At the heart of Culturally Responsive and Relevant Teaching is a willingness to listen, reflect, and celebrate the richness that cultural and linguistic diversity has to offer. Eugene Garcia and Okhee Lee (2008) speak to the necessity for diversity to be viewed as a resource for teaching and learning, rather than being viewed as a problem or deficit. Teachers can maximize potential as, “students build understanding by integrating prior knowledge with new information” within a culturally supported community with a focus on recognizing, utilizing, and promoting cultural and linguistic resources.

More and more states have instituted CRT guidelines in classrooms, emphasizing embracing diversity, enhancing cultural connections, and identifying how implicit bias can affect daily decisions, relationships, and expectations. Yet, few states have fully embedded Culturally Responsive Teaching practices beyond preservice requirements or one-and-done professional learning opportunities. Just as many teaching techniques first employed for students with learning differences or for second-language learners, it is often revealed that what makes these such effective strategies for the intended group also enhances learning opportunities for all. Good teaching is good teaching, and it starts with knowing and understanding your students as people with gifts, challenges, connections to the community, and life history.

Being aware of, sensitive to, and supportive of increasing access to role models in literature, the community at large, and the historical stories told needs to be a goal in education. We’ve all been fed a long-standing diet, especially in science and engineering, that all the Fathers of Science are just that—fathers and predominantly white. Yes, there was a time when my own science lab hallway was graced with large photographs of the giants in science: Newton, Mendel, Einstein, Darwin, to name a few. Yet, it only took one observant student pointing out that all the photos were of old white guys for me to see that I’d been promulgating the one-story history. I’m not saying we shouldn’t admire and honor the greats of science. Still, we need to consider complete history, including the voices and contributions from varied cultural and linguistically underrepresented communities.

It’s time to listen, reflect, and consider how we can provide learning opportunities as we recognize and respect our students’ lives, inherent gifts, and histories. Creating learning environments where diversity is valued, expectations are elevated, and cultural and linguistic contributions are celebrated will enhance student understanding of a socially just and equitable world. Focusing on possibilities rather than deficits will inspire young learners to reach their potential and beyond.

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REFERENCES