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Providing an Equitable Education Through Curriculum Transformation

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### Abstract

The purpose of this essay is to identify criteria within curricula that contribute to providing equitable education and to analyze and evaluate one curriculum based on these criteria. I first describe school-based factors that contribute to the achievement gap, in order to demonstrate the need for curricular change. Then I describe the criteria used to create the curriculum evaluation tool, which addresses four categories: learners and learning, the learning environment, curriculum materials and instructional strategies, and assessment. Finally, I use the evaluation tool to analyze and evaluate a sixth grade language arts curriculum to determine the degree to which the curriculum provides an equitable education.

## Providing an Equitable Education Through Curriculum Transformation

In an age of educational accountability, the term “achievement gap” is one that has become familiar not only among educators but among the general public. Whether measured by standardized test scores, drop out rates, or college entrance rates, students from racial and ethnic minority groups are not reaching the same level of achievement as their white classmates. Many factors, both within and outside of the school system, contribute to this gap, and closing the gap has become a primary concern of educators and policy makers. Transforming a school’s curriculum can play a crucial role in raising student achievement. Three pedagogies in particular – multicultural education, critical multiculturalism, and culturally responsive teaching – offer strategies that, if implemented, will enable schools to provide all students with an equitable education. In this essay, I analyze these three pedagogies to identify criteria that have implications for curriculum design and implementation. Using these criteria, I designed a curriculum evaluation tool to analyze and evaluate the degree to which a curriculum addresses issues of diversity and provides students with an equitable education.

I begin by briefly describing two of the school-based factors that contribute to the achievement gap, in order to demonstrate the need for curricular change. I then describe the tool I created, which addresses four areas in which such change can be implemented: learners and learning, the learning environment, curriculum materials and instructional strategies, and assessment. Putting the tool into action, I analyze the sixth grade language arts curriculum of a private middle school and evaluate the degree to which the curriculum meets the criteria for providing an equitable education. Finally, I reflect on the value and drawbacks of the tool and

how my learning will impact my practice both as a teacher and as a curriculum specialist in the future.

#### Examining Underlying Causes: Recasting Achievement Gap as “Education Debt”

In her 2006 AERA Presidential Address, Gloria Ladson-Billings offered a new paradigm for viewing the discrepancy in achievement between students of color and white students. Rather than focusing on the immediate gap or “deficit,” she described an education debt that has accumulated over time. This debt is the sum of previous inequities—many of them tied directly to education—that racial and ethnic minority groups have faced throughout history in our country. Ladson-Billings argues that the achievement gap itself is not the problem; it is just a symptom of larger problems that must be addressed in order to truly provide all students with an equitable education. Focusing on the achievement gap only offers short-term solutions and ignores the underlying problem: that many of these inequities are still perpetuated by school and society today. Societal factors, such as poverty, that contribute to the education debt are clearly larger than a school system can address on its own. However, the school system itself plays a role in reproducing societal inequalities through practices that disadvantage students who are not part of the dominant culture. Two of the most harmful practices are ignorance of and invalidation of students’ home cultures, leading to cultural discontinuity, and tracking, which consistently provides certain groups of students with an inferior education.

The theory of cultural discontinuity describes “a mismatch between the culture of the school and the culture of the home, which results in misunderstandings between teachers and students in the classroom” (Au, 2005, p. 8). Students from the dominant culture enter school with an advantage because they are already accustomed to the norms and values upon which the school system is based. These norms and values are also known as cultural capital and include

