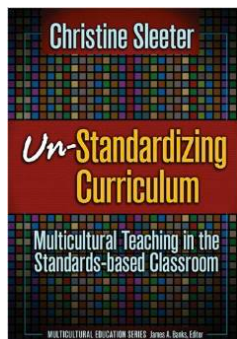


### Professional Book Review

Sleeter, C. E. (2005). *Un-Standardizing Curriculum: Multicultural Teaching in the Standards-Based Classroom*. New York: Teacher College Press. 210 pp., ISBN: 978-0-8077-4621-9. \$24.49

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Multicultural education is an important issue for today's educational arena. Aimed at providing equal educational opportunities for every student, regardless of his/her race, gender, language, religion, social class, etc., multicultural education is a need for this century's diverse classrooms. Teachers meet every day with students, who have different learning needs and different perspectives regarding social issues. They have the responsibility to make curriculum culturally relevant for all their students to provide equal achievement opportunities for them. From this point on, there is a need for literature to equip teachers and other educators with ways to implement a multicultural curriculum in their schools.

In a highly standardized educational era, it is a problem to adjust curriculum for different needs of the students. The author states "currently, many teachers see the curriculum standards as the curriculum itself (p.2)". For this reason, they tend to teach those standards through textbook content in order to raise the test scores. Sleeter believes that teachers can customize the curriculum to respond to the diversity in their classrooms and shift from content standards to performance standards. Performance standards are different from content standards in that they emphasize the broader skills that students are expected to acquire. Content standards, on the other hand, focus on what students should know, and leaves almost no space for differentiating curriculum. The book focuses on equity and diversity in curriculum and provides guidelines for teachers to "un-standardize" knowledge in a highly standardized curriculum.

Starting with concepts like standards, curriculum design and multicultural education in *Chapter 1* Sleeter, sets the foundations for the rest of the book. She begins the chapter with the discussion of standards-based education in the USA. Although intended to address the equity issues, standards-based reform has resulted in homogenizing curriculum. Moreover, many teachers assume that there is no need to make curriculum more multicultural because, they think, with this reform curriculum multicultural issues are dealt with sufficiently. This poses a challenge to address diversity problems, such as language, social participation, etc., effectively. To be a part of the solution of those problems, Sleeter argues, multicultural curriculum should focus on questions, which are different from classical curriculum theories. These questions should be value-based and intended to inquire knowledge selection and construction processes.

For an effective multicultural curriculum knowledge transformation is a need. This means multicultural curriculum should be transformative and consider different perspectives by examining given knowledge. On *Chapter 2*, Sleeter examines and challenges teachers' beliefs about knowledge. Examining epistemological beliefs is the first step to look at knowledge from different points of view. To help teachers engage with knowledge transformation the author explains some strategies, which begin with studying concepts of ideology and epistemology and go on with personal interactions, analyzing documents and reflective writing. On *Chapter 6*, Sleeter again focuses on knowledge transformation but this time she also invites teachers using students as resources of transformational knowledge. Knowing students effectively will also minimize stereotyping and make curriculum more culturally relevant.

After emphasizing the importance of knowledge transformation, Sleeter, begins to explain the multicultural curriculum development process. On *Chapter 3*, she suggests using "big ideas" when designing a multicultural curriculum. Starting with these 'big ideas', which means, core essential understandings, backward design provides a useful basis to develop a multicultural curriculum. Sleeter argues that curriculum standards force teachers to emphasize content coverage, therefore, for a multicultural curriculum, which focuses on values and meanings, development of the 'big ideas' is essential.

Assessment is a crucial part of the curriculum. How we assess students, determines what to focus on in the instruction process. Too many tests cause the "schools lose their places as public spaces where young people might learn to engage with different perspectives, empathize with others, or engage in social problem solving (p. 69)". On *Chapter 4*, Sleeter, focuses on classroom based-assessment methods. She gives details of performance assessment as a method to improve student

learning and evaluate high quality work. She also underlines the importance of culturally relevant assessment to respond to the diversity of the students.

In line with Banks' (2008) four levels of multicultural curriculum approaches, Sleeter, argues that additive approach to curriculum is not enough to engage with different perspectives of knowledge. On *Chapter 5*, she criticizes textbooks' additive approach to multicultural curriculum, where multiculturalism is reduced to heroes, heroines and group characteristics. Sleeter suggests using counter narratives and transformative intellectual knowledge to improve students' ability to analyze the underlying assumptions and points of view of a given knowledge. The author explains usage of different kinds of instructional resources also on *Chapter 8*.

Criticizing another aspect of standards movement, on *Chapter 7*, Sleeter invites educators to set high expectations for all their students. A multicultural curriculum should be intellectually challenging and have activities targeting higher order thinking skills. Sleeter develops concepts of "knowledge consumers" and "intellectual workers" to clear the difference between low-level activities and activities involving higher order thinking skills.

On the closing *Chapter 9*, Sleeter moves on to broader connections of multicultural curriculum with today's world. In the section called curriculum and democracy she elaborates on why multicultural curriculum provides learning, which is "students' best defense against rapidly shifting job markets and unstable opportunities (p.169)". Multicultural curriculum is also essential to develop active citizens who will take part by making the world more peaceful and just place.

Sleeter and Grant (1987) found five major approaches in their investigation of multicultural education literature. Ranging from 'teaching the culturally different' to 'education that is multicultural and social reconstructionist' there are many ideas and practices which are under the name of multicultural education, but may have different objectives. Therefore, there is a need to clarify values and effective practices of multicultural education. With its emphasis on implementation the book is a valuable resource to provide multicultural education practices to develop values like equity, peace, respect and tolerance. From this point on, it is also very important to help students internalize these values. However, in an era of standards, which focus on content coverage, most teachers cannot find a space to work on those values. According to the author's words "...the more standardized we make curriculum to improve students' achievement, the more we cut ourselves off from students' cultural, experiential, and personal resources on which learning should be built (p. 124)".

Research done on teachers' perceptions of multicultural education (Borland, 1994; Taylor, 1999) also point out the need for literature, which mainly covers multicultural curriculum practices. Teachers often have positive thoughts about multicultural education but their activities mostly show the characteristics of contribution or additive approach to multicultural curriculum.

*Un-Standardizing Curriculum: Multicultural Teaching in the Standards-Based Classroom* is mainly written for teachers, who wish to develop a multicultural curriculum. The book gives importance to enable teachers as curriculum developers. Based on teachers' experiences it provides realistic guidelines to develop a multicultural curriculum. The book also serves as a bridge between theory and the practice of multicultural education.

## References

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