Culturally Responsive Curriculum Scorecard

About NYU Metro Center

The Metropolitan Center for Research on Equity and the Transformation of Schools (NYU Metro Center) promotes equity and opportunity in education through engaged sciences—research, program evaluation, policy analysis, and professional assistance to educational, governmental, and community agencies serving vulnerable communities and populations. NYU Metro Center is nationally and internationally renowned for its work on educational equity and school improvement, bringing together scholars, educators, and innovators from diverse backgrounds to collaborate on a range of projects to strengthen and improve access, opportunity, and educational quality across varied settings, but particularly in striving communities.

For nearly four decades, NYU Metro Center has been a partner and resource for schools and school districts throughout the U.S. and beyond, including Detroit, Denver, Houston, New York City, Pittsburgh, San Juan, Washington, D.C., and Wilmington. Its research and community engagement programs help prepare teachers, school leaders and staff, and parents to improve school culture and climate, reduce referrals to special education, and better support the unique needs of youth across a range of abilities and backgrounds. Its research initiatives inform the policy and intervention communities on how best to serve vulnerable populations in and beyond our school systems.

About EJ-ROC

The Education Justice Research and Organizing Collaborative (EJ-ROC) brings together researchers and community organizers to provide critical research, data, policy and strategic support for the education justice movement. EJ-ROC aims to democratize education data, research and policy; maximize the synergy between research and community organizing; magnify the voices of grassroots communities of color; and advance the capacity of organizing efforts to design solutions, make demands, and sustain policy wins.

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Purpose Of This Scorecard

NYU Metro Center designed this tool to help parents, teachers, students, and community members determine the extent to which their schools' English Language Arts curricula are (or are not) culturally responsive. We hope that this process will provoke thinking about how students should learn, what they should learn, and how curriculum can be transformed to engage students effectively. To create this tool, we drew upon a wide variety of existing resources, including multicultural rubrics, anti-bias rubrics, textbook rubrics, and rubrics aimed at creating cultural standards for educators, determining bias in children books and examining lesson plans (ADEED, 2012; Aguilar-Valdez, 2015; Grant & Sleeter, 2003; Lindsey et al, 2008; NCCRES, 2006; Rudman, 1984; World View, 2013). We supplemented those with additional questions to provide a more comprehensive tool (see Scorecard Development at bit.ly/CRCScorecard for full details).
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What Is Culturally Responsive Education (CRE)?

Culturally responsive education (closely related to the terms "culturally relevant" and "culturally sustaining" education) refers to the combination of teaching, pedagogy, curriculum, theories, attitudes, practices, and instructional materials that center students' culture, identities, and contexts throughout educational systems. Gloria Ladson-Billings and Geneva Gay's scholarship is foundational to culturally responsive education. Some key principles of culturally responsive education (CRE) include (1) validating students' experiences and values, (2) disrupting power dynamics that privilege dominant groups, and (3) empowering students, NYU Metro Center's report "Culturally Responsive Education: A Primer for Policy and Practice" more fully details the origins, significance, and impact of CRE in schools.

Significance of CRE

Across the country, rigorous evaluations and studies have shown that culturally responsive curricula increase student academic engagement, attendance, grade point averages, graduation rates, civic engagement, positive racial self-images, and self-definition (Browman, 2011; Butler-Barnes, 2017; Cabrera, 2012; Carter, 2008; Dee & Penner 2016; Morell, 2013). CRE is essential for students of color, and also has a positive impact on White students and their ability to think critically (Laird, 2005). Not only does CRE impact students' academic experiences, but it can also have significant influence on racial attitudes and biases, and provide the cognitive tools needed to critique institutional racism (Garth-McCullough, 2008).

CRE and Curricula

When public schools talk about curriculum, they often mean the whole package of learning goals and standards; units and lessons that lay out what teachers teach each day and week; assignments, activities and projects given to students; and books, materials, videos, presentations, and readings used in the class. Some examples of curricula materials include textbooks and the accompanying teacher's manual, a notebook of handout a textbook or a book list with matching activities. Curriculum is a key component of culturally responsive teaching, as it is filled with stories, activities, assignments, and illustrations that influence how young people understand the world, and contribute to centering and normalizing people, cultures, and values. Curricula that only reflect the lives of dominant populations - for example, White people and culture, nuclear families, or able-bodied people - reinforce ideas that sideline students of color, linguistically diverse students, single parent/multi-generation/ LGBTQ+ led families, and students with disabilities.

While textbooks are largely static and not responsive to students in ways that teachers can be, textbooks can provide opportunities and resources for teachers to utilize culturally responsive practices. This tool provides a way for parents, teachers, students, and communities to assess the extent to which their curriculum provides these opportunities.

How To Use This Scorecard

We have designed this scorecard so that it can be customized to the context and conditions of your school district and campaign. Completing the entire document will give you the most comprehensive analysis of how culturally responsive your curriculum is. If you don't have the time or capacity to do that, you can complete an individual section and get a more limited evaluation. We designed this tool with K through eighth grade English Language Arts curricula in mind, but feel free to try it with other grades and subjects as well. If your school doesn't have a set curriculum, you can also use this tool to evaluate the diversity of the school or classroom library.

