



ASSESSING BIAS IN STANDARDS AND CURRICULAR MATERIALS

Created by:
Midwest and Plains Equity Assistance Center

February, 2017



Acknowledgements

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About the Centers

Great Lakes Equity Center (Center) is an educational research and service center located in Indiana University's School of Education at IUPUI. The Center engages in equity-focused technical assistance and related research with educational and community agencies focused on systemic improvements to serve all learners with particular focus on educational access, participation and outcomes for those who have been historically marginalized. Midwest and Plains Equity Assistance Center a project of the Center, provides technical assistance in educational equity related to student race, national origin, sex, and religion at no cost to public educational agencies throughout the 13 Midwest and Plains States.



Introduction

Academic content standards and curricular materials often frames the histories and experiences of White Americans as a monolithic and universal experience (GLEC, 2016). The perspectives, histories, and contributions of non-White, non-male, non-disabled, or non-cisgender people are generally minimized, misrepresented or often omitted altogether (GLEC, 2016). While this may occur as an effect of teacher positionality, it is also rooted in content standards and curricular materials that are not ideologically neutral but steeped in experiences of dominant cultures (Sleeter, 2005, p. 31). At a time when teachers are often obligated to teach directly from standardized curricula and district adopted textbooks, it is imperative that curricular materials and content standards reflect the diverse backgrounds, histories, and narratives of all students in schools (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Sleeter, 2005; Stovall, 2006; Duncan-Andrade, 2007; Gay, 2010; Paris, 2012; Laing, 2013; Paris & Alim, 2014; Aronson & Laughter, 2015; Waitoller & Thorius, 2016).



About This Tool

The *Assessing Bias in Standards & Curricular Materials* Tool enables users to determine the extent to which developed standards and curricular materials reflect educational equity (Fraser, 1998; GLEC, 2011). The tool provides guidance in reviewing standards and curricular materials using equity-oriented domains. It also includes a scoring and analysis guide to assist with the evaluation process.

The *Assessing Bias in Standards & Curricular Materials* Tool is adapted from the 2016 Equity Leaders Institute (ELI) by The Great Lakes Equity Center and David Sadker's (n.d.) *Some Practical Ideas for Confronting Curricular Bias*.

Both resources were used to articulate equity-oriented rubrics with respective domains



About This Tool (Continued)

and indicators in efforts to surface bias within standard development and interpretations, as well as curricular material creation, selection, and application.

The **standards** rubric is sectioned into the following three domains:

I. Build Consciousness—Content standards cultivate an understanding of how knowledge is constructed and that the co-construction of knowledge is the medium through which society defines itself.

II. Reflect Students' Cultural Repertoires and View Them as Worthy of Sustaining—Perpetuate and foster linguistic, literate, and cultural pluralism by sustaining in-group cultural practices and cross-group cultural practices (Paris, 2012).

III. Social Improvement—Content standards encourage social critique and just action.

The **curricular materials** rubric is sectioned into the following seven domains:

I. Invisibility—The complete or relative exclusion of a group (Sadker, n.d., Invisibility section, para. 2).

II. Stereotyping—Widely held but fixed and oversimplified image or idea of a particular type of person or behavior at the cost of individual attributes and differences (Sadker, n.d., Stereotyping section, para. 1).

III. Imbalance and Selectivity—Representing only one interpretation of an issue, situation, or group of people. Simplifying and distorting complex issues by omitting different perspectives (Sadker, n.d., Imbalance and Selectivity section, para 1).

IV. Historical Whitewashing—(Sleeter, 2005) - Minimizing unpleasant facts and events in history by ignoring prejudice, racism, discrimination, exploitation, oppression, sexism, and inter-group conflict (Sadker, n.d., Unreality section, para. 1).

V. Fragmentation and Isolation—Physically or visually isolating a group of people in the text. Often, racial and ethnic group members are depicted as interacting only with persons like themselves, isolated from other cultural communities Sadker, n.d., Fragmentation and Isolation, para. 1).

VI. Linguistic Bias—Ways in which the use of language and words perpetuate stereotypes, bias, and marginalization of specific groups of people (Sadker, n.d., Linguistic bias Section, para. 1).

VII. Cosmetic Bias—The aesthetics of curricular materials suggest that the material is “bias free” however it is really a marketing strategy to give a favorable impression to potential purchases (Sadker, n.d., Cosmetic Bias section, para.1).



