

Culturally Responsive Pedagogy: A Pathway for the Inclusion of Diverse Learners in Today's Contemporary Classroom.

¹Patrick Fonyuy Shey Ph.D, ²Melem Linda Fangwi Ph.D

¹Department of Educational Psychology, Faculty of Education, University of Buea

²Department of Educational Psychology, Faculty of Education, University of Buea

**Corresponding Author: Patrick Fonyuy Shey*

ABSTRACT: - Studies have shown that culture influences the learning process and social adjustment of students. As agents of change, teachers need to be multi-culturally aware of differences among students and promote cultural understanding to enable them become sensitive to others who are not from the same culture as theirs. A wide array of legislative documentation, strategic plans and policies unanimously espouse commitment to inclusive educational practices within our classrooms. Despite these guarantees, and the proliferation of literature and research that continues to mount, disparities for the full practice of inclusion in all spheres of education remain. This gap in the practice of full inclusion is the reason this paper seeks to understand the place of culturally responsive pedagogy as a base for inclusive practices within ordinary classrooms.

Key words: Culturally, Responsive, Pedagogy, Inclusion, Diverse, Learners

I. INTRODUCTION

As more and more students from diverse background populate the 21st century classrooms and efforts mount to identify effective methods to teach these students the need for pedagogical approaches that are culturally responsive intensifies. Today's classroom requires teachers to educate students varying in culture, language, abilities and many other characteristics. To meet these challenge teachers must employ not only theoretically sound but also culturally responsive pedagogy. Teachers must create classroom culture where all students regardless of their culture and linguistic backgrounds are welcomed, supported and provided with the best opportunities to learn. For many students the kind of behaviour required in school contrast with home cultural and linguistic practices. To increase such student success, it becomes imperative that teachers help bridge the gap between home and school. The creation of a culturally responsive environment minimizes the student's alienation as they attempt to adjust to the different world of school (Heraldo, Ayanna and Timothy, 2007). This paper therefore seeks to discuss culturally responsive pedagogy as a means to address the instructional needs of diverse students' population in our contemporary classroom.

Teachers and cultural awareness

Research has shown that culture influences the learning process and social adjustment of students, and providing culturally appropriate practice is a main concern of the teaching profession (Robles de Melendez & Beck 2007). It is thus important for teachers to be culturally competent in pedagogy to address the diversity in the classroom, and in particular, the various learning styles of students. Teachers need to be able to promote cultural understanding in various ways to enable students to become sensitive to other students from other cultures, so as eventually to be able to live harmoniously in the multicultural community (Nunan, 1999). In order to succeed there is need for teachers to be multi-culturally aware of differences among their students, to better act as role models.

The increasing diversity of the student populations served by our public education system is already taking an adverse toll on students' overall achievement and is forcing more and more educators to question their own beliefs and prejudices (Taylor, 2010). The cultural dissonance that exist between home and school is a contributor to poor educational outcomes, thus in order to increase student's success it is imperative that teachers help students bridge the discontinuity. Students bring with them a set of values and beliefs, or their

“funds of knowledge” (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992) from their homes and neighborhood cultures that may complement or clash with the school culture, and may legitimate the social, economic, political, and cultural hegemonic values of the dominant society.

An eruption of social consciousness and moral seriousness has occurred about the savage inequalities faced by minorities and poor children in many of our schools today. While it is clear that culturally diverse students have the greatest need for quality instructional programme, many researchers argue that they are less likely to be taught with the most effective evidence-based instruction (Taylor, 2010, & Cartledge and Kourea, 2008). Banks (2002) contends that the challenges facing educators in meeting the needs of multicultural students is of highest importance. Cultural awareness, sensitivity, and competency will help both pre-service and in-service teachers to understand the problems facing students from culturally diverse background in the educational system.

Culturally responsive pedagogy and the need to develop teachers’ multicultural competencies.

