

FIG: Culturally Responsive Teaching and the Brain

Lane Community College, Fall 2020

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Text:

Culturally Responsive Teaching and the Brain, by Zaretta Hammond (2015)

Resources:

[Book Study Guide](#)

[Culturally Inclusive Teaching Tools spreadsheet](#)

FIG on Culturally Responsive Teaching and the Brain

Schedule

Meeting	Chapters to Read (in the text)	Reading Guide Questions Talking Points	Note taker	Zoom Links(to be added)
1 Oct 19, 3-4 pm	Introduction and 1, 2	Brief Introductions Ch 1 pages. 1-3 Ch 2 pages 6-7	Cybele Higgins	https://lanecc.zoom.us/j/96545254879
2 Oct 26th 3-4 pm	3, 4	Ch 3 pages 10-11 Ch 4 p. 15 - 16	Pat Boleyn	https://lanecc.zoom.us/j/96545254879
3 Nov 2 3-4 pm	5,6	Ch 5 p. 13-14 Ch 6 p. 18-19	Ingrid Nordstrom	https://lanecc.zoom.us/j/96545254879
4 Nov 9 3-4 pm	7,8	Ch 7 p. 22 - 23 Ch 8 p. 25-26	Ingrid Nordstrom	https://lanecc.zoom.us/j/96545254879
5 Nov 16 3-4 pm	9 and Discussion on future steps	Ch 9 p. 28 Discussion on Next Steps	Jill Jones	https://lanecc.zoom.us/j/96545254879

Week 1: Chapters 1 & 2

- Introductions
- Purpose of group
- What is Cultural Responsiveness?
 - It's not about knowing the surface culture, but the deep culture and overlaps. For instance, some cultures (Hmong-American) experience the teachers viewing the parents as uninvolved and not caring for their children's education. However, reality is there is high respect for educators, they are very trusting, so they do not challenge the educators' decisions. This creates biases in teachers, which then creates changes in students and starts guiding them in certain directions.
 - We all come with a set of biases, the first necessary step is being aware of biases. CRT is cultural literacy and cultural competency.

- We must understand the dominant paradigm. Most white people are racist because of the influences of a system in which they've grown up in, and have been trained or enculturated within.
- In America, we follow an Individualistic paradigm, but only 20% of the world follow's this paradigm. Collectivism accounts for 80% of the world.
- It is not just about the color of your skin, but each individual person has their own culture. Every person's perception of their own or other's experience impacts how they see and feel, so everyone essentially has a different culture, we can't make assumptions based off of categories. However, we need to see this within the larger social power dynamic, which is a large part of responsiveness. The system's hierarchical nature leads to people who want to identify with the top group to feel equal or safe unknowingly step on the heads of people even within their own group on the hierarchy, also creating internalized oppression.
With social stratification there is a Hierarchy of Values triangle (who is valued more than others and why). The top of the triangle is European immigrants - people coming from the mindset of a monarchy - kings and queens, etc. This led to the social construction of what we are trying to undue now.
- I have an activity in class that I have been doing for years, where I ask my student's to tell me who has the most political power in the U.S. and every time I have done this the student's always quickly call out white, male, heterosexual, wealthy, alterabled as the characteristics as having the most power. I then have them ponder for a couple of days, how we all know this without thinking about it and how does this deep/strong underlying knowledge impact the way we see and act toward one another? The psychology of knowing this so clearly, creates a default behavior of those at the top and those within the hierarchy, an attitude, that becomes like the air we breathe. People who are lower on the hierarchy become invisible to those above them and even those in their same group, not because we are bad but because this kind of knowing that comes from hierarchical social structures impacts who we notice or pay attention to. Understanding and paying attention to this is and calling it out in our own thinking, directly relates to becoming effective, culturally responsive teachers.
- We need to learn how to communicate across cultural ways, trunk and roots - spread into our classes.
- Language is a big part of the culture. In the book, many spots the word "culture" could easily be replaced with "language".
- What are some assumptions we make about our students?
 - Assumptions that people can read and write. However, some students have trouble reading and writing, but it's needed for forums online, etc.
 - Assumptions about students being able to be independent learners. Need to set up ways to get students to move from being dependent to independent learners.
- Ideas for use in classes
 - Essays about people of color who had surmounted odds and been successful. However, we need to avoid making assumptions that, ex, black students will appreciate and get something out of reading these articles. They may want more "normal life" examples.
 - Writing, grammar correction, etc... can be non-traditional. How important is "standard" American English grammar? We can teach it, but teach it as *one* way, for example in academic settings, it is not the only way. It just happens to be the dominant way. Help students know other ways and kinds of knowledge.
 - Can use readings and examples in class that are culturally responsive. However, sometimes international students do not want to be inclusive of other modes, they may want to be taught the western approach. Perhaps surveying the students can be helpful.

