each year to better implement changes and to work within

(Continued)

(Continued)

the system more effectively. The district also provides flexible working conditions, which allow for sharing or rotating jobs and creating a relief team of experienced teachers. Teachers within the district have formed their own organization, the Prince William Sound Teachers' Association. Since they are a team, they believe that everyone should share the same rewards, so they rejected a salary plan proposed by the district with a pay-for-performance system that rewards individual and districtwide accomplishments. Instead, they asked that everyone receive the same, averaged amount.

Due to the collaborative approach, the district has created a new environment for learning where all community members have embraced their rights and responsibilities as stakeholders in the future of the students.

For more information on the CSD and their standards-based system, visit www.chugachschools.com.

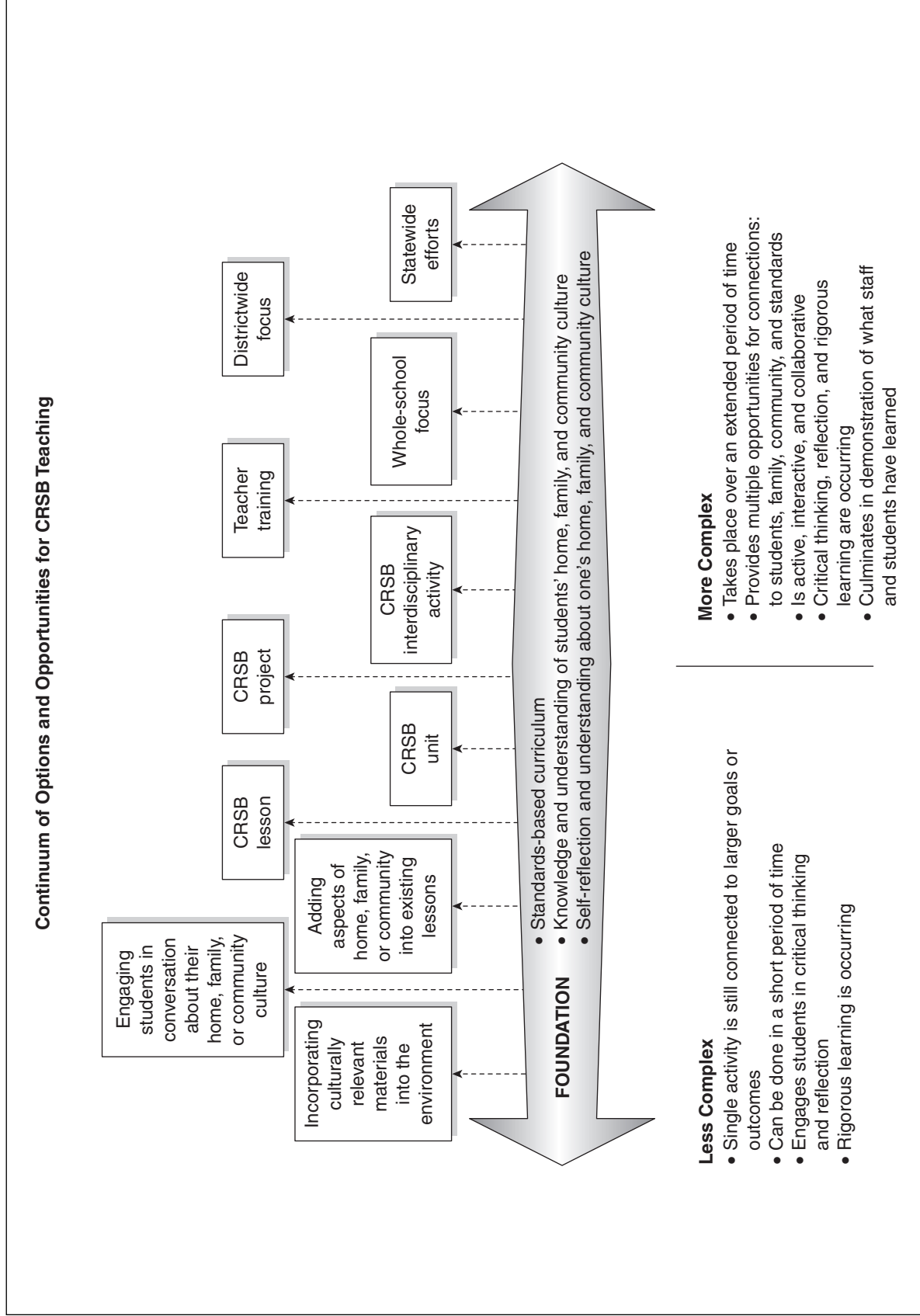
The CSD received the 2001 Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award in the area of education. To read the write-up by the National Institute of Standards and Technology, visit www.nist.gov/public_affairs/chugach.htm

