

M2-S7: Curriculum as a Catalyst: Selecting Culturally Responsive Content

CLH	<p>Hello Gina, and hello listeners!</p> <p>Welcome to your seventh TALE Academy session in Module 2 focused on culturally responsive-sustaining education. This session is entitled Curriculum as a Catalyst: Selecting Culturally Responsive Content.</p> <p>So Gina, we are both ELA teachers. You could say we know a thing or two about the Western literary canon. But for the sake of any STEM teachers out there listening, what are we talking about here?</p>
GK	<p>It just refers to what we have collectively established to be the important books for students to be exposed to. But it turns out that what is important to me might not be important to my students.</p> <p>The Western literary canon, which influences, if not dictates, most required reading lists for schools across the country, has become a controversial topic - particularly in relation to culturally responsive-sustaining education, referred to throughout TALE Academy as CRSE.</p> <p>Because most of the texts are written by white male authors of the past, such as Shakespeare, Dickens, Hawthorne, Emerson, Steinbeck, Fitzgerald, and Hemingway, to name just a few, many teachers and school librarians argue these lists need to be revised in order to better reflect the diversity of classrooms. They talk about the implicit bias that is often embedded in elevating certain authors above others, and how it affects people of color, women, LGBTQIA, and other marginalized groups.</p> <p>They also cite the harm that this causes to not only the students from traditionally marginalized groups but also those from the dominant culture, as this bias further reinforces limited exposure to other cultures. The debate over the Western literary canon's relevance to students and its hold on most prescribed curriculum helps to illustrate what teachers must grapple with as they seek a more CRSE-informed instructional approach.</p>
CLH	<p>This is a particularly critical topic for New York State educators. If we are not conscious of and intentional about our curricular choices, we risk alienating or failing a large portion of our student body. To put this into numbers:</p> <p>56.8% of our New York State students are students of color according to NYSED.</p> <p>83% of the authors on NYC schools' most commonly used English language arts book lists and curricula for elementary and middle school were white, while</p> <p>85% of NYC's student population was students of color according to Diverse City, White Curriculum published by the NYC Coalition for Educational Justice in 2019.</p>
GK	<p>Impressive figures.</p>

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	<p>When these students' lived experiences are primarily ignored, their histories unacknowledged, or their interests dismissed, we are missing opportunities to engage and empower a LOT of kids.</p> <p>In this session, we will consider how to leverage our curriculum as a means of fostering the 21st-century skills of student collaboration, criticality, creativity, and communication, as well as how to use the curriculum to achieve three primary goals of CRSE:</p> <p>(1) academic achievement, which means students grow intellectually and succeed academically;</p> <p>(2) cultural and linguistic dexterity, which means students feel their culture is acknowledged and honored while gaining exposure to and an understanding of the culture of others; and</p> <p>(3) critical consciousness, which means students develop the ability to analyze, deconstruct, and address social inequities.</p>
CLH	<p>Let's start by looking at CRSE and curriculum development.</p> <p>In Session 3 of Module 2 and in Session 6 of Module 1, we explored the three major aspects of curriculum backward design according to Wiggins and McTighe's Understanding by Design. These are:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Identify desired results2. Determine acceptable evidence3. Plan learning experiences and instruction <p>In other words... start at the end.</p>
GK	<p>Let's now examine these three facets of curriculum development through the lens of CRSE.</p> <p>First, identify desired results.</p> <p>You do this by combining grade-level state standards and embedding the CRSE goals of academic achievement, cultural and linguistic dexterity, and critical consciousness within the enduring understandings. For example, a state standard might require students to know the causes that led to the creation of the Declaration of Independence, and a CRSE-embedded, enduring understanding might lead students to understand the similarities and differences in the struggles and tactics of various groups for freedom throughout U.S. history. Enduring understandings ensure teachers are able to facilitate deeper connections to and applications of academic content.</p>

