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Multicultural Program Evaluation

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*Introduction*

Banks (2006) provides a comprehension, critical evaluation checklist for schools to examine their multicultural education program. After reviewing this checklist, I want to show a copy to my school faculty and staff and have them review it as well. I found it to be eye opening and rigorous; it really made me think about multicultural education in general and how well my school is implementing this type of education for our students. I found we are stronger in certain areas and weaker in others. Throughout my evaluation, I will review my school's multicultural principles, highlight our strengths and weaknesses and provide suggestions for improvement.

*Guidelines 1.0-1.5*

At the K-6 elementary school I work at, we pride ourselves in being a diverse, ELL school. The district itself is extremely diverse, with over 54 languages spoken at home other than English. Our school does do a nice job of celebrating ethnic and cultural diversity. The school library and resource centers provide a variety of books and videos on the histories, experiences, and cultural of several different groups. Our librarian does a nice job of pulling books that teach about each upcoming cultural holiday for students and teachers to choose from. Many of these books are bilingual. Attention is drawn to every cultural holiday. We have a variety of speakers that come to our school, ranging from the classroom to school-wide assemblies from different backgrounds. The posters and pictures in the hallways, classroom, lunchroom, library, and textbooks portray students and adults from a wide range of ethnicities. The district has hired a diversity coordinator who does an excellent job of sending out resources to teachers to raise awareness about the academic and social needs of a diverse student population. Our school has "The Wall of Excellence"

which makes a collaborative effort to recognize the achievement of students who may not traditionally be recognized otherwise. Our ESL teacher does a nice job of providing summer school to ELL students who need extra support. She also hosts Sunday potlucks for ELL families to gather and discuss problems, solutions, questions, or concerns about their child's learning.

However, I do not feel ethnic content and perspectives are adequately incorporated into all aspects of the curriculum. Our mathematics and reading curriculums do provide strategies for teaching ELL students but that is the extent. The social studies and science curriculums do not provide various perspectives, simply factual information about different ethnic groups that I do not feel are always realistically reliable due to the date of publication.

#### *Guidelines 2.0-2.5*

The school's principal does a great job of fostering positive interactions amongst our school family. She welcomes families in and encourages them to provide insight on how to better educate their child to accommodate their learning styles and culture. Teachers pride themselves on having strong, positive relationships with families from various backgrounds. I feel our school does an excellent job respecting the dignity and worth of all students as individuals and as members of racial, ethnic, and cultural groups because it is what makes our school family unique. Teachers are willing to make any accommodation necessary to equitably teach students of ethnic and cultural groups. Students who qualify for ELL services receive pullout daily to focus on language arts skills. Testing accommodations are made with students who have a language barrier by allowing a teacher to read the test and aid in comprehension of the questions. We do recognize

holidays and festivities of various ethnic groups by creating bulletin boards in the hallways, themed lunch menus that also provide choices to accommodate religious requirements, and spirit weeks include a day where students are asked to dress up in a way that reflects their culture.

I want to say my school avoids all instructional and guidance practices based on stereotyped and ethnocentric perceptions, but I am unable to do that. For example, I know in the primary grades, students are taught around Columbus Day that Christopher Columbus did indeed discover America. There is no discussion of the Native Americans that truly founded America; credit is given to Columbus. I feel we present events, issues, and concepts primarily from mainstream perspectives and points of view rather than Banks' (2006) desirable presentation of events, issues, and concepts from diverse cultural and ethnic perspectives (p. 238).

#### *Guidelines 3.0-3.1*

Every teacher and staff member within my school is White. I do not believe this is on purpose, however, I feel there should be more of an effort to incorporate multiethnic and multiracial faculty and staff members. Our school celebrates the diversity of our students; but when we look at our faculty and staff we do not see the same outward diversity. This may send a conflicting message to our students. Only 10% of the faculty and staff are male, the rest are female. It is a big deal to students who get to have one of the two male teachers in our building; they appreciate the change. Therefore, I feel my school needs improvement in recruiting and maintaining staff members from various racial and ethnic groups.

