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Culturally Responsive Pedagogy In Action

The term pedagogy refers to the interactions between a student and their teacher, taking into account the learning environment and tasks proposed by the teacher (Murphy, 2018).

Effective pedagogy is based off of the goals of education that an educator has in mind. There are many factors that a teacher takes into consideration before constructing the pedagogy that they feel is appropriate for their classroom. Among all of these factors, the most relevant in today's society is the need for pedagogy to be culturally relevant. Culturally relevant pedagogy is a way of supporting all students in a classroom through instructional material, no matter what their culture may be (Richards et al., 2007). Culturally relevant pedagogy is founded off of the importance of teachers hearing the student voice (Rawls & Robinson, 2019). I believe that before a teacher is put into a classroom it is important for him or her to acknowledge why culturally relevant pedagogies are important, the pros and cons of employing these pedagogies, the strategies they will use to implement it, and reflect on what they have experienced as a student that may have shed some light onto the topic of culturally relevant pedagogies.

In our society today, culturally relevant pedagogies are proving to be more and more necessary and important. The United States is constantly growing and attracting people from different countries and different backgrounds and it is important that teachers remain flexible in the strategies that they are using to educate. With such a rising multicultural population in the United States, it is progressively more important for teachers to identify the students that they are

teaching, the environment they are teaching in, and how it effects the way that their students are going to be able to learn. Remaining flexible in teaching strategies helps teachers connect with students of different backgrounds and educate them effectively. When a teacher is able to identify the group of students that they are teaching and adapt their teaching style accordingly, they will ultimately be more successful. The U.S Department of Commerce published that “by the year 2050 African American, Asian American, and Latino will constitute approximately 57% of all United States Students” (Howard, 2003). This projection shows us just how rapidly culture is growing in the United States and leads us to further conclude that culturally relevant pedagogy will continue to claim its importance on education in a culturally growing society. Educational pedagogies must be constantly growing and changing with the population of the United States itself in order to best educate students. *The Urban Review* explains that the practice of culturally relevant pedagogy serves to empower students so that they are able to examine educational content that they are given critically and ask questions regarding its’ role is in creating a society built on many different cultures (Milner IV, 2010). Having a culturally relevant approach to education enables students to place meaning in their education and better find social and cultural successes in his or her life. There is a growing need for pedagogy to be culturally relevant in the school systems, and people view this with both pros and cons.

Culturally relevant pedagogies are increasingly more important and there are many pros to employing culturally relevant pedagogical strategies in a classroom, especially in a classroom where the teacher may not be of the same race, class, gender, or ethnicity of the students. Culturally relevant education is important because it can serve to connect a students’ home life and school life. The American Evaluation Association provides many pros to culturally relevant teaching through the statement, “Those who engage in evaluation do so from perspectives that

reflect their values, ways of viewing the world, and culture” (Gay 45, 2018). This concept helps to identify that students truly benefit from the employment of culturally relevant pedagogical strategies because they are able to understand material without attempting to change the way that they view things. Students can stand firm in their cultural beliefs and remain themselves, and teachers will adapt their teaching to benefit the students more. Education is not something that can be looked at with one view, and one view only. Each child’s perspective on the world and culture influences the way he or she learns (Gay 45, 2018). When a teacher employs different cultural pedagogy, they put their own cultural views aside and look for what will best benefit the children in their class. Employing culturally inclusive strategies allows each child to feel that they are being taught material fairly, in a way that is beneficial to them. While working towards a culturally relevant pedagogical approach may be difficult and require hard work, the reward of seeing a child remain who they are and understand the information better is far more important. We cannot discount that while there are many pros, there are also a few reasons why some people chose not to enforce culturally relevant strategies.

Though there are many pros of implementing culturally relevant pedagogies, we must also recognize that there are still aspects that are not as great and may need improvement. A teacher is faced with many challenges in having the responsibility of putting these culturally relevant approaches into practice. It is sometimes very difficult, especially when students exhibit cultural characteristics that are so vastly different from the teachers’ own cultural characteristics (Sparks 2013). The biggest con of employing culturally relevant pedagogy in schools tends to be the large responsibility it places on a teacher. A teacher has to really demonstrate the drive to embrace all cultures and ethnicities and reflect a great appreciation for all. This places a huge burden on the teacher to not only learn more about each culture, but also figure out how they can

embrace different cultures in the way that they are teaching their students. More “behind the scenes” work is required for teachers and it is work that they know they might not receive explicit credit or reward for. This can drive teachers away from the field or make them overly stressed. It is often more difficult for educators to look at content from all different possible perspectives in order to best share the material with their students. A teacher that takes time to get to know their students and their cultural background of their students will have more of an internal reward, that others may not see. While some view this task as worth it, it is a difficult task to ask a teacher to create lessons that will suit each students’ culture and learning styles.

