

Applying the Framework for Culturally Responsive Teaching to Explore the Cultural Adaptations of Teach First Beginning Teachers (0008)

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Background

The research in this paper draws on the experiences of a group of Teach First (TF) trainee teachers placed in a range of challenging schools across Yorkshire and Humberside (UK). The purpose of this research was to investigate the cultural issues and challenges faced by TF teachers in their first year of teaching, having been placed in a schools that were culturally very different from anything they had experienced before, and very different from their own family and educational backgrounds.

During their first year, the trainees are teachers in training, with master's level academic work and QTS evidence to gather, and usually an 18 hour timetable for which they are solely responsible. This is not an easy route into teaching with a lot of stress and pressure in the first year, thus only the brightest and the best are taken on to the programme ([Blandford, 2008](#)). This route is designed to attract people who would not otherwise have thought of teaching as a career, and are generally middle class graduates from Russell Group universities. Hence there is often a cultural gap between the teachers and their pupils, and it is this gap which has been explored in this research. This study shows that cultural differences do arise, and that teachers find ways to deal with them. It is this that will be examined in detail through the findings of this research.

Theoretical Framework

The research draws on the concept of culturally responsive teaching (CRT) developed by Gay as one which 'teaches to and through the strengths of ethnically diverse students', and which uses the 'cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning outcomes more relevant to and effective for them' (Gay, 2013, p49). It recognises that not all schools are a homogeneous environment, and neither are the teachers and pupils in them – there is divergence in the pupil population, and school culture and pupil culture do not always align ([Gay, 2000](#), [Gay, 2010](#)). To avoid culture clashes, school and community must connect, there must be a convergence between curriculum, teacher and pupil. Applying the conceptual framework of CRT allows the examination of any resulting issues through a CRT lens, irrespective of the ethnic composition of the school in which the issues arose.

The basic framework of CRT has the following five characteristics:

1. It acknowledges the different cultural heritage of pupils as legacies that affect their learning and as valuable content within the curriculum.
2. It bridges the gap between home and school, and between academic concepts and sociocultural realities.
3. It deploys a variety of teaching and learning strategies.

4. It encourages and instructs pupils to embrace and praise each other's cultural heritages.
5. It incorporates a range of multi-cultural information, resources, teaching and learning materials across all school subjects within the curriculum. ([Gay, 2000](#)).

Using the above framework as a tool for analysis, the current research explored how far the TF trainees are able to adapt their teaching to respond to the multi-cultural or simply different culture(s) they experience in their schools.

Methods

A mixed methods approach was chosen for this research with the intention that different forms of data would be collated to form a more coherent whole. The intention being that these would add rigour to any claims made from such data, avoiding anecdotalism through limited quantification of the qualitative data ([Gorard, 2004](#)). The participants in this research were 'self-selecting' in that they had been allocated to the author at the start of the academic year and were all placed in schools across Yorkshire and Humberside (UK). The author/researcher was responsible for them in the role of professional tutor. The limited size of the sample meant that in-depth context rich data could be obtained from the participants throughout the year.

Qualitative data was collected through three separate surveys done with the participants at the start, middle and end point of the academic year. Interviews were also conducted with the professional mentor in school, and participants took part in a final focus group at the end of the academic year, following up on the survey responses. The intention being that bringing the participants together like this would allow for the gathering of in-depth data, through the sharing and reflecting on different viewpoints ([Elton-Chalcraft et al., 2008](#)), and developing responses to issues they had previously only reflected on alone..

Findings

Data from the research showed that all the characteristics of CRT are prevalent in the trainee teachers in this study, that is, they are culturally responsive to the needs of their pupils, It also showed how this increased as they proceeded through the first year of teaching. The CRT framework provided me with a lens through which I was able to analyse the data from this research to evidence how participants not only demonstrated the characteristics of CRT, but took this further, and continually adapted their teaching to remain culturally sensitive as they developed their practice through the year. They exhibit the the characteristics of what I have named culturally adaptive teaching (CAT). The participants adopted new pedagogies as they moved through the year, and did so intuitively, without guidance or support, as survival strategies that helped them improve their practice in the classroom.

As a tool for data analysis, the CRT framework has relevance in other areas. This concept is arguably not restricted to teacher education, and has relevance to TF nationally, in terms of preparing trainees for school, and to initial teacher education nationally and internationally, where similar situations arise. It has the potential to allow a convergence of ideas within teacher education, that enable us to better prepare trainees for the divergence they will encounter. It also has relevance to other types of professional learning, such as medicine and

law, where students are placed in workplaces that are culturally and socially very different from anything they have experienced before.

References

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