



Developing Cultural Diversity in Virtual Classrooms

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Abstract

In recent years, online education has gained popularity. With the emergence of the COVID-19 epidemic, online learning has grown in importance as an alternative to conventional classrooms. As more education is delivered online, instructors must discover methods to build online settings that foster a sense of community and pleasant educational experiences for all students. This involves thinking about how to foster cultural diversity in the online classroom. Promoting cultural variety in the virtual classroom greatly enhances virtual learning. Finding successful approaches to foster cultural diversity in unconventional learning contexts, on the other hand, may be difficult. Educators need culturally sensitive teaching competence. A good grasp of the goals of culturally responsive education prepares and empowers educators to innovate in order to guarantee cultural diversity is embraced in their online classrooms.

Introduction

What is the significance of equality, diversity, and inclusion in schools? A lack of variety and inclusivity in the classroom may make kids feel alienated, raise anxiety levels for minority or somehow disenfranchised pupils, and make them more likely to be bullied [1]–[3]. Minority kids, Homosexual students, and students who engage in activity that deviates from traditional gender norms are thought to be more vulnerable to bullying, which may lead to academic issues, mood swings, and even suicide attempts [4]–[6]. Creating school settings where kids are encouraged to recognize and appreciate diversity is critical to their safe learning and safety.

Educators believe that instructors who are culturally aware and adept, as well as maybe diverse personally, can help close racial performance gaps. Part of an educator's responsibility is to assist students realize how their lives affect one another and how they may influence and alter the world at large. Training and educating culturally competent instructors who have the knowledge, abilities, and attitudes needed to successfully handle the requirements of a culturally varied student group is an important issue of discourse in recent times [7].

You can enable children to feel comfortable, create healthy relationships, and make a positive influence on others by supporting and celebrating diversity in your classrooms. Diverse learning environments are safe learning places [8]–[11].

Cultural diversity inside the classroom entails more than just honoring other colors and nationalities. It also entails identifying how they, together with gender, gender identity, ability, religion, and socioeconomic position, impact people and influence how they learn and view the world. Promoting cultural variety has several advantages for all students [14], [15], [16].

Students may check their biases when they discuss the problems, experiences, and opinions of others. New knowledge about what others have gone through may inspire pupils to reconsider long-held beliefs and perspectives. They may think about how they might react in similar situations or if they have unjustly judged others because of their color or sexual orientation. This method allows students to reconsider how they generate ideas and attitudes, as well as to cultivate empathy and awareness for others [17], [18].

Creating learning settings that value diversity allows all students to achieve. It makes pupils from all backgrounds feel included and gives the message to the class that all are welcome [21], [22]. Creating a secure atmosphere allows pupils to form positive connections with one another. When kids see their diversity valued, they typically gain confidence. Furthermore, classrooms that are intended to accommodate the requirements of students from various backgrounds make learning more accessible and equal [23]–[25]. This has the potential to play a significant role in resolving racial inequities in student accomplishment.

Types of Cultural Diversity in the Classroom

Teaching diversity inside the classroom is an important aspect of building a cultural diversity policy for the school or district as a whole. Schools may do their share to promote policies and processes for diversity and inclusion in schools, but teachers can apply diversity and inclusivity in the classroom on a regular basis with their students [26]–[28]. The following are some things that instructors should think about in the classroom.

Race

Although children learn about race, they may still perceive skin color and the disparities between individuals, particularly in a racially varied culture like the United States. Acceptance and sensitivity to race should pervade the classroom on all levels—between students and between instructors and students [30]–[32]. Teachers must appreciate and realize the influence of race on their pupils just as much as students must recognize it among themselves.

Ethnicity

Aside from physical distinctions, culture and legacy play an important role in shaping unique identities. While race is restricted to a few categories, ethnicities include whole nations, cities, communities, and tribes. Understanding your pupils' nationalities can help you realize the distinct interests and views that their ethnic origins influence [34]–[36].

Language

Ethnicity may influence a student's main or secondary language, and pupils from immigrant households may speak a language other than English entirely at home. This might result in language difficulties between parents and instructors, as well as linguistic obstacles among kids who may not be fluent in English [38]–[40].

Religion

Religions may be as diverse as ethnic origins, and it is critical to respect each student's religious views and practices. Religion is often not incorporated into a student's educational life outside of parochial schools unless the student's conduct is directly impacted by their religious views. Teachers should also note that pupils may struggle to grasp that the religious views in which they were reared may differ from the beliefs and lifestyles of their friends [42], [43].