the ways in which teachers and students interact, the ways students interact with their peers, and the instructional strategies, curriculum, and assessments that are used in the classroom. Every culture has its own cultural capital – the behavior, dress, speech, attitudes, and norms that are valued by that culture. However, schools value and reproduce the cultural capital of the dominant culture (Bourdieu, 1973). Children from outside the dominant culture have to learn how to act in this new setting and are therefore at a disadvantage and often have difficulty achieving academic success. Rather than using culturally congruent communication styles, instructional strategies, and curriculum materials, students' home cultures and languages are devalued, and they are expected to assimilate into the dominant culture (Au, 2005; Bourdieu, 1973; Delpit, 2006; Gay, 2000; MacLeod, 1995; Nieto, 2000). Disproportionate rates of school failure are occurring, not because these children are incapable of success, but because “by the definitions and standards of the school, they consistently are evaluated as deficient” (MacLeod, 1995, p. 100). Indeed, not only do students from racial and ethnic minority groups have lower test scores, higher drop out rates, and lower college entrance rates (NCES, 2005), they are also over-represented in special education programs (Kea & Utley, 1998; Milner, 2007), under-represented in gifted and Advanced Placement programs, and disciplined more frequently and more severely (Milner, 2007), suggesting that the way schools evaluate these students is biased.

Not only do instructional strategies and interaction styles become barriers to student success, but the learning environment itself can disadvantage students through the practice of tracking; that is, placing students into groups based on perceived ability. This can be within a single classroom (such as reading groups in elementary classrooms), by subject area (basic or accelerated math classes), or by programs of study at the high school level (academic or vocational). The majority of schools in the U.S. use some form of tracking despite “empirical

evidence, court decisions, and reform proposals [that] suggest that tracking and rigid ability grouping are generally ineffective, and for many children, harmful” (Oakes & Lipton, 1994, p. 189). Poor, African-American, and Latino students are disproportionately placed in low-ability level groups, often based on factors other than their actual ability (Nieto, 2000). This is problematic because several studies have shown students in lower ability level groups receive inferior instruction.

Students in higher ability level groups are taught more holistically, while lower level students are deprived of techniques that have been shown to improve student learning, such as uptakes, reading in context, and pauses before teacher correction. In fact, the opposite of some of these strategies can even be detrimental. For instance, immediate teacher correction can lead to what is known as learned helplessness; children come to rely on the teacher's response and cannot self-correct or make meaning on their own. Additionally, curriculum in lower level courses omits learning, such as critical thinking, that would enable students to move to and be successful in upper level courses. Instead of providing students with remediation or extra help that allows them to progress further in their education, tracking holds students back (Cazden, 1988; Nieto, 2000; Oakes & Lipton, 1994).

### Transforming Curriculum

Transforming a school’s curriculum can eliminate cultural discontinuity and provide an equitable learning environment. Pedagogies such as multicultural education, critical multiculturalism, and culturally responsive teaching offer ways in which curriculum can be transformed to reflect a culturally pluralistic view of knowledge, include culturally congruent instructional strategies and assessments, hold high expectations for all students, create a positive

learning environment, and empower students and teachers alike to become agents of social change.

Multicultural education strives “to reform schools, colleges, and universities so that students from diverse racial, ethnic, and social-class groups will experience educational equality” (Banks, 2006, p. 3). This reform includes changes to curriculum and pedagogy, as well as changes in the structure and administration of schooling. Critical multiculturalism differs from traditional multicultural education in that it deals directly with issues of oppression and social inequality, with the vision of reconstructing society. Culturally responsive teaching focuses specifically on curriculum and pedagogy with the goal of “using the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning encounters more relevant to and effective for them” (Gay, 2000, p. 29). Culturally responsive teaching focuses primarily on what goes on in the classroom. Multicultural education extends its scope to the entire school system, and critical multiculturalism reaches beyond school to examine and critique society. Each of these pedagogies offers strategies for curriculum transformation in the four categories addressed in my evaluation tool.

To discuss implications for curriculum development, it is first necessary to define what is meant by the term curriculum. At its most narrow definition, curriculum is a set of materials, such as a textbook, used in instruction. At its most broad, curriculum encompasses all of the experiences an individual has in his or her interaction with the school. Numerous definitions exist in between, for instance curriculum as a program of studies, as planned learning activities, or as a set of subject areas. The three pedagogies I examine argue that curriculum must be viewed broadly in order to have the greatest impact. As Geneva Gay describes, “If we are to achieve equality, we must broaden our conception [of curriculum] to include the entire culture of

the school—not just subject matter content” (as cited in Oliva, 2005, p. 5). Thus my curriculum evaluation tool was designed to examine curricula as defined broadly and includes criteria for examining both the planned curriculum and the enacted curriculum.

