Foundations of Culturally Responsive Evaluation

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Welcome to our Workshop!

This workshop addresses theoretical foundations of Culturally Responsive Evaluation (CRE) and the strategies that operationalize it in evaluation practice. It is delivered as a conversation between presenters and among participants. Following opening introductions, we will set the context with a reflection on the relevance of diversity, equity and intersectionality in the current moment of our country and where the evaluation profession sits within that. Against this backdrop, we highlight the history of CRE's development and identify key theoretical elements.

The workshop then transitions from theory to practice in three segments. The first segment pairs analysis of evaluation contexts with reflections on one's own cultural location as an evaluator. This prepares us for the second segment, which considers methods that are culturally congruent with their contexts of practice, noting potential strengths and limitations of each. CRE values the return of benefit to the community, and the third segment examines both methods and issues in communicating findings. We pair examples from the literature with your own examples as participants to connect workshop content with your contexts, interests, and concerns. In closing the workshop, we will return to fundamental issues such as grounding CRE in social justice and how this location poses important metaevaluation questions that connect to both ethics and validity.

About the Presenters.

RODNEY K. HOPSON is Professor, Department of Educational Psychology, College of Education, University of Illinois – Urbana Champaign. He received his Ph.D. from the Curry School of Education, University of Virginia and has done post-doctoral/sabbatical studies in the Faculty of Education, University of Namibia, the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health and Centre of African Studies, Cambridge University. He served as President of the American Evaluation Association in 2012.

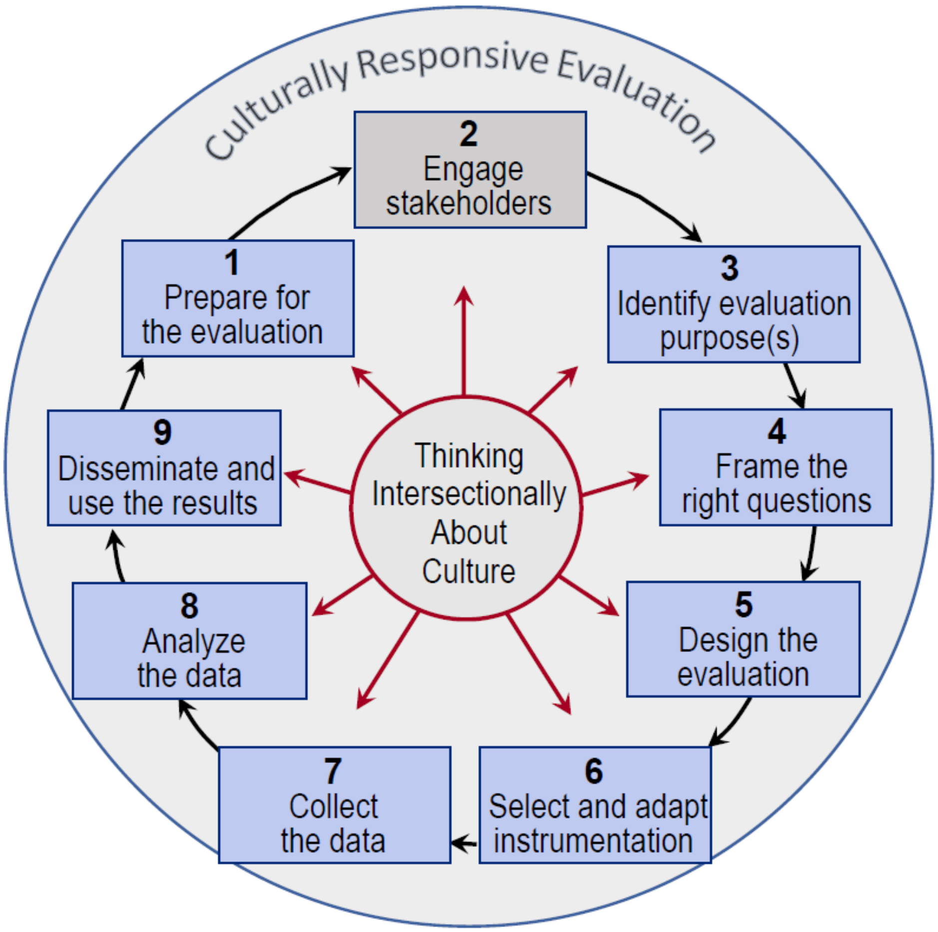
Dr. Hopson's research interests lie in social politics and policies, foundations of education, sociolinguistics, ethnography, and evaluation. His work raises questions that 1) analyze and address the differential impact of education and schooling on marginalized and underrepresented groups in diverse global nation states and 2) seek solutions to social and educational conditions in the form of alternative paradigms, epistemologies, and methods for the way the oppressed and marginalized succeed and thrive despite circumstances and opportunities that suggest otherwise.