Economic

Students come from a variety of socioeconomic backgrounds, which may be influenced by their upbringing, the area in which they live, and the income levels of their family. These inequalities might manifest themselves in a variety of ways, including personal technology gadgets, clothing, transportation, and Christmas presents from family members. Some children may be required to work after school or hurry home to care for a younger sibling, but others may be allowed to engage in extracurricular activities. Remember that a student with few things may not come from a low-income home, or a student from a poor family may have purchased a brand-new iPhone using their own money. Not everything is as it looks, and every parent provides for their children in their own unique manner [45]–[47].

LGBTQ

A young person's sexuality and gender identity are critical aspects of their journey. It is frequently during their period of study that they come to terms with who they are. These personal journeys may require teacher and counselor help or peer acceptance, so teachers should keep a look out if they detect adolescents suffering in any of these areas [49]–[53].

Culturally Responsive Classrooms: Teachers' Approaches

What does it mean to promote cultural variety in the education context? Culturally responsive teaching is used in this technique to promote understanding between instructors and students. Teachers must grasp how cultural differences may lead to communication failures that damage pupils and hinder them from attaining their full potential [55]–[57].

Self-Awareness Enhancement

Recognizing one's own possible biases and how one's personal identity effects their views is a crucial step in developing a culturally responsive classroom. Teachers might then analyze how such factors impact their contact with students and form their expectations of them. Teachers may become more conscious of their implicit biases, which may impede their capacity to engage with parents or lead them to ignore chances to incorporate more representative educational materials [59]–[62].

Presenting Diverse Points of View

Culturally responsive classrooms look for methods to include student perspectives and experiences. This might include creating a curriculum that conveys the tales of many groups or allowing students to express their individual experiences and interests [64], [65]. The learning of literature, science, math, and art, for example, should incorporate the achievements of people of color. This allows students who are usually underrepresented in these disciplines to identify with remarkable accomplishments. Teachers may also develop projects that enable students to advocate for issues or subjects that are important to them.

Teaching to Different Learning Styles

Culturally responsive teaching entails recognizing varied learning styles and instructing in ways that are sensitive to students' specific cultural learning processes, in addition to linking material to the cultural backgrounds of diverse groups. In certain cultures, for example, information is passed down verbally and via action. As a result, instructors might structure lessons around games or tales [67]–[70].

Promoting Cultural Diversity in the Classroom

We aspire to create the safest educational settings and experiences possible for our kids. It is both a responsibility and a goal, and it entails teaching diversity to students. It necessitates not just the creation of physically safe and secured settings, but also the protection and promotion of students' emotional health, making them feel valued, nourished, and included. As educators, we can model equality and diversity in our classrooms and educate kids how to be more inclusive [72]–[74]. We can all work together to establish culturally varied safe environments that promote, welcome, and celebrate our diversity by doing the following:

1. Meeting child and their family

The dynamics of a student's home life might have an influence on their mood, stress levels, punctuality, communication styles, and other factors. Figuring out as much as you can about your kids and their families can get you started on the path to developing a culturally relevant classroom. Begin the school year by encouraging families to complete surveys on their cultural origins and customs, parent jobs, and household makeup. Knowing whether a kid comes from a military family, is in foster homes, is homeless, or has a sick sibling or parent at home allows you to work with students and families to best assist them and overcome any problems that may emerge [75]–[78].

2. Media representatives

Culturally diverse classrooms should include images, books, music, flags, and media that display and convey the experiences of people from many ethnic, racial, and gender origins, as well as oppose conventional gender norms [79]–[81]. Include LGBTQ-inclusive media that depicts a range of family configurations, such as same-sex parent, adopted, and multi-generational families [82], [83].

3. Acting out roles

Students increase cultural knowledge via role-playing exercises. With younger pupils, this might entail incorporating culturally relevant clothing and cuisine into dramatic play, as well as playing with dolls representing other races and cultures. You may plan more complicated exercises for older kids, such as offering pupils particular situations to play throughout a week that embody distinct cultural experiences [84]–[86]. For example, have students act out a student in foster care who is always traveling around, a single mom managing a budget to provide for three kids, or a guy who is a dancer or a stay-at-home dad.

