

## Engage Students through Culturally Responsive & Sustaining Academic Instruction

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**Resources & Annotated References for Using Engagement Strategies to Increase Students' Meaningful Participation in Learning** | All resources from Session 7 support responsive and sustaining pedagogical practices and academic instruction.

**[Supporting and responding to behavior: Evidence-based classroom strategies for teachers.](#)** | This practice guide is an updated version of Supporting and Responding to Student Behavior (Office of Special Education Programs, 2015). "Supporting and Responding" summarizes evidence-based, positive, and proactive practices that support and respond to students' social, emotional, and behavioral (SEB) needs in classrooms and similar teaching and learning environments (e.g., small-group activity).

**Guide:** <https://www.pbis.org/resource/supporting-and-responding-to-behavior-evidence-based-classroom-strategies-for-teachers>

**[What Is Culturally Responsive And Sustaining Pedagogy? And Why Does It Matter?](#)** | In this video essay, What is Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy and Why Does It Matter, written by Django Paris and H. Samy Alim, I will summarize their work on distinctions between culturally relevant and culturally sustaining pedagogy. While you might be familiar with the terms culturally relevant and culturally responsive, keep watching to discover how Paris and Alim extend the notion of what relevance and responsiveness mean in a pluralist society.

**[Dr. Gloria Larson Billings: On What Worries Her The Most](#)** | Reflection and connections opportunity

**[Gloria Ladson-Billings: Culturally Relevant Pedagogy](#)** | Defines

**Culturally Responsive and Sustaining Learning Environments** | This resource provides a practitioner-focused framework for creating learning environments that affirm students' cultural identities while sustaining their linguistic, cultural, and community assets over time. The Great Lakes Equity Assistance Center outlines key conditions of culturally responsive and sustaining learning environments, including inclusive curriculum, affirming relationships, student voice and agency, and instructional practices that connect learning to students' lived experiences. Grounded in equity-centered school improvement, the resource supports teachers and administrators in examining policies, classroom practices, and schoolwide structures to reduce marginalization and promote belonging, engagement, and academic success for all students.

**Creating Safe and Inclusive Schools: A Framework for Self-Assessment** | This tool provides a framework with four domains for assessing the extent to which classroom and non-classroom spaces reflect a positive school climate, along with a self-assessment tool to help school and district teams prioritize domains in planning efforts. 2014 by Great Lakes Equity Center

**[On Educating Culturally Sustaining Teachers](#)** | This brief advances a vision of teacher preparation and professional learning that centers equity as foundational rather than supplemental to instructional practice. Grounded in culturally sustaining pedagogy, the brief emphasizes the importance of preparing educators to critically examine power, identity, and systemic inequities while sustaining the cultural and linguistic assets students bring to schools. It provides conceptual framing and guiding considerations to support educator learning systems in developing teachers who are equipped to foster inclusive,

affirming, and academically rigorous learning environments for all students. Paris, D. 2017 Midwest & Plains Equity Assistance Center

**[American Evaluation Association Statement On Cultural Competence In Evaluation](#)** | The American Evaluation Association's Public Statement on Cultural Competence in Evaluation articulates evaluators' ethical responsibility to attend to culture, context, power, and equity throughout the evaluation process. The statement emphasizes that culturally competent evaluation requires ongoing reflection on positionality, meaningful engagement with communities, and evaluation designs that honor diverse ways of knowing. It provides a foundational framework for conducting evaluations that are methodologically sound, contextually responsive evaluations aligned with principles of social justice.

**Foundations of Equity-Centered MTSS** | Multitiered systems of support (MTSS) are widely recognized as an evidence-based framework for organizing a continuum of universal, targeted, and intensive supports to address students' academic, behavioral, social-emotional, and mental health needs (Sullivan et al., 2018; Freeman et al., 2015). Commonly operationalized through models such as RTI and SWPBIS, MTSS is increasingly implemented through integrated approaches that coordinate academic and social-emotional-behavioral supports to improve efficiency and responsiveness (Lane et al., 2014; Sugai & Horner, 2020). While equity is often named as an intended outcome of MTSS, particularly in efforts to reduce disproportionality, it is frequently treated as secondary rather than foundational. This Equity by Design brief advances an equity-centered conceptualization of MTSS, positioning equity as central to system design, implementation, and evaluation, and provides guiding questions and resources to support schools and districts in advancing more just and rights-protective educational systems.

