

SCHOOL CLIMATE AND STUDENT OUTCOMES

We know that school climate is composed of a complex set of elements. We know that it promotes meaningful student learning. The school and classroom climate clearly supported the learning and leadership of the Grade 11 Muslim student in Chapter 1, who intervened to bring an additive and corrective orientation to Islam to the approved text book in use in her history classroom. We also know that the school curriculum is multifaceted. Nora Allingham, former director of the Antiracism and Ethnocultural Equity Team, Ontario Ministry of Education and Training, itemized the scope and nature of the curriculum by reminding us that it includes the following:

- Seating plan
- Group work
- Posters
- Music
- Announcements
- Prayers and readings
- Languages spoken in the school
- Food in the cafeteria
- Visitors to the classroom
- Reception of parents in the office
- The race(s) of the office staff, custodial staff, administration, and teaching staff
- Displays of student work
- School teams, sports, and clubs
- The school logo or emblem
- Field trips

This is an important checklist, but even more important is how a list such as this should/could be used to rethink the existing formal curriculum, which still persists in foregrounding the values, experiences, achievements, and perspectives of European members of North American society. There are two Canadian secondary schools, for example, that had used the term “Redmen” to name their school teams that had to adopt new names for the teams and team logos out of respect for First Nations’ experiences

and perspectives. In addition to some of the entry points for implementing inclusive approaches to curriculum mentioned in Chapter 1, Zoric, Charania, and Jeffers (2003) put forward the following list of questions as a starting point for adapting existing curricular programs and practices:

- Whose voices are present? Whose voices are absent?
- What and whose knowledge is recognized? How is it recognized?
- Do resources acknowledge all people and perspectives?
- What assessment and evaluation tools will be most equitable?
- How do the social identities of teachers and other school staff shape interactions with students, parents, and community?
- How can we create a classroom and a school climate that supports and welcomes the diversity of all students, staff, and community members?
- How can the knowledge and experience of families and the general community be valued and reflected in our curriculum?
- Is a variety of methods used to ensure that all students are engaged in learning?
- Are students supported in their development as active citizens and leaders who are encouraged to advocate for social justice?

The questions cited in Chapter 2 and attributed to CampbellJones, CampbellJones, and Lindsey (2010) and Pollock (2008) also provide robust roots for reflecting on knowledge construction and transformation in the official curriculum. Rethinking curriculum therefore involves reworking content, altering pedagogies, examining issues of access, and creating a classroom climate that builds on the experiences of students and provides them with spaces to connect to their roots and their past and to envision the future.

Models such as the James Banks framework (Toronto District School Board, n.d.), which delineates both theoretical and practical approaches to inclusive curriculum, are informative about both process and progress toward total school community inclusion.

The James Banks Model—Approaches to an Inclusive Curriculum

Level 1	Contributions Approach	Adding diverse hero/ines to the curriculum selected, using criteria similar to those used to select mainstream hero/ines for the curriculum
Level 2	Additive Approach	Adding a variety of content, concepts, themes, and perspectives to the curriculum without changing its basic structure
Level 3	Transformation Approach	Changing the actual structure of the curriculum to help students to view concepts, issues, events, and themes from the perspectives of diverse groups
Level 4	Social Action Approach	Allowing students to make decisions on important social issues and take actions to help solve them

(See the Tools and Resources Section at the end of this book for a comprehensive description of this model.)

At Levels 1 and 2, students are passive recipients of information, and the curriculum remains virtually unchanged. Learning is teacher led and teacher driven with administrative support. It is at Levels 3 and 4 that there are opportunities for student leadership, where the students are active/activist learners who must develop a spirit of inquiry and engage in projects that promote and reflect equity. These approaches “aim for a curriculum of life that takes into account students’ lived experiences, their local and global concerns, and respects their intellectual capacities” (Portelli, Shields, & Vibert, 2007, p. 57). Student-led clubs with a specific focus and issue-focused support groups such as Gay-Straight Alliances and Students and Teachers Against Racism (STARS) promote and encourage students to develop a positive school climate. Peer mediation models, where student leaders act as advocates around issues of harassment, human rights, and discrimination, are also powerful ways to engage students in their own learning and improve student outcomes.