

Self-Report Surveys to Increase Cultural Responsiveness

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Abstract. Social injustices, cultural callousness, and inequitable access to educational opportunities plague global society. The demographic composition of college classrooms is changing. An increase in diversity predicates the need for educators to improve antiquated practices used in homogeneous classes to ensure disadvantaged populations do not continue to be adversely impacted. This paper will help instructors adopt more culturally responsive teaching practices and provide insight into navigating difficult discussions within their classroom. This paper will introduce the pedagogical strategy of culturally responsive teaching (CRT) as well as familiarize readers with cultural awareness and CRT scales to help instructors better understand how their teaching style/methods may be perceived.

Keywords: culturally responsive teaching, diversity and inclusion, social identity, cultural awareness surveys, classroom management self-efficacy, organizational behavior, teaching intervention, classroom exercises.

1. Introduction

The composition of many college classrooms is changing. A report in 2020, by the National Center for Education Statistics, compared college enrollment rates since 2000. According to this report, enrollments for Black students increased from 31 to 37 percent. Hispanic enrollment increased from 22 to 36 percent and American Indian/Alaska Native students increased from 16 to 24 percent (Hussar *et al.* 2020). The percent of Asian students remained relatively unchanged, but their college enrollment rates were still higher than Whites, Blacks, and Hispanics across all reported years.

Analogous to shifting racial and ethnic demographics, a more diverse array of students with additional demographic, cultural, and social identities (i.e., gender,

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gender identity, sexual orientation, religion, socio-economic status, social class, country of origin) now have access to higher education. For example, a survey by Cantor *et al.* (2020) indicated 17 percent of students enrolled in postsecondary education identified as lesbian, gay, bisexual, asexual, queer, questioning, or preferred not to list their sexuality, and 1.7 percent reported being transgender, nonbinary, or questioning. Finding comparable data to determine changes in percentages prior to this date is difficult as many students were and still are afraid to reveal their sexuality. The Fund for Global Human Rights (2023) reports 83 percent of the LGBTQ+ community hide their sexual orientation. Concurrently, a considerable percentage of college students identify as “nontraditional” students. Nontraditional students are defined as meeting one or more of the following characteristics: over 24, employed, a parent, getting a GED, a first-generation college student, or waiting one or more years to start college after high school (MacDonald, 2024). According to a 2015 study, “about 74 percent of all 2011–12 undergraduates had at least one nontraditional characteristic. Moreover, this result is consistent over recent decades: since 1995–96, at least 70 percent of undergraduates possessed at least one nontraditional characteristic” (Radford *et al.* p. 1). These individuals do not fit the profile of a “typical” college student between the ages of 18–22 going to school full-time. Both groups discussed above contribute to the diversity of a classroom.

Universities and instructors should attempt to make all students feel acknowledged, appreciated, and supported for who they are and the unique qualities they bring to a classroom. Developing culturally sensitive courses is essential for faculty to allow students to maintain their cultural competence (Landon & Billings 1995). In other words, an essential component of learning is allowing students to express who they are (e.g., ideations, attire, elocution) in a safe, judgment-free environment. To foster atmospheres of inclusion and facilitate optimal learning experiences, instructors can evaluate their classroom management and see their students as individuals and identify the external influences impacting internal classroom performance.

Social injustices and cultural insensitivity have long been a problem across the globe. Recent events have enabled discourse on social injustice issues to rise to the top of our collective conversations. However, despite greater discourse about inequity, we see more adverse impacts from COVID-19 on Black, LGBTQ+, and Hispanic students, such as higher rates of absenteeism as compared to their peers in higher income groups or White, non-Hispanic students (Herbers *et al.* 2021). These groups are also more likely to suffer from mental health issues (Watts *et al.* 2023), and police brutality (Sosa, 2020), than those in more affluent and majority student groups. In addition to the issues highlighted above, universities in the United States now must navigate through the June 29, 2023, Supreme Court ruling (Supreme Court of the United States), limiting the use of race and affirmative action programs despite the National Center for Education Statistics in 2018 reporting significant graduation rate disparities based

on race and ethnicity: Asian (74%), White (64%), Hispanic (54%), Black (40%), and American Indian/Alaska Native students (39%) (de Brey *et al.* 2019). Affirmative action made it possible for universities in the United States to include race as one of many factors when considering qualified applicants. This allowed previously under-represented groups to be admitted in higher percentages than ever before. Historically, when affirmative action is removed, there is usually a clear, significant drop in minority enrollments (Totenberg 2023).

