

## Infusing Culturally Responsive Instruction into Daily Teaching

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At times, effective teaching involves some form of differentiation. A less thought of but very effective form of differentiation is culturally and linguistically responsive instruction (CRI). Instructional modifications that are responsive to students' learning needs culturally and linguistically can make substantive differences in achievement.

### Defining Culturally and Linguistically Responsive Instruction

Geneva Gay, in Culturally Responsive Teaching – Theory Practice, and Pedagogy (2000), defines culturally responsive pedagogy as the use of cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning encounters more relevant to and effective for them. It teaches *to and through* the strengths of these students. It is culturally validating and affirming. More simply, culturally and linguistically responsive instruction validates and affirms the home language and culture of students through the use of responsive instructional strategies, which act as bridges or enablers to acceptance, achievement, and empowerment in academic settings and mainstream culture at large. To validate means to make legitimate the cultural and linguistic elements of cultural groups who have been historically discriminated against and denied equal access in American institutions. To affirm means to make positive images, mores, and traditions, which have been made negative and stereotyped through mainstream media and other sources of information. CRI provides a pedagogy for achievement with students who are underserved by the traditional public school as well as enhances learning for students who have experienced success in the system.

### Benefits of Culturally and Linguistically Responsive Instruction

A survey of almost any recent or past standardized data gives a clear picture of who is achieving and who is not achieving in American education. In this context, culturally and linguistically responsive teaching would most benefit the students whom are not only underachieving, behind two or more grade levels, but who are underperforming, not performing at their highest potential due to lack of motivation and/or disengagement. According to Barbara Shade (1997), the benefits of CRI are as follows:

- Students are consistently affirmed in their cultural connections through instruction and environment
- Students are reinforced for academic development
- Classroom interactions stress collectivity rather than individuality
- Students see the classroom as theirs, a place of learning that is physically inviting
- Diversity is celebrated in authentic ways daily

be infused into teaching daily. The five instructional strands with descriptive elements are explained below:

1. Standards Based Teaching Using Culturally Relevant Literature
  - Purposefully utilizing texts that affirm and validate the backgrounds, cultures, languages, and experiences of the students
  - Utilization of effective literacy and language strategies made culturally responsive
2. Systematic Teaching of Situational Appropriateness in Language
  - Building understanding and awareness of the linguistic structures of Standard English as differentiated from the home language
  - Encouraging students to accept and to appreciate the value of code-switching linguistically without losing their identities
3. Building on Cultural Behaviors For A Positive Classroom Community
  - Engaging the students in rigorous activities, which tap into the personal learning styles
  - Providing a litany of protocols for discussion and participation that facilitate the validation and affirmation of cultural behaviors in the classroom and the teaching of situational appropriateness
4. Expanding Academic Vocabulary Through Conceptually Coded Words
  - Validating the knowledge base and home vocabulary of students
  - Linking cultural concepts to academic words and
  - Applying understanding of synonyms/antonyms
5. Creating a Validating and Affirming Learning Environment
  - Accepting, affirmative, risk-free classroom environment
  - Including in the room environment images that are reflective of students' cultures from the instructional texts and materials to the instructional activities, from the classroom walls, to the classroom library

Picture this. A classroom full of students. A tapestry of the cultural and linguistic identities of America. Instruction that meets the needs of each student responsively, in a way that is validating and affirming. Meets the needs of the successful students. Meets the needs of students who are not as successful. The picture is culturally and linguistically responsive instruction.

## References

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