



Equity Now!

Beyond Black History Month: Engaging a Multicultural Curriculum Year-Round



IMPACT: Educate, Engage, Empower--For Equity

"I believe that education is the civil rights issue of our generation. And if you care about promoting opportunity and reducing inequality, the classroom is the place to start. Great teaching is about so much more than education; it is a daily fight for social justice."

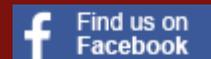
Secretary Arne Duncan, October 9, 2009

Educate

Su is a 13-year-old Chinese student who came to the U.S. three years ago with her parents. Because English is her second language and the curriculum she regularly encounters in school does not represent her home country or culture, she struggles academically. This, in turn, has led her to struggle socially and emotionally as well. Su confided to her teacher that she feels very lonely at school and is having trouble with her coursework. What's worse, she has started to lose the ability to write Chinese.

Su's experience is not unique. Many students struggle academically and socially when curricula are not aligned with their needs and interests (Zhao, 2008); often, curricula fail to leverage students' funds of knowledge to improve schooling outcomes (Gonzalez, Moll, & Amanti, 2005). Black History Month heightens our awareness of histories and identities that are often projected as belonging to "others" and which are consistently omitted from curricula and instructional materials and practices in K-12 settings. As our student populations become more diverse and as we focus on preparing them to navigate an increasingly global society, it is essential that we constantly reexamine our curricula so that they are grounded in the cultural histories and family experiences of all students.

January 2013



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Meet the Authors:

The newsletter at Great Lakes Equity Center is written and edited by [Kitty Chen](#), [James Kigamwa](#), [Erin Macey](#), [Jada Phelps](#), [Marsha Simon](#), [Seena Skelton](#), and [Kathleen King Thorius](#).

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Our Institute is Full!

[Equity Leaders Institute](#)

WAITLIST: We will continue to accept applicants for placement on our waiting list.

WHEN: February 20-21, 2013

WHERE: Indianapolis, IN

TOPIC: Advancing Educational Equity

What does this mean for our daily teaching practice? In an effort to respond to the demands, needs, and aspirations of our students, equity-focused educators must engage in a multicultural education throughout the school year—not only during Black History Month or other ethnocentric observances (Banks, 1997). As we make this effort, we must also be cognizant of the master narratives (Thorne & McLean, 2008) in society that privilege dominant-group cultural stories over minority-groups' stories, and work to emphasize the marginalized narratives.

One important component of a multicultural curriculum is choice of instructional materials. As we seek out relevant instructional materials, we should ask ourselves:

- Are the instructional materials relevant to and representative of all the students in my class?
- Will the selected materials help illustrate the idea that multiple perspectives exist?
- Do the materials challenge and reframe dominant narratives about who is successful (e.g. highlight female scientists or Black mathematicians) as well as other valued artifacts of our educational system?

The diverse ethnic and cultural makeup of today's classrooms makes it unlikely that one single curriculum will meet the needs and interests of all students (Ede, 2012). At times, this may mean setting aside scripted or prepackaged curricular materials that often fail to match students' backgrounds, learning styles, and interests. In a powerful example, Zaslavsky (1994) researched a unique African counting system and used it to make students aware that different societies developed their own mathematics. In doing so, he broadened students' horizons with a new branch of mathematics and, at the same time, taught them to respect the achievements of Black mathematicians.

Another critical component of a multicultural education pertains to instructional practices. Using instructional activities that create space for students to share their backgrounds is an example of an effective instructional practice that can support culturally grounded curricula. Chan (2007) introduced storytelling as a way to make the curriculum more culturally responsive. By sharing specific stories about their lives or their family histories, students became aware of the cultural backgrounds of their classmates, including their unique values, beliefs, and norms. In her effort to engage students and help them understand each others' narrative histories, Chan helped minority students shape their own ethnic identities and connect with their peers. These types of experiences must be balanced with sensitivity to students who are the sole minority in their classrooms or schools to try to ensure that students' racial/ethnic diversity emerges as an asset rather than a deficit. Teachers can proactively take steps to protect students' space by providing culturally responsive teaching and learning that allows students choice and respects their identity expressions.

Crafting a multicultural curriculum requires time and effort, so engaging in teacher learning and collaboration with families is essential. As educators, we must study our students' cultural backgrounds and thereby understand the subtle ways in which our own cultural norms and values – including beliefs about what everyone should know or be



Equity Spotlight



Danielle Tubby is a descendant of the Oneida Nation of Wisconsin and the Choctaw Band of Mississippi Indians. For nearly a decade, she has been working as a Native American Liaison for the West De Pere School District. Her role is to help build the bridge between the Native American home, school, and community. Danielle first began working as a mathematics and reading tutor serving Native American students. Her role began to shift as she realized that the students she was serving needed additional social, emotional, physical and spiritual support that was centered on their cultural needs. She states, "I have learned a tremendous amount in this position and love being able to work with our Native American families. Someone once asked me if working with students and families was the hardest part of my job, absolutely not....it's the best part about my job."