The planned curriculum is the curriculum that is written down and can include the curriculum guide, scope and sequence, subject area standards, lesson plans, and materials such as text, worksheets, and images that are used by teachers or students. The enacted curriculum consists of what materials are actually used or implemented, what information is emphasized and tested, the ways in which the teacher, students, and materials interact, and the attitudes of the teacher and others in the school community (Ball, 1996). This distinction is important in evaluating a curriculum for equity, since what is planned may not be enacted, and therefore may not actually contribute toward increasing educational equity. The planned curriculum may meet most of the criteria for equity and yet is not implemented in such a way as to achieve its intent.

The evaluation tool identifies criteria for providing equitable education in four categories: learners and learning, the learning environment, assessment, and curriculum materials and instructional strategies. In some cases, criteria apply to more than one category and are found listed more than once.

### Learners and Learning

The criteria related to learners and learning attempts to answer two questions, how should students be treated and how do people learn? In answering these questions, the goal is to eliminate bias and discrimination on the basis of race, class, culture, or gender and to alleviate the problem of cultural discontinuity.

In order to avoid bias and discrimination, curricula should reflect a dynamic and complex view of culture and identity and avoid essentializing a culture based on stereotypical or



“different” elements of that culture. Curricula should reflect the fact that individuals have multiple overlapping identities. Categories of diversity, such as race, class, gender, culture, and ability, are not competing with one another to see which achieves prominence in an individual’s identity; rather, each element forms an integral piece (Delpit, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 2004; McLaren, 1995; Nieto). Students should also have a voice in deciding to some degree what goes on in the classroom, such as making choices about what topics they are interested in learning about, how they prefer to learn, and how they prefer to be assessed. Finally, both teacher and curriculum should express high expectations for all students and hold the view that all students are capable of success (Banks, 1991; Fine, 1989; Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1994, 1995; Nieto, 2000).

Allowing students to have voice in the classroom and allowing their needs and interests to inform the curriculum are characteristics not only of how students should be treated but also of how they learn best. Instructional strategies should take into account different learning styles, multiple intelligences, and cultural differences in learning and communication (Banks, 1999, 2006; Cazden, 1988; Delpit, 2006; Lee, 2008; Nieto, 2000) by using the “cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning encounters more relevant to and effective for them” (Gay, 2000, p. 29). Regular use of cooperative learning and heterogeneous grouping is one strategy that has been shown to be effective for students of many different cultural backgrounds (Gay, 2000; Haberman, 1991; Slavin & Cooper, 1999).

### The Learning Environment

Another important area in which curriculum transformation can have an impact is the learning environment. This includes characteristics of the classroom, school, and community that

support student achievement, as well as the role that the teacher takes in interacting with students. First and foremost, the culture of the school should be one that empowers students by allowing them to take an active role in their own education and enabling them to become active agents of social change. The role of education should be one that enables students to contribute toward building a better society (Au, 2005; Banks, 1999, 2006; Cummins, 1986; Weil, 1998). To this end, the curriculum must deal directly with problems of oppression and social inequality and encourage students to take action toward solving these issues (Ball, 2000; Banks, 1999; Sleeter & Grant, 1994). The classroom, school, and community must be designed in such a way as to create a collaborative community of learners among students, teachers, and community members. Teachers should employ regular use of cooperative learning and heterogeneous grouping, which assist in creating a community of learners, facilitate cross-race peer interaction, and enable students to learn from one another (Banks, 2006; Cochran-Smith, 1995; Gay, 2000; Haberman, 1991; Ladson-Billings, 1994, 1995; Slavin & Cooper, 1999).

As members of a collaborative community of learners, teachers should view themselves as co-creators of knowledge and constructors of curriculum alongside their students, rather than as dispensers of knowledge, doling it out to students piece by piece. Teachers should express high expectations for all students and hold the view that all students, no matter what their background or previous academic record, are capable of success. Developing a positive student-teacher relationship is one of the key factors in promoting student achievement (Cochran-Smith, 1995; Gay, 2000; Ladson Billings, 1994, 1995; Nieto, 2000).