4. Language that is inclusive

Incorporate a variety of languages in your teaching. Label learning areas and classroom resources ("blocks," "computer," "library") in two or more languages, and display classroom rules. They should be reviewed often with pupils. Encourage awareness in kids when new concepts, language, or cuisine are presented by prohibiting the use of words like "strange" or "disgusting" to characterize unfamiliar items. Avoid bringing up gender roles and conventions in the classroom or in conversations about family life [87]–[90].

"What do you and your family eat when you're home?" for example. rather than "What does Mom cook?" Instead of "mom and dad," support the use of neutral gender pronouns and phrases like "family" or "parents."

5. Divide students into groups for learning activities.

Students may gain cooperation, teamwork, and leadership qualities via group learning. To take it a step further, organize your pupils in diverse groups that mirror the variety of the classroom. Students could learn the same amount from them as they can from the lessons you teach them, and it may offer up opportunities for interaction that they would not have otherwise [91]–[93].

6. Ask the question, "What can we learn about you?" days

These classroom sessions, similar to show-and-tell, let students to come up in front of the class and present something new to their peers, or just express what makes them unique or exceptional. The student may teach the class a few lines in a second language, demonstrate how to manufacture a craft specific to their origin, or display a slideshow of holiday celebrations with their immigrant family [94], [95].

7. Penfriends

Penpals may help children learn about individuals from various cultural experiences and background. Develop a penpal program for your students by contacting instructors at a local or international school. Matching kids with penpals from diverse ethnic and cultural origins who have same interests might help pupils see how we can have a lot in common with individuals from different backgrounds [96]–[98].

8. Make Diversity a lesson theme.

Diversity should not be restricted to social studies classrooms. Regardless of topic, instructors may take a pause at any time to educate about diversity, tolerance, and acceptance. Although there are numerous less direct approaches to make learners feel comfortable and to help students recognize each other better, a direct approach may occasionally help students acquire the culturally sensitive exposure and life skills they need [99]–[101].

In The Classroom, How Do You Handle Diversity?

There are numerous approaches for educators and administrators, like principals and coaches, to ensure that the classroom atmosphere and curriculum are sensitive to our society's expanding ethnic variety. These tactics will promote cultural understanding in all children, enhance each student's sense of identity, and cultivate inclusion in the classroom community [102]–[104].

1. Become Familiar with Your Students

Understanding each unique student is the first step in promoting cultural awareness in the classroom. Learn about each student's cultural background, interests, learning methods, and what distinguishes them. A genuine interest in knowing about each kid and their culture can help you create trust and form a link with them, making them feel appreciated. If children feel valued and at ease with the instructor, they are more likely to feel at ease communicating with and respecting their classmates - and communication is at the heart of a culturally aware and inclusive classroom [105]–[107].

2. Keep Consistent Communication

Aside from getting to know your students, instructors should keep in touch with them throughout the semester or school year. Scheduling one-on-one sessions with students to "check in" on a regular basis can enable you to continually enhance how accessible the classroom is to all kids. Students might discuss whether or not they feel included in the classroom culture. This may assist in identifying problems or methods to enhance the overall experience. It's also a chance to talk about their accomplishments in class and provide advice on how they may better based on their unique requirements as a student [95], [108], [109].

3. Recognize and Respect Every Student

It is equally critical for kids to recognize and appreciate their own and one another's various backgrounds. Teachers should encourage pupils to investigate and learn about their own ethnic and cultural heritage when appropriate. This helps students comprehend their own culture as well as the distinctions and subtleties between themselves and their classmates [110], [111]. As an added benefit, this may be a terrific ice breaker activity, with students giving presentations about their family customs and culture to help introduce the class to things outside of their normal comfort zone. Recognizing these disparities and fostering a safe environment for conversation promotes understanding in the classroom and beyond. Also, as you urge children to learn about their different histories, remember to emphasize what is inappropriate as well as the difference between cultural pride and appropriation. Learning how to discuss various cultures in a courteous and mature manner is critical for success in life outside of the classroom [112]–[114].

4. Exercise Cultural Sensitivity

While it is important to have an open discourse among students, it is also critical to be respectful to everyone's culture, values, and language problems. Take the time to grasp each student's cultural subtleties, from learning methods to language use, and utilize this knowledge to develop your lesson ideas. Provide English language learners, for example, with suitable and relevant materials to assist them enhance their English comprehension abilities. Create learning experiences that are more interactive and involve cooperation rather than typical lecture style teaching. These factors will assist guarantee that every student feels included, has the freedom to study in their own manner, and has the opportunity to achieve [115]–[117].

