

# OVERVIEW OF The Culturally Responsive Education by Design ONLINE PLC

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## An Informational Document for School Leaders

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## WHAT IS THE PLC?

We are coming into this new school year after the massive disruption of our everyday lives brought on by the twin pandemics of COVID-19 and continued racial injustice. The disruptions in K-12 education over the last 18 months have left many children with unfinished learning. This has created unprecedented challenges for our most vulnerable students; many who were already performing below grade level.

We will have to leverage the most effective research-based practices to re-engage them. This will mean charting new, more equitable paths forward. These new paths, hopefully, will become the new normal for creating the conditions that allow under-served students to thrive socially, emotionally, and academically.

In their recent research brief, the SoLD Alliance said it best: *“Our goal must be not only to respond to current crises and accelerate learning, but to transform our education systems to help all young people achieve their full potential – to choose policies and approaches that plant seeds, not just fill holes”*.

The Culturally Responsive Education by Design Online PLC is a new approach to equity-focused professional learning, centered around teams of teachers, coaches, and leaders who use inquiry to build capacity around culturally responsive instruction. It is designed to empower students so that they develop new skills and stamina to close their own learning gaps and complete unfinished learning.

**In order to directly address the long-standing inequities in teaching and learning that the pandemic revealed, The Culturally Responsive Education by Design PLC is committed this year to working specifically with schools whose student demographics include 25% or more students of color.**

The PLC is a 5½ month experience of two-tiered learning – we first help teachers learn the core instructional practices at the core of culturally responsive instruction, then we support them to use those practices to coach students to change their moves, on their way to becoming independent learners.

Rather than being just another training focused on diversity and inclusion or social justice-themed lesson design, the Culturally Responsive Education by Design (CRE by Design) Online PLC gets to impact by helping teachers master a set of foundational shifts in their practice that increase responsiveness and instructional decision-making.

We use a blended professional development model grounded in the science of learning.

The PLC learning experience combines asynchronous online course modules with synchronous virtual coaching. Coaching is provided using a scaffolded inquiry process to effectively implement culturally responsive practices in the form of new structures, routines, and instruction. Those practices help students build key learning skills and master the instructional tools necessary to accelerate their own learning.

The PLC is team based. Teams should consist of 4 -12 people. A school may have more than one team.

- ⇒ **Participation in the PLC is by application only**
- ⇒ **The PLC runs from January 17, 2022 - June 30, 2022**
- ⇒ **Cost is \$5,000.00 + \$1,500 per team member**

Consider SoLD Alliance’s recommendations for leveraging ESSR funds for your school-level equity work: [Using ARP Funds to Redesign Schools for Whole Child Equity: Early State and Local Policy Recommendations from the Science of Learning and Development](#) (Briefing Paper, 2021)

**We invite you to review this document carefully to ensure that you understand the content of the PLC, its intended outcomes, and the related rights and responsibilities of participants.**

## OUR THEORY OF CHANGE

Our intent in the Culturally Responsive Education by Design PLC is to build capacity rather than offer novel, so-called culturally responsive strategies or help designing one-off diversified lesson plans. ***This is an important distinction to keep in mind.*** Impacting school equity goals requires increased capacity of the student to carry more of the cognitive load during instruction.

This requires teachers to do more than cover content. They must become “the personal trainers” of students’ cognition.

The research on the effectiveness of traditional professional development is clear: **Typical stand-alone teacher training and professional development offerings don’t lead to this type of change in teachers’ practice, nor does it impact student learning capacity significantly.** This is particularly true when addressing issues of educational equity and culturally responsive practice. That is why professional learning communities centered in collective efficacy are the perfect structure for building skill, will, knowledge, and capacity to use CRT to increase learning.

Unfortunately, many educators have reduced culturally responsive teaching to a set of engagement strategies with little focus on improving instruction, so that students “learn how to learn.” Decades of education reform have taught us that a set of turn-key strategies is ineffective in increasing a student’s ability to take on grade level materials.