Ms. Tubby has been able to implement an array of dynamic opportunities for Native American students in the West De Pere School District. For example, she was integral in creating a district summer program that helped build on students' cultural identities while preparing them for their academic and professional futures. Danielle has also been extremely instrumental in organizing the piloted Oneida Language courses in her school district. The programs initiated for the Native American students and their families have been purposefully formed in collaboration with local post-secondary institutions, tribal communities, and the school district. Danielle and West De Pere School District is an exemplar of how we may meet the cultural needs of students and their community every day

able to do – intersect and sometimes conflict with those of our students and families. Home visits, classroom activities that invite reflection and sharing, participation in community events, and wide exposure to literature from other cultures are excellent knowledge sources to inform our practice (Wilson-Brook, 2010). We can also encourage schools to take the initiative in collaborating with parents when adopting/creating instructional materials and curricular activities. Involving parents on this level will foster a higher level of parental engagement, helping parents to move beyond volunteerism to activism. Understanding the lived personal and educational histories of students and families can help stakeholders build collaborate relationships and to move toward a more culturally responsive, learner-centered curriculum (Mennis, 2008).

Black History Month and Su's story remind us that we live in a country in which opportunity has been - and continues to be - distributed unevenly on the basis of race, gender, and national origin. Even if we can and do transform curriculum to represent and engage our students, holding a special place to celebrate the civil rights victories of the past and to continue to remedy the unjust disparities in school funding, discipline, special education designations, teacher quality, and materials for our students remains important. These events remind us that multicultural education is not simply teaching students about their own cultural heritage and that of other groups, but it is about “unifying diverse students around a shared critique of injustice” (Duncan-Andrade, 2008, p. 159). Integrating multicultural curriculum and instructional practices can better prepare students to be active and responsible citizens.

Have a question or comment about this article? [Share it here!](#)

Engage



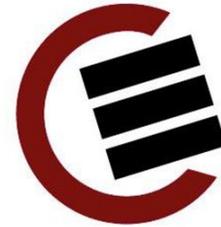
The **National Association for Multicultural Education (NAME)** unifies diverse individuals and groups to advance equity and social justice through multicultural education (NAME, 2013). To fulfill this mission, NAME provides opportunities for learning about multicultural education, and provides a digital clearinghouse of resources about educational equity and social justice.

NAME also proactively reframes public debate and works to impact current and emerging policies in ways that advance social, political, economic and educational equity through advocacy, position papers, policy statements, and other grassroots strategies.

For over two decades, this non-profit organization has mobilized an active and growing volunteer-driven membership of 1,500 people throughout and beyond the United States to help achieve their mission. Educators from preschool through higher education and representatives from business and communities comprise NAME's membership. Members in many local communities and states have formed NAME local chapters that serve the same networking, support, and outreach functions on a local level. Each of the Region V states – Illinois, Indiana, Ohio,

of the year. As a Center, we commend Danielle Tubby and the West De Pere School District for going beyond Black History Month.

Virtual Equity



Library

Upcoming Events

Illinois

March 16-18, 2013

[ASCD 2013 Annual Conference](#)

Chicago, IL

April 25-27

[NCEBC: Strategies to Increase Excellence in Education for African American Males](#)

Chicago, IL

Indiana

Feb. 6, 2013-9:00am

[Indiana Department of Education State Board Meeting](#)

Indianapolis, IN

Michigan

March 9, 2013

[2013 Michigan SOGI \(Statewide Conference on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity\) Education Conference](#)

Rochester, MI

Minnesota

March 1-Nominations Due

[Recognize an Education Minnesota member for their work on human rights](#)

Minnesota, Michigan and Wisconsin - have NAME chapters. Each chapter works to develop NAME's national publication on multicultural education as well as contributes as a region to assist in hosting national and international conferences. Additionally, each chapter president and regional director assists in providing leadership and guidance in national and state dialogues on equity, diversity, and multicultural education. Robin Brenneman, the regional director of the great lakes area, based out of Hilliard, Ohio, is also chair of the NAME Film Festival Committee. This unique medium screens and promotes a broad range of multicultural films and presents them at the annual NAME Conferences.

Sankofa is a West African word meaning "looking backward to move forward," indicating that we can learn from past experience to create a better future. NAME uses Sankofa as a guiding principle to represent the concepts of self-identity, redefinition, and vision, and it symbolizes an



understanding of one's destiny and the collective identity of the larger cultural group. It is evident that NAME is a multicultural transformative entity that consciously and proactively strives to reshape the goal of multiculturalism by using lessons from the past to help restore justice and build a more equitable and inclusive future.