KAREN E. KIRKHART has been active in the evaluation profession for over thirty-five years. She holds a Ph.D. in Social Work and Psychology from The University of Michigan, and she is currently Professor and Director of the Baccalaureate Program, School of Social Work, David B. Falk College of Sport and Human Dynamics, Syracuse University. Dr. Kirkhart is also an affiliated faculty member of the Center for Culturally Responsive Evaluation and Assessment (CREA) at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign.

Dr. Kirkhart served as President of the American Evaluation Association in 1994. Her leadership has been recognized with the Robert Ingle Award for Outstanding Service to the AEA. Dr. Kirkhart's scholarly contributions to multicultural validity, cultural competence in evaluation, and evaluation influence have been recognized by the AEA with the Paul F. Lazarsfeld Award for Outstanding Contribution to Evaluation Theory. Dr. Kirkhart is currently interested in intersectionality and validity theory and also rethinking evaluation influence in the current political moment.

Foundations of Culturally Responsive Evaluation: A Workbook

This workbook[1] is intended to guide you through reflections on each phase of Culturally Responsive Evaluation (CRE), shown visually below, in relation to an evaluand of relevance to your work and your context.



[1] The format of this workbook is modeled after a teaching tool on the Key Evaluation Checklist authored by Kirkhart and Scriven (1989). Content is based on Frierson, Hood, Hughes, and Thomas (2010) and Hood, Hopson, and Kirkhart (2015).

PROBLEM STATEMENT:

Briefly describe a circumstance or situation in which evaluation is needed or might be useful in your work. Include a statement of:

a. What is to be evaluated (evaluand)
b. The context of this evaluand, including both individual and organizational culture
c. Intended use of findings from this evaluation

NOTE: This is a brief statement to anchor your understanding of CRE. It is a starting point only; it does not have to be complete or detailed. It would fit on an index card.

PHASE 1: PREPARE FOR THE EVALUATION

This is a very broad category of activities that often requires attention to detail. It involves listening carefully, stepping cautiously, and gathering information on which relationships can be built. Evaluators must do their homework to familiarize themselves with the history and values of a particular context.

What are important dimensions of cultural context that set the stage for this evaluation? Consider:

