A WCET Closer Look at Culturally Responsive Digital Learning

Overview of Topic

Culturally responsive digital learning is a powerful tool for promoting inclusivity, equity, and academic success in education (Ladson-Billings, 2014; Gay, 2018). This approach recognizes and values the diverse cultural backgrounds and experiences of students and uses technology to create personalized learning experiences that incorporate culturally relevant content and teaching strategies (Ford & Grantham, 2020). By embracing cultural diversity, educators can create a more inclusive and empowering educational environment that meets the unique needs and perspectives of each learner (Benjamin & Henry, 2018).

At the heart of culturally responsive teaching is being responsive to students' academic and social-emotional needs. With care and planning, any educator teaching online can create a culturally responsive virtual classroom, one that can provide a space where, every day, students feel welcomed and valued (Mahmood, 2020).

In her book *Culturally Responsive Teaching And The Brain*, Zaretta Hammond explains that high-trust, low-stress environments can help marginalized students effectively process and retain learned information. When students feel safe and trust that we have true learning partnerships with them, they will be more likely to take the necessary risks needed to learn (Mahmood, 2020).

Examples of Culturally Responsive Teaching include:

- Course syllabus that includes representative and inclusive language.
- Course materials that represent different cultures, genders, identities, class, and race.
- Connecting with students on a personal level to build trust.
- Personalized learning.
- Incorporating an array of student experiences and voices into course content and work groups.
- An environment where differences are appreciated.

Contents

Definitions

Culturally Responsive Pedagogy

Kristal Moore Clemons defines culturally responsive pedagogy as "including students' cultural experiences in all aspects of the learning" (Roth, 2021).

Culturally Responsive Teaching

Geneva Gay (2010) defined "culturally responsive teaching" as "using the 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."

Digital Learning

According to Every Learner Everywhere (2021), any instructional practice that effectively uses technology to strengthen a student's learning experience, including a broad range of content and communication tools, curricular models, and instructional strategies.