According to Gay (2002), culturally responsive pedagogy is using cultural characteristics, experiences and perspectives of ethnically diverse students as conduits for teaching them more effectively. He further explains that this is a process of “using the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of references, and performance styles of students from diverse backgrounds to make learning environments more relevant to and effective for them. Therefore, culturally responsive pedagogy is a concept that has its root in multicultural education which is seen as a critical component for the preparation of teachers comprising an understanding of a variety of cultures. Where multicultural education is a reform movement designed to bring about educational equity for all students, including those from different races, ethnic groups, exceptionality and social classes as defined by Banks et al (2005). Although most teacher education programs incorporate multicultural education into their course offerings, evidence suggests that these efforts have not been sufficient to keep pace with the changing public-school student populations (Tchombe, 2019). Teacher educators should help teachers understand their own socio-cultural history (Villegas & Lucas, 2002) and help teachers see that they come with their own cultural identity which positions a person to various forms of oppression and privilege (Cochran-Smith, 2004). This initiates the exploration of the notion of culture and culture group (Gay, 2000). For many teachers discussing and deconstructing one’s own socio-cultural history, values, and sharing cultural identity can be uncomfortable and for some, viewed as unnecessary.

Over the decades, the definition of culture has moved from a narrow to a broader perspective which holds that; culture is “the shared learned meanings and behavior derived from living within a particular life activity” (Hitchcock, Prater, & Chang, 2009). Culture encompasses numerous aspects which have direct implications for teaching and learning. These are namely, ethnic groups’ cultural values, traditions, communication, learning styles, contributions and relational patterns. Teachers need to know how different ethnic groups give priority to communal living and cooperative problem solving and how these preferences affect educational motivation, aspiration and task performance, ways of interacting between children and adults in instructional setting and gender socialization role in different ethnic groups. The knowledge that teachers know about cultural diversity goes beyond mere awareness of, respect for and general recognition of the fact that ethnic groups have different values or express similar values in various ways. Teachers thus deal with students, who are in the majority, of different beliefs and practices and who have different views of what or how learning and teaching should occur.

Teachers need to be able to promote cultural understanding in various ways to enable students to become sensitive to other students from other cultures, so as eventually to be able to live harmoniously in the multicultural community (Gay, 2000). Teachers need to first be multi-culturally aware of differences among their students, to better act as role models in the English classroom. In the USA, for instance, multicultural education is a critical component for the preparation of teachers and such preparations include an understanding of a variety of cultures (Hitchcock, Prater, & Chang, (2009).

Gay (2000) believes that when academic knowledge and skills are situated within the lived experiences and frames of reference of students, they are more personally meaningful, have higher interest appeal and are learned more easily and thoroughly. Therefore, it is important that teachers are provided with assistance and knowledge on developing their multicultural competency to be able to meet the needs of their students. Multicultural competence comprises:

Multicultural awareness: It stands for how teachers’ attitudes, beliefs, values, assumptions, self-awareness affect the way they interact with those who are culturally different from themselves. It is also seen as

“teachers’ awareness of, comfort with, and sensitivity to issues of cultural pluralism in the classroom”, seeing cultural diversity as an asset and feel that they have a responsibility to address multicultural issues in the teaching/learning process (Hitchcock et al 2009, p. 2). Teachers’ attitudes have a direct implication and may determine the success or failure of the learners in their classrooms. In line with the above statement, (Ambe, (2006); Banks & Banks, (2007); Fong & Sheets, (2004) are of the opinion that teachers’ perspectives and attitudes toward diversity are manifested in areas like teacher-student interaction, attention given to students, expectation of students’ achievements, conflict resolution, teaching materials selection and many other aspects.

