

Curriculum

The role of **curriculum** in segregated, desegregated, and integrated schools.

Introduction and Background:

Curriculum plays a large role in shaping a school's *academic* outcomes and speaks largely to a school's priorities in creating a culture of *belongingness*, its collective *commitment* to dismantling racism, and appreciation of *diversity* ([the ABCDs of RIDES](#)). This paper discusses the role of curriculum in segregated, desegregated, integrated and intentionally diverse schools, including both how it may foster inclusion and cultural proficiency as well how it may hinder an education.

Traditionally, American education has sought to prepare students to be Americanized and has used various curricula, structures and teaching practices to assimilate students into prevailing cultural norms ([B of the ABCDs](#)). Whether segregated or desegregated, most schools in the United States have typically used curricular materials that reinforce Eurocentric values as normative. Here, we attempt to provide a brief overview of the history of the topic as well as approaches and resources to combat Eurocentrism prevalent in American schools.

Historical and Theoretical Overview:

Curriculum refers to a particular set of courses that a school or governing body designates, but may also refer to a variety of activities designed to foster education and meet the needs of a learning community. Broadly, curriculum centers on a variety of lessons or teaching programs selected for students and the collection of primary and supplemental materials, instructional aids, activities, used in the instructional program.

In the 2016 UNESCO publication of "What Makes a Quality Curriculum?", UNESCO states "Curriculum...provides the bridge between education and development – and it is the competencies associated with lifelong learning and aligned with development needs, in the broadest, holistic sense of the term, that span that bridge" (p. 4).

As we narrow our curriculum focus to integrated schools, we find a variety of perspectives regarding curriculum to consider. In [The Curriculum Handbook](#) by Glatthorn, Carr and Harris, the authors illuminate subtle differences between recommended (developed from specialists), written (explicitly stated curriculum to be taught), supported (supplementary documents), tested (curriculum reflected in assessments), taught (material presented to students), learned, hidden (what students inadvertently receive) and excluded (omitted) curricula. It is important to be mindful of these elements of curriculum and purposeful for teaching diverse and marginalized groups of students.

Historically, prior to the 14th Amendment to the Constitution, African-Americans were disenfranchised and received little or no formal education. In the late 1800s, eastern and southern Europeans migrated to the US. Cultural diversity emerged as a result of their increased migration and created a need for assimilation into American culture. Blacks attended "separate but equal" schools and a legally sanctioned dual system of education continued for decades. People who were White, Anglo Saxon, Protestant, and middle class were considered to embody American ideals, while people who were not were pushed to society's margins. Schools encouraged students to become Americanized by instituting curricula, structures and practices to shape

students into assimilating into this cultural norm. Since the 1954 landmark decision of *Brown vs. Board of Education*, public schools were mandated to desegregate. It's been over half a century and we have yet to see a plethora of exemplars of integration and excellence for all subgroups of students in integrated schools. Heightened social awareness of the 1970s-80s began to recognize cultural diversity in terms of race, ethnicity, gender, class and disability. This recognition permeated schools and educators began to approach curriculum and instruction in non-traditional ways ([D of the ABCDs](#)).

History of key concepts

Curriculum is typically taught through isolated subjects of reading, mathematics, writing, English/Language Arts, social studies, science, and music in the elementary grades. In middle schools, the same subjects were taught with the addition of extracurricular subjects. In high school, graduation requirements dictated which courses and credits would award diplomas in a vocational or academic track that could lead to college. As some schools became more integrated with diverse populations, curriculum also changed to meet the needs of these diverse learners. Since many schools have flexibility in selecting their curriculum, some schools choose to have teachers use the below practices to inform their instructional goals. Some schools use an [integrated curriculum](#) which incorporates the humanities, a multidisciplinary integration model of teaching and learning.

As schools enrolled students from various cultural backgrounds and began to acknowledge the impact that students' identities have on their learning, [Multicultural education](#) became a strategy for including this awareness into classroom learning. This approach refers to any form of **education** or teaching that incorporates the histories, texts, values, beliefs, and perspectives of people from different cultural backgrounds. While the term emerged post Civil-Rights when African-Americans demanded that curriculum include content that included this subgroup, it has broadened to include other groups who also felt discrimination in schools and society.

Differing viewpoints of the limited effectiveness of a multicultural education approach led researchers to broaden its reach and scope. Within the multicultural realm emerged [Equity Pedagogy](#) which facilitates when teachers are intentionally modifying their instruction to meet the needs of diverse students and their learning styles. [Culturally Responsive Teaching \(CRT\)](#) is a pedagogy that recognizes the importance of including students' cultural references in all aspects of learning (Ladson-Billings, 1994).

Locally, schools, districts and states decided what and how students would be taught and assessed in classrooms. At the turn of the 21st century with a goal to create high standards and consistency in classrooms across the nation, bipartisan policy-makers and practitioners came together to craft an approach that would support preparing all students for college and career readiness. In December 2008, CCSSO, NGA and Achieve released [Benchmarking for Success: Ensuring U.S. Students Receive a World-Class Education](#). An advisory group guided leading education researchers, state education chiefs, and governors recommended states adopt a core of internationally benchmarked standards in language arts and math for grades K-12 to ensure students were equipped with essential knowledge and skills to be globally competitive.

In 2009, the [Common Core State Standards](#) (CCSS) were institutionalized across the United States and over time states have adopted these concepts to support instructional design for what students need to know and understand to reach mastery of the standards. Even with CCSS,

schools continue to have flexibility to implement curriculum; however, instructional choices need to meet Common Core State Standards.

