

# Culturally Responsive Teaching and Leading Introductory Guidebook



## **What is Culturally Responsive Teaching and Leading?**

Illinois adopted culturally responsive teaching and leading standards in 2021. Culturally responsive teaching and leading ensures that educators and school leaders are meeting the needs of diverse students through the inclusion of cultures, customs, experiences, and perspectives to create culturally responsive classrooms. Culturally responsive teaching aims to affirm marginalized stories, histories, and experiences to benefit learning for all students. ISBE describes the benefits of culturally responsive teaching and leading: “Cultural responsiveness improves student outcomes across a range of indicators from math and reading scores to attendance, to postsecondary enrollment. The standards encourage future teachers, administrators, and school support personnel to engage in self-reflection, to get to know their students' families, to connect the curriculum to students' lives, and to support students.”

ORIGINAL

## What are the Culturally Responsive Teaching and Leading Standards?

SECTION 24.50 | The Illinois Culturally Responsive Teaching and Leading Standards

<https://www.isbe.net/Documents/Culturally-Responsive-Teaching-Leading-Standards.pdf>

A. Self-Awareness and Relationships to Others – Culturally responsive teachers and leaders are reflective and gain a deeper understanding of themselves and how they impact others, leading to more cohesive and productive student development as it relates to academic and social-emotional development for all students. The culturally responsive teacher and leader will:

1. Understand and value the notion that multiple lived experiences exist, that there is often not one "correct" way of doing or understanding something, and that what is seen as "correct" is most often based on our lived experiences.
2. Approach their work and students with an asset-based mindset, affirming the validity of the students' backgrounds and identities.
3. Know about their students and their lives outside of school, using this knowledge to build instruction that leverages prior knowledge and skills.
4. Include representative, familiar content in the curriculum to legitimize students' backgrounds, while also exposing them to new ideas and worldviews different from their own.
5. Engage in self-reflection about their own actions and interactions and what ideas and biases motivated those actions.

6. Explore their own intersecting identities, how they were developed, and how they impact daily experience of the world.

7. Recognize how their identity (race/ethnicity, national origin, language, sex and gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, physical/developmental/ emotional ability, socioeconomic class, religion, etc.) affects their perspectives and beliefs about

pedagogy and students.

8. Educate themselves about students' communities, cultures, and histories.

9. Critically think about the institutions in which they find themselves working to reform these institutions whenever and wherever necessary.

10. Assess how their biases and perceptions affect their teaching practice and how they

access tools to mitigate their own behavior (racism, sexism, homophobia, unearned privilege, Eurocentrism, etc.).

**B. Systems of Oppression – Culturally responsive teachers and leaders understand that there are systems in our society especially, but not limited to, our school system, that create and reinforce inequities, thereby creating oppressive conditions. Educators work actively against these systems in their everyday roles in educational institutions. The culturally responsive teacher and leader will:**

1. Understand the difference between prejudice, discrimination, racism, and how to operate at the interpersonal, intergroup, and institutional levels.

2. Collaborate with colleagues to determine how students from different backgrounds

experience the classroom, school, and district.

3. Know and understand how the system of inequity has impacted them as an educator.

4. Understand how current curriculum and approaches to teaching impact students who are not a part of the dominant culture.
5. Be aware of the effects of power and privilege and the need for social advocacy and social action to better empower diverse students and communities.
6. Understand how a system of inequity creates rules regarding student punishment that negatively impact students of color.
7. Understand how a system of inequity reinforces certain suppositions as the norm.

C. Students as Individuals – Culturally responsive teachers and leaders view and value their students as individuals within the context of their families and communities. The culturally responsive teacher and leader will:

1. Learn from and about their students' culture, language, and learning styles to make instruction more meaningful and relevant to their students' lives.
2. Engage with students' families and community members outside of the classroom to develop a more holistic understanding of the students' lived experiences.
3. Develop positive, strength-based partnerships with students and their families by learning about them, soliciting their opinions, and valuing their expectations, especially with those marginalized by schools in the past.
4. Provide parents with information about what their child is expected to learn, know, and do at his or her grade level and ways to reinforce concepts at home.
5. Share the classroom systems and policies (expectations, agreements, recognition and incentive practices, etc.) used in the classroom with students' families and align them

to the values and cultural norms of those families.

6. Provide multiple opportunities for parents to communicate in their language and method of preference, to the greatest extent possible.

