


Chapter 8


Validating Student Identities Through Culturally Responsive Curriculum

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ABSTRACT

Diversity in higher education extends beyond race and ethnicity and also includes age, sex, gender, language, culture, and disability status. A culturally diverse student population requires more culturally diverse educators committed to providing quality education. This can be achieved through culturally responsive practices that acknowledge diverse student identities. Culturally responsive educators focus on student learning outcomes and the various ways in which the classroom environment, teaching styles, and curriculum impact student learning. Classroom environments that fail to validate student identities may miss the opportunity to fully educate and empower the next generation of teachers, doctors, architects, counselors, etc. In this chapter, we will discuss the importance of validating student identities through a

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culturally responsive curriculum and various pedagogical practices, approaches, theories, and frameworks. We will also offer a practical case example with questions for educators to consider.

INTRODUCTION

Culturally responsive teaching (CRT) in higher education is pertinent considering the higher enrollment of diverse individuals and the advancement of technology that increases access to diverse cultures, languages, etc. (Larke, 2013; Hutchison & McAlister-Shields, 2020). Despite increased enrollment, racialized minorities struggle to complete the degree requirements in comparison to their Caucasian peers (Hutchison & McAlister-Shields, 2020). For centuries, the academic needs of diverse students have remained unmet (New York State Education Department, n.d.). CRT sheds light on these disparities and acknowledges the role educators play in supporting and validating diverse student identities. CRT is an essential aspect of teacher and educator preparation because it teaches strategies to foster inclusion and academic achievement using culture as a cognitive platform (Hutchison & McAlister-Shields, 2020).

CRT encourages the knowledge and use of diverse teaching strategies that speak to different student experiences (Larke, 2013). Educators who endorse CRT develop a culturally diverse knowledge base, create culturally relevant curriculum, display cultural caring, develop cross-cultural communication skills, and create cultural congruence in classroom instruction (Larke, 2013). They also use “cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning outcomes more salient” (Hutchison & McAlister-Shields, 2020, p. 2). Additionally, culturally responsive educators acknowledge and validate the diverse student identities that enter the classroom.

VALIDATING STUDENT IDENTITIES

Individuals in the classroom are more than “students”/learners. They are fully formed humans with fully formed lives, responsibilities, expectations, and goals. When considering student identity, it is essential to picture a holistic person who is a cultural-being with, perhaps, several identities and intersectionalities. The Stanford Center for Teaching and Learning states, “everyone has many identities” (Baltakmens, n.d.). Individuals in the classroom are beyond the student identity, and they bring all of themselves into the classroom environment. Educators would be

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