

Culturally Responsive Pedagogy: An Imperative Approach to Instruction

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Cultural diversity has gradually become the norm in the nation's school-aged population, and researchers predict a significant increase in the culturally diverse population during the upcoming century. Immigration patterns, birth rates, and lower average age contribute substantially to this remarkable growth. Williams (1992) predicts that by the year 2000, culturally diverse students will account for from one fourth to one third of the U.S. population. Hispanics, the

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fastest growing minority group, have increased by 53% during the last decade (Chapa & Valencia, 1993).

Increasing diversity presents a challenge to educators. Teachers face the task of providing effective instruction to a heterogeneous group of students with different language and cultural backgrounds. The racial homogeneity of teachers across the nation and the dearth of teacher preparation in multicultural issues and second language learning represent major limitations to teacher effectiveness.

In this paper, we address the role of culture in education through a description of areas of possible mismatch between current instructional practices and the learning styles of ethnolinguistically diverse students. We synthesize current research and theory to provide guidelines that can help teachers select and develop effective instructional methodology. A culturally responsive approach is considered imperative for effective instruction.

The Role of Culture

Researchers have not yet reached a consensus regarding a definition of culture (Banks, 1994). During the first half of the century, the word "culture" traditionally was used to indicate customs and patterns of behavior. This definition de-emphasized the importance of cultural tools and artifacts studied by anthropologists but still implied a focus on explicit cultural characteristics. More recent definitions embrace a broader perspective. Culture now refers most commonly to a system of shared knowledge and beliefs that shape human perceptions and social behavior (Gibson, 1984). Those who have adopted this definition recognize that our cultural background influences the way we act, believe, perceive ourselves and others, and evaluate the world around us. Bennett (1990) refers to culture as a unique perspective or world view that is likely to be shared by members of a cultural group. Human behaviors and interactions are a result of the underlying cultural assumptions that shape the world view of individuals. Families and schools thus represent valuable sources for the transmission of cultural norms, knowledge, and values.

Families provide the culture through which children develop their ethnic identity. Knight, Cota, and Bernal (1993) describe this identity as consisting of culturally transmitted attitudes, feelings, preferences, and behavior patterns based on cultural mores and values. Children develop their communication patterns, perceptual orientation and learning modes, and social values within this ethnic framework. Therefore, when students first enter the school system,

in order to succeed they must master the subject matter *and* learn new, culturally appropriate interaction patterns (Villegas & Watts, 1991).

A typical classroom could be described as a community composed of approximately 30 students and a teacher. Although classrooms are dynamic in nature, standard practices predominate in American schools (e.g., grading systems, class periods, bells, rules, and prescribed curricula). The classroom community's rules and regulations are strongly influenced by the dominant culture and by the teacher in charge. Classroom environments not only affect students' acquisition of knowledge, they play a major role in student socialization. When schools promote academic achievement, they also reaffirm dominant cultural values.

Explanations for the relatively poor educational attainment of ethnolinguistically diverse students have been controversial and have led to a variety of interpretations. Some educators (e.g., Cummins, 1989) explain student underachievement as a result of biased patterns of teacher behaviors, i.e., teachers from the predominant culture perpetuate the minority status of some student populations. To conclude that the educational problems of ethnolinguistically diverse students result only from intentional manipulation by a predominantly White educational system, however, is overly simplistic when we examine the complexity of factors involved in such interactions.

A second explanation for poor minority student performance suggests a causal relationship between racial and ethnic characteristics and educational underachievement (Ogbu, 1992). The view that minorities have intellectual and genetic deficits, however, has been discredited since the late 1960s. Rather, cultures currently are seen as varied and dynamic, and minorities are recognized as capable of successfully adapting to new environments.

What, then, are the reasons for the low educational attainment of the majority of ethnolinguistically diverse students? What should the role of the teacher be in countering this trend? Are there specific instructional practices that will help? In the following sections, we synthesize expert opinions to answer these questions. After a brief discussion of the issues regarding cultural mismatch, we examine relevant literature to show that experts in multicultural issues (e.g., Banks, 1993; Bennett, 1990; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Ruiz, 1991; Scarcella, 1990) concur on the significance of several factors important to the effective teaching of diverse students, including (a) teacher beliefs and attitudes, (b) selection of content and classroom materials, (c) choice of instructional approaches and methodologies, and (d) ways to structure the educational setting.

Cultural Mismatch

Curricular goals and the corresponding assessment of academic achievement consistently have been subjects of educational research. Although their importance and relevance to school improvements are indisputable, such a focus alone does not provide a comprehensive understanding of the educational process. Consequently, it has become imperative that educators, particularly those of ethnolinguistically diverse students, are aware of the complexity of factors that influence the classroom setting and thereby, the development of the students involved.

