

Chapter 54

Culturally Responsive Online Learning for Asian/ Pacific Islanders in a Pacific Island University

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ABSTRACT

This chapter examines the socio-cultural contexts of Asian/Pacific islanders in a Western Pacific island to identify key components for culturally responsive online course development. A model for constructing an online learning environment is proposed using McLoughlin and Oliver's (2000) principles as design frameworks for designing a culturally inclusive instructional design that will support Asian/Pacific islanders' learning in blended courses.

INTRODUCTION

The University, a land-grant institution accredited by the Western Association of Schools and Colleges, is the major institution of higher education in the Western Pacific. In a student population of just over 3,000, 90% are of Asian-Pacific islander ethnicity from Guam and the Northern Mariana Islands, the Philippines and the Micronesian islands of Chuuk, Palau, Pohnpei, Kosrae, Yap, and the Marshalls. The remaining population includes a small contingent of white and other ethnic groups. Inherent in the open-door policy of the University is the responsibility of meeting the needs of a culturally and linguistically diverse student population. While the University faculty honors and addresses cultural diversity in the regular classrooms, no studies have been conducted to determine the degree to which cultural inclusivity is addressed, if at all, in the University's online learning environments.

The purpose of this chapter is to examine the socio-cultural contexts of Asian/Pacific islanders in a Western Pacific island to identify key components for culturally responsive online course development. Given that Chamorro Pacific Islanders and Filipinos comprise the largest percentage of students attending the University, the chapter will focus on these two cultural groups. Chamorros make up 43%

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of the student population, while Filipinos comprise 37%. We will begin with a discussion of culturally responsive education, to include online learning environments. We will then introduce Guam and the Chamorro indigenous population, Chamorros' shared colonial history with the Philippines, and the core cultural values of the Chamorro islanders and Filipinos. Finally, we will examine McLoughlin & Oliver's (2000) principles as design frameworks for designing a culturally inclusive instructional design that will support Asian/Pacific islanders' learning in blended courses. Blended courses integrate online with traditional face-to-face activities.

CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE EDUCATION

Culturally responsive education is not a new concept. For over two decades, educators and researchers have looked at ways to develop a closer fit between students' home culture and the school as a response to the growing diversity in classrooms across the United States. This work has had a variety of labels including "culturally appropriate" (Au & Jordan, 1981), "culturally congruent" (Erickson & Mohatt, 1981), "culturally responsive" (Cazden & Leggett, 1981), "culturally compatible" (Jordan, 1985; Vogt, Jordan, & Tharp, 1987), culturally relevant (Ladson-Billings, 1992, 1995) and culturally sensitive (Banks, 1999). The idea behind culturally responsive instruction is that teaching approaches build upon the strengths that students bring from their home cultures, instead of ignoring these strengths or requiring that students learn through approaches that conflict with their cultural values (Au, 2001, p. 3). In doing so, culturally responsive pedagogy places other cultures alongside middle class mainstream culture at the center of the instructional paradigm (Smith, 1991).

Most educators would agree with Au (1993) that for educational experiences to be relevant, they must connect with the students' particular life experiences and perspectives. Students learn in different ways and under different conditions, many of which are governed by their cultural socialization. The more a teacher understands the cultures and other aspects of diversity in a classroom, the more likely the teacher can provide a classroom context that is culturally responsive and that will result in successful, high-quality education for culturally and linguistically diverse students (Au, 1993; Gay, 1988; Gilbert & Gay, 1985; Ladson-Billings, 1992, 1995; Smith, 1991; Vogt, Jordan, & Tharp, 1987). For example, the Kamehameha Early Education Program (KEEP), established in Hawaii in the early 1970s as a research and development center to meet the educational needs of native Hawaiian children, provides an example of how an educational program can develop academic skills if it is compatible with the culture of the children it serves. These children, ethnic minority group speakers of Hawaiian Creole English, were not achieving well in school, particularly in reading (Au & Jordan, 1981).

Efforts at the KEEP school have shown that with an approach that is culturally responsive, these children do learn to read. Co-narration, or "talk story," a familiar feature of the native Hawaiian storytelling tradition, was incorporated into reading lessons (Au, 1980; Au and Kawakami, 1985; Au and Mason, 1983). According to the researchers, one student does not do all the talking, but rather various speakers enthusiastically "jump in" and provide their descriptive and contextual enhancement to the story. Group performance, rather than individual performance, is the focus of this cultural pattern of communication. Through an understanding of children's home and community experiences, cultural congruence was established successfully in the classroom context through KEEP, and literacy learning flourished. As a result, reading achievement scores increased and remained at national norm levels for over a decade (Tharp & Gallimore, 1988, p. 116).

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