CURRICULUM AS CATALYST

Selecting Culturally Responsive Content

Across Learning Environments

CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE-SUSTAINING EDUCATION

TALE *Academy*

MODULE 2– SESSION 7

LEVERAGING CURRICULUM TO FOSTER 21ST-CENTURY SKILLS

The Western literary canon, which influences (if not dictates) most required reading lists for schools across the country, has become a controversial topic - **particularly in relation to culturally responsive-sustaining education (CRSE).**

Because most of the texts are written by white male authors of the past (Shakespeare, Dickens, Hawthorne, Emerson, Steinbeck, Fitzgerald, and Hemingway, to name just a few), many teachers and school librarians argue these lists need to be revised in order to better reflect the diversity of classrooms. They cite the implicit bias that is often embedded in venerating certain authors above others (i.e., people of color, women, LGBTQIA, and other marginalized groups).

They also cite the harm that this causes to not only the students from traditionally marginalized groups but also those from the dominant culture, as this bias further reinforces limited exposure to other cultures. The debate over the Western literary canon's relevance to students and its hold on most prescribed curriculum helps to illustrate what teachers must grapple with as they seek a more CRSE-informed instructional approach.

This is a particularly critical topic for NYS educators. If we are not conscious of and intentional about our curricular choices, we risk alienating or failing a large portion of our student body.

56.8% of our New York State students are students of color (NYSED). → **56.8%**

83% of the authors on NYC schools' most commonly used English language arts book lists and curricula for elementary and middle school were white, while → **83%**

85% of NYC's student population was students of color ("Diverse City- White Curriculum", 2019). → **85%**

When students' lived experiences are primarily ignored, their histories unacknowledged, or their interests dismissed, we are missing opportunities to engage and empower them.

In this session, we will consider how to leverage our curriculum as a means of fostering the 21st-century skills of student creativity, criticality, communication, and collaboration, as well as how to use the curriculum to achieve three primary goals of CRSE: (1) academic achievement (students growing intellectually and succeeding academically); (2) cultural and linguistic dexterity (students feeling their culture is acknowledged and honored while gaining exposure to and an understanding of the culture of others); and (3) critical consciousness (students developing the ability to analyze, deconstruct, and address social inequities).

CRSE AND CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT

In Session 3 of Module 2 and in Session 6 of Module 1, we explored the three major aspects of curriculum backward design according to Wiggins and McTighe's Understanding by Design. **These are:**

1. *Identify desired results*
2. *Determine acceptable evidence*
3. *Plan learning experiences and instruction*

START at the END

Let's now examine these **three facets of curriculum development** through **the lens of CRSE:**

IDENTIFY DESIRED RESULTS

Combine grade-level state standards and embed the CRSE goals of academic achievement, cultural and linguistic dexterity, and critical consciousness within the enduring understandings. For example, a state standard might require students to know the causes that led to the creation of the Declaration of Independence, and a CRSE-embedded, enduring understanding might lead students to understand the similarities and differences in the struggles and tactics of various groups for freedom throughout U.S. history. Enduring understandings ensure teachers are able to facilitate deeper connections to and applications of academic content.

DETERMINE ACCEPTABLE EVIDENCE

Create assessments that are not only aligned with grade-level state standards but also provide students with opportunities to demonstrate their understanding beyond traditional standardized testing methods and in more culturally responsive ways (see Module 2, Session 6 for more details).

PLAN LEARNING EXPERIENCES & INSTRUCTION

Design curriculum that covers not only required content from grade-level state standards but also reaffirms students' intersectional identities and lived experiences. This curriculum should also provide opportunities to apply knowledge in the context of the real world and to practice sociopolitical consciousness and sociocultural responsiveness (see Module 2, Session 5 for more details).

DEVELOPING CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE-SUSTAINING CURRICULUM

NYSED's CRSE Framework provides additional ways to support the planning instruction phase of understanding by design, recommending that the following be included in curriculum development **(included are examples of how to connect these recommendations to the 4 C's of 21st-century skills):**

CURRENT EVENTS INCORPORATED INTO INSTRUCTION

There are so many ways that creativity, critical thinking, communication, and collaboration can be integrated through current events. For example, students can "translate" a current event into a comic strip, song/rap, or monologue, or they can write an op-ed piece (such as interpreting the Second Amendment in relation to the growing issue of school shootings) or engage in a classroom debate in teams about a relevant news story.

