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Analysis and Summary:
Preparing for Culturally Responsive Teaching

In the article, *Preparing for Culturally Responsive Teaching*, Geneva Gay does what Robert Fulghum did in his book, *All I Really Know I Learned in Kindergarten* (2004) and took a complex social issue and reduced it to several steps so simple that one has to wonder why it was ever an issue in the first place.

In this day and age, very few places in our world are truly homogeneous. Advances in transportation technology, global business, and the sheer quality of people who currently exist has created societies of mixed cultures, races, religions, and ethnicities. And this change has been gradual enough that we should have simply and naturally adapted. Unfortunately, many people continue to live and think in the past, towards the way things “used to be”, and they either don’t realize that things have changed, or they don’t accept it.

Educators, above all, should be aware and responsive to the multiculturalism of their classes, schools, districts, and communities as their approach to education and to the students themselves, is often the best exemplar that students have when naturally seeking models for proper behavior.

Gay proposes that there are 5 essential elements of culturally responsive teaching:

- **Developing a knowledge base about cultural diversity.** This entire concept is summed up when Gay quotes Howard (1999) saying “We can’t teach what we don’t know”. Teachers who have difficulty with multiculturalism and diversity in their classrooms and curriculum are typically educators who have not taken the time to learn about their students and their cultures and therefore have a shared language, so to speak. If I, as a teacher, understand that one student comes from a home where both parents work, the student him/herself must work after school, and in which english is not the primary language, I might have different expectations for homework and at-home assignments and projects for my entire class.

- **Including ethnic and cultural diversity content in the curriculum.** In all education, in any curriculum, at any age, students learn new concepts by what Piaget called “Accommodation & Assimilation (A&A). The teacher’s responsibility is to present new information by connecting it with previous schema, therefore expanding the student’s current database rather than trying to introduce something new in a vacuum. In order to facilitate A&A, the educator must know what the students already know, and build on that. The curriculum is no different. If students don’t recognize the names, places, and references in the curriculum, they won’t be able to make connections in their prior knowledge to build on.
- **Demonstrating caring and building learning communities.** Again, this is a common sense item that shouldn’t need much explanation. All students should not only feel safe and welcome in the educational setting and curriculum in order to be able to learn, but they should feel as if their educational system and teachers are just as invested in them personally. Students who feel unsafe, alienated, or unwelcome in their school are not going to buy into a system that doesn’t buy into them.
- **Communicating with ethnically diverse students.** Communicating with culturally diverse students is an example of a win-win situation. Educators have as much to learn from their students as the students have to learn from them. Communicating with these students give educators the information they need to address all of the other elements mentioned above, giving educators a knowledge base from which to understand and teach from, the information needed to include culturally diverse information into their lessons and curriculum, and to naturally, through interest and sharing, establish positive communications.

- **Responding to ethnic diversity in the delivery of instruction.** In my opinion, this is, perhaps, the most difficult of the five elements. People must be able to step outside of their own cultural norms, values, and experiences in order to be able to respond to diversity in any area of life, but especially in the delivery of instruction. As an earth science teacher, I can relate to this on a small scale when I need to take different cultural and religious family viewpoints into account when teaching scientifically based theories (such as evolution or the Big Bang theory) that may conflict with what students are taught at home. If I present the scientific curriculum as fact, with no consideration for other points of view, I take the chance of losing students who may not believe anything I teach after that, or risk interfering with the religious and cultural education they receive at home or in their religious education. Being aware that there are other views allows me to say “this is ONE theory presented by the scientific community...”, thus fulfilling the requirements of my curriculum while still being sensitive that there are some who may believe otherwise. As an educator, when I present “one view”, and encourage students to share their views, I not only engage all students in the lesson, but we all learn from each other as well.

In conclusion, I found this article to be a very interesting read and wonder, as I do when reading Fulghum and Covey, why these aren't just common sense elements that all people should be naturally buying into for their own good, the good of students, and the good of the community as a whole.