

Culturally Responsive and Sustaining Curriculum for Indigenous Students

Instructional activities and materials should be relevant to students' cultures, experiences, communities, and familiar environments. This extends to the curriculum—the standards-based sequence of experiences that guide teaching and learning. While students certainly need instruction on national- and global-level concepts, events, and issues, it is equally important for them to reflect on this content in terms of their local context. This approach helps students better understand interdependencies and the cause-and-effect relationships that shape the world around them.

Much of the literature on culturally responsive and sustaining education recommends incorporating Native experiences into the curriculum, including culture, history, politics, legal status, and current affairs. Students should also have opportunities to engage in discourse and offer critiques throughout their learning, especially in ways that encourage them to explore how the subject matter impacts their local communities. Curricula should be examined for inclusivity, bias, stereotyping, and omissions.

For example, students may not understand their tribal histories within the context of the larger U.S. history. They may lack an understanding of the historic and contemporary politics, economics, and society that have shaped their experiences. Providing opportunities for this kind of inquiry allows students to gain greater insight into how their communities fit within larger societal frameworks, how relationships between various communities and nations have developed, and how they, as students, can contribute to the changes they believe are necessary.

For Native students, a curriculum that incorporates these elements ties learning to the goal of self-determination. It enables students to "read" the world and act in ways that foster social change, greater equity, and social justice for their communities. When students feel empowered and have a sense of agency, education becomes more meaningful, and they develop their identities as active, effective participants in society.

References

Castagno, A. E., & Brayboy, B. M. J. (2008). Culturally responsive schooling for indigenous youth: A review of the literature. *Review of Educational Research, 78*(4), 941–993.
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