

AFFIRMING DIVERSITY: The Sociopolitical Context of Multicultural Education, Fifth Edition

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SAMPLE CHAPTER 10: Adapting Curriculum for Multicultural Classrooms

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Adapting Curriculum for Multicultural Classrooms



Diana Corley, in Gina Simm's class.
Family portrait. Mixed media, 2005.

"The curriculum is never simply a neutral assemblage of knowledge, somehow appearing in the texts and classrooms of a nation. It is always part of a selective tradition, someone's selection, some group's vision of legitimate knowledge."

— Michael Apple

"The Politics of Official Knowledge," *Teachers College Record*, 1993.

A question that we hear time and time again is “What does a truly multicultural curriculum look like?” Teachers are swamped with data about achievement and models of so-called “best practices.” It can be difficult to sort out trendy jargon from effective teaching.

When considering the implications of the previous chapters, it is clear that multicultural education is a multifaceted, complex process. Nowhere is this process more visible than in the curriculum teachers implement in their classrooms. Many teachers in PK–12 classrooms acknowledge the need to adapt the curriculum and their practices to meet the needs of their increasingly diverse student populations. However, there are many challenges they face in developing a multicultural curriculum.

In keeping with our commitment to making curriculum culturally relevant to specific learning communities, we do not provide specific lesson plans or “canned” curriculum in this book. Instead, we present three cases of curriculum with which teachers and students have demonstrated success. There are myriad ways in which curriculum may be conceived and designed. We do not advocate any one, single model. The three approaches described in this chapter include concrete, hands-on examples to provide educators with both inspiration and ideas for developing a parallel unit on a similar or different theme or to spin off an activity and add their own creative questions. The three cases include:

1. Studying specific cultures and geographic regions: a study of Cambodia and the Cambodian American experience
2. Transforming pedagogy: detracking math
3. A thematic approach: expanding definitions of Family

In addition to the three cases described here, a fourth example can be found on the Companion Website at www.ablongman.com/nieto5e. The curriculum case focuses on teaching about current events in a unit called “Hurricane Katrina and the Opportunity for Change.”

One approach to transforming curriculum through a more multicultural perspective is the strategy of teaching about a specific geographical region and the cultural experiences of its people. This approach can develop rich, robust questions and understandings about specific groups, their histories, and their traditions. However, if the topic of a certain cultural group is approached as merely “adding color” to the curriculum, teachers run the risk of stumbling into any one of a number of pitfalls that run counter to the critical multicultural approach we have advanced in the previous chapters. Such pitfalls include perpetuating stereotypes by painting a group of people with a broad brush, “exoticizing” the “other” through a shallow “tourist” approach or, even more damaging, developing new pigeonholes by reinforcing a limited understanding of the experiences of a group of people. Out of concern for these pitfalls and fear of the unfamiliar, teachers may shy away from presenting a unit about specific cultural groups.

On the other hand, using a problem-posing approach and constructing curriculum with students on topics that both teachers and students want to explore creates an authentic learning experience. This is not to suggest that teachers enter blindly into cre-

ating curriculum on a random topic or subject area. Some preparation is always necessary. When teachers announce their own curiosity and model their own struggle with ignorance, students are empowered to ask previously hushed questions and uncover misconceptions. For instance, in a study of Cambodia and the Cambodian American experience, students who are unfamiliar with the topic may feel sanctioned to voice confusions that they might otherwise feel inhibited to ask—for example: “I thought Cambodians and Vietnamese kids were the same. How are they different?” “Why did Cambodian families move here to our community?” Or some students may point to social discrepancies that they feel uncomfortable about voicing: “I’m Cambodian and all my relatives are Cambodian, and we all live together with our relatives in the apartments at the edge of town. Why don’t most White kids live with their relatives?”

Students’ questions can reveal how social structures create stereotypes and lack of information that may lead to tension, alienation, and conflict. Attentive teachers can invite those questions and affirm a classroom culture that creates trustful, respectful dialogue. Such dialogue reveals that many of us are wondering about these things and why it is so crucial to use our academic skills to demystify the questions. By modeling an inquisitive mindset that takes a social justice stance, educators can encourage students to express their wonderment. Teachers can do this by making statements such as, “There is a growing Cambodian community here in our town. The first Cambodian families immigrated here in the 1970s, yet 30 years later, we study very little about the Cambodian culture or the experience of Cambodian American families in our school. Do you think it is worth exploring this community?” Dialogue can help promote academic rigor directed by a classroom community’s curiosity.

CURRICULAR ADAPTATION 1: A STUDY OF CAMBODIA AND THE CAMBODIAN AMERICAN EXPERIENCE

In what follows, we offer an example of a curriculum that was developed by a team of teachers of middle school students in an effort to stimulate intellectual growth, deepen understandings, support curiosity, and affirm the identities of students from all backgrounds. Besides describing the curriculum that the team of teachers developed, this example provides suggestions for expanding it.¹ We hope this sample curriculum will be viewed within the framework of critical pedagogy and multicultural education. It is one of many models that can be transferred and expanded to other curriculum units of regional studies and cultural groups, and it lends itself to continual adaptation by teachers for their specific learning communities.

WHAT WE DON’T KNOW

A team of seventh grade teachers was concerned about the academic achievement of their Cambodian students, so they developed and implemented a curriculum about Cambodia. They called themselves *Team C* and included teachers of science,

math, social studies, English, and art. These teachers noticed that while there was a small population of Cambodian students—an average of 8–10 in a school of about 630 students—the Cambodian students expressed their culture in several distinct ways. Team C teachers also noticed, with distress, that many of the Cambodian students in the school were experiencing low academic achievement. The individual teachers on the team brought a range of philosophies and perspectives to their classrooms, but something on which they all agreed was that they lacked knowledge about Cambodia and the Cambodian American experience.

PREPARATION

Supported by the school system's staff development funds, the team of teachers met during the summer to study the topic of Cambodia. They enrolled in a course called *Cambodian Culture, American Soil: Conflict, Convergence and Compromise* co-taught by a Cambodian teacher in their district, and his colleague, an activist in the community.