IMPLEMENTING CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE STANDARDS-BASED TEACHING

In our work with teachers, we have found that beginning the CRSB process usually includes the following steps:

1. Think about the various ways you can effectively bring your family and community culture into the classroom. Ask yourself, What self-exploration do I need to do? How does my own cultural framing affect the way I see my students and their families?
2. Think about what more you need to know about your students before you begin. Ask yourself, What are my students' cultural backgrounds and perspectives? What are the various things they and their families value? How can I tap into the cultural strength of my students' family and community cultures? How can I make sure I am not operating on stereotypes?
3. Consider how you build relationships and community in your classroom. Ask yourself, What activities or actions can help me and my students get to know one another better and learn from each other? How can I show students, families, and community members that their cultural framing and knowledge are valuable?
4. Start small and then build up to larger activities and projects. Ask yourself, How can I bring a "cultural responsiveness" to current lessons and activities? In other words, How can I expand lessons or activities to make sure they are student centered, transformational, and that they build relationships? Ask yourself, How can I help students see and consider various points of view and understand ways that concepts apply in other contexts?
5. Find allies—in students, teachers, parents, community members, administrators, and others. Ask yourself, What other teachers in the building currently practice or would support CRSB teaching? How are my CRSB lessons connected to other initiatives or projects in the school? How do my CRSB activities connect to our building or district mission? It helps to have support!

Figure 1.3 Continuum of Options and Opportunities for CSRB Teaching



CONTINUUM OF OPTIONS AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE STANDARDS-BASED TEACHING

There is a broad array of options and opportunities for implementing CRSB teaching in your classroom or program. Figure 1.3 (page 21) shows the variety of options and where they fall along a continuum: from informal and brief to formal and elaborate. The continuum moves from less-complex areas such as engaging students in dialogue about their family or community culture to more complex areas such as interdisciplinary units centered on family or community connections. Note that both of the examples in this chapter fall at the more-complex end of the continuum. Throughout this manual, you will be able to read about simpler, less-complex ways to adapt your standards-based lessons and activities to make them more culturally responsive. The rest of this book will take you through various points on the continuum, describing them in more depth and providing examples and tips for implementing them.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. What is your personal response to CRSB teaching? What does it mean to you?
2. What are the different types of cultures that you see among your students, families, and colleagues? In what small ways could you incorporate one of these cultures into your existing lesson(s)?
3. What are the important aspects of your own culture(s) that impact who you are? How does this affect how you relate to and interact with the culture(s) of your school, your students, and their families?
4. Do you know any teachers—or have you read about any or seen any in films—that engage in CRSB teaching? Describe the things they do that are culturally responsive and tell how you could use some of their strategies in your classroom.
5. Describe an activity you have seen or done that is culturally responsive but not standards-based and one that is standards-based but not culturally responsive. How might you alter these activities to make them both standards-based and culturally responsive?
6. What are some specific standards that Project FRESA appears to address? What state or district standards can you draw from to create a similar project?
7. How has youth culture changed since you were a student? How does it compare to the current youth culture of your students?
8. Were there any conflicts between your family culture and the culture of your school when you were a student? How did that impact your learning? What are some conflicts between the culture of the school you work in or with now and your students' cultures? How do you think that is impacting their learning?
9. Think back on a powerful and positive learning experience you had as a student. In what ways were some of the essential elements of CRSB teaching a part of that experience?
10. How are any or all of the essential elements reflected in your current teaching practices?
11. Are there any “elements” in addition to the ones listed that you think are necessary to ensure CRSB teaching?
12. What are some examples of CRSB activities you have seen at the beginning, middle, and end of the continuum of options and opportunities?