Cooper and Upton (1990) describe human behavior as essentially interactional, since it results from an ongoing interplay between environmental factors and an individual's characteristics and motives. With the principle of reciprocal determinism, Bandura (1986) affirms the interdependence between human behavior and the environment. Reciprocity thus is integral to the classroom in which teacher, learner, and environmental factors constantly interact.

Student outcomes depend on the quality and congruity of these interactions. Children whose upbringing prepares them for the traditional classroom will see the school experience as an extension of their home environments. The more educators can help create an optimal match among critical interacting factors (e.g., student backgrounds, teacher predisposition, and classroom setting), the better the probability of maximizing students' cognitive and social development. Conversely, the greater the discrepancies between the students' ethnic heritage and classroom ethnicity, the more likely students are to experience educational discontinuities, or mismatch. For ethnolinguistically diverse students, the clash of school experiences with expectations often leads to anxiety, frustration, and insecurity — feelings that can affect academic achievement (Kreuzer & Payne, 1989). Moreover, students whose language is not the dominant one may struggle to see themselves as active participants in classroom interactions and ultimately more far-reaching social, economic, and political processes (Cummins, 1986; Ovando, 1993).

Williams (1992) proposes that ethnolinguistic minorities are trapped in a cycle of educational disadvantages. Stereotypical views and low expectations on the part of some teachers limit the possibility that minority students will break out of the cycle and attain a better quality of life. Conversely, *appropriate* schooling provides the best opportunity to maximize the educational attainment of ethnolinguistically diverse students (Chapa & Valencia, 1993).

Culturally Responsive Pedagogy

The efficacy of distinct teaching practices that suit the needs of ethnolinguistically diverse students has been debated widely among educators. While some (e.g., Yates & Ortiz, 1991) suggest that teachers benefit from assistance provided by multicultural specialists, others (e.g., Claxton, 1990; Kreuze & Payne, 1989) argue against the need for distinctive instructional approaches. Given the absence of a consensus concerning effective instruction for specific cultural groups, teachers must try to develop classroom environments that are responsive to all children. Teachers must develop an awareness of the profound and pervasive influence of culture. They also must develop a culturally responsive pedagogy.

Teacher Attitudes and Perceptions

Data from the National Center for Statistics (1991) indicate that the average American teacher is white, middle class, and monolingual. Within the framework provided by Bandura's concept of reciprocal determinism, it is easy to understand how these characteristics will affect the educational process for ethnolinguistically diverse students. Teacher attitudes and perceptions affect patterns of interaction involving the learner and the school curriculum (Porter & Brophy, 1988). The selection of instructional methods and procedures, classroom organization, and classroom management all are influenced by teacher beliefs and attitudes.

Rosenthal and Jacob (1968), in the classic Pygmalion study on teacher expectations, clearly illustrated the importance of teacher beliefs and predispositions. According to their findings, teacher-student interactions can be based on stereotypical information. Teachers' lack of awareness of their own ethnocentric views and limited cultural competence affect patterns of student-teacher interaction and consequently affect student achievement (Cummins, 1989). As the demand for experienced and culturally knowledgeable personnel increases, these limitations must be addressed by teacher training programs. Teachers cannot be expected to understand fully all the cultures represented by students in today's classrooms; they should, however, understand that students are unique entities influenced by their culture and communities.

Selection of Content and Classroom Materials

The instructional materials and content must be selected with more than a trivial acknowledgment of the importance of culture. Appreciation of cultural differences should not be considered a separate or isolated aspect of curriculum; rather, cultural sensitivity needs to be embedded in the curriculum and materials selected for the classroom (Bennett, 1990). Classrooms should be a pluralistic and democratic setting where students can develop a positive ethnic and national identification (Villegas, 1988).

Instructional Approaches and Methodologies

Just as a culturally responsive pedagogy is not limited to the development of a unit on a particular culture or to the selection of materials enriched by images of diverse ethnic and racial groups, cultural and linguistic differences must also be integral to the teaching *process*. Teachers continually need to modify instructional practices to facilitate and promote academic success for all their students. Burstein and Cabello (1989) describe how lack of consistency between home values and school values can become a source of conflict for any student, particularly those from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. When teacher and learner do not share a common culture, the possibility of a mismatch between the teacher's instructional methodologies and the student's learning style increases significantly. To reduce such a mismatch, teachers need to use equitable pedagogical practices that vary according to student needs and the teacher's preferred style. In a later section of this paper, we address more specifically some implications for classroom teaching.

The Educational Setting

Placement inequities have been evidenced by both over and under representation of ethnolinguistically diverse students in special education programs. As diversity increases within the already large population of students currently underserved by traditional educational practices the need to provide accommodations in both special and general classrooms increases as well. All teachers should be prepared to design a classroom environment that is inclusive of all students and responsive to their cultural backgrounds.

