



# Equity Dispatch

Designing and Delivering Culturally Responsive and Sustaining Curricula

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*Note: This Equity Dispatch focuses specifically on the development of curricular materials.*

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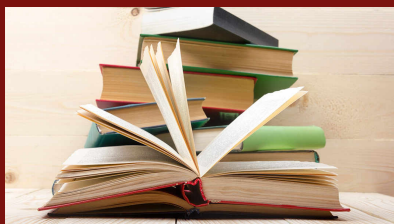
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**By using text and materials that are culturally sensitive and empowering, educators are not only diversifying the instruction through multiple perspectives, but critical thinking is encouraged.**

-Richards, Brown, & Forde, 2007



## Did You Know?

Use of Culturally Responsive and Sustaining Curricular Materials Increases Opportunities to Learn

Educators have the power to shape students' perception of self and the world through the content used or withheld from use in the educational environment (Harmon, 2012). Educators pursue paths towards more safe, inclusive, and responsive learning environments by using culturally responsive and sustaining curricular materials as tools to promote opportunities for students to learn. Culturally responsive and sustaining curricular materials help students understand the world around them, and support teachers in meeting the needs of all students when traditional curricula reflect cultural and linguistic insensitivities, omissions, and biases (Richards, Brown, & Forde, 2007). Traditionally, curricular materials has been reflective of European American thought, knowledge, and perspectives which dominate present society (Sleeter, 2010). The use of culturally responsive and sustaining curricular materials gives students a more comprehensive and authentic profile of history, life, and culture in the United States (Gay, 2009); it uses the realities, histories, and perspectives of students as an integral part of educational practice (Ladson-Billings, 1995). It also communicates what we choose to remember about our past, what we believe about the present, and what we hope for the future (Sleeter, 2010).

Using curricular materials that are reflective of the cultures, linguistic practices, norms, and values of all students supports equal opportunities to learn (Richards, Brown, & Forde, 2007). It ensures that the sharing of knowledge occurs in a culturally supportive, learner-centered environment in which historically marginalized students see themselves reflected in the lessons presented (Richards, Brown, & Forde, 2007). Implementation of culturally responsive and sustaining curricular materials supports shaping students' perceptions of themselves as active citizens in a democratic society and global community by recognizing shared values and practices, as well as recognizing individual differences and identities.



## Why It Matters?

All Students Benefit from Culturally Responsive and Sustaining Curricular Materials

All students benefit when educators utilize culturally responsive and sustaining curricular materials that promote educational equity, mutual respect and understanding (Paris & Alim, 2014). When the only cultural representation

available to students in teaching materials is one belonging to the dominant culture, historically marginalized students may see themselves as “less than” others (Paris & Alim, 2014). The use of culturally responsive and sustaining curricular materials ensures that students are represented in teaching materials equitably. Furthermore, the use of culturally responsive and sustaining curricular materials raises the social and political consciousness of all students (Richards, Brown, & Forde, 2007), while also providing them with the tools to critique cultural norms, values, and institutions that produce and maintain inequities (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Paris & Alim, 2014). This approach to curricular design and delivery enables students to use their funds of knowledge in the classroom (Moll, 2015). It also helps students form their own identities and develop counter-narratives to contrast or more accurately deconstruct often negative and oppressive representations about students of color, students with dis/abilities, students who identify as LGBTQ or other non-dominant identity markers (Solorzano, & Yosso, 2002).

When students are exposed to culturally responsive and sustaining curricular materials they may feel empowered to increase awareness of social issues, engage in critical thinking and advocacy, and promote social justice (Gay, 2009). When educators use culturally responsive and sustaining curricular materials they prepare students for responsible and meaningful participation in school and society (Richards, Brown, & Forde, 2007).



## For Equity Now!

Design, Select, and Use Culturally Responsive and Sustaining Curricular Materials

To ensure that curricular materials are culturally responsive and sustaining, educators must accept cultural pluralism and respect differences without equating them with inferiorities (Gay, 2009). The means and materials educators use during instruction to enable students to reach curricular standards must also reflect this understanding. Moreover, efforts should be made to surface and redress biases in district approved core curricular materials. Educators may need to question and trouble decisions made at the district level about the design and selection of curricular materials. Additionally, educators may need to supplement core curricular materials with content that utilizes a pluralistic approach to content representation (Sleeter, 2010) Content should reflect multiple perspectives and diverse lived

experiences (Gay, 2009), and incorporate culturally relevant content that capitalizes on students' inherent knowledge.

## **Three steps towards designing, selecting and using culturally responsive and sustaining curricular materials:**

### **Acknowledge how one's identities shape curricular decisions**

It is important for educators to realize that choices regarding curricular content and materials are influenced by and reflective of one's own sociopolitical consciousness and personal identities. Educators must be conscious and intentional about choosing materials that are inclusive of all students' lived experiences, thereby encouraging all students to excel, feel empowered, think critically, and feel validated and respected (Richards, Brown, & Forde, 2007; Villegas & Lucas, 2002).

### **Engage in learning about students' cultures and identities**

In order for educators to integrate students' funds of knowledge into curricular content and classroom instruction, a concerted effort must be made by educators to venture out and learn more about their students and their students' cultures (Ladson-Billings, 1994).

### **Provide opportunities for students to question the status quo**

Educators must create space for and use curricular materials to support students in examining, deconstructing, and addressing societal policies, practices, and language that perpetuate injustices. By engaging in this kind of critique, students learn to recognize inequities, and that in order to see shifts toward equity, they can be change makers and actively develop solutions (Richards, Brown, & Forde, 2007).

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## **Meet the Authors**

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