

The Pillars of Cultural Responsiveness

Adeyemi Stenbridge, PhD
New York University
Expanded Success Initiative (ESI)

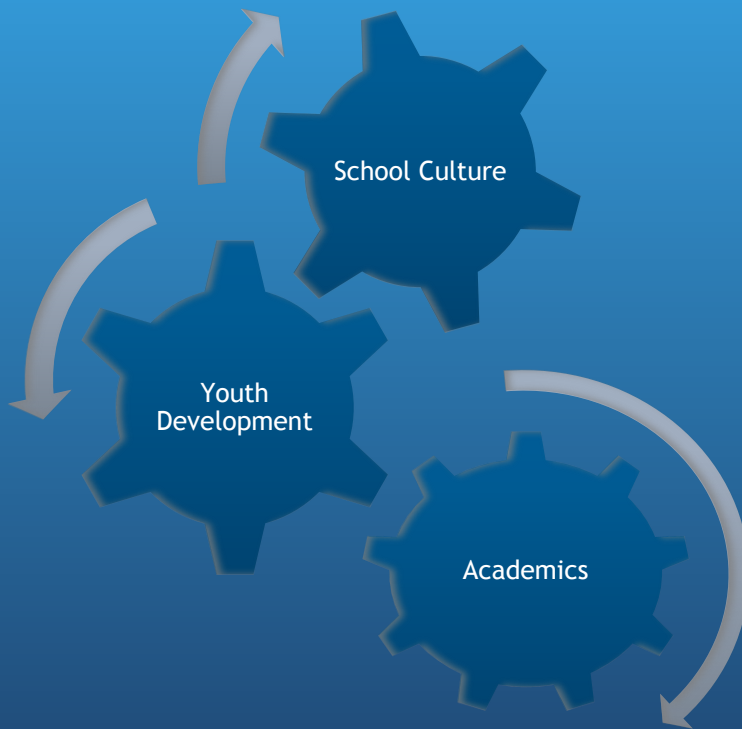
Opening Gambit: Three Points to Frame the Discussion

First, college readiness does not equal high school achievement. If your school's identity has been primarily defined according to the metrics of high school achievement, then you are going to have to give careful, deliberate consideration to what success outcomes mean to you.

Second, the Expanded Success Initiative has an ambitious objective which can *NOT* be thought of as an isolated program; rather, college readiness outcomes are achieved in the context of a whole school effort that defines its ethos and personality over other defining characteristics.

Third and lastly, students learn best in educational environments in which they have the greatest cultural fluency. College readiness is a far greater matter than mastery of academic content; It entails critical issues of identity—especially for those students who identify strongly with racial, ethnic, and cultural groups that have been (1) historically marginalized from American opportunity structures, and (2) stereotyped as intellectually deficient.

The Three Inter-related Areas of School Operation in the ESI:



- Taken together, these three core components of the ESI comprise the **WHAT** or the substance of college readiness. In other words, **WHAT** we mean by college readiness is represented in one or more of these three domains.
- The challenge of the work will be closing the gap between the **WHAT** and the **HOW**.
- **HOW** will college readiness be supported in the ESI schools?

The Three Inter-related Areas of School Operation in the ESI:

The *WHAT* of college readiness must be underscored by the principles of Culturally Responsive Education (CRE).

What is CRE?



- CULTURAL COMPETENCE is the knowledge-base of the different cultures represented among the student body.
- CULTURALLY INFORMED HABITS OF THINKING are disciplined approaches to thinking, rooted in cultural competence, that inform policy and practices for Cultural Responsiveness.”
- CULTURALLY INFORMED POLICIES are those proposed or adopted courses or principles of action that are rooted in a culturally responsive philosophy of purpose.
- And the rest is JUST GOOD PEDAGOGY—because there are no magical, pedagogical bullets that work universally for Black and Latino boys.

What is Culture?

SURFACE CULTURE

The aspects of culture that are explicit, visible, and taught.

UNSpoken Rules

The transition zone where the cultural observer has to be more alert; the area where implicit understandings become talked about, and explained.

UNCONSCIOUS RULES

"Hidden" culture: the habits, assumptions, understandings, values, and judgments that we seem to know (almost intuitively) but do not or cannot easily articulate.

The challenge of CRE is moving beyond the mere accumulation of cultural competence to developing systems and interventions that smartly make use of it in the policy-forming, problem-solving, and pedagogical structures of schools.

To be culturally responsive, we have to be reflective, introspective, and *really* smart about culture.

- Culture is the mediating lens through which we make sense of the world and our lived experiences.
- Because learning is inherently social, culture is involved in all learning.
- Culture is not a static set of characteristics located within individuals; rather, it is a fluid, dynamic, and complex construct that binds people through shared norms and outlooks.
- CRE recognizes that there is actually no such thing as a culture-neutral, race-neutral, or ethnicity-neutral pedagogy. Social and cultural norms reflect the shared understandings of specific cultural groups.
- Cultural dissonance creates vulnerabilities for the student populations least familiar with the dominant cultural norms.
- College readiness for Black and Latino students requires that we ***take careful inventory of their lived experiences and the norms and codes that mediate their world-view.*** If we don't, we disadvantage those who don't already have a familiarity with the school's default culture.

Priority Points for CRE

- Culturally responsive practices support the intellectual, behavioral, and affective engagement of Black and Latino students in ways that develop their academic identities without dismissing the value of the cultural capital they bring with them to school.
- Culturally responsive schools create space for talking about the implications of race, ethnicity, and culture in the lives of their students.
- The principals of cultural responsiveness must be embedded into school's problem-solving structures in order to affect the school culture.