Core Function → **Domain 3: Instructional Transformation**

Effective Practice → **Remove barriers and provide opportunities - Classroom culture**

Indicator: All teachers are responsive to students' cultural backgrounds and incorporate culturally-relevant material in their classrooms. (6824)

Explanation: Research suggests that teachers who provide culturally relevant teaching by incorporating students' culture into their classrooms can enhance student outcomes. Using culturally relevant Instructional materials can foster student learning but these materials are frequently lacking within schools. Instructional teams must carefully review classroom instructional materials to be sure that they minimize bias and stereotyping, include representations of diverse peoples and cultures, and include plenty of culturally relevant examples to enhance student learning.

Questions: *Has the school reviewed classroom materials to ensure they represent students' cultural backgrounds? If not, what steps could the school take to review classroom materials with a critical eye to ensure they promote culturally inclusive practices? Do classroom materials/curricula include representations of diverse cultures and discussions about controversial issues such as racism to promote student learning? Are classroom materials free of bias and stereotypes, and if not, are they highlighted by teachers and discussed with students? Are the issues and perspectives of minority students represented in, or regularly incorporated into classroom materials?*

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 removes barriers and 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, instructional materials, and learning experiences to verify that they are standards-based and have built-in supports to ensure access for students, regardless of cultural background (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 teachers must be responsive to students' cultural background by incorporating culturally-relevant materials in their classrooms in order to strengthen students learning (Sleeter, 2012; Villegas & Lucas, 2002).

Several major research efforts have 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 which 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 educa-

tion (Aronson & Laughter, 2016; Gay, 2013; Ladson-Billings, 2014). 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).

One important component of CRT is using culturally relevant instructional materials. Researchers have noted that instructional materials often do not allow students to feel connected to the curriculum as they frequently do not represent diverse cultures or address controversial issues (Epstein, Mayorga, & Nelson, 2011; Loewen, 2007, as cited in Aronson & Laughter, 2016). Textbooks and state learning standards often represent people of color as marginal to the "true story" of national progress, which, when coupled with teachers' fear of encouraging painful or difficult conversations about race, often leads to the absence of discussion about people of color in history classrooms (Branch, 2003; Loewen, 2007). For example, history textbooks often distort historical contexts leading up to some of today's most dire social ills, such as some textbooks' portrayal of the South's secession from the US prior to the Civil War as a decision to maintain state's rights, rather than preserve slavery (Wong, 2015). For teachers to practice CRT, they must develop their own knowledge on cultural and ethnic diversity, and be able to translate that knowledge to the classroom, in part through the selection of culturally relevant curriculum materials (Aronson & Laughter, 2016). Culturally responsive materials include culturally relevant examples of the histories and views of marginalized people of color who are framed as active agents within history and society (Banks, 2006; Howard, 2004). A variety of studies have demonstrated how using culturally relevant materials can engage students and promote success (e.g., Bui & Fagan, 2013; Choi, 2013; Feger, 2006; Souryasack & Lee, 2007).

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). Teach-ers 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 cultures and viewpoints, and include learning activities that promote appreciation for all cultures?
2. Does the curriculum include information about the past and present experiences of people from different cultural backgrounds? Of both women and men? Is textbook information fragmented or isolated by being placed in a box or chapter separate from the text's main body?
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?

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