



16 Ways to Integrate Culturally Responsive Teaching Into Your Classroom

In today's increasingly diverse schools, culturally responsive teaching is a crucial way to make sure all the students in your classroom get the attention they need and the respect they deserve. [Culturally responsive teaching](#) acknowledges that different heritages and languages affect students' attitudes and approaches toward learning. It also uses an array of strategies to reach students of different ethnicities and learning styles while validating the importance of different cultures whenever possible in the classroom.

Maintaining a culturally responsive learning environment requires a willingness to learn about other cultures, to question your assumptions, and to experiment with new ways of reaching students. If it feels like hard work, then you're probably doing it right!

To get started, try some of these suggestions for transforming your pedagogy to address cultural differences in your classroom.

How to Maintain a Culturally Responsive Classroom Environment

Maintain a Positive Perspective on Students and Families

Inclusion is a very important part of culturally responsive teaching. One of the most important ways to include all cultures in your classroom is to reach out to families who may otherwise be less likely to engage with the school community. Try these action steps to get started:

1. Create (or participate in) a team of teachers, administrators, parents, and community members focused on diversity to develop a harassment prevention handbook.
2. Invite community leaders to provide workshops for school personnel that offer insights on different cultures in your area.
3. Send newsletters and email reminders about school resources and services to parents, so they have access to news, information, and events.
4. Open a dialogue to understand what parents of different cultures want for their children. This can be done informally by sending notes home, via a quick chat on the phone, or in whatever way works best for your families.
5. Provide opportunities for students to share family histories and cultural heritage to help all members of the classroom understand what it means to belong in different groups.

6. Consider offering classes or informal seminars to parents and community members to bring them into the building and foster communication. These offerings could be geared towards use of technology, age-appropriate homework strategies, or any other useful topic that will bring people together--it doesn't have to be directly about culture to have a positive impact.

Communicate Your High Expectations for All Learners

Developing a relationship with each and every student lets them know you care about them and are invested in their progress. To avoid letting children of diverse backgrounds slip through the cracks, make an effort to connect in these ways:

1. Welcome each student by name when they enter the classroom, taking care to correctly pronounce everyone's name. This is a crucial signal that you value your student's presence and heritage.
2. Make eye contact with all students to show respect. It can be surprisingly easy to avoid students that you don't feel you connect with, so make it a priority to monitor your body language and facial expressions to stay positive towards everyone.
3. Set clear expectations for behavior and learning, and enforce them equally for all students. According to the Director of Colegio Americano del Sur, Kathleen Serverian-Wilmeth, over-praising students who struggle could "send unintended messages of lower expectations."
4. Arrange your classroom to encourage discussion and cooperation instead of hierarchy. Consider a circular or semicircular seating chart, and be sure to design lessons to facilitate safe and respectful sharing of opinions and differing points of view.

Encourage Learning Within the Context of Culture

To develop a truly multicultural classroom, it's important to openly discuss differences while highlighting the value of different cultures and ways of thinking. This can involve direct instruction about different cultural viewpoints, as well as a willingness to alter delivery to meet the preferred learning style of a particular group. For example:

1. Incorporate various students' stories about their culture along with lessons about the history, food, celebrations, and important members of various cultures represented in your classroom. Research indicates that such examples have a positive effect on achievement among minority populations.

2. Learn to recognize patterns in your students' learning styles and preferred methods of problem-solving so you can adapt lessons to meet a wide range of learners—including those whose styles are influenced by their culture.

3. Fill your classroom with culturally diverse learning materials, including a library of books that feature both characters and authors from all over the world. You can also incorporate powerful visual images of diversity on bulletin boards, with classroom posters, and in other textbooks and instructional materials used around the school. This representation is an important reminder that everyone belongs in your classroom.

Facilitate Student-Centered Instruction

To help learners develop into adults with the skills to communicate effectively with people of many cultures, you need to offer your students plenty of opportunities to practice respectful dialogue. Try these tips to make your classroom a safe space for communicating to members of all cultures:

1. Model interactive dialogue. Instead of lecturing, discuss your lesson with them as well. Provide your students plenty of opportunities to share what they think and show that you value their opinions. This simple interaction breaks down the idea that there is a single “right” way to think in your classroom.

2. Again, the importance of arranging your space to foster group discussion cannot be overstated. Group desks in quads or a horseshoe arrangement so students can look directly at each other when engaged in discussion.

3. Challenge yourself to acknowledge all students' comments, questions, responses, ideas, and contributions. Preferential treatment can be insidious, so try tracking participation in a low-key way to make sure everyone gets a chance.

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