



Good Teaching Is Culturally Responsive Teaching

Last month, we talked about the ways in which the [UNC Center for Urban Education](#) has created a “third space” to prepare pre-service teachers for urban classrooms. A third space results from the alignment of what professors are teaching, what in-service teachers are doing in the classroom, and the expertise of students’ family, clergy, and community members.

A second way we prepare our teacher candidates for urban classrooms is by providing quality coursework that focuses on cultural responsiveness.

What Is Cultural Responsiveness?

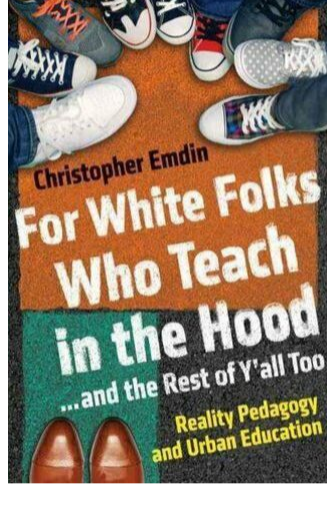
Culturally responsive teachers have consistently high expectations of all learners and draw upon students’ lived experiences, interests, and ways of learning to help students understand what’s being taught.

There is no better way to teach cultural responsiveness to pre-service teachers than to use those methods in the university classroom. Professors at the Center:

- Build **trust and community**—student to student, student to professor, and professor/school to student’s family
- Support students as people and not just as learners
- Have students use **reflective tools** such as journals so professors can understand what students are learning, what they’re struggling with, and how they’re feeling about their learning
- Start with and focus on students’ strengths, and naming those strengths in front of the class
- Assign **engaging projects**, such as researching events, analyzing literature, publishing original creative writing, conducting scientific experiments, and applying models to the real world
- Build on a successive series of conversations, projects, field experiences, presentations, and opportunities for revision to take students from different starting points to the same level of proficiency
- Put students in a number of **different groups and pairings** to encourage them to learn from one another as much as from the professor
- Use a variety of **culturally relevant visual representations** to present material and give students the opportunity to present their understanding through images
- Assess performance in a number of ways to account for different approaches to learning

At the Center, we rely on many sources of wisdom to teach cultural responsiveness. In this article, we focus on three texts that we have studied and incorporated into our body of knowledge and practice:

1. *For White Folks Who Teach in the Hood ...and the Rest of Y’all Too* by Christopher Emdin;
2. *Higher Education and First-Generation Students: Cultivating Community, Voice, and Place for the New Majority* by Rashne Rustom Jehangir; and
3. *Not Light But Fire: How to Lead Meaningful Race Conversations in the Classroom* by Matthew R. Kay.



For White Folks Who Teach in the Hood

In his book *For White Folks Who Teach in the Hood ...and the Rest of Y’all Too*, teacher and scholar Christopher Emdin combines real-life teaching stories with theory and research and gives us a radical new paradigm for urban education. He rejects the idea of students of color being unteachable. He asks educators to welcome and champion each student’s culture, experiences, and knowledge as factors in their own learning.

He says, “The key to becoming an effective educator is acknowledging the differences between students and teacher and adjusting one’s teaching accordingly, which often requires nontraditional approaches to teaching and learning.”

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Emdin gives us practical tools to reveal and set free each student’s intelligence, wonder, and joy of learning. Such practices must of course be predicated by building trust and creating a family-like structure in the classroom. Emdin helps all of us understand the deeply rooted problems of our education system and how to solve them—not with Band-Aids, but with serious long-term effort and a willingness to unsettle and completely reorganize the existing system.

Higher Education and First-Generation Students

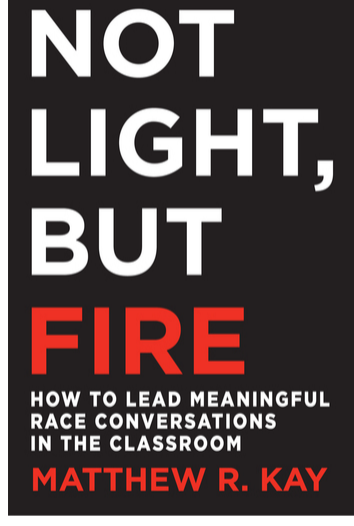
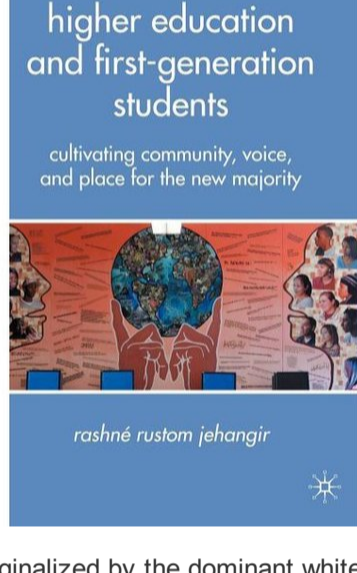
In her book, *Higher Education and First-Generation Students: Cultivating Community, Voice, and Place for the New Majority*, Rashne Rustom Jehangir uses first-generation college students’ voices to create a clear picture of their university experiences. Students who are the first in their family to attend college are more likely to be low-income persons of color. They often don’t know what the norms and expectations are in universities, and they end up being isolated and marginalized by the dominant white, English-speaking majority.

Jehangir says, “We as educators cannot be expected to have all the answers, and we may not even be asking all the right questions. This is why it will be important for us to engage low-income, first-generations students in the process of shaping their own destiny in higher education.”

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Jehangir offers proven ways to rethink the university environment, including interdepartmental partnerships, learning communities, training on multicultural competence, and culturally responsive pedagogy. University leadership teams can use the author’s ideas to make their institutions work better for first-generation, low-income students.

The author concludes, “Should we take on the challenge of answering these questions, we, like our students, will be forced to consider new ideas, new ways of working together, and new ways of seeing ourselves. We will be uncomfortable, and we will be frustrated. This is progress.”



Not Light But Fire

In his book, *Not Light But Fire: How to Lead Meaningful Race Conversations in the Classroom*, teacher and author Matthew R. Kay teaches us how to lead students through the difficult conversations about race. It is the right mix of theory, real-life solutions that work, and skill-building instruction.

Kay gives us practical ways to build a safe venue in which to tackle the toughest and most meaningful race issues and conflicts. He asserts that educators must make race conversations urgent and purposeful and have enough know-how to successfully pivot when things don’t go as planned. Kay guides us by giving us detailed examples from his own classroom.

School can be an excellent venue for discussing race, if teachers build community, use good facilitation skills, actively demonstrate the art of reflection, and model humility. Kay says, “The students, as the people forced to endure your conversations, can offer the most useful opinions on your execution. We should never stop imagining ways to better gather these opinions, as painful as the process might be.”

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Kay exhorts us to push past the obvious answers and grapple with the hard questions. We also learn from him how to tie race-related conversations to the larger themes of the courses we teach. The text is valuable because it doesn’t simply exhort us to have race conversations in school, it tells us how. With Kay’s help, we can sort out the purpose of and intent behind such conversations and plan for them so they will be successful.

CUE Coordinates Extensive Community Outreach

The [UNC Center for Urban Education](#) continues its efforts to enroll Denver-area paraprofessionals in the University and prepare them for careers as K–12 teachers. CUE mentors and professors are conducting more than 35 informational meetings for paraprofessionals this spring, with an average attendance of five to eight attendees at each session.

We’d love to double our planned enrollment for fall, with your help! Interested in scheduling an in-person or remote paraprofessional outreach meeting at your school? Contact CUE Director Rosanne Fulton by [email](#) or call 303-637-4334.



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