The Seven Steps To Complete Your Curriculum Scorecard

1 Get your child's/school's curriculum

Go to your teacher, principal, or district office, and ask to see your child's or school's English Language Arts curriculum. In many districts, there is a Parent Bill of Rights that gives parents the right to access their child's curriculum. If the school is using a commercial curriculum, ask for a copy or the name and publisher so you can look it up online. (If you need to purchase it, NYU Metro Center can help). If the school is using a home-made curriculum, ask for a copy, or at least a sample of a few months of lesson materials. If they refuse to give you the curriculum, take your request to a higher level in the district, or discuss with your team to decide next steps.

2 Select your curriculum evaluation team

The curriculum scorecard will work best if you have a team of at least 3 people with diverse identities (race, gender, age, sexuality, class, national origin) and roles (parent, student, teacher, administrator, community member) who work together to evaluate the curriculum. These people do not have to be education professionals or have prior experience with evaluation. The more people, the better!

3 Choose the grades, units, and lessons to analyze

Curricula can be thousands of pages, so you will need to select one or a few grades, units, and lessons to focus on (a sample of the larger curricula). The units you choose should not focus specifically on diversity and multiculturalism; they should be typical units. If you are able to cover more than one grade, select at least one lower and one upper grade.

4 Pull out keywords

Once you have your curriculum and the scorecard in hand, review the statements for the scorecard you will begin with (Representation, Social Justice or Teachers Materials). Make sure the team understands each statement, and refer to the Glossary and Explanations with any questions. Chart key words, ideas and qualities from the statements that you will be looking for as you read the curriculum. This will help ensure that as you read, you are focused on the information you'll need in order to effectively score.

5 Conduct the evaluation

The scorecard asks for your level of satisfaction with the curriculum on various measures. There is no right answer; this is just your opinion as someone who cares about culturally responsive education. As you answer each statement, use the Scoring Guidelines to help you decide your ratings.

6 Score the evaluation

Tally your score for each section of the scorecard. A curriculum may excel in one area and fall short in another, and it is important to record those differences. You should come out with one score for each of the following sections:

+ Character Tally
+ Author Tally
+ Representation
+ Social Justice
+ Teachers Materials

7 Discuss with your team

Discuss the process with your team: Did anything new come up? What was easy and what was hard? Did some items seem more important than others? This is also an opportunity to strategize about next steps: Do you think this evaluation provides an accurate picture of the curriculum? Does additional information need to be collected? Is there anyone you want to meet with to discuss the results?

8 Share the results

Let other people know how culturally responsive your curriculum is! Please share the results of your scorecard through this link: bit.ly/scorecardresults.

Explanation of Scorecard

Representation

The Representation section helps you determine the extent to which students in your school are reflected in their curriculum, and the extent to which they are being exposed to a group of diverse of authors, characters, identities, and cultures. Representation can sometimes be just a token gesture - putting non-White or female characters in the place of White male characters. This numerical representation coupled with deeper indicators of representation provides the first layer of CRE analysis.

Character And Author Tally

This section of the scorecard captures the representation of characters from specific cultures. Use the tally to count the symbolic representation of characters and authors by race, gender, and ability. Refer to this tally to help you determine your level of satisfaction in the Representation section of the scorecard we will use tally the types of people in each image by race, gender, and ability to assess for frequency of representation..

Diversity of Characters

This section looks at how diverse people and cultures are portrayed in the curriculum - specifically the extent to which people of different cultures, skin tones, abilities, etcetera are central to a story.

Accurate Portrayals

This section looks at the extent to which characters accurately reflect the histories and experiences of their cultures. Culturally responsive curriculum will position characters as multi-dimensional and portray characters in non-stereotypical ways.

Social Justice

The Social Justice section is divided into three categories, each of which contribute to understanding the opportunities that curricula provide for cultural responsiveness.

Decolonization, Power, & Privilege

This section focuses on understanding relationships among people, worldviews, resources, ideas, and power dynamics. Historically, public school curricula reflected Eurocentric ideas and culture, while the contributions and philosophies of other groups were excluded, minimized, misrepresented, or relegated to a small portion of the curricula. A culturally responsive curriculum centers sources of knowledge, experiences, and stories of diverse groups of people.

Centering Multiple Perspectives

Centering multiple perspectives means affirming, valuing, and sustaining the worldviews of historically underrepresented peoples as the central focus in educational materials or curricula.

Connect Learning to Real Life & Action

One of the most essential components of CRE is connecting or relating learning to students' real life experiences, communities, and cultures. Culturally responsive curricula should encourage students to connect to experiences beyond their own, examine their own perspective and privilege, and develop a critical consciousness about systems of oppression in order to take action against them.

Teacher's Materials

For this section, review all the teacher's materials for the curriculum you selected. This means that you may have more than one section to review – a Teacher's Manual for the curriculum overall as well as any teacher guidance within the individual units or lesson plans. Since many teachers do not receive training on culturally responsive teaching strategies, curricula should provide teachers with guidance on how to approach, enhance, and customize lessons for their student populations.