



Culturally Responsive Teaching and Education

Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT) is a pedagogical approach that recognizes the importance of cultural diversity in the teaching and learning process. The core emphasis of CRT is the inclusion of diverse cultures in the design of instruction ([Addy et al., 2021](#)). [Gay \(2010\)](#) defines CRT as “using the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning encounters more relevant to and effective for them” (p.31). This resource expands on the understanding of culturally responsive teaching and provides practical suggestions for teaching in higher education.

Ways to invite students’ cultural identities and experiences

The goal of Culturally Responsive Teaching is to create learning environments that students can experience as opportunities for comprehension, validation, and support ([Stembridge, 2020](#)). As instructors, our roles are to connect students’ cultural knowledge and experiences to learning outcomes. To begin to practice culturally responsive thinking instructors might consider the following (the list is retrieved from Stembridge, 2020).

- Viewing teaching and learning as a journey and not a destination
- Regularly thinking about one’s thinking
- Listening/observing with understanding and empathy
- Questioning and innovative problem-posing
- Designing learning experiences with a focus on engagement
- Mining actionable data from students’ learning experiences.

Recognizing Cultural Diversity

Culture refers to “set of shared dispositions, tastes, styles, understandings, ways of being and knowing, histories, and other social resources among groups of individuals who cohere around a specific identity” ([Carter & Darling-Hammond, 2016](#)). There are visible cultural aspects such as holidays, language, food, arts and literature, and invisible aspects, such as religion, moral norms, family concepts, time, and ways of communication. Culturally responsive instructors bring culture into the classroom and create inclusive environments, materials, and teaching practices. Listed below are suggestions on ways to understand cultural diversity.

- Recognize and reduce implicit and explicit bias
- Learn about who’s in class
- Provide choices in learning and assessments
- Inviting students to make connections with the materials based on students’ embodied experiences.



Six Themes of Culturally Responsive Education

Adeyemi Stemberge, who specializes in equity-centered teaching, proposes six themes of Culturally Responsive Education (CRE). Below is a brief explanation of each theme as well as questions and actions to consider.

Engagement

There are different dimensions of engagement such as behavioral, affective, and cognitive. Cognitive engagement is the highest goal of culturally responsive education because a learning experience is most successful when students are self-directed and empowered to achieve learning outcomes. Actions that are suggested to improve student and instructor engagement are:

- Provide choices in learning and assessments
- Inviting students to make connections with the materials based on students' embodied experiences.

Cultural Identity

Cultural identity encompasses the feeling of belonging to a group, forming an integral part of an individual's self-image and understanding. It is shaped by factors such as race, ethnicity, religion, nationality, gender, social class, generation, locality, or any social group characterized by unique cultural norms and practices ([Bransford, et al., 2000](#)). In CRE, instructors should support bridging the cultural/social and academic identities of the students.

- In what ways does instruction make reference to culture?
- How does instruction allow students to draw from their cultural knapsack?

Relationships

Relationships within CRE refer to relationships among students, students, and the instructor, and students and instructors' relationships with the content. Building relationships draws from the authenticity of educators. Here are some suggestions for instructors to implement in their teaching to build and support a healthy and productive sense of learning community.

- Recognize and reduce implicit and explicit bias
- Learn about [who's in class](#)

Vulnerability

Vulnerability accounts for two aspects in CRE, 1) becoming aware of protective factors for vulnerable students, and 2) the educator's personal nature, which pertains to an individual's willingness to engage in one's professional development.

- Regularly reflecting on one's thinking and values
- Listening/observing with empathy
- Having the courage to learn and grow. Vulnerability requires educators to be courageous in confronting discomfort and uncertainty

Assets

An Asset-based perspective values students' cultural/social experiences and knowledge and sees these as foundations of learning rather than obstacles to overcome. To value students' cultures as assets, instructors:

- Encourage storytelling
- Provide feedback that emphasizes students' strength, achievements, and areas of growth rather than focusing on deficits or mistakes
- Facilitate collaborative learning activities that allow students to share knowledge, skills, and



Rigor

Rigor in CRE involves maintaining high academic standards while also ensuring that instruction is responsive, accessible, and meaningful to all students.

- Designing learning experiences with a focus on engagement
- Mining actionable data from students' learning experiences
- Include resources and texts from multiple perspectives

So, the questions that we should keep in mind are

- How does the instructional design encourage students to employ higher order thinking skills beyond mere recall?
- In what ways are students led to construct their own meaning and interpretations from content?

References

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