Culturally Responsive Teaching

Culture can be broadly defined as characteristic features of a person's or group's everyday existence, such as shared values, attitudes, and practices. It is an essential part of learning and culturally responsive teaching practices are vital. Culturally responsive teaching cultivates student identity, background, stories, and perspectives as an essential part of everyday learning. Culturally responsive practices aim to promote collaboration, help broaden student knowledge through critical thinking, and assist students in developing a strong sense of identity. By making culture a deliberate part of teaching and learning, the inclusion of diverse cultures, points of views, and differing personalities is prioritized. Teachers are essential to promoting the development of students' awareness and sense of self in relation to the world.

1. What is culturally responsive teaching?
2. Why is culturally responsive teaching important?
3. How can I facilitate culturally responsive learning in blended and online environments?

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KEY Elements

Culture can be broadly defined as characteristic features of a person's or group's everyday existence, such as shared values, attitudes, and practices. Teachers and students collaborate and share knowledge as it pertains to their unique identities and upbringings, thus contributing to culturally diverse and rich classroom experiences. Culturally Responsive Teaching aims to intentionally connect student culture, language, and life experiences to what they learn in school. This type of connection is especially important in online and blended environments when authentic and collaborative experiences help create and sustain learner attention, engagement, and interaction.

There are several strategies teachers can use to make teaching culturally responsive. For example, one approach is to begin classes by allowing students to recall their personal experiences and background. This strategy is called "hook and anchor" where the stage is set for the lesson in a way that is collaborative and includes perspectives from everyone in the classroom. Teachers can encourage students to give real-world examples, share stories that are unique to them, and interact by highlighting similarities and differences when learning classroom content. Students are encouraged to consider multiple perspectives and diversity of experiences by listening and reflecting on their own life connections. Also, when teaching, teachers may evaluate and modify existing instructional material to include counter-stereotypical examples. Teachers should review if the names, places, cultural practices, and recommended books and literature encompass a wide range of cultures. If not, teachers can supplement instructional material with literature from other parts of the world and use examples which promote critical thinking. Culturally responsive teaching also aims to promote critical reflection and introspection where biases are recognized, accounted for, and addressed. These biases may be based on gender, race, achievement, culture, language, religion, personal belief, and incomplete information about a person or situation. By raising awareness of personal bias, teachers can then work towards increasing empathy, eliminating incorrect perceptions, and encouraging respect and communication among all students in the classroom.

Technology also plays a significant role in creating culturally inclusive environments. Availability of and access to technology resources differs from home to home. Some homes may have many devices and technology-oriented support from parents and siblings, while in other homes the technology access may be limited. Language barriers may also be present in a home. Teachers should consider how the content is presented to students and families by offering multiple representations and encouraging learning in more than one modality.

Culturally responsive teaching is essential for student and family engagement. By being aware of multiple perspectives and needs of diverse populations, teachers can provide equitable and inclusive online educational experiences.