The 4-C's Model: Care Theory for Culturally Responsive Pedagogy

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Abstract
Classroom teachers strive to create environments in which all students have the possibility of success. As schools become increasingly more diversified, research shows that even experienced teachers struggle with the challenges presented by classroom diversity. In this article we propose the 4-C's Model, a theoretical framework that provides guidance to teachers for implementing Care Theory in their classrooms. The design of the 4-C's Model functions as an efficacious, pedagogical, conceptual structure through which the critical components of school **C**urriculum, professional **C**ompetence and **C**ulture are bridged by **C**are Theory. The 4-C's Model, as a socio-constructivist framework, supports efforts to create culturally responsive classrooms. The Model operationalizes the notion of a "caring environment" to include cultural and linguistic diversity, as well as effective pedagogy and authentic learning experiences as pathways toward a classroom environment that is inclusive and empowering for all students. This article offers significant pedagogical directions to support educators as they scaffold learners from diverse backgrounds.
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1. Need for a New Model

A considerable body of research suggests that the American educational system, historically, has primarily focused on the Eurocentric (i.e., mainstream) culture and was typically oriented to serve White middle-class students (Banks, 2016; Utt, 2018). Based on the content and design of Eurocentric curriculum as well as the educational resources and materials offered by public schools (Banks, 2016), it has been suggested that not all schools incorporate any perspectives beyond white European curriculum (Stanek, 2018).

Education, through formal schooling, encompasses students, teachers, families and institutions of all cultural backgrounds. Sound education encompasses more than the memorization of facts and figures (Banks, 2016). The collective wisdom of researchers has shown that a student's academic success is influenced by critical social and emotional factors (cf. Jagers, Rivas-Drake, & Williams, 2019) as well as sociocultural factors (Hurley, 2020; Nieto & Bode, 2018; Sutantoputri, et al., 2020). At the same time, demographic studies also indicate significant changes regarding diversity in US public schools (Glock, Kleen, & Morgenroth, 2019) forecasting a need for strategies that accommodate multiple perspectives. Reports on classroom composition indicate that 49% of the student population came from marginalized groups: "Among students in kindergarten through 12th grade, [only] 51% were non-Hispanic white" (US Census, Dec 2019). Classroom diversity also encompasses other aspects of human experience, such as gender, sexual orientation, languages, and religious practices (Bredtmann, et al., 2021; Nieto & Bode, 2018).

In the face of these realities, research shows that teachers are challenged to address the needs of diverse students (Flores & Smith, 2009). In a study conducted by Flores and Smith (2009), teachers professed a lack of efficacy around issues related to diversity and instruction; even experienced teachers struggle with the challenges presented by classroom diversity. Based on their quantitative findings, Flores and Smith (2009) assert that even those who identified as members of minoritized communities were just as likely to indicate that they were bewildered to provide culturally responsive instruction to the broad spectrum of students in today's classroom.

As a possible solution for the disconnect between diverse student needs and teacher preparedness for the creation of a culturally responsive, and caring environment for all students, we offer a theory-based framework. We propose the amalgamation of pedagogical theories to create a supportive, caring learning environment. With

the design of the 4-C's Model for culturally responsive pedagogy, **C**are Theory bridges the other critical components, i.e., **C**urriculum, professional **C**ompetence, and **C**ulture.   The application of the 4-C's Model scaffolds the creation of a caring environment that is inclusive for all students.

1.1 Benefits for Teachers
Teaching is more effective and less burdensome when there are connections between the curriculum and the students (Valenzuela & Rubio, 2018). Studies of pedagogy demonstrate that when teachers offer their students humanistic, culturally responsive lessons and activities, they create an environment in which the students are more likely to be engaged in the instruction (Grant & Ladson-Billings, 1997; Noddings, 2005; White, 2015; Woodhouse, 2020).

In her research, Aburumuh (2007) discussed the urgency for a model that would connect the various elements commonly discussed with Care Theory. We extend her original work and proffer the 4-C's Model as an approach to work with various cultural or linguistic groups found in schools. While her work was contextualized within the Arab and Muslim communities, her original research naturally extends to the broader array of audiences found in schools (e.g., Africa American, Asian, Latinex communities, etc.).

We would argue that most individuals who enter the profession of education strive to be good teachers. As mentioned earlier, research shows that even seasoned professionals are often ambivalent regarding the need for culturally responsive instruction (Flores & Smith 2009). The 4-C's Model offers a set of theoretically based principles to support teachers in their efforts to create a caring classroom environment that attends to the cognitive as well as the affective (e.g., cognitive, and cultural) needs of all students. This approach is inclusive of meaningful human experiences such as, culture, gender, language, learning style, immigration status, religion, or social class.

1.2 Care Theory as a Foundational Component
Noddings (2005) proposed Care Theory to clarify the kind of relationship necessary between teacher and student to promote high academic achievement, self-esteem, and interpersonal development. This theory has been tied to various components of instruction including culture and curriculum content (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Valenzuela & Rubio, 2018), as well as teacher competence (Goldstein, 1997; Noddings, 2005). Arguably, successful, caring, education depends on the interconnection of culture, curriculum, and competence. We maintain that Care Theory serves as the bridge or link between these important elements of education. In isolation, each of these components—culture, curriculum, and competence—is important. We developed the 4-C's Model to operationalize a conceptual and theoretical amalgamation. This paper details how the integration of Care Theory creates a powerful teaching environment that addresses the cognitive, affective, and social-emotional needs of all students (Jagers, et al., 2019). Furthermore, the model describes a caring environment for all students and provides guidance to teachers who wish to create them. Dermody (2003), within the context of schooling, describes the characteristics and goals of the Caring Environment:

> [They] provide safe, warm, and supportive learning environments. As we meet our students' academic needs, we must also concern ourselves with *who* our students are going to become. If we ultimately want caring adults, we must nurture that tendency in our children. It is essential that we build classrooms that foster positive relationships among all students and give students activities and responsibilities that foster personal accountability, kindness, and respect for others. We need to give students opportunities to care.

The inclusion of diverse perspectives and epistemologies leads to the development of a caring environment in which instructional practices are culturally meaningful and engaging for all students. Through the 4-C's Model, Care Theory serves as a foundational component that supports teachers as they create culturally responsive and academically rigorous classrooms. In order to operationalize the model, the teacher must acquire a set of skills or "cognitive tools" for effective implementation. We clarify below.

2.   The Road to Implementation
The Model requires that the educator have developed several inherent characteristics and dispositions. The fundamental precursors for the implementation of the 4-C's Model are summarized in the acronym *APOW* (Agency, Patience, Openness, and Willingness). In the following discussion, we review these foundational elements to implement the 4-C's Model effectively.

2.1 Agency
Agency is the start. It refers to the human capacity to make decisions and implement them. That capacity is the power of people to act purposely and reflectively, in more or less complex interrelationships with one. Inden (2000) provides a definition of human agency as:

The realized capacity of people to act upon their world and not only to know about or give personal or

intersubjective significance to it. That capacity is the power of people to act purposively and reflectively, in more or less complex interrelationships with one another, to reiterate and remake the world in which they live, in circumstances where they may consider different courses of action possible and desirable, though not necessarily from the same point of view (as cited by Moore, 2008, p. 591).

