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The CUS Framework for Culturally Responsive and Relevant Pedagogy

There are great issues of inequity within schools. In the Toronto District School Board (TDSB), we now have disaggregated data, data broken down by demographic categories. This way of looking at data allows us to think more clearly about educational inequities and seek out ways to move forward towards more equitable outcomes for all students.

The TDSB data makes it clear that who sits in the classrooms has changed dramatically over the last 20 years. Of all TDSB elementary students, 29% are white, 27% are South Asian, 15% are East Asian, 10% are Black, 9% are bi-racial, 4% are Middle Eastern, 4% South-East Asian, 2% are Latin American and 0.1% are Aboriginal (*Understanding TDSB Students and Their Needs*. TDSB, 2009).

The TDSB secondary school data confirms that not all groups of students are being provided with the same level of success as others. The *TDSB Cohort Study,* which followed all secondary students over a five year period, revealed that certain groups of students were much more likely to "drop out" of secondary school before graduation than others. At the Centre for Urban Schooling (CUS), we refer to the "drop-out" rate as a "push-out" rate because we believe that the systemic inequities are prima-

rily responsible for the lack of engagement and achievement for marginalized and racialized children and youth.

From *The TDSB Grade 9 Cohort Study: A Five-Year Analysis, 2000-2005*, published in 2006, we find the following "drop-out" rate: 40% of students from the English-speaking Caribbean, 37% of students from Central and South America, 32% of students from East Africa and 29% of students from Southeast Asia.

In our work at the Centre for Urban Schooling, as we have become more actively involved in teacher professional development to support equity-based and social justice educational practices over the past two years, we saw a need to develop a tool that would encompass the many components that should be addressed for school change and also provide guidance to initiatives. From there, we developed a "Framework for Culturally Responsive and Relevant Pedagogy," a pedagogical and philosophical lens, which we felt supported the work within a Canadian urban context.

Our Framework is based upon the literature and theoretical tenets of bodies of work from the United States known as Culturally Relevant Pedagogy and Culturally Responsive Pedagogy. As we pull from both camps in our work, we have incorporated what the research states into our collective thinking, along with how research shows that teachers are engaging in these practices. The research speaks to the work of many, including but not limited to Gloria Ladson-Billings, Geneva Gay, Jacqueline Irvine, Ana Maria Villegas and Lucas and many others who do work around the connection between a broadly defined culture and classroom teaching and learning. Among the many ways this work gets implemented, at the core it connects pedagogical practice to high expectations regardless of issues of social identity; it infuses issues of a broadly defined culture and cultural components within the classroom teaching and environment; and engages students in developing questioning of the status quo and critical consciousness.

In an effort to support the professional development that CUS is providing to some urban schools within the Toronto District School Board, the Centre for Urban Schooling attempted to put "the meat on the bones" of what this work could look like and represent in our classrooms and schools. What might this look like when you are a teacher or administrator with this "lens"?

What happens in the school, in terms of leadership, school climate, family/caregiver-school relations when this practice is occurring?

We have put some ideas together and begun to share these ideas with educators about what schools, where all aspects embody the philosophy, might look like. The literature around culturally responsive and/or relevant pedagogy is very individually, teacher focused, without a push for overall school changes. In our minds, in order to really make the changes needed for students, we have to interrogate all aspects of our schools, in addition to teacher practice as we attempt to make education more meaningful for the students who are at the most risk of being "pushed out" of school.

Our framework requires that schools examine their thoughts, beliefs, attitudes and actions in seven areas: Classroom Climate and Instruction; School Climate; Student Voice and Space; Family/Caregiver-School Relations; School Leadership; Community Connection; and Professional Development.

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Framework for a Culturally Responsive and Relevant Pedagogy

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1. Classroom Climate and Instruction:
- The school has a broadly defined definition of "curriculum", which includes formal, hidden, symbolic and media curricula.
- Issues of social justice - including anti-racism, anti-classism, anti-sexism, ableism, and anti-homophobia - are central to the classroom curriculum in the broadest sense, thereby ensuring the development of all students' critical-thinking skills.
- The curriculum speaks to the lives of the students in the classroom and does not mandate a "one-size fits all curriculum", based upon a white middle-class societal view.
- Students see their lives represented in the materials, the books, the pictures, the teachers, the administrators, etc. within the classroom and school.
- The lived experiences of students, including family and community, are at the core of what is taught and talked about in the classroom and school. It is not simply "added-on" before moving back to the traditional curriculum.
- The curriculum encourages learning through doing, especially through doing things together which make a difference in the world.