On a school-wide level, eliminating tracking is a crucial step toward providing students with an equitable learning environment, whether it is tracking within classrooms, within subject areas, or high school programs of studies (Nieto, 2000; Oakes & Lipton, 1994).

### Curriculum Materials and Instructional Strategies

In evaluating the actual curriculum materials used and the instructional strategies with which they are paired, it is important to consider how the curriculum answers three questions: What is knowledge? What is important for students to know and be able to do? What instructional strategies best facilitate student learning?

Multicultural education, critical multiculturalism, and culturally responsive teaching hold the view that knowledge is not neutral or static. Rather, it is constructed and shaped by cultural and social factors and issues of power. The definition of knowledge espoused by traditional school curricula reflects the ways of knowing that are valued by the dominant group in society. An equitable curriculum, on the other hand, should present students with alternate views and empower them to become involved in the knowledge-construction process. Cochran-Smith (1995) critiques the traditional lesson plan created in advance by teachers and applied in the same way for each group of students each year. This type of lesson assumes that teaching is a linear process and that “knowledge, curriculum, and instruction are static and unchanging, transmitted through a one-way conduit from teacher to students, rather than socially constructed through the transactions of teachers, children, and texts” (p. 496).

Knowledge is also culturally pluralistic. The traditional school curriculum is one that is Eurocentric and male-dominated, with the perspectives of women and other racial or ethnic groups provided as add-ons and talked *about* rather than given voice. In an equitable curriculum, the world view is shifted from a Eurocentric perspective to a multicultural perspective, where each concept, theme, or event is described and discussed from the perspective of a wide variety of ethnic or cultural groups, both genders, and multiple social classes. Each of these groups is given voice and accurately portrayed in both text and images. Culture is viewed as complex and

dynamic and is not watered down to the “holidays and heroes” approach found most often in traditional curricula (Banks, 199, 1999, 2006; Cochran-Smith, 1995; Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1994, 1995, 2004; McLaren, 1995; Sleeter, 1996, 2001; Weil, 1998).

Along with a transformed view of what knowledge *is* comes a transformed view of what knowledge is important. Viewing knowledge as culturally pluralistic means that students should learn to view the world from a multicultural perspective and should gain the information and skills needed to function within and across various cultures. And since the purpose of education is to enable students to take action in the world, students should be empowered to confront inequality and injustice and work to transform society. The curriculum should guide students to identify, analyze, and challenge the dominant discourse (Banks, 1991, 1999, 2006; Gay, 2000; McLaren, 1995; Sleeter, 1996; Sleeter & Grant, 1994; Weil, 1998).

Instructional strategies that best facilitate student learning are ones that take into account cultural differences in learning and communication, incorporating these differences and building on student strengths, rather than forcing students to assimilate into the dominant culture. This means that students’ home languages and cultures should be valued, validated, and incorporated into the classroom. Different learning styles and multiple intelligences should also be taken into consideration when planning instruction to make sure that the needs of all students are met. The use of scaffolding, in which new learning is connected to students’ prior knowledge, is also an effective strategy for all students and requires that teachers become familiar with their students’ backgrounds in order to access this prior knowledge. Other strategies previously mentioned include expressing high expectations and the view that all students are capable of success, regular use of cooperative learning and heterogeneous grouping in an environment characterized as a collaborative community of learners, and allowing student participation in curricular

decision-making (Banks, 1999, 2006; Cazden, 1988; Cochran-Smith, 1995; Cummins, 1986; Delpit, 2006; Gay, 2000; Haberman, 1991; Ladson-Billings, 1994, 1995; Lee, 2008; Nieto, 2000; Slavin & Cooper, 1999).

### Assessment

The final category in which curriculum must be transformed in order to achieve educational equity is assessment. Assessments used, both formative and summative, must be free of bias and informed by knowledge of students' cultural backgrounds. Multiple forms of assessment should be utilized to allow for multiple intelligences, multiple definitions of success, and multiple forms of excellence. Assessments should be used, not to rank and categorize students, but to provide frequent feedback that is used to adjust teaching and enhance student learning (Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1994, 1995).

