

***The C.L.E.A.R. Framework for Successfully Educating and Empowering Diverse Student Populations***

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**Abstract**

Breaking the visible and invisible barriers that impede the success of school-age children of racially and linguistically diverse communities requires that we have a clear framework that allows for their academic and holistic success. The C.L.E.A.R. approach is a culturally responsive framework designed by this author, based upon a yearlong qualitative research study of urban youth of color. This model was designed and based upon teachers' best practices of student learning, engagement and overall success. C.L.E.A.R. represents (C) culturally relevant pedagogy (Gay, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 2009); (L) listening to students' voices and needs deeply and meaningfully; (E) empowering excellence continuously and consistently, (Hilliard, 2006; Ladson-Billings, 2009); (A) assessing students' thinking, knowledge, and understanding, (Darling-Hammond, 2010) and; (R) implementing routines and structures to create a learning environment conducive to academic, social, and emotional success (Noddings, 2005). The C.L.E.A.R. model asserts that these are critical components for developing instructional materials and sustaining successful learning communities for racially and linguistically diverse students.

**Keywords:** Culturally responsive; diversity

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## **Introduction**

Breaking the visible and invisible barriers that impede the success of school-age children of racially and linguistically diverse communities requires that we have a clear framework that allows for their academic and holistic success. The C.L.E.A.R. approach is a culturally responsive framework designed by the author, based upon a yearlong qualitative research study of urban youth of color. This model was designed and based upon teachers' best practices of student learning, engagement and overall success. C.L.E.A.R. represents (C) culturally relevant pedagogy (Gay, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 2009); (L) listening to students' voices and needs deeply and meaningfully; (E) empowering excellence continuously and consistently, (Hilliard, 2006; Ladson-Billings, 2009); (A) assessing students' thinking, knowledge, and understanding, (Darling-Hammond, 2010) and; (R) implementing *routines* and structures to create a learning environment conducive to academic, social, and emotional success (Noddings, 2005).

The C.L.E.A.R. framework stems from a research based after school learning program titled Kamili Ville, a year long African centered afterschool program designed for urban youth of African descent. Kamili is a holistic model, which espouses five elements of the whole self: ancestral, spiritual, social, mental and physical. This model allows for the full development of students, as opposed to narrowly focusing on the mental self. If practitioners desire comprehensive results, our approach but reflect a strength based and holistic frame.

## **Getting C.L.E.A.R.**

The C.L.E.A.R. model asserts that these are critical components for developing instructional materials and sustaining successful learning communities for racially and linguistically diverse students. The framework provides educators, and practitioners, who seek assistance in affectively educating all children a practical conceptual frame to support and develop academic success and overall wellbeing. Research findings demonstrated that, when employed, the framework created a safe and equitable learning space that allowed for self-expression, self-efficacy, engendered hope and optimism and provided transformative healing to children of color (Johnson, 2011). Educators can employ the C.L.E.A.R. approach to increase instructional effectiveness and enhance their daily and general pedagogical practices. Students can greatly benefit from this approach and receive an education that empowers them to see themselves as relevant and valid in school curricula programming and in their overall education.

The C.L.E.A.R. framework supports teachers' pedagogical development and seeks to increase student learning. Comprehensively stated, it provides: 1) critical components for developing instructional materials and sustaining successful learning communities; 2) strategies to educators and practitioners who seek assistance in effectively educating all children; 3) educators and practitioners a practical conceptual frame to support and develop academic success and overall wellbeing; 4) an approach to increase instructional effectiveness and enhance daily and general pedagogical practices; 5) students with an education they can greatly benefit from as this approach empowers and allows students to view themselves as relevant and valid in school curricula programming (Gay, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 2009); 6) a holistic paradigm

(Akbar, 2007) for practitioners working with racially, ethnically and linguistically diverse populations and (7) gives clear, specific, trans-contextual elements to include when educating students. Table 1 below illustrates the C.L.E.A.R. framework, along with how it was utilized in Kamili Ville.

**Table 1**

*C.L.E.A.R. Framework*

C.L.E.A.R. Component	Empirical Evidence Through Kamili Ville
C—Culturally Relevant Pedagogy	Specific use of an African-centered model for urban African youth
L—Listening to our students and showing them continuous care. This helps to affirm their self-worth. Our children need to know that we can hear them and learn from them.	Kamili provided the space for students’ voice within a caring community. Students were able to engage in a conversations ranging from pop culture to provocative dialogues on life, love, spirituality and their role and location in the community and the world.
E—Empowering Excellence	Taught lessons that allowed students to see images of their ancestors as mighty people as well as provided current images and lessons of African youth who are making successful contributions to society. These lessons empowered students to envision themselves as successful people.
A—Assessment	Assessed student thinking and understanding through formative methods such as journal writing, surveys and conversations. Doing a research project also served as a summative assessment as students engaged in an in-depth project that assessed various academic skill sets.
R-Routine and Structure	Students meditated prior to the homework help portion of Kamili every time we met. During the enrichment session of Kamili everyone present read the Kamili Creed. This meant that visitors also read the Creed if they were in the room. There were other routines such as journal writing and whole group share that became routine practices in Kamili.

