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| OPTIC FOCUS ELEMENTS |
| CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE LOOK-FORS |

The OPTIC platform provides educators with an opportunity to calibrate perceptions of practice based on seven **focus elements** from the [Classroom Teacher Model Rubric](https://www.doe.mass.edu/edeval/model/PartIII_AppxC.pdf). These elements were selected because they represent highly observable practices and are considered foundational to teacher practice.

This resource lists **observable, culturally responsive teacher and student actions, or look-fors,** for each of the seven focus elements. These look-fors were developed by the 2021 OPTIC Content Fellows, who used a culturally responsive lens to identify aspects of great teaching practice aligned to each focus element. These practices represent **great teaching for all students** and can be used to support calibration training, professional development, observations, feedback, and/or coaching

It is strongly recommended that educators read the **overview of culturally responsive teaching (p. 2)** before using this resource. Culturally responsive teaching is a nuanced, context-dependent endeavor, and while this resource captures some important look-fors, it does not attempt to be an exhaustive list of observable practices that align with culturally responsive teaching. Instead, it is a *supplementary resource* that highlights several important culturally responsive teaching practices aligned with specific elements in the Classroom Teacher Model Rubric.

Each page in this resource lists one focus element, its proficiency descriptor in the Classroom Teacher Model Rubric, and teacher and student look-fors developed by the OPTIC Content Fellows. Some of these look-fors are marked as content-specific (“In ELA” or “In Math”) based on the content expertise of the OPTIC Content Fellows. Each page also lists OPTIC video tasks aligned to the focus element with benchmark scores from OPTIC Content Fellows. Use the links below to navigate to each of the focus elements’ culturally responsive look-fors:

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| [Culturally Responsive Teaching Overview](#overview) | |
| [Subject Matter Knowledge](#SMK) | [Well-Structured Units and Lessons](#WellStructured) |
| [Adjustments to Practice](#Adjustments) | [Student Engagement](#engagement) |
| [Meeting Diverse Needs](#diverse) | [Safe Learning Environment](#safe) |
| [High Expectations](#expectations) | |

Overview of Culturally Responsive Teaching

Culturally responsive teaching happens in classrooms that foster and support students’ diverse backgrounds, identities, strengths, and challenges to deepen their learning, examine the systems in which they operate, and address systemic inequities.[[1]](#footnote-1) According to leading scholar Gloria Ladson-Billings, there are three tenets of culturally responsive teaching[[2]](#footnote-2):

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| **Academic Achievement** | **Cultural Competence** | **Sociopolitical Awareness** |
| Educators hold high, transparent expectations for all students, and support the development of students’ academic skills and identities as learners. | Educators understand culture’s role in education, their students’ cultures, and their own identity and biases to 1) affirm students’ backgrounds and identities and 2) foster their ability to understand and honor others’ cultures. | Educators and students partner to identify, analyze, and work to solve systemic inequities in their communities and the world. |

It is important to spotlight a few key points about culturally responsive teaching[[3]](#footnote-3):

* **Culturally responsive teaching is synonymous with great teaching.** A teacher’s practice cannot be strong, effective, or rigorous *unless* it is culturally responsive. Historically, neither the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) nor our education system as a whole have positioned culturally responsive practice as essential to great teaching. As the Commonwealth continues to develop and strengthen its capacity to provide culturally responsive instruction to each and every student, this resource will explicitly call out and highlight culturally responsive instructional practice. However, in explicitly naming it, it is important to be clear that culturally responsive practice is not something educators do “on the side,” but is integrally woven into the concept of great teaching.
* **All students need and deserve culturally responsive teaching.** A common misconception about culturally responsive teaching is that it is only for students who have been historically marginalized. If we are to prepare and lead students to build a more just and equitable world, all students – including students with access to systems of power - need and deserve a culturally responsive education.
* **Educators exist on a continuum of culturally responsive teaching.** Culturally responsive teaching is complex and varies based on the context and circumstances. An educator might demonstrate strength in culturally responsive teaching in some ways in a specific moment, and demonstrate areas of growth in the next. The purpose of naming and focusing on culturally responsive teaching is not to reach a specific endpoint, but to strive for consistent and authentic teaching practices that embody and promote academic achievement, cultural competence, and sociopolitical awareness.
* **Educators must do a combination of adaptive and technical work** **to engage in culturally responsive teaching.** In other words, educators need to build *technical* skills, such as the ability to identify and enact teacher moves that support culturally responsive teaching. This Facilitator’s Guide is one way to support the development of those technical skills. At the same time, educators can only teach in culturally responsive ways if they are also doing the *adaptive* work: engaging in ongoing learning and self-reflection to confront their own biases and racism, and develop asset-based, anti-racist mindsets. Therefore, this Facilitator’s Guide is a small part of a much larger set of ongoing, continual work that we as educators must do in our work towards cultural responsiveness.