7. Set holistic goals for students that accommodate multiple ways of demonstrating strengths and success, (e.g., alternate academic achievement metrics, growth indicators, leadership, character development, social- emotional learning competencies, and school values).

D. Students as Co-Creators – Culturally responsive teachers and leaders who fundamentally believe all students are capable center learning around students' experiences and position them as co-creators, with emphasis on prioritizing historically marginalized students. The culturally responsive teacher and leader will:

1. Encourage and affirm the personal experiences (family, community, culture, etc.) students share in the classroom.

2. Make authentic connections between academic learning and students' prior knowledge, native language, culture, and values.

3. Consistently solicit students' input on the curriculum (e.g., interests, people, or concepts).

4. Co-create, with students, the collective expectations and agreements regarding the physical space and social-emotional culture of the classroom and school.

5. Create and embed student leadership opportunities into the student experience (e.g., peer-led discussion, student-led workshops, and student-run schoolwide initiatives).

6. Persistently solicit student feedback, value that feedback (resist defensiveness), and adjust based on that feedback.

E. Leveraging Student Advocacy – Culturally responsive teachers and leaders will support and create opportunities for student advocacy and representation in the content and classroom.

The culturally responsive teacher and leader will:

1. Emphasize and connect with students about their identities, advocacies, and self-interest.
2. Offer guidance to students on how to develop a self-advocacy plan to inform decisions and choices.
3. Include students in the creation of an inclusive learning community with more opportunities for student expression.
4. Help students identify actions that can be taken to apply learning to develop opportunities and relationships for alliances.
5. Create a risk-taking space that promotes student advocacy.
6. Research and offer student advocacy content with real world implications.
7. Communicate high expectations to which all students can be held and urge students to lead as student advocates appropriate to the students' age and development.
8. Give students space to solve their own problems, negotiate their advocacy needs, and present their perspectives.

F. Family and Community Collaboration – Culturally responsive teachers and leaders will partner with families and communities to build rapport, form collaborative and mutual relationships, and engage in effective cross-cultural communication. The culturally responsive teacher and leader will:

3. 1. Regularly interact with students, families, and communities in both English and home language through methods of their preference.
2. Actively seek multiple perspectives and contribution from families and the community and invite them to actively share their opinions, feedback, and concerns that impact the school community. Forge ongoing participation with families and community members to meet the diverse needs and interests of students.
4. Continuously learn and build cultural knowledge that families and the community bring to the school community to nurture and foster relationships and inform student learning experiences.

5. Use best practices that are culturally responsive to value students and their families' cultural traditions when recognizing, motivating, encouraging, and supporting student success and growth.
6. Develop relationships with families and the community outside of the classroom setting.
7. Foster students' cultural understanding and connection to the surrounding community.
8. Invite family and community members to teach about topics that are culturally specific and aligned to the classroom curriculum or content area.
9. Welcome communication from parents and reply in a timely manner.
10. Communicate and provide appropriate techniques and materials to support and enrich student learning at home.
11. Collaborate effectively over time with the local community and community agencies, when and where appropriate, to promote a positive environment for student learning.

G. Content Selections in all Curricula – Culturally responsive teachers and leaders intentionally embrace student identities and prioritize representation in the curriculum. In turn, students are not only given a chance to identify with the curriculum, they become exposed to other cultures within their schools and both their local and global communities. The culturally responsive teacher and leader will:

1. Curate the curriculum.
2. Identify and articulate the purposeful ways in which marginalized communities are represented in curriculum, including print, digital media, and other classroom resources.
3. Employ authentic and modern technology usage inspiring digital literacy through an equity lens.
4. Ensure assessments reflect the enriched curriculum that has embedded student identities.



5. Embrace and encourage a balance of viewpoints and perspectives that leverage asset thinking toward traditionally marginalized populations.
6. Assess one's story through multiple vantage points to gain a whole narrative that includes all sides of parties involved.
7. Implement and integrate the wide spectrum and fluidity of identities in the curriculum.
8. Ensure text selections reflect students' classroom, community, and family culture.
9. Ensure teacher and students co-create content that encourages critical thinking about culture and includes counternarratives to dominant culture.
10. Use a resource tool to assess the curriculum and assessments for biases.
11. Promote robust discussion with the intent of raising consciousness that reflects modern society and the ways in which cultures and communities intersect.
12. Consider a broader modality of student assessments, such as performance portfolios, essays, multiple choice, State exams, oral examination, community assessments, work experiences, social justice work, action research projects, and recognition beyond academia.