5. Include Diversity in Your Lesson Plan

The classroom atmosphere is vital for creating cultural understanding, but you should also make sure that diversity is reflected in your lesson plan. For example, extend history classes to include topics other than US history and culture. Alternatively, utilize allusions and comparisons to various cultures in your courses and assignments to assist students from varied backgrounds connect on a personal level. Bringing in varied speakers to provide different points of view and real-life context to different themes is another wonderful method. Cultural awareness and diversity may be included into your lesson plan in a variety of ways, depending on the cultures represented in your classroom and the subject you're teaching. Always strive to convey and link teachings to real-world concerns, regardless of the topic. When there is a real-life example for pupils to connect to, it is simpler to foster cultural understanding in your teaching [118]–[120].

6. Allow Students Flexibility and Freedom

When it comes to classroom management, teachers often feel compelled to adopt a harsh, authoritative stance. Because the most useful lessons are typically learnt via a student's personal experiences, allowing them considerable autonomy in the course creates a stronger connection to the curriculum. Allow students to read and present their own resources related to the core lesson so that they may approach the subject from their own point of view. As a teacher, you may serve as a facilitator, encouraging discourse and constructive debate among varied viewpoints. Group projects are also an excellent approach to introduce students to different points of view while enabling them to collaborate to investigate and solve an issue. This will also help students prepare for a varied job in which they will need to collaborate with a variety of individuals to achieve their professional objectives [121]–[123].

Overcoming Obstacles in Developing Culturally Diverse Virtual Classrooms.

Online classrooms provide significant alternatives to conventional classrooms, particularly when face-to-face learning is not possible, but they also pose issues. Teachers must discover strategies to overcome pupils' sense of isolation and assist them in remaining focused in distracting home circumstances. Furthermore, instructors in charge of online classrooms must overcome any challenges that may obstruct culturally appropriate education [125], [126].

Communication Difficulties

One of the most significant distinctions between online and conventional classrooms is how professors and students interact. Teachers must think carefully about how to include culturally responsive communication into the virtual classroom [127]–[129].

Written interactions are often the majority of communication in online courses. However, for many children, this might hinder their capacity to comprehend and express themselves. This change may be difficult for English language learners in particular. Finding technologies that allow for a broader choice of communication styles may result in a far more inclusive online learning environment. Using communication technology platforms like as Zoom and Blackboard Collaborate, for example, may provide students with more chance to share themselves and listening to others. Live chats, voice tapes, and video-recorded classes may also be effective tools for teachers to improve culturally responsive communication [130]–[132].

Interpretation Difficulties

Communication breakdowns may also lead to misunderstandings. Students from various backgrounds have particular obstacles in online classes since they might readily perceive things differently. As a result, instructors must think about the architecture of their online classrooms [133]–[135]. Teachers should do the following to increase cultural variety in the online classroom:

- Pay attention to the quantity of information on a page [129], [136].
- Incorporate instructions and learning goals into the online learning environment.
- For the visually handicapped, use captioned movies and photos with alt text.

Furthermore, instructors may create online lessons that take into account people's tendency to scan websites while reading online. The aesthetics of online classrooms may also influence their accessibility to a wide variety of students. Students from various backgrounds, for example, may understand pictures, symbols, and even colors differently. With this in mind, instructors should use pictures and images that take into account varied cultural views [137], [138].

Teachers who want to create culturally diverse online classes should think about the following:

- How pupils from various backgrounds perceive photos, movies, and art.
- If the chosen medium represents cultural diversity
- If the online classroom provides many sorts of interaction and enables students to express themselves in various ways.

Conclusion

Equitable education requires careful talks about how to accommodate cultural diversity in both online and conventional learning contexts. Understanding the impact of culture in molding how children learn, communicate, and flourish necessitates the development of the necessary skills and knowledge. It is more vital than ever for teachers to include culturally responsive education in the classroom, whether they are teaching elementary, middle, or high school students, in our increasingly varied and global society. And the growth in diversity isn't limited to race and ethnicity; it may also include students from various religions, socioeconomic backgrounds, sexual orientation, gender identity, and linguistic backgrounds.

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