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| OPTIC Content Fellows | 2021-2022  The 2021 OPTIC Content Fellows are a group of MA educators and educator preparation faculty with strong expertise in subject matter content and culturally responsive teaching. | | | |
| ELA | | Math | |
| Image of Ashley Clerge | **Ashley Clerge**  *Grade 5 Teacher*  *Hugh Roe O’Donnell School, Boston* | Image of Jason Colombino | **Jason Colombino**  *Principal*  *Danvers High School, Danvers* |
| A person taking a selfie  Description automatically generated | **Joanna Ganci**  *ELA Program Coordinator, 6-12*  *Andover Public Schools* | A picture containing person, smiling  Description automatically generated | **Deatrice Johnson**  *District Supervisor of Math*  *Springfield Public Schools* |
| Image of Sarah Little | **Sarah Little**  *Literacy Coach*  *Lee Academy Pilot School, Boston* | Image of Carly Nunez | **Carly Nunez**  *Math Coach*  *Guilmette Middle School, Lawrence* |
| Image of Trevor Munhall | **Antonelli Mejia**  *Director of Student Advancement*  *Mario Umana School, Boston* | Image of Hannah Tolla | **Hannah Tolla**  *Director of Data, Accountability & Financial Analytics*  *Andover Public Schools* |
| Image of Trevor Munhall | **Trevor Munhall**  *Grade 8 English Teacher*  *UP Academy Leonard* |  | **Marc Lewis**  *Network Director of Special Education and English Language Development*  *Phoenix Charter School Network* |
| A picture containing person, person, outdoor, jacket  Description automatically generated | **Raphael Rogers**  *Associate Professor of Practice*  *Clark University* |  |  |

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| **I-A-1** | Subject Matter Knowledge |
| *Demonstrates sound knowledge and understanding of the subject matter and the pedagogy it requires by consistently engaging students in learning experiences that enable them to acquire complex knowledge and subject-specific skills and vocabulary, such that they are able to make and assess evidence-based claims and arguments.* | |

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| The teacher: | The students: |
| * Implements questions, tasks, and activities that are aligned to grade-level standards * Uses culturally responsive curricular materials and instructional supports that allow students to synthesize content and connect it to their own lives * Facilitates academic conversations that center student voice and leadership * Uses open-ended questioning to push student thinking toward learning targets * When needed, provides direct instruction and scaffolds to support academic skill development * Provides just-in-time supports to scaffold grade-level content, as opposed to spending large amounts of time teaching pre-grade standards * Implements lessons that will support students’ grade-level work * Implements lessons that help students build sociopolitical awareness (e.g., connecting content to relevant systems of power and oppression) * **In ELA:** Implements tasks and questions to support students to interrogate the sources, perspectives, and biases of a text, and interrogates the texts themselves prior to delivering content * **In Math:** Attends to the conceptual and procedural language of a content standard | * Do most or all of the thinking in the lesson * Engage in a collaborative dialogue with one another about the content * Use precise, academic vocabulary * **In ELA:** Interrogate the sources, perspectives, and biases of the text * **In ELA:** Use evidence from the text to support nuanced, grade-level reasoning * **In ELA:** Read, write, and discuss content that demonstrates comprehension of content from various perspectives * **In Math:** Understand the “why” of math procedures, demonstrating a conceptual understanding   OPTIC Tasks with Content Fellow Benchmark Scores for Subject Matter Knowledge  **ELA**   * Kindergarten | Same, Same, Different – Task 2 * Grade 6 | Fishbowl Egyptian Artifacts – Task 1 * Grade 12 | Collaboration Annotation – Hamlet – Task 1   **Math**   * Kindergarten | Decomposing Numbers – Task 1 |

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| **I-A-3** | Well-Structured Units and Lessons |
| *Adapts as needed and implements standards-based units comprised of well-structured lessons with challenging tasks and measurable outcomes; appropriate student engagement strategies, pacing, sequence, resources, and grouping; purposeful questioning; and strategic use of technology and digital media; such that students are able to learn the knowledge and skills defined in state standards/local curricula.* | |