H. Student Representation in the Learning Environment – Culturally responsive teachers and leaders ensure the diversity of their student population is equally represented within the learning environment. In turn, all members of the student population feel seen, heard, and affirmed. Exceptionally well-versed culturally responsive teachers and leaders provide exposure to underrepresented or misrepresented minority groups, even when they are not present within the population of their school and community at large. The culturally responsive teacher and leader will:

1. Uphold systems of support that create, promote, and sustain a welcoming and inclusive community.
2. Ensure linguistic diversity is represented throughout the building and seek ways to

reflect representation of world languages.

3. Verify that course materials are representative of all students, including materials for centers, stations, labs, classroom libraries, etc.

4. Ensure classroom and building decorations are inclusive of all students throughout

the building or within the community or city at large.

(Source: Added at 45 Ill. Reg. 3320, effective March 2, 2021)

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## **Some Considerations When Engaging in This Work**

1. Learning about ways to create and sustain culturally responsive teaching and leading should be an ongoing endeavor.
2. Culturally responsive teaching and leading requires introspection, self-assessment, and reflection.
3. This work is not linear. Do not let apprehension about knowing where to start prevent you from beginning or continuing the work. There are resources and support available.
4. This work can be difficult and feel personal. The key is to find spaces, people, places, and resources that allow us to work through the difficult moments and feel supported as we move forward, so that we positively impact all students.
5. Develop an understanding of Culturally Responsive Teaching and Leading standards, and goals, and how you can incorporate that into your classroom, pedagogy, and leadership.

**What Do the Standards Look Like in Action? The charts on the following two pages offer examples of what Culturally Responsive Teaching and Leading standards look like in action.**

**ISBE CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE TEACHING AND LEADING STANDARDS**

STANDARD	WHAT IT ENTAILS	WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE IN ACTION
Self Awareness and Relationships to Others	Building relationships with students and families, perspective taking, illuminating the histories/lived experiences of others, learn about your students, examine your positionality (lens) through self-reflection and unlearning, advocating for students and educational reform, and listening to students.	This might look like journaling, engaging in a meaningful professional development to fill in a skill gap, attending a student's extracurricular school activity, making a positive phone call home, having a 1-1 check in with a student.
Understand Systems of Oppression	Understanding and learning about systems of oppression and systemic inequities is an ongoing commitment. This includes understanding the histories of historically marginalized cultures, groups, and communities. Develop curricula that helps expand perspectives and celebrate an array of cultures and ethnicities.	This might look like attending a webinar about culturally responsive teaching, reading a text about a history you are not well versed in, learning about your inequities or lack of access in your city (e.g. redlining, etc.), committing to creating a lesson plan about a group often overlooked, or collaborating with a colleague to help expand your area of knowledge.
Students as Individuals	Valuing students, means taking the time to know your students. This includes communicating with students, including your students in dialogue in curricula, and offering representation in lessons and classroom activities.	This might look like having a 1-1 meeting with a student to check in, attending one of their school extracurricular events, acknowledging them for a positive action you witnessed or academic strength, or giving them choice on an assignment regarding how they demonstrate their learning.
Students as Co-Creators	Students are listened to and respected. Student feedback and voice are considered. Authentic relationships and mentoring is prioritized. Opportunities for students to lead and guide inquiry is provided.	This might look like allowing students to lead a Socratic seminar about a topic the class is learning about. This could also include offering students choice in how they demonstrate learning (e.g. a menu of options for a final project), or a self-assessment that students complete.

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**ISBE CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE TEACHING AND LEADING STANDARDS**

STANDARD	WHAT IT ENTAILS	WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE IN ACTION
Leveraging Student Advocacy	Leveraging student advocacy means offering guidance to students, connecting with students, helping students learn how to collaborate, and modeling and encouraging autonomy.	This might look like allowing students to share their insights about a lesson or to help co-create a project idea. It also includes inquiry based learning, and students having the opportunity to solve their own questions and problems.
Family and Community Collaboration	Valuing students, their families, and their cultures and experiences, means taking the time to know your students. This includes communicating with students and families, including your students in dialogue in curricula, and offering representation in lessons and classroom activities.	This might look like inviting a parent in to speak to the class about an area of expertise they have, sending home a monthly newsletter, sharing a student survey for feedback about a lesson plan or the classroom culture, etc.
Content Selection in all Curricula	Content selection in all curricula means working to create inclusive lessons and activities that provide representation for students to see themselves in curricula and connect their worlds to the learning content.	This might look like examining inclusive histories, including a diverse range of stories and texts, offering multiple viewpoints and perspectives, and considering global learning. An assessment tool/framework (e.g. the un/HUSH framework) can help assess if lessons are culturally responsive.
Student Representation in the Learning Environment	Student representation in the learning environment means having diversity and inclusion in curriculum, and also representing it visually in your classrooms, text choices, etc. Inclusion should consider languages, cultures, ethnicities, and so forth.	This might look like a class library with diverse books, posters and classroom decorations that are inclusive, and lessons that celebrate and offer learning opportunities about other communities, cultures, people, and histories.

