



## CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE TEACHING (CRT) IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA AS A PATHWAY TO A NEW ORDER IN TEACHING SOCIAL STUDIES IN DIVERSE SOCIETY: A LITERATURE REVIEW

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### ABSTRACT

Culturally responsive teaching (CRT), an approach to education that values students' diverse cultural backgrounds, constitutes a new order in teaching Social Studies in diverse societies such as the United States of America. This paper explores existing literature CRT on CRT in the United States of America. The review considers the principles of CRT, the concept of cultural competence, strategies for implementing CRT, challenges and solutions to CRT implementation, and why CRT is essential in teaching Social Studies in the United States of America. The paper concludes that culturally responsive teaching is vital in the United States as it addresses the diverse needs of students, reduces educational inequities, enhances teachers' cultural competence, prepares students for a globalized world, and promotes positive relationships in the classroom. The paper recommends among others that CRT as a new order in the teaching of Social Studies should be included in the Social Studies Curriculum in the United States of America as a reflection of the diversity of American Society.

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## 1. Introduction

Culturally responsive teaching (CRT) is an approach to education that values students' diverse cultural backgrounds. It involves tailoring teaching methods to make learning more relevant, inclusive, and effective for students from different cultures. This approach is vital in helping all students feel respected and supported in the classroom. Culturally responsive teaching emphasizes the connection between students' cultural experiences and their learning environment. Instead of assuming a "one-size-fits-all" method, CRT acknowledges that every student brings unique cultural knowledge and experiences to the classroom (Gay, 2018). It seeks to bridge the gap between what students learn in school and their cultural realities. Several countries have adopted or are in the process of integrating CRT into their teaching, particularly in Social Studies. Here are some examples:

In the U.S., CRT is widely recognized in Social Studies classrooms for addressing racial, cultural, and historical issues. Teachers use students' cultural backgrounds to explore topics like civil rights, immigration, and indigenous histories. For instance, classrooms discuss how historical events shaped various communities and relate them to current societal challenges (Gay, 2018). Canadian schools embrace CRT to respect the multicultural nature of their society. Social Studies lessons often include

Indigenous perspectives, such as the history and contributions of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples. This approach is part of Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission's calls to action for education reform (Battiste, 2013). In Australia, CRT in Social Studies focuses on understanding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures. The curriculum incorporates these perspectives to promote respect, reconciliation and shared understanding among students (Burridge & Chodkiewicz, 2012). While in South Africa schools use CRT to address the historical injustices of apartheid. Social Studies lessons include discussions about racial equity, cultural diversity, and nation-building efforts since democracy (Chisholm, 2012). Finland's education system integrates CRT by emphasizing student-led learning. Social Studies explores global citizenship and cultural diversity, preparing students to engage with a multicultural world (Sahlberg, 2015).

CRT is being used and applied in some other subjects, for example in mathematics, Teachers can use culturally relevant examples and stories to make math concepts relatable. For example, they might incorporate local economic activities or cultural patterns into problem-solving exercises (Leonard et al., 2010). In science, CRT can highlight contributions from diverse cultures. Teachers might explore indigenous knowledge systems, such as how Native Americans used ecological practices to sustain natural resources (Medin & Bang, 2014).

Language arts can incorporate literature from various cultures, encouraging students to see their identities represented in stories. Teachers can use texts by authors from different backgrounds to discuss universal themes like resilience and justice (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Also, Art classes can celebrate cultural diversity by exploring traditional art forms from around the world. Students can create pieces inspired by their heritage or other cultures, fostering appreciation and creativity (Efland, 2002). Lastly, in physical education, CRT can include games and sports from different cultures, promoting physical activity and cultural understanding simultaneously. For example, students can learn about capoeira from Brazil or traditional African dances (Ennis, 2011).

CRT is premised on certain core principles. They include but are not limited to the following.

1. **Respect for Diversity:** Teachers acknowledge and appreciate the cultural identities of their students.
2. **Equitable Learning Opportunities:** CRT ensures all students have access to high-quality education regardless of their background.
3. **Cultural Integration:** Lessons and materials include examples, stories, and perspectives from diverse cultures.

4. **Empowering Students:** CRT helps students develop a strong sense of self and pride in their cultural heritage.