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| The teacher: | The students: |
| * Implements lessons to meet grade-level learning targets * Implements lessons that increase student engagement and leverages students linguistic, cultural, experiential and social- emotional assets * Helps students understand how the content is relevant to their lives * Asks higher-order thinking questions to ensure students reach the learning target by the end of the lesson * Implements lessons that are well-paced with activities that build towards learning targets * Builds frequent checks for understanding into lessons * Builds in opportunities for students to contribute their own knowledge * Provides intentional scaffolds and supports (e.g., question sequences, rubrics, sentence stems) | * Work collaboratively in flexible groupings * Reflect on their learning with limited teacher support * Understand and can articulate the purpose of the lesson and unit * Can access the content and achieve the learning targets * Demonstrate gradual progress toward grade-level learning targets * When needed, demonstrate they are prepared for the lesson or activity   OPTIC Tasks with Content Fellow Benchmark Scores for Well-Structured Units and Lessons  **ELA**   * Grade 2 | Reading Comprehension, Cloudy with a Chance of Meatballs – Task 1 * Grade 4 | Evidence Based Discussion – Yes Ma’am – Task 1 * Grade 6 | Fishbowl Egyptian Artifacts – Task 1 * Grade 7-8 | Socratic Discussion – Eugenics – Task 2   **Math**   * Grade 5 | Adding Fractions – Task 1 |

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| **I-B-2** | Adjustments to Practice |
| *Analyzes results from a variety of assessments to determine progress toward intended outcomes and uses these findings to adjust practice and identify and/or implement differentiated interventions and enhancements for students.* | |

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| The teacher: | The students: |
| * Collects meaningful data throughout the lesson on student understanding * Uses the data to provide targeted scaffolded supports and opportunities to accelerate learning, when needed * Uses the data to co-create student learning goals * Asks responsive questions * Provides in-the-moment feedback to students * Provides a variety of ways for students to demonstrate learning * Adjusts tasks to meet the needs of individual learners to demonstrate mastery of skill * **In Math:** Highlights and provides support for students to work through common misconceptions | * Self-assess their learning and progress * Advocate for themselves when they need additional supports, and can explain specifically where they need support * Provide feedback to the teacher on their learning and experience in the class * Regularly receive academic feedback from the teacher   OPTIC Tasks with Content Fellow Benchmark Scores for Adjustments to Practice  **Math**   * Grade 6 | Equivalent Expressions – Task 1 * Grade 8 | M&M and Hershey’s Equations – Task 1 |

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| **II-A-2** | Student Engagement |
| *Consistently uses instructional practices that are likely to motivate and engage most students in the content of the lesson.* | |

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| The teacher: | The students: |
| * Provides multiple options for students to engage in learning and demonstrate their progress * Provides opportunities and supports for students to lead or design their own learning * Provides positive feedback to encourage student effort * Communicates warmth and mutual respect in interactions with students * **In ELA:** Chooses texts that draws on students cultural and linguistic experiences where students independently and collaboratively make connections to their own lives * **In Math:** Situates the mathematical concepts and processes within a realistic context to help students connect the learning to their lives | * Build their own positive identities as learners in the classroom * Do most or all of the thinking in the lesson * Collaborate with one another * Ask questions about what they are learning * Actively and curiously participate in their own learning through questioning * Take academic risks   OPTIC Tasks with Content Fellow Benchmark Scores for Student Engagement  **ELA**   * Kindergarten | Tools of the Trade – Task 2 * Grade 5 | Alvin Exploration – Task 1   **Math**   * Grade 5 | Graph and Analyze Relationships – Task 1 |

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| **II-A-3** | Meeting Diverse Needs |
| *Uses appropriate inclusive practices, such as tiered supports and scaffolded instruction, to accommodate differences in students’ learning needs, abilities, interests, and levels of readiness, including those of academically advanced students, students with disabilities, and English learners.* | |

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| The teacher: | The students: |
| * Provides scaffolds and supports based on student data, as opposed to preconceived notions and/or biases * Provides equitable opportunities for engagement (i.e., all students have opportunities to participate, share with the class, receive academic and behavioral feedback) * Provides multiple options for students to engage in learning and demonstrate their progress * Considers student interests and learning styles to plan diverse, developmentally appropriate tasks * Provides multiple options for students to engage in learning and demonstrate their progress * Identifies opportunities for acceleration, when appropriate * **In ELA:** Provides opportunities for students to engage with a variety of texts (genre, content, perspective) * **In ELA:** Names what is not known and demonstrates critical thinking about a text | * Build their own positive identities as learners in the classroom * Make connections between their learning and their individual backgrounds and contexts * Access multiple supports beyond the teacher when they are stuck (e.g., peer collaboration, anchor charts, manipulatives) * Successfully demonstrate their own learning toward the learning target * Remain on task, fully participating and accessing content   OPTIC Tasks with Content Fellow Benchmark Scores for Meeting Diverse Needs  **ELA**   * Kindergarten | Same, Same, Different – Task 2 * Grade 5 | Alvin Exploration – Task 1 * Grade 12 | Collaboration Annotation – Hamlet – Task 1   **Math**   * Grade 5 | Adding Fractions – Task 1 * Grade 6 | Equivalent Expressions – Task 1 * Grade 8 | M&M and Hershey’s Equations – Task 1 |

