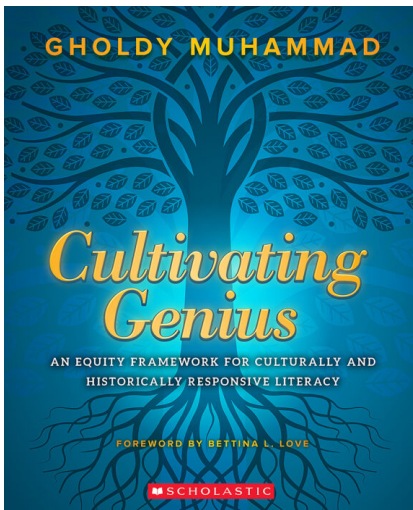




New To Me & Maybe You Too!



Source: [Scholastic.com](https://www.scholastic.com)

Hello MN Math Teachers,

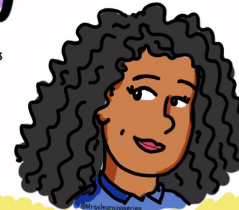
I am excited to share a book that has motivated me to think that changes we make in the classroom could radically impact how our students connect to mathematics and keep us as teachers inspired and enthusiastic. Dr. Gholdy Muhammad published *Cultivating Genius: An Equity Framework for Culturally and Historically Responsive Literacy* during the beginnings of the Covid-19 pandemic. It has been a book that has resonated with me as we have implemented so many changes to our instruction

Identity

The ability to understand the self within local and broader contexts of reading and signs of the time

Skills

Cognitive acts of reading, writing, and speaking (being able to read and write/print independently)



Historically Responsive Literacy Mode Pursuits:

Gaining knowledge across the disciplinary areas
Literacy development as a root for all learning
(Literature, language, science, history, and mathematics)

Intellect

Using literacy as a step for social change
Linked to the ideals of liberation, security, and protect

Criticality

Joy!

Helping youth to see the joy in themselves and others

during the last three school years. Dr. Muhammad's research into 19th century Black literary societies motivated her to think more broadly about how we can connect with our students. *Cultivating Genius* describes four pursuits that make up the framework that she proposes as a result of her research: Identity, Skills, Intellect, and Criticality. In follow up articles and lectures, she has added a fifth pursuit, Joy.

The four pursuits of Culturally and Historically Responsive Literacy + Joy:

Identity - For teachers to be able to know their students, they need to know themselves. Knowing yourself as a teacher gives you the reflective power to understand your students' identities and how students may or may not see themselves in the content and lessons you are sharing with them. As you design and plan your lessons, consider the

Source: <https://mobile.twitter.com/mrgslearning/status/138248989053>

question “How will this lesson/unit plan help my students to learn something about themselves or others?” (Muhammad 78) As you work to connect your lessons to your students’ identities, be prepared to be transformed yourself as you begin to view the world and mathematics from more perspectives.

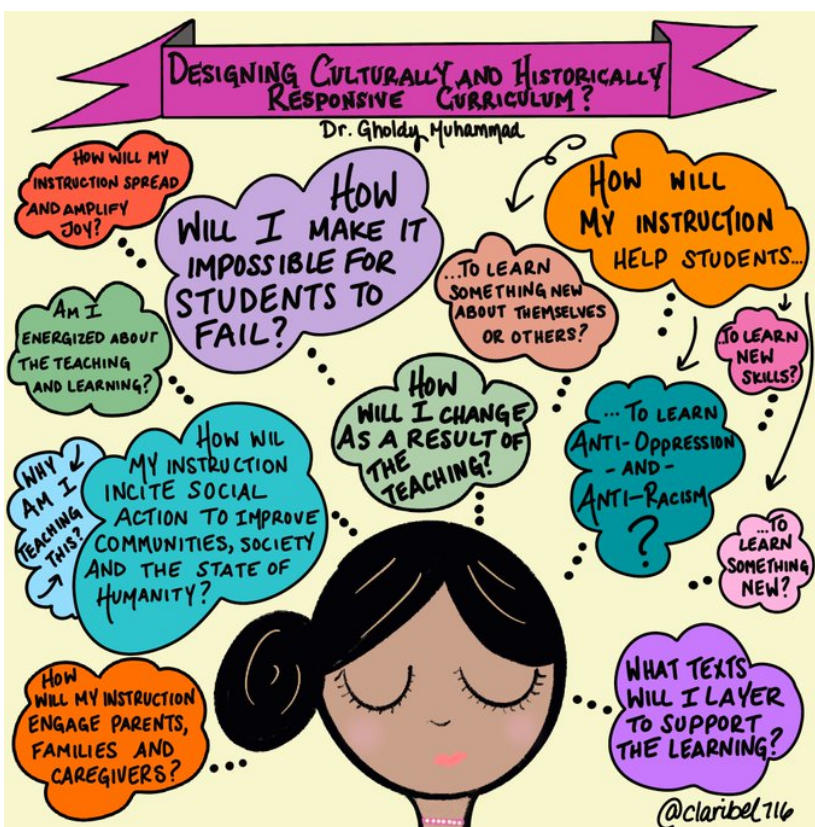
Skills - Dr. Muhammad makes the case that in the era of standards and testing, our classrooms have overemphasized skills. The skills described in the standards form much of the content of mathematics. Teaching skills are important. However, without considering the other pursuits in our math classrooms, we keep our students from reaching their full potential and limit their perspectives on mathematics and themselves.

Intellect - I have had the most trouble grappling with this pursuit in the context of mathematics. As more people in the math community engage in Dr. Muhammad’s work, a promising area for discussion is to distinguish between skills and intellect in mathematics. My current resolution of this tension is to connect the development of intellect in mathematics to the development of the [Standards for Mathematical Practice](#). Developing intellect in mathematics classrooms combines the tasks of inspiring curiosity in our students along with providing students with ways to approach problems mathematically.

Criticality - How often do you “engage students’ thinking about power, anti-oppression, and equity in the text, in communities, and in society?” (Muhammad 131) In math classrooms, we can use the pursuit of criticality to examine issues of disproportionality and (in)justice. Mathematics can be a tool to highlight, examine, and solve problems connected to power, race, and gender. As math teachers, we should also help students to see that the power of mathematics to generalize and abstract can lead to dehumanization of others and support oppression.

Criticality in the mathematics classroom prepares students to reflect on and answer important questions about how they want to use mathematics in their lives and their careers.

Joy - Teaching and learning mathematics has many moments of productive struggle followed by the joy of the “aha” that comes with solving a problem. As we plan and build our classrooms and communities to include the four pursuits, we also need to balance frustration and insight to create a joyful space for both our students and ourselves. As we explore criticality in mathematics, we should not just highlight the oppressive nature of problems impacting the world, but also layer in stories and examples of the agency and humanity of those who are impacted by those problems.



Source: <https://twitter.com/claribel716/status/1426311934564081664>

I look forward to having more conversations with math teachers about *Cultivating Genius*. Be sure to share what

you liked/didn't like either on Twitter, by tagging @mctm_mn or in the MN Math Teachers Closed Facebook group. Don't forget, if you have an idea to feature in this column, just fill out [this form](#)! Thanks!

Chris Wernimont
6-12 Math District Program Facilitator
Minneapolis Public Schools
Christopher.Wernimont@mpls.k12.mn.us