Agency, especially for school change, depends upon the willingness of the teacher to act. Our definition of agency concurs with Francis and Roux (2011) who write in their study that "agency is action-oriented; it is critical; it is the way that teachers use power, influence, and [content area instruction] to make decisions that affect positive social change" (p. 301). Some teachers are presented with a particular reality with a degree or amount of agency that they possess. With the 4-C's Model, teachers are encouraged to claim that agency, however great or small it may be, and direct it toward the creation of a caring, culturally efficacious classroom. When exploring this Model, teachers may feel that the agency of those in administration is so great, that it negates any influence they might have.

School change is a multifaceted process that requires competencies (cultural and pedagogical), personal dispositions, resources, and time. In using the term "agency," we are not suggesting that teachers always exercise deliberate self-conscious choices. We use the term with the understanding of the dynamic and dialectical nature of the interaction between individual and social contexts, and the active role of the individual in the process of identity construction and teaching for social justice (Banks, 2016). Social contexts can either enable or hinder the degree of agency that teachers have. As clarified by Moore (2008), agency is "action-orientated; it is critical; it is the way that teachers use power, influence, and science to make decisions that affect positive social change" in schools (p. 591).

The 4-C's model presents a road for teachers to exercise agency in working for social justice. Inden (2000) clarifies that "people do not act only as agents" but they also "have the capacity to act as 'instruments' of other agents,and to be 'patients,' to be recipients of the acts of others" (p. 23). Agency, therefore, is a necessary quality to contest social imbalance for the individual or the collective benefit of all (Moore, 2008).

2.2 Patience
This element is critical. Like many things in education, positive results are often not instantaneous, but become apparent after the passage of time. Patience, this personal disposition, is appreciated in all educational initiatives. Because it is dynamic and ongoing, the 4-C's Model requires patience for the implementation. Patience is needed for communication with students, parents and other partners. Patience is necessary when searching for culturally informed materials (e.g., culturally affirming textbooks) as well as explorations of the students' Funds of Knowledge (González, et al., 2006). For example, ongoing, informal meetings with parents and other community members, volunteer work or membership in local community organizations (e.g., quilting "bees", choirs, community garden associations) are opportunities to acquire knowledge about community culture and Funds of Knowledge.

Gay (2000) states that caring relationships are characterized by patience, persistence, facilitation, validation, and empowerment of the students. Patience is called for when constructing alternative ways to present new knowledge and learning new pedagogical skills (e.g., professional development). These activities, like the change and benefits the Model produces, occur over time. As Snyder (2017) reminds us, teachers, even those engaged in the process of change, transform at their own pace. If patience is not utilized judiciously when viewing their behaviors, any openness they have toward change may be overlooked or misconstrued as resistance.

2.3 Openness
This construct is a non- quantifiable and indispensable quality. It is observable through the disruption of routine or "the expected." Openness implies emotional forbearance over any stress or cognitive dissonance generated by something new (e.g., "New Literacies", Street, 2014) or unexpected, which may cause resistance to change. Guo et al. (2013) state resistance to change "makes reference to the difficulty to break with the routine or the emotional stress produced when the individual has to face changes (as cited in Sánchez-Prieto et al., 2019, p. 2438).

The presence of openness is noted through actions and decisions. With this mindset one can observe how a teacher acknowledges and respects new epistemologies (i.e., ways of knowing), phenomenologies (i.e., ways of perceiving), pedagogies (i.e., ways of teaching), as well as cultures (i.e., ways of being). Openness includes accepting new ways of teaching, embracing opportunities to learn and improve as professionals, to eschew changes. Its presence is discerned when teachers modify their habitual behaviors (Sánchez-Prieto et al., 2019). When a teacher modifies their thinking or redirects their attention toward new epistemologies this demonstrates openness.

The nemesis of openness is resistance. Those with an attachment to old forms of engagement or fear of things outside of their control may present resistance to change (Akmal, & Miller, 2003). Yılmaz and Kılıçoğlu

(2013) assert that resistance to change originates in fear or threat of loss or displacement from a comfort zone and moving to a space of the "unknown." The threat may be an anticipated loss of agency (i.e., control over a group), an imagined challenge to omnipotence (i.e., the knowledge), reproach for antiquated pedagogies or contestations to institutional hegemony (i.e., whose history is advanced or prioritized) (Howard, 2016), apathy (Robert-Okah, 2014) and increased workload. Expected increases or demands of time (e.g., training, staff development), insecurities (e.g., fearing scrutiny while implementing new pedagogies) may be the root of resistance. The 4-C's Model leads teachers toward a deeper level of openness and an inclusive classroom environment. Openness implies that the teacher has willingly stepped outside of their comfort zone in expectation of something new and more advantageous.

2.4 Willingness

Willingness is an invaluable trait in the implementation of the 4-C's process. Findings from Zeid, Assadi, and Murad (2017) indicate that the likelihood of change toward issues of diversity increases with levels of willingness: "It is therefore possible that when teachers are willing and ready to be part of an educational change, they are also willing and ready to diversify and try new teaching modes" (Zaid et al., 2017, p. 1167). When teachers confront sociocultural issues within the school or classroom, they often ask themselves (1) am I willing to make change for the betterment of all students and (2) how might I use my agency to affect change?

Teachers may cling to old ways of teaching and believing to avoid the discomfort of change -even when the teacher recognizes the need for something different or new. Teachers commonly ask their students to stretch themselves, or to reach outside their "comfort zone." Studies on teacher change indicate that teachers also struggle with mental parochialism and appear reluctant to step outside "their comfort zone "(Borbye, 2010).

As described earlier, agency, as it relates to the 4-C's Model, means willingness to engage in behaviors with the goal of effecting change. While agency is often discussed when considering personal goals, within the context of the 4-C's Model, teachers must be willing to use their agency as they seek educational equity and a caring educational environment for all students. We conclude that the existence of one's agency is not contingent upon the degree or amount of power (e.g., head teacher, senior instructor).

The four interconnected elements that teachers need to implement the 4-C's Model are summarized through APOW: Agency, Patience, Openness, and Willingness. In order to effectively implement the 4-C's Model, teachers must be willing to direct and invest whatever amount of agency they have toward school change and the betterment of the conditions for the underserved. For example, a librarian demonstrates agency when intentionally acquiring more culturally inclusive volumes for the library. Similarly, the patience of a teacher can be noted when they avoid scapegoating the student and find new instructional strategies to meet their diverse needs. The openness of a teacher is shown when they welcome, respect, and incorporate epistemologies and perspectives from a variety of cultures. The teacher's willingness is observed when they work collaboratively with their students to explore the social issues of various ethnic communities and grant opportunities for critical reflection and dialogue.

Stagnant curricula, outdated approaches, and teacher-centered pedagogies are the telltale signs of a lack of willingness. But there is the possibility of change. Much like their students, teachers have the possibility of growth overtime. In the following section, we explicate the metaphoric space in which teachers process and transform their pedagogies.