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| **II-B-1** | Safe Learning Environment |
| *Uses rituals, routines, and appropriate responses that create and maintain a safe physical and intellectual environment where students take academic risks and most behaviors that interfere with learning are prevented.* | |

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| The teacher: | The students: |
| * Provides positive feedback to celebrate big and small successes for all students * Provides scaffolds, probing questions, wait time, and checks for understanding to help students move forward in their learning * Facilitates and holds students accountable for co-created, predictable, and purposeful classroom norms, routines, and procedures that support student learning (as opposed to a compliance-based approach) * Spotlights artifacts that connect to students’ experiences, cultures, and identities * Creates a respected learning environment where students are consistently challenged and are comfortable taking risks * Uses learning materials that represent and foster students’ cultural identities * Leverages opportunities to build students’ sociopolitical awareness (e.g., creating space to discuss the ways individuals from different communities and identities might relate to the content) * Communicates warmth and mutual respect in interactions with students | * Enthusiastically engage in productive struggle * Collaborate with one another * Support one another’s learning and well-being without prompts from the teacher * Take ownership of and demonstrate investment in the classrooms’ norms, routines, and procedures * Show joy and curiosity   OPTIC Tasks with Content Fellow Benchmark Scores for Safe Learning Environment  **ELA**   * Grade 2 | Reading Comprehension, Cloudy with a Chance of Meatballs – Task 1 * Grade 7-8 | Socratic Discussion – Eugenics – Task 2 * Grade 10 | Building Arguments – Task 2   **Math**   * Kindergarten | Decomposing Numbers – Task 1 * Grade 2 | Number Talk – Task 2 * Grade 10-12 | Functions and Exponential Equations – Task 1 * Grade 10-12 | Trigonometry – Task 1 * Take academic risks |

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| **II-E-1** | High Expectations |
| *Clearly communicates high standards for student work, effort, and behavior, and consistently reinforces the expectation that all students can meet these standards through effective effort, rather than innate ability.* | |

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| The teacher: | The students: |
| * Designs lessons to meet a grade-level learning target * Communicates clear, co-created classroom norms, routines, procedures, and expectations about teacher and student roles for each activity * Clearly explains the purpose of the lesson, activities, and follow-up questions to student responses * Provides adequate wait time to allow students to process and answer questions * Provides scaffolds and supports based on student data, as opposed to preconceived notions and/or biases * Provides opportunities for students to share their thinking, including those who are not volunteering to participate * Provides positive feedback to encourage student effort * Provides frequent checks for understanding * Holds students accountable for their learning * **In ELA:** Challenges students to analyze complex texts and creates tasks that allow them to think critically and examine context, credibility and bias * **In Math:** Exposes students to unfamiliar tasks to assess conceptual understanding | * Understand and can share the learning target and its purpose * Engage in collaborative dialogue and learning * Ask questions to support their own learning * Engage in productive struggle * Use precise, academic vocabulary * **In ELA:** Create, ask and answer text-dependent questions * **In ELA:** Explore and ask questions about multiple perspectives to uncover assumptions and biases in the text * **In Math:** Understand the “why” of math procedures, demonstrating a conceptual understanding   OPTIC Tasks with Content Fellow Benchmark Scores for High Expectations  **ELA**   * Kindergarten | Tools of the Trade – Task 2 * Grade 4 | Evidence Based Discussion – Yes Ma’am – Task 1 * Grade 10 | Building Arguments – Task 2   **Math**   * Grade 2 | Number Talk – Task 2 * Grade 5 | Graph and Analyze Relationships – Task 1 * Grade 10-12 | Functions and Exponential Equations – Task 1 * Grade 10-12 | Trigonometry – Task 1 |

1. MA Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, [“Cultural Responsiveness Continuum.”](https://www.doe.mass.edu/odl/e-learning/culturally-resp-sust/content/index.html#/lessons/S9HvUB-Dj3clwF_UuEN5F5vwDi2jv8w4) [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Gloria Ladson-Billings, “[But That’s Just Good Teaching! The Case for Culturally Relevant Pedagogy](https://nationalequityproject.files.wordpress.com/2012/03/ladson-billings_1995.pdf).” [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. [Overcoming Racism](https://www.overcomeracism.com/); Geneva Gay, *Culturally Responsive Teaching*. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)