

Culturally Responsive Teaching: Theory, Research, and Practice, Third Edition

Geneva Gay

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Geneva Gay's book, now in its third edition, demonstrates the rich resources available for positively integrating cultural diversity in the classroom. Essentially a textbook for college or masters-level students preparing to teach in the K-12 system, this book offers to scholars in religious fields an in-depth review of the literature concerning the challenges of our current educational models, as well as constructive suggestions for changes teachers can make in their own classrooms. Each chapter is full of references to additional sources, laying out an argument for the importance of culturally-responsive teaching in conversation with theorists and educators from the past century. Beginning with the assertion that the PreK-12 educational system as it exists now is inequitable, particularly for children of color, Gay demolishes the deficit-based models of achievement remediation, instead arguing for a more holistic appreciation for the gifts and strengths children from diverse cultural backgrounds bring to the classroom environment and how teachers can better prepare to act in culturally-responsive ways.

Awareness of cultural diversity and good intentions are insufficient, Gay asserts, pointing readers towards a better way: a success story of student achievement that focuses on cultural-responsiveness. Such culturally-responsive teaching emphasizes caring, communication, curriculum, and culturally-congruent learning styles. Gay writes that caring is the "ideological grounding" of such teaching, in that students learn more and succeed more readily when they are validated and cared for, given high expectations and the supports necessary to build on their strengths (203). While caring may appear obvious, Gay reveals how attentive caring actually is learned and requires practice; the conclusion of chapter three provides lists of ways teachers can cultivate and practice such caring (86-88).

The chapter on communication illuminates the cultural context of language, and how our ways of thinking, speaking, and writing often depend upon the expectations of our ethnic communities. Two examples of communication structures include topic-centered and topic-associative. Gay shows how traditional educational models rely on European American preferences for communication via topic-centered approaches, while many children from other cultural contexts may have grown up valuing different communication skills. The performative and aesthetic aspects that accompany topic-associative modes of communication are often preferred in Latin American and African American discursive contexts, as opposed to the topic-centered approach favored by European Americans which relies on linear logic.

Culturally Responsive Teaching includes specific examples of teachers and educational programs that successfully model this kind of teaching, giving readers a clear picture of what working towards a more equitable learning environment might entail. Among the helpful resources included in the book is a list of songs that demonstrate different artists' renditions of social justice, as well as a list of nearly one hundred authors of color who have written books for children and adolescents. Principles for learning (such as those included on page 204) and suggestions for how teachers can sustain their own growth towards culturally responsive teaching (on pages 244-248), are other examples of the invaluable resources this book provides teachers of today's increasingly diverse classrooms, including those of us teaching in seminaries and university settings.