Classrooms are often diverse in multicultural societies like the United States. CRT fosters a sense of belonging by showing students their culture is valued and respected. For example, a teacher might incorporate multilingual greetings or share stories from different cultural traditions to enhance academic success. Research shows that academic students perform better when their cultural backgrounds are considered in the curriculum. They feel more engaged and motivated when lessons relate to their experiences (Howard, 2020). For instance, a Social Studies lesson might include examples from various cultures' contributions to social studies. CRT also teaches students to appreciate others' perspectives. By learning about different cultures, students develop empathy and reduce biases, which prepares them to thrive in a global society.

## **2. Theoretical Framework: Cultural Competence**

Cultural competence refers to understanding, appreciating, and interacting with people from different cultural backgrounds. Cultural competence theory was first developed by Dr Derald Wing Sue and his colleagues in the field of multicultural counselling. Their work focused on helping professionals effectively interact with people from diverse cultural backgrounds. The theory emphasizes understanding, respecting, and valuing cultural differences to promote equitable and inclusive practices (Sue et al., 1982). While it originated in counselling, cultural competence theory has been widely adopted in education, healthcare, and other fields where cross-cultural interactions are essential. It is an essential skill for educators, healthcare providers, and professionals in a globalized world. This concept is grounded in theories that explain how individuals and organizations can develop the skills to effectively navigate cultural diversity. Cultural competence involves more than just knowing about other cultures. It requires attitudes, knowledge, and skills that allow people to work effectively in cross-cultural situations. According to Cross et al. (1989:4), cultural competence is "a set of congruent behaviors, attitudes, and policies that come together in a system or agency to work effectively in cross-cultural settings."

Cultural competence promotes understanding and collaboration in diverse environments. It helps reduce prejudice and fosters mutual respect, which is essential for creating inclusive communities (Banks, 2019). In fields like education, healthcare, and business, cultural competence ensures services are relevant and effective. For example, healthcare providers who understand cultural differences can offer better care by respecting patients' beliefs and practices (Betancourt et al., 2016). Cultural competence prepares individuals to thrive in a globalized world. By appreciating cultural diversity,

people can build stronger international relationships and address global challenges.

### **Key Assumptions of Cultural Competence Theory**

Cultural competence theory is based on three main assumptions:

1. **Awareness of Cultural Biases:** Individuals must first recognize their own cultural beliefs and biases to avoid imposing them on others.
2. **Knowledge of Cultural Differences:** Understanding the unique values, histories, and practices of different cultural groups is essential for effective interaction.
3. **Skills to Adapt:** Developing strategies to communicate and engage effectively with people from diverse backgrounds is key to fostering inclusivity (Sue et al., 1982).

These assumptions highlight the importance of self-awareness, knowledge, and adaptability in creating meaningful cross-cultural connections.

### **3. Relating Cultural Competence to Social Studies Teaching**

Cultural competence theory is highly relevant to social studies because the subject focuses on understanding people, cultures, and societies. In social studies classrooms, teachers can apply this theory by creating lessons that reflect the diverse cultural backgrounds of their students. For instance, when teaching about migration, educators can incorporate stories from various cultural groups, allowing students to see their own identities represented.

Additionally, cultural competence helps teachers address sensitive topics like systemic racism or colonialism with care and respect. By being aware of their biases and using culturally relevant examples, educators create a safe space where students feel valued and respected. This approach not only enhances learning but also helps students develop empathy and critical thinking skills, which are essential for participating in a multicultural world (Banks, 2019).

Cultural competence theory, developed by Dr. Derald Wing Sue, provides a framework for understanding and valuing cultural diversity. Its principles are essential for social studies teaching, where the goal is to help students explore the complexities of human society. By incorporating cultural competence into their practice, educators can make social studies lessons more inclusive, engaging, and impactful.

To develop cultural competence, there is a need for a start in examining personal beliefs and biases. Understanding how one's cultural background influences perceptions can help in overcoming

stereotypes. Engage in lifelong learning about different cultures through books, courses, and experiences. For example, attending cultural festivals or reading literature from various cultures can expand knowledge. Form genuine connections with people from different backgrounds. Listening to their stories and perspectives deepens understanding and empathy. Organizations can offer training programs on cultural competence. These workshops can provide tools and techniques to navigate cultural diversity effectively.

#### **4. Strategies for Implementing CRT in the United States of America**

Implementing culturally responsive teaching (CRT) in the United States is essential for creating inclusive classrooms that recognize and celebrate the diverse backgrounds of students. One effective strategy is to integrate students' cultural experiences into the curriculum. This can be achieved by selecting teaching materials that reflect the cultural identities of the students. For example, educators can include literature, historical figures, and examples from various cultures that resonate with the students' lives. This approach not only enhances engagement but also validates students' identities, making them feel valued in the learning environment (Caingcoy, 2023; Levine, 2024).