**Assessing Bias in Standards and Curricular Materials** | Academic content standards and curricular materials frequently center White American histories and experiences as universal, while minimizing, misrepresenting, or omitting the perspectives of non-White, non-male, non-dis/abled, and non-cisgender communities (GLEC, 2016; Sleeter, 2005). Because educators are often required to teach from standardized, district-adopted curricula, inequities embedded in standards and materials have direct implications for student learning, identity development, and belonging in schools (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Sleeter, 2005; Stovall, 2006; Duncan-Andrade, 2007; Gay, 2010; Paris, 2012; Laing, 2013; Paris & Alim, 2014; Aronson & Laughter, 2015; Waitoller & Thorius, 2016). The Assessing Bias in Standards & Curricular Materials Tool provides a structured, equity-oriented framework for examining the extent to which standards and curricular resources reflect educational equity (Fraser, 1998; GLEC, 2011). Adapted from the Great Lakes Equity Center's Equity Leaders Institute (2016) and Sadker's work on confronting curricular bias, the tool includes domains, indicators, and a scoring guide to support systematic analysis of bias in curriculum development, selection, interpretation, and application.

**Funds of Knowledge Toolkit.** | Practical guide helping teachers capture key information about students' cultural and family backgrounds; includes a matrix linking data to classroom application.

[https://ospi.k12.wa.us/sites/default/files/2023-10/funds\\_of\\_knowledge\\_toolkit.pdf](https://ospi.k12.wa.us/sites/default/files/2023-10/funds_of_knowledge_toolkit.pdf)

**Social identity wheel activity guide.** | Provides a protocol for exploring social identities; useful for teacher reflection and promoting equitable classroom interactions.

<https://sites.lsa.umich.edu/equitable-teaching/social-identity-wheel/>

**Get to know you survey.** | A survey tool to gather student background and preferences, supporting relationship building and relevant learning.

**Learner-Centered Collaborative. (2023). Learner-centered feedback tool.** | Middle/high school tool for providing structured feedback that promotes active engagement and self-reflection.

[https://learnercentered.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/LCC-Tool\\_Feedback-Protocol.pdf](https://learnercentered.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/LCC-Tool_Feedback-Protocol.pdf)

**ReACT. (2024). Wise feedback overview.** | Overview of feedback strategies to foster student reflection, engagement, and ownership.

<https://bpb-us->

[e1.wpmucdn.com/blogs.uoregon.edu/dist/f/19192/files/2024/08/WiseFeedback\\_Overview-1.pdf](https://bpb-us-e1.wpmucdn.com/blogs.uoregon.edu/dist/f/19192/files/2024/08/WiseFeedback_Overview-1.pdf)

**Habits of Effective Classroom Practices** | This practice brief describes how we (a) develop habits of effective classroom practice and (b) expand effective habits in our schools, districts, and states. Be sure to watch the [related webinar](#).

<https://www.pbis.org/resource/habits-of-effective-classroom-practice>

**Thematic choice board examples.**

<https://www.torreytrust.com/design-projects#h.95idxhj90fj6>

**Spot and check protocol.** <https://searchinstitute.org/resources-hub/spot-check; Protocol> | Tool to gather structured student feedback on engagement and classroom experiences.

<https://d2pck61xhq74q6.cloudfront.net/Spot-Check.pdf>

**Top ten list and diamond sort.** <https://searchinstitute.org/resources-hub/top-ten-list-and-diamond-sort; Protocol> | Student feedback tools to rank and prioritize ideas, supporting student voice.

<https://d2pck61xhq74q6.cloudfront.net/Top-Ten-List-and-Diamond-Sort.pdf>

**Picture essay protocol.** <https://searchinstitute.org/resources-hub/picture-essay; Protocol> | Visual tool for students to express perspectives and experiences, enhancing engagement and self-expression.

<https://d2pck61xhq74q6.cloudfront.net/Picture-Essay.pdf>

**Resources to facilitate project-based learning.** | Collection of tools and templates to support engagement and collaboration in PBL environments.

<https://my.pblworks.org/resources>

**Roles that encourage equitable collaborative learning in middle and high school.** | Discusses student roles in PBL to foster equitable participation and active engagement.