Approaches and Strategies:

Examples of curricular materials, processes and practices used in integrated schools are as follows:

- If you're looking for quick tips on making your lesson connect with students from a diverse set of backgrounds, read [Three Tips for Making any Lesson Culturally Responsive](#)
- For a historical context for the current status of educating children of color and practices that will enable transformation of beliefs and instruction to raise expectations, teaching and learning, read "[MULTIPLICATION is for WHITE PEOPLE" - Raising Expectations for Other People's Children](#) by Lisa Delpit.
- If your school's staff is all or predominantly white, consider this framework to determine the level of examination of whiteness and how your identity impacts the work you do in schools and with diverse student populations. [Examining Whiteness: An Anti-Racism Curriculum](#)
- The [Storytelling Project Curriculum](#) invites students to tell their own stories and visions for a diverse, yet just and inclusive school and society.
- The [Now-based Curriculum](#) empowers and enables students to understand and act against current injustices.
- For anti-bias curriculum lessons from the [Anti-Defamation League](#) or how to build K-12 age-appropriate lesson plans with social justice standards aligned with Common Core Standards, consider the following Teaching Tolerance [toolkit](#).
- Educators are looking beyond standardized test scores to determine student proficiency and growth. Social-emotional learning is being considered as a needed development area for students. Teachers are incorporating social-emotional lessons to support students in their classrooms. You can find opportunities to include social-emotional learning in the Common Core classroom [here](#).

Curriculum materials are available to support the learning of all stakeholders in schools. In addition to examining the kinds of materials used to improve learning across the school community, we encourage you to keep in mind curriculum that differentiates by multiple learning styles to meet the schema for diverse learners and aligns with the A-B-C-D of the RIDES Systemic Map ([the ABCDs of RIDES](#)).

Systemic Focus:

Stakeholder Groups	Kinds of curriculum materials with a lens for diversity, equity and inclusion	A* B* C* D *A-academics *B-belongingness *C-commitment to dismantling racism *D-diversity
Teachers	Curriculum for teacher professional development topics (e.g. Culturally Responsive Teaching & The Brain)	A; B; C; D
Students	Curriculum for each course throughout schooling (e.g. An Equity Toolkit For Inclusive Schools: Centering on Youth Voice In School Change)	A; B; C; D
Family and Community Partnerships	Curriculum for family and community engagement (e.g. Reaching Out to Diverse Populations: What Can Schools Do to Foster Family-School Connections?)	A; B; C; D
Leadership	Curriculum for leadership development (e.g. Racial Equity Tools)	A; B; C; D
Culture	Curriculum for creating school culture and climate (e.g. Anti-Bias Curriculum Engages Preschoolers in Discussions)	A; B; C; D
Systems & Structures	Curriculum for organizational development to support equitable policies and practices for diverse schools (e.g. Restructuring and Reculturing Schools to Provide Students with Multiple Pathways to College and Career)	A; B; C; D

Assessment:

While there are standardized and teacher-created assessments for formative and summative evaluation of student learning, little has been done to differentiate which kinds of assessments are used for racially diverse students in integrated schools. If you and your staff want to engage in a critical reflection process to detect potential bias in your curriculum, use this tool to [Assess Bias in Standards and Curricular Materials](#) from the Great Lakes Equity Center (assessing curriculum for bias vs. assessing student learning from curriculum).

Implications:

K-12 curriculum development and choices have evolved over time, as we have evolved as a society. With attention to the diversity of our student demographics and the importance of students feeling academically, socially and emotionally connected to their school community, the kind of curriculum used in schools is an important decision.

The choices that teachers make regarding curriculum can liberate students of color or indoctrinate them into mainstream dominant culture. Before educators can make informed choices about what and how to teach diverse students, awareness of the history of schooling in the US is a critical part of developing critical consciousness and determining what curriculum is better taught to marginalized students. Style, E. , 1996 writes in *Curriculum as Windows and Mirror* “ All students deserve a curriculum which mirrors their own experience back to them, upon occasion — thus validating it in the public world of the school. But curriculum must also insist upon the fresh air of windows into the experience of others — who also need and deserve the public validation of the school curriculum.”

Creating and using an engaging curriculum that represents various groups of racial and ethnically diverse students is meaningful; however, there is opposition to offering curriculum that provide ethnic groups access to their particular contributions to US history (i.e. African-American studies, Native-American studies, women’s history). Those in opposition believe that these offerings undermine American history and its traditions. More information about this perspective can be found in this article entitled “[What’s Happened to Public School Curriculum?](#)”

Conclusion:

Curriculum is the cornerstone of educating the whole child. The cognitive and affective learning of diverse groups of students in integrated schools hinges on educators intentionally selecting liberatory pedagogy and practices that will serve the needs of all students as they matriculate through their K-12 learning experience. If done well, schools have the potential to become learning environments where adults provide each child an opportunity for authentic engagement.

These promising practices can support a school’s efforts to provide curricular materials that support equity, diversity and inclusion while enabling each student to become competent and confident life-long learners and graduates who positively contribute to our democracy and society.

References:

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Stabback, Philip. (2016). "What Makes a Quality Curriculum" No.2 IBE/2016/WP/CD/02.
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Style, E. (1996). Curriculum as window and mirror. The SEED Project on inclusive curriculum.
Retrieved June 26, 2013.

Internal Intern Notes

- Under approaches and strategies, see if the different resources fit within the systemic focus stakeholder groups (They should go within the chart)
- Make sure this is telling a larger story (feels a little term and name-droppy)
- Clean up the references
- Review editing history under Assessment section