- [Example Online Assignment: Privilege Scavenger Hunt](#) is an activity that can be used in class, based on readings in Chapters 1 and 2.

Week 2: Chapters 3 & 4

- The Amygdala Hijack
 - Parts of the brain
 - Reptilian brain (brainstem and cerebellum) - is always “on”, only reacts, controls automatic functions, and senses any changes in the environment to ensure we are staying “safe” (through the Reticular Activating System, RAS).
 - Limbic brain (thalamus, hippocampus, and amygdala) - is only present in mammals, and is considered the “emotional” brain. Manages our emotions and records memories and experiences.
 - Thalamus - dispatch hub
 - Hippocampus - background databank, connects information to aid in memory
 - Amygdala - our guard dog and the seat of our fear system. It can bypass the dispatch hub (thalamus), hence it is the “amygdala hijack”.
 - Neocortex - executive functioning. Controls planning, abstract thinking, organization, and self-regulation. Also houses our imagination.
 - Three branches of the Autonomic Nervous System (Sympathetic Nervous System, Parasympathetic Nervous System, and [Polyvagal Nervous System](#) - social engagement system)
 - When polyvagal nervous system is not releasing enough oxytocin, we begin to experience anxiety. This anxiety triggers the sympathetic nervous system (fight or flight system), and releases cortisol.
- How can we help avoid an Amygdala Hijack in our classrooms?
 - Set expectations and develop relationships with students at the start of each class.
 - Be purposeful about language in the syllabus and what is used during class discussions.
 - Create a space for students to discuss behavioral expectations for class discussions and peer reviews. How can we create a safe place for all students?
 - Behavioral contract for overnight field trips, where the students help design the contract and sign it.
 - Publish a classroom courtesy policy your department has designed.
 - Widen our aperture to let more light in and a wider world view.
 - Create an exit ticket in a google survey.
 - Communicate a clear policy on cheating, so there is no surprise for students.
 - Try not to call students out, it can lead to fear of isolation.
 - Double testing can be used. They first take the test by themselves, then a second time they take it collaboratively with other students. Combine scores for the full exam grade.

Week 3: Chapters 5 & 6

- On listening, building rapport, alliance, and connection....

