



Real Classroom Techniques that Get You Thinking about Cultural Responsiveness

At the [UNC Center for Urban Education](#), we work hard to model culturally responsive teaching strategies in our own classrooms. We want to prepare our teacher candidates for success in their own classrooms when they graduate. In [last month's issue](#) of the *Leadership Chronicle*, we explained the principles of culturally responsive teaching.

This month, we give you examples from real classrooms—our classrooms at the Center for Urban Education (CUE)—that you can use or modify in your own classrooms. We asked our very own professors how they practice what they teach.

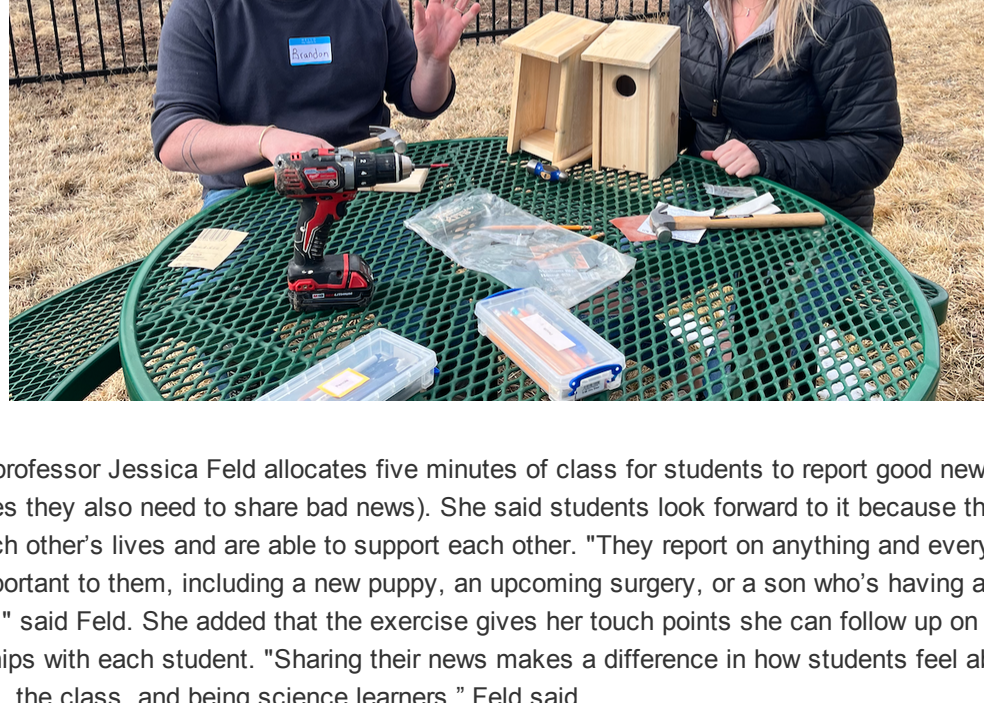
Building Trust and Community

To build trust and community, English professor Sandy Mason asks students to write an "I Am" poem. The students follow a series of prompts to describe and express themselves, including phrases such as "I am" (two special characteristics), "I wonder," "I say," "I worry," and "I dream about."

"The 'I Am' poem exercise is a fun and inviting way for students to begin the conversation about who they are and what's important in their lives," said Mason. She's used the very same activity when teaching elementary students online to help her understand them at a deeper level. As they read their poems, Mason takes notes and listens for ways she can make connections students—like shared traditions or heritage.

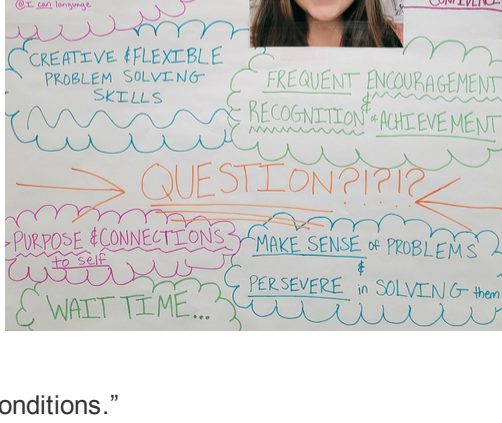
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Professor Brandon Grossman teaches science classes at CUE. He builds trust by connecting the course content to students' families and local communities. This semester, he partnered with [Colorado Parks and Wildlife](#) and planned outdoor expeditions in local state parks—based on the theme of birding. Grossman said, "It has been incredible to see students get excited about these wild animals that are always around us and have a lot to tell us about the health of local and global ecosystems."



Science professor Jessica Feld allocates five minutes of class for students to report good news (though sometimes they also need to share bad news). She said students look forward to it because they learn about each other's lives and are able to support each other. "They report on anything and everything that's important to them, including a new puppy, an upcoming surgery, or a son who's having a hard time in school," said Feld. She added that the exercise gives her touch points she can follow up on to build relationships with each student. "Sharing their news makes a difference in how students feel about each other, me, the class, and being science learners," Feld said.