Multicultural knowledge: this is informed understanding of cultures that are different from one’s own culture. Teachers are not only responsible for delivering knowledge to their students; they also act as multicultural agents by helping students from different ethnic groups to work together (Maasum, Maarof, and Ali (2014). As multicultural agents, teachers help students of diverse cultural backgrounds to negotiate between home, school and community via an expression of excerpts of cultural values and practices of the various cultures present in the classroom. Building culturally responsive practices requires teachers to construct a broad base of knowledge that shifts as students, contexts, and subject matters change (Grant & Gillette, 2006). This is further complicated by the fact that their students come to the classroom with multiple cultural identities.

Multicultural skills: these are skills individuals use to engage in effective and meaningful interactions with those who are from different cultural backgrounds. Multicultural education not only reflects the diversity of society; it also raises awareness about inequality, discrimination, and stereotypes caused by differences. Thus, teachers act as agents of social change by promoting an equitable and democratic society for all citizens. To meet this objective, teachers should help students to develop critical and analytical thinking skills in a democratic classroom via discussion and dialogue (Banks & Banks, 2007).

Taking into consideration the above analysis and following research on students’ multicultural competence if teachers are to increase learning opportunities for all students, they must become knowledgeable about the cultural background of their students. The same knowledge should inform teachers’ pedagogical and curricular decisions in the classroom to ensure that disciplinary-based content knowledge is accessible to every student (Maasum, Maarof, & Ali, 2014; Grant & Gillette, 2006). Multicultural teaching competency is regarded as an on-going process where teachers examine their attitudes and beliefs concerning cultural diversity (Bales and Saffold (2011). In addition, these teachers could increase their understanding of the characteristics of the different cultures and evaluate the effects of their knowledge and beliefs on their teaching.

Culturally responsive teaching

Culture plays an important role in learning (Vygotsky, 1978), as it encompasses numerous aspects which have direct implications for teaching and learning. In a culturally responsive classroom, effective teaching and learning occur in a culturally supported learner centered context, whereby the strength students bring to school are identified, nurtured and utilized to promote student’s achievement (Rohaty & Salasiah (2011). It’s been proven that when academic knowledge and skills are situated within the experiences and frames of reference of students, they are more personally meaningful, have higher interest appeal, are learned more easily and thoroughly and it is culturally validating and affirming (Rohaty & Salasiah; 2011, Omar & Che; 2008).

Culturally responsive teaching is an umbrella term which encompasses a variety of approaches, such as culturally relevant, culturally sensitive, culturally congruent, and culturally contextualized pedagogies. This equity-based approach places students’ cultures at the core of the learning process and utilizes the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students. By creating classroom norms reflective of the students’ native cultures, and not those of mainstream culture, the culturally responsive educator mitigates the challenges of overcoming “cultural mismatches” between the home and school (Maasum, Maarof, & Ali, 2014).

According to Spanierman., Heppner., Neville., Mobley., Wright., Dillon., & Navarro., (2010), culturally responsive teaching is distinguished by its emphasis on validating, facilitating, liberating, and empowering students by cultivating their cultural integrity, individual abilities, and academic success and is based on the four pillars of ; “teachers’ attitude and expectations, cultural communication in the classroom, culturally diverse context in the curriculum, and culturally congruent instructional strategies. Culturally responsive pedagogy comprises three dimensions as stated by Guy (2000) a) institutional, b) personal c) instructional. The institutional domain reflects the administration and its policies and values. The personal dimension refers to the cognitive and emotional processes teachers must engage in to become culturally

responsive. The instructional dimension includes materials, strategies and activities that forms the basis of instruction. All three dimensions significantly interact in the teaching and learning process and are crucial to understanding the effectiveness of culturally responsive pedagogy.

Addressing diversity in contemporary times

The world is evolving as such diversity within the classroom will continue to grow. Individuals from varied backgrounds, nationalities, ethnicities, and races all bring cultural traditions to their interactions, and it's up to teachers to recognize, celebrate and share these different perspectives. These differences are mankind's primary adaptive mechanism that must be incorporated into the classroom for these individuals to learn appropriately. For diversity to be dealt with in our contemporary school society, it must be addressed from the institutional, personal and instructional dimensions.