Preparing to Engage in Critical Reflection

To prepare for critical reflection on curricular materials and content standards, consider the following key framing questions:

- 1) What purposes should curriculum serve?
- 2) How should knowledge be selected, who decides what knowledge is most worth teaching and learning, and what is the relationship between those in the classroom and the knowledge selection process?
- 3) What is the nature of students and the learning process, and what does it suggest about how learning experiences should be organized (GLEC, 2016; Adapted from Questions for Standard Analysis Sleeter, 2005, p. 55)?



Assessing Bias Instructions

Rate content standards and curricular material for each domain based on the associated indicator/s.

- 1) Provide a rationale statement to support your rating, as well as evidence.
- 2) Propose a modification, addition, or deletion to the material or standard related to changing, improving, or enhancing it (GLEC, 2016, p. 2).
- 3) Indicate whether the proposed change is a recommendation or a revision (GLEC, 2016, p. 2).
- 4) Total the points for each domain by adding the numbers associated with ratings together.
- 5) At the end of the assessment, add together point totals for each domain for a grand total.
- 6) Correlate that number to the corresponding description to analyze whether the curriculum or standard meets equity domain indicators.

I. Standards: Build Consciousness

Content standards cultivate an understanding of how knowledge is constructed and that the co-construction of knowledge is the medium through which a society defines itself.

Rate the standard or textbook content on the extent to which it evidences the visibility and inclusion of diverse narratives and practices	Strongly Disagree 0	Disagree 1	Agree 2	Strongly Agree 3
1.2 Support students to understand, investigate, and determine how the implicit cultural assumptions, frames of references, perspectives, and biases within a discipline influence the ways in which knowledge is constructed within it (Banks, 1997).				
1.2. Support students utilizing collaborative processes with diverse people in knowledge construction to produce new understanding or knowledge that would exceed something that anyone alone could not achieve (Oksanen, 2017).				

Rationale/Explanation and Evidence

Recommendation or Consideration

Point Total:

II. Standards: Reflect Students' Cultural Repertoires and View Them As Worthy of Sustaining

Perpetuate and foster linguistic, literate, and cultural pluralism by sustaining in-group and cross-group cultural practices (Paris, 2012).

Rate the standard or textbook content on the extent to which it evidences the visibility and inclusion of diverse narratives and practices	Strongly Disagree 0	Disagree 1	Agree 2	Strongly Agree 3
2.1 Support students' cultural self-awareness – the recognition of one's social identities and the ways in which those identities interact to shape sense of self and experiences (Goodman, 2011).				
2.2 Support students' engagement in ongoing self-examination to excavate how one's identities inform their understandings of and experiences with complex social problems (Mitchell, 2015).				
2.3 Are inclusive and reflect the cultural repertoire, practices and contributions of diverse communities in ways both traditional and evolving (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992; Sleeter, 2005; Duncan-Andrade, 2007; Gay, 2010; Paris, 2012; Paris & Alim, 2014).				
2.4 Represent those most familiar and used by students in their age group, home and communities (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Gay, 2010; Paris, 2012; Paris & Alim, 2014).				
2.5 Are inclusive and avoid stereotypic depictions in terms of race, gender or dis/ability.				
2.6 Avoid centering one group's cultural practices as the standard to which all others are compared (e.g. Euro-centric, male-centric etc.).				
Rationale/Explanation and Evidence				
Recommendation or Consideration				
Point Total:				

III. Standards: Stimulates Social Improvement

Content standards encourage social critique and just action.

Rate the standard or textbook content on the extent to which it evidences the visibility and inclusion of diverse narratives and practices	Strongly Disagree 0	Disagree 1	Agree 2	Strongly Agree 3
3.1 Promote or provoke students asking critical questions about societal status quo (Freire, 1970; Duncan-Andrade, 2007).				
3.2 Represent alternative points of view, experiences, and approaches to problem solving and present them as equally worth considering (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Sleeter, 2005; Duncan-Andrade, 2007; Gay, 2010; Paris, 2012; Paris & Alim, 2014).				
3.3 Support students in identifying and using tools and knowledge resources from multiple communities for critiquing the status quo and empowering students to make decisions that will lead to social change towards a just community (Stovall, 2006; Gay, 2010; Aronson & Laughter 2015).				
3.4 Liberate students to express one's emotions, desires and opinions constructively (Duncan-Andrade, 2007; Ladson-Billings, 1994).				
3.5 Empower students to make decisions towards self-determination (Duncan-Andrade, 2007; Ladson-Billings, 1994).				
3.6 Avoid centering one group's cultural practices as the standard to which all others are compared (e.g. Euro-centric, male-centric etc.).				

Rationale/Explanation and Evidence

Recommendation or Consideration

Point Total:

I. Curricular Materials: Invisibility

What You Don't See Makes a Lasting Impression (Sadker, n.d.)

