

# What Are Key Features Of Culturally Responsive Teaching?

**Communicate high expectations.** Make sure that you let each student know that you expect them to engage, perform, and achieve at high level, rather than making excuses in your own mind for some students who don't participate at optimal levels at times.

**Actively engage your students in learning.** Coach your students to question, consult original material, connect content to their own lives, write to learn, read broadly, build models, test hypotheses, and make time to build relationships with them so that the disappointments that come from trying and not quite succeeding don't cause them to quit learning.

**Facilitate learning.** Build students' capacity to handle new material, solve complex problems, and develop new skills by scaffolding their learning from what they already know through a series of increasingly complex experiences that shift the locus of control from the teacher to the learner.

**Understand the assets and capabilities that students' families bring to their parenting.**

Understand the cultures represented in your classroom by getting to know your students. Visit the neighborhoods where they live. Listen to them talk about their lives. Understand what and whom they care about. Consistently engage in real conversation and dialogue with your students. For example, if you have English language learners in your class, go to lunch with them. Try to understand their reality by actively listening to them and the sense that they are making of the curriculum. Use small group, personalized instruction to help students develop their academic language skills.

**Anchor your curriculum in the everyday lives of your students.** Connect their knowledge and skills to content knowledge. Spend time on helping students learn the content. Use real life, authentic texts. Engage students in inquiry about things that matter to them.

**Select participation structures for learning that reflect students' ways of knowing and doing.**

Put yourself in situations where you're not dominant, where you're a noticeable minority or in a group where you don't know the norms and unspoken rules. Recognize what that feels like and sit with the discomfort. Ask yourself these questions: What did I do to make myself more comfortable? What did I do to be effective or survive in that situation? What did others do that either helped or hindered my effectiveness? What would have helped me in that situation? Use the answers to these questions help you to structure how you include students.

**Share control of the classroom with your students.** Challenge yourself to see yourself in the opposite situation of which you identify. For example, if you see yourself in the non-dominant culture as a woman, in which situations can you see yourself as the dominant culture? Stretch yourself to expand your own self-definition. To help you see life from a different perspective, consciously read books or watch movies about groups other than your own. In addition, explore your own privileges and the impact those have on the organization and the people in it.

**Engage in reflective thinking and writing.** Teachers must reflect on their actions and interactions as they try to discern the personal motivations that govern their behaviors. Understanding the factors that contribute to certain behaviors (e.g., racism, ethnocentrism) is the first step toward changing these behaviors. This process is facilitated by autobiographical and reflective writing, usually in a journal.

**Explore personal and family histories.** Teachers need to explore their early experiences and familial events that have contributed to their understanding of themselves as racial or nonracial beings. As part of this process, teachers can conduct informal interviews of family members (e.g., parents, grandparents) about their beliefs and experiences regarding different groups in society. The information shared can enlighten teachers about the roots of their own views. When teachers come to terms with the historical shaping of their own values, they can better relate to their colleagues and students who bring different histories and expectations.

**Acknowledge membership in different groups.** Teachers must recognize and acknowledge their affiliation with various groups in society, and the advantages and disadvantages of belonging to each group. For example, for White female teachers, membership in the White middle-class group affords certain privileges in society; at the same time being a female presents many challenges in a male-dominated world. Moreover, teachers need to assess how belonging to one group influences how one relates to and views other groups.

**Learn about the history and experiences of diverse groups.** It is important that teachers learn about the lives and experiences of other groups in order to understand how different historical experiences have shaped attitudes and perspectives of various groups. Further, by learning about other groups, teachers begin to see differences between their own values and those of other groups. To learn about the histories of diverse groups, particularly from their perspectives, teachers can read literature written by those particular groups as well as personally interact with members of those groups.

**Visit students' families and communities.** It is important that teachers get to know their students' families and communities by actually going into the students' home environments. This allows teachers to relate to their students as more than just "bodies" in the classroom but also as social and cultural beings connected to a complex social and cultural network. Moreover, by becoming familiar with students' home lives, teachers gain insight into the influences on the students' attitudes and behaviors. Additionally, teachers can use the families and communities as resources (e.g., classroom helpers or speakers) that will contribute to the educational growth of the students.

**Visit or read about successful teachers in diverse settings.** Teachers need to learn about successful approaches to educating children from diverse backgrounds. By actually visiting classrooms of successful teachers of children from diverse backgrounds and/or reading authentic accounts of such success, teachers can gain exemplary models for developing their own skills.

**Develop an appreciation of diversity.** To be effective in a diverse classroom, teachers must have an appreciation of diversity. They must view difference as the "norm" in society and reject notions that any one group is more competent than another. This entails developing respect for differences, and the willingness to teach from this perspective. Moreover, there must be an acknowledgment that the teachers' views of the world are not the only views.

**Participate in reforming the institution.** The educational system has historically fostered the achievement of one segment of the school population by establishing culturally biased standards and values. The monocultural values of schools have promoted biases in curriculum development and instructional practices that have been detrimental to the achievement of students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. Teachers need to participate in reforming the educational system so that it becomes inclusive. As the direct link between the institution and the students, teachers are in a pivotal position to facilitate change. By continuing a traditional "conform-or-fail" approach to instruction, teachers perpetuate a monocultural institution. By questioning traditional policies and practices, and by becoming culturally responsive in instruction, teachers work toward changing the institution.

*Source: Culturally Responsive Teacher Matters! Equity Alliance*