<https://www.edutopia.org/article/roles-encourage-equitable-collaborative-learning>

## Annotated Reference List

Aronson, B., & Laughter, J. (2016). The theory and practice of culturally relevant education: A synthesis of research across content areas. *Review of Educational Research*, 86(1), 163–206. |

This research synthesis reviews empirical studies across subject areas examining culturally relevant education. Findings consistently link culturally relevant practices to **improved student engagement, motivation, academic achievement, and deeper comprehension**, particularly for historically marginalized students. The authors highlight relevance, identity affirmation, and instructional responsiveness as key mechanisms.

<https://doi.org/10.3102/0034654315582066>

Chung, E., Bottiani, J. H., Francis, M. K., & Bradshaw, C. P. (2025). Associations between culturally responsive teaching practices and student–teacher connectedness: A multi-informant examination | Using reports from both students and teachers across multiple middle schools, this empirical study found that culturally responsive teaching practices were strongly associated with higher student–teacher connectedness. Students reported feeling more supported, understood, and respected when teachers intentionally incorporated students’ cultural identities into instruction. This study underscores for educators and school leaders that culturally responsive teaching is not only an instructional strategy but also a key relational practice that supports engagement, belonging, and readiness to learn.

Cornelius-White, J. (2007). Learner-centered teacher–student relationships are effective: A meta-analysis. *Review of Educational Research*, 77(1), 113–143. | This meta-analysis finds strong positive effects of learner-centered practices on student achievement, engagement, motivation, and classroom behavior. ***Supportive relationships and instructional approaches that center student voice are associated with reduced discipline issues and improved academic outcomes.***

<https://doi.org/10.3102/003465430298563>

Debnam, K. J., Kaihoi, C. A., Pas, E. T., & Bradshaw, C. P. (2024). A school-wide approach to cultural responsiveness and student engagement: A randomized trial of Double Check in middle schools. | This randomized controlled trial examined the impact of Double Check, a school-wide culturally responsive instructional framework, across multiple middle schools. Findings demonstrated improvements in student engagement, classroom climate, and instructional practices, with stronger effects when culturally responsive strategies were implemented consistently across classrooms. For practitioners and administrators, this study provides concrete evidence that culturally responsive practices, when supported at the systems level, enhance academic engagement and strengthen implementation fidelity within PBIS and MTSS frameworks.

Gay, G. (2018). *Culturally responsive teaching: Theory, research, and practice* (3rd ed.). Teachers College Press. | This book synthesizes decades of research on culturally responsive pedagogy. Evidence indicates that culturally responsive teaching improves student motivation, engagement, academic achievement, and classroom climate by aligning instruction with students’ cultural knowledge and lived experiences.

Larson, K. E., Pas, E. T., Bradshaw, C. P., Rosenberg, M. S., & Day-Vines, N. L. (2018). Examining the relationship between culturally responsive practices and classroom climate. | This study explored how teachers’ culturally responsive practices related to classroom interactions and climate. Results indicated that classrooms with higher levels of culturally responsive instruction demonstrated more positive teacher–student interactions, fewer exclusionary discipline practices, and stronger emotional support. For classroom practitioners, the findings highlight specific teacher behaviors that promote emotionally safe and inclusive learning environments. For administrators, the study reinforces the importance of coaching and professional learning focused on culturally responsive pedagogy as a core component of classroom management and climate.

Riddle (Payno-Simmons), R. (2014). *Cultural mismatch and silenced voices: Experiences of historically marginalized elementary students within school-wide positive behavior supports* (Doctoral dissertation, Michigan State University). | <https://doi.org/10.25335/36hj-9735>

This qualitative study reveals how ***PBIS practices can unintentionally marginalize students when cultural relevance and voice are absent. Findings emphasize the need for engagement strategies that affirm identity and student agency.***

Santiago-Rosario, M. R., McIntosh, K., & Payno-Simmons, R. (2022). *Centering equity within the PBIS framework: Overview and evidence of effectiveness*. Center on PBIS, University of Oregon. | This report summarizes empirical evidence supporting equity-centered PBIS practices. Findings link **culturally responsive engagement strategies to improved behavioral outcomes, student belonging, and instructional effectiveness**. <https://www.pbis.org/resource/centering-equity-within-the-pbis-framework-overview-and-evidence-of-effectiveness>

Note: These resources are curated for K–12 educators to inform engagement strategies, relevant learning practices, and culturally sustaining pedagogy.