Chapter 1

Culturally Responsive Teaching to Empower Indigenous Student Communities

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ABSTRACT

This chapter presents an example of culturally responsive teaching, CRT, in a private university in Puebla, Mexico. The university developed a program to integrate indigenous students into higher education programs promoting personal development and community growth. CRT has been used as a methodology that promotes inclusion in the classroom, helping students connect their cultural backgrounds in the new context. In the study, focus groups were conducted and students’ narratives were collected based on their personal experiences during their stay at the university. Additionally, the CRT Survey was applied to a sample of professors who taught indigenous students in their courses.

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INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the program *A Bet for the Future*, a project developed at the Universidad Popular Autónoma del Estado de Puebla (UPAEP), a private university in Puebla Mexico, conceived to offer university education to indigenous students. After several years in operation, the Business School introduced Culturally Responsible Teaching (CRT) to empower indigenous students, and to create positive environments for their development, to increase retention. The participants were students from communities in the northern Sierra of Puebla, as well as other marginalized communities from the state of Veracruz. The program has proven to engage other students as well, and has resulted in better academic experiences.

Practices of with CRT were documented, and showed both the challenges the university and the indigenous students had to face, and the best practices that were carried out. The results from focus groups with students are presented in this paper, along with the results of a survey with professors who participated in developing the program.

Students’ stories were be recorded in an attempt to establish the way in which CRT helped them obtain the required tools and allowed them to successfully obtain a university degree. In order to provide a more complete perspective, students who participated in the first generation (before CRT programs were in place) were also interviewed so as to determine their reasons for leaving the program and the difficulties they faced while trying to adapt to the new culture and to traditional pedagogies. The most relevant comments are included.

In the different sections of the chapter, CRT is defined and a brief bibliometric analysis on the subject is presented, to help understand the importance that the topic has had over the years. The population in Mexico is described, first, in a general manner, and later on, the most relevant ethnic groups in the state of Puebla and their characteristics are assessed.

The history of UPAEP is described along with its mission, leading values, and educational model, as a way to introduce the intention behind the creation of the program *A Bet for the Future*. Basic statistics of the program are included, along with its benefits and the introduction of CRT to provide better conditions for indigenous students. Results from the brief exploratory study reflect the current situation of the program, from students’ perceptions and evaluations regarding the way professors use the methodology in their classes.

This study is relevant because it provides opportunities for indigenous students who have traditionally been underrepresented in higher education in Mexico, as well as in other countries. Opportunities to participate in formal education have historically been low. Adults in regions composed mostly by indigenous population have completed on average three years of schooling, while adults in municipalities
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