#### *Guidelines 4.0-4.6*

The area I feel my school needs to improve on the most is found within these guidelines on staff development. This past year, we did not make AYP, so every staff development meeting we had was over our school improvement plan and how we were going to meet AYP the following year. All of our regular faculty and staff are required to attend staff development programs, with the exception of para-educators and teacher aides. However, I feel it is equally important for them to be a part of the programs since they work directly with students daily. I have only been at this school for one year, however, none of our staff development programs had anything to do with providing opportunities like those provided by Banks (2006) in order to examine our attitudes and feelings about various racial, ethnic, and cultural groups. Nor were there any meetings dedicated to gaining knowledge and understanding about these groups. Our diversity coordinator sends out emails about professional workshops and conferences (given in lecture format) that we can attend to learn about diversity, but none of them are required, thus, few teachers actually attend.

#### *Guidelines 5.0-5.2*

One of the claims my school made in its school improvement plan was that we would utilize Kagen cooperative learning strategies to reach the learning styles of all students. The jigsaw strategy is one I have used and observed being used in various classrooms. Like Banks (2006) suggests, integrating students from various ethnic and cultural backgrounds into cooperative learning groups has helped students make improvements and learn from one another. Teachers use a variety of learning strategies and instructional methods to reach all learners, no matter what their ethnic or cultural background may be.

*Guidelines 6.0-6.4*

Teachers and administration throughout my school provide multiple opportunities for students to examine their backgrounds, share with others, and welcome families into the classroom. Most teachers have a student of the week and they dedicate a bulletin board that displays pictures and information about the student and their backgrounds, including their culture. Career Days are excellent for students because parents are extremely diverse with a variety of jobs and we invite them in to share about their occupations. Another great example of a way teachers celebrate a student's family heritage is through programs like "Cultural Feast Fridays." A family brings in a dish that represents their heritage background to share with the class. We then point out what country the family originally came from on a map and keep track of all the places we have "been to." Many teachers provide similar opportunities for families and students to share their heritages with their classmates.

*Guidelines 7.0-7.7*

This is another area where I feel our school curriculum is extremely weak, providing knowledge to help students understand the wholeness of the experiences of ethnic and cultural groups. Banks (2006) claims we should study historical experiences, cultural patterns, social problems that confront each group, as well as the dynamic diversity of the group itself (p. 322). From what I have observed in our social studies curriculum, it focuses on the "heroes" and positive aspects of a few different ethnic and cultural groups. It does not provide the total experience and various perspectives. It would be helpful to have a curriculum that would make students more aware of the rich diversity of different groups and their affect on the world we live in today.

*Guidelines 8.0-8.2*

It is difficult for me to assess these guidelines, for I am only familiar with the primary curriculum and not the intermediate or higher-grade level curriculums. However, I do know the United States values and ideals are presented in the primary curriculum in a way that they have been achieved and we should take pride on how we have achieved these ideals. I relate to Banks (2006) "passing down the myths and legends of our national heritage" (p. 323). Like I mentioned earlier, Christopher Columbus is an American hero, without discussion of the violent manner he achieved control. Abraham Lincoln is depicted as a man against slavery, when he himself owned slaves. Our curriculum leaves out the "bad stuff" about our traditional heroes and is given from only an Anglo-American viewpoint with mentioning perspectives from the minority groups.

*Guidelines 9.0-9.2*

I believe every teacher in my school would say they create a classroom environment that reflects acceptance and respect for ethnic and cultural differences. We focus heavily on the Character Counts program of the "Six Pillars of Character: Respect, Responsibility, Trustworthiness, Fairness, Caring, and Citizenship." We feel this works for our diverse school because these are ethical values everyone can agree with. None of them are political, religious, or culturally biased, thus they can be enforced with every student. I feel our students need to be educated in the reality of our world, that they will be judged based on their ethnicities and cultures but we can provide them with strategies on how to deal with this cultural bias. This is an area I feel we could work on more within our school. We do not want students going out into the world feeling like they are accepted just as they are but instead go out into the world expecting to encounter various perceptions and attitudes and knowing how to overcome them.

*Guidelines 10.0-10.4*

I feel the curriculum we implement within our school strives for unity amongst different groups. We are provided with learning opportunities that allow our students to come together on a common ground, but we do not emphasize differences and address conflicts. Our main focus tends to be on showing students how we are all alike in that we live in America and need to portray the democratic ideals of our society. In reality, we could do a better job of allowing students to examine multiple differences among ethnic and cultural groups and how well our nation has encompassed their differences into our society. The curriculum is too focused on creating the image that America is one big “melting pot.” As a teacher, I try to encourage differences because it is what makes us individually unique.

