

Tools Vary in How They Seek to Identify Equitable Representation in Materials, Finds New Analysis From EdReports

A landscape analysis of 15 resources in use throughout the country seeks to help educators become more aware of what researchers, community groups, and education stakeholders believe is necessary when creating strong criteria to evaluate culturally responsive practices in instructional materials.

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Durham, NC, July 19, 2022 — A new analysis published today by EdReports, a nonprofit that provides free reviews of instructional materials, found strong momentum in the K-12 education space to evaluate curriculum for culturally responsive practices. However, the available resources to do so vary greatly in depth, detail, and support.

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The report, [Evaluating Materials for Culturally Responsive Practices: A Landscape Analysis](#), evaluated 15 resources in use throughout the country to better understand the extent to which instructional materials address representation, student agency, and support for students with diverse backgrounds and needs. One key finding details how teachers are most often tasked with reviewing instructional materials for aspects of cultural responsiveness but are rarely provided guidance on how to rate/score materials or examples of what they should be looking for.

“The goal of this analysis is to shed light on the definitions, supports, and evidence other educators are using to review materials for qualities of cultural responsiveness,” said Courtney Allison, EdReports Chief Academic Officer. “While we believe that standards alignment is a prerequisite for all students, attention must also be paid to diverse representation in authorship, protagonists, and historical perspectives, multilingual learner supports, and strong professional learning connected to the curriculum.”

The analysis offers 12 key findings that provide insight into the range of tools available to help educators understand how culturally responsive practices are currently viewed in relation to instructional materials. Of note are:

- Tools have two distinct purposes: Evaluating resources for inclusion of culturally responsive practices, and informing practice/shifting mindsets regarding culturally responsive practices in materials. Of the tools reviewed, there is significant variance in the detail and depth of how culturally responsive criteria were scored.
- Terms used in most tools are not grounded in a common language or shared definitions derived from research. This finding is of particular importance now as the language of culturally responsive practices is being politicized with increasing impact on which materials are allowed to be adopted.
- Representation appears in almost every tool in some fashion; however, there is significant variance in how representation is defined.

Student engagement and cultural relevance have both been proven to have a positive impact on student outcomes. Researchers report that culturally relevant education can increase grades, participation and critical thinking skills and can lead to higher graduation rates.¹ As a result, school districts are investing more capacity toward selecting materials that are not only standards-aligned, but also reflect the diverse needs of their students. The need for better curriculum is reflected in [recent data released by EdReports](#) that found that 82% of teachers cite “content and approaches that are culturally relevant” as somewhat or extremely important to them.

“For more than four decades, researchers have made the case for culturally relevant and responsive instruction. Unfortunately, curriculum has been left largely behind,” said Tanji Reed Marshall, Ph.D., Director of P-12 Practice at The Education Trust, a nonprofit that seeks to drive conversations about how public education systems can better serve students of color and students from low-income backgrounds. “This study offers insight into the on-going challenges educators face in obtaining and implementing curriculum that can reach all students they have the privilege to help learn.”

Jessica Faith Carter, EdReports Specialist and a lead author of the report, added: “One clear takeaway from conducting this analysis is that educators broadly recognize instructional materials need to better reflect the students in our classrooms. Reviewing curriculum for aspects of cultural responsiveness is a positive first step, and a goal of this analysis is to help educators learn from one another and improve how they conduct this important work.”

EdReports’ analysis does not rank or score criteria and instead provides readers with an opportunity to familiarize themselves with the range of tools currently available to evaluate culturally responsive practices in materials. In particular, for school districts, teachers, and those creating review criteria, the analysis highlights the opportunities and challenges that exist when

¹ The Education Justice Research and Organizing Collaborative (EJ-ROC), “[Diverse City, White Curriculum: The Exclusion of People of Color from English Language Arts in NYC Schools](#)”



reviewing curriculum for attributes that support culturally responsive practices such as the need for shared definitions, clear guidance and examples, and capacity considerations.

Read [Evaluating Materials for Culturally Responsive Practices: A Landscape Analysis](#) on the [EdReports.org](#) website along with nearly 1,000 free reviews of core comprehensive instructional materials.

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