3. The Zone of Proximal Development for Teachers (ZPDT)

When teachers have the willingness to change and improve their practices, they are predisposed to acquire new understandings and to develop new skills. Teaching and learning are reciprocal actions. Teachers constantly learn new concepts and ideas. Throughout this interactive process, teachers move from their initial beliefs about culture, diverse student needs, and curriculum (i.e., old ways of understanding). Teachers, in this way, construct new pedagogies informed by the 4-C's Model (acquisition of new knowledge and skills), through the application of APOW. Guided by the socio-cultural- constructivist perspective (Jaramillo, 1996) we propose the *Zone of Proximal Development for Teachers* (ZPDT)(see Figure 1) to describe the process of teacher transformation. The ZPDT is their space for learning, growth, and change.

Emphasizing the social nature of learning and teaching, during this process of teacher transformation, teachers seek out and benefit from collegial support, professional development opportunities, and pathways to access culturally responsive resources. Over time, through continuous engagement with more knowledgeable "professionals," the teacher will move from their current state of cultural understanding, to higher levels of culturally responsive, caring pedagogy.

Effective teachers leave their comfort zone and embrace change because of the benefits for students, despite whatever fear or challenges they may have (cf. graph). This transformation is the result of the teacher's efforts to support students in a caring environment. The creation and maintenance of a supportive classroom environment is the heart of the 4-C's Model. In the following section, we detail each of the key components of this Model.

We describe each and link them to the literature on teaching and learning.

4.   The Main Components of the 4-C's Model

The four key concepts of this Model encompass the following: Teachers constantly learn new concepts and ideas. Competency, Culture, Curriculum, and Care Theory. All four components have a meaningful influence on the "4-C's Model" for effective education in U.S. public schools. The metaphor used to describe the Model is an equilateral triangle. The image depicts the multilateral integration of processes for a caring classroom environment (see Figure 1).

[Place Figure 1 about here: "Main Components of 4-C's Model]

We offer the triangular shape because it denotes the necessary balance among the three components of Competence, Curriculum, and Culture with Care Theory as the link that integrates the three into a functioning whole. The triangular shape is also a sign of caution. Excess in any one area (e.g., preoccupation with testing, Euro-centric curriculum, draconian school policies, cultural myopia, (Banks, 2016; Nieto & Bode, 2007/2018), may produce temporary improvements but will do little to create engaged, critical thinkers with a desire for life-long learning and global awareness (Noddings, 2005).

Teachers, therefore, must use their informed, professional judgment to make adjustments in the areas to maintain the appropriate balance. When teachers apply the 4-C's Model the outcome is a transformative, caring learning environment. All members of the school community, students, teachers, and families will benefit if teachers apply the tenets of this Model to their teaching practices. Each element of the 4-C's Model is equally powerful, and for that reason, balance is critical. The teacher must attenuate instruction to the unique needs of the students in the classroom. Because it provides a bridge or connection between the other components, the foundational element, Care Theory, will be discussed first.

4. 1 Care Theory

The vital link between the 4-C's Model components is Care Theory. As Pang (2005) states, Care Theory is "not touchy-feely stuff" (p.12). It is more concerned with treating caring as a *relation* rather than a *virtue* (Pang, 2005). A stated by Noddings (2005), "Caring is a way of being in relation, not a set of specific behaviors (p. 17)." Caring in this framework is based on moral and ethical purposes (Grant & Ladson-Billings, 1997). From this perspective, teaching is a reciprocal, relational process which addresses the cognitive, and affective needs of students (Valenzuela, 1999).

Nodding advances that caring pedagogy is based on moral and ethical purposes; she argues that "each caring encounter is an interaction between a person giving care and a person receiving that care: a one-caring and cared-for" (as cited in Goldstein, 1997, p. 14). When teachers work from an ethic of care, they make a conscious moral commitment to make decisions that support and develop the social, cultural, cognitive and physical needs of the students and to develop reciprocal relationships with them and their families (Smith, et al., 2022).

Research shows that students need personal connections with teachers and that such connections are made when "teachers acknowledge [students'] presence, honor [students'] intellect, respect [students] as human beings, and make them feel that they are important" (Gay 2000, p. 49). Those teachers who enact Care Theory in their classrooms move beyond superficial or technical concerns and attempt to engage students in meaningful activities that validate their culture, language, and perspectives while supporting their academic and emotional needs. When instruction lacks Models or culturally affirming references, students are discouraged from academic engagement (Smith & Iyengar, 2019).

4.2 Aesthetic vs. Authentic Care

In order to clarify the nature of Care Theory and its applications to the classroom, theorists have suggested dichotomies of instructional delivery such as "technical academic discourse" vs. "expressive academic discourse" (Prillaman & Eaker, quoted in Valenzuela, 1999, p. 22) or aesthetic caring vs. authentic caring (Valenzuela, 1999). Instruction based merely on an aesthetic approach gives primacy to "form and non-personal content and only secondarily, if at all, [to] students' subjective reality" (Valenzuela, 1999, p. 22). The 4-C's Model, because it is based on expressive academic discourse and authentic caring (Noddings 2018) "brings trust, respect, and compassion into the classroom" (Pang, 2005, p. 12).

To appreciate the importance of Care Theory, one can imagine a child in a classroom where her home culture is ignored or degraded. That child is on guard to ward off the effects of the symbolic violence experienced through the curriculum or the impersonal (Aburumuh, Smith, & Ratcliffe, 2009; Warde, 2002), emotionally distant manner of the teacher (Noddings, 2016; Woodhouse, 2020). The student may acquire new knowledge, but the learning process becomes more difficult because of the emotional energy they need to survive their situation (Iyengar & Smith, 2016). Classrooms based on Care Theory encourage students to take academic risks because they feel safe (Gay, 2000). Having familiarity with the culture and customs of the

children, a caring teacher can decide whether to unobtrusively accommodate a student or to make her individual experience part of the whole-class curriculum (Gay, 2000; Nieto & Bode, 2018; Smith, et al., 2022).

When caring teachers treat students with dignity and respect, students are free to spend less time on emotional self-defense or defending their preferences and perspectives (Banks & Banks, 2018). Authentic caring guides teachers toward humanistic approaches to instruction that nurture academic and affective growth (Noddings, 2005; Woodhouse, 2020). To be authentic, relationships need to be adapted to the curriculum. The dignity of the student is upheld when teachers scrutinize texts for inaccuracies and modify daily activities to connect with students' backgrounds and needs. The concept of "caring environment," as described earlier, incorporates the inclusion of respectful and meaningful relationships with students, their families, and communities. To this end, teachers who *authentically* care about their students generate higher levels in many aspects of success (such as the cognitive, social, and emotional) than those who do not (Flores et al., 2015). In order to have the greatest impact on their students, teachers must be agents of positive change—in the lives of students, in society and within themselves (Freire, 2018).

