



**Indicator:** Instructional Teams and teachers embed cultural education into learning experiences in the curriculum. (6825)

**Explanation:** Research suggests that teachers who provide culturally relevant teaching by incorporating students' culture into the curriculum can enhance student outcomes. Instructional Teams will likely need to identify professional development that helps teachers self-reflect and overcome any pre-existing deficit views of diverse groups of students, implement culturally inclusive pedagogy, discuss controversial issues in the classroom, and integrate an appreciation and respect for diverse cultures into the curriculum. Schools may conduct a curriculum audit to ensure anti-bias, historical accuracy, and cultural relevance of instructional materials and pedagogical practices.

**Questions:** *How does the school determine the degree to which teachers integrate culture and language into the curriculum? Have teachers' attitudes and beliefs about culturally responsive education been assessed? Is there evidence to suggest that teachers are differentiating instruction based on the unique learning needs of all students? What, if any, PD has the school provided in the past to help teachers integrate culture into the curriculum and provide culturally responsive teaching? What evidence is available regarding the success of these initiatives? Did the PD include teachers' exploring their own cultural perspectives, engaging in culture-related dialogue, and implementing inclusive pedagogical practices? What steps should the school take to review curriculum with a critical eye to ensure it promotes culturally inclusive practices?*

Instructional transformation requires system-wide changes in classroom instruction, including the use of evidence-based practices when planning curriculum and instruction (Herman et al., 2008; The Center on School Turnaround, 2017). Schools must set high academic standards, and incorporate research-supported curriculum and instruction that allows access for *all* learners, irrespective of cultural or linguistic background (Aronson & Laughter, 2016; Drake, 2007; The Center on School Turnaround, 2017). School improvement requires a thorough analysis of the school's curriculum, lesson plans, and learning experiences to verify that they are standards-based and have built-in supports to ensure access for all students (Drake, 2007; Herman et al., 2008). Research has shown, however, that schools often lack culturally relevant curricula and supports to address the diverse needs of their students (Council of the Great City Schools, 2017; Gándara, Maxwell-Jolly, & Rumberger, 2008; Movit, Petrykowska, & Woodruff, 2010), and instructional teams and teachers may need professional learning to help them embed culturally relevant practice into their teaching (Sleeter, 2012; Villegas & Lucas, 2002).

Identifying and developing ways to effectively teach diverse groups of students arose as a new movement in the 1980s, following the onset of school desegregation efforts (Aronson & Laughter, 2016). Several major research efforts emerged addressing culturally relevant education, including culturally responsive teaching (CRT) (Dover, 2013; Gay, 2010, 2013), and culturally responsive pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1994, 2014). Gay (2013) describes culturally responsive teaching (CRT) as "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"

(pp. 49-50). Ladson-Billing's framework, though similar, focused on the attitudes and dispositions that a teacher might adopt that would influence planning, instruction, and assessment (Ladson-Billings, 1994). However, both research strands seek to validate students' cultures by creating bridges between school and home through the use of diversified instructional strategies and curricula towards the broader goal of culturally responsive education (Aronson & Laughter, 2016; Gay, 2013; Ladson-Billings, 2014). In synthesizing the two models, Aronson & Laughter (2016) identified the following practices of culturally responsive educators:

- They use constructivist methods to build bridges that connect students' cultural knowledge and assets to academic skills and concepts, and create classrooms that are inclusive of all students;
- They engage students in critical reflection about their lives and the societies in which they live, using inclusive curricula and activities that support all of the cultures represented in the classroom;
- They facilitate students' cultural competence by creating a classroom environment in which students learn and develop a sense of pride about their own and others' cultures; and,
- They explicitly involve their students in critiques about the discourses of power by revealing and deconstructing oppressive systems, and signal the importance of social justice for all members of society. (See also Villegas & Lucas, 2007)

CRT has been used successfully across a variety of content areas. A recent research synthesis revealed that CRT practices generally led to improvements in teachers' capacity for critical reflection and cultural competence, positive affective changes in students, and some evidence of improved student learning (Aronson & Laughter, 2016). Positive research findings were found in science (e.g., Johnson, 2011; Johnson, Bolshakova, & Waldron, 2016); math (e.g., Hubert, 2013); social studies/history (e.g., Epstein, Mayorga, & Nelson, 2011; Martell, 2013); and English language arts (e.g., Bui & Fagan, 2013; Hill, 2012). However, very few studies have explicitly and rigorously linked CRT practices to student achievement and/or standards-based learning (Aronson & Laughter, 2016; Lee, 2010; Sleeter, 2012).

While preparation of new teachers has begun addressing the link between culture and learning (CAEP, 2013; Civitillo, Juang, & Schachner, 2018), many in the current

teaching force lack preparation and need substantive professional learning in CRT in order to avoid a cultural disconnect with their students (McKoy, MacLeod, Walter, & Nolker, 2017). Aronson and Laughter (2016) suggest that expanding CRT must include deep, rather than superficial analysis and the adoption of social justice foundations by teachers. Sleeter (2012) cautions that culturally responsive education is not cultural celebration, does not trivialize cultural differences, and does not avoid political analysis. Unfortunately, the research base on effective strategies to promote teachers' use of CRT through professional development (PD) is quite limited, and therefore few firm conclusions can be drawn about the effectiveness of various approaches (Bottiani et al., 2018; Griner & Stewart, 2013). A recent large-scale qualitative study of teachers in low-income communities, however, revealed a number of perceived challenges that suggested the need for professional learning opportunities that "allow [teachers] to (1) explore their beliefs, values, assumptions, dispositions, biases, and experiences related to diversity, (2) discuss controversial topics to increase their comfort level and skill set when facilitating such conversations in their own contexts, (3) learn inclusive pedagogical strategies and consider how to best incorporate these strategies into their environment, and (4) engage in dialogue on how to foster an inclusive climate and culture with students" (Samuels, 2018, pp. 28-29).

CRT requires that Instructional materials and assessments convey respect for diverse cultures and are culturally relevant to the students served. Instructional materials (including digital) should be free of negative stereotypes, and address sensitive topics with respect and historical accuracy, including carefully chosen videos and images to develop students' background and provide context (Council of the Great City Schools, 2017). Teachers and school leaders can review curricula for anti-bias, historical accuracy, and cultural relevance by addressing questions such as (adapted from Krasnoff, 2016):

1. Does the curriculum provide for a balanced study of world cultures and include learning activities that promote appreciation for non-European cultures?
2. Does the curriculum include information about the past and present experiences of people from different cultural backgrounds? Of both women and men?
3. Are opportunities to explore the perspectives of individuals from different backgrounds included?

4. Are issues and perspectives of minority groups included?
5. If the curriculum contains biased information or stereotypes, is this pointed out and are students provided with more accurate information?
6. Do classroom displays and instructional materials include positive representations of diverse international and domestic cultures?

### References and resources

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