

plenty of policy and structural barriers stand in the way of widespread adoption of technology in K-12 education. Perhaps the toughest of these is our traditional approach to school funding.

Simply put: Our current education finance

ments. Education innovators get trapped in this maze—which is even harder to escape when budget totals are flat.

This is a particular problem for digital learning because today's funding arrangements assume that a student will attend a specific

development of  
persuasively  
demonstrated in K-12  
education."

programs; and  
• Encourage innovation by ensuring people who have new ideas about instruction could, if families wanted to use them, get public funding.

Changing the funding framework this way

# The Teaching Evaluation Gap

## Why Students' Cultural Identities Hold the Key

By Willis D. Hawley  
& Jacqueline Jordan Irvine

**T**eacher evaluation has, until recently, been a symbolic act largely without meaning or consequence. No longer. Race to the Top requirements call for performance-based pay. The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation's multi-million-dollar investment to define effective teaching will produce highly specified systems of teacher evaluation. Other reforms tie tenure and leadership roles to measures of teacher effectiveness.

Attention to serious teacher evaluation is long overdue. However, most of the protocols for measuring performance give inadequate attention to teaching practices that are particularly effective with students from diverse racial, ethnic, cultural, and linguistic backgrounds. By ignoring these research-based practices, generally called "culturally responsive pedagogy," or CRP, any high-stakes teaching evaluation is likely—unintentionally and ironically—to fail the very students most in need of highly effective teaching.

Current discussions of teacher evaluation often focus on performance as reflected by student test scores or value-added measurement, or VAM. Taken in isolation, VAM, which typically accounts for less than 50 percent of the evaluation, will have little effect in improving

teacher performance because it does not measure teaching practices.

In contrast, research shows that well-executed evaluation based on observations of teacher behavior can increase teacher effectiveness. Giving teachers the opportunity to learn how to improve specific practices magnifies the effect. If teaching practices—such as CRP—that have been shown to be important for students from diverse backgrounds are not included or adequately assessed, the achievement of these students will be limited accordingly.

Culturally responsive teachers understand that all students, regardless of race or ethnicity, bring their culturally influenced cognition, behavior, and dispositions to school. For example, ethnically diverse students' mastery of English, pronunciation, vocabulary, and phonology (rhythm, tempo, or pitch) often differ. What is spoken and left unspoken, whether one interrupts, defers to others, or asks direct or indirect questions, can vary importantly from group to group.

Culturally responsive teachers understand how semantics, accents, dialect, and discussion modes affect face-to-face interactions. Similarly, nonverbal communications can raise questions about the cultural meanings of interpersonal space, eye contact, body language, touching, and gestures. Culturally responsive teachers not only understand differences related to race, ethnicity, culture, and language, they treat them as assets upon which to build

rather than as deficits to overcome.

Culturally responsive teachers know how to adapt and employ multiple representations of subject-matter knowledge using students' everyday lived experiences. This bridges the gap between students' personal cultural knowledge and the unknown materials and concepts to be mastered. Culturally responsive teachers learn from families and community organizations and use this knowledge to inform their teaching and help families support their children's education. Culturally responsive teachers, aware that students of color are not mere products of their culture, avoid making generalizations about group behavior or identity. Culturally responsive teachers interact with students as individuals, caring and supporting them while holding high expectations.

Unfortunately, many educators discount the effects of race and ethnicity on student learning. They may find it difficult to understand and respond to cultural differences. Many believe that race is no longer relevant or that paying attention to race is a form of discrimination. Teachers may see poverty as the main challenge, and not focus on their own behaviors or inequitable school policies and practices. The socioeconomically related experiences of students are unquestionably important, but students' race and ethnicity, in addition to their culture and language, are powerful influences on students' learning, independent of their family wealth.

Many dozens of observation protocols exist for evaluating teacher performance. While they differ in emphasis and vocabulary, the best reflect a research-based consensus that learning is influenced significantly by the readiness, beliefs, and prior experiences that stu-

dents bring to any particular opportunity to learn. But research indicates that excellent teachers can be even better when they artfully employ culturally responsive practices.

Here are six examples, based on research that demonstrates how CRP enhances student learning, of how effective teaching can be measured.

### • Learning From Family and Community Engagement

Teacher interacts frequently with families to inform them about their students' progress and help them support their students' learning. Teacher learns from families about the lived experiences of their students and uses this information in selecting learning resources and adapting instruction.

### • Developing Caring Relationships With Students

Classroom interactions between the teacher and individual students are highly respectful, reflecting genuine warmth and sensitivity to students' cultures and levels of development. Teacher holds high expectations for all students and provides needed support. While recognizing the importance of students' racial, ethnic, and cultural identities, teacher avoids stereotypes.

### • Engaging and Motivating Students

Learning activities build on the lived experiences of diverse learners and support instructional outcomes. Teacher engages students in high-level cognitive activities that are differentiated, as appropriate, for individual learners. Teacher takes into account differences in semantics, accents, dialects, and language facility, as well as differences in student responsiveness to different types of rewards for high achievement.

### • Assessing Student Performance

Assessments are based on a variety of measures of student learning that take into account differences in students' cultural experiences and language facility. Attention is paid to the possibility that students' per-

formance will be based on their confidence about doing well, rather than their actual knowledge of the content being assessed.

### • Grouping Students for Instruction

Various grouping strategies are flexibly used. Groups based on prior achievement are used sparingly and for specific purposes. Racially and ethnically homogeneous grouping is minimized, and student differences in readiness to contribute to group learning are taken into account.

### • Selecting and Effectively Using Learning Resources

Learning resources engage all students in higher-order intellectual challenges. They incorporate a variety of materials that reflect the cultural diversity of the school, the community, the nation, and the world.

The measures identified here for assessing culturally responsive teaching describe the practice of all effective teachers, regardless of the characteristics of their students. All students bring their race, ethnicity, culture, and language facility with them to school. But these characteristics are not equally relevant to the learning opportunities of all students or to educators' dispositions about, and understandings of, student behavior and readiness to learn. Because of their family histories, the racially isolated character of their communities, and the likelihood that their skin color has resulted in subtle or overt discrimination that has influenced their lives, the experiences of most students of color are often different from those of most white students.

It is essential to include explicit measures of CRP throughout teacher-evaluation programs. The specific measures (i.e., rubrics) in evaluation instruments will become the accepted definitions of effective teaching. If culturally responsive practices are not explicitly included, or CRP is referred to only vaguely, we should not expect to see improvements in teacher capacity to meet the particular needs of students from racially, eth-

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nically, culturally, and linguistically diverse backgrounds. Moreover, if exceptional effectiveness can be achieved and rewarded without expertise in CRP, teachers seeking to improve will not be motivated or get the support they need to develop culturally responsive expertise.

Students from diverse backgrounds need the opportunity to learn from highly effective teachers who have the capacity for CRP in their repertoires of professional expertise. Unless CRP becomes an essential part of the teacher evaluation process as well as the training and professional development of all teachers, it is likely that closing the achievement gap will continue to be our greatest educational challenge. ■

WILLIS D. HAWLEY is a professor emeritus of education and public policy at the University of Maryland and the director of the Teaching Diverse Students Initiative of the Southern Poverty Law Center, in Montgomery, Ala. JACQUELINE JORDAN IRVINE is the Charles Howard Candler professor emerita of urban education at Emory University, in Atlanta.