In their research, Mcallister and Irvine (2002) indicate that teachers agreed that empathy is essential, but not enough, on its own for working with culturally diverse students. In her work, Noddings (2002) distinguishes between the concepts "caring-for" and "caring-about." According to Noddings, caring-for involves direct interaction, in which the teacher attends explicitly to the needs of the students, and then gradually develops to care-about them. To clarify, Nodding describes the ethic of caring thus: "each caring encounter is an interaction between a person giving care and a person receiving that care: a one-caring and cared-for" (Goldstein, 1997, p. 14). To be sustained, Care Theory must be embedded in hope—for the future and for faith in the ability of others to change. Care Theory also implies the willingness to give the best of oneself. It is important to recognize that, for effective instruction, Care Theory should not operate in isolation; it functions as a bridge between the critical three elements presented in the following discussion: Culture, Competency, and Curriculum. The following section discusses the cultural component of the 4-C's Model.

4.3 Culture

When depicted as a triangle, at the top of the 4-C's Model (see Figure 2) would be the concept of "Culture." Those embracing authentic care seek out the socio-cultural strengths and experiences of the students in their classroom. Despite limitations of the teacher's knowledge of a specific culture, those operationalizing the 4-C's Model for instruction look for opportunities to include elements of the students' culture (e.g. language, historicities, traditions or values) in their instruction. It is unreasonable to assume that an individual teacher possesses advanced knowledge of each culture represented in the classroom or to expand the student's understanding of their heritage culture (i.e., heritage cultural development). However, using the 4-C's Model, informed by Care Theory, educators will strive to make an environment in which differences are respected and considered a resource to the benefit of all. Because culture is equally important within the 4-C's Model, we describe the term, presenting various benefits and implications when properly incorporated into instruction.

To date, there is no universally accepted definition of this important concept. Culture is difficult to describe in a fully inclusive way. Moran (2001, p. 23) however, provides an effective point of departure: "Culture is the evolving way of life of a group of persons, consisting of a shared set of practices associated with a shared set of products based upon a shared set of perspectives on the world, and set within specific social context." This "evolving way of life" reflects the dynamic nature of culture and shows that there is a history to the products (e.g., artifacts, clothing, language, religion, education), practices (e.g., celebrations, verbal and nonverbal communication), and perspectives (e.g., perceptions, beliefs, values). Nieto and Bode (2012) opine that "Culture consists of the values, tradition, world view, and social and political relationship created, shared, and transformed by a group of people bound together by a common history, geographic location, language, social, class, religion, or other shared identity" (p. 158).

At this point, a teacher might say, I understand that it is important to show respect to all students. I am a math (or science or language arts) teacher. I don't feel my class is about anybody's culture. I ignore culture in my instruction. I want to be fair and have a classroom where no student gets singled-out because of their culture! Do I have to learn all the languages spoken in our school community? The following section will address these common concerns and will demonstrate how the 4-C's Model provides a seamless approach to culturally sustaining instruction.

5.   Cultural Diversity in the Classroom: Challenges and Possibilities

Research shows that teachers, even those who are members of an ethnic group, feel underprepared and overwhelmed by the diversity they find in their classrooms (Salas, Flores & Smith, 2006). In their survey of 546 teachers, (Flores & Smith, 2009) found that all participants, regardless of ethnicity, indicated a need for guidance on diversity issues. The presence of differences in the classrooms may be viewed as a problem or a valuable learning opportunity. As mentioned previously, *willingness*, one of the tenets of APOW, is essential for

successful implementation of the 4-C's Model. In the case of diversity, the educator must become willing to honor differences and interweave them into curricular planning. The common strategy for those who are uncomfortable with difference is to argue for a "color-blind" approach to teaching (Darder, 1991; Nieto & Bode, 2018). Such teachers say that they don't see differences, e.g., color, ethnicity, religion, gender. However, when teachers choose to ignore patently observable characteristics of their students, they convey the message that academic success depends upon cultural conformity and that those who differ from the "standard" tarnish their academic aspirations.

5.1 The 4-C's Model: An Effective Alternative to a Colorblind Approach to Curriculum
The good news is that the creation of a caring, effective classroom environment is possible without encyclopedic knowledge of the world's many cultures. As described earlier, the 4-C's Model has as its focus a caring environment. In this way it values and incorporates multiple cultural perspectives while promoting an educational experience that supports the social, cultural and cognitive well-being of all students. Color-blind approaches, because they ignore or omit culture, are neither culturally responsive nor inclusive (Banks, 2016; Nieto & Bode, 2018). The negation of the students' culture is a poor alternative for instruction. Educators who wish to create a caring environment should view differences among their students as a strength and not a liability. Teachers who opt for a color-blind approach, in reality, do a disservice to the students because it ignores or devalues their identity (Nieto & Bode, 2018). A caring and culturally responsive pedagogy acknowledges differences and recognizes them as contributing factors toward the students' cognitive and academic development.

The 4-C's model supports the students' social and emotional development which reinforces the formation of positive ethnic identity (Jagers, et al., 2019). The 4-C's Model integrates the students' Community Cultural Wealth (Burciaga, & Kohli, 2018; Yosso, 2005), and their Funds of Knowledge (González et al., 2006; Moll et al., 1992) as essential resources to cultivate a caring, inclusive classroom environment. Eschewing the deficit mentality of a color-blind approach, teachers enacting the 4-C's Model provide rigorous, caring, culturally responsive pedagogy because it encompasses and leverages students' differences into culturally affirming, contextualized pedagogical practice.

While on the surface, a color-blind approach may appear to be enticing and safe, because of a supposed "culture-free, academic focus" alone, this is not effective pedagogy. Some teachers, with good intentions, may opt for the "color-blind approach" for educational equity. Research demonstrates that it is precisely the omission of the students' cultural characteristics that may lead to curricular distancing or the students' sense of estrangement from schooling (Doane, 2017). When culture is severed from instruction, it communicates the notion that difference is undesirable. Through the 4-C's Model, teachers witness how the students' cultural backgrounds contribute (and not detract) from academic achievement. School success does not depend upon bracketing or hiding minority culture. The 4-C's Model celebrates the full student. Their linguistic and cultural characteristics are embraced. This outcome of the 4-C's Model creates a nurturing and caring environment that supports the academic advancement of all students.

6.   Applications of the 4 C-'s Model: A Culturally Responsive Focus
The importance of cultural integration for effective instruction cannot be minimized. The 4-C's Model addresses the idea of culture in the following way. A caring teacher will (a) teach about many cultures, (b) will learn about the many cultures in their classroom, and (c) will use culture to inform their instructional practices. Most teachers are unaware of the multiple influences culture has on the classroom. The content of textbooks, district mandated curricula, the scope and sequence for instruction, even the district calendar (holidays vs. "school days") are influenced by culture. A classroom informed by the 4-C's Model capitalizes on the cultural backgrounds of the students to increase engagement in instruction. As discussed earlier, a caring classroom environment is culturally responsive. Gay (2000, 2002) points out that "Culturally responsive teaching is defined as using the cultural characteristics, experiences, and perspectives of ethnically diverse students as conduits for teaching them more effectively (p. 106). Gay (2002) suggests that teachers need to make meaningful connections to the student backgrounds. We offer one example from the sciences.

The focus of the lesson could be "the phases of the moon" - which is culturally universal. Students could be given an opportunity to research the countries and cultures that use the "lunar calendar" (as opposed to the Gregorian calendar commonly referenced in the West). As students explore concepts of astronomy, they are also introduced to the ways in which the days for important cultural observances are determined. The lesson could be extended to include research on the various reasons and meanings behind the traditions, celebrations, and commemorations.

