What is Culturally and Linguistically Responsive Education (CLRE)?

Many of us have heard the term “Culturally and Linguistically Responsive Education”, but what does it really mean? How can we use it in our classes, schools, and communities? As we prepare for a new school year, NIEA would like to provide fundamental understandings for CLRE, and how it can be integral part of our educational learning environments.

What is CLRE?
CLRE is a method of teaching that intentionally connects, engages, and implements the cultural beliefs, norms, and values of the student’s community and/or tribe into the classroom aesthetics (set-up), curriculum, lesson plans, and educator pedagogy (style of teaching) in order to provide an educational experience that connects the student’s prior knowledge and understandings through community-based culture and language.

How is CLRE used?
Communities, schools, and tribes are all different, and CLRE provides an intentional way for educational institutions to engage and infuse community, school, and tribal understandings of local, place-based culture, and language. CLRE does not prescribe to education and instructional methods that are “one-size fits all”, but rather, honors the unique culture, history, and values of each tribal community.

What does each term in Culturally and Linguistically Responsive Education mean?
Culture: a particular group’s beliefs, knowledge, and values that have been developed over time.
Linguistic: relating to a particular group’s use of language and how it relates to that group’s culture.
Responsive: recognizing that culture and language overlap with all aspects of learning in order to connect and reflect the communities needs and wants.
Education: the way of connecting, transferring, and utilizing knowledge.

Who should engage in CLRE?
Ideally, all community and educational stakeholders should be involved in engaging CLRE. Within a school, CLRE must be engaged and understood by all educational staff, i.e. administrators, teachers, support staff, and faculty. Within the community/tribe, families, parents, and community stakeholders should be integral parts in the development and engagement of CLRE because they are the holders of cultural and linguistic beliefs, knowledge, values, and understandings.

Where should CLRE be implemented?
CLRE should be ongoing connections and understandings that value the community/tribe, and its unique cultural and linguistic understandings. CLRE understandings can and should be embedded in curriculum, lesson plans, pedagogy, school aesthetics, school policy, and training. It should, ideally, be implemented in any setting where students are engaged in learning, which is school wide.

Why should CLRE be used?
Students learn best when learning is connected and prior knowledge is engaged. CLRE doesn’t just engage community/tribal understandings, but it allows the students and teachers to engage, learn, and teach through their passions and understandings. It provides an inclusive environment that allows for diversity, inclusion, and equitable learning and teaching opportunities.

When should CLRE be implemented?
It should be initiated now! The NIEA provides professional development to assist and support your communities, schools, and tribe’s initiation, integration, and understandings of CLRE. NIEA’s program team would enjoy discussing how we can partner to make CLRE a part of your community learning environment. Please contact Francis Vigil, fvigil@niea.org, or Casie Wise, cwise@niea.org for more information.