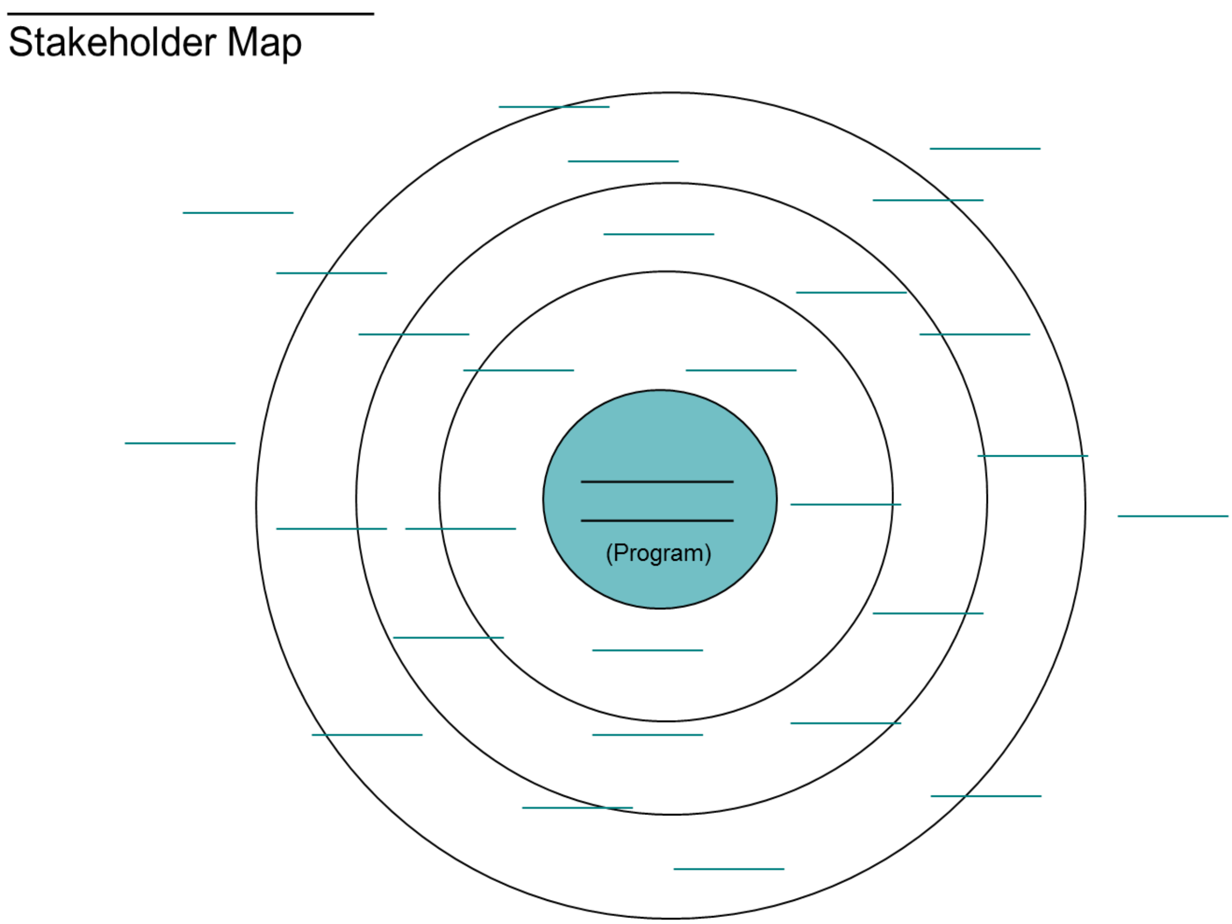
- ♦ The history of this place (community, neighborhood, organization, program)
- ♦ Why is evaluation desired at this particular time and by whom?
- ♦ Who are the stakeholders and where does the evaluation stand in relationship to each of them?
- ♦ What are the appropriate protocols for entering into conversation with different stakeholders?
- ♦ How is power held, exercised, and shared (or use oppressively) in this context? Whose values are marginalized and whose values are privileged?
- ♦

What dimensions of culture are important to consider in assembling the evaluation team? Consider:

- ♦ The personal and professional fit between evaluators and stakeholders. Who brings relevant life experience as well as professional experience?
- ♦ Who is fluent in the languages spoken in this site?
- ♦ Who has the technical expertise required to design and carry out an evaluation?
- ♦ Who has the cultural competence in areas relevant to this specific site?
- ♦ Will a cultural insider be required to guide the evaluators in their interactions and understandings?
- ♦

WHO ARE THE STAKEHOLDERS? CREATE A STAKEHOLDER MAP

Instructions: Title the map with the corresponding program name. The center circle represents the program and should be labeled with the program name, as well. On a separate sheet of paper, or mentally, list all of the potential stakeholders with interest in a program and place them on the blank lines according to where you think they are in relation to the program. See the example that follows. NOTE: This map can be completed as a group exercise with key program staff members or can be completed individually by several key staff and then compared to one another.



Adapted from *The Guide to the Systems Evaluation Protocol: Phase I Planning* (C.O.R.E., 2012) by Hopson & Casillas. (2014). *Cultural responsiveness in applied research and evaluation*. Claremont Evaluation Center's Professional Development Workshop Series in Evaluation and Applied Research Methods

PHASE 2: ENGAGE STAKEHOLDERS

This is a process of relationship-building. It may involves formal or informal interactions, both among *individual* evaluation team members and stakeholders and between the evaluation team and stakeholder *groups*. It is not a single "once-and-done" activity, but something that is consciously cultivated over time.