The complete or relative exclusion of a group (Sadker, n.d, Invisibility section, para. 2).

Rate the standard or textbook content on the extent to which it evidences the visibility and inclusion of diverse narratives and practices	Strongly Disagree 0	Disagree 1	Agree 2	Strongly Agree 3
1.1 Curricular materials include illustrations and depictions of people from diverse backgrounds (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Sleeter, 2005; Stovall, 2006; Duncan-Andrade, 2007; Gay, 2010; Paris, 2012; Laing, 2013; Paris & Alim, 2014; Aronson & Laughter, 2015; Waitoller & Thorius, 2016).				
1.2 Textbook content reflects the cultural histories, community practices, and cultural repertoires of people from diverse backgrounds (Paris & Alim, 2015; GLEC, 2016)				
1.3 Standards make visible the histories, voices, and/or practices of diverse communities.				
Rationale/Explanation and Evidence				
Recommendation or Consideration				
Point Total:				

II. Curricular Materials: Stereotyping

Shortcuts to Bigotry (Sadker, n.d.)

Widely held, but fixed and oversimplified, image or idea of a particular type of person or behavior at the cost of individual attributes and differences (Sadker, n.d., Stereotyping section, para. 1).

Rate the standard or textbook content on the extent to which it evidences the visibility and inclusion of diverse narratives and practices	Strongly Disagree 0	Disagree 1	Agree 2	Strongly Agree 3
2.1 Heteronormative roles and the privileging of cisgender identities are challenged in the content through text and illustration. For example, men are presented as caretakers of children and women are portrayed in light of their careers.				
2.2 Ableist ideologies that depict people with dis/abilities as disadvantaged or that they only serve as inspiration are challenged. People with dis/abilities are depicted in terms of their careers, contributions to society, and active members of communities.				
2.3 Curricular materials avoid making broad-sweeping generalizations about groups of people.				
2.4 Standards reflect students' acknowledgement of, challenge of, and disrupting of stereotypical images and ideas of a particular type of person, groups of people, or behaviors.				

Rationale/Explanation and Evidence

Recommendation or Consideration

Point Total:

III. Curricular Materials: Imbalance and Selectivity

A Tale Half-Told (Sadker, n.d.)

Representing only one interpretation of an issue, situation, or group of people. Simplifying and distorting complex issues by omitting different perspectives (Sadker, n.d., Imbalance and Selectivity section, para. 1).

Rate the standard or textbook content on the extent to which it evidences the visibility and inclusion of diverse narratives and practices	Strongly Disagree 0	Disagree 1	Agree 2	Strongly Agree 3
3.1 Curricular materials avoid referring to one group of people "granting" or "giving" privileges or rights to other groups of people.				
3.2 Curricular materials present history from the perspective of multiple groups of people, inclusive in the general formatting of the text. The text does not "feature" stories of marginalized groups, but rather centers their stories as part of a general, encompassing narrative.				
3.3 Curricular materials present the idea that many groups of people from all over the world are responsible for making notable scientific discoveries.				
3.4 Standards reflect the historical perspectives and lenses of multiple, diverse groups of people through acknowledging the narratives and counter-narratives of diverse groups of people.				

Rationale/Explanation and Evidence

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Recommendation or Consideration

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Point Total:

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IV. Curricular Materials: Historical Whitewashing (Sleeter, 2005)

Minimizing unpleasant facts and events in history by ignoring prejudice, racism, discrimination, exploitation, oppression, sexism, and inter-group conflict (Sadker, n.d., Unreality section, para. 1).

Rate the standard or textbook content on the extent to which it evidences the visibility and inclusion of diverse narratives and practices	Strongly Disagree 0	Disagree 1	Agree 2	Strongly Agree 3
4.1 Curricular materials avoid overgeneralizing the success of social programs. The text does not present social programs as having solved the problems of a community.				
4.2 Curricular materials address persistent social problems without offering a "quick fix."				
4.3 Standards depict historical events in light of sociopolitical context, including facts and historical events rooted in racism, discrimination, exploitation, oppression, sexism, and inter-group conflict.				

Rationale/Explanation and Evidence

Recommendation or Consideration

Point Total:

V. Curricular Materials: Fragmentation and Isolation

The Parts Are Less Than the Whole (Sadker, n.d.)

Physically or visually isolating a group of people in the text. Often, racial and ethnic group members are depicted as interacting only with persons like themselves, isolated from other cultural communities (Sadker, n.d., Fragmentation and Isolation, para. 1).