STUDENTS AS CO-DESIGNERS OF CURRICULUM

The 4 C's of 21st-century skills can be integrated with student co-created curriculum because groups of students can be tasked with teaching one objective within a given unit to their classmates, which would require them to engage in critical thinking, creativity, communication, and collaboration during the design phase, as well as collaboration and communication during the actual delivery of the lesson.

RESOURCES WRITTEN AND DEVELOPED BY RACIALLY, CULTURALLY, AND LINGUISTICALLY DIVERSE PERSPECTIVES

Teachers' selections of more diverse resources provide fertile ground for students to exercise the 4 C's of 21st century skills because diverse perspectives help to spark the imagination, identify commonalities, enable problem-solving, and require articulating those ideas.

As we seek ways to better incorporate a CRSE-aligned curriculum, we can focus on four key areas according to eTeachNY.org resources on identifying inclusive curriculum and assessment. **Check your curriculum to ensure the following:**

4 Key Focus Areas

1 REPRESENTATION
The curriculum reflects the diversity that exists in our classroom and offers opportunities for students to celebrate themselves and their cultures.

2 INTERSECTIONALITY
The curriculum presents multiple perspectives on the same topic from a range of folks with diverse experiences - particularly elevating the voices of people from historically marginalized groups - and promotes students' development of anti-bias viewpoints and provides a look through the lens of the past, present, and future.

3 CRITIQUE AND CHALLENGE
The curriculum requires students to develop critical thinking skills and an ability to construct arguments and sound counter-arguments, as well as to engage in civil discourse when confronted with divergent perspectives.

4 AVOID TRAUMA
The curriculum checks that the content does not require students to re-live either a fresh or past traumatic experience and/or provides a trigger warning with an alternative way to engage with the topic and participate in the learning.

CRSE QUESTIONS TO ASK WHEN DESIGNING CURRICULUM

How is my curriculum aligned with the diverse cultures, histories, languages, and experiences of my students?

Where does my curriculum possess natural entry points for field trips to community-learning sites, such as museums, parks, cultural centers, neighborhood recreational centers, and community centers?

In what ways does my curriculum bridge instructional content with the natural interests, pop culture, and daily lives of my students?

What aspects of my curriculum have entailed student co-creation, and where can I integrate more of these partnerships with my students?

How does my curriculum facilitate a greater understanding of global cultures while also fostering a stronger connection to the local community?

What parts of my curriculum include the explicit development of student agency and leadership by promoting students creating and running student-led initiatives?

To what degree is my curriculum incorporating opportunities for students to integrate social-emotional learning that promotes stronger classroom connections and builds community with a deeper sense of belonging?

New York

Highbridge Green School: Community Connections

One school that has exemplified the principles of the NYSED CRSE Framework in their curriculum (even though the project precedes the framework's creation) was highlighted in a 2014 Chalkbeat New York story. Highbridge Green School, located in the Bronx, initiated a collaboration between teachers and families to co-create an English unit plan for the school's inaugural sixth-grade class.

The unit included a project that consisted of students reading a book about a Chinese boy's immigration journey and then interviewing community members (in many cases, the students' own parents or family) on their immigration experience so they could write an essay that made connections between the story and the interviews. Both the students and the parents quoted in the article reported that this was a powerful learning experience.

East: The Power of a CRSE-Aligned Curriculum

Teachers at East - a pairing of a lower school (grades 6-8) and an upper school (grades 9-12) - have been creating a more culturally relevant and responsive curriculum since 2015 in partnership with the University of Rochester.

By combining the power of the understanding by design model (Wiggins, McTighe, Kiernan, & Frost, 1998) with culturally responsive pedagogy, the faculty made rapid progress in a short period. The class of 2015 had a 33.3% four-year graduation rate. However, the class of 2019, the first cohort to have four years of a CRSE-aligned curriculum, had a 69.7% four-year graduation rate, and the class of 2020 had a 78.1% four-year graduation rate.

To share some of the sources of their success, East created Elevated Educator: a database of culturally responsive lessons and materials that you can access here. Elevated Educator also created and published a rubric for aligning your pedagogy, lessons, and units with the principles of culturally responsive-sustaining education.

