

Seven Core Themes of the Culturally Responsive Arts Education Initiative*

The Culturally Responsive Arts Education Initiative is a new effort of the Endowments' Arts & Culture Program, in partnership with the foundation's Education Program. The initiative aims to bring the power of the arts to bear on the particular educational challenges facing African American children. It is based on empirical and anecdotal evidence that the arts, positive racial identity and culturally responsive pedagogy can lead to increased achievement and resilience in African American children.

Towards this end, we have supported projects in select Pittsburgh Public Schools and Propel Charter Schools that will employ the arts of the African Diaspora and incorporate the culture of the students in curricular and instructional planning, implementation and assessment. While the initiative focuses on African American children because of the issue of racial disparities in education, we firmly believe that the increased incorporation of African American culture into the school curriculum is a gain for all children, who then benefit from thoughtful conversations regarding diversity and inclusion in our community. To learn more about this area of work, see the executive summary or full report for "Cultural Responsiveness, Racial Identity and Academic Success: A Review of Literature" by Drs. Mary Stone Hanley and George Noblit of George Mason University and University of North Carolina, respectively.

In our view, it is important that the arts of the African Diaspora, and specifically teaching artists representing these genres, are at the center of this initiative. In this setting, and in collaboration with arts specialists and classroom teachers, artists

* These themes were developed by the Pittsburgh Public School's CRAE Advisory Committee, which consists of parents, teachers, teaching artists, Pittsburgh Public School administrators, members of the Equity Advisory Panel, and Heinz Endowments staff, and provides advice and insight to the district and the Endowments on the general framework of the CRAE agenda.

might facilitate a process in which children, by the work of their own hands, develop an internal narrative to counter a pervasive notion that their academic potential is somehow predetermined. Whether the drum, spirituals, capoeira, quilting, painting, jazz, spoken word, rapping or b-boying, the arts of the Diaspora exhibit the richness of Black culture and demonstrate the resilience of its people. Through both stand-alone arts instruction and arts integration, CRAE asks learners and teachers to see one another and academic subjects anew. In this setting, it is hoped that children and teachers might co-create a world in which they experience, discuss and gain insight on issues pertaining to art, racism, ethnicity and citizenry and that schools might see the unique power of the arts in improving the overall quality of education.

As Culturally Responsive Pedagogy often refers to a variety of educational models including multicultural education, cultural competency and African-centered education, it is important to give greater explication to the definition above. With this in mind, we present the following themes as CRAE's core elements.

1. Employ the arts of the African Diaspora.
2. Partner with artists in order to develop an instructional climate that promotes a positive racial identity.
3. Develop leadership qualities within children.
4. Forge collaboration among arts specialists, teaching artists and teachers of other core subjects.
5. Employ artists in connecting to and developing relationships with the child's family.
6. Engage artists in the building of a relationship between a child and her school.
7. Encourage relationships with community institutions.

These themes represent an arts-based interpretation of the core ideas expressed in the report "Cultural Responsiveness, Racial Identity and Academic Success: A Review of Literature" by Drs. Mary Stone Hanley and George Noblit, as well as the extensive conversations of the CRAE Advisory committee and Pittsburgh Public School staff. They serve as the bedrock of the CRAE program and as guideposts for designing, implementing and evaluating CRAE programs. While these ideas are ambitious, they are rooted not only in high expectations for the children, but also in a knowledge that we will need higher expectations for ourselves in order for the children and youth to succeed.

While these themes are to be the underpinning of the CRAE projects, we look forward to the unique ways in which individual schools interpret them and bring them to life, and recommend incorporation of the following practices.

1. OFFER OPPORTUNITIES FOR REAL SKILL DEVELOPMENT IN THE ARTS OF THE AFRICAN DIASPORA. Central to the program is the belief that children develop a sense of their own capacity through personal victories, and the development of a demonstrable artistic skill is just such a victory. Programs should offer the opportunity for deep artistic engagement so that children might see for themselves their many capacities. In learning these art forms, children should engage in their own conversations about the value and beauty of African Diasporic culture. Their artistic expressions also will offer a window into their thinking and values that can help their teachers to better understand and teach them.

2. PARTNER WITH ARTISTS IN ORDER TO DEVELOP AN INSTRUCTIONAL CLIMATE THAT PROMOTES A POSITIVE RACIAL IDENTITY. Curriculum that promotes a positive racial identity serves as a counter-narrative in an environment that often communicates to African American children, and their teachers, that they are less than capable. Working with artists who can engage children in the arts of the African Diaspora is one means of developing this counter-narrative. In order to facilitate this process, schools and programs should augment positive lessons from a child's home and community, and provide children with examples of how African Americans have achieved in spite of racism and oppression.

3. DEVELOP LEADERSHIP QUALITIES WITHIN CHILDREN. Turning around the challenging conditions that predominate in many African American communities will require new leadership on an almost unprecedented scale. Programs should provide children with opportunities to develop artistic skill and understand its larger context, so that they can be leaders in demonstrating, teaching and explicating art. Almost without exception, arts of the African Diaspora serve both form and function. For this reason, in addition to learning about aesthetics, children should know the role art has played in the larger community, thus giving them a sense of art forms in context. Understanding a larger mission has been shown to increase African American children's motivation to learn.

4. FORGE COLLABORATION AMONG ARTS SPECIALISTS, TEACHING ARTISTS AND TEACHERS OF OTHER CORE SUBJECT AREAS. Culturally responsive arts education requires adaptations in instructional practice, classroom organization and motivational management, as well as in curricula and espoused values. CRAE programs are to be grounded in real world projects that exemplify challenges and opportunities that are germane to the lives of African American children in Pittsburgh. Collaborative

relationships among instructors should ensure that these programs teach the arts with other subjects in ways that both meet the Pennsylvania standards and involve children in a process of relevant inquiry.

5. EMPLOY ARTISTS IN CONNECTING TO AND DEVELOPING RELATIONSHIPS WITH A CHILD'S FAMILY. Parents and families play a critical role in identity development. Research indicates that children whose parents explain the existence of racial barriers, and how to circumvent them, achieve at higher levels than those children who do not have these barriers explained to them. Arts specialists and teaching artists should be given opportunities to involve families in their own unique way, which could include engaging them directly in art forms. Parent engagement is linked to a variety of protective factors for children and is particularly important in student success.

6. ENGAGE ARTISTS IN THE BUILDING OF RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN CHILD AND SCHOOL. According to Gloria Ladson Billings, the core elements of culturally responsive teaching include developing caring relationships with children and not avoiding issues of race and identity as they emerge in classroom settings. For this reason, artist residencies should be of sufficient length that these relationships can be established. In an ideal setting, residencies could be as many as 100 days. Classroom teachers might look at how high-quality teaching artists connect with children as one model in this area.

7. ENCOURAGE RELATIONSHIPS WITH COMMUNITY INSTITUTIONS. Children come to school attached to a variety of institutions, whether they are churches, mosques or community centers. Where possible, establish relationships with these organizations and involve them in program planning. Use well those opportunities that allow children to benefit from the resources of the community's larger arts institutions while maintaining the consistency of the program's message.

This emerging definition of Culturally Responsive Arts Education is drawn directly from "CULTURAL RESPONSIVENESS, RACIAL IDENTITY AND ACADEMIC SUCCESS: A REVIEW OF LITERATURE" by Mary Stone Hanley, Ph.D., George Mason University, and George W. Noblit, Ph.D., University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.