*Guidelines 11.0-11.8*

Our language arts curriculum does put emphasis on teaching students how to distinguish facts from interpretations and opinions. In the primary grades, students are taught to look for key words like “I think” or “I feel” when the author is presenting an opinion or recognize when facts are presented, “The tree frog can jump 15 feet.” In later grades, students engage in forms of literature and research documents to uncover the underlying messages. Some of this literature involves characters from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds to allow students to engage in critical thinking opportunities. Our “Second Step” program for the primary grades teaches students conflict resolution skills and allows them to practice these skills in their everyday life. Teachers enforce the skills and encourage the transferability of the program into the classroom and amongst peer relationships. Now I feel like we could do more to provide students with opportunities to



“use decision-making abilities and social action skills in the resolution of problems [specifically] affecting ethnic, racial, and cultural groups” as Banks (2006) suggests on page 328.

*Guidelines 12.0-12.2*

As I mentioned earlier, our school strives to use cooperative learning groups as much as possible to encourage students to learn how to work with others who have different socio-economic statuses, ethnicities, races, cultures, ages, genders, and lifestyles than they do. We teach students to be respectful, fair, and caring when working with one another. These skills carry over into real life as they have been exposed to working with various ethnic and cultural groups in school and recognize they are individuals, and should not be stereotyped because of their appearance. Students learn to become friends with others based on their similar interests regardless of their ethnicity and our school environment encourages these positive interactions.

*Guidelines 13.0-13.7*

There is not a comprehensive, continuous multicultural curriculum used at my school. The teacher must supplement the majority of multicultural education. Our district, community, and libraries have several resources available for teachers and students to use that will introduce deeper knowledge on the varying backgrounds of cultural and ethnic groups, however, a teacher has to seek out these resources. Our school does a great job of teaching special units, occasions, and holidays because teachers find it easy to discuss them every once in a while. But to incorporate diversity topics within every lesson and unit beyond the cultures represented at school is difficult. It is time consuming to seek out resources at a local, national, and global level, so if our school had a curriculum that already

included diversity into instructional plans, I feel teachers would be more likely to address these issues. This would be a topic to discuss at a faculty meeting and try to find a way we can incorporate multicultural education daily and at every grade level.

*Guidelines 14.0-14.3*

In reflecting on how well my school studies ethnic and cultural groups, I feel we do a fair job of discussing the ones that are prominent in our school, such as African-American, Hispanic, Asian, and Caucasian, but few outside this realm. It is during random units and holidays that we discuss and examine these groups' experiences that have been affected by their race. For example, in January around Martin Luther King, Jr. Day, we discuss how Black people felt living in a society characterized by segregation and prejudices. We then discuss if there are any similarities in today's world and if students feel these issues are still are problem. The majority of students say no. However, I feel if we integrated more studies of several ethnic and cultural groups that are undoubtedly faced with resistance today, students would be more aware of the existing conditions of various groups.

*Guidelines 15.0-15.2*

I believe our curriculum could provide a lot more multidisciplinary analyses than it does now. The majority of the curriculum is one-sided from an author's single point of view. I think a more integrated curriculum would allow my school to address various components, experiences, and lifestyles of cultural and ethnic groups using an interdisciplinary approach. Teachers could focus a particular event, and then address economical, historical, political, and individual influences that surfaced including represented viewpoints from all groups involved.

*Guidelines 16.0-16.2*

At the elementary level, we really encourage students to welcome their individual similarities and differences. Several curricular activities focus on how students are alike or different but do not address similarities and differences among and between the students' ethnic and cultural groups. As Banks (2006) discussed, teachers and curriculum developers may worry about hurting a student's feelings or about having stereotyping to occur in the classroom, intentionally or unintentionally. However, students need to be able to recognize similarities and differences of an entire ethnic and cultural group and compare these with their own or with another one in a fair, respectful manner.

*Guidelines 17.0-17.2*

We present history and the rest of our curriculum from the mainstream perspective. Rarely, if ever, do we address the perspectives of marginalized groups. I do agree that the teacher "should try to help students understand how each group may view a situation differently and why" (Banks, 2006, p. 332). However, our lack of professional development and knowledge of these perspectives prevents teachers in my school from addressing these issues and allowing students to make their own judgments. Another factor limiting our ability to incorporate different ethnic and cultural perspectives is because we all come from the same mainstream group, white, Anglo-American backgrounds. We could utilize help from our school families in providing representation and viewpoints from different diverse groups.