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CLH	<p>The second stage of understanding by design is to determine acceptable evidence.</p> <p>You do this by creating assessments that are not only aligned with grade-level state standards but also provide students with opportunities to demonstrate their understanding beyond traditional standardized testing methods and in more culturally responsive ways. If you missed it, you can go back to Module 2, Session 6 for more ideas on how to develop equitable assessments and grading systems.</p>
GK	<p>Third, plan learning experiences and instruction.</p> <p>Here, we design curriculum that covers not only required content from grade-level state standards but also reaffirms students' intersectional identities and lived experiences. This curriculum should also provide opportunities to apply knowledge in the context of the real world and to practice sociopolitical consciousness and sociocultural responsiveness. If you missed it, you can go back to Module 2, Session 5 for more details on helping students develop sociopolitical consciousness.</p> <p>So, that was so many lists. The bottom line is, how do we develop a culturally responsive-sustaining curriculum?</p>
CLH	<p>It's definitely time for some concrete examples!</p> <p>First, to increase the CRSE quotient of any curriculum, incorporate current events into instruction.</p> <p>There are so many ways that creativity, critical thinking, communication, and collaboration can be integrated through current events. For example, students can "translate" a current event into a comic strip, song/rap, or monologue, or they can write an op-ed piece (such as interpreting the Second Amendment in relation to the growing issue of school shootings) or engage in a classroom debate in teams about a relevant news story.</p>
GK	<p>Second, a great way to boost the culturally responsive-sustaining quality of your curriculum is to consider students as co-designers of curriculum. Bring them on board!</p> <p>Groups of students can be tasked with teaching one objective within a given unit to their classmates, which would require them to engage with the 21st century skills of critical thinking, creativity, communication, and collaboration during the design phase, as well as collaboration and communication during the actual delivery of the lesson.</p>
CLH	<p>I can actually see that this is ticking a lot of boxes – student engagement, 21st century skills, doing some of my work for me....but ok.</p> <p>Third, to increase the CRSE value of your curriculum, use resources written and developed by racially, culturally, and linguistically diverse perspectives.</p>

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	Teachers' selections of more diverse resources provide fertile ground for students to exercise those 4 C's of 21st-century skills because diverse perspectives help to spark the imagination, identify commonalities, enable problem-solving, and require articulating those ideas.
GK	<p>As we seek ways to better incorporate a CRSE-aligned curriculum, we can focus on four key areas, according to eTeachNY.org resources on identifying inclusive curriculum and assessment. Check your curriculum to ensure the following:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1.) Representation. Does the curriculum reflect the diversity that exists in our classroom and offers opportunities for students to celebrate themselves and their cultures?2.) Intersectionality. Does the curriculum present multiple perspectives on the same topic from a range of folks with diverse experiences - particularly elevating the voices of people from historically marginalized groups - and promotes students' development of anti-bias viewpoints and provides a look through the lens of the past, present, and future?3.) Critique and Challenge. Does the curriculum require students to develop critical thinking skills and an ability to construct arguments and sound counter-arguments, as well as to engage in civil discourse when confronted with divergent perspectives?4.) Avoid Trauma. Check to see that the content does not require students to re-live either a fresh or past traumatic experience and/or provides a trigger warning with an alternative way to engage with the topic and participate in the learning.
CLH	<p>So those are great questions and considerations for using existing curricula. Here's another angle— the CRSE questions to ask when designing curriculum from the ground up:</p> <p>How is my curriculum aligned with the diverse cultures, histories, languages, and experiences of my students?</p> <p>Where does my curriculum possess natural entry points for field trips to community-learning sites, such as museums, parks, cultural centers, neighborhood recreational centers, and community centers?</p> <p>In what ways does my curriculum bridge instructional content with the natural interests, pop culture, and daily lives of my students?</p> <p>What aspects of my curriculum have entailed student co-creation, and where can I integrate more of these partnerships with my students?</p>

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	<p>How does my curriculum facilitate a greater understanding of global cultures while also fostering a stronger connection to the local community?</p> <p>What parts of my curriculum include the explicit development of student agency and leadership by promoting students creating and running student-led initiatives?</p> <p>To what degree is my curriculum incorporating opportunities for students to integrate social-emotional learning that promotes stronger classroom connections and builds community with a deeper sense of belonging?</p>
GK	<p>I feel like all of these questions are holding us to a high standard of excellence. But we put out a lot of checklists, so let's take a look at a few case studies to bring these concepts to life.</p> <p>One school that has exemplified the principles of the NYSED CRSE Framework in their curriculum, even though the project precedes the framework's creation, was highlighted in a 2014 Chalkbeat New York story. Highbridge Green School, located in the Bronx, initiated a collaboration between teachers and families to co-create an English unit plan for the school's inaugural sixth-grade class.</p> <p>The unit included a project that consisted of students reading a book about a Chinese boy's immigration journey and then interviewing community members—and in many cases, the students' own parents or family—on their immigration experience so they could write an essay that made connections between the story and the interviews. Both the students and the parents quoted in the article reported that this was a powerful learning experience.</p>
CLH	<p>Awesome. Here's another.</p> <p>Teachers at East Upper and Lower Schools - a pairing of grades 6-8 and grades 9-12 - have been creating a more culturally relevant and responsive curriculum since 2015 in partnership with the University of Rochester.</p> <p>By combining the power of the understanding by design model with culturally responsive pedagogy, the faculty made rapid progress in a short period. The class of 2015 had a 33.3% four-year graduation rate. However, the class of 2019, the first cohort to have four years of a CRSE-aligned curriculum, had a 69.7% four-year graduation rate, and the class of 2020 had a 78.1% four-year graduation rate.</p> <p>To share some of the sources of their success, East created Elevated Educator: a database of culturally responsive lessons and materials that you can access in the transcript. Elevated Educator also created and published a rubric for aligning your pedagogy, lessons, and units with the principles of culturally responsive-sustaining education.</p>