Rate the standard or textbook content on the extent to which it evidences the visibility and inclusion of diverse narratives and practices	Strongly Disagree 0	Disagree 1	Agree 2	Strongly Agree 3
5.1 Curricular materials include narratives and historical accounts that feature racial, ethnic, and sex-based groups as societal and/or political actors within the general text.				
5.2 Standards include the narratives and histories of racial, ethnic, and sex-based groups as part of the dominant discourse, not separate from or featured in a specialized unit or curriculum.				
Rationale/Explanation and Evidence				
Recommendation or Consideration				
Point Total:				

VI. Curricular Materials: Linguistic Bias (Sadker, n.d.)

Ways in which the use of language and words and perpetuate stereotypes, bias, and marginalization of specific groups of people (Sadker, n.d., Linguistic bias Section, para. 1).

Rate the standard or textbook content on the extent to which it evidences the visibility and inclusion of diverse narratives and practices	Strongly Disagree 0	Disagree 1	Agree 2	Strongly Agree 3
6.1 Curricular materials avoid using language such as "roaming", "wandering", or "roving" to describe the travel of the Indigenous People of the United States.				
6.2 The text avoids using language that suggests groups of people were order-less or uncivilized than Euro-Americans.				
6.3 The text avoids using language that suggests specific groups of people needing "saving" or "help."				
6.4 The text avoids using words such as "forefathers", "mankind", and "businessman" to deny the contributions (or even existence) of females.				
6.5 The text avoids showing bias against non-English speakers.				
6.6 Standards describes groups of people in such a way as to counter stereotypes, bias, and marginalization through inclusion, centering, and valuing the historical narratives of non-dominant groups of people.				
Rationale/Explanation and Evidence				
Recommendation or Consideration				
Point Total:				

VII. Curricular Materials: Cosmetic Bias (Sadker, n.d.)

The aesthetics of curricular materials suggest that the material is “bias free;” however, it is really a marketing strategy to give a favorable impression to potential purchasers who only flip the pages of books rather than engaging an in-depth content analysis (Sadker, n.d., Cosmetic Bias section, para. 1).

Rate the standard or textbook content on the extent to which it evidences the visibility and inclusion of diverse narratives and practices	Strongly Disagree 0	Disagree 1	Agree 2	Strongly Agree 3
7.1 Curricular materials include actual narratives (and not just pictures) about female scientists and mathematicians.				
7.2 Curricular materials include actual narratives (and not just pictures) about non-White mathematicians, writers, artists, and other contemporary and historical figures.				
7.3 Curricular materials feature the stories, histories, and narratives of people of color, people with dis/abilities, and LGBTQ+ people beyond the cover or pictures.				
7.4 Standards reflect content that includes and embeds the actual histories and narratives of people from diverse backgrounds.				
Rationale/Explanation and Evidence				
Recommendation or Consideration				
Point Total:				



Scoring and Analysis

78 CURRICULAR BIAS NOT EVIDENT

These curricular materials and content standards do not present any curricular bias and have an evident social justice lens. The standard calls for the curriculum to represent histories and narratives from multiple perspectives, avoiding stereotypes and generalizations. Students are required to demonstrate knowledge and understanding of histories and representations from a wide breadth of diverse backgrounds, and are asked to demonstrate a critique of dominant narratives that may serve to oppress people.

52-77 CURRICULAR BIAS SOMEWHAT EVIDENT

This curriculum evidences some curricular bias, but generally seems to avoid common stereotypes. It represents some histories and narratives, but also evidences some privileging of White, Euro-centric narratives and perspectives. Students are not asked to demonstrate an understanding of diverse backgrounds or to critique dominant narratives.

27-52 CURRICULAR BIAS CLEARLY EVIDENT

This curriculum evidences curricular bias regularly throughout the text. The text may feature some narratives and histories of historically marginalized groups, but they are separate from the main text in “text inserts”, “text boxes”, or further marginalized through being concentrated in one chapter (Sadker, n.d.). Students are asked to demonstrate an understanding of a limited historical perspective focused on an Euro-centric narrative.

0-26 CURRICULAR BIAS EXTREMELY EVIDENT

This curriculum evidences curricular bias regularly throughout the text by privileging the specific narratives of White, European or European-descendants through the exclusion (making invisible) of or even deriding the narratives or histories of people of color, people of low socioeconomic status, women, people with dis/abilities, and LGBTQI+ people. This book relies heavily on stereotypes, and fails to present the dynamic humanism of history, narrative, and representation (Sadker, n.d.). Students are not asked to acknowledge diverse histories, or students are encouraged to present diverse histories as deviant or unlawful, or are asked to recall events in such a way that negates or erases a people’s history: for example, discussing the slave trade from West Africa as “immigration” (GLEC, 2016).