Ohio

March 6-8, 2013
Ohio School Board Association
[Moving the Profession Forward: Preparing Teachers for a New World of Learning and Work- P – 16 Partnerships](#)
Dublin, OH

Wisconsin

February 22, 2013
Western Wisconsin Education Conference
[WWEC 2012: Educating the Whole Child](#)
La Crosse, WI

National

April 27, 2013
[Teaching Equity Conference](#)
Des Monicas, WA

Empower

Something to Use!

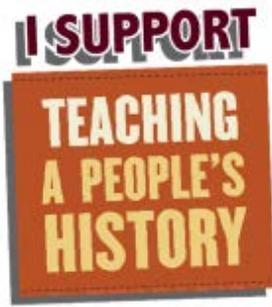


It can be difficult to meet the needs of the various students in one's classroom. In this [four-page guide](#), Darlene Leiding, Principal of Oh Day Aki, a K-12 charter school in Minneapolis, provides suggestions for planning simple lessons that uphold the basic tenets of multicultural teaching and learning. A multicultural curriculum benefits all students – those from majority and those from

minority groups - alike.

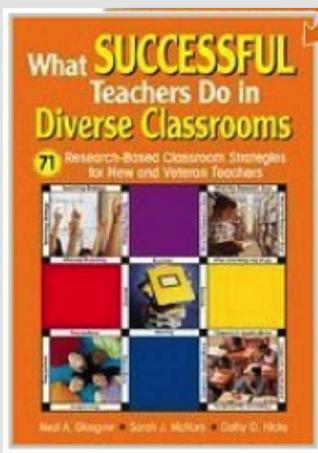
Something to Like!

Why is Hiram R. Revels a name your students should know? What might *Dirty Wars* teach your students about America's current wars in Afghanistan, Yemen, and Somalia? How did a fellow educator teach an 'outside the textbook' lesson on Martin Luther



King? [The Zinn Education Project page](#) on Facebook provides a wealth of resources for educators. "Like" it to receive updates daily, including 'un(der)-told' history stories, movie summaries, and lesson plan ideas from other equity-focused educators. This resource is coordinated by two non-profit organizations, [Rethinking Schools](#) and [Teaching for Change](#).

Something to Read!

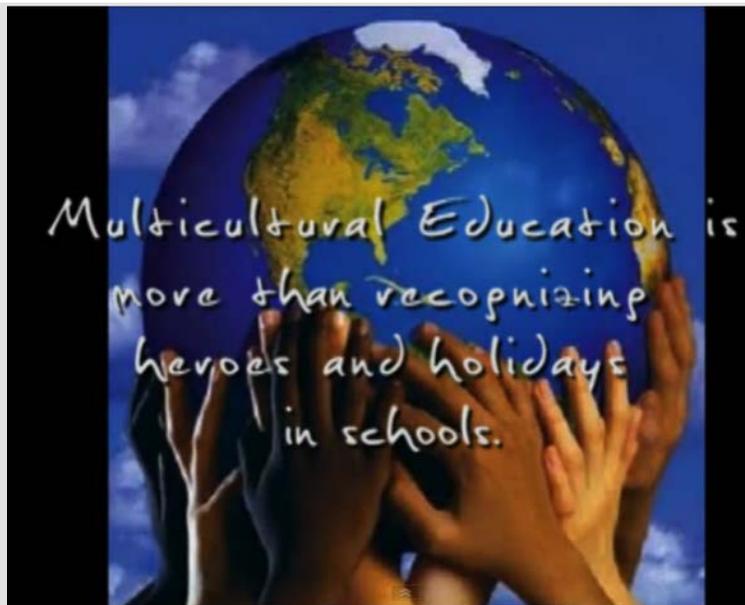


There are many books and other resources about multicultural curricula. Neal Glasgow, Sarah McNary, and Cathy Hicks (2006) have edited the title [What Successful Teachers Do in Diverse Classrooms: 71 Research-Based Classroom Strategies for New and Veteran Teachers](#). This text provides 71 strategies for engaging a class with diverse learners. Some of the strategies include how to make multicultural connections and how to move beyond the "color blind"

perspective. Other strategies have to do with working with students with special needs, cultivating gender sensitivity, being inclusive of students who are sexual minorities, and supporting students who are economically disadvantaged. English language learners are not left out, and there are also strategies for working with parents.

Something to Watch!

[This video](#) is based on James Banks' (1993) *Multicultural Education: Issues and Perspectives* as well as Sonia Nieto's (1992) *Affirming Diversity: The Sociopolitical Context of Multicultural Education*. It explores the depth of integration of multicultural education into school curricula. Where is your school on this continuum? Does it engage at the first level, or the "contributions approach," focusing on heroes and holidays? Has it reached the fourth level, the "social action approach," in which students and their teachers make important decisions on social matters as they try to solve issues of equity. Or are you somewhere in between?



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Engage:

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