What does it mean to be a culturally responsive teacher?

University student bodies across the country are becoming increasingly diverse. Learning how to support these students is essential in order to foster a safe and constructive classroom.

Culturally Responsive theory is about “using the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning encounters more relevant and effective” (Gay, 2010, p. 31). The unique combinations of communities that form a students’ cultural identity impact how they learn and process information in a classroom. As teachers, we need to be aware of our students’ learning needs so that our teaching practices support and affirm one’s cultural identity.

We can support our students by getting to know them and never making assumptions about one’s identity or background. Incorporating choice into course assignments/assessments allows students to present their knowledge in whatever medium they are most comfortable. This is not always possible; however, even shifting towards choice or options in smaller assignments can being fostering a culturally responsive space. Autonomy over one’s education allows learning to be all the more meaningful and rewarding.