As argued by Samantrai (2004, p. 33) cultural competence does not mean "knowing everything about every culture. Rather, it means acceptance of and respect for difference, and willingness to adapt one's practice approaches to make them culturally appropriate and relevant to [the students]." Culturally competent teachers

learn about their own linguistic and cultural heritage and those of the students in the classroom. In this way, becoming culturally competent involves developing self-awareness and acquiring cultural knowledge of self and the student. In the following section, we discuss "Competency" and its critical role for creating effective, culturally informed instruction in a caring classroom.

6.1 Competency

The idea of "competency" is often applied to technical or didactic issues. The word "competence" implies the capacity to function effectively. It means "responding effectively to the purpose" or goal or possessing sufficient resources to address a need (McPhatter, 1997, p. 262). Most teachers are technically competent. College preparation and in-service training exist for this reason. Many have competence as content experts. They possess sufficient depth and breadth of particular subject matter in order to guide and support student learning. For this reason, (technical) competence is a critical component of effective teaching. Within the 4-C's Model, competency is applied to both the technical and cultural areas.

As suggested by McDermott (2008, p. 99), for caring teachers, cultural competence includes the ability to understand the effect of culture on home school-relationships, and the ability to tailor one's behavior accordingly. Within the 4-C's Model competency is understood as both cultural and technical. Technical competence and subject-matter knowledge, while important (Kennedy, 1991), are not sufficient by themselves. Research has shown that even veteran teachers are challenged to integrate culturally informed instruction (Flores & Smith, 2009). Teacher preparation programs are often found lacking in multicultural awareness and its pedagogical implications (Garcia & Pugh, 1992; Gorski & Parekh, 2020; Qadhi, et al., 2020). In the area of culture, the curriculum often needs more guidance and contextualization, deeper exploration, and ongoing examination in order to achieve "Cultural Competence."

6.2 Cultural Competence: Definition and Perspectives

Cultural competence is the ability to effectively teach culturally diverse students (Delano-Oriaran, 2012). This concept refers to the attitudes and orientations toward practices, and historicities of individuals beyond the mainstream. As we mentioned before, it does not obligate teachers to have encyclopedic knowledge of all the cultures of the classroom. It is simply a disposition for respect of other perspectives, recognition of the intrinsic values held by other people, a commitment to social justice and advocacy for educational equity within the context of schooling.

Paasche-Orlow (2004) offers a tripart explanation of cultural competence. This concept includes "(1) acknowledgement of the importance of culture in people's lives, (2) respect for cultural differences, and (3) minimization of any negative consequences of cultural differences" (p. 347). The National Education Association details the skills and outcomes involved in cultural competence:

> [T]he ability to successfully teach students who come from a culture or cultures other than our own. It entails developing certain personal and interpersonal awareness and sensitivities, understanding certain bodies of cultural knowledge, and mastering a set of skills that, taken together, underlie effective cross-cultural teaching and culturally responsive teaching.

Cultural competence though often ignored (Burgess, 2019; Nieto, 2018), is a crucial factor for effective instruction. Informed by Cross et al. (1989) the National Center for Cultural Competence (NCCC) (1989, para. 8) developed a set of skills and abilities which apply to academic settings when striving for cultural competence. Those skills include a defined set of values and principles, and demonstrate behaviors, attitudes, policies, and structures that enable them to work effectively cross-culturally. In addition, they suggest that there be a (1) value given diversity, (2) engagement in self-assessment, (3) management of the dynamics of difference, (4) acquisition and institutionalization of cultural knowledge, and (5) adaptation to diversity and the cultural contexts of communities they serve.

When children from "minoritized" groups receive an education in which contributions from their cultures are integrated into the curriculum, research shows they develop the emotional fortitude to withstand the pernicious discourse within society and schools (Serrano-Villar, Serrano-Villar, & Calzada, 2016). Research also provides convincing evidence that there are protective effects from a healthy or affirming identity that minority youth receive (Serrano-Villar & Calzada, 2016; Zapolski et al, 2017). Serrano-Villarand and Calzada (2016, p. 27) state that "children who felt more secure in their understanding of their ethnicity and especially in its permanence may have been more self-confident and less susceptible to the potential stress of negotiating cultural differences between home and school."

Caring teachers demonstrate cultural competence through the selection of materials and activities that dignify the various cultures represented in the classroom and beyond. Culture is visible through themes, resources and lesson plans. Cultural competence connects with students and their parents. Communication, when culturally informed, encourages meaningful and ongoing dialogue with parents. Culturally informed communication includes modes of expression, referents, and interpretation. Communication as the manifestation

of human culture is dynamic and interstitial in nature. The teacher maintains and articulates high expectations. This might require curricular adaptations to meet the culturally unique needs of all students in the classroom (Flores & Smith, 2009). Using the 4-C's Model, teachers are encouraged to construct a caring classroom by building upon what they know - however minimal it may seem. Teachers are recognized for their tentative first steps toward diversity (e.g., foods, holidays, famous people) and their nascent understanding.

6.3 Caring Communication and the Classroom

Within a caring environment, individuals must be able to communicate successfully. Successful communication depends, in part, on the awareness of teachers and the understanding of their students' diverse needs and interests. According to Gay (2002), communication is more than written or spoken language. She states, "Sociocultural context and nuances, discourse logic and dynamics, delivery styles, social functions, role expectations, norms of interaction, and nonverbal gestures are as important (if not more so) than vocabulary, grammar, lexicon, pronunciation, and other linguistic structural dimensions of communication" (as cited in Nieto & Bode, 2018. p.144). If teachers ignore this aspect of caring communication, they risk the establishment of a caring classroom environment. When teachers strive to become culturally competent, as demonstrated through curricular choices and their forms of communication, they contribute to the development of the student's cultural identity. This strategy would allow the teacher who desires multicultural instruction, to move beyond the "Holidays & Heroes approach" (Banks & Banks, 2018; Gorski, 2001, 2010) to instruction that is authentic, meaningful, and culturally affirming.

As teachers communicate with their students in an authentic way, they integrate content knowledge with understanding and support. In this way, the teacher demonstrates concern for the subject matter and also for the well-being of the student. When developing cultural competence, teachers may avail themselves of what they already know and expand upon that knowledge base. Because it embraces and incorporates the foundational components of instruction, i.e., culture, care, competency and curriculum, the 4-C's Model is integrative. In doing so, it avoids the trivialization of the cultures represented in the class. In the section that follows, we offer an exemplar to the approach, using a common theme.

