

Culturally Responsive Curriculum

The curriculum is the road map for what will be taught, when it will be taught, and the materials that will be used. When designing and using culturally responsive curriculum and materials or resources, rigor and relevance must be stressed (see Banks. 2008; Ford & Harris, 1999). In a study of culturally different students who dropped out of school, the students ranked as the two primary factors (1) poor student-teacher relationships and (2) lack of relevance in the curriculum (Bridgeland et al., 2006). Worth noting is more than 85 of these culturally different students had passing grades and could have graduated from high school if they had persisted.

Thus, when seeking to create curriculum that engages students and has meaning for them, the following questions, among others, should be considered (Banks, 2006; Ford & Harris, 1999):

How have teachers tried to ensure that all students are interested, engaged, and motivated by what is taught?

In what ways can teachers make connections between what they must teach—the formal, written, mandated curriculum—and what students want to learn so it is relevant to students?

Have teachers presented a balanced, comprehensive, and multidimensional view of the topic, issue, and/or event?

Have multiple viewpoints been shared and discussed?

Have teachers addressed stereotypes, distortions, and omissions in the curriculum?

Is the curriculum rigorous?

Does it challenge students and promote critical thinking and problem-solving skills?

Adapting the works of Banks (2006) and Schmitz (1999), we offer the following strategies for developing culturally responsive curriculum.

1. *Define learning goals.*

a. Determine what students in your field need to know; use deductive reasoning methods.

Identify big ideas, generalizations, and theories that you want students to take away from the lesson.

b. Hold discussions and survey or interview students to learn about their interests and hobbies. Use this information to guide the lesson, readings, and related activities.

c. As you develop the lesson, choose activities, and select materials, think about what you want students to learn about themselves, their community, their classmates, and society,

2. *Question traditional concepts and use transformational approaches.*

a. Critique (when developmentally appropriate with students) how traditional curriculum has obscured, distorted, or excluded certain ideas, events, and/or groups.

b. Teach students how to be critical readers and consumers of information, using a transformational approach to curriculum. Include questions and materials that offer students more than one perspective of events, people, ideas, research, and so forth.

c. Incorporate new and contemporary research, theories, and models that address distortions, inconsistencies, discrepancies, and omissions.

3. *Understand student diversity and differences, and adopt student-centered approaches.*

a. Give thought to the kinds of diverse perspectives and experiences that students will bring to the learning situation (e.g., limited or extensive travel, international travel, community violence, family structure, socioeconomic status, literacy rich or poor home).

b. Assess students' prior knowledge and experiences through thoughtful discussions, surveys, and other information-collection methods.

c. Do not ask students to speak as representatives for "their" racial group.

d. Use constructive feedback to (re)teach to all students and build positive, mutually respectful relationships with them.

4. *Select materials and activities.*

a. Go beyond the contributions approach (e.g., holidays, heroes, foods, fashion, and artifacts) to teach students about their culture and heritage and that of others.

- b. Integrate new material so it is not simply an "addon." Infuse multicultural materials throughout all subject and content areas and lessons.
- c. Consistently evaluate materials and resources for multicultural accuracy and authenticity. Highlight, discuss, and contradict stereotypes and all inaccuracies with students.
- d. Make sure that visuals and resources are representative, including posters, photos, artwork, videos, books, music, crayons, paints, coloring/art paper, bandages, and the like.
- e. Use a variety of teaching materials and activities to facilitate student engagement and learning (e.g. videos, guest speakers, books, poetry, mnemonic devices, songs, word walls, word games, simulations, stories).

5. *Evaluate effectiveness.*

- a. Constantly critique the effectiveness of the lesson and materials. Make revisions that will facilitate student understanding, learning, and success.
- b. Use mastery teaching strategies to assess student learning—pretest, teach, practice, test, revise lesson or activities, reteach.
- c. Differentiate assessment using a variety of methods to gauge student learning and progress (e.g. presentation, discussion, verbal test) (p.7-8)