CRSE-ALIGNED CURRICULUM FOR TALE

As we consider how best to effectively deliver a CRSE-aligned curriculum across learning environments, we can check for the presence of the following CRSE considerations in digital resources.

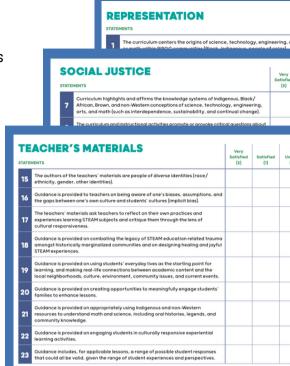| CRSE CONSIDERATION	DIGITAL RESOURCE SUGGESTIONS
Digital resources showcase various perspectives and offer counternarratives to widely held beliefs.	The following links share a two-part series explanation of digital projects incorporating narratives and counternarratives: **Narratives and Counternarratives: Building Digital History Projects in the Classroom** This site is dedicated to eliminating violent extremism by providing counternarratives: **Hedayah**
Digital resources provide students with the opportunity to demonstrate their understanding and equip them to mitigate bias.	The following link contains an assessment that teachers and students can take to learn more about their own implicit biases in order to better mitigate them: **Harvard Implicit Association Test**
Digital resources further develop students' ability to engage with and constructively challenge divergent viewpoints.	This site contains resources that engage students in a variety of ways, including supporting them to explore diverse perspectives: **Empower Students with Digital Study Skills**
Digital resources enable students to more effectively engage with their local and extended communities.	The following is a link with numerous examples of ways to connect students with scholars from around the globe, including identifying specific platforms: **Five Ways to Use Technology and Digital Media for Global Learning**
Digital resources serve as a means to further explore the relationship between power and privilege and fighting against injustices.	This article can help students unpack the concepts of power and privilege, providing a variety of questions for students to reflect upon: **Power and Privilege: How Do We Define?**

CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE CURRICULUM SCORECARDS

If we want to engage in a more formal evaluation of the quality and efficacy of our curriculum from a CRSE lens, NYU Steinhardt's Culturally Responsive Curriculum Scorecards provide a structured way to evaluate inclusion of the following elements:

- *Representation*
- *Social justice*
- *Teachers' materials*
- *Materials/resources (presented to students)*

The scorecard ultimately identifies where our curriculum falls along a continuum, from "culturally destructive" to "culturally insufficient" to "emerging awareness" to "culturally aware" to "culturally responsive." Based on our results in the aforementioned areas, we can identify areas we can build upon, as well as areas we can improve upon.

REPRESENTATION

STATEMENTS

1. The curriculum centers the origins of science, technology, engineering, or math within BIPOC communities (Black, Indigenous, people of color)

SOCIAL JUSTICE

STATEMENTS

7. Curriculum highlights and affirms the knowledge systems of Indigenous, Black/African, Brown, and non-Western conceptions of science, technology, engineering, arts, and math (such as interdependence, sustainability, and continual change).

The curriculum and instructional activities promote or provoke critical questions about

TEACHER'S MATERIALS STATEMENTS	Very Satisfied (2)	Satisfied (1)	Un
15	The authors of the teachers' materials are people of diverse identities (race/ethnicity, gender, other identities).		
16	Guidance is provided to teachers on being aware of one's biases, assumptions, and the gaps between one's own culture and students' cultures (implicit bias).		
17	The teachers' materials ask teachers to reflect on their own practices and experiences learning STEAM subjects and critique them through the lens of cultural responsiveness.		
18	Guidance is provided on combating the legacy of STEAM education related trauma amongst historically marginalized communities and on designing healing and joyful STEAM experiences.		
19	Guidance is provided on using students' everyday lives as the starting point for learning, and making real-life connections between academic content and the local neighborhoods, culture, environment, community issues, and current events.		
20	Guidance is provided on creating opportunities to meaningfully engage students' families to enhance lessons.		
21	Guidance is provided on appropriately using Indigenous and non-Western resources to understand math and science, including oral histories, legends, and community knowledge.		
22	Guidance is provided on engaging students in culturally responsive experiential learning activities.		
23	Guidance includes, for applicable lessons, a range of possible student responses that could be valid, given the range of student experiences and perspectives.		