6.4. "Holidays & Heroes" as an Educational Strategy: A Critical Point of Departure

According to Darder (1991, p. 113) "one of the most common places to begin is by bringing traditional cultural objects and symbols in the classroom. Most multicultural curricula place a major emphasis on such cultural artifacts because they can be easily seen, manipulated, and quantified." According to this statement by Darder, far too often, teachers focus on visible, tangible or superficial elements of culture and overlook the deeper culture. Meanings, significance, and iconicity found within deeper culture are important elements that unify the curriculum and clarify the importance of cultural practices. In his five-stage model, Gorski (2010) states that teachers often utilize this approach because it is easy to implement into the classroom. In-depth exploration of culture is avoided (Banks & Banks, 2018). Those without an authentic commitment to cultural diversity often use this approach to "justify the lack of effort at more authentic transformative measures" (Gorski, 2010, para. 1). If this manner of instructional delivery is not problematized (i.e., interrogated, contested) then the "Heroes and Holidays" approach remains to trivialize the overall experiences, contributions, struggles, and voices of non-dominant groups, consistent with a Eurocentric, male-centric curriculum (Gorski, 2010).

The innovation of the 4-C's Model is that it capitalizes on the teacher's initial attempts to incorporate culture. Heroes, holidays, foods, festivals, and music from the popular cultural "pentagram" are a starting point. Moving from the superficial, the 4-C's Model encourages teachers to expand their horizons and to create instruction that engages "the more complex subjectivities of cultural values, belief systems, and traditions that inform productions of such cultural forms (Darder, 1991, p. 113).

The 4-C's model advocates for an incremental approach to culturally competent instruction. Teachers are encouraged to build upon "prior knowledge," and move from the festivities of holidays (and or famous people) toward a more educational focus. As teachers build upon their prior knowledge about cultures other than their own, they are more likely to engage in the process of reification of multiculturalism. By this we mean a series of steps or actions that create increasingly greater knowledge and appreciation for diverse cultures. When they move beyond an aesthetic appreciation, teachers have the opportunity to construct deeper understandings of diverse cultures (e.g., world view, values). In this way, they progress from products to processes (Nieto & Bode, 2018; Moran, 2001). These "hands on" experiences place them at the threshold to deeper cultural connections and understandings. As a prime example of the ZPDT proposed earlier, the nascent efforts of teachers regarding culture increase with time and experience and make the academic experience richer. When this developmental approach is applied to the teacher's development in multiculturalism, we witness the ZPDT.

For many schools, multicultural education is limited to the occasional reading about famous people from various cultures or commodification of cultural artifacts (Gorski, 2012). Other schools celebrate festivals (e.g., *Cinco de mayo*) without an appreciable exploration of the significance of the commemoration. Within the 4-C's

Model, these aspects of culture (e.g., holidays, foods, famous people) serve as a strategic "first step" towards an engaging and academically sound educational experience. These cultural tools support the goal of higher levels of technical and cultural competence. Based on Moran (2001), the "products" or aesthetic aspects refer to the "what" of a culture. As mentioned before, this includes, among other things, the art, famous people, important places, holidays, foods, and the music associated with a cultural group include those artifacts generated by the socio-cultural group. The inclusion of the individual and their historicity (e.g., contributions, challenges, triumphs) will foster discussion, critical thinking and a greater appreciation of culture. When holidays, heroes, (or foods, artifacts) are used as a point of departure for deeper engagement, they transcend superficial or aesthetic approaches to cultural diversity in the classroom. Given that they understand its importance, teachers who use the 4-C's model develop a curriculum that is responsive to the cultural background of the students. In the face of a total absence of diversity within the curriculum, events that highlight the accomplishments of diverse groups are an important "first-step" toward a caring, culturally inclusive curriculum.

Beyond a set of "universal facts" (cf. Cummins,1999) the curriculum can include opportunities for students to understand the context in which they live and to acquire skills to better mediate their lives (Darder, 1991; Freire & Macedo, 1987). Celebrating Asian Heritage Month, Black History Month, Hispanic Heritage Month, are common curricular "add-ons" that may be potential points of departure. With the 4-C's Model, aspects of culture are intentionally celebrated as a motivational tool and taught for its intellectual value. As holidays are commemorated, students learn their cultural significance and the rationale for these celebrations. Culture and cultural practices become the basis for integrated thematic instruction (Banks, 2016; Kovalik, 2013). According to research by Drake and Reid (2018), "students who experience the integration of socio-emotional learning improve their academic scores" (p. 37). In the section to follow, we discuss Curriculum, a central component to the 4-C's Model and its contributions to a caring classroom environment. Because it goes beyond what is commonly understood as curriculum and instruction, we explicate the idea of a "Caring Curriculum" within the 4-C's Model.

6.5 Curriculum

A common definition for curriculum is the plan or scheme for instructional content and delivery. It encompasses a variety of activities, such as selection of whom should be educated; establishment of goals for education; selection of appropriate content; and deciding how content should be gathered, organized, developed, taught, and evaluated (Moon, 2017). All perspectives on curriculum have student learning as the goal (Ornstein & Hunkins, 2004). Traditionalists focus on the *overt* elements of curriculum: standards, benchmarks, scope and sequence, legitimated knowledge (i.e., "what students must know[1] ") (Hodgins, et sl. 2019), and testing (Darder, 1991; Orstein & Hunkins, 2004).

Progressive views of curriculum emphasize the need to engage the student in "active thinking about meaningful problems and challenges found in the world around them" in order to advance through the various stages of development (Goldstein, 1997; Orstein & Hunkins, 2004). Included within the curriculum is the notion of appropriate instructional delivery and pedagogy, the science of providing instruction. The 4-C's Model considers curriculum to be a dynamic and interconnected set of experiences and practices that occur within the context of the classroom and beyond (Ornstein & Hunkins, 2004).

7.   Operationalizing a Caring Pedagogy

A "caring pedagogy" is foundational for the 4-C's Model and for effective teaching. For clarity, Goldstein (1997, p. 14) says that "caring is not something you are, but rather something you are engaged in, something you do." A caring approach to pedagogy, as proposed by the 4-C's Model, includes, not only the mastery of the curriculum and related skills, but also a commitment to creating a supportive environment to address the social and emotional well-being while addressing the cognitive development of the student (Jagers, et al., 2019). According to Smith (2012/2019, para. 2) a caring pedagogy may be defined as follows:

> Pedagogy is a way of being and interacting that involves joining with others to bring flourishing and relationship to life (animation) [and] being concerned about their, and others needs and wellbeing, and taking practical steps to help (caring); and encouraging reflection, commitment and change (education).

The 4-C's model regards efforts to change as opportunities to create a caring environment that incorporates culturally responsive pedagogy. According to Gay (2006), culturally responsive pedagogy is an approach to teaching and learning that uses "the cultural characteristics, experiences, and perspectives of ethnically diverse students as conduits for teaching them more effectively" (as cited in Rigney & Kelly, 2021, p. 3). As we have stated before, achieving this goal depends on the agency, patience, openness, and willingness of the teacher. Change, despite whatever need, does not happen by itself. Both teachers and students (along with the community) must work in collaboration to integrate the cultural components into the curriculum. UsingCare Theory as a bridge, the 4-C's Model operationalizes the most important elements of a "caring" pedagogy in the classroom.

Through the Model, traditional elements (e.g., criteria, goals, standards, structure,) are repositioned or

counter-balanced with active student participation (Chen & Yang, 2017; Siddig & Al Khoudary, 2018), culturally inclusive (Iyengar & Smith, 2016), and experientially relevant activities (Currie-Mueller & Littlefield, 2018) lead to the creation of a caring environment . With this pedagogy, writing tasks focus on the context relevant to the students' socio-cultural backgrounds. This will lead to deeper understandings of universal concepts beyond icons or tokens. As we demonstrate in the following section, by applying the 4-C's Model in the classroom, the lesson becomes the catalyst for rigorous, culturally informed academic explorations.