Key Terms

ACCESS: All members of the educational community should have entrance into, involvement with, and full participation of resources, conversations, initiatives, and choices which are attentive to heritage and community practices (Paris, 2012).

ASSET PEDAGOGIES: Teaching practices that "...empower students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically by using cultural referents to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes" (Ladson-Billings, 1994, p. 17). Asset Pedagogies utilize the backgrounds, knowledge, and experiences of the students to inform the teacher's lessons and methodology (Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 2014; Paris, 2012; Paris & Alim, 2014).

CRITICAL CONSCIOUSNESS: The willingness and ability to see how power and privilege are at work to systematically advantage some while simultaneously disadvantaging others (Radd & Kramer, 2013).

CRITICAL COLLABORATIVE INQUIRY: Shared and on-going ways of being and doing that center the perspectives of historically marginalized groups in dialogue intended to (de)construct individual and collective knowledges, and use data to identify inequities, and co-create strategies or actions towards ensuring inclusive, educational practices (Rogoff, 2003; Waitoller & Kozleski, 2012).

CULTURAL APPRECIATION: Learning about another culture with respect and courtesy (Quynh, 2015).

DIVERSE BACKGROUNDS: Identities, histories, and narratives related to race, national origin, economic communities, dis/ability, gender and gender expressions, sexual orientations, and religion.

EDUCATIONAL EQUITY: When educational policies, practices, interactions, and resources, are representative of, constructed by, and responsive to all people such that each individual has access to, can participate, and make progress in high-quality learning experiences that empower them towards self-determination and reduces disparities in outcomes regardless of individual characteristics and cultural identities (Great Lakes Equity Center, 2011).

HETERONORMATIVITY: Heteronormativity is a system that works to normalize behaviors and societal expectations that are tied to the presumption of heterosexuality and an adherence to a strict gender binary (Nelson, 2015, <http://everydayfeminism.com/2015/07/what-is-heteronormativity/>).



Key Terms

IMPLICIT BIAS: The attitudes or stereotype that affect our understanding, actions, and decisions in an unconscious manner. The biases, which encompass both favorable and unfavorable assessments, are activated involuntarily and without an individuals' awareness or intentional control (Blair, 2002 and Rudman, 2004, as cited in Staats, Capatosto, Wright, & Contractor, 2015).

INTERSECTIONALITY: The study of overlapping or intersecting social identities and related systems of oppression, domination or discrimination (Crenshaw, 1989).

LINGUISTIC BIAS: In the context of curricular materials and academic content standards, linguistic bias refers to the privileging of Standard American English, which consequently disempowers, disvalues, and potentially undermines the knowledge, histories, and narratives of students "from linguistic backgrounds other than Standard American English" (Leaders Project, 2013). Linguistic Bias also refers to the ways in which non-White, non-male people and groups of people are described in derogatory or pejorative terms (Sadker, n.d., Linguistic Bias section, para. 1).

MEANINGFUL PARTICIPATION: Agency and voice are afforded to all members of a community, by intentionally centering members who have been historically on the margins including, but not limited to people living in under-resourced communities, people with dis/abilities, as well as racially, ethnically, and linguistically diverse individuals. Multiple perspectives are pursued and valued (Fraser, 2008).

POSITIONALITY: The multiple, unique experiences that situate each of us; namely that gender, [gender expression], race, class, [ability, religion, national origin, language], and other aspects of our identities are markers of relational positions rather than essential qualities (Takacs, 2003; Maher, 1993; Alcoff, 1988).

POWER: The legitimate control of, or access to, those institutions [resources and opportunities] sanctioned by the state [authorities] (Major, 2002).

PRIVILEGE: Any advantage that is unearned, exclusive, and socially conferred (Johnson, 2006).

REPRESENTATION: Providing and having adequate presence of all when decision and choice making as to examine the patterns of underlying beliefs, practices, policies, structures and norms that may marginalize specific groups and limit opportunity (Mulligan & Kozleski, 2009; Chen et al, 2014).



Key Terms

STEREOTYPE: A fixed idea that many people have about a thing or a group that may often be untrue or only partly true (Merriam Webster).

TOKENISM: The Practice of doing something (such as hiring a person who belongs to a minoritized group) only to prevent criticism and give the appearance that people are being treated fairly (Merriam Webster).



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Recommended citation: Coomer, M. N., Skelton, S. M., Kyser, T. S., Warren, C., & Thorius, K. A. K. (2017). Assessing bias in standards and curricular materials. *Equity Tool*. Indianapolis, IN: Great Lakes Equity Center.

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