(*Source: NYU Steinhardt*)

One of the most powerful ways to ensure that the curriculum engages diverse students across learning environments is to incorporate student voice and student choice. In Session 5 of Module 2, we shared ways that we can empower students to own and elevate their sociopolitical consciousness while also exercising agency and autonomy in selecting topics or kinds of projects. Teachers can also provide choices in how to consume content as well as how they will demonstrate their learning.

For instance, students may be given the option to demonstrate their understanding of the connections between historical events and modern-day social justice issues by writing a traditional paper; creating a podcast episode; completing an oral presentation with slides; digitally designing a campaign brochure; or recording a vlog.

Lastly, student voice and choice can also be elevated by allowing students' interests to drive curricular decisions that are not predetermined by state or local requirements, such as the texts they read, the topics they review, or the field trips they attend. The more that teachers are able to incorporate student voice and choice, the more likely students are to engage and excel.

Given what we know now about the connection between backward design (or UbD) and CRSE, we are better equipped to assess how our curriculm is aligned with culturally sustaining practices. Moreover, we can also incorporate more student voice and choice in ways that extend across learning environments.

Now it's your turn!

Does your curriculum reflect the diversity that exists in your classroom?

Reflect on this question and more in a CRSE curriculum self-assessment in your workbook.

Works Cited

Capital Region BOCES Communications Service. (n.d.). eTeachNY. http://eTeachNY.org

The Education Justice Research and Organizing Collaborative. (n.d.). Culturally responsive curriculum scorecards. NYU Steinhardt. https://steinhardt.nyu.edu/metrocenter/ejroc/services/culturally-responsive-curriculum-scorecards

Feldman, J. (2018, October). School grading policies are failing children: A call to action for equitable grading. Crescendo Education Group. https://crescendoedgroup.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/Call-to-Action-for-Equitable-Grading-Oct-2018.pdf

McTighe, J., & Wiggins, G. (2012). Understanding by design framework. ASCD. https://files.ascd.org/staticfiles/ascd/pdf/siteASCD/publications/UbD_WhitePaper0312.pdf

New York State Education Department (n.d.). Culturally responsive-sustaining education framework. http://www.nysed.gov/common/nysed/files/programs/crs/culturally-responsive-sustaining-education-framework.pdf

New York State Education Department. (n.d.). NYSED data site. http://data.nysed.gov

NYC Coalition for Educational Justice. (2020). Diverse city, white curriculum: The exclusion of people of color from English language arts in NYC schools. http://www.nyccej.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/Diverse-City-White-Curriculum-3.pdf

Sokoloff-Rubin, E. (2014, April 7). Highbridge Green School students present a project their parents helped design. Chalkbeat New York. https://ny.chalkbeat.org/2014/4/7/21095344/highbridge-green-school-students-present-a-project-their-parents-helped-design

Stauffer, B. (2021, December 31). What are the 4 C's of 21st century skills? Applied Educational Systems. https://www.aeseducation.com/blog/four-cs-21st-century-skills

About Us

The TALE Academy

The TALE Academy is a series of virtual learning experiences available to all New York State educators and offers a rich array of resources on topics related to teaching across learning environments (TALE). The TALE Academy is built upon the work New York State educators carried out during emergency remote teaching (ERT) throughout the COVID-19 pandemic and extends it toward the future. TALE invites educators to think beyond online learning to consider a broader perspective on teaching and learning that encompasses teaching across multiple environments (in-person, remote, and hybrid).

The Teaching in Remote/Hybrid Learning Environments (TRLE) Project

The TALE Academy is part of a broader New York State Education Department (NYSED) initiative known as Teaching in Remote/Hybrid Learning Environments (TRLE). In July 2020, NYSED was awarded funding through the United States Department of Education's Education Stabilization Fund-Rethink K-12 Education Models Grant to implement TRLE – a three-year project to build the capacity of teachers and educational leaders to effectively implement remote/hybrid learning for all students. Launched in the depths of the pandemic, the first phase of the TRLE project focused on getting resources to the field through partnerships with Boards of Cooperative Educational Services (BOCES) and school districts across the state. The second phase, which began in February 2022, focused on aggregating lessons learned and emerging teaching and learning strategies to address a broader field of practice: teaching across learning environments.

New York State
EDUCATION DEPARTMENT
Knowledge ❯ Skill ❯ Opportunity