### Analysis of Sixth Grade Language Arts Curriculum

Putting these criteria into action, I examined the sixth grade language arts curriculum of a private middle school to determine the degree to which the curriculum achieves educational equity. My analysis in this case covers a more limited view of curriculum, the planned curriculum only. This includes a textbook unit on disasters and adventures, one week of teacher-created lesson plans from this unit, and the corresponding sections from the curriculum guide. The curriculum guide breaks down the three state content standards for sixth grade English into learning expectations, essential questions, instructional ideas, and assessments. While the lesson plans and textbook unit I examined were only a small sample, I examined the majority of the curriculum guide, since the week-long lesson plan referenced twenty out of the twenty-nine learning expectations. I have included a copy of the tool and my scoring in the appendix.

In evaluating each criterion, I used the following rating scale: A = Many examples seen

throughout the curriculum, defining feature of curriculum; B = Some examples seen throughout curriculum; C = Occasional example seen in curriculum, but not a defining feature; D = Not seen in curriculum; F = Opposite feature seen in curriculum. Overall, I scored the curriculum as a C; there were some features of an equitable curriculum, but most were seen only occasionally and many important elements were absent altogether. Since this is only a small sample of the school's curriculum, however, it is not necessarily indicative or representative of the complete curriculum.

### Learners and Learning Analysis

In the category of Learners and Learning, I did not find any evidence that students' home languages and cultures were addressed in the curriculum or that the curriculum explored cultural differences in any way. There was really no reference to culture at all in any of the materials I examined, other than one learning expectation in the curriculum guide, which stated that students should "recognize widely used foreign words (e.g., bon jour, hasta la vista)." This example itself seems to take a very simplistic view of cultural differences. I also did not find any evidence that the curriculum addressed cultural differences in learning and communication, except for one example that was potentially culturally biased. The curriculum guide described the use of "correct stress, pitch, and juncture in oral reading" and a "variety of nonverbal communication techniques." The use of the word "correct" in the first phrase leads me to believe that techniques that differ from those used by the dominant culture may be considered unacceptable. However, without seeing this learning objective in action, I cannot be certain that this is the case.

I was pleased to see that the curriculum attempted to make use of multiple intelligences; in the curriculum guide, the instructional ideas and assessments were both keyed to the multiple intelligences reflected in each. However, when I examined the frequency with which each

intelligence was represented, the results reflected primarily traditional academic intelligences, with linguistic and intrapersonal showing up thirty-six and twenty times, respectively, followed by interpersonal at eleven. Other intelligences were either not represented or represented infrequently. Of course, the fact that this is a language arts curriculum makes it likely that the linguistic intelligence would be utilized more frequently, but even taking this into consideration, the curriculum does not reflect a balanced use of the intelligences. The curriculum also addressed different learning styles by providing activities that involve viewing and creating art, acting, talking, and listening.

Some activities in the curriculum allowed students a limited opportunity for voice, such as the ability to choose a writing topic for some assignments. There were also a few occasions in which relevance to students' lives was addressed. In reading, the curriculum asks students to identify the importance of various reading selections to their lives and to relate texts to their personal experiences. In writing, students are prompted to use their prior knowledge to provide background information for the task. However, in other instances, student voice and relevance are limited; for instance, students are often provided writing prompts that do not allow choice and are given a topic for a research paper rather than choosing their own. The frequent use of grammar worksheets lessens the relevance of building grammar skills.

I saw limited use of cooperative learning, with a few suggested activities in the textbook and some, most often pair activities, in the curriculum guide. The lesson plans did not show any use of grouping other than whole-class and pairs. None of the materials specified how these groups should be formed, so I could not determine whether or not heterogeneous groups would be used.

### Learning Environment Analysis

In examining the learning environment, some criteria could not be observed from the written curriculum, such as an empowering school culture or whether or not tracking was in place. Other characteristics of the learning environment were not present or only occasionally present. The curriculum did not address issues of oppression or social inequality and did not encourage social action. As mentioned previously, there was limited use of cooperative learning. There were also some indications that the classroom functioned as a collaborative community of learners. For instance, the curriculum guide encouraged the formation of student book clubs and provided suggested group games and activities. Other collaborative activities include reading in groups, conducting peer evaluations, and the “hot seat” activity used in the lesson plans. The “hot seat” activity might also serve as a collaboration between teachers and students, since the teacher must relinquish control of the conversation to students in order to conduct the activity. Other elements regarding the role of the teacher were not able to be observed.