- Listening is important but also very difficult. Requires eye contact and attention, and it's important in developing a relationship with students.
- Listening is a skill. Intentful listening and giving the other side plenty of time to respond and reflect is important.
- Face-to-face makes it easier to be approachable to most students.
- Current online environment is making this difficult, especially when students don't often use their cameras, we can't see their expressions and body language.
- There's a lot of communication in writing but it's not as meaningful as in person conversations. The differences are striking.
- Caring and pushing - we show students we care but we also push students to meet their full potential. We don't offer meaningless feedback. In this kind of environment we can push students to take more risks, to challenge themselves more, to be more empowered and independent.
- A male student of color who spent a lot of time in an instructor's office and told her that his mind doesn't work the way it needs to to understand the concepts. He repeated this. Instructor responded, "I don't believe this. I refuse to believe that." He reported he felt incredibly different in class from then on because she so assertively refused to believe it and he began to hear things differently. The power of someone believing that he had the brain power he needed to understand difficult concepts.
- How do we develop a meaningful and trusting relationship with students in the online environment?
 - Use an introduction video to make yourself more "human".
 - Storytelling is useful and powerful.
 - Storie can be shared from student's family and culture to invoke empathy
 - Don't be afraid to be appropriately vulnerable with students.
 - Making "comments" on Moodle assignments can create more engagement.
 - The materials we share in our class are a big way for us to show how we value student differences and experiences. Such resources can help students to feel more empathetic toward each other and other groups.
 - The language on the syllabus is important because it can make students feel safe immediately.
 - Acknowledgement of other's feelings, even if they implicate us in behavior we don't want to see, can help student's develop self validation of their own feelings/experience and helps them to more fully develop emotional resilience.
 - Soft peddling feedback often feels to us like we're being supportive, when it can actually seem condescending to students.
 - Helping students become more aware (right away) of what it means to be respectful, appreciative. This helps students to feel like feedback from peers is helpful and not mean. We can't learn language when anxious; it's important to be calm.
 - *The Color of Fear film* has been a really powerful tool to help people understand unconscious bias and can help people to understand how they can become better allies for social justice (it needs to be facilitated by a person who has really done some deep work on this).
 - Helps students see that having privilege isn't their fault and doesn't make them bad; we need to understand the histories that led to this in order to heal and to create a society that understands the benefit of equality to everyone including our planet. What we do to each other we do even worse to our planet.
 - Jane Elliott's blue-eyed/brown-eyed is also an unbelievably powerful tool. It helps students see how quickly we can be reprogrammed to be against each other because of what an authority figure tells us or models in their behavior. I strongly recommend it for those that haven't seen it.
- Discussion on upcoming presidential election

- A male student was harassing a female student on Zoom via private chat. It was a “Trumpster” sending threatening messages to students on Zoom using the private chat. A female student reported it to the instructor because this student was sick to her stomach whenever she saw him in class. Instructor wrote an incident report and the students involved have been contacted.
- Perhaps begin classes this week by talking about how we’re doing, just having a conversation about the election, how we feel.... How can we build trust with students in the wake of the election? It is important for students to be able to share fears.
- Realize it is possible that someone may hijack the meeting and dominate with their views and add to students’ anxiety. Need to set up the rules ahead of time, and there have to be boundaries. Important to have boundaries for what is acceptable. Discussion needs to be focused on the fears and vulnerabilities.
- What are the differences between alliance and rapport?
 - Rapport is building trust, whereas alliance is recognizing they are individuals--the pact where students are the driver, teacher is the ally.
 - Building rapport builds trust, which allows us to go into the alliance stage where we push them without triggering an amygdala hijack.

Week 4: Chapters 7 & 8

- Building students’ confidence in having a Growth Mindset
 - It is a struggle to develop relationships with students that might be necessary to help students develop their self confidence. How do we do this in a short, ten week term?
 - When there are a wide range of ages, the experiences students bring in are so incredibly different and have an impact on the students’ confidence.
 - Would it be okay to ask students directly if they feel confident as students?
 - What about trying more open ended questions asking students to assess their strengths and weaknesses? Then you could emphasize the growth mindset -- how the student grows throughout the term.
 - It would be important to connect those student self-assessments to the assignments throughout the term. This would help to scaffold learning, create opportunities for metacognitive awareness. Each assignment has outcomes and strategies for how to accomplish the assignments -- being explicit what their brain could be doing while working on the assignments, connecting to the areas students indicate they need to work on.
 - This is a good way to point out the academic mindset that students need to develop.
 - International students have to deal with language barriers and communication anxiety issues; continue to encourage them so they can be successful. Offer examples of students who were in similar situations and how they were able to be successful. Students need to believe that success is possible.
 - Students get discouraged when they struggle to listen, struggle to communicate. If native English speakers are also making errors, then they see that it isn’t a negative thing for them to also be making mistakes.
 - Have students mimic speeches by accomplished speakers and practice intonation -- helps to break them out of tracks that their brains are in. You could print out a one or two minutes section of a speech, play it repeatedly, then have students mark it for pauses, intonation, emphasis, key ideas, organizational shift emphasis. Then students practice the speeches.