## **Findings and Implications**

### **C-Culturally Responsive Pedagogy**

Lack of self-knowledge is a powerful destructive tool. Students are acutely aware of the marginalization and exclusion of their ancestral history from school curricula. Kamili students expressed the hurt, confusion and anguish this caused. One Kamili student noted, *“They need to have more programs like this. I think that would be good because a lot of students across the country and around the state they don’t know enough about themselves...”*

Using culturally responsive pedagogy to build ancestral knowledge and understanding, as well as knowledge of self, helped develop positive racial and cultural esteem. One participant explained, *“Sometimes when people are...insecure about themselves they tend not to participate in class and they tend not to work their hardest or do the best they can do, because they’re so worried about their insecurities and what people are gonna say about them. And socially it’s a horrible experience.”*

### **L-Listening to students’ voices and needs deeply and meaningfully**

The Kamili research project found that relationships and safety matter to students of color. Educators, parents and practitioners can either nurture or negate students’ holistic needs based upon the rapport and environment that is established. Learning environments must be conducive to self-expressiveness and give voice to students. A participant elaborated, *“express yourself and... how you really feel and be yourself around people...so I think that Kamili is a way for us to express ourselves and act like we are human beings. At first I didn’t know that I could just like be myself and it would come out as such a good like reward to being yourself. It is a way to express yourself and a way to umm celebrate like your culture and express yourself and write down like your true feeling.”*

### **E-Empowering Excellence**

Practitioners must model and demonstrate excellence consistently and continuously. In and out of the classroom teachers must show racially and ethnically diverse students positive images and examples of successful adults of color. Nurturing the mental self and developing critical thinking skills builds self-efficacy. As noted by one Kamili student, *“It [Kamili] taught me kinda how to stand up for myself a little bit more, but without being violent about it...I feel like more, like I walk a bit bigger and I have more pride because I know where I came from cause I really didn’t know that and I, and I know that um that our people are like super important.”*

### **A-Accessing and Assessing students’ thinking, knowledge, and understanding.**

There is power in (de) constructing knowledge of self and cultural identity as it allows students to transcend the paradox of African identity (or other racial/ethnic minorities) in the urban U.S. One Kamili student stated, *“[Kamili] has made me more confident about myself because... I used to come in here like with low [self-esteem]. I would always felt bad about myself... I would always criticize...every detail about me... there is something wrong and Kamili has changed that, cause Kamili [taught me that] even though you are different you make mistakes you can learn from them.”*

## **R-Routines and Structure**

One of the most troubling issues affecting urban youth of color is the ability to hope and envision themselves as successful people within an oppressive society. Creating routines and structure that gives space for students to center themselves and attend to their emotional needs, trans(forms) their consciousness and gives them the ability to hope and envision an optimistic life. Daily Kamili students would sit quietly upon entering, this was a time of mindfulness. In addition, we would recite the Kamili Creed, which grounded students and reminded them of the expectations and guidelines for our program and for leading a positive healthy lifestyle. Such routines and structure created an environment of clarity and cooperative learning. Poignantly one student said, *“Kamili Ville is like a place where we talk about things that happen in the world and how they affect us and then how it changes us and how we can fix ourselves so we can represent our community.”*

## **Conclusion**

Employing the C.L.E.A.R. method can enhance practitioners’ pedagogical practices as this model helps to ensure a safe and equitable classroom where students’ holistic needs are nurtured and developed. In addition, school leaders can also use this model to create a rich and equitable school culture and climate. Teachers who wish to be effective should employ the C.L.E.A.R. principles in their instruction, intention, planning, and implementation of their daily lessons and curriculum units. In turn, their students will benefit from being given tasks with C.L.E.A.R. principles, in which they understand the objectives and purpose of the lessons in which they are engaged.

It is important that practitioners reflect on their own practice and examine how this work might impact all youth who struggle with various aspects of identity. C.L.E.A.R. can be used as a model for educators and activists who wish to bring about transformation and deep-seeded change.

Practice, theory and research involving youth of color must : 1) Empower students and take a strength based approach; 2) Be holistic and attend to students’ mental, ancestral, physical, social (emotional), and spiritual selves; 3) Incorporate students’ culture and cultural learning styles; 4) Be C.L.E.A.R. There is depth of genius that is often hidden in our young people. When healing communities of love and care are created, youth feel empowered to express their deepest desires, fears, and goals. The shame and self-loathing that plague so many of our youth can be reduced and eventually eradicated through a holistic African worldview that validates their ancestral history and heritage. Youth of color will feel secure in who they are physically, mentally, and socially when their ancestral history is taught and their spirits are developed and set free. Self-liberation and actualization will not be possible in urban schools until the whole child is nurtured. Without this component, transformation and change will remain a distant vision.

I invite readers to do a reflective read of this work as the concepts extend beyond African and urban communities. All students need to feel safe; thus, one can utilize lessons learned from Kamili Ville—a holistic, African-centered program—to create transformative change and help others in a journey of self-love and liberation. We have the power to make choices that empower and create revolutionary transformation.

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