**Step 1: Use self-reflection and self-assessment as a starting point. Use the below exercises to consider how your positionality (your lens) impacts how you might interact with and/or view others.**

Exercise 1: This graphic could be used to journal or think through the questions listed on the left. Think through various circumstances that might arise in your teaching or leadership role. How might your positionality interact with the various aspects listed on the right? (Bunch, *Magnitude of Us*, 2024).

**Considering Our Positionality**

1. What is my \_\_\_\_\_?

- How might my \_\_\_\_\_ influence my current perspective of this lesson's content?
- What might I need to unlearn or relearn as a result of my \_\_\_\_\_?

2. What is the student's \_\_\_\_\_?

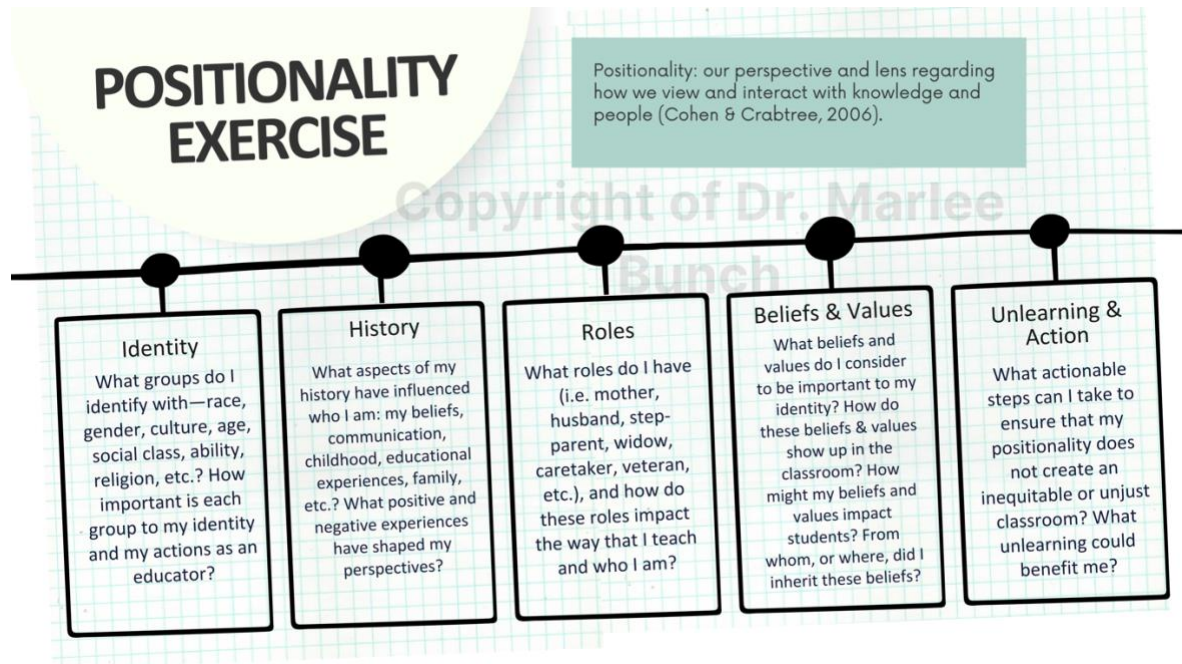
- How might the student's \_\_\_\_\_ interact with the lesson?
- What needs might there be as a result of the student's \_\_\_\_\_?

IDENTITY  
LANGUAGE  
SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS  
GENDER IDENTITY  
VETERAN FAMILY STATUS  
PERSONALITY TYPE  
AGE  
HOUSING CONDITIONS  
EDUCATION  
ETHNICITY  
SEX  
RACE  
APPEARANCE  
CITIZENSHIP  
MENTAL HEALTH  
RELIGION  
SEXUAL ORIENTATION  
GENERATION  
HOBBIES & INTERESTS  
LIFE EXPERIENCE  
ABILITY

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Exercise 2: Use this positionality exercise to expand on exercise 1. Journal or discuss with a trusted partner or colleague the answers to the questions in each area

(identity, history, roles, beliefs and values, and unlearning and action). Images below are courtesy of Dr. Marlee Bunch, *The Magnitude of Us* (Teachers College Press, 2024).