Voltz and Damiano-Lantz (1993) report that students with different cultural backgrounds and limited language proficiency frequently suffer from alienation.

That alienation often contributes to learning difficulties and a low self-concept. They emphasize the crucial role played by supportive classroom environments in promoting a sense of connectedness, active involvement, and ownership in the learning process.

Effective Teaching: Relevant Research

Instruction for culturally diverse students is discussed frequently by educators, but a need remains to provide concrete suggestions for teachers that are based on empirical data. Educators currently are limited by the lack of substantive, data-based, effective instructional practices (Fradd, Figueroa, & Corea, 1989). In this section, we synthesize research findings based on observations of teachers and programs that have proved successful with diverse populations. The studies selected focus particularly on the Hispanic student population, the nation's largest cultural minority. However, the resulting implications for teaching practice may provide valuable insights to teachers of all ethnolinguistically diverse students.

A sample of research indicates that researchers (e.g., Castañeda, 1992; Goldenberg & Gallimore, 1991; Moll, 1992) concur on the effectiveness of distinct educational approaches for increasing the academic success of Hispanic students. Their descriptions of successful programs, case studies, classroom observations, and teacher interviews reveal common elements critical to the effective teaching of diverse students. In Figure 1, we delineate (a) categories identified by experts as critical to ethnolinguistically diverse students' educational attainment (discussed in the previous section of this paper), (b) components of effective instruction as supported by research, and (c) specific suggestions for classroom practice.

Figure 1. Elements Critical to Effective Teaching of Diverse Student Populations.

Factors Influencing Student Achievement—Expert Opinions	Successful Teaching Practices—Research Findings	Implications for the Classroom
Teacher attitudes and perceptions	Positive teacher expectations	<p>Recognize and combat personal prejudice</p> <p>Develop cross-cultural competence—learn about students and their cultures; avoid stereotypes</p> <p>Accept cultural and linguistic diversity</p> <p>Provide challenging lessons; recognize student capabilities</p> <p>Accept responsibility for student success</p>
Selection of content and classroom materials	Context-embedded curriculum and culturally sensitive instruction	<p>Incorporate student language and culture</p> <p>Develop curricula based on commonalities, while acknowledging differences</p> <p>Use a holistic approach emphasizing meaning rather than form</p> <p>Make lessons comprehensible by building on student knowledge</p> <p>Select content and materials that are meaningful to the learner</p> <p>Appeal to a variety of learning styles</p>

Culturally Responsive Pedagogy

Factors Influencing Student Achievement—Expert Opinions	Successful Teaching Practices—Research Findings	Implications for the Classroom
Instructional approaches and methodologies	Interactive and experiential approach	<p>Encourage student participation and interaction</p> <p>Promote critical dialogue</p> <p>Provide effective feedback</p> <p>Allow students to shape curriculum</p> <p>Increase exposure to written and spoken language</p> <p>Relate instruction to student interests</p> <p>Present concepts in a way that relates to students' experiences</p>

Factors Influencing Student Achievement—Expert Opinions	Successful Teaching Practices—Research Findings	Implications in the Classroom
Educational setting	Sensitive and receptive environment	<p>Engage students in classroom design</p> <p>Promote cooperative learning</p> <p>Involve parents and community members</p> <p>Emphasize commonalities</p> <p>Help build friendships</p> <p>Be sensitive to others' feelings and opinions</p> <p>Accept and encourage students' use of their native language</p> <p>Facilitate understanding of and adaptation to classroom routines and regulations</p> <p>Develop a network of support among teachers, administration, parents, and community members</p>

Concerning the first category in Figure 1 (teacher attitudes and perceptions about the student population), research findings indicate that a positive view of minority students is essential to an appropriate education (Moll, 1992). Teachers convinced that minority children are competent and capable of learning through a challenging, innovative, and intellectually rigorous curriculum have reported higher levels of student achievement. This suggests that teachers who maintain high expectations for students and support their transition through increasingly complex tasks reinforce student pride and feelings of efficacy. Conversely, a watered-down approach reinforces feelings of incompetence.

Regarding the second factor (selection of appropriate content and classroom materials), researchers (e.g., Baca & Cervantes, 1989; Bennett, 1990; Cummins, 1989; Scarcella, 1990) support the need for context-embedded and culturally sensitive instructional planning. Meaningful content and student experiences are seen as tools for building student knowledge. Selection of materials should therefore be based on both their relevance to the content to be studied and their relevance to the students.

