



Research into Practice K to 12

Promoting Learning in Culturally Diverse Classrooms

Research Bytes

Culture refers to the socially communicated learned behaviours, patterns of social behaviours, beliefs, values, attitudes, goals, and knowledge that groups use to understand the world. Culture plays an important role in learning, in terms of how information is communicated and in how we think. Our self-identity as learners is grounded in various salient cultural dimensions such as, ethnicity, gender, language, race and religion, to name a few.

Cultural differences can be reflected in the background knowledge, skills, attitudes, norms, and thinking patterns that we bring to new learning situations. They can also affect our comfort level with various social situations and instructional practices (e.g., eye contact, personal space, collaborative versus individual learning, story-telling traditions, etc.).

Culturally responsive practice promotes learning by creating conditions that demonstrate an understanding of our own and our students' cultural identities. A seminal report prepared by the National Research Council (2000) entitled *How People Learn: Brain, Mind, Experience and School* provides a comprehensive research overview on cognition, learning, development and culture. Consistent with this body of research on human learning, the culturally responsive approach:

- builds upon students' prior knowledge, skills, schemas and attitudes
- fosters positive social interactions, interpersonal relations and collaborations
- cultivates value and respect which enhances levels of motivation

Culturally Responsive Strategies

- communicate consistently high expectations of all cultural groups
- connect learning and assessment to equity and inclusive education
- consider cultural identity in student-centred instruction
- contextualize curriculum for cultural relevance
- engage learning, allowing for multiple points of view
- ensure an inclusive, respectful environment and celebrate diversity
- evaluate fairly, considering cultural perspectives
- honour the perspectives of all parents/families
- situate learning within the context of culture

Research in Action – Reflective Practice

1. With which culture(s) do my students identify?
2. What salient behaviours, beliefs, and values from my own cultural identity and background might influence the school or classroom dynamic?
3. In my practice, what am I doing that demonstrates an awareness and understanding of the cultural diversity in my school or classroom?
4. What additional strategies might I consider to incorporate into my practice?

Resources

- Education Alliance at Brown University. (n.d.). *Principles for culturally responsive teaching*. Retrieved from <http://www.alliance.brown.edu/tdl/tl-strategies/crt-principles.shtml>
- Gay, G. (2000). *Culturally responsive teaching: Theory, research & practice*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Gould-Lundy, K. (2006). *Imagine a school...what could high schools look like if we got it right?* Toronto: Canadian Education Association. Retrieved from <http://www.cea-ace.ca/sites/default/files/EdCan-2006-v46-n4-Lundy.pdf>. See also *Imagine a school* [Video webcast] <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tNLAGHdIC6M>
- Gould-Lundy, K. (2008). *Teaching fairly in an unfair world*. Toronto: Pembroke Publishers.
- INTIME (Integrating New Technologies Into the Methods of Education). *Culturally responsive teaching*. Retrieved from: <http://www.intime.uni.edu/multiculture/curriculum/culture/teaching.htm>
- Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat. (2007, March 8) *All Children Can Achieve: A Focus on Equity of Outcome* [Video webcast]. Retrieved from <http://www.curriculum.org/secretariat/march8.shtml>
- National Research Council. (2000). *How people learn: Brain, mind, experience, and school*. Washington, DC: National Academy Press.
- Toronto Catholic District School Board, Literacy and Library Services. (2010, May). *Literacy, diversity and education: An annotated bibliography*. Toronto: Author.

Ontario Ministry of Education documents supporting culturally responsive practice include:

- *Growing Success: Assessment, Evaluation and Reporting in Ontario's Schools* (2010)
- *K-12 School Effectiveness Framework: A Support for School Improvement and Student Success* (2010)
- *Student Success: Differentiated Instruction Educator's Package* (2010)
- *Learning for All K-12 Draft* (2009)
- *Realizing the Promise of Diversity: Ontario's Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy* (2009)
- *Shaping a Culture of Respect in Our Schools: Promoting Safe and Healthy Relationships* (2008)
- *Ontario First Nation, Métis, and Inuit Education Policy Framework* (2007)
- *Many Roots, Many Voices: Supporting English Language Learners in Every Classroom* (2005)