Inclusive Course Design

Inclusive course design is an iterative process which begins with adopting a reflective and equity-minded approach to teaching and learning. An equity-minded approach involves intentionally applying pedagogical approaches and strategies to curriculum development and assessment that engage students in meaningful, relevant, and empowering learning experiences as well as identifying and removing barriers to student success (Diatta-Holgate).
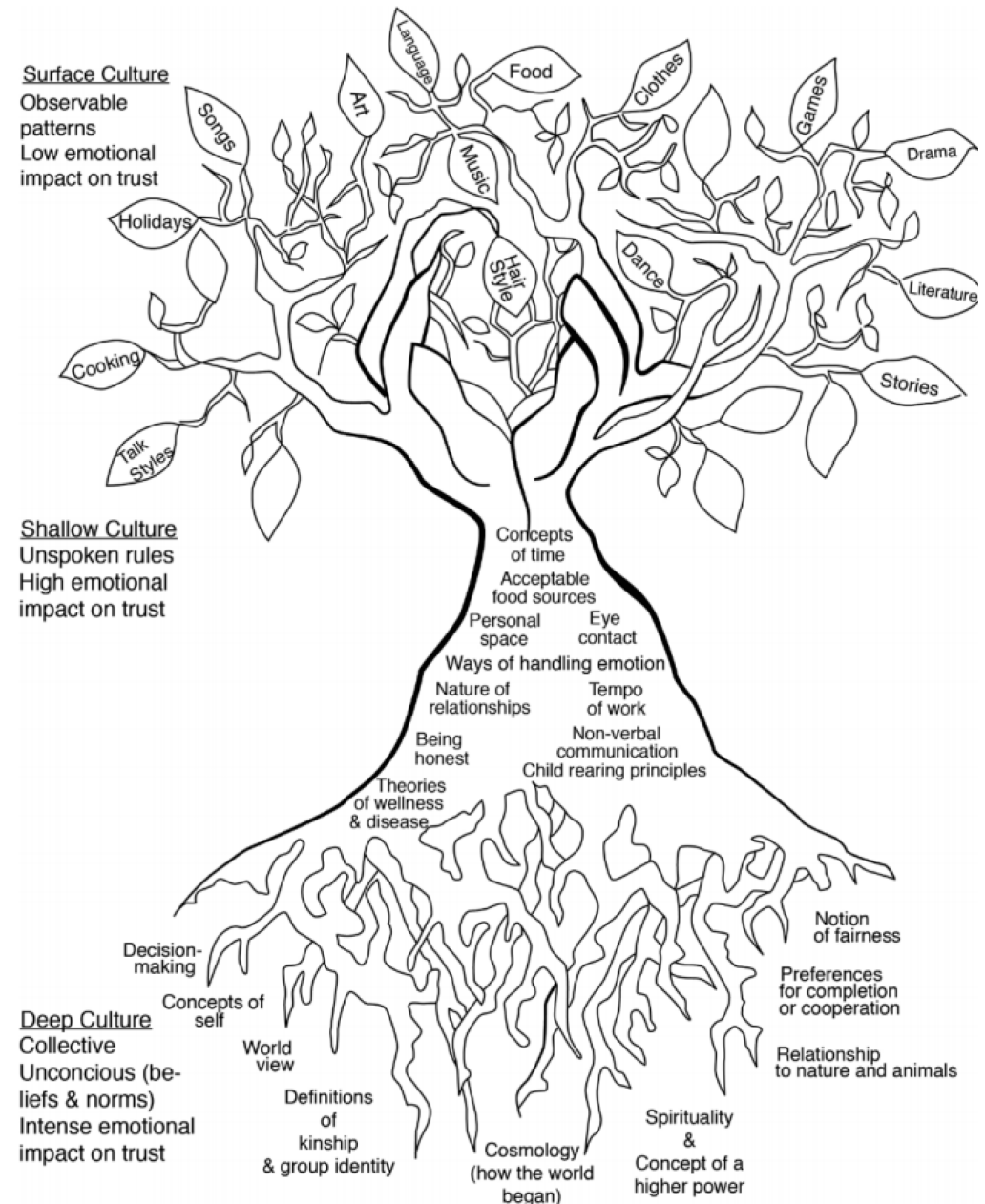
Interpersonal Bias

May shape one's approach to teaching and learning. While individuals may not intend harm, they often operate under institutional, societal, and political systems or belief systems that maintain an inequitable status quo (Every Learner Everywhere, 2010).

Main Takeaways

Effective culturally responsive teaching and learning requires ongoing self-reflection and engagement with students. Knowing students is vitally important, especially in a digital format. Who are they? What are their stories? Below are three key considerations to help embed culturally responsive teaching and learning in digital learning.

1. Digital learning can support culturally responsive teaching and learning in the following ways:
    *   Videos, stories, translation tools, and other multimedia can help students understand different cultures, experiences, and perspectives.
    *   Personalize learning and support for students. Promote active learning.
    *   Provide diverse examples that connect with students in a personal way.

2. There are three levels of culturally responsive teaching (Hammond, 2014):
    *   Surface — observable and concrete elements of culture, such as food and music.
    *   Shallow — cultural norms and attitudes, communication styles, nonverbal cues.
    *   Deep — tacit cultural knowledge, worldview, guiding ethics.

View the *Culture Tree* (Hammond) for a visual representation of the levels.

Figure 1: Zaretta Hammond, Culturally Responsive Teaching & the Brain

What are some examples of what other higher ed institutions or organizations are doing related to this topic?

- Community College of Aurora in Colorado offers multiple classes and workshops for instructors designed to confront equity gaps that impact degree completion.
- Community College of Baltimore County has educated over 1,500 of their instructors and staff about culturally responsive teaching in their center for teaching and learning. They also offer train-the-trainer courses and put on conferences on the subject.
- Columbus State Community College in Ohio offers a Global Diversity and Inclusion Certificate through courses on microaggressions, diversity, and implicit bias.