The institutional dimension

The educational system is the institution that provides the physical and political structure for schools. Schools act as systemic mediators, which move away from traditional ethnocentric pedagogy and connect mainstream setting with home cultures and cultural diversity of students. Thus, schools are transformed into intermediate spaces of reciprocal cultural contact where all students become culturally competent in each other's cultural mindset. Setting the Stage for Culturally Responsive Pedagogy Richards, Brown, and Forde (2007) emphasized that in order to address cultural differences in various institutions, attention must be given to effecting change in at least three specific areas:

Organization of the school: This includes the administrative structure and the way it relates to diversity, and the use of physical space in planning schools and arranging classrooms. Rashid and Tikly (2010) propagates that in culturally inclusive schools, head teachers and senior management teams take ownership of the issues and lead by example. This is important if issues of inclusion and diversity are to be taken seriously by the school community. The leadership team create a shared vision for a culturally inclusive school. Members of the school community are actively involved in creating the vision through on-going consultation and dialogue. Policies and plans incorporate inclusion and diversity and there are action plans for implementing policies. The leadership team monitors and evaluates their effectiveness. Leadership responsibility for inclusion and diversity is distributed amongst staff learners, governors and parents. Inclusion and diversity are integral to school planning, policies and processes. Responsibility for implementing operates at all levels of the school.

School policies and procedures: This refers to policies and practices that directly impact the delivery of services to students from diverse backgrounds. A suitable legal framework is required to provide a basis in law for ensuring that policy makers and practitioners address issues of inclusion for culturally diverse learners (Omar & Che; 2008). Areas of policy where governments can intervene to support inclusion for culturally diverse learners. The following policy areas are vital for government intervention to support inclusion and diversity.

A major focus for governments wishing to support pupils and students from diverse cultural background is through providing curriculum guidelines that support inclusion and diversity. In order to ensure equal access and that all learners benefit from the curriculum it is also important to ensure that systems of assessment are in place that can be used to track and monitor the progress of learners. Inspection systems and frameworks have an important role to play in ensuring that schools implement equality policies, deliver a diverse curriculum and raise standards for all learners (Sleeter, (2001).

Provision of teacher and head teacher training in inclusion and diversity: many schools do not have teachers or head teachers with specialist expertise in teaching intercultural education and there are relatively few examples where issues relating to inclusion and diversity are included as an aspect of initial or continuing professional training (Rohaty & Salasiah, 2011).

Government policies to promote learner voice: For schools to respond to diversity they need to understand and to take seriously the views and aspirations of young people in the school. Learners contribute positively to the culture of the school. Culturally inclusive schools have effective and democratic school councils with real responsibility and learner voice plays a role in school decision making, Positive relationships demonstrate respect in a culturally inclusive school. There is a safe learning environment free of bullying. All bullying incidents are monitored and dealt with efficiently and effectively. The school has a shared behaviour management policy produced in consultation with teachers, parents and learners. The policy is applied fairly and consistently by all staff (Talbot.,2006).

Policy is the basis for which teachers in today's classrooms can educate students varying in culture, language, abilities, and many other characteristics. It is the framework for the creation of a classroom culture where all students regardless of their cultural background are welcomed and supported, and provided with the best opportunity to learn.

Community involvement: Hudalla, (2005) holds that a culturally inclusive school demonstrates commitment to working in partnership with parents. There is effective communication with parents and the school offers support to enable them support their children's learning. The school provides learning opportunities to parents, including training on inclusion and diversity and invites parents to contribute to the curriculum. He believes that engaging parents and communities in the life of the school is important for several reasons. It can provide stakeholders with a formal means whereby they can be included in the policy making processes of the school; can provide parents with opportunities to support their children's learning; as a means for mobilising community resources; and, as a means to educate stakeholders about the importance of inclusion and diversity.