The third factor in Figure 1 (appropriate teaching practice) encompasses the use of interactive and experiential teaching. Cummins (1989) notes that teachers often have a tendency to assume control of the learning process and thereby promote a passive attitude in students, often detrimental to academic development. On the other hand, Voltz and Damiano-Lantz (1993) suggest that interactive teaching is effective because it promotes feelings of responsibility, pride, and belonging—all critical for the diverse learner. Drill and practice of concepts in isolation thus should be minimized in favor of context-embedded approaches (Bennett, 1990). In addition, Cummins (1986) and Ovando (1993) have stressed the importance of enhancing conceptual development through encouraging students to practice their primary language as well as to become proficient in English. Teachers may need to enlist parents in order to facilitate such communication. Higher-order thinking skills are developed effectively through dialogue that is not constrained by the early stages of second language development, and encouraging use of the primary language helps validate students' cultural identity.

The last factor (the educational setting) is of dramatic importance for students undergoing acculturation. A sensitive and receptive environment where collaboration plays a major role enhances opportunities for success (Landgon & Cheng, 1992). A collaborative approach is most effective when it encompasses teachers, students, parents, and members of the community (Reglin, 1993). Strong partnerships, particularly with parents, enhance the development of supportive learning environments (Flood, Lapp, Villamil-Tinajero, & Nagel, 1995).

Implications for the Classroom

In addition to being founded in expert opinion and relevant research, the guidelines for culturally responsive teaching presented in this discussion can be related to three critical competencies for ethnolinguistically diverse students that Tuginoff (1983) has described. They are (a) participative competence—ability to respond appropriately to class demands and procedural rules, (b) interactional competence—ability to respond to classroom rules regarding discourse and social interaction, and (c) academic competence—ability to acquire new skills and information to construct new concepts. Effective classroom practices can be viewed within the framework these competencies provide.

Participative Competence

An experiential and interactive approach enhances students' ability to respond to classroom demands. Teachers empower their students when they share responsibility for the learning process. They can provide guidance and facilitate learning while acknowledging student knowledge and potential. The encouragement of individual responsibility for learning builds on pride that is often characteristic of Hispanic students (Carrasquillo, 1991) and is consistent with positive teacher expectations evidenced in effective programs.

Student participation in planning and designing the classroom, setting up rules, and developing curriculum tends to promote positive motivation, feelings of belonging, and understanding of classroom demands (Voltz & Damiano-Lantz, 1993). Shared decision making capitalizes on the preference for interpersonal relationships and cooperation that is rooted in many Hispanic cultures, and it helps all students develop an internal locus of control. Conversely, Casas (1988) notes that students who have experienced minority status frequently develop an external locus of control and a tendency to accept life as it is. Teachers who enhance student participation in decision-making processes often can counteract the destructive influences of cultural insensitivity.

Interactional Competence

Collaborative learning or teaming often aids the development of interactional competence for minority students, including those with Hispanic backgrounds (Irujo, 1989). Group work promotes social interactions among students and

teachers. The collaborative process ultimately enhances students' ability to learn and to cope with classroom interaction patterns. To prevent misunderstandings, explicit instruction in rules and task requirements is a necessary part of implementing cooperative arrangements (Scarcella, 1990).

Academic Competence

Context-embedded and culturally sensitive instruction is highly recommended by educators (Baca & Cervantes, 1989; Bennet, 1990; Scarcella, 1990). Rather than teaching concepts in isolation or from an exclusively Anglo perspective, teachers who deliberately use a more holistic, inclusive approach incorporate meaningful and functional student experiences. Students who are taught contextually rich content related to their own cultural backgrounds tend to develop a positive attitude about learning, a heightened self-concept, and pride (Durán, 1988). This type of holistic approach may help lower the dropout rate for many minority students through fostering respect for their cultural heritage.

Conclusion

Changes in demographics are reshaping the nature of our educational system. Characteristic of most of the growing number of ethnolinguistically diverse students, particularly those with Hispanic backgrounds, are low academic achievement and increasing poverty. Culturally responsive pedagogy is essential to reverse these trends and to enhance the students' success.

As educators face the challenges of the coming century, they must embrace culturally sensitive teaching practices. Initially, they must develop self-awareness about predispositions and beliefs. Second, they must learn more about students' cultures to facilitate student-teacher interactions and mutual understanding. Finally, the knowledge and skills developed through information and reflection must be translated into effective teaching.

Research findings, along with expert opinions, indicate that high teacher expectations, appropriate instructional approaches and methodologies, culturally sensitive selection of content and materials, and a receptive and supportive environment are all crucial to the development of a culturally responsive pedagogy. These factors strongly influence educational attainment and are necessary if teachers are to respond effectively to the needs and demands of a changing school population and ultimately to enhance the quality of life for ethnolinguistically diverse students.

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