Furthermore, teachers should encourage discussions that allow students to share their cultural perspectives, fostering a classroom atmosphere where diverse voices are heard and respected (Yu, 2018; Barnes & McCallops, 2019). Another important strategy is to provide professional development for teachers focused on culturally responsive practices. Educators must first understand the principles of CRT to effectively implement them in their classrooms. Training programs should emphasize the importance of recognizing personal biases and understanding the cultural contexts of their students (Jia & Nasri, 2019; Vidwans & Faez, 2019). By participating in workshops and collaborative learning communities, teachers can share experiences and strategies that work in diverse classrooms. Professional development (through training programs, workshops, and collaborative learning communities) helps build teachers' confidence in using CRT, which is crucial for its successful implementation (Wah & Nasri, 2019; Young et al., 2019).

Additionally, schools should create a supportive environment where teachers feel empowered to experiment with new teaching methods that reflect their students' cultural backgrounds (Finn, 2023; Levine, 2024). Creating a school-wide commitment to culturally responsive teaching is also vital. This involves engaging the entire school community, including administrators, teachers, and parents, in discussions about the importance of CRT. School leaders should advocate for policies that promote inclusivity and support teachers in their efforts to implement CRT in their classrooms (Kelly-McHale,

2018; Barnes, 2019). For instance, schools can establish mentorship programs that connect teachers with culturally competent role models who can provide guidance and support. Moreover, schools should actively involve families and community members in the educational process, recognizing that education is a partnership that extends beyond the classroom (McEvoy & Salvador, 2020; Lyublinskaya, 2024). By fostering a collaborative environment that values diversity, schools can create a culture of respect and understanding that benefits all students.

Lastly, assessment practices should be adapted to be more culturally responsive. Traditional assessment methods may not accurately reflect the abilities of students from diverse backgrounds. Educators should consider incorporating alternative assessment strategies, such as portfolios or project-based assessments that allow students to demonstrate their knowledge in ways that are meaningful to them (Wah & Nasri, 2019; Burns et al., 2020). Additionally, involving students in the assessment process can enhance their engagement and ownership of their learning. This approach not only helps to identify areas where students excel but also highlights the unique strengths that each student brings to the classroom (Amjad, 2018; Young et al., 2018). By implementing these strategies, educators can create a more equitable learning environment that supports the success of all students.

## **5. Challenges of implementing CRT in the United States of America**

Implementing culturally responsive teaching (CRT) in the United States presents several challenges that educators must navigate to create inclusive classrooms. One significant challenge is the lack of adequate training and professional development for teachers. Many educators feel unprepared to implement CRT effectively due to insufficient knowledge about their students' diverse cultural backgrounds. Research indicates that when teachers do not have a deep understanding of the cultures represented in their classrooms, they may struggle to connect with their students and meet their educational needs (Hansen-Thomas & Chennapragada; 2018; Jia & Nasri, 2019). This gap in training can lead to a cultural mismatch between teachers and students, which may hinder the effectiveness of CRT practices (Al, 2023). Therefore, ongoing professional development that focuses on cultural competence is essential for teachers to feel equipped to implement CRT successfully.

Another challenge is the resistance to change within educational institutions. Many schools operate under traditional teaching models that prioritize standardized curricula and assessments, which may not align with CRT principles. This resistance can stem from a lack of awareness about the benefits of CRT or fear of deviating from established practices (Idrus et al., 2023). Moreover, some educators may hold biases or misconceptions about certain cultural groups, which can further complicate their willingness

to adopt CRT strategies (Finn, 2023). To overcome this challenge, school leaders must advocate for a shift in mindset and provide support for teachers as they transition to more culturally responsive practices. This includes creating a school culture that values diversity and encourages collaboration among educators to share best practices.

Furthermore, the diverse needs of students in multicultural classrooms can pose a significant challenge to implementing CRT. Students come from various backgrounds, each with unique cultural experiences and learning styles. This diversity requires teachers to be flexible and adaptable in their teaching approaches (Anuas, 2024). However, many educators may feel overwhelmed by the task of addressing the individual needs of each student while still meeting curriculum standards. This can lead to a one-size-fits-all approach that does not adequately support all learners (Smith, 2023). To address this challenge, teachers should be encouraged to use differentiated instruction and culturally relevant materials that resonate with their students' experiences, fostering a more inclusive learning environment.