Instead, we have to focus on helping students consciously and deliberately increase their learning power and level up their learning moves. That is why The Culturally Responsive Education by Design PLC’s theory of change centers around building the capacity of a small team of teachers, coaches, and instructional leaders to actually move a small, manageable group of students from dependent learners to cognitively independent learners who have new habits and practices – for not just completing assignments, but for taking on more rigorous and complex content.

Rather than focus solely on strategies, we invite educators to look closely at their interactions with students during learning, and get smart about what does or doesn’t help struggling students interrupt the cycle of “below grade level” learning.

- **Team Based:** A strong team will include:
  - Between 4 and 12 teachers
  - Members who share or support the same students, content, or core instructional practices
  - At least half of the team members that are classroom-based, core-content teachers
  - Instructional leaders, at least one who is in the role of assistant principal, coach, and/or teacher-leader
  
- **Student Centered:** Our motto in the PLC is “Only the learner learns.” It highlights what social and cognitive neuroscience tells us; that learning is a process that is mainly controlled by the student. We simply create the conditions and provide support. That is why we focus on student change in cognitive behaviors, rather than implementation of strategies alone. We support teams to identify a set of focal students who represent other dependent learners in the whole class. Teams can

consider themselves successful when their students are able to carry more of the cognitive load and demonstrate more independent learning behaviors.

- **Inquiry Grounded:** Teams will engage in rigorous, systematic inquiry cycles. We will be using the Edthena platform to link video observations to key teaching standards and rubrics for culturally responsive instructional practices. This provides opportunities for coaching and feedback around the effective implementation of specific culturally responsive moves.

### ***The CRE by Design PLC OUTCOMES:***

- Gain knowledge and skill in core culturally responsive design principles and practices that allow teachers and coaches to design and implement standards-based, equity-centered instruction grounded in the science of learning
- Be able to successfully coach students, especially diverse students who are struggling, to higher levels of intellectual growth that closes learning gaps
- Build capacity to use inquiry methods for continuous improvement in classrooms

### ***Alignment and Coherence with Other School / District Equity Efforts***

It is important to make sure that the various strands of equity work within a school and district are aligned. The Culturally Responsive Education by Design PLC easily complements other strands of equity that focus on anti-racism, social justice, and awareness, offered by The National Equity Project as well as Dr. Bettina Love's work and Dr. Ibram Kendi's work around anti-racism.

We expect that school teams that participate in the PLC come to this program with some exposure to the anti-racism work of these scholars as a foundation for delving deeper into culturally responsive practice.

Through the CRE by Design PLC, we hope to fill a gap between adult-to-adult implicit bias work and teacher anti-racism/social justice lesson planning we often see in equity work that focuses on closing achievement gaps, and holding grade level work expectations for students.

We help teachers use culturally responsive instructional practices, grounded in cognitive science, to increase students' capacity to do high level work assignments and engage in deeper learning associated with taking on more rigorous content. We help them improve students' information processing skills. A key misconception we try to dispel is that information processing and higher order thinking are the same. They are not.

This is why curriculum-based approaches like UDL, project-based learning, and Dr. Muhammad's culturally responsive and historically responsive literacy framework are important for redesigning lesson plans to be more inclusive, but have their limits in improving a student's ability to process new content. While teachers learn to execute better lessons, they are not taught to help dependent learners (who are often disproportionately children of color) grow into cognitively independent learners who can do more rigorous

work without extensive external support. As a result, teachers tend to over-scaffold during instruction to “help” struggling learners get through grade level material, contributing to student dependence and unintentionally reinforcing inequitable outcomes.

The goal of the PLC is to break this cycle by empowering students to be self-directed, independent learners.

## THE STRUCTURE OF THE PROFESSIONAL LEARNING EXPERIENCE

**Each member of the PLC team works through nine (9) modules** grounded in the Ready for Rigor frame and works together to make important changes in the classroom. *You will find an overview of the modules in Appendix I.*

Teams meet to discuss a set of focal students that they are actively working to move from dependent learning using the content of the modules. Using inquiry methods like:

- Video analysis
- Data collection
- Documenting student change using multi-modal artifacts

**The CRE by Design Online PLC requires a significant time commitment.** While members move through the content and inquiry at their own pace (within the firm start and end dates of the PLC), there are a number of PLC-related activities we engage in as a cohort.

