

Culturally Responsive Assessment: Goals, Challenges, and Implications

Equity is the belief that student achievement increases when all students receive opportunities that allow them to draw on their social and cultural literacies in order to be academically successful.¹

To create equitable classrooms, teachers and schools must be culturally responsive to their students. Culturally responsive pedagogies can allow educators to design and select assessments that promote student equity as part of a balanced system of assessments.

Culturally Responsive Pedagogy & Balanced Assessment Systems

For assessments to be culturally responsive or culturally sustaining, they must be able to account for differences in students' cultural identities.² This means that they need to be adaptive enough to allow students the opportunity to bring their own cultural references and fluencies into demonstrations of achievement.

For example, students might be asked to evaluate the historic contexts of artwork specific to their cultures and write an analysis as an interdisciplinary assessment on visual arts and the social studies.³ For students from collectivist cultures, teachers might consider talking through their knowledge as a group rather than focusing on individual reproduction of knowledge.

Culturally Sensitive

- Aware that cultural differences and similarities between people exist without assigning them a value.

Culturally Relevant

- Students' heritage and community cultural practices are resources to honor and explore.
- Teachers take students' everyday lived cultural experiences and make the appropriate linkages to intended learning; teachers are cultural translators and bridge builders.

Culturally Responsive

- Schools adapt to students.
- Teachers see their students as sources of knowledge, full of concepts, and bearers of information.
- Students have many assets that can be more responsively leveraged in order to give students the opportunity to bring their own cultural references and fluencies into learning spaces.

Culturally Sustaining

- Students' heritage and community cultural practices are resources to honor, explore, and extend.
- Youth are producers of culture as well as consumers.



Designing for Equity in a Balanced Assessment System

When designing culturally responsive assessments, consider:

- In what ways does the assessment make reference to culture?
- How does the assessment allow students to draw from their cultural fluencies?
- How does the assessment support students in bridging their social/cultural identities with their academic identities?

Define Expectations



Focus on content standards that support equity when designing balanced assessment systems that support equity. Articulate expectations for students in a way that allows for different ways of knowing and doing. Teachers might give each student a choice in how to demonstrate their knowledge (for example, write a paper, create a graphic organizer, or make a video).

Focus on Equity



Define what equity means in your context and make it an overarching emphasis within the design of the assessment system. To do this successfully, consider which stakeholders need to be at the table while the definition is being developed.

Collaborate with Vendors



Clarify your definition of equity and communicate that with potential assessment vendors. Work with vendors to understand and discuss how they are working to address issues of cultural sensitivity and fairness.



Notes

1. Stemberge, A. (2020). *Culturally responsive education in the classroom: An equity framework for pedagogy*. Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group.
2. Large-scale, standardized assessments at the district or state level require a high level of comparability between students of different backgrounds and thus aren't designed to be adaptive enough to meet the same level of cultural responsiveness.
3. Taylor, J. A., Iroha, O. & Valdez, V. (2015). Culturally Responsive Teaching with Visual Art in the Social Studies. *The Councilor: A Journal of the Social Studies*, 76(1).

Additional Resources

Malick, S. (2020). *Using culturally responsive practices to foster learning during school closures: Challenges and opportunities for equity*. [Blog]. Regional Educational Laboratory Mid-Atlantic. <https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs/regions/midatlantic/app/Blog/Post/1031>

Regional Educational Laboratory Mid-Atlantic. (2019). *Fact sheet: Teaching diverse learners using culturally responsive pedagogy*. https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs/regions/midatlantic/app/Docs/Infographics/RELMA_Culturally_responsive_pedagogy_fact_sheet.pdf

Regional Educational Laboratory Midwest. (2018). *Ask a REL response: What research and resources are available about the relationship between school leadership practices and culturally relevant education?* <https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs/regions/midwest/askarel/2018/culturally-relevant-education-school-leadership.aspx>

Regional Educational Laboratory Pacific. (2021). *Multilingualism and equity in the Pacific region*. [Webinar]. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Mv16liSdICI>

Regional Educational Laboratory Pacific. (2021). *Culturally sustaining teaching practices for multilingual students*. [Infographic]. https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs/infographics/pdf/REL_PA_Culturally_Sustaining_Teaching_Practices_for_Multilingual_Students.pdf

Regional Educational Laboratory Pacific. (2021). *Supporting multilingualism and translanguaging in the classroom*. [Video]. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=USRW-NXJVFc>

Regional Educational Laboratory Pacific. (2020). *Translanguaging to support students' bilingual and multilingual development*. [Infographic.] https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs/infographics/pdf/REL_PA_Translanguaging_to_Support_Students.pdf

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