Exercise 3: After reading the roadmap below, develop a plan for how you will avoid these pitfalls. This could be a bulleted list, a step-by-step guide, etc.

## ROADMAP TO AVOIDING COMMON TEACHING PITFALLS

This is a visual snapshot of things to be mindful of while creating lessons and working towards a culturally competent classroom:

- Avoid deficit thinking regarding students/participants.
- Analyze your own bias and challenge your assumptions.
- Continuously expand your content knowledge.
- Engage students in activities that allow for inquiry and real world learning.
- Have preparedness when creating lessons & activities.





Exercise 4: Use the self-evaluation below to self-assess and reflect.

# UN/HUSH SELF-EVALUATION

Use this form to self-evaluate implementation of the framework and culturally responsive and inclusive lessons.

Copyright of Dr. Marlee S. Bunch

## HISTORIES

- Lessons illuminate histories not often told.
- Lessons demonstrate cultural and global awareness.
- Lessons ask and consider who is not included? Why?
- Students have opportunities to analyze history.
- We examine how current issues are rooted in the past.
- Histories are presented through a contemporary lens.
- Students have space to reflect & ask questions.
- We examine disparities/gaps in historical information.
- Lessons lean on lived experiences and oral histories to give voice to marginalized groups.

## STORIES

- Lessons & activities include marginalized stories.
- I understand that stories build connection.
- I build stories into classroom lessons & activities.
- Our classroom works to acknowledge all stories.
- I use stories to make content & texts relevant.
- Lessons use stories to examine power dynamics.
- I elevate inclusive stories beyond calendar events.
- I use stories to reach instructional objectives.
- I use stories to forge connections and build relationships.

## UNLEARNING

- Reflection & evaluation are part of my pre-planning.
- I seek out opportunities to learn and grow.
- Research is part of my curricular planning process.
- I regularly journal and consider difficult questions.
- I examine my own bias and gaps in knowledge.
- I consider how my positionality impacts my teaching.
- I seek to understand systemic barriers.
- I listen to others and seek to understand.
- I strive to be open-minded and accept feedback.

## HEALING

- Lessons offer opportunities to build connections.
- Lessons foster empathy and perspective taking.
- Lessons encourage coalitions and civic engagement.
- Lessons offer choice and autonomy.
- Lessons explore action, agency & activism.
- Lessons offer varied perspectives.
- My classroom offers students choices in learning.

## ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATIONS

- What do I want to learn more about?
- What new strategy am I willing to try?
- How does my positionality (lens) impact my classroom/lessons/students?
- What areas of growth should I consider?

**Step 2: Using a framework can serve as a guide when creating culturally responsive curricula and/or implementing Culturally Responsive Teaching and Leading standards in classroom learning. Use the un/HUSH Framework as a guide when creating curricula and activities. This framework can also be utilized to assess existing lessons and/or texts. Take a moment to review the principles of the un/HUSH Framework below.**

## THE PRINCIPLES OF THE un/HUSH FRAMEWORK

\*The [UN] should be incorporated with the other principles of the framework\*

### 1 [UN] UNITING & NAMING

Uniting for collective effort through collaborative actions. Naming our positionality to become more aware of our perspectives and areas for growth.

### 2 [H] HISTORIES

All histories are valuable and worth being illuminated. Unearthed and unheard stories are shared.

### 3 [U] UNLEARNING

Willingness to unlearn practices or thinking (as educators) that does not equitably serve students through reflection and self-evaluation.

### 4 [S] STORIES

Stories are bridges to understanding and connecting with others. Stories are celebrated and shared to enhance learning.