8.   Care Theory for Culturally Responsive Pedagogy

The research of Brown and McIntyre (1993) revealed that the labor of a teacher could be described as a 'craft knowledge' of ideas, routines and situations' (as cited in Smith, 2012, 2019). While pedagogy is commonly understood as referring to the science and art of teaching, it should also encompass the concept of "caring." As explained in our paper, Noddings placed great emphasis on caring as a relation and claimed that "caring is a way of being in relation, not a set of specific behaviors" (Noddings, 2005, p. 17). With this perspective, there is an interplay or weaving of divergent, but complimentary, skills. Using their technical competence, teachers can link cultural knowledge throughout the content areas. Bearing in mind that a caring environment is concerned with the whole child, teachers should design their pedagogical activities to incorporate and affirm diverse cultural perspectives. We provide examples to illustrate the applications of the 4-C's Model with the embedded Care Theory for culturally responsive pedagogy.

8.1 Practical Applications

Meaningful explorations scaffolded by the 4-C's model include a variety of foci. For example, in Language Arts, students can read and discuss the work of international authors of a similar genre (e.g., poetry, comedy, historical fiction). Students can explore themes and concerns that are meaningful to their lives through literacy activities. Using the focus of leadership, students could begin with biographical readings of key figures (e.g., leaders, Dr. M. L. King, Dolores Huerta). Later, the historical figures selected could be the catalyst for deeper exploration and reflection on the protagonists and the issues involved. With a critical lens, such as in Critical Reader Response (Blake, 1998), the aesthetic or superficial perspectives from the area of Social Studies would connect to the conceptual level of "leadership." The teacher could facilitate interactive discussion by using integrated thematic instruction[2]   (Kovalik, 2013; Putra, et al., 2019) around the critical social issues the leaders confronted. With this focus, historical and influential figures such as Ruby Bridges or Malala Yousafzai, both pioneers in education, could be incorporated in discussions on societal change or social justice.

As an expected outcome, the inclusivity of the 4-C's Model would support a meaningful discussion of various biographical topics. These classroom discussions could segway into explorations of history, sciences, mathematics and other inquiry-based activities. By operationalizing the 4-C's model in this way, students might explore natural resources of various geographic areas, investigate the customs and traditions of the cultural groups that live in those regions. Students might be assigned projects to explore other realities of the regions as opportunities to make connections and to construct new knowledge (e.g., flora and fauna, environmental changes). Emma Tenayuca, who initiated the pecan shellers strike[3] , could be discussed as a leader, the financial injustice (the cause of the strike) could be studied[4] (Vargas, 1997).

Explorations, starting with Tenayuca, could lead to explorations of women's contributions to society. Harriet Tubbman and her role as a leader could generate discussions about liberation (i.e., social studies), written depictions of slavery (i.e., language arts), farming and agriculture (i.e., science), the cost of slaves that were led to freedom (i.e., mathematics, money), the consequences of slavery and freedom (i.e., logic). One of the outcomes of the application of the 4-C's Model is to motivate students to be change agents and to strive for social justice.

Additionally, the Fine Arts should be included. Fridah Kahlo and her meaningful contributions to society were arguably equal to those in the arts. The heroism of entertainer Josephine Baker during World War II and the wartime inventions of Hedy Lamarr would easily transition from aesthetic or superficial discussions on famous people (Banks, 2016), to polemical and thoughtful discussions. The 4-C's Model, as we shall see, is not limited to the humanities.

Science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) classes offer additional possibilities. To initiate a lesson cycle, the class could discuss the significant contributions of figures from diverse cultures, for instance: Muhammad ibn Musa al-Khwarizmi the inventor of algebra or Cai Lun of China, who invented papermaking. In science class, readings on Sally Ride, the astronaut or the Arctic explorer, Matthew Henson, could be integrated into instruction. The "Hidden Figures," is the story of three African American women who were mathematicians at NASA at the height of the space race in the 1960s. Both the novel and the movie could be a catalyst for the study of mathematics, science and social studies. This would promote social inclusion and understanding of the unique contributions of all members of our society.

8.2 Meaningful Inclusion of Culture

The occasional mention or haphazard inclusion of cultural products and practices is unlikely to make significant contributions toward the development of a healthy ethnic identity (Bishop, 2018; Serrano-Villar & Calzada, 2016; Zapolski et al, 2017). By integrating culture throughout instruction, there is a greater likelihood of change and academic benefit (Jones & Kahn, 2017; Matthew & Lopez, 2019; Simamora & Saragih, 2019). While insufficient by themselves, culturally informed activities, when integrated into a broader, more rigorous set of academic experiences, prove to be an engaging starting point toward the creation of an education that is academically and culturally enriching (Convertino, et al., 2020). Bearing in mind that a caring environment is concerned with the whole child, teachers should design their pedagogical activities to incorporate and affirm diverse cultural and gender perspectives. In this article we presented a few examples of the application of the 4-C's Model. These examples are intended to aid teachers in creating a caring environment in their classrooms.

The 4-C's approach is a humanistic model that addresses the integration of culture, curriculum, and competency— thus creating a caring environment in the classroom. Within a caring environment, instruction moves from the aesthetic elements of culture to deeper meanings and understandings. Concomitantly, a caring environment addresses educational equity and authentic cultural validation for students from culturally and linguistically diverse groups (Banks, 2016; Nieto & Bode, 2018). By weaving the four components, the teacher maximizes the classroom experience for all students.

It is the commitment to care theory that leads teachers to develop reciprocal relationships with students and their parents (Grant & Ladson-Billings, 1997; Noddings, 2005). As discussed in our article, the 4-C's Model proposes that the curriculum place greater emphasis on care to benefit students. With this structure, there is more than an academic plan, but a dynamic, culturally responsive guide map. While attending to cognitive development, a caring curriculum supports the social, emotional, cultural, *and* cognitive growth of students (Ornstein & Hunkins, 2004). Classroom instruction resulting from this new configuration, capitalizes on authentic and meaningful cultural explorations that afford the student opportunities to understand their cultural epistemologies (Inayatullah, 2004), their reality, and the social positionality of others.

As advanced through the 4-C's Model, when teachers work from an ethic of care, they consciously make a moral commitment to attend to the needs of students[5] (Noddings, & Brooks, 2017). Noddings believes that education is based on moral and ethical purposes (Grant & Ladson-Billings, 1997). She argues that when teachers work from an ethic of care, they consciously make a moral commitment to care for and teach students and to develop reciprocal relationships with students and their parents (Grant & Ladson-Billings, 1997). For effectiveness, the 4-C's Model necessitates a commitment to creating an environment in which all students feel safe, included, and culturally respected. The ethic of care is for the benefit of all students.