**We ask teams to commit to 20-25 hours per month to implement new practices and engage in inquiry cycles** to monitor implementation and impact on students' learning.

The majority of time spent in the program is job-embedded.

- We encourage teams to devote only 20% of their collective and individual PLC time to the course modules.
- We suggest spending 60% of their time doing inquiry and making changes in their classroom, where real opportunity for transformation takes place with students.
- We expect teams to use the other 20% of their PLC time to work together on inquiry tasks and analysis based on the job-embedded learning during their 60% classroom time.

### On-Site Team Meetings

An important part of the 20-25 hours that teams will devote to this work per month are the on-site team meetings for the PLC members. Teams should have a regular meeting time, scheduled to support each other through their cycles of inquiry.

Collaborative time serves a crucial role in building trust and critical friendship among team members so that they can individually and collectively do the hard work of deep change.

Because we are asking teams to create and maintain an electronic portfolio, they will need dedicated time to review and organize their findings from their inquiry cycles that will be documented in the portfolio.

## WHAT PRINCIPALS NEED TO KNOW

Many school leaders are looking to quickly build the skill and capacity of their teachers and staff to be more culturally sensitive and responsive to diverse students and their families.

We recognize that this requires shifting long-standing practices in order to create the right learning conditions within classrooms. It will take more than so-called turn-key CRT strategies.

**That is why the PLC is not a train-the-trainer model.** The power isn't in the tools or strategies, but in teachers' ability to coach students to change their learning moves and internal mindset while engaged in the kind of productive struggle that is essential to high-level cognitive work.

Why isn't it a train-the-trainer model, you might ask? *Because information isn't transformation.* Just sharing strategies doesn't change students' individual learning behaviors. Sharing strategies alone doesn't prepare students for grade level work. **That is why we ask each member to sign our Educational Materials Use Agreement.**

We intentionally keep the focus on building teachers' capacity to tune into student strengths and thoughtfully adapt the way they coach a student to build more brain power. That's responsive teaching, grounded in instructional decision-making.

**To ensure that teams stay focused on learning through their inquiry cycles and resist sharing materials and processes, we have restrictions on how materials may be used. We ask each team member to sign our Educational Materials Use Agreement as part of their onboarding process.**

**In addition, because the materials and methods are proprietary and copyrighted, members may NOT share them with others outside the PLC, or use them in school PD sessions. Teams may not make group presentations using the materials or methods learned in the CRE by Design Online PLC, to coach other teachers who are not in the PLC.** (You can read the entire Educational Materials Agreement in Appendix II).

With these restrictions, you might be asking, *How does a school benefit from a team's participation?*

The CRE by Design PLC is designed to be the first phase of building teacher capacity and student cognitive stamina in your school. Without a small group of educators who have actually moved students from dependent learning to more cognitively independent learning, it will be impossible to create the right conditions and replicate the process down the road.

**Here are four important things leaders need to know to support team participation in the PLC and supporting their effort during the 5 ½ month experience.**

1. **This year's cohort is designed for schools serving a student body that is 25% or more students of color.** As stated earlier, we are trying to be responsive to the impact of the pandemic on under-served communities.

2. **Each team member must self-assess their readiness, and participate willingly.** Like all good professional learning experiences, teachers need to be ready to take on the work associated with inquiry, changing practice, and reflection. We've identified a set of readiness indicators that will help potential team members decide if they are up to the challenge. Each team member will have the opportunity to take a readiness self-assessment as part of the selection process.
3. **Teams need regular time for site meetings.** Having time to collaborate at school with peers is an essential ingredient in the PLC experience. As the school leader, our hope is that you are able to help team members secure common meeting time for collaboration, data gathering, and other inquiry tasks.
4. **The expectation is that teams focus on actually moving students cognitively, and not be put in the position to prematurely share any lessons learned.**

