

Cultural Curriculum Audit

PURPOSE

This audit is an exercise in thinking more deeply about how curriculum design, materials and assessments are culturally affirming and sustaining for students. Through this process, you will review “look-fors” and “red flags” around four key questions related to including students’ cultural knowledge and ways of being, representation, developing students’ critical skills, and co-creation of meaningful learning experiences. This audit can be done individually or as a team.

DIRECTIONS:

1. Choose one resource (a set of lesson materials, a unit plan, etc.) as a representation of your curricular design, materials and assessments.
2. Using this resource, go through the process below, on your own or with a colleague or team.
3. Using the guiding questions, reflect on your takeaways and next steps.

Identify a Curricular Resource

Choose one resource (a set of lesson materials, a unit plan, etc.) that you feel is a pretty good representation of your curricular design, materials and assessments. This works best when there is enough content in the resource to think critically about your approach, but not so much content that it’s overwhelming to get into the details.

Resource title:

Resource type:

This resource contains:

Curriculum Audit

For each inquiry question, a set of “look-fors” and “red flags” point to concrete ways an approach to instruction can be culturally affirming and sustaining. Using these indicators, on your own or with a team, audit your curricular resource as a way of practicing your whole-child lens. Record your evidence, notes and reflections at the bottom of each section.



How well do the curriculum design, materials and assessments **create opportunities for students to capitalize on and demonstrate their own cultural knowledge and ways of being?**

LOOK-FORS

- ☐ Students are often and explicitly asked to **connect to their own prior knowledge and experience** about this topic, and share it with others.
- ☐ Students are set up to work in **heterogenous groups** so they benefit from a set of diverse perspectives.
- ☐ There are specific prompts and opportunities for students to **bring multiple perspectives**, which may be different than that of their peers or teachers (e.g., “Did anyone solve this problem another way?” “Who can share a different perspective?”).
- ☐ There is more than one way for students to engage and demonstrate their learning, **via modalities that honor varied cultural norms and practices** (e.g., written and oral presentation, collaborative and individual work, etc.).
- ☐ Students are invited to bring in, connect to, or create **art, music, dance, fashion or other forms of self-expression** from their cultural experiences
- ☐ **Examples, scenarios, metaphors, analogies, etc.** in the content reflect students’ real, lived experiences, so they can bring what they already know into their learning.
- ☐ There is built-in **support for English-language learners** to access the content (e.g., support for content-specific vocabulary).
- ☐ There is opportunity for students to use their **first language or dialect** (in written or verbal expression).

RED FLAGS

- ☐ This content assumes all students have **the same (or no) prior knowledge and experience** about this topic.
- ☐ Students are set up to work in heterogenous groups, but **without the skill supports to respect the diversity of their peers** (e.g., empathetic listening, asking respectful follow-up questions, avoiding “othering”), which may create an unsafe environment.
- ☐ **Models of high-quality student work** show only one way of demonstrating learning.
- ☐ Students are **asked to speak on behalf of their entire culture or community**, assuming they all have the same values, experiences and worldviews.
- ☐ There are any **blanket statements** about the cultures and communities, assuming they all have the same values, experiences and worldviews.
- ☐ Students who represent dominant groups (e.g., White, male) are considered to have “**no culture**” or be just “**normal**” compared to others.
- ☐ If students are required to **use formal, “academic” language**, it is framed as the only correct way to communicate, instead of one way to use language for a specific purpose (e.g., referring to African American vernacular English as incorrect English).

Evidence/Notes:



How well do the curriculum design, materials and assessments **represent both students' own and others' identities, cultures and experiences?**

LOOK-FORS

- ☐ The authorial sources used (researchers, historians, institutions, writers, etc.) bring **multiple perspectives**, especially from groups that have been historically silenced (e.g., from *Black, Indigenous, and Peoples of Color, people with disabilities, LGBTQIA+ people*).
- ☐ Individuals in the content (*characters, historical figures, etc.*) **represent diverse identities**, including:

<input type="checkbox"/> Race	<input type="checkbox"/> First language
<input type="checkbox"/> Ethnicity	<input type="checkbox"/> Religion
<input type="checkbox"/> Gender identity	<input type="checkbox"/> Family Structure
<input type="checkbox"/> Sexual orientation	<input type="checkbox"/> Socioeconomic status
<input type="checkbox"/> Disability	<input type="checkbox"/> And: _____
<input type="checkbox"/> Nationality and immigration status	_____
- ☐ There are individuals in the content (*characters, historical figures, etc.*) who **reflect the specific identities of your students**.
- ☐ There are individuals in the content who **represent intersectional and pluralistic identities** (*embody more than one ethnicity or language, have multiple aspects of identity that affect their experiences*).
- ☐ Diverse cultural traditions are highlighted through **names, hairstyles, clothing, etc.**
- ☐ **Photos, illustrations and descriptions show varied representations** of individuals within groups (e.g., *not all individuals of Color look the same*).
- ☐ **Positive contributions** of many different cultures and communities are celebrated.