Consider:

- ♦ The pace at which it is appropriate to move
- ♦ The protocols appropriate to respectfully enter a community or other context
- ♦ Spending time in the context to appreciate its ways of doing business, getting things done
- ♦ The order in which stakeholders should be contacted, reflecting formal or informal hierarchies
- ♦ How to create meaningful roles for stakeholders in the evaluation process
- ♦ How program participants or recipients can be involved in the evaluation
- ♦ Diversity within and among stakeholder groups
- ♦ How respect is communicated, trust established in this specific context
- ♦

PHASE 3: IDENTIFY EVALUATION PURPOSE(S)

The details of an evaluation design are shaped by the intended purpose(s) of the evaluation. The purposes set the framework for what you are hoping to accomplish by conducting this evaluation.

For example,

- Is the evaluation required as a condition of funding?
- Is the evaluation being initiated to gain knowledge for program planning and development?
- Is the evaluation intended to inform decisions about future action, such a restructuring or downsizing?
- Is there a political controversy behind this evaluation?
- Have concerns been raised about the program that led to a call for more information?
- Is this evaluation part of a philosophy of ongoing program reflection and improvement?
-

PHASE 4: FRAME THE RIGHT QUESTIONS

Perhaps the most important procedural step in an evaluation is developing the right questions for the evaluation to seek to answer. Evaluation questions set the parameters of what will be examined and what will remain outside the scope of a given evaluation.

Consider:

- ♦ Whose values and interests are represented in the proposed questions?
- ♦ Who participates in developing and refining the questions?
- ♦ What will be accepted as credible evidence in answering each question?
- ♦ Do the questions address issues of equity of opportunity? Of outcome?
- ♦ Will the evaluation explore who benefits most and least from the program?
- ♦ Are the questions broad enough to permit more than one way of studying the question?
- ♦ Will the evaluation be attentive to unintended consequences of both program process and outcomes?
- ♦

PHASE 5: DESIGN THE EVALUATION

The actual design of an evaluation specifies **what information is needed** to answer each evaluation question and where than information can be found. The **source** of information needed may be program documents or an electronic information system or it may be people, such as program participants and their families or program staff. Multiple sources of information may be needed to give different perspectives on a question. Consider both traditional and non-traditional sources, consistent with the values of the community. For each source, consider the most appropriate **ways of gathering** or retrieving the information. Because each method will have both strengths and limitations, multiple methods are recommended to strengthen the evaluation design. Finally, the design should envision how the data will be processed after they are collected. What **analyses** will be required to answer the questions?

Consider:

- Who *owns* the information that is relevant to this evaluation?
- What protections are built in to assure ethical treatment of participants and appropriate guardianship of their information?
- Have non-traditional sources of information been respected?
- What quantitative methods of data collection might be available and appropriate to this context?
- What qualitative methods of data collection might be culturally congruent?
- How does the pace and timing of the evaluation fit the time frame of this community?
- How might qualitative and quantitative methods be integrated to form more complete answers to the evaluation questions?
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PHASE 6: SELECT AND ADAPT INSTRUMENTATION

All data used in an evaluation must be valid for the purpose at hand. When an evaluation requires original data collection, the instruments themselves must be validated for the intended audience, context and purpose. Sometimes instruments are adapted from another context, and sometimes they are developed specifically to answer the questions of a given study. Either way, both the item content and the method of administration should be culturally appropriate.

Consider:

- ♦ The literacy level and language proficiency of the persons from whom you are gathering information
- ♦ Whether oral or written communication is more culturally congruent
- ♦ Whether an existing tool or a more culturally-specific tool is the method of choice
- ♦ Whether a culturally-specific method of communication in this context might be used in data collection
- ♦ Whether non-verbal communication will be included or excluded from consideration
- ♦

Using or adapting an existing tool can offer advantages, but it can also challenge multicultural validity. Before using an existing tool for your context and purpose, carefully review the history and evidence supporting this instrument.

Consider:

- ♦ Who participated in the original research that developed and validated this instrument?
- ♦ Where was the instrument developed and in what time frame?
- ♦ Are the assumptions and theoretical foundation of the instrument congruent with the context of your evaluation?
- ♦ Is the instrument available in languages appropriate to your context?
  - ♦ If translation is needed, be sure to follow best practices, addressing both semantic content and equivalence.
  - ♦ Forward translation alone is inadequate.
- ♦ Are relevant norms available to assist you in interpreting the data correctly for this context?
- ♦

PHASE 7: COLLECT THE DATA

Data collection under CRE emphasizes relationship. The cultural locations of members of the evaluation team shape what they are able to hear, observe, or experience. Persons collecting the data must be educated in the cultural context of the study, not just trained in technical procedures. Shared lived experience is often a solid grounding for culturally-responsive data collection, but that alone does not guarantee validity. Data collection must be approached from a position of respect.