Such disparities inherently expose the need for us all to be a part of a solution. The Association for the Advancement of Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB) lists inclusivity and global unity as two of their values. According to AACSB's 2020 *Guiding Principles and Standards for Business Accreditation and Interpretive Guidance*, accredited schools are expected to be driven by the guiding principle of diversity and inclusion, stating "...the school is expected to demonstrate a commitment to advancing diversity and inclusion issues in the context of the cultural landscape in which it operates. The school fosters awareness, understanding, acceptance, and respect for diverse viewpoints related to current and emerging issues" (p. 16). These principles can be used by AACSB accredited schools to fulfill their obligation to foster diversity and inclusion in their programs.

This paper provides instructors with a way to self-reflect on classroom ideals and makes suggestions for improving classroom dynamics and building a rapport with students. Simultaneously, this paper delineates a survey-based activity to assess cultural awareness. This paper will briefly introduce readers to a culturally responsive teaching (CRT) instructional pedagogical strategy focused on "addressing the needs of all students" (Larke 2013, p. 39) and delineate scales indexing various aspects of culturally responsive teaching and cultural awareness.

2. Literature Review

Theoretical Foundation

The diverse array of students in our learning environments have unique social identities beyond those of historic demographic delineations. The concept of intersectionality is something instructors should consider getting familiar with. It emphasizes that individuals cannot be fully understood or categorized solely based on one aspect of their identity, but rather, that their experiences are shaped by the intersection of multiple identities and social structures (Crenshaw 1989). People identify as Black, lesbian, and Protestant, or southern, non-binary, White, and Catholic all at the same time but with differing levels of emphasis on each characteristic. Jones *et al.* (2012) "found that sense of self was more than a series of identity categories strung together" (p. 716). In other words, people can have the same identity categories (e.g., Catholic) but have very different experiences,

perspectives, and cultural norms associated with those identities. Similarly, our students are not all impacted the same way by events in their environment so, in turn, they may respond differently to said events and interactions with instructors (Milner 2011). Similarly, faculty feedback, examples, and instructional practices are not experienced uniformly by all students (Gay 2002).

Instructors are encouraged to understand students as individuals and avoid broad generalizations. Pretending “everyone is the same” or purporting “racial neutrality” creates biases and causes more harm than good (Ferguson 2003). Viewing everyone as homogeneous or stereotyping students based on demographic/cultural characteristics nullifies our ability to genuinely know and help them. Burke-Smalley (2018) postulates “rapport” with individual students can lead to a multitude of positive outcomes such as motivation, trust, learning, engagement, and retention. Burke-Smalley (2018) states “rapport building” involves, “(a) personalized connection, (b) supportive communication, and (c) accessible interaction” (p. 355). This collaborative state of mutual respect primarily occurs when instructors genuinely want to get to know their students and facilitate opportunities for greater communication and understanding.

Culturally responsive teaching (CRT) is based on the notions that not every learner is the same and that forcing students to acquiesce to predominant cultural norms and teaching practices hinders learning. CRT has been around since the early 1990s, and multiple articles as well as books have been published on this subject since then (i.e., Ladson-Billings 1992; Gay 2000; Gay 2010). These sources stress the importance of three criteria in CRT: academic competence, cultural competence, and critical thinking. First, students need to achieve academically despite possible injustice in the classroom. Second, students need to develop cultural competence under classroom conditions where they feel safe to be themselves. This means they can own who they are and not be judged or criticized for it. Third, students need to develop critical thinking skills that allow them to challenge prejudice and other forms of injustice. Students “must develop a broader sociopolitical consciousness that allows them to critique the cultural norms, values, mores and institutions that produce and maintain social inequities” (Ladson-Billings 1995, p. 162). When implemented effectively, these criteria help students build self-efficacy, share with others, and develop the skills to push back against prejudice.

Transformations in historical orientations and approaches to education to embrace diversity are long overdue (Gay 2010). Educators should consider providing educational opportunities that celebrate diversity and address a diverse group of learners (Maasum *et al.* 2014). It is every educator’s responsibility to provide culturally relevant curriculum and support (Ladson-Billings 2006). Creating culturally congruent educational opportunities in university settings may not be an easy endeavor but is felicitously timed and important, especially in organizational behavior (OB) courses.

CRT and organizational behavior (OB) are interconnected in several ways. OB encompasses the study of how individuals and groups behave within an