

Resource Guide

Overcoming Common Instructor Concerns about Culturally Responsive Teaching

Culturally responsive teaching is the use of the cultural characteristics, experiences, and perspectives of students to encourage their learning (Gay, 2002) more effectively. Chavez and Longerbeam (2016) describe the differences between individuated and integrated cultures in which classroom expectations are likely to differ. They note that an instructor may consider how they present, sequence, and assess materials to ensure a balance between cultural strengths, balancing culturally familiar with challenging experiences for students with a variety of cultural backgrounds.

As an instructor, broaching the topic of culture may come with additional stressors beyond “how do I change my activities to appeal to more cultural strengths?” Simply raising the topic is likely to make your own cultural background more salient (Turner, 1985). Here are a few common faculty concerns around broaching the topic of culture in the classroom:

- **Talking about culture is awkward**
 - Culture and inclusion may be avoided or ignored as emotionally laden “hot button” issues (Watt, 2007) seen as highlighting differences and prejudices seen as potentially offensive to others (Sue et al., 2009). These fears may be assuaged if instructors focus on diversity as an asset rather than a deficit. Awkwardness arising from an unspoken feeling of culture as a taboo topic will be reduced if you, as the instructor, broach the topic in a way that is authentic and inviting to your students. As Addy et al. (2021) point out, inclusive teaching is best approached as a collaborative effort between faculty and students. They suggest building inclusiveness into the course, starting with the syllabus, to set expectations that the classroom is an inclusive and collaborative space where cultural differences are seen as strengths.

- **Concerns about essentializing students**
 - Chavez and Longerbeam (2016) observe that many instructors’ anxiety around culture stems from fears that they may “single out” or essentialize students in their classes. One way to help avoid this is to recognize that, despite broad cultural patterns, each individuals’ lived experience provides them with an array of identities that are unique to them. Showing a desire to understand your students and the ways their culture may contribute to their education will go a long way to creating a space in which culture may be discussed without fear of students feeling stereotyped or essentialized.

- **Good News: Self-reflection is the first step to Culturally Responsive Teaching**
 - If you've never considered how your own culture influences your teaching, expectations, and grading then it may be hard to consider how to broach these topics in the classroom. For this reason, recognizing your own fears, assumptions, and culturally derived habits related to teaching is the first step toward being more culturally responsive in the classroom (Chavez & Longerbeam, 2016). Part of your self-reflection may include an effort to recognize what you are already doing (or not doing) in your classroom to support inclusion. Sharing some of your realizations with your students and showing genuine interest in a growth-oriented, collaborative approach toward culturally responsive teaching will help reduce fears associated with doing those very things.
 - Some ways to achieve this include:
 - Demonstrate an appreciation for diversity in your preparation. For instance, you may offer different versions of instructional materials suited for different cultural frameworks (e.g., bulleted lists vs. visual presentation without specific order)?
 - Encourage students to share with one another while interacting with materials from a diverse collection of authors.

Resources

Addy, T.M., Dube, D., Mitchell, K. A., & SoRelle, M.E. (2021). *What inclusive instructors do*. Stylus publishing.

Chavez, A. F. & Longerbeam S. D. (2016) *Teaching across cultural strengths: A guide to balancing integrated and individuated cultural frameworks in college teaching*. Stylus Publishing.

Gay, G. (2002). Preparing for culturally responsive teaching. *Journal of teacher education*, 53(2), 106-116.

Sue, D. W., Lin, A. I., Torino, G. C., Capodilupo, C. M., & Rivera, D. P. (2009). Racial microaggressions and difficult dialogues on race in the classroom. *Cultural diversity and ethnic minority psychology*, 15(2), 183. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0014191>

Watt, S. K. (2007). Difficult dialogues, privilege and social justice: Uses of the privileged identity exploration (PIE) model in student affairs practice. *College student affairs journal*, 26(2), 114-126.

For more information or to discuss how you might incorporate these ideas into your courses, contact the Reinert Center or visit our website.