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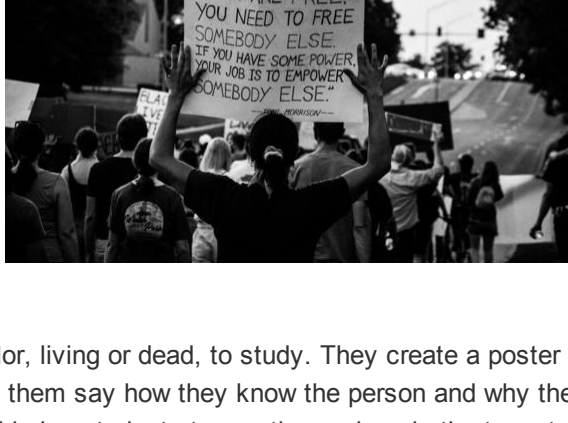
Setting High Expectations for All Students

In her math methods classes, Professor Juli Lenzotti assigns a project called "Favorable Conditions" to create a shared vision for how to facilitate excellent math instruction and set high expectations for all students. Students first read the inspiring story of Clarence F. Stephens, a Black man born in 1917 in the South who earned a PhD in mathematics, became a teacher, and created a list of "favorable conditions" that allowed his math students to excel.

Lenzotti then asks CUE students to create their own "favorable conditions" posters. At the beginning of each class, they update their posters to include any new favorable conditions they have created for their students along the way. In the final class, students examine each other's posters and celebrate everyone's "favorable conditions."

Using a Variety of Culturally Relevant Visual Representations

Each day, Mason shows her students a new cultural or social justice picture. The image portrays something connected to the current lesson, a political holiday, or a current cultural theme in the news. Students post their feelings, thoughts, or comments about it on the shared electronic blackboard. Students connect with one another over shared observations and obtain new cultural perspectives from their peers.

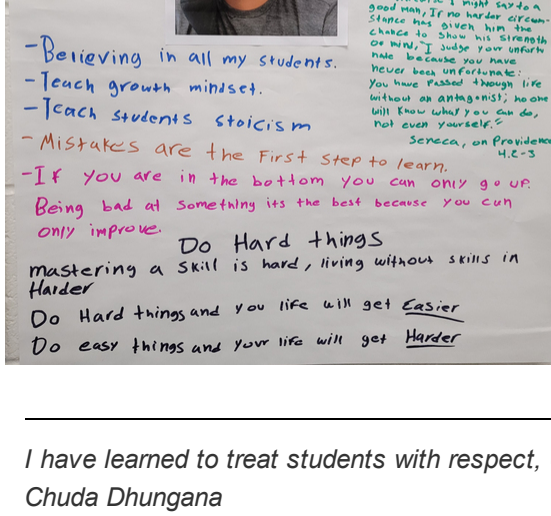


Feld has her science students choose a scientist of color, living or dead, to study. They create a poster to display that person's contributions to science. Feld has them say how they know the person and why the person is a positive role model for them. The visual tool helps students to see themselves in the tapestry of science as a whole and the specific content they're learning.

Assessing Performance in a Number of Ways

To account for different approaches to learning, Mason uses many different assessment tools to acquire summative and formative information about her students' progress. Summative assessments are based on predefined criteria and happen at the end of a unit or course. Formative assessments collect real-time feedback from learners throughout the course. Mason conducts surveys, has students respond to journal prompts, asks students to take notes on the Padlet app, and solicits oral feedback, among others.

Feld assesses progress on her assignment to "create your own STEM identity" by having students create a poster, write an essay, talk to an interview subject on the phone, or give a presentation to the class as a small group.



Using Reflective Tools

Reflective tools such as journals help teachers understand what students are learning, what they're struggling with, and how they're feeling about their learning. Feld has students write about their positive and negative experiences with science on the shared Canvas blackboard. They also have to respond to the posts of two other classmates, who share their fears about science and talk about how teachers stereotyped them. "That exercise opens their eyes to how they want to treat their own students," said Feld.

Lenzotti has students complete a writing assignment at the end of the "Favorable Conditions" project, where students reflect on what they learned and how it prepared them to be excellent math teachers. Here are some examples of the breakthroughs the teacher candidates report:

I have learned to treat students with respect, earn their respect, and make them feel comfortable. — Chuda Dhungana

Allowing enough time for students to truly acquire knowledge gives them a deeper and stronger understanding of mathematics, which makes them believe in their abilities and be confident learners. —Flor Contreras

My whole life I was taught to believe I could never understand math and that math problems could be solved only one way. Now I understand that with a supportive environment, all students can succeed. —Hannah Robertson

I decided to create an environment where mistakes are achievements. I want to give them enough time to make mistakes and create new pathways in their brains to learn the new content. —Nestor Casares Santillano

We hope these real-life examples of culturally responsive teaching spark some new ideas for you and how you can implement them in your classroom. At the Center, we endeavor to model the behaviors we are inculcating in future teachers. We are confident that they will be excellent teachers in our urban PK-12 classrooms!

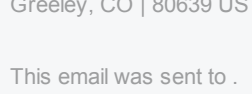
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