

# Curriculum change – incorporating issues of culture and diversity

There are numerous reasons for transforming a curriculum multiculturally.

- ❖ Expose biases, stereotypes, inaccuracies, and marginalization in curricular content, pedagogy, and academic policies
- ❖ Develop and deliver content that is fair, balanced, and accurate
- ❖ Accommodate diverse teaching and learning styles to reach all students and faculty
- ❖ Recognize the need for, work towards, and achieve a multicultural student, faculty, and staff population that is representative of the society
- ❖ Prepare students for a diverse workforce and clientele for a global environment
- ❖ Increase sensitivity to and awareness of different cultures, and celebrate and appreciate their perspectives, heritage, and contributions
- ❖ Promote scholarship and highlight opportunities for new areas of research and artistry
- ❖ Undergo personal transformation becoming an ally and an advocate

Educators should not ignore racial and ethnic differences when planning instruction; nor should they dismiss the question of racial and ethnic differences with the all-too-easy cliché, *"I don't see racial differences in students and I treat them all alike."*

Research on cognitive styles and language and communication characteristics of ethnic groups suggests that if all students are treated alike, their distinctive needs are not being met and they are probably being denied access to equal educational opportunities (**Cummins 1986; Heath 1983; Kochman 1981; Philips 1983**).

**Cummins, Jim.** "Empowering Minority Students: A Framework for Intervention." *Harvard Educational Review* 56, no. 1 (February 1986): 18-36. **Heath, Shirley Brice.** *Ways with Words: Language, Life and Work in Communities and Classrooms.* New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983. **Kochman, Thomas.** *Black and White: Styles in Conflict.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981. **Philips, Susan U.** *The Invisible Culture: Communication in Classroom and Community on the Warm Springs Indian Reservation.* New York: Longman, 1983.

**Multicultural curriculum reform may be said to have five stages. Educators can examine these stages, make comparisons to their own current practices, and see what can be done to improve their curriculum. Higher stages represent greater multicultural competence.**

➤ **Stage 1 - Recognition**

*Educators must first recognize that the traditional curriculum is not the only possible content to be taught. Specifically, mainstream curriculum does not include ideas and experiences representative of today's diverse society.*

➤ **Stage 2 - Heroes and Holidays**

*After recognizing the need for curriculum reform, educators may make an initial effort to integrate other perspectives into their curriculum by celebrating cultural holidays and highlighting famous individuals from non-dominant groups. Although these activities do draw attention to the fact that society is shaped by multiple perspectives, effective educators should not stop at this point of integration.*

➤ **Stage 3 - Integration**

*To move beyond superficial integration of multicultural content, educators seek to integrate information about non-dominant groups across several areas of the curriculum. A daily lesson plan may incorporate a special lesson, book, or film that highlights members of non-dominant groups. Because much of the new materials and units incorporated at this stage are only used as secondary sources, it is important that educators continue to progress to the next stage.*

➤ **Step 4 - Structural Reform**

*During this stage educators refine their curriculum to weld together their traditional curriculum with diverse perspectives and multicultural materials. This combination is done seamlessly so as to ensure that one source of information is not seen as primary or more accurate than the other.*

➤ **Step 5 - Social Action and Awareness**

*The final stage of this model of curriculum reform involves integrating social issues into curriculum. At this stage educators incorporate discussions and activities that address such social issues as equity, democracy, overcoming discrimination/prejudice based on differences in access to power, accommodations for persons with disabilities, etc. Educators can encourage students to develop their own views and understanding of these concepts based on experiences and increased self-awareness.*