These institutional reforms must certainly occur in order to create a culturally responsive environment that fosters the personal and instructional changes that are also necessary. Transformed institutions exhibit characteristics such as viewing diversity as an asset of the school, providing staff development on best practices for teaching students with and without disabilities from diverse backgrounds and providing teachers with opportunities to collaboratively explore best practices in culturally responsive pedagogy while resisting political pressures for exempting students from taking tests and pressure to teach to the test. Culturally responsive schools set high expectations and provide a scaffold of support for students, as opposed to tracking them into low-level classes(Nieto 2003). These schools also provide direct instruction in the hidden curriculum while cultivating culturally rich environments that allow students and teachers to connect with one another, which contributes to the creation of a classroom community. If transformation is to be realized, according to Brown (2007), the allocation of resources impacting school policies and procedures, as well as partnerships between school districts and university faculty that provide professional development comprised of mentoring, supporting, and evaluating teachers' abilities to practice culturally responsive and differentiated instruction must become a reality.

This framework describes the norms and practices of an environment in which inquiry, respect, and the opportunity for full participation by diverse learners is the norm and is based on the integrated use of four elements:

- i. Establishing inclusion that is School policies that create an environment of respect and connectedness and that use cooperation and equitable treatment of all learners reflect the element of establishing inclusion.
- ii. Developing attitude: This includes norms and practices that help students develop a positive attitude toward the learning process by building on students' personal experiences and knowledge and by allowing learners to make choices throughout the learning process.
- iii. Enhancing meaning: It provides students with skills, norms and values on how to live and work in a society where every individual is unique. in an increasingly fragmented society, the ability to connect with peers, coworkers and neighbours with diverse backgrounds and abilities is invaluable. Diversity builds empathy and encourages students to think differently.
- iv. Engendering competence: Diversity in the classroom teaches students to appreciate different perspectives and draw stronger conclusions, teaches them how to interact with their peers on different social level, and equip them with skills they'll use for the rest of their life. It improves their critical thinking skills and encourages academic confidence. understanding each student brings unique experiences, strengths, and ideas to our classroom.

Herald., Ayanna., and Forde (2007) believes that a culturally responsive schooling is a privilege to student life and act as an essential starting point and a valuable resource for instructional and curriculum design.They further states that schools act as systemic mediators, which move away from traditional ethnocentric pedagogy and connect mainstream setting with home cultures and cultural diversity of students. Thus, schools are transformed into intermediate spaces of reciprocal cultural contact where all students become culturally competent in each other's cultural mindset. Affirming culturally specific attitudes would enhance all students to appropriately use and transfer cultural codes in mainstream or other contexts.

Nargis and Leon (2010) holds that culturally inclusive schools reflect and celebrate the cultural, religious and linguistic diversity in the school, the community and the city. Diversity is reflected in wall displays and the achievements of all learners are celebrated. The school is a welcoming place for students and parents from different backgrounds, the makeup of the staff at all levels and the governing body reflects diversity within the community. This also means collecting and analysing data on ethnicity and diversity to ensure that policies can be sensitive to the changing needs of the school community. The school must be responsive to the needs of newly arrived learners, through providing induction for learners and their families including language support, familiarisation with the new country and education system. One strategy is to use mentoring and buddying pairing newly arrived learners up with other learners in the school.

The personal dimension

This dimension is anchored on teachers' self-reflection. Culturally responsive teachers believe that culture deeply influences the way children learn and, when given the responsibility of teaching students from diverse backgrounds, their attitudes reflect an appreciation of the cultural, linguistic, and social characteristics of each of their students. This can be very difficult, especially when students exhibit cultural characteristics that are markedly different from their own. However, an honest examination of their attitudes and beliefs about themselves and others will enable teachers to discover why they are who they are and can confront biases that have influenced their value systems (Taylor., 2010). Teachers value impact relationships with students, and their families they must reconcile negative feelings towards any cultural, language, or ethnic group. Often teachers are resistant to the notion that their values might reflect prejudices towards certain groups. When teachers are able to rid themselves of such biases, they help to create an atmosphere of trust and acceptance for students and their families resulting in greater opportunities for success.