- Teachers have high and differentiated expectations for their students within a curriculum and program that is academically rigorous.
- "Success" is measured in multiple ways. Moreover, lack of student progress is considered unacceptable, and not primarily the fault of the student.
- Teachers must use a variety of teaching methods in order to ensure that ALL students can access the curriculum.
- The curriculum is presented in ways that integrate materials and subjects so that students are able to see the whole, rather than only seeing things in isolation.
- Student input is essential in the development of curriculum.
- Teachers collaborate with colleagues in doing this equity-focused work and the school supports teachers with the time to plan and implement this kind of program.

2. School Climate:

- The school demonstrates a climate of respect and collaboration regarding school, family, community and global issues.
- The school supports the physical and psychological health of its students, through nutrition programs, support services (social work, child and youth workers), etc.
- There are physically safe and aesthetically pleasing spaces to learn and spend time in: clean environments, natural light, proper ventilation, open spaces, warm, inviting colours, etc.
- The equipment (e.g. media technology, athletic gear, art materials, etc.) is current and well-maintained.
- The school responds quickly and practically to all issues of discrimination and structural inequities.
- The school has clear procedures that encourage both students and teachers to work together to address these issues.
- There are clear procedures in place to monitor the progress in making school-wide changes towards equity.
- There must be flexibility and innovation in the implementation of policies regarding schooling (e.g. collective agreements, the curriculum, staffing models, time-tabling, programming, supervision time, etc.) to meet the needs of all students, but especially those who are not well-served by conventional schooling practices.
- The school is a safe space and also creates additional safe spaces where students can affirm all aspects of their social identities and build a foundation of confidence, self-esteem and self-awareness.

3. Student Voice and Space:

- Schools are places where students matter: Their ideas, opinions, perspectives, wants and needs are the basis for all that happens in the building.
- Diverse student interests and skills determine both the curricular and extra-curricular activities at the school.

- There are processes and structures in place that allow and encourage students to become involved in decision-making in both the classroom and school, and their participation has real impact.

4. Family/Caregiver-School Relations:

- The school respects all families and family structures, and invites them to participate in the life of the school and the educational process for the students.
- The school does not use a top-down, one-sided approach in which the "professionals" need to inform the parents of how to best educate their children. To the contrary, the school uses a model that ensures true collaboration based on mutual respect.
- The school recognizes and acknowledges that the parent community knows the most, and cares deeply about their own children.
- The school honours family/caregivers as an educational resource, by valuing their personal and/or professional knowledge of their children and by inviting them to share their areas of expertise with the students and school.
- In communities where people have not always had the best experiences in school themselves, trust needs to be established and nurtured. It is incumbent upon the school to take the first steps.
- Where necessary, the school seeks out services to allow another adult (e.g. family member, legal guardian, community advocate) to act in the student's best interests.
- Family/caregivers are consulted with and involved in making key decisions regarding important aspects of their children's school life.
- The communication between teachers/administrators and family/caregivers is respectful and validating.
- The forms of communication are invitational, accessible, multilingual and timely.
- The school uses innovative outreach strategies to make family/caregivers feel welcome.
- The school recognizes the socio-political events that shape family/caregiver involvement. Changes in labour laws, housing policies, job restructuring/outsourcing, immigration policies, market fluctuations, etc. all have an impact. Therefore, the school has reasonable and realistic expectations of family/caregiver time and resources.

5. School Leadership:

- The school administration communicates their vision clearly to all stakeholders. That vision articulates the notion that issues of equity and social justice are the pillars upon which the school mission rests.
- The leadership in the school is courageous and challenges the practices and policies of the Board and the Ministry when they do not align with the best interests of the students and community.
- The power in the school is shared by all stakeholders in different ways.

- The school has systematic policies and practices in place which help to train and maintain leadership throughout the school.
- School staff are supported and encouraged to develop and provide leadership in different areas.
- The leadership in the school is clear about the strengths and abilities that students bring to school as well as the strengths of their parents and community. The leadership focuses on these strengths and never blames the students, parents and community for what they lack.

6. Community Connections:
- The school has policies and practices in place to ensure that it learns from the knowledge of community agencies and community members who know the community in ways that the school does not.
- Teachers and school administrators are provided with the tools to become aware of existing demographic trends in their school's neighbourhood and the implications that those trends have for the school.
- The school is involved in social justice and advocacy work in the community around important issues that affect the students and their families. This work is not limited to advocacy around education, but around all of the other social determinants of health.
- As part of its curriculum, the school ensures open spaces for students to discuss the issues that affect their community, as well as provide opportunities for students to get involved in community advocacy.
- The school reaches out to the community and establishes collaborations with community agencies whose mandates include serving school-age children, youth, and their parents.

