

Georgina Rivera's Story and Figure 1.12. Text-Based Discussion Protocol

“Culturally relevant pedagogy is a pedagogy that empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically by using cultural referents to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes” (Ladson-Billings, 1994). As my professor posted that quote on the board in our graduate class, I came to the abrupt realization that I had never heard about how pedagogy could empower students. I knew in that moment that it was imperative that I learn more about culturally relevant practices and how they would help both impact the teachers I coached and their students. What I had not anticipated in this moment was an intersection where my childhood and my teaching career would collide and create an unforeseen moment of healing. As I worked my way through school from kindergarten through college, I had never seen glimpses of myself or my culture represented in the curriculum, lessons, materials, or artifacts in my classrooms. I could see representations of my classmates and their families in stories, movies, worksheets, poems, and math problems but I never saw myself. At that time, I did not understand why it was important or what I was seeking, but as I reflect, I now realize I was seeking a sense of belonging and to be seen.

As I learned more about culturally relevant practices, I decided that the healing process would mean being bold and sharing with teachers and students a part of myself. Stepping out of fear and into courage meant sharing my journey and culture. I began by asking two teachers I had built a strong relationship to teach a mathematics lesson to their classes. I created and launched the lesson by using the window and mirror analogy from the work of Rudine Sims Bishop (1990), later adapted to mathematics by Rochelle Gutiérrez (2012). I explained to students that I was going to share a story problem with them and the mirror was a view of myself and my culture, but it would be a window for them into my life and culture. The story problem was about a birthday cake that I would have on my birthday called “Bolo de Bolacha” that my mom would make. It was made out of layered cookies and frosting. The story problem was aligned to a third-grade multiplication standard.



Mrs. Rivera was making a bolo de bolacha for her mom's birthday. She used 7 cookies on the bottom layer of the cake. The cake was 10 layers high. How many cookies did she use to make her cake (bolo)?

After sharing the story problem with them, I challenged the students to write a story problem that was a mirror of their culture and a window for all of us in the class. As a class, we had to unpack what the word culture meant. Students discovered that it went beyond race or ethnicity because culture includes traditions, hobbies, art, music, customs, family interests, their neighborhood, environment, or religion. In my experience, it is difficult to get students to write story problems, but in this case, I could not get them to stop. They were elated to research ideas online, look at problem types, and then share their stories through problems they were sharing with their classmates. As I stood in the back and watched students say, “Here is a mirror of me, let this be a window for you of who I am,” tears streamed down my face because in that moment, the little girl that was never seen in her mathematics courses was now creating a window for all the students in the room for their culture to be seen through mathematics story problems. In the end, I collected all their stories and put them in a book that I keep to remind me that being bold made a difference.

Now that I am in a leadership position, I have been able to take what I have learned about culturally relevant pedagogy to help guide an algebra textbook committee to look at mathematics textbooks with a different lens. I posed the question, “Do the problems in the textbook reflect our students and their culture?” The prompt opened up the discussion about culturally relevant practices and how to view rigorous math tasks that provide a window or mirror for our students. As a result, the team selected a text that was aligned to rigorous standards but also reflected and opened up windows for our student population. In another circumstance, I led a curriculum writing team and was able to incorporate a culturally relevant rubric to rate how the curriculum was culturally relevant, which led the team to make adjustments and reframe their thinking. Lastly, I continue to share my story with the teachers and leaders I serve locally and at national conferences in hopes that someone else in a mathematics leadership position will learn more about culturally relevant practices and then take the leap of faith to learn more and be a BOLD leader by incorporating culturally relevant practices as they make leadership decisions to ensure equity and access for each and every learner.

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Text-Based Discussion Protocol


Preparation: Timing is important as it keeps the focus on building on each other's thinking rather than engaging in dialogue. Participants should work in small groups of four.

Protocol:

1. In each group, select a timekeeper to keep pace.
2. Each participant should select a quote or brief passage from the article.
3. One member volunteers to go first. This presenter identifies the quote or passage and then reads it aloud without explanation.
4. Each of the other three members gets 1 minute to respond to the passage, which could be used to say what the passage makes them think about, what questions or comments it raises, and so on.
5. The first participant takes 3 minutes to state why she or he chose that passage and then responds or builds on what her or his colleagues have stated.
6. Repeat the pattern until all participants have been a presenter.
7. Come back to the whole group. Have each small group share a key idea or thinking that emerged from the discussions.
8. Debrief the process. How did this structure help participants explore ideas in the text and help participants connect it to their own thinking?

Source: Adapted from National School Reform Faculty.

Figure 1.12. Text-Based Discussion Protocol

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