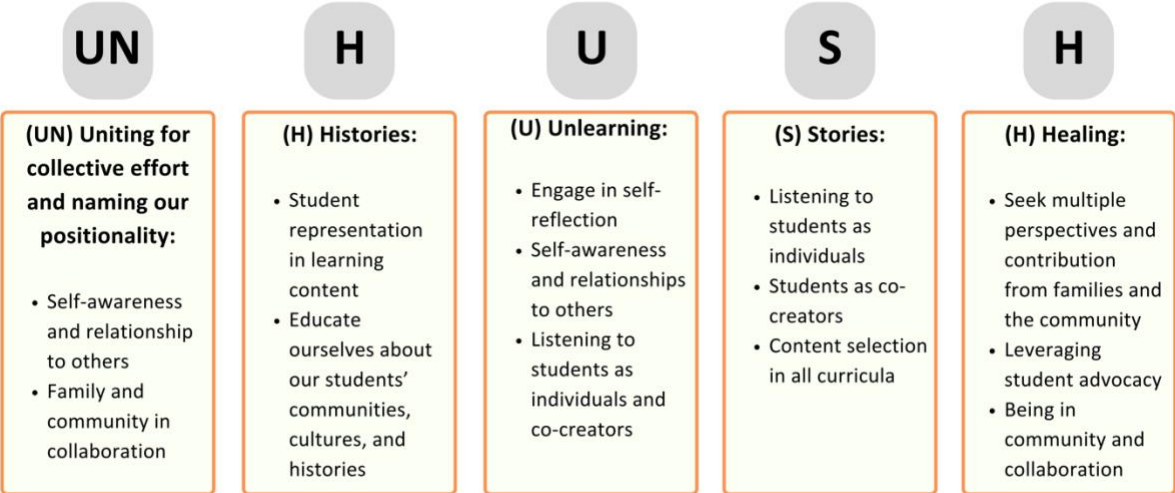
### 5 [H] HEALING

Fostering healing through positive relationships, connections, and bearing witness to one another's lives.

Below is a graphic that aligns the Culturally Responsive Teaching and Leading standards with the un/HUSH Framework for additional clarity. Choose an existing lesson you have that works well, and practice walking through that lesson to see if the principles are evident in the lesson plan or activity. How might the lesson be improved or made more inclusive?

**THE PRINCIPLES OF THE un/HUSH FRAMEWORK©**

*\*This framework is aligned with Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) Culturally Responsive Teaching and Leading Standards and can help assess and guide curricula development\**



**Step 4: Having a shared language can help with implementing and understanding what culturally responsive teaching and leading require of us. Take a moment to review the terms that the Illinois State Board of Education recommends being knowledgeable about.**

**<https://www.isbe.net/Documents/CRTL-Key-Terms.pdf>**

The following key terms can help individuals understand concepts included throughout the Culturally Responsive Teaching and Leading Standards

**Academia:** The educational environment in its entirety, tasked with the pursuit of education and learning; the life, community, or world of teachers, schools, and education (Merriam-Webster, 2021).

**Accessibility** Ways in which educational institutions and policies ensure — or at least strive to ensure — that students have equal and equitable opportunities to take full advantage of their education (Partnership, Great Schools, 2014).

**Affirm:** To offer support or encouragement to confirm validity; to confirm or ratify (Cornell Law School, 2020).

**Allyship:** A relationship that values each individual's cultural values and experiences (Merriam-Webster, 2019a).

**Asset Thinking:** An approach that focuses on strengths of each student and views diversity in thought, culture, and traits as positive assets; students are valued for what they bring into the classroom (University of Memphis, 2019).

**Consciousness:** A developmental process that makes people aware of systems of oppression (J Med Life, 2014)

**Counternarrative:** Story going against that of the majority culture as expressed in educational text, print, or digital form (Center for Intercultural Dialogue, 2014)

**Cross-Cultural:** Dealing with or offering comparison between two or more different cultures or culture areas (Cambridge, 2021)

**Cultural Mismatch:** The incongruence in beliefs or ways of being between people or groups of people based on their cultural heritage, age, region, etc.; when cultural norms in mainstream institutions do not match the norms prevalent among social groups which are underrepresented in those institutions (Stephens, Townsend, 2001).

**Culture:** The customs, traditions, arts, and beliefs of a racial, religious, or other social group; that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired...as a member of society (Tylor, 1870).

**Culturally Responsive Pedagogy:** It is an approach that empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically by using cultural referents to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes\* (Ladson-Billings).

**Curriculum:** The aggregate of courses of study, including all components of material and resources used to instruct and facilitate student learning; a standards-based sequence of planned experiences where students practice and achieve proficiency in content and applied learning skills (RIDE, 2021).

**Deficit Thinking:** A paradigm by which educators attribute the academic or behavioral difficulties of some students to the students themselves, their families, communities, and cultures; [the concept] holds students from historically oppressed populations responsible for the challenges and inequalities that they face (Davis, 2019).