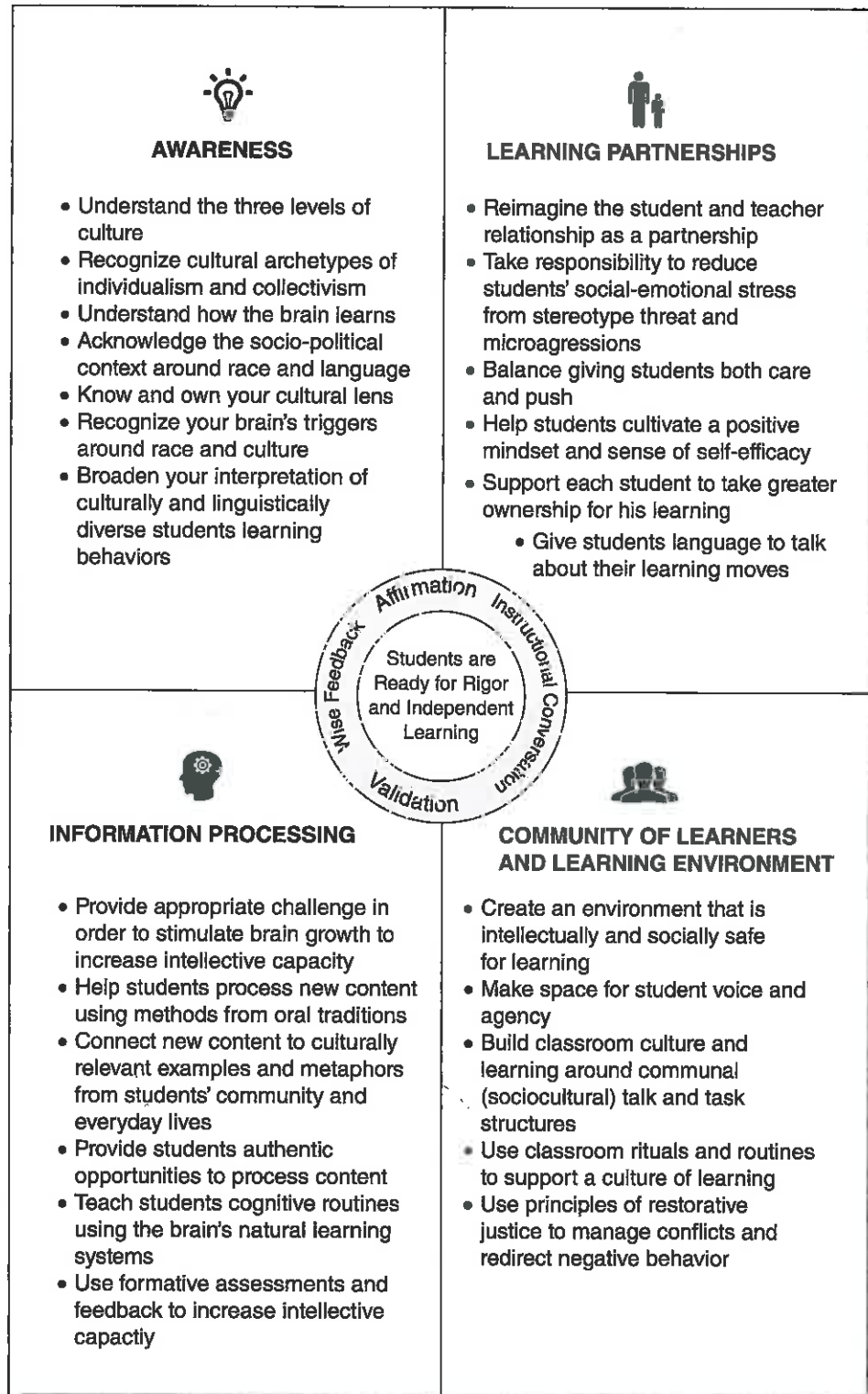


Culturally Responsive Teaching and the Brain

by Zaretta Hammond

Figure 1.2 Ready for Rigor Framework



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THE FOUR PRACTICE AREAS OF CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE TEACHING

Learning to put culturally responsive teaching into operation is like learning to rub your head and pat your stomach at the same time. This move feels a bit awkward at first because you have to get your hands to perform two different movements in unison. The trick is to get each movement going independently then synchronizing them into one rhythmic motion. Learning to operationalize culturally responsive teaching is much like rubbing your head and patting your stomach at the same time. The practices are only effective when done together. In unison they create a synergistic effect. The Ready for Rigor framework lays out four separate practice areas that are interdependent. When the tools and strategies of each area are blended together, they create the social, emotional and cognitive conditions that allow students to more actively engage and take ownership of their learning process.