Consider:

- ♦ Have you made clear the purpose of the evaluation and how it is ultimately intended to benefit persons in this community or setting?
- ♦ Is the voluntary nature of participation well understood?
- ♦ Have appropriate assurances been communicated and followed regarding safeguarding the information shared?
- ♦ Have you allowed adequate time for introductions before beginning data collection?
- ♦ Is the pace of data collection appropriate for this respondent? Have you made provisions to have more than one interaction rather than rushing through your agenda?
- ♦ If an interpreter is needed, has that person been vetted by the community?
- ♦ Will non-verbal communication be documented in your procedures?
- ♦ How will you conclude the interaction and express appreciation for the gift of information that you have been granted?
- ♦

PHASE 8: ANALYZE THE DATA

Data analysis and interpretation involves processing and synthesizing the qualitative and quantitative data you have collected in order to answer your evaluation questions. Understanding cultural context is especially important in the accurate interpretation of data.

Consider:

- ♦ A cultural interpreter may be needed to capture nuances of meaning
- ♦ Involving stakeholders in interpretation can support the validity of understandings and actions
- ♦ It is often useful to examine program operations or outcomes in relation to subgroups of participants; the program may not be received by all persons in the same way.
- ♦ Pay attention to outliers and unexpected results. Successful or positive outliers may offer especially valuable clues to the resilience of a community.
- ♦ Notice how the evaluator lens (values, experience, expectations) shapes the conclusions, especially with regard to what information is given the most and least weight in coming to answers.
- ♦

PHASE 9: DISSEMINATE AND USE THE RESULTS

Culturally Responsive Evaluation (CRE) puts a priority on social betterment, particularly with respect to groups that have been previously marginalized. Results should be used to promote equity. While dissemination of findings to key stakeholders is an important part of the process, consider also the evaluator's responsibility to guard information that should not be shared.

Consider:

- Create opportunities for key stakeholders to review and comment on drafts
- Be clear about ownership of the findings. What information is culturally restricted and should not be shared?
- How to communicate with each stakeholder audience in the most culturally appropriate ways
- Notice who will benefit from sharing the results; who might be harmed?
- Moving from evidence to advocacy and action
- Do the actions taken reflect an accurate understanding of the findings?
- Are positive changes created by actions taken? Whose justice is advanced?
- How to involve stakeholders in the dissemination of findings. Not all results come directly from the evaluator; who holds a position to ensure that the results are taken seriously?
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APPENDIX A: EXAMPLE

Manswell-Butty, Reid and LaPoint (2004) describe their evaluation of a single component of the Talent Development (TD) school program in partnership with Howard University's Center for Research on Education of Students Placed at Risk (CRESPAR). The evaluand was Breakfast Club, a school-to-career transitions intervention located in an urban junior high school in the northeastern United States. It consisted of a series of interactive discussions and activities that took place one hour prior to the start of the regular school day. A series of eight workshops were held, with 17 participants—students who were expected to graduate from the ninth grade to high school at the conclusion of the academic year.

Manswell-Butty, Reid and LaPoint (2004) provide a clear example of how the practice of CRE builds theory on the ground by operationalizing general principles of the CRE framework at each of the nine stages. Their work also illustrates how the stages overlap and repeat; they are not distinctly separate, linear activities. This example is cited in Hood, Hopson and Kirkhart (2015).

Stage 1. Preparing for the Evaluation. The TD evaluation was interwoven with the TD intervention in the school, so evaluators met on multiple occasions with stakeholders to understand the sociocultural context of that particular school. Evaluators listened carefully to the perspectives of the principal, counselor, liaison, teachers and students and also reviewed student profiles to determine program goals and aspirations. In a two-way exchange of information, evaluators brought relevant findings from prior research to inform program development. Student, family, and community factors were kept clearly in view as both the program and the evaluation were tailored to fit the specific context of application.