Lastly, systemic issues such as funding disparities and resource limitations can hinder the implementation of CRT. Schools in low-income areas often lack the necessary resources to provide culturally relevant materials and training for teachers (Jackson et al., 2021). This inequity can perpetuate educational disparities and limit the effectiveness of CRT initiatives. To combat this issue, policymakers must prioritize equitable funding for schools and invest in resources that support culturally responsive education. Additionally, community partnerships can play a vital role in providing schools with the necessary support and resources to implement CRT effectively (Gupta, 2023). By addressing these systemic challenges, educators can create a more equitable and inclusive educational landscape for all students.

## **6. Mitigating the Challenges of CRT Implementation in the United States**

One of the most effective solutions is to include materials that reflect the diverse cultures, histories, and experiences of students. Social Studies educators can incorporate resources such as books, films, and primary documents that showcase perspectives from underrepresented groups. For example, teaching American history should include stories of Indigenous peoples, African Americans, Asian Americans, and other marginalized communities. This approach ensures that all students see their identities and histories valued in the curriculum (Gay, 2018). Providing teachers with training in culturally responsive teaching is critical. Professional development programs should focus on helping educators understand the importance of cultural diversity and how to incorporate it into their teaching. Workshops, seminars,

and peer mentoring can equip teachers with practical strategies for integrating culturally relevant materials and methods into their lessons. Continuous learning opportunities also ensure that teachers stay updated on best practices and emerging research in this field (Howard, 2020).

Building partnerships with students' families and local communities is another solution. Teachers can invite community members to share their experiences, traditions, and knowledge in the classroom. Such engagement fosters a deeper understanding of students' cultural backgrounds and creates opportunities for students to learn directly from diverse perspectives. Moreover, involving families in the learning process helps to create a supportive environment both at home and in school (Villegas & Lucas, 2021). In addition, flexibility in teaching methods is essential for culturally responsive teaching. Social studies educators should use various techniques to address the needs of different learners. For instance, incorporating visual aids, hands-on activities, and collaborative projects can make lessons more engaging and accessible for all students, including those learning English or students with different learning styles. Teachers should also encourage critical thinking by facilitating discussions about historical and current events that affect diverse groups (Banks, 2019).

Assessments should reflect the diversity of students and their cultural knowledge. Instead of relying solely on traditional tests, teachers can use projects, presentations, and portfolios that allow students to demonstrate their understanding in culturally meaningful ways. For example, a student could research and present a significant figure or event from their cultural background. This approach values students' contributions and encourages them to connect their heritage to what they are learning (Sleeter, 2020). Moreover, teachers and school leaders must advocate for policies that support culturally responsive teaching. Such advocacy will involve pushing for funding to provide diverse resources and training opportunities. It also involves revising state and national standards to ensure they emphasize cultural diversity and equity in education. When systemic changes occur, they pave the way for widespread implementation of culturally responsive practices, benefiting not only social studies but all areas of education (Gay, 2018).

## **7. Why CRT is Essential in Social Studies in the United States of America**

Culturally responsive teaching (CRT) is essential in the United States because it addresses the diverse needs of students in an increasingly multicultural society. As classrooms become more diverse, educators must recognize and incorporate the cultural backgrounds of their students into their teaching practices. This approach not only helps students feel valued and understood but also enhances their engagement and academic success. Research shows that when students see their cultures reflected in

the curriculum, they are more likely to participate actively in their learning (Jackson et al., 2021; Schirmer & Lockman, 2022). By fostering an inclusive environment, CRT promotes a sense of belonging among students, which is crucial for their emotional and social development.

Another important reason for implementing CRT is its ability to challenge and reduce educational inequities. Many students from marginalized backgrounds face systemic barriers that can hinder their academic performance. Culturally responsive teaching empowers these students by validating their experiences and providing them with the tools to succeed. It encourages critical thinking and helps students develop a deeper understanding of social justice issues (Grover et al., 2020; Achamrah, 2022). CRT not only benefits individual students but also contributes to a more equitable education system overall. This is particularly important in the United States, where historical and systemic inequalities have long affected access to quality education.

Moreover, CRT enhances teachers' cultural competence, which is vital for effective teaching in diverse classrooms. Educators who engage in culturally responsive practices are better equipped to understand their students' unique backgrounds and learning styles. This understanding allows them to tailor their instruction to meet the specific needs of each student (Barton & Riddle, 2021; Han, 2022). Professional development programs focused on CRT can help teachers reflect on their biases and improve their teaching strategies, ultimately leading to better educational outcomes for all students. Schools can create a more inclusive and supportive learning environment by fostering a culturally competent teaching workforce.

