Seven Key Characteristics of a Multicultural Education Curriculum

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and the Multicultural Pavilion
http://www.edchange.org
http://www.edchange.org/multicultural
(Please note below is a revised version)

Category 1

Delivery

Delivery must acknowledge and address a diversity of learning styles while challenging dynamics of power and privilege in the classroom. Does the curricula material/resources:

• Vary instructional techniques.
  o Lecture
  o Cooperative Learning
  o Dialogue
  o Individual Work
  o Student Teaching
• Understand the dynamics of power in the room so you do not perpetuate privilege and oppression.
  o Who do you call on?
  o Who do you encourage to work through a problem and to whom do you provide the answer?
• Challenge the notion of Teaching as Mastery.
  o Ask students what they already know about a topic.
  o Ask students what they want to learn about a topic.
  o Ask students to participate in the teaching of a topic.

Content

Content must be complete and accurate, acknowledging the contributions and perspectives of ALL groups. Does the curricula materials/resource:

• Ensure that the content is as complete and accurate as possible.
  o “Christopher Columbus discovered America” is neither complete nor accurate.
• Avoid tokenism—weave content about under-represented groups (People of Color, Women, Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual People, People with Disabilities, etc.) seamlessly with that about traditionally over-represented groups.
  o Is under-represented groups presented as “the other”?
  o Are these groups only presented through special units and lesson plans (“African American Scientists”; “Poetry by Women”) or within the context of the larger curriculum?
  o Do the curricula materials/resources “celebrate” difference or study, explore, and acknowledge it as part of the overall curriculum?
• Study the history of discrimination in curriculum and ensure that it is not replicating it.
  o Are supporting stereotypes (learning about Native Americans by making headdresses and tomahawks) or challenging them (learning about Native Americans through resources by Native Americans)?
  o Is the curricula materials/resources supporting or challenging the assumption that our society is inherently Eurocentric, male-centric, Christian-centric, heterosexual-centric, and upper-middle-class centric?
Category 2

Teaching and Learning Materials

Teaching and learning materials must be diverse and critically examined for bias.

• Does the curricula materials/resources offer various instructional materials.
  o Texts
  o Newspapers
  o Videos/Movies
  o Games
  o Workbooks

• Examine all materials for bias and oppressive content.
  o Do the curricula materials/resources show stereotypical or inaccurate images of people from certain groups or eras (ex. railroad workers)?
  o Do the curricula materials/resources use male-centric language?
  o Do the curricula materials/resources have racist language or stereotypical images (ex. the Huck Finn debate)?
  o Does the language in the curricula materials/resources assume heterosexuality, a 2-biological-parent household, American citizenship..?

• Does the curricula materials/resources diversify images and content (bulletin boards, posters, and other constantly-visible materials)
  o Do the curricula materials/resources support diversity only during special months or celebrations?

Perspective

Content must be presented from a variety of perspectives and angles in order to be accurate and complete.

• Does the curricula material/resources present content from a variety of perspectives, not only that of majority groups.
  o For example: How do we define “classic literature” or “great books” or “the classics” and from whose perspective?
  o For example: From whose perspective do we tell history? When is “westward expansion” the same as “genocide”? When are champions of “liberty” the same as slave owners?

• Is the content presented through a variety of lenses, not just those of a few heroic characters. For example:
  o Slave narratives to teach about slavery (not Frederick Douglas).
  o Slave narratives to teach about colonial Virginia.
  o Native American texts to teach about westward expansion.

Category 3

Critical Inclusivity

Students must be engaged in the teaching and learning process—transcend the banking method and facilitate experiences in which students learn from each other’s experiences and perspectives.

• Do the curricula material/resources bring the perspectives and experiences of the students themselves to the fore in the learning experience.

• Do the curricula material/resources encourage students to ask critical questions about all information they receive from the curricular materials, and model this type of critical thinking for them. For example:
  o Who wrote or edited that textbook?
  o Who created that Web site?
Whose voice am I hearing and whose voice am I not hearing?

- Do the curricula material/resources make content and delivery relevant for the students—facilitate experiences in which they connect it with their everyday lives.
- Do the curricula material/resources recognize that students are the most important multicultural resources?

**Social and Civic Responsibility**

If we hope to prepare students to be active participants in an equitable democracy, we must educate them about social justice issues and model a sense of civic responsibility within the curriculum.

- Do the curricula material/resources support even with the youngest students to incorporate discussions about difference and inequality into the materials. Think about how his can be done across all subject areas. For example:
  - How has misapplied science been used to justify racism and anti-Semitism?
- Look for ways in which recognized names in various disciplines used their work and stature to fight social injustices. (It can be particularly powerful to find people from majority groups who fought certain types of oppression.)
  - Mark Twain
  - Albert Einstein
  - Eleanor Roosevelt
- When an opportunity arises to address racism, sexism, homophobia, classism, or other forms of oppression, does the curricula material/resource facilitate it?
- Does the curricula resource/material; offer opportunities for honest discussion with students about the history of privilege and oppression in your subject area, school, education, and society at large.
- Does the curricula resource/materials connect teaching and learning to local community and larger global issues.
- Does the curricula resource/materials encourage students to think critically about the United States, capitalism, the two-party system, and other traditionally untouchable subjects of critique.

**FYI for you – try it with your colleagues**

Curriculum must be constantly assessed for completeness, accuracy and bias.

- Work with a cohort of teachers to examine and critique each other’s curricular units, lesson plans, and entire frameworks.
- Request and openly accept feedback from your students.
- Return to this model from time to time to make sure you haven’t reverted to former practices.