Another important aspect of the personal dimension is exploration. It is crucial for teachers to explore their personal histories and experiences as well as the history and current experiences of their students and families. With knowledge comes understanding of self and others and greater appreciations of differences. When teachers are unbiased in their instruction and knowledge about themselves and their students, they can better respond to the needs of all their students. Gary Howard's (1999) book title "We can't teach what we don't know" sums up the problem. This applies as much to the students themselves as it does to the subject matter. Conversely according to Brown (2007), teachers are inadequately prepared to teach students from diverse backgrounds. The preparation of a culturally responsive teacher includes both self-reflection as well as exploration of their personal histories and experiences. Teachers must discover for themselves who they are so that they can begin to confront biases that have influenced their value system. What teachers value directly impacts relationships with their students. Therefore, teachers must reconcile negative feelings toward any culture, language, or ethnic group. Nsamenang (2016) believes that many times, teachers are resistant to admitting that they possess prejudices toward certain groups, but that through self-reflection, they can begin to rid themselves of those biases, thereby beginning to build trusting relationships with their students. Those trusting relationships will yield greater opportunities for student success, thereby addressing diversity.

The Instructional Dimension

The Instructional dimension in addressing diversity refers to culturally responsive classroom practices, which focus on both high learning expectations and academic rigor as well as scaffolded learning activities harnessing student's lived experiences as a learning asset (Gay 2000). Montgomery (2001), sees a culturally responsive classroom as one that specifically acknowledges the presence of culturally diverse students and the need for these students to find connections among themselves and with the subject matter and the tasks the teacher asks them to perform. It is Using different activities and games in multicultural classrooms is an excellent way to foster inclusivity and encourage students to share their heritage. It's also a beneficial way for teachers to involve students in different styles of study to immerse them in their learning. Montgomery (2001) provides guidelines for teachers to follow when preparing a culturally responsive classroom. These include: (a) conduct a self-assessment to determine the knowledge base of self and others 'cultures, (b) use varied culturally responsive methods and materials in the classroom, (c) establish classroom environments that respect individuals and their cultures, (d) establish interactive classroom learning environments, and (e) employ ongoing and culturally sensitive assessments. Therefore, in order to maximize learning opportunities, teachers must gain knowledge of the cultures represented in their classrooms, then translate this knowledge into instructional practice. Overall, Aceves and Orosco (2014) highlighted four evidence-based culturally responsive teaching practices:

- Collaborative teaching: Research indicates that direct and explicit collaborative learning improves student literacy, engagement and motivation. Collaborative teaching includes a wide range of instructional methods to enhance problem solving, reciprocal and differentiated learning. It enables both teachers and learners to engage in a collective learning sharing knowledge outcome. This requires individual responsibility, accountability and positive interdependence, self-directed learning and strong interpersonal skills.
- Responsive feedback: Culturally responsive feedback occurs when teachers provide immediate, critical and ongoing feedback in well-designed activities. Informal and formal assessment activities capitalize on students' linguistic and culturally diverse knowledge perspectives. Culturally responsive assessment practices involve measures and procedures, which validate students' unique perception of learning (students' own life worlds/ insights) and correct the imbalance in student achievements created by official norms and extrinsic approaches (reward and punishment through grades and class rank). Instructional biases in choosing assessment procedures contribute to students' underachievement and their placement in special reinforcement programmes.
- Instructional modeling: Instructional modeling involves explicit documentation and framing of learning repertoires (learning focus and outcomes, content and learning activities.). It also provides an optimal framing offering opportunity for students to engage in decision making about their learning content and techniques using their ideas, background knowledge, values, communication styles, and preferences in a self-regulated mode. This framing exemplifies and values student cultural, linguistic and lived experiences and connects them with curriculum in a meaningful and effective way. Perso (2012) has also suggested that using community local stories, which are meaningful to students' everyday life as well as teaching new vocabulary every day and placing visual aids/pictures around the classroom and school is appropriate technique for language teaching.
- Instructional scaffolding: Scaffolding may include an epistemic framework of mixing different multimodal activities (experiential, conceptual, analytical and application) (Kalantzis and Cope, 2012) to enhance deeper understanding and learning. Teachers and students are producers of knowledge and not just consumers of nationally-selected materials, which are usually ethnocentric. Researchers have argued that diversity should be present in materials to reflect students' cultural backgrounds (Banks, 2004; Gay, 2010, 2013; Ladson-Billings, 2014). Scaffolding impacts teachers' genuine interest in their students' learning styles and outcomes (McIntyre and Hulan, 2013). Knowing students diverse learning styles (ways of knowing and doing) is important and can be ascertained through rigorous exploration of students' home cultures and expectations.