7. Culture of Professional Development:
- A culture of professional development is nurtured and applies to all administrators, teachers and support staff.
- In schools where teachers have very different life experiences from their students, professional development must question the "common sense" assumptions about schooling. This demands a new and different kind of professional development, focused on learning about the lives of students and their families.
- Professional development must also support and encourage school staff to focus on their own social identities and privilege.
- The school determines its priorities for professional development in a democratic and inclusive manner.
- Teachers are encouraged to explore areas of particular relevance to their interests and students' needs in determining their professional development plans for each school year.
- The school accepts that while professional development in areas such as equity and social justice education can at times create discomfort, this is an

accepted part of the process. At the same time, the school ensures a safe adult learning environment for all.

• School staff are provided with opportunities for on-going professional development in equity and social justice education.

For each of the seven components of the framework, we also have developed a continuum for educators to use as one way to situate themselves and determine areas that might be appropriate for beginning or continuing the work.

A sample of items from the continuum focused on Classroom Climate and Instruction:

For each of the following statements, please use the continuum to identify the strength of your classroom/school practice at this time. Please mark on the continuum your current location.

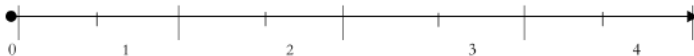| Place	0 = Not at All	1=Beginning	2=Some	3=Mostly	4 = Fully in

Please then provide an example to demonstrate your current position on the continuum.

The school has a broadly defined definition of "curriculum", which includes formal, hidden, symbolic and media curricula.
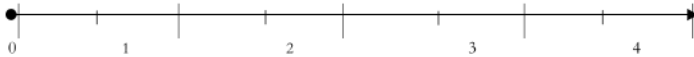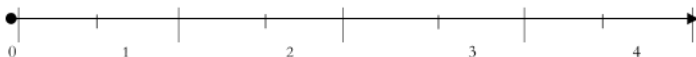

EXAMPLE:

Issues of social justice—including anti-racism, anti-classism, anti-sexism, ableism, and anti-homophobia—are central to the classroom curriculum in the broadest sense, thereby ensuring the development of all students' critical-thinking skills.

EXAMPLE:

The curriculum speaks to the lives of the students in the classroom and does not mandate a "one-size fits all curriculum", based upon a white middle-class societal view.

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EXAMPLE:
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Schools and individual educators can use The CUS Framework for Culturally Responsive and Relevant Pedagogy and the continuum as a means to:

1. *Suggest concrete ways to enact this pedagogical approach broadly within each component;*
2. *Encourage introspection and reflection on current situations within classrooms and schools, allowing schools and teachers to situate their practice regarding different aspects of their work;*
3. *Provide "look-fors" and establish indicators for educators regarding the seven components of the framework; and*
4. *Provide opportunity for planning and next steps.*
   This framework and the accompanying continuum for each component are "works in progress" at our Centre. We don't claim one way only to move forward in this work. However, we do firmly believe that educators must have support to make meaningful changes in our schools and classrooms in support of racialized and marginalized students. Critical conversations about racism, classism, homophobia, sexism and other equity issues have to occur and practices must be interrogated. We believe the tools we have created can offer one way to move forward in equity work in our schools.

Please email us at jeff.kugler@utoronto.ca and nwest-burns@oise.utoronto.ca with any suggestions or feedback.

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Jeff Kugler *is the Executive Director of the Centre for Urban Schooling at OISE/UT. Jeff was most recently the Principal at Nelson Mandela Park Public School (TDSB) in the Regent Park community of Toronto. He has worked on and off in Regent Park for 19 years as a teacher, Vice Principal, Principal and Course*

Director. For three years, while seconded to the York Faculty of Education he worked to set up the York University Regent Park Teacher Education Program and now at OISE through the creation of the new inner city teacher education programs. This work also has a strong focus on community and how to build on community strengths instead of deficits. Jeff and the Centre for Urban Schooling are engaged in Professional Development with schools and school boards on the topic of Culturally Responsive and Relevant Pedagogy.

Nicole West-Burns, *Ph.D. is a Research Officer with the Centre for Urban Schooling. For the past two years, Nicole has worked in teacher professional development related to culturally responsive and relevant teaching, and practices which promote and support equitable educational outcomes in schools. Prior to moving to Toronto in 2007, Nicole worked for the New Jersey State Department of Education in the area of early literacy instruction. Her primary roles there, beginning in 2002, were professional development coordinator, literacy coordinator and coach. Prior to that, Nicole worked as a reading coach/consultant in schools in several states, and was an elementary teacher in Baltimore City, Maryland. Nicole's master's and doctoral level work focused on African-American student achievement and related issues of culture and power in education. Specifically, Nicole completed her dissertation on African-centered education.*