- For listening: Are there any discussion groups where classmates talk about what they heard? If students could have places where they regularly write and see classmates write, or a formalized place where native and nonnative speakers are paired together (could be extra credit) so they could talk through things with native speakers in very small steps. This would help them see how native speakers also struggle with concepts. For public speaking, having a lot of activities where students get practice organizing speeches -- breaking everything down to tiny steps. This can actually help all students, not just nonnative speakers.
- Create relationships
 - For many instructors who only see students a couple of times a week, it's hard to establish the relationship we might desire with students. In some disciplines (communication, writing, etc.) it's easier to create relationships than in others.
 - Sometimes we become the teacher-mother, feels love, and then are able to create relationships (even if it's a science course). It's good to have a reflection, every class, on how students are doing every class, even if it takes away from the content.
- Ignite, Chunk, Chew, Review
 - "Ignite" phase can be difficult and it can be hard to be creative with this phase. Need to offer students some sort of warm up or way in.
 - "Ignite" is like what we're doing as a participant in the FIG: We read a couple chapters, have time to think through those ideas, then we discuss them.
 - How do we do the "chew" phase in an online course? Things have been much more directive in classes and there is a desire to try offering students more freedom to do this kind of "chewing" in class.
 - Use breakout rooms in small groups (2-3) and give them problems that they can work through together in their own way.
 - Breaks students into breakout rooms, giving them longer chunks of time to work, then have them co-write a response in an in-class discussion forum on Moodle.
 - There's a whiteboard in Zoom that students can use to brainstorm/chew on ideas.
 - There are always a few students who won't join the breakout groups so they become a "main room" group.
 - Be very prescriptive in discussion forums, asking students to write their post, then pair up with someone and give very specific kinds of feedback. Something effective, something that needs improvement, and something that they define for themselves.
 - Give students points for peer responses, but if they just say, "I like what you said," students will earn 0 points. The response has to further the conversation, so even if a student likes what was said, they have to explain *why* they liked it.
- Some of this work doesn't directly fit in math/science classes. Perhaps some of this work can be done through support services? For example, students talk about their math anxiety, and sometimes we don't have to be the ones to scaffold that, but other resources (math tutors, for example) can help students overcome their anxiety.
- Challenges in memory
 - We need to revisit info/use new knowledge within 24 hours to remember 80%.
 - If we wait longer we only remember about 30% of what we learned.
 - How can we have students move through their coursework more quickly so that the knowledge/content is practiced? This is especially challenging in an online course environment when students may do part of their coursework in the beginning of the week and complete it at the end of the week.
 - We should share this fact with students so they know there is science behind this and to encourage students to move through work more effectively.

Week 5: Chapter 9

- Ethos - Most people need to feel safe in order to not be timid or fearful about communication in the classroom. Make people visible in how you set up the classroom or the materials you choose. Approach needs to be realistic and pertinent to all the students in the classroom. Need to create a safe environment at the very beginning of the term.
- Ideas moving forward
 - Choose diverse texts and authors. Try to represent life (emotions, cultures, experiences).
 - Belonging is very important for feeling like you are part of a group. Include questions on an exam or example which are inclusive (same gendered couple, transgender, transfluid, other examples).
 - Example in text of including artwork in the Moodle classroom. Incorporate different artists and different types of art.
 - Put up images on the screen, ponder what the image represents, what their job may be. Then tell a story of what the person does; don't put into a stereotypical role. Multitude of possibilities for anyone. Self-check about not limiting other people's biases. Takes a bit of courage to try activity to challenge beliefs.
 - Discussion about use of poetry and music in class.
 - Spoken word poetry gathering on campus.
 - Write rap songs, poems, for biology topics.
 - Choose your own adventure; choose how they want to present the information.
 - Rituals and Routines
 - Start with a 5-minute rewind example (photo of a cassette tape). Set review to 80's music, ask questions about prior learning.
 - Students read in class; go away and read, will return in 15 minutes. Can stay in Zoom and will play music. All opted to listen to music ([Lofi Hip Hop](#)) and remain present in Zoom. Calming to have music. Students can mute music if they want to while they read.
- Overall impressions of book
 - Writing style of the text is very easy to read and succinct.
 - Text resonated with the group; multicultural topics and concepts.
 - It was good to reflect on teaching - Identifying deficits and finding areas of growth.
 - Members are excited to share the textbook with other educators who will benefit.
 - Lead by example and extrapolate learning from text into classroom and further into leadership positions and thinking.