RED FLAGS

- ☐ The authorial sources used to teach about a culture or community are **not created by members of that group**.
- ☐ Individuals in the content who represent dominant groups (e.g., *White, male*) are given the role of **main character, hero, savior, or fixer** (*especially when it comes to how they interact with non-dominant groups*).
- ☐ Individuals in the content who represent diverse groups are given the role of **sidekick, villain, mascot, or are tokenized or exotified**.
- ☐ Stories, works and perspectives of diverse groups are only included when **studying their oppression**.
- ☐ Stories, works and perspectives of diverse groups are or are not included **only during separate, designated times** (e.g., *LGBTQIA+ voices included only during Pride Month*).
- ☐ All individuals within a group are shown to have **the same values, experiences and worldviews** (e.g., *all Chinese people believe...*).
- ☐ There are any **incomplete, inaccurate or stereotype-driven narratives** within the content (e.g., *an oversimplified story of Thanksgiving*).
- ☐ There are **only traditional or heritage practices** shown in the content, without also showing the contemporary and evolving aspects of that culture.

Evidence/Notes:



How well do the curriculum design, materials and assessments **set students up to think critically about the world?**

LOOK-FORS

- ☐ Goals for students (unit objectives, grading criteria, etc.) within this content include **building transferrable critical-thinking skills**, such as questioning, analyzing, making inferences, creative problem-solving, etc.
- ☐ Goals for students (unit objectives, grading criteria, etc.) within this content **include building a positive sense of self**, by understanding their own identity, how they belong to a community, and the power they have to enact change.
- ☐ The content uses **real-world data, examples, scenarios, texts, etc.** to connect to local, national and global issues.
- ☐ As part of this content, students are asked to **analyze and critique rules, practices, authority figures, etc. that exist within the classroom, school or district.**
- ☐ As part of this content, students are asked to **analyze and critique policies, practices or power structures that exist within their local, national or global communities.**
- ☐ Students are challenged to **articulate multiple perspectives on the same issue** (e.g., *participating in a debate, writing from more than one POV, etc.*).
- ☐ Students are asked to **propose solutions to real-world issues** as part of this content.

RED FLAGS

- ☐ Goals for students (unit objectives, grading criteria, etc.) are based solely on building **domain-specific knowledge or skills, without connection to real-world application.**
- ☐ **Following the assessment for this content, students will not necessarily need or use** these learnings, especially outside of school.
- ☐ Students are asked to **always reach consensus**, and are discouraged to cause productive conflict, disagree or “derail” a conversation by adding complexity.
- ☐ Although this content relates to real-world issues, they are not included to **avoid controversy** (e.g., *science connections to climate change, vaccinations, etc.*).
- ☐ Language used to frame real-world issues within the content is **patronizing or promotes a savior mentality** (e.g., *talking about the “needy” or “less fortunate”*).
- ☐ Language used to frame real-world issues within the content is **downplaying or oversimplifying progress** (e.g., *“when racism used to be an issue...”*).
- ☐ Language used to frame real-world issues **problematizes individuals without supporting students to see systemic root causes** (e.g., *focusing on personal responsibility to reduce, reuse and recycle without examining corporations who produce the greatest carbon emissions*).

Evidence/Notes:



How well do the curriculum design, materials and assessments **invite students to co-create meaningful learning experiences?**

LOOK-FORS

- ☐ This content uses agreed-upon **norms and expectations for how all community members agree to act and interact that were co-created** by leaders, teachers, students and other school community members.
- ☐ Before and during the learning experience, students are invited to **give input on and/or make choices about what and how they will learn** (e.g., *goal-setting, topic areas, means of engagement*).
- ☐ During and following the learning experience, students are invited to **provide feedback on what and how they learned**.
- ☐ **Small and large group discussions** are common in this content (*live and in-person, virtual, via discussion boards or written, etc.*), and skill-building support is provided for them to engage productively.
- ☐ Students are given the tools (e.g., *grading criteria, rubrics, practice tests, models of high-quality student work*) and the time to **evaluate their own learning, progress and growth areas**.
- ☐ **Students of different strengths and growth areas** are set up to support one another (e.g., *modeling, giving feedback, working collaboratively, being a resource for questions, etc.*).

RED FLAGS

- ☐ This content, along with how students engage with it, is **determined only by adults** (*teacher, leaders, etc.*), leaving no room for students to pursue their own goals and interests or learn about themselves as learners.
- ☐ Although **student input or feedback is collected**, it is **not used** to change what or how students will learn.
- ☐ Adults do primarily “**stand and deliver**” **direct instruction** within this content.
- ☐ Students’ success in this learning experience relies heavily on things like **rote memorization, reciting information on demand, and following adults’ directions closely**.
- ☐ Students work almost **entirely independently** in this content.
- ☐ During small or large group conversation, **adherence to White dominant norms is expected in how students participate** (e.g., *never allowing for more collaborative/overlapping discussion patterns, following a teacher-student-teacher-student discussion pattern, etc.*).
- ☐ The **only evaluation students have of their own learning comes from adults**, instead of also self-evaluation, peer support, etc.

Evidence/Notes:

Reflect on your Findings

1. What are your biggest areas of strength and growth from the Cultural Curriculum Audit?
2. What might you want to investigate further or learn more about?
3. What changes might you make based on this exercise? What might you edit, supplement, remove, or add?