Stage 2. Engaging Stakeholders. Clearly the preparation described above included stakeholder engagement, but the authors gave particular attention to building solid relationships with the school principal, liaison and counselor, who were identified as key stakeholders. One person, the school liaison, was selected as the key point of contact for evaluators, and they were explicit in identifying how her personal characteristics made her ideal for this role. Her academic training, extensive experience of over thirty years in public education, and perhaps most significantly, her genuine commitment to the welfare of the students aligned her with the principles of CRE. This created an atmosphere in which ideas and suggestions could be freely exchanged and debated.

Stage 3. Identifying the Purpose and Intent of the Evaluation. This evaluation was intended to serve both formative and summative purposes, and the evaluation team laid these dual functions out clearly for mutual understanding of all stakeholder. The formative purpose was to document and describe program operations, providing ongoing feedback to inform program staff and give them information to continue to develop and improve the program. Feedback from the students participating in Breakfast Club "was used to fine-tune subsequent sessions to make them more valuable and enjoyable" (Manswell Butty, Reid and LaPoint, 2004, p. 42). The summative purpose was to determine whether the Breakfast Club achieved its objectives, focusing on the direct effects on participants.

Stage 4. Framing the Right Questions. Following the CRE framework, questions of concern to key stakeholders—school principal, liaison, and counselor—were included. Questions coming from the broader TD project level were adapted and tailored to local context. To confirm that the right questions were being posed, evaluators constructed a “data map” or visual matrix so that everyone was clear how the evaluation questions related both to the Breakfast Club intervention and to the evidence that was needed to answer each question.

Stage 5. Designing the Evaluation. This evaluation used mixed methods to promote both conceptual and methodological triangulation. Qualitative data included interviews and written assessments and quantitative data included surveys and self-assessments. Evaluators paid particular attention to both the preferred schedule and method of data collection, noting that “many students preferred discussions and other interactive activities rather than filling out surveys and self-assessments” Manswell Butty, Reid, and LaPoint, 2004, p. 43). The career self-assessment was administered to all ninth graders in the school, so the Breakfast Club participants were not singled out and comparisons could be made.

Stage 6. Selecting and Adapting Instrumentation. Many of the evaluation tools were developed or adapted specifically for use with the Breakfast Club audiences. Instruments were carefully selected with attention to their cultural sensitivity in form, language, and content. The authors report that one of the standardized tools was normed on majority populations, calling into question the validity of score interpretation for students of color. The authors countered this by augmenting that instrument score with other outcome data that were more responsive to context.

Stage 7. Collecting Data. Overlapping instrumentation and data collection in CRE is the recognition of self-as-instrument. Those who are collecting the data must be attuned to the nuances of expression and communication specific to the contexts of this program, school, and community. TD evaluators shared a racial background with the stakeholders, entering the school with “an increased level of sensitivity and awareness to the plight and lived experiences of the various stakeholder groups” (Manswell Butty, Reid, and LaPoint, 2004, p. 44). The authors credited the (Stage 1) multiple meetings with stakeholders and participation in or observation of school-related functions with helping evaluators be responsive to context and culture.

Stage 8. Analyzing Data. The stakeholder conversations previously cited extended into data interpretation. Stakeholders advised on how best to analyze and interpret data to derive valid, contextualized meaning. Whole group data were disaggregated to examine differences by gender and age. The age disaggregation was especially relevant to this context, in which ninth graders ranged in age from fourteen to sixteen and were therefore at considerably different developmental stages.

Stage 9. Disseminating and Using the Results. Finally, evaluation findings were reported to stakeholders in formats tailored to communicating effectively with each audience. Feedback to participants was delivered “in a student-friendly manner” (p. 45). Results were explained to the principal, counselor, and liaison within the context of the Breakfast Club program, so that practice implications were clear. Successes as well as challenges were highlighted. Findings were also disseminated to funders and other project staff outside of the immediate context of application.

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Appendix B

Culturally Responsive Evaluation (CRE): A Personal Bibliography

We respectfully share some of our favorite resources that have shaped our thinking on CRE. It is necessarily a partial list, but we have sampled broadly from our library to offer both classic and current resources. We invite you to add your own personal favorites to the list. For additional resources on intersectionality, visit the CREA V conference website: https://crea.education.illinois.edu/home/conferences/fifth-international-conference.

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