



## Culturally Responsive Teaching and the Brain:

Promoting Authentic Engagement and Rigor Among Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Students

By Zaretta Hammond (Corwin, 2015)

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### What are the main ideas?

- ~ Students will be independent learners when there is a successful marriage between culturally responsive teaching and rigor.
- ~ The teacher needs to create a classroom that combines their cultural awareness with positive relationships, challenging content and a supportive learning environment.

### Why would a school leader want to read this?

In the past few years, schools and districts have made efforts to create more equitable spaces for students and families. Unfortunately, the definition of equity and what it looks like in practice has quickly become confusing and diluted. For our school systems to have drastically different outcomes, there need to be different inputs. In this book, Hammond breaks down many of the myths associated with the concept of culturally responsive teaching and explains a necessary marriage between rigor and culture. She argues that if schools can keep these two factors in play, they will be better able to reach those long-sought outcomes. She introduces the Ready for Rigor Framework, an incredibly valuable tool that supports this work. School leaders who read this book will find that:

1. It's practical. Many leaders and teachers are looking for a roadmap for creating a culturally responsive classroom. Although there is no definitive roadmap, Hammond offers critical steps for leaders to take their school in the right direction.
2. It's user friendly. Hammond's work is grounded in research, but her approach is not intimidating. She provides bite-sized suggestions that a principal can use to support teachers without feeling overwhelmed.
3. It has multiple uses. Hammond provides exercises that can be used in professional development or in a coaching session, as well as exercises that teachers can use with their students in the classroom.

## Overview of the Parts of the Book and Professional Learning Suggestions

### **Part 1: Building awareness and knowledge**

The first few chapters clearly layout the meaning and importance of culturally responsive teaching and illustrate how it supports students' success. Hammond introduces her Ready for Rigor Framework, which breaks down culturally responsive teaching into four stages: awareness, learning partnerships, information processing, and community building. When implemented well in classrooms, she argues, those four areas together will help students become independent successful learners.

As with all equity-focused work, she explains that CRT must start with self. "You can never take yourself out of the equation," she writes. You have to understand yourself and the privilege you come into the classroom with, your knowledge base around culture and how that impacts your interactions with your students.

She does an excellent job of defining many of the terms we hear in equity-focused conversations such as bias and mental models to help us develop a common language. She also provides a number of exercises that you can do on your own or in professional learning sessions to help enter this conversation. She offers prompts, charts, and figures that have helped me spur conversation in professional learning sessions and as I think through this work on my own.

### **Part 2: Building learning partnerships**

In this section, Hammond delves into neuroscience and how teachers can use understanding and knowledge to build a positive trusting relationship with students in which they "listen with grace." These chapters include exercises you can use in your classroom to help you examine your interactions with different students and explore how you can change negative interactions. She also provides strategies for building trust with your students based on who you are and your style.

Chapter 6 explores how teachers can help their students develop into independent learners by being "warm demanders" -- building trusting and supportive relationships with their students while holding them to high expectations. Hammond offers examples of what that could look like, emphasizing the importance of giving "wise" feedback. In Chapter 7, Hammond then returns to the brain, explaining the stages students go through and how adults can create learning environments that give students the confidence to be academically successful and independent learners. She also writes about where culturally relevant curriculum can fit into Carol Dweck's "growth mindset."

### **Part 3: Building intellectual capacity**

This section breaks down the levels of a culturally responsive classroom. It helps educators identify whether their classroom is at a basic, superficial level – Are you just introducing culture by hanging some posters on the wall? How are you thinking about routines and rituals and making sure you are providing space for students to work in groups? Are you giving students agency and voice and making the space for them to be partners in the classroom and build the classroom collaboratively? She offers some compelling routines you can put in place in the classroom to help students build their capacity, such as by using music or storytelling or graphic organizers or word play to provide a culturally responsive classroom.

#### *Professional learning suggestions*

Select exercises from these chapters to use in professional learning with your team. Teachers can also use these exercises with their students. Try them out, and then come back as a group to reflect on how they went. Consider what the successes and challenges were and what might have been getting in the way of making it successful.

Be sure to read the summaries, questions for reflection, and resources for delving deeper at the end of each chapter.

## Additional Resources

Learn more about Hammond's Ready for Rigor framework [here](http://msgfocus.com/files/amf_sage/workspace_42/GLOBAL-IMAGES/documents/Hammond_Pg_17.pdf):  
([http://msgfocus.com/files/amf\\_sage/workspace\\_42/GLOBAL-IMAGES/documents/Hammond\\_Pg\\_17.pdf](http://msgfocus.com/files/amf_sage/workspace_42/GLOBAL-IMAGES/documents/Hammond_Pg_17.pdf)).

Listen to Hammond tell her story about her childhood and her work [here](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ME8KjqyqthM&list=PLhuaDAXMy8NxT5Sh6Kkyu5TdFi-VBp3Ti):  
(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ME8KjqyqthM&list=PLhuaDAXMy8NxT5Sh6Kkyu5TdFi-VBp3Ti>)

**ASCD Express** reflected on the 65<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Brown vs. Board of Education with an issue titled, "Putting Race on the Table in America's Schools"

**The Podcast Code Switch** produces thought-provoking episodes on a range of topics.

**The April 2019 issue of Educational Leadership** was titled, "Separate and Still Unequal: Race in America's Schools" and features articles from many prominent voices in the field of race and equity.