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GK	<p>Those examples really helped! But wait – we haven’t made the shift between learning environments with our CRSE curriculum design!</p> <p>Let’s look at CRSE-aligned curriculum for TALE.</p> <p>As we consider how best to effectively deliver a CRSE-aligned curriculum across learning environments, we can check for the presence of the following CRSE considerations in digital resources. The links for these resources are linked in the transcript for this session.</p>
CLH	<p>The first CRSE consideration is the use of digital resources that showcase various perspectives and offer counternarratives to widely held beliefs.</p> <p>Suggestions to explore further include a series called Narratives and Counternarratives: Building Digital History Projects in the Classroom. Hedayah is a site dedicated to eliminating violent extremism by providing counter narrative.</p>
GK	<p>The second CRSE consideration is digital resources that provide students with the opportunity to demonstrate their understanding and equip them to mitigate bias.</p> <p>The Harvard Implicit Association Test is an assessment that teachers and students can take to learn more about their own implicit biases in order to better mitigate them.</p>
CLH	<p>The third CRSE consideration is the use of digital resources that further develop students’ ability to engage with and constructively challenge divergent viewpoints.</p> <p>Empower Students with Digital Study Skills contains resources that engage students in a variety of ways, including supporting them to explore diverse perspectives.</p>
GK	<p>Another consideration is selecting digital resources that enable students to more effectively engage with their local and extended communities.</p> <p>Here, one example is Five Ways to Use Technology and Digital Media for Global Learning - this resource offers examples of ways to connect students with scholars from around the globe.</p>
CLH	<p>Finally, consider selecting digital resources that serve as a means to further explore the relationship between power and privilege and fighting against injustices.</p> <p>Read “Power and Privilege: How Do We Define?” on how to help students unpack the concepts of power and privilege. It includes a variety of questions for students to reflect upon.</p>
GK	<p>Don’t forget! Links for these resources are shared in the transcript for this session.</p> <p>Let’s tie this lesson up by exploring culturally responsive curriculum scorecards.</p>

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	<p>If we want to engage in a more formal evaluation of the quality and efficacy of our curriculum from a CRSE lens, NYU Steinhardt's Culturally Responsive Curriculum Scorecards provide a structured way to evaluate inclusion of the following elements:</p> <p>Representation</p> <p>Social justice</p> <p>Teachers' materials</p> <p>Materials/resources (presented to students)</p> <p>The scorecard ultimately identifies where our curriculum falls along a continuum, from “culturally destructive” to “culturally insufficient” to “emerging awareness” to “culturally aware” to “culturally responsive.” Based on our results in the aforementioned areas, we can identify areas we can build upon, as well as areas we can improve upon.</p>
CLH	<p>One of the most powerful ways to ensure that the curriculum engages diverse students across learning environments is to incorporate student voice and student choice. In Session 5 of Module 2, we shared ways that we can empower students to own and elevate their sociopolitical consciousness while also exercising agency and autonomy in selecting topics or kinds of projects. Teachers can also provide choices in how to consume content as well as how they will demonstrate their learning.</p> <p>For instance, students may be given the option to demonstrate their understanding of the connections between historical events and modern-day social justice issues by writing a traditional paper; creating a podcast episode; completing an oral presentation with slides; digitally designing a campaign brochure; or recording a vlog.</p> <p>Lastly, student voice and choice can also be elevated by allowing students' interests to drive curricular decisions that are not predetermined by state or local requirements, such as the texts they read, the topics they review, or the field trips they attend. The more that teachers are able to incorporate student voice and choice, the more likely students are to engage and excel.</p>
GK	<p>Given what we know now about the connection between backward design, or UbD, and CRSE, we are better equipped to assess how our curriculum is aligned with culturally sustaining practices. Moreover, we can also incorporate more student voice and choice in ways that extend across learning environments.</p>
CLH	<p>The goal of the TALE Academy is to help teachers rethink education so that everyone—students, families, educators, school leaders, and communities—all have the opportunity to succeed. You've just added another tool to your toolbox when you select culturally responsive content while teaching across learning environments.</p> <p>Thanks for listening. Now it's your turn to visit the choice board for your next foray into curriculum as catalysts.</p>

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