### Curriculum and Instruction Analysis

In the category of Curriculum Materials and Instructional Strategies, the criteria regarding knowledge received the lowest scores. On viewing knowledge as constructed, I rated the curriculum as a C, because of limited opportunities for student voice and student-teacher collaboration mentioned previously. I found no other indications that knowledge was viewed as constructed. On viewing knowledge as culturally pluralistic, the curriculum received an F. All of the texts from the unit I examined are by white authors, set in Western countries (U.S., Canada, and England), and reflect a Eurocentric perspective by focusing on themes such as exploration and Western expansion.

The curriculum also fails to provide a multicultural perspective when discussing writing



and grammar. Discussion in both the curriculum guide and textbook on the organization of writing refers to chronological or sequential organization as the “correct” way of writing, which is a reflection of the dominant culture. By contrast, storytelling in African American culture is often episodic, including shifting scenes, and may not be linear. Arapaho storytelling is often serial, with no clear beginning, end, or climax (Cazden, 2001; Delpit, 2006). To view one way of storytelling as “correct,” thus labeling others “incorrect,” is culturally biased. In covering grammar objectives, the curriculum guide refers to standard English, “correct” usage, and “usage errors” rather than dialectal variations. Dialectal variations are mentioned as a learning expectation, but the focus is on regional differences (north, south, west, east) rather than cultural or social class differences. This view can be detrimental to students who speak nonstandard dialects at home, as the curriculum is effectively labeling their home language as “wrong” or “ungrammatical” (Delpit, 2006).

Additionally, the curriculum does not serve to empower students to confront inequalities. It does include some information and skills that may enable students to function within and across various cultures, specifically when addressing audience in writing. The language arts content standard requires students to “produce written language that can be read, presented to, and interpreted by various audiences.” The curriculum guide breaks this down further to specify that students will “write for a variety of audiences and purposes” and “identify the mode, usage level, and conventions” appropriate for each audience. The potential audiences listed include family, friends, classmates, teachers, school and community. This learning expectation provides opportunity for students to communicate cross-culturally, although it does not explicitly suggest it.

Some equitable instructional strategies are employed in the curriculum as mentioned

earlier, including addressing different learning styles and multiple intelligences, allowing limited student voice and relevance, some use of cooperative learning, and attempts to create a collaborative community of learners. There are also several instances where scaffolding is explicitly used. For instance, to develop reading fluency, the curriculum guide calls for guided, small group, and independent reading, and reading both aloud and silently. Students are also asked to use text features such as title, headings, images, etc, to preview the text before reading and to “utilize personal experiences to build background knowledge for reading.” In the lesson plans, the teacher also models reading and comprehension strategies for students before asking them to use the strategies on their own.

#### Assessment Analysis

The final category I examined was Assessment. This was probably the most difficult to evaluate, since I did not have copies of actual assessments used, only descriptions of the assessments. Because of this limitation, I was not able to determine whether or not the assessments were free of bias or informed by knowledge of students’ cultural backgrounds. The textbook, curriculum guide, and lesson plans did appear to include both formative and summative assessments, although they were not necessarily labeled as such. Some feedback was noted, such as the teacher providing immediate feedback after student presentations. However, feedback was not mentioned often and was not necessarily connected to enhancing student learning. Multiple forms of assessment were used to a limited degree. The primary means of assessment was through the use of rubrics, completed as self-, peer-, and teacher-evaluations. Other assessments mentioned include creating a collage, interviewing classmates, read-aloud performances, and writing conferences with the teacher.

Overall, the curriculum I analyzed does not meet the criteria for providing equitable

education. The majority of the instructional strategies used are not culturally responsive and the view of knowledge reflects the dominant culture rather than providing a multicultural perspective. It is possible that this sample is not representative of the entire curriculum and that further analysis would garner a higher score. However, the sample is enough to show that the curriculum is not ideal and needs to be transformed in order to provide an equitable education for all students.