Teachers are tasked with the responsibility of continuously learning and adapting to different teaching styles in their classroom environment. Among this challenge is another of consistently making sure their class content is culturally relevant for the students enrolled and making sure what is taught is being taught in a way that students will better understand. Ana Maria Villegas and Tamara Lucas explain a new curriculum proposal for teachers to be prepared culturally in the classroom. Teachers must first broaden their horizons and be conscious of the cultures around them (Villegas & Lucas 2002). This is important for a teacher to first grasp an understanding of different cultures in order to better prepare lessons for students. Teachers must also have an accepting and affirming attitude in the classroom towards all of their students of all different cultures. If a teacher is constantly affirming with students and being affable, the students are more likely to be drawn towards the teacher (Rawls & Robinson, 2019). Teachers should strive to treat all students with the same respect and kindness regardless of their sociocultural background and get to know students at the same deeper level. If a teacher gives off a sense of being “easy to approach” to all students, the teacher is more likely to build a caring classroom for all students, in which students will feel more susceptible to learning from the

teacher. Teachers also must demonstrate commitment for change and facilitate growth in the students' lives and in the classroom as a whole (Villegas & Lucas, 2002). Teachers can manage to make a classroom more culturally relevant by taking part in each of these changes, but overall teachers should prioritize getting to know each and every one of their students to the point that they are able to provide the best access to education that the students could possibly need. "A central task of teachers who are culturally responsive is to create a classroom environment in which all students are encouraged to make sense of new ideas—that is, to construct knowledge that helps them better understand the world—rather than merely to memorize predigested information" (Villegas & Lucas, 2002). Teachers can best serve all students in their classroom by being open to learning and adjusting the classroom to make way for new ideas. The main goal of an educator should be to help their students better understand the world, in whatever way that may be, opposed to memorizing terms short-term in order to pass a test.

In my experience in schools, I have had teachers that teach by assigning memorized terms that have stuck with me short-term, and teachers that have gotten to know me and taught me things that I will carry throughout my life. "Students seem to be interested in the personal experiences of their instructors." (Rawls & Robinson, 2019). Just as mentioned in the Rawls and Robinson book, I remember always being engaged in the classroom setting when teachers would tell stories about their lives and relate it to the material. It helped me to realize the importance of school and exactly what I was learning in terms of how it affects my day-to-day life. It also helped me to realize that the people educating me were also people too, and not just high authority figures. This has had a huge impact on the way that I view Culturally relevant pedagogy. I have seen first-hand how the teachers that made an effort to know me on a deeper-level and cared about my life have been the teachers that I have learned the most from. These

teachers went above and beyond to be vulnerable with their students and connect material to their own lives, as well as find out how they could connect it to the students' lives. I have had many teachers teach us about current events in the context of their own class curriculum. These teachers have helped me to learn things that I will carry for the rest of my life. While, I have experienced many positive aspects of culturally relevant pedagogy in my school system, I have also had negative experiences with culturally relevant pedagogy. Some of my classes had prepared us for the cultural relevance of our community but did not make information applicable for the cultural relevance of the world. Our community was not a very diverse community, therefore there were not many lessons that made us aware of all of the cultures in different surrounding communities. I have seen this fault in my own school growing up and it has only helped me to develop a passion for making my future students aware of many different cultures through curriculum. These school experiences have helped to shape the way that I view Culturally responsive pedagogy and will help me to shape my own pedagogical statement when I become an educator.

Culturally Relevant pedagogies are becoming a more prominent part of education in today's society and this is important to acknowledge, but also leaves teachers with a decision of what should happen in their classrooms. Teachers must weigh the pros and cons of culturally relevant pedagogy before making a final decision on what role it will have in their classroom. Educators must also look to their past experiences with cultural relevance in the education system to better decide what impact that they would like culturally responsive pedagogy to have in their classroom. Overall, it is important for educators to think about how they will have a role in each and every students' lives, and for them to decide what is best for their students to learn in their classroom.

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