Additionally, culturally responsive teaching prepares students for a globalized world. In today's interconnected society, students must learn to navigate and appreciate diverse cultures. CRT helps students develop cultural awareness and empathy, skills that are essential for success in a multicultural workforce (Young et al., 2019; Jackson et al., 2021). By incorporating diverse perspectives into the curriculum, educators can equip students with the knowledge and skills needed to thrive in a global society. This preparation is crucial not only for individual success but also for fostering a more inclusive and harmonious society.

Furthermore, CRT promotes positive relationships between teachers and students. When educators demonstrate an understanding and appreciation of their students' cultures, it builds trust and respect in the classroom. This positive relationship can lead to increased student motivation and a greater willingness to engage in learning (Davis et al., 2019; Ma, 2023). Students are more likely to take

academic risks and participate in discussions when they feel their cultural identities are acknowledged and respected. This supportive environment is essential for fostering a love of learning and encouraging students to reach their full potential.

CRT helps students see the connection between their own lives and what they are learning in class. In social studies, this means using examples and stories from students' cultural backgrounds to explain historical events or societal issues. When students see themselves in the curriculum, they are more likely to connect with and understand the material (Gay, 2018). By introducing diverse perspectives, CRT encourages students to think critically about history, politics, and social systems. For example, studying the civil rights movement from multiple cultural viewpoints helps students analyze the complexities of social change. This approach helps learners develop the skills needed to evaluate different sources and make informed decisions (Ladson-Billings, 1995).

Social studies often focus on the stories of dominant cultures. CRT ensures that the voices and histories of marginalized groups are included, creating a more accurate and complete understanding of history. This inclusivity helps students appreciate diversity and fosters respect for people from different backgrounds (Banks, 2019). Social studies is about understanding people and societies. CRT enhances this by helping students explore the experiences of others through their cultural lens. For example, learning about the impact of immigration laws on specific communities builds empathy and helps students understand the challenges others face in society (Hammond, 2015).

When students see their cultures reflected in the curriculum, they feel a sense of belonging, which boosts engagement and motivation. Research shows that CRT can improve academic outcomes, particularly for students from historically marginalized groups (Gay, 2018). This makes CRT a powerful tool for closing achievement gaps in education. Today's world is interconnected and diverse. CRT equips students with the skills they need to navigate this complexity. By exploring global issues and multiple cultural perspectives, students become more informed and compassionate citizens, ready to collaborate and contribute to a multicultural society (Banks, 2019).

Culturally responsive teaching is essential in social studies because it makes learning relevant, promotes critical thinking, fosters inclusivity, builds empathy, improves academic performance, and prepares students for the future. By adopting CRT, educators help students become active, informed participants in a diverse and interconnected world.

## 8. Conclusion

Culturally Responsive Teaching is transforming education by making learning more inclusive and meaningful. While its roots are often seen in Social Studies, CRT can be successfully integrated into all subjects, creating a richer and more engaging educational experience. By using CRT, educators prepare students to thrive in a diverse and interconnected world.

Culturally responsive teaching is vital in the United States as it addresses the diverse needs of students, reduces educational inequalities, enhances teachers' cultural competence, prepares students for a globalized world, and promotes positive relationships in the classroom. As the demographics of American classrooms continue to evolve, the importance of CRT will only grow. By embracing culturally responsive practices, educators can create inclusive learning environments that empower all students to succeed academically and socially. Assessing culturally responsive teaching is vital for ensuring that classrooms are inclusive and effective. By using diverse methods and addressing challenges, schools can support educators in creating learning environments where all students feel valued and empowered.

Through continuous assessment and improvement, CRT can fulfill its promise of equity and excellence in education. Implementing culturally responsive teaching in social studies classrooms enriches students' learning experiences and prepares them to thrive in a multicultural world. By diversifying the curriculum, fostering inclusion, and encouraging critical thinking, CRT transforms social studies into a powerful tool for equity and understanding. Teachers, administrators, and communities must collaborate to ensure this approach is embraced and supported. Culturally responsive teaching aligns seamlessly with social studies education by fostering a curriculum that is inclusive, engaging, and socially conscious. This approach not only enriches students' understanding of history and society but also empowers them to become informed and empathetic citizens. By embracing CRT, Social Studies classrooms can become spaces where every student's voice is heard, respected, and valued.

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