


Chapter 23

The Role of Culturally Responsive Assessment in Culturally Responsive Curriculum

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ABSTRACT

Culturally responsive curriculum is a necessary piece of an equitable and inclusive educational experience for diverse student populations. Yet, an oft under-examined element of a culturally responsive curriculum is the role played by assessment to humanize, reinforce, and integrate the lived experience of students into the system by which their knowledge, skills, and abilities are judged. This chapter focuses on how culturally responsive assessment can support culturally responsive curriculum through a twofold focus on student engagement and student choice in how their learning is evaluated. Lastly, the chapter argues that culturally responsive assessment may also provide a means to help educators address past learning trauma of students transitioning from Pre-K through 12th grades into postsecondary education.

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INTRODUCTION

Educators have an ethical responsibility to not only teach assigned and meaningful curricula but provide opportunities for students to demonstrate what they know and can do through various assessment approaches in alignment with intended learning design. While diverse and varied content in the curriculum is vital to culturally responsive education, the ways in which students are required throughout their education to demonstrate their knowledge is oft under-examined. Yet, how students' learning is assessed can negatively impact students' sense of belonging, their beliefs about their ability to learn, and their overall engagement with the educational experience (Boud, 1990; Martens et al., 2019; Falchikov, 2005). Efforts to ensure that students' experience curriculum that is not only culturally relevant but culturally responsive through equitable assessment processes and practices has increased over the past several years but remains disconnected from educational reform and curriculum discussions more broadly (Montenegro & Jankowski, 2017; 2020; Henning et al., 2022).

The student learning environment of today is quite different from the classroom of the past. Events such as a global pandemic, eroding of democratic institutions, calls for policing and voting reform, imply that the sociopolitical context in which students experience education is different as well. From learning remotely to teaching through the aid of technology, students and faculty have had an unprecedented shift in how education is delivered with implications to their longer-term learning including learning loss, disengagement, and a heightened awareness of inequitable access to educational contexts (Jankowski, 2020). The impacts of this time in history upon educational structures, administrative leadership, faculty, and students will be explored for years to come. And while education can serve as an equalizer, it can also serve to further divide. This chapter argues that with attention to assessments that are culturally relevant and responsive, the educational experience may assume a healing role when intentionally applied in the classroom - whether online or in person. At the end of a national survey report on assessment processes and practice throughout the global pandemic, Jankowski (2020) urged those working with students to not just be aware of and address systemic inequities, but to also engage in trauma-informed and healing-centered pedagogy and assessment practices, an undertaking this chapter explores with an eye towards the incoming students from the secondary education system.

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