Applying Concepts in Future Classes

1. Privilege scavenger hunt activity to raise awareness and empathy.
2. Survey of students on deep culture (cultural archetypes) on whether they are collectivist or individualistic in their learning style. Help students differentiate between shallow culture and deep culture. May also use ethnobotanical interviews in my plant biology classes. May also use traditional vs. western science charts to examine world approaches to science.
3. Add an activity on learning and the brain. Include quotes from the book on some of the neuroscience on learning and building new neural pathways.

4. Use the author's charts to analyze relationships and triggers with students from all backgrounds to track any patterns of bias.
5. Integrate more storytelling into courses as "trust generators."
6. Help students develop their academic mindset. Use figure 7.1 in the text to do this with students, and even ask them how they believe they can achieve it. Ask this at the start and the end of a course, and then discuss how this may have changed for them, over time.
7. Examine curriculum using the author's lens of: ignite, chunk, chew and review. Create more activities that ignite, using music and puzzles. Stop every 10 minutes to allow learners to process. This could be a pause in a slideshow, video, Zoom session or in the classroom.
8. "Storify" content with at least one story per term.
 - a. Example used in Survey of Biology 101 (class on cells and genetics) is a video called the cancer warrior depicting the struggle of a scientist whose beliefs were maligned for generations. Finally, after many years, he was proven correct.
 - b. Develop an activity on [Henrietta Lacks](#), and her legacy, with an emphasis on ethics in medical research, and an example of racial inequity.
9. Use more metaphors, analogies, word play and games. Students act out what decisions they would make about different genetic diseases that run in families.
10. Review: Let students know if we learn new material and review within 24 hours we can remember 80%, but if we wait longer we may only remember 30%! So, continue to make infinite tries for content that they must complete in 24 hours, like H5P flashcards, scored just for completion.
11. Find and post inclusive images on Moodle each week to make an online class be more welcoming and reinforce inspiration and belonging in students.
12. Use more quote games. This was emphasized as a way to encourage validation through rituals.
13. Listen more to students. Online this could mean the use of flipgrid, as a social talk structure.
14. Allow students to talk and learn from each other in brainstorming sessions online using whiteboards and forum entries while in breakout groups on Zoom. Use concepts such as helping trios, chalk talk, and world cafe.
15. Incorporate Fixed Mindset versus Growth Mindset (p. 116) into classes, to encourage independent learning.
16. Use Tracking (pp. 81-84) to see where instructors may be discriminating.
17. When experiencing a tension-filled situation with a student, review and reflect (pp. 61-62).
18. Create space in class for students to share their own insights and make connections between their experiences and the work of the class. Do this in an organic way; never put students in the position of having to speak for a certain identity (e.g. a certain race, sexual identity, class, etc.). Some ideas:
 - a. Begin or end class with a reflective writing prompt.
 - b. Ask students to do multimodal projects in a range of genres (e.g. raps, poetry, videos).
19. Be a reflective practitioner! Continue the process of critical self reflection so that I can see the ways in which I am being triggered by students' ideas and opinions and how my responses to students may be impacting the way I interact with them and respond to them in class and in written responses. This also gives me the opportunity to consider how my background shapes my work as a teacher.

20. Choose texts for students to read and make sure that texts by writers of color reflect a range of life experiences. Representations of joy matter just as much as stories of overcoming obstacles.