The framework is divided into four core areas. The individual components are connected through the principles of brain-based learning:

Practice Area I: Awareness

Successfully teaching students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds—especially students from historically marginalized groups—involves more than just applying specialized teaching techniques. It means placing instruction within the larger sociopolitical context. In this first practice area, we explore the development of our sociopolitical lens. Every culturally responsive teacher develops a sociopolitical consciousness, an understanding that we live in a racialized society that gives unearned privilege to some while others experience unearned disadvantage because of race, gender, class, or language. They are aware of the role that schools play in both perpetuating and challenging those inequities. They are also aware of the impact of their own cultural lens on interpreting and evaluating students' individual or collective behavior that might lead to low expectations or undervaluing the knowledge and skills they bring to school. Mastering this practice area helps teachers

- Locate and acknowledge their own sociopolitical position
- Sharpen and tune their cultural lens
- Learn to manage their own social-emotional response to student diversity

Practice Area II: Learning Partnerships

The second practice area focuses on building trust with students across differences so that the teacher is able to create a social-emotional partnership for deeper learning. Culturally responsive teachers take advantage of the fact that our brains are wired for connection. As they move through the work in this area, teachers build capacity to

- Establish an authentic connection with students that builds mutual trust and respect
- Leverage the trust bond to help students rise to higher expectations
- Give feedback in emotionally intelligent ways so students are able to take it in and act on it
- Hold students to high standards while offering them new intellectual challenges

Practice Area III: Information Processing

The third practice area focuses on knowing how to strengthen and expand students' intellectual capacity so that they can engage in deeper, more complex learning. The culturally responsive teacher is the conduit that helps students process what they are learning. They mediate student learning based on what they know about how the brain learns and students' cultural models. This practice area outlines the process, strategies, tactics, and tools for engaging students in high-leverage social and instructional activities that over time build higher order thinking skills. Moving through this area, teachers learn how to

- Understand how culture impacts the brain's information processing
- Orchestrate learning so it builds student's brain power in culturally congruent ways
- Use brain-based information processing strategies common to oral cultures

Practice Area IV: Community Building

In the fourth practice area, we focus on creating an environment that feels socially and intellectually safe for dependent learners to stretch themselves and take risks. Too often, we think of the physical set up of our classroom as being culturally "neutral" when in reality it is often an extension of the teacher's worldview or the dominant culture. The culturally responsive teacher tries to create an environment that communicates

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care, support, and belonging in ways that students recognize. As they move through this practice area, teachers understand how to

- Integrate universal cultural elements and themes into the classroom
- Use cultural practices and orientations to create a socially and intellectually safe space
- Set up rituals and routines that reinforce self-directed learning and academic identity

CHAPTER SUMMARY

- The achievement gap has denied underserved students of color and English learners opportunities to develop the cognitive skills and processes that help them become independent learners.
- Culturally responsive teaching is a powerful tool to help dependent learners develop the cognitive skills for higher order thinking.
- Culturally responsive teaching uses the brain principles from neuroscience to mediate learning effectively.
- The Ready for Rigor framework helps us operationalize culturally responsive teaching.

INVITATION TO INQUIRY

- How is your school addressing the needs of low-performing students of color?
- How do you support struggling students to become independent learners?
- How have you and your colleagues operationalized the principles of culturally responsive teaching?

GOING DEEPER

To deepen your knowledge, here are some books, reports, and articles I would recommend:

- *All Students Reaching the Top: Strategies for Closing Academic Achievement Gaps* by the National Study Group for the Affirmative Development of Academic Ability.
- *The Flat World and Education: How America's Commitment to Equity Will Determine Our Future* by Linda Darling-Hammond.

Figure 2.1 Culture Tree

