

Video Transcript of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy Using Primary Sources: Tenet 2 in an Elementary Classroom

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Narrator: As an elementary teacher, you really want your students to be engaged in their learning. So, how can you make this happen when it comes to social studies? By using culturally relevant pedagogy with primary sources! Primary sources are first-hand evidence of the past. They highlight authentic voices and reflect multiple perspectives and cultures. They also facilitate students' own cultural competence, which is a key element of culturally relevant pedagogy, or CRP. CRP is a teaching framework established by Dr. Gloria Ladson-Billings. There are three tenets to CRP. All students must experience academic success, develop cultural competence, and have opportunities to examine and critique the status quo. This video focuses on tenet 2, developing cultural competence.

Geoff: Oftentimes, students will come up with cooler ideas than I had ever intended. My name's Geoff Freeman. I'm a fourth and fifth grade teacher at J. J. Hill Elementary.

Jehanne: Culturally relevant pedagogy is authentic, it's meaningful, and students' voices are valued. Tenet 2 of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy is all about tapping students' individual cultural competences and making that cultural expertise valued and leveraged in the classroom. It's also about teachers connecting the curriculum and the learning to students' lives as part of the learning process.

Geoff: To me, what that means is you are genuinely interested in working to tease out who the students are, and make sure that that is guiding the work that they're doing.

Sydney: My partner thought the lakes and city and street names were important...

Elzo: The way to school...

Bryce: ...The homes and apartments, people...

Jocelyn: ... stores and public places were important...

Narrator: 5th graders at J.J. Hill Elementary, a Montessori school in St. Paul, are examining 90-year old maps of their community. After this activity, the students created their own maps, highlighting the school, their homes, and important personal landmarks. The two activities, map-making and the examination of historical maps, taps the students own cultural and neighborhood knowledge to make sense of their school's history.

Geoff: In order to make this particular lesson culturally relevant, we really started by asking students about themselves and to identify some places around St. Paul that they thought were really important.

Sydney: It was very difficult to decide what you wanted to put on there. But I thought of some of my favorite places in St. Paul...

Geoff: And when students maybe had a hard time coming up with some of those things, we also had students work with their parents.

Sydney: My family calls it the electric park because it has fake grass so it shocks a lot.... I put it there because I used to go there all the time when I was really little.

Geoff: ...we assembled all of their personal maps into one map of St. Paul that told a story about the students of J. J. Hill...

Jehanne: In this lesson Geoff is incorporating the history of his century-old school, so that the kids can connect those stories and that history to their own lives.

Miles: I'm just interested to find out more what the school was like before I was here...

Geoff: This spring, we'll be working with Hamline University to do an archaeological excavation at the school... I do want to sort of conclude in the spring, working with students to create a vision of who we want to be. Primary resources are a great way to engage students. The Library of Congress is...a boundless resource of information and pictures, maps, and content that makes finding exciting, relevant content really easy.

Students: [WHISPERING] Oh, look. That must be a factory, because you can see smoke coming out. So there, well, those are a bunch of houses, but you can see the factories here because they are bigger.

Geoff: It does encourage and induce higher order thinking because the work that you're doing is the work of investigation... The higher order thinking, especially at fourth and fifth grade, that we're looking for is like comparing and contrasting... and those are social studies but also literacy skills. Did the historical maps include anything that our maps did not? Yeah, Miles?

Miles: A date.

Bryce: ...They had more buildings and rivers.

Jehanne: Geoff's students are analyzing the cultural characteristics of the community around JJ Hill, you know, a hundred years ago, and they are using that understanding and those interpretations to make sense of the cultural characteristics and the things that are important to them today in their community.

Zoe: I think that the person that made this map thought the streets were really important... because... it's the main part of the map, basically.

Sydney: They thought the schools were important because they're bigger in reality, but they're also

a lot bigger on the map. How do you think this image was captured? What is this perspective? Zoe.

Zoe: Hot air balloons, because helicopters and airplanes were not invented yet...

Ronan: Maybe the drawer knew everything or... remembered everything in his mind to start drawing it...drawing it in the aerial view.

Geoff: I think that primary source work is essential to culturally relevant teaching, because... if the emphasis is on authentic work, then I think using authentic sources is a great starting point.

Miles: I knew what a map looked like, but not like in the sense of this. Because that's not really what I would picture a map looking like.

Jehanne: By using close reading techniques with both the historical map and students' own maps, Geoff has basically sent the message to the students that the cultural knowledge they have of their own neighborhood and school & their world is just as valuable as the knowledge of that expert, the person who made the map all those years ago. And so there's deep respect for the students' cultural expertise and their competence.

Geoff: What we're gonna do now is ... observe carefully using some of the same strategies that we used with the historic maps. We're gonna observe each other's maps.

Bryce: Taking a step back, the first things I notice are ... Zoe.

Zoe: Mississippi River, University Avenue, and a bunch of buildings.

Bryce: Ronan.

Ronan: Target and a bunch of trees.

Geoff: Culturally relevant pedagogy puts the students and their culture, at the center of their learning, and takes their work seriously. What can you tell about JJ Hill students based on our maps? Tell us about the map makers in that culture. Sydney.

Sydney: They can tell you about how they get to school and their favorite things of the city.

Geoff: You want to ask students to identify what they notice about the culture in the historical photos, and you want to ask what their maps tell us about their culture or our culture. Then I think with that in place, they could then make a comparison...

Jehanne: The overall unit is one where students are using geographic skills and historical skills, um, academic skills, to connect with their own cultural knowledge of their community and their school in order to get a better sense of who they are.

Jehanne: Culturally relevant pedagogy is a lens through which you are constantly sort of reworking

and rethinking about your curriculum, and so it's not something you master overnight, it's this iterative process where you're constantly thinking about who your kids are and how to connect the curriculum to who they are.

Brycee: "This is actually not my way to school, it's just stuff that's important." Lists them.

Jehanne: Culturally relevant pedagogy is a lens through which you are constantly sort of reworking and rethinking about your curriculum, and so it's not something you master overnight, it's this iterative process where you're constantly thinking about who your kids are and how to connect the curriculum to who they are.

Zoe: I'm curious about how they learned back then.

Jocelyn: ... if the school changed or if it looked any different when they went here.

Miles: I think it's important to learn about it because we're not the only people who've been here. And I just think it's cool to learn about the history.

Geoff: Who are we? What is our culture? How has it changed? And what do we want it to be in the future? And I think that's an important question for schools to ask.

Narrator: Lessons and supporting materials are available on the Inquiry in the Upper Midwest Project website. Be sure to check out our other videos about CRP and primary sources.