Cartledge and Kourea (2008) suggest that the first important step in ensuring the success of multicultural students in our classrooms is to identify academic and behavioral markers as early as possible and to intervene immediately. They base the urgency associated with this step on research findings that low-income culturally diverse students begin their formal schooling behind their more affluent peers in language and readiness skills (ibid). Specifically, their vocabulary knowledge and verbal ability are limited; they have less experience with complicated syntax, and have limited background knowledge. Without immediate identification and intervention, the alarming result is that these students systematically fall further behind as they move through the grades. Culturally responsive instruction demands that we intervene as early as possible with sufficient intensity and urgency to remedy existing skill gaps and to prevent further loss.

In addition to the sense of urgency exhibited in culturally responsive classrooms, a high level of pupil academic responding is also apparent. Cartledge and Kourea(2008) report that low-income students from diverse backgrounds spent significantly less time in the classroom actively engaged in academic subjects. Further, Good and Nicholls (2001) found that students deemed to be less capable had lower academic response rates. Therefore, truly effective and culturally responsive instruction must actively promote high rates of observable and measurable responses (for example., words per minute read aloud, math facts completed correctly). Several strategies for promoting active student responses in the classroom activities have been identified. For example, Heward (2006) suggests response cards, choral responding, and guided notes are effective. With research indicating that increased response rates result in increases in correct responding and a reduction in disruptive behavior, it is apparent that both teachers and students in culturally responsive classrooms directly benefit from the increased academic responding.

Implications of this paper to literature on inclusive education

Diversity encompasses many characteristics including ethnicity, socio-economic background, home language, gender, special needs, disability, and giftedness as stated by Aceves and Orosco (2014). They hold that teaching needs to be responsive to diversity within ethnic groups. We also need to recognise the diversity within individual students influenced by intersections of gender, cultural heritage(s), socio-economic

background, and talent. Teaching that is responsive to student diversity can have very positive impacts on low and high achievers at the same time. Drawing inferences from the above discussions the following suggestions were made in order to facilitate the practice of culturally responsive pedagogy in our classrooms to enhance inclusion of every learner:

Get to Know Your Students: Teachers need to know how different ethnic groups give priority to communal living and cooperative problem solving and how these preferences affect educational motivation, aspiration and task performance, ways of interacting between children and adults in instructional setting and gender socialization role in different ethnic groups. The knowledge that teachers know about cultural diversity goes beyond mere awareness of, respect for and general recognition of the fact that ethnic groups have different values or express similar values in various ways. Take the time to learn about student's cultural background, hobbies, learning styles, and what makes them unique. Demonstrating a genuine interest in learning about each student and their culture will help establish trust and allow you to form a bond with them so they feel valued. Knowing your students will help create effective links between school and other cultural contexts in which students are socialised, to facilitate learning (Rohaty & Salasiah 2011).