Considerations for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

Culturally relevant digital teaching and learning, done well, inherently increases diversity, equity, and inclusion for learners. Students who are part of a community of learners and can connect to course content and lessons on a personal level are more successful.

According to Every Learner Everywhere's "Getting Started with Equity" (2021), educational equity requires:

- Established learning environments that empower, encourage, and equip students to be successful in their academic journey.
- Committed educators and administrators who cultivate spaces and communities that are rigorous and culturally affirming.
- Valuing student's stories, cultures, and experiences by allowing them to speak and write in their own voice even if that does not align with written or spoken standard English.
- Personalizing and active learning.
- Ongoing professional development for faculty, staff, and administrators.

Culturally relevant practices should be part of an institution's overall DEI strategy and plan.

DEI and Technology

Quality broadband and up-to-date devices, platforms, and programs are not readily available for all learners. Understanding the access levels students have is essential, as that understanding informs the accommodation needed for learners to be successful. Broadband infrastructure is expanding post-pandemic but there are large swaths of areas that continue to have no or limited internet access, especially for Tribal Colleges and Universities.

Additionally, students may not be comfortable with the technologies required for digital learning. Helping students gain skills and confidence with technology is instrumental to their academic success. Being a good digital citizen is also vital. Before adopting a new technology for a course or across the institution, question if a new technology is necessary or duplicative. Every Learner Everywhere (2021) recommends the following considerations prior to adopting a new edtech tool:

- Does this tool provide a benefit to students they cannot access through technologies the institution already licenses such as the learning management system, virtual meeting software, or other enterprise platforms such as Google, Outlook, and Adobe?
- Is the cost to students for the digital learning tool commensurate with the benefit of the tool?
- Is there a departmental plan for training students to use the digital learning tool and for training faculty or the IT team to support students in their use of the tool?
- Does the tool support evidence-based teaching practices such as interactive learning, low-stakes practice for mastery, and data analytics to give instructors real-time information about student learning and to give students information that helps them take control of their learning process, including tips for being a better learner?
- Offer scholarship access codes for digital courseware and course materials for your students.
- Choose course materials that can be used offline or on a mobile device and are accessible to screen reader technology.
- To ensure full accessibility of your course and course materials, follow UDL guidelines for course design.

The Opportunity of Equitable Digital Learning

More Information

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About WCET

WCET is the leader in the practice, policy, & advocacy of digital learning in higher education. We are a member-driven organization that brings together colleges, universities, higher education organizations, and companies to collectively improve the quality and reach of digital learning programs.

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More Resources and References

Additional culturally responsive teaching resources

[ATD Teaching & Learning Institute: Changing The Narrative: Advancing Culturally Responsive Professional Learning](#) Virtual conference recordings

[Culturally Responsive Curriculum Scorecards](#) from The Metropolitan Center for Research on Equity and the Transformation of Schools at New York University.

[Curating Inclusive Course Content That Centers Students And Equity](#) Webcast from Achieving the Dream and Every Learner Everywhere.

[Designing Assessments Through A Culturally Responsive Lens](#) Webcast from Achieving the Dream and Every Learner Everywhere.

[Designing and Teaching an Inclusive Course: A Guide for Faculty](#) from Wiley University Services.

[Equity and Assessment: Moving Towards Culturally Responsive Assessment](#) from The National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment.

[Getting Started with Equity: A Guide for Academic Department Leaders](#). Every Learner Everywhere and Intentional Futures.

[How Do I Make My Course Content Inclusive?](#) from The Northwestern University School of Professional Studies.

[The Importance Of Knowing And Teaching To Your Students In Digital Learning](#) Webcast from American Public and Land-grant Universities.

[Partnering to Promote Equity and Digital Learning](#) from Digital Promise and Every Learner Everywhere.

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