Integrating CRSE into STEM Classrooms

Sarah Anne Eckert, PhD & Beth Rajan Sockman, PhD

PA Teacher Education CRSE Initiative

Why This Matters

Science Technology Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) is often described as neutral, universal, culture-free. Yet STEM is a human invention, shaped across civilizations, languages, and ways of reasoning. When STEM begins with Culturally Relevant and Sustaining Education (CRSE), especially in mathematics, we acknowledge that numbers travel through culture before they ever land on paper. If students experience math as detached from their identities, communities, or linguistic resources, they may master procedures while quietly questioning whether they belong in the discipline. CRSE reframes STEM not as a gatekeeper, but as a tool for interpreting and transforming the world. The goal of math and science is not merely correct answers or controlled experiments; it is disciplined curiosity, pattern-seeking, problem-solving, and the ethical application of knowledge in service of humanity. When students see their histories reflected in STEM contributions and their lived experiences treated as legitimate data for scientific inquiry, rigor deepens rather than diminishes. Including CRSE in STEM ensures that excellence is expansive, that intellectual authority is shared, and that the pursuit of truth is inseparable from the pursuit of dignity.

CRSE and Danielson Alignment

This CRSE-Danielson mapping serves as a professional bridge, ensuring that the innovative, culturally responsive shifts you make in your STEM classroom are recognized and rewarded as Distinguished practice during your evaluation cycle.

Danielson Domain	CRSE Competency
1: Planning and Preparation	4: Provide All Learners with Equitable and Differentiated Opportunities to Learn and Succeed

- **Instructional Strategies:** Use collaborative models, case studies, and primary sources to move from passive learning to active inquiry.
- **Knowledge Production:** Empower students to vet provided information and produce their own data, positioning them as active contributors to the field.
- **Student-Informed Planning:** Use surveys and local data (environmental/economic) to embed student interests and community issues directly into unit design.
- **Open Genius:** Center the work of marginalized experts and non-Western innovations as fundamental to STEM, rather than supplemental.
- **Anticipatory Planning:** Pre-emptively identify cultural or linguistic "friction points" and integrate supports like vocabulary previews and sentence stems.
- **Multiple Entry Points:** Offer tiered access to tasks through visual models, numerical data, and real-world scenarios before moving to formal symbolic equations.
- **Flexible Assessment:** Provide varied pathways—such as oral reasoning, annotated diagrams, or simulations—to maintain high rigor while varying the mode of expression.

2: Learning Environments	5: Promote Asset-based Perspectives about Differences

- **Normalize Diverse "STEM Logic":** Publicly value non-traditional problem-solving strategies and ask students to connect their logic to out-of-school experiences, reinforcing that brilliance exists beyond the textbook.
- **Cultural & Historical Visibility:** Integrate the contributions of experts from historically marginalized communities as core components of the curriculum, ensuring diverse perspectives are central to scientific and mathematical methods.
- **Language as an Intellectual Asset:** Encourage students to use home languages or familiar terminology to process complex concepts first, then use those insights as a bridge to formal academic English.

Domain 2: Learning Environments	8: Establish High Expectations for Each Learner that Treat them as Capable and Deserving and Achieving Success

- **Warm Demand Pedagogy:** Pair high expectations with relational support, insisting on precision and rigor while providing the scaffolds necessary to prevent lowering cognitive demand.
- **Transparent Success Criteria:** Use explicit learning targets and exemplars to demystify high-quality work, ensuring academic expectations are accessible and unambiguous for every learner.
- **Public Belief in Brilliance:** Use identity-shaping language that positions students as emerging experts, explicitly connecting their classroom reasoning to professional STEM practices.
- **Commitment to Belonging:** Build classrooms where representation affirms identity and disrupts bias, communicating that every learner is capable of high-level participation and success.

Domain 3: Instruction	3: Design and Facilitate Culturally Relevant Learning that Brings Real World Experiences into Educational Spaces

- **Community-Connected Problem Solving:** Design investigations around authentic local issues—like air quality, transit efficiency, or food deserts—using ratios and statistics.
- **Student-Generated Contexts:** Invite students to author math problems or science scenarios based on their lived experiences, positioning them as knowledge creators.
- **Collaborative Sense-Making:** Use structured group work to build shared understanding, prioritizing norms that value collective problem-solving and respectful questioning.
- **Critical STEM Inquiry:** Investigate the ethics of STEM decisions by analyzing who benefits from specific data sets or technological innovations.

Domain 4: Professional Responsibilities	9: Educate Oneself About Microaggressions and their Impact on Diverse Learners, Educators, and Families, and Actively Disrupt the Practice by Naming and Challenging its Use

- **Curriculum Identity Audit:** Review materials for a "hidden curriculum" that may inadvertently assume specific socioeconomic or cultural backgrounds.
- **Diverse Media for PD:** Swap standard training for books and podcasts created by marginalized voices to broaden your pedagogical perspective.
- **Audit "The Unspoken":** Have a colleague track your interaction patterns, such as call-on frequency and body language, to uncover implicit biases.
- **Active Disruption:** Move from passive observation to active mediation when addressing microaggressions or biased narratives.