As noted earlier, the CRE by Design PLC is not a train-the-trainer program. Teachers need time to change their learning moves, and we know the change process takes us through “conscious incompetence” before we master new moves. So we ask that team members are given the time and space to do their inquiry – and not be put in a position to lead PD. **Because the materials and methods are proprietary, participants are NOT allowed to lead professional development using the materials from the PLC or share with others outside of the PLC. Resist putting pressure on them to be the CRT experts.**



## SETTING THE STAGE FOR DISTRICT-WIDE CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE EDUCATION BY DESIGN PLCs IN THE FUTURE

We know that districts are eager to better serve historically marginalized students by becoming more culturally responsive. But we know from the research of Michael Fullan and other system change thought leaders that long-term change has to be sequenced, beginning with increased capacity.

District leaders should think of this as a multi-phase process that builds capacity over time, so that these culturally responsive techniques become instructional norms through sustained inquiry rather than through strategy focused, traditional professional development.

There are the potential phases to move through that goes from one team participating in the PLC, to several teachers consistently and reliably moving dependent learners to become cognitively independent learners.

**Phase I** (Year 1) begins with having a team or two of educators participate in our Culturally Responsive Education by Design Online PLC as a starting place.

By the end of the 5 ½ months of the PLC, teams will have learned the ins-and-outs of moving students from dependent learners to more cognitively independent learners who can accelerate their own learning at will. If a team utilizes the process, they will emerge with a context-specific road map for engaging in conversations and helping others reassess how they may be unknowingly creating dependent learners and how to interrupt that process.

**Phase II** (Year 2) would focus on supporting the PLC team to continue to build their capacity to move students.

While they continue to improve, they are mapping the implementation gaps in the system, that support a new way of teaching that is authentically student centered. The focus is on shifting the learning conditions that support a new, more responsive way of teaching. Other teams join the PLC. Alumni of the PLC are then uniquely positioned to mentor newer teams. Over time this becomes a critical mass, triggering a wave of transformation – small teams of teachers shaping how we talk about culturally responsive teaching, rebalancing individualistic and collectivist practices, creating structures and routines that center student learning.

During this phase, a school with successful teams would be eligible to license the CRE by Design PLC materials for site use.

**Phase III** (Year 3) would focus on smart scaling (slowly) across the school district.

The focus during this phase is on activating the right drivers to support slow, steady scaling based on collaborative inquiry, rather than training on one-size-fits all strategies. At this point, a district would have a critical amount of internal capacity for scaling properly.

District leaders need to understand that this whole process can take 3 - 5 years to execute. It's not a quick fix but, when done correctly, initiates change at a systemic level.

## APPENDIX I

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### OVERVIEW OF THE CRE BY DESIGN MODULE CONTENT

The course modules in the PLC are divided into three stages. Members stay at each stage for a designated amount of time in order to deepen their understanding, through direct experience in the classroom.

#### STAGE 1: BUILDING THE FOUNDATION

Here members assess current reality and begin learning how to reimagine the classroom with new foundational structures, routines, and practices that support students to take the first steps toward independent learning.

**Module 1: Understand Accelerated Learning Through a CRT Lens.** Correct the misconceptions and myths about CRT, strengthen members' understanding of core concepts and key design principles, and deconstruct inequity by design – by pinpointing the mental models behind instructional inequity.

**Module 2: Rebalance Classroom Community.** Use culture as both a social-emotional lens and a cognitive scaffold. Go deeper than the standard surface-level definitions of culture to better understand the individualism-collectivism continuum. Implement structures and routines to rebalance the cultural ways of being and doing in the classroom.

**Module 3: Practice the Basics of Instructional Redesign.** Move past superficial multicultural gimmicks and add-ons to help students internalize the fundamentals of processing content.

#### STAGE 2: CLOSE THE KNOWING-DOING GAP

The keyword for this phase is coaching students to improve their information processing skills. This phase is 3 months long. We focus on designing instruction that helps students grow their brain power. Teams pair these modules with inquiry cycles to ensure that their practices are having impact.