9.   Conclusion

This paper, informed by social-constructivism, presents the 4-C's Model as a practical framework to help teachers implement Care Theory in their classrooms for the benefit of all students. Social-constructivist theorists advocate for curricula embedded in culturally created epistemologies (González, Moll, & Amanti, 2006; Jaramillo, 1996; Tharp & Gallimore, 1991). Within this Model, Care Theory functions as a bridge through which the ideas of curriculum, competence, and culture interconnect in order to create a caring environment for optimal learning. When pedagogy is culturally informed and sustaining, it has the possibility to create such an environment that is nurturing as well as academically engaging where teachers, students, and families are actively involved in the learning process (Noddings, 2005; Smith, et al., 2022). The same theoretical school (e.g., Vygotsky, 2012) encourages teachers to value students' background knowledge and resources that they bring to the classroom. Caring educators combine school knowledge with home epistemologies. Such an amalgamation of home-school knowledge creates a caring learning environment; this is the heart of the 4-C's Model.

The Model embraces the rich and varied knowledge students bring from their homes to the classroom (Moll, et al., 1992; Nieto & Bode, 2018). When the Funds of Knowledge become the source of instruction, teachers, and their students benefit (Moll, et al., 1992). As described in this article, among the benefits are the students' feeling of inclusion and the contributions to their social-emotional development. By addressing students' diverse perspectives, as well as their cognitive and affective needs, the possibility of academic success increases (cf. Banks, 2016; Flores & Smith 2009). In this way, the primary school objective—high academic achievement—is reached. The four elements of the 4-C's Model—Care, Culture, Competency, and Curriculum—are purposely interwoven to construct pedagogy based on human and cultural diversity. Through the integration of culturally responsive pedagogy, the model promotes cultural visibility that contributes to the development of healthy ethnic identity, leading to increased academic success (Serrano-Villar & Calzada, 2016; Zapolski et al, 2017).

When teachers operationalize the important components of the 4 C's Model, all students feel motivated to succeed. Through this Model, teachers produce a caring environment that is inclusive for all students. Inarguably, teachers are responsible for content. Just as important are the responsibilities to cultural and affective efficaciousness (Flores, et al., 2015). We are reminded that caring teachers have positive attitudes and high

expectations for their students. Caring teachers understand that they must address the cognitive *and* emotional needs of the students through their interactions, i.e., relationships. They advocate for, and empower their students as a way to foster school success (Gay, 2000, p. 62). They seek opportunities to develop caring relationships with students and their parents.

As teachers commit to the foundational *APOW* core values (i.e., Agency, Patience, Openness, and Willingness), they are more likely to become caring teachers who strive to create a caring environment that is inclusive and conducive toward social justice. Caring teachers who endeavor to create a caring classroom environment will utilize their *agency* for constructing the appropriate experiences for their children. Meaningful transformation is ongoing. It takes time. Being aware of this dynamic process, caring teachers will be *patient* with themselves and their students as they explore new ways of cultural understanding. Caring teachers must be open to new possibilities. This may include an *openness* to new pedagogies, openness for the inclusion of new cultures or openness to new ways of thinking. Perhaps the great element would be *willingness* to engage in activities that demonstrate authentic care toward their students. This contextualized learning approach would generate higher levels of meaningful engagement (e.g., cognitive, social, and emotional) and success than those who do not. Caring is produced through critical reflection, respect for diversity, and a *willingness* to accept the differences and realities of other people.

In order to appreciate the valuable outcomes that diversity can bring to the classroom, teachers must first develop "an understanding of [their] own cultural identity and how culture has shaped [their] values, practices, and beliefs" (Samantrai, 2004, p. 32). They must also move beyond superficial knowledge of other cultures and languages to a deeper level of understanding and appreciation, as well as the recognition of the dynamics of "difference" and "power" in culturally responsive and on-going relationships. Drastic, overnight transformations should not be expected or demanded. Teachers, even those who are completely committed, should envision a Zone of Proximal Development for Teachers (ZPDT) for their professional growth and implementation of change in the classroom. In their efforts to attend to the needs of all students, schools must also address the learning needs of their teachers.

To better serve increasingly multicultural school communities, teachers are encouraged to create more culturally responsive learning environments that respond to the diverse needs of all students. Teachers are advised to use the principles of the 4-C's Model, as it offers a balance between all three essential components, Competence, Curriculum, and Culture with Care Theory that creates a functioning whole. Classrooms established within this framework are better positioned to offer culturally responsive and equitable pedagogy. For possible future research efforts, scholars may incorporate our 4-C's Model as a theoretical framework when deliberating on approaches to construct an inclusive and caring classroom environment. This may lead to innovative instruction. Because of its proven benefit, educators are well-advised to utilize a culturally responsive pedagogy for all learners.

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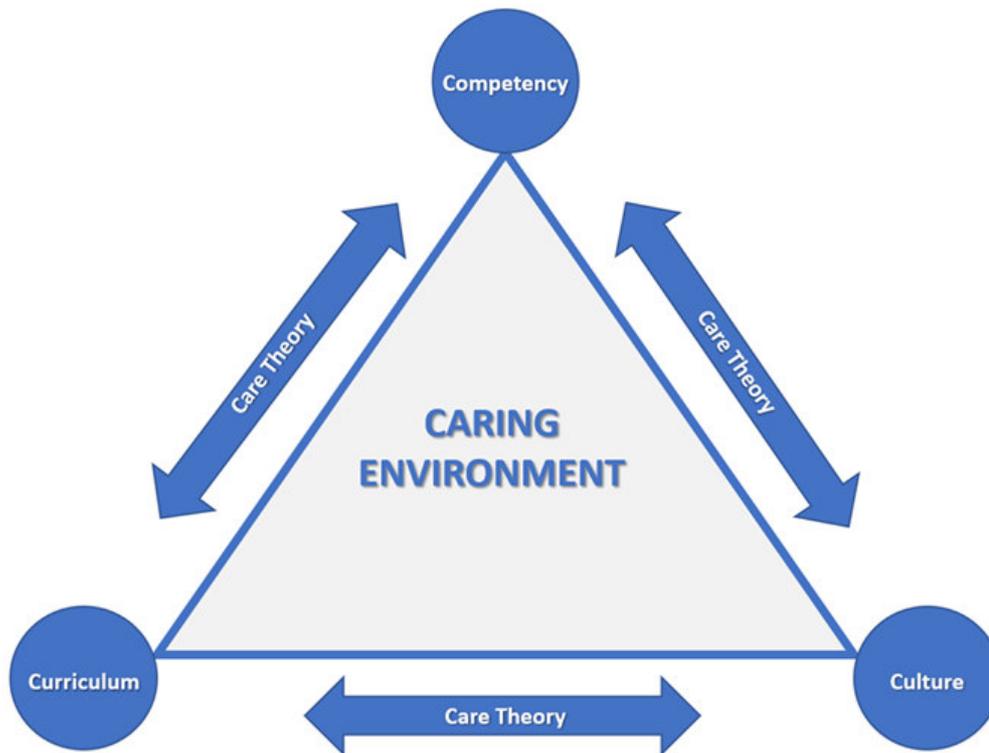
Notes
Attached Figure 1. The 4-C's Model

Figure 1. The 4-C's Model for
Multilateral Integration of Processes for a Caring Classroom Environment