*Guidelines 18.0-18.2*

After examining how our curriculum depicts the growth of the United States, I feel we do address the involvement of Native Americans, Hispanic, and Mexican to some degree but the main objectives underline European settlers as developers of our nation. I cannot

identify the curriculum mentioning the northwesterly flow of cultures from Africa or the easterly flow of cultures from Asia, and little discussion on the northerly flow of cultures from Mexico, Latin America, and the Caribbean (Banks, 2006). We need to expand students' knowledge of the entire cultures that make up America and how they have influenced our national identity over time, not just focus on the mainstream European culture.

*Guidelines 19.0-19.6*

This is an area where I feel my school is stronger in. Because we are such a diverse school in a diverse community, we have the resources available as well as students from various ethnic and cultural backgrounds to learn from directly in the classroom. In language arts, the curriculum incorporates literature from various groups and class discussions allow for conceptual understanding of the actions and thoughts of multicultural characters. The latter is up to the teacher to initiate. Students are provided multiple stories to read, but critical discussion is necessary for students to develop empathy for and understanding of people from various ethnicities and cultures. We are fortunate to have a Music teacher who teaches students various songs and dances from a variety of groups. At our winter program, diverse songs are sung that represent cultures around the world and students sing them in the native language. It is rather impressive. Our Art teacher provides several multicultural artistic opportunities. Every week students create artwork representing a variety of different ethnic or cultural backgrounds and are motivated to learn and share the meaning of the art, even in the primary grades. Teachers could do more by inviting in members of our diverse communities and allow role-playing situations to occur depending on the current topic being discussed.

*Guidelines 20.0-20.4*

Our school has a strong ELL program with a teacher and teacher aides that are fluent in second languages. This allows for efficient communications between the school and non-English speaking families that attend the school. Students receive these services and are scaffolded in the English language until they become proficient. For example, the ELL teacher will speak Spanish with students as needed to aid in their comprehension of the English curriculum. Unfortunately, our second language Spanish program was recently cut out of the school due to funding cuts. Therefore, any learning of a second language comes only from the classroom teacher and is limited to counting or a few words and phrases here and there in another language. Hopefully, a second language teacher and class will return to our school if funding ever increases again.

*Guidelines 21.0-21.3*

Community programs do a nice job of raising awareness of their programs by supplying schools with brochures or pamphlets to hand out to students. Teachers also help raise awareness of the various members in our diverse community. Unfortunately, it can be difficult to arrange field trips to these multicultural opportunities within the community due to funding. A local art museum is utilized often and exposes students to various ethnic and cultural viewpoints. I do not feel we take enough advantage of our diverse community and more effort could be made to include these community members within the educational setting.

*Guidelines 22.0-22.2*

In our daily assessments of students, we use a variety of assessment techniques of both formative and summative assessments. There are also mandatory assessments by our district, such as DIBELS fluency testing, MAP quarterly formatives, and state assessments.

Daily informal assessments through conversations and observations allow teachers to take into account the diversity of their students and how well they are achieving the academic goals set for them.

*Guidelines 23.0-23.5*

We do not currently have an evaluation in place for multicultural education practices at our school. We do analyze the test results and data of the various ethnic and cultural groups within our school and discuss as a school how we can improve upon them and what strategies or programs we need to implement in order to do so. Parents and community members are not currently involved in this, but I feel it would definitely help to have them included. They could provide diverse background knowledge and insight that may allow us to reach all of our students even more. As a school, we are always looking for ways to improve but we need to find alternative ways to assess our diversity opportunities and growth rather than just looking at standardized test results.

*Conclusion*

In conclusion, I believe our school has the resources and the willingness to implement a more cohesive and determined multicultural education program. Faculty and staff members need to be on the same page with the same determination to implement such a program. This will require training and recognition of our current attitudes and beliefs about multicultural education. This evaluation has highlighted strengths and weaknesses already in place. Now it is time to receive the training necessary to improve on our weaknesses so we can fully implement multicultural education into our school.

References

Banks, J.A. (2006). *Cultural diversity and education: Foundations, curriculum, and teaching*.

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