### Personal Learning and Implications for Future Practice

As an undergraduate, I completed my honors thesis on multicultural education. My goal in attending graduate school was to learn more about equitable education and develop the skills needed to design and implement this type of curriculum. Throughout the two years of my Master's program, I learned about the school-based inequities underlying the achievement gap, cementing my resolve to pursue this goal. This project helped me to synthesize what I have learned and clarify my understanding about both curriculum development and equitable educational practices. Actually utilizing the evaluation tool gave me further experience analyzing curriculum, which will impact my future practice, since this is the type of work I hope to do. I now feel more confident in my ability to evaluate curricula and provide a rationale for that analysis. As a teacher, this skill will help when developing lesson plans, choosing curriculum, and serving as an instructional leader among my colleagues.

I did find when using my tool that it has some drawbacks. I found it difficult to conceptualize how some of the criteria could be seen in the curriculum or what they would look like enacted in the classroom. This suggests clarification of the tool as well as continued learning on my part. Also, this is not a tool that can be picked up and used by anyone; the evaluator must have an understanding of each criterion in order to identify them. There are likely other faults in

the tool as well, but I view it as a starting point and as a tool I can continue to refine in years to come.

I also realize that despite my learning, I still have a long way to go in order to be able to teach equitably and design equitable curriculum myself. I need to learn more about cultural differences in learning and communication in order to be able to incorporate them in the classroom. I need to learn more about different cultures in general and develop a multicultural perspective within my discipline, since as a student I was taught using traditional perspectives. In order to continue my own education, I plan to collaborate with colleagues and students as co-constructors of curriculum, investigating and learning together.

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**I. Learners and Learning**Score:   C  **Guiding Question: *How should students be treated?***

- D   1. Students' home languages and cultures are valued, validated, and incorporated
- D   2. Culture and identity viewed as dynamic and complex: multiple overlapping identities; culture not essentialized; diversity defined as more than just race and culture; categories of diversity not competing
- D   3. Explores both cultural differences and similarities; avoids binaries
- C   4. Opportunities present for incorporating student voice; relevant to students' lives
- N/A   5. Expresses high expectations and view that all students are capable of success

Comments:   1) 6.1.06 – “Recognize widely used foreign words (e.g., bon jour, hasta la vista); stereotypical?”

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**Guiding Question: *How do people learn?***

- D/F?   1. Addresses cultural differences in learning and communication
- B   2. Addresses different learning styles, multiple intelligences
- C   3. Student needs/interests inform curriculum; opportunities present for incorporating student voice; relevant to students' lives
- C   4. Regular use of cooperative learning and heterogeneous grouping

Comments:   1) “correct stress, pitch, and juncture in oral reading”; “variety of nonverbal communication techniques” – culturally biased? 2) Instructional ideas and assessments in curriculum guide keyed to MI, but not all MI represented 3) No choice offered for research project (6.1.09); use of grammar worksheets, not very relevant (6.3.01); use of prior knowledge to provide background for writing (6.2.01)

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**II. Learning Environment**

**Score:   C**

*Classroom, school, community – characteristics of*

- N/A   1. Empowering school culture
- D   2. Curriculum encourages/promotes social action
- D   3. Deals directly with issues of oppression and social inequality
- B   4. Collaborative community of learners
- C   5. Regular use of cooperative learning and heterogeneous grouping
- N/A   6. Eliminate tracking at all levels

Comments:   1) student book clubs (6.1.11); group games and activities – reading in groups, peer evaluations  

*Role of the teacher*

- N/A   1. Positive student teacher relationships
- C   2. Teachers and students as collaborative co-creators of knowledge and constructors of curriculum
- N/A   3. Expresses high expectations and view that all students are capable of success

Comments:   2) Use of “hot seat” activity as attempt to relinquish control to students?