**Module 4: Leverage Student Schema to Use Culture as a Cognitive Scaffold.** Revisit instructional decision-making through a culturally responsive lens to inspire deeper learning.

**Module 5: Coach Student Learning Moves Through Instructional Conversation and Affirmative Feedback.** Track and document students' improved abilities to carry the cognitive load, think critically, and become cognitively independent learners. Members build their will and emotional capacity to reduce over-scaffolding.

**Module 6: Adapt Culturally Responsive Practices for the Most Dependent Learners.** Put in the right supports to help struggling students and special education students experience cognitive growth as a way to trigger a sense of competence and agency.

## STAGE 3: CULTIVATE AUTHENTIC INTEGRATION

In the final month of the PLC, members step back and take time to think about how to shift the learning conditions across their classrooms, based on what they learned from their focal students during inquiry cycles, with an eye toward making more system changes to the instructional core.

**Module 7: Make New Practices Systemic.** Teams will focus on establishing processes for continuous improvement.

**Module 8: Let Go of Familiar but Ineffective Practices.** Moving students from dependent learning to independent learning means that members have to uncover and resolve their competing commitments and ineffective practices.

**Module 9: Connect with Community for Continued Support.** Members work to internalize what they learn, in order to make these new practices their new normal. They commit to continuous learning through lesson study and inquiry practices.

## APPENDIX II

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### EDUCATIONAL MATERIALS USE AGREEMENT

#### What is it?

The Educational Materials Use Agreement is an explanation and binding agreement regarding the limited license that each PLC member has, to use Zaretta Hammond’s intellectual property and proprietary methods, for personal use only.

All participants are required to sign the agreement before starting the CRE by Design Online PLC. It is provided electronically on the PLC site as part of the onboarding process.

#### Why is this required?

The methods and materials in this membership are not covered by the education “fair use” rules, so it’s important for us to have agreements about how members may and may not use the materials and methods outside of this online PLC. Too often with equity-focused work, people misappropriate intellectual property that ends up being used incorrectly: potentially doing more harm than good for historically marginalized students.

#### What does the agreement say?

The wording of the agreement is simple and straightforward. It reads as follows:

**Once you agree to the following terms and conditions, you will have access to the membership platform and can begin your transformation process.**

- 1. Unauthorized Sharing / Use of Login Information.** Your user name and password are for you, the registered user only, and may not be copied or shared so that others who are not paid members may access content within the CRE by Design Online PLC platform.
- 2. Limited License Use.** You are permitted limited personal use of the materials in the CRE by Design Online PLC. All materials, including downloadable PDFs such as the Field Guide, checklists, rubrics, templates, videos, graphics, and other support materials, are copyrighted intellectual property. A limited license is granted for the personal use of the registered user only. Materials may not be copied for distribution, nor privately shared with others who are not registered members in the CRE by Design Online PLC community.
- 3. Prohibition on Use of Materials for Outside Professional Development Trainings.** No part of the materials, training, methods, or models may be used for professional development for educators outside of the CRE by Design membership including, but not limited to, grade level team meetings, department meetings, PLC/inquiry groups, and district professional development workshops.

In addition, you may not reproduce, copy, modify, republish, perform, display, reverse engineer, translate or distribute PLC site assets in any way, to any person, computer, server, website, or other entity. You are prohibited from using materials, methods, etc. for your own coaching or professional development materials or presentations.

**4. Integrity of Copyrighted Materials.** You agree to maintain the integrity of copyrighted materials. You may not create derivatives of materials (i.e., your own version), nor cut, paste, or alter, to incorporate into your own unauthorized handouts, slides, and other materials.

**5. Restricted Sharing on Social Media or Websites.** You agree not to share images or screenshots of materials, worksheets, video trainings on social media, including on your own private social media pages. Districts are not permitted to upload any graphics, PDF handouts, slide decks, transcripts, templates, or rubrics on their websites for display or inclusion in “toolkits” or resource banks where unregistered PLC educators have access.

The consequences of violating any of these agreements is the immediate deactivation of membership, along with appropriate legal action if warranted.