Maintain Consistent Communication: Aside from getting to know your students, teachers should also continue to maintain ongoing communication throughout the school year. Scheduling 1-on-1 meetings with students to check on their wellbeing will allow you to consistently improve how accessible the classroom is to everyone. Students can talk about whether they felt included in the classroom culture. This can help identify issues or ways to improve the overall experience. It's also an opportunity to discuss their progress in the class and offer guidance on how they can improve, based on their individual needs as a student. Thereby enhancing the provision of quality teaching which is responsive to student learning processes (Rashid and Tikly (2010)

Acknowledge and Respect Every Student: It's also important for students to celebrate and respect their own diverse backgrounds, as well as each other's. When appropriate, teachers should encourage students to research and learn about their own ethnic and cultural backgrounds. This allows them to better understand their own culture as well as the differences and nuances with their peers. Allowing students to give presentations about their family traditions and culture to help expose the class to concepts outside of their own familiar comfort zone. Acknowledging these differences and creating a safe space for discussion helps promote understanding in the classroom and beyond. Also, as you encourage students to learn about their diverse backgrounds, remember to take the time to highlight what's offensive and the distinction between cultural celebration and appropriation. Learning how to talk about other cultures in a respectful, mature way is essential for success in life outside the classroom (Ceren, Volman and Fischer (2019).

Practice Cultural Sensitivity: While it's important to keep an open dialogue amongst students, it's equally important to make sure you're being sensitive to everyone's culture, beliefs, and language concerns. Take the time to understand each student's cultural nuances from learning styles to the language they use and use these insights to design your lesson plans. Rather than teach with a traditional lecture style, create learning experiences that are more interactive and require collaboration. These considerations will help ensure that every student feel included and is given the space to learn in their own way and a chance to succeed (Rohaty & Salasiah 2011).

Incorporate Diversity in the Lesson Plan: The classroom environment is important for fostering cultural awareness, but you also should ensure diversity is represented in your actual lesson plan. For example, broaden history lessons so that they encompass the world beyond national history and culture. Or, use references and analogies to other cultures in your lessons and assignments to help students with diverse backgrounds personally connect. Another great strategy is bringing in diverse speakers to add varying points of view and real-life context to different subjects. There are several ways you can ingrain cultural awareness and diversity into your lesson plan, and it will vary depending on the cultures represented in your classroom and the course you're teaching. Regardless of the subject, always try to present and connect lessons to real-world issues. It's easier to promote cultural awareness within your lessons when there's a real example for students to relate to. Quality teaching is focused on student achievement (including social outcomes) and facilitates high standards of student outcomes for heterogeneous groups of students (Ceren, Volman and Fischer (2019).

Give Students Freedom and Flexibility: Teachers often feel like they need to take on a strict, authoritative approach when it comes to managing their classroom. The most valuable lessons are often learned through a student's own experiences, so giving them some freedom in the course encourages more connection to the curriculum. Allow students to read and present their own materials that relate to the fundamental lesson so they can approach the topic from their own perspective. As a teacher, you can act as a facilitator and encourage

conversation and healthy debate between diverse opinions. Group assignments are also a great way to expose students to diverse perspectives, allowing them to work together to explore and solve a problem. This will also help prepare them for a diverse workforce where they'll have to partner with a range of people to accomplish their professional goals (Gay, 2000).

In conclusion, multicultural education is an approach to education that aims at including all students, promote learning of other cultures, and teach healthy social skills via culturally responsive pedagogy in a multicultural setting. The utilization of culturally responsive pedagogy in a multicultural classroom is a melting pot of learning rather than a passive, one-way flow of learning from teacher to student, there is a brainstorming of ideas, stories, and experiences that enrich the educational experience in ways that are impossible in monocultural classes. It is a means of recognizing the inherent dignity, the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family and it serves as the foundation of freedom, justice, and peace in the world which is the bases for inclusion as stipulated by UNESCO (2002).

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**Corresponding Author: Patrick Fonyuy Shey*

¹Department of Educational Psychology, Faculty of Education, University of Buea