**III. Curriculum Materials and Instructional Strategies**

Score:   C  

*What is knowledge?*

- C   1. Knowledge is constructed; shaped by cultural/social factors and issues of power
- Opportunities present for incorporating student voice
  - Teachers and students are collaborative creators of knowledge and constructors of curriculum
  - Student participation in curriculum decision-making; students as producers and critiquers of content

- F   2. Knowledge is culturally pluralistic
- Multicultural perspective – concepts, themes, and events discussed from the perspectives of a wide variety of ethnic or cultural groups, both genders, and multiple social classes
  - Information and skills that enable students to function within and across various cultures
  - Variety of cultures, ethnic groups, both genders, and other categories of diversity given voice and accurately portrayed in both text and images; not Eurocentric
  - Free of cultural bias
  - Culture and identity viewed as complex, not essentialized; categories of diversity are not competing

Comments:   2) Texts used are all by white authors and reflect Eurocentric perspective, such as Western expansion, exploration, etc, and are set in Western countries – US, Canada, England

  2) organization of writing – chronological or sequential as “correct” way of writing in both curric guide and textbook, reflecting dominant culture

  2) curric guide refers to standard English, “correct” usage and “usage errors” rather than dialectal variations; “explore variations in the use of English in different parts of the country” is mentioned as learning expectation, but the focus is on regional differences (north, south, west, east) rather than cultural or social class differences

positive – interviews, journals, diaries, and narratives as legitimate sources for research (6.2.13); identify stereotypical vs. realistic characters

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***What is important for students to know and be able to do?***

- D   1. Empowers students to confront inequality, injustice, and work to transform society
- Deals directly with issues of oppression and social inequality
  - Guides students to identify, analyze, and challenge the dominant discourse
  - Provides counter-narrative to colorblindness and Eurocentrism
- F   2. Multicultural perspective – concepts, themes, and events discussed from the perspectives of a wide variety of ethnic or cultural groups, both genders, and multiple social classes
- C   3. Information and skills that enable students to function within and across various cultures

Comments:   3   *Content standard 2 – “produce written language that can be read, presented to, and interpreted by various audiences”; 6.2.02 – “write for a variety of audiences and purposes...classmates, family, friends, teachers, school, and community”; “identify the mode, usage level, and conventions” appropriate for each audience*

*1) Identify propaganda?*

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***What instructional strategies best facilitate student learning?***

- D/F?   1. Addresses cultural differences in learning and communication; builds on student strengths
- B   2. Addresses different learning styles, multiple intelligences
- D   3. Students’ home languages and cultures are valued, validated, and incorporated
- B   4. Use of scaffolding, building bridges to assist student learning
- C   5. Student needs/interests inform curriculum; relevant to students’ lives; opportunities present for incorporating student voice
- D   6. Teachers and students are collaborative creators of knowledge and constructors of curriculum
- D   7. Student participation in curriculum decision-making; students as producers and critiquers of content

- \_N/A\_ 8. Frequent feedback provided and used to adjust teaching and enhance learning
- \_B\_ 9. Collaborative community of learners created
- \_C\_ 10. Regular use of cooperative learning and heterogeneous grouping
- \_N/A\_ 11. Expresses high expectations and view that all students are capable of success

Comments: 4) 6.1.05 – Scaffolds to develop reading fluency: guided and independent reading, aloud and silently; use features of text to preview text; “utilize personal experiences to build background knowledge for reading”; teacher modeling reading and comprehension strategies

5) choice of writing topic; identify importance of reading selections to life, relate text to personal experiences

**IV. Assessment**

**Score: \_C\_**

- \_C\_ 1. Multiple forms of assessment utilized to allow for multiple intelligences, multiple definitions of success, multiple forms of excellence
- \_N/A\_ 2. Assessments used are free of bias (cultural, gender, etc)
- \_C\_ 3. Frequent feedback provided and used to adjust teaching and enhance learning
- \_B\_ 4. Both formative and summative assessments used
- \_N/A\_ 5. Informed by knowledge of students’ cultural backgrounds

Comments: self/peer/teacher assessments using rubrics; immediate feedback from teacher after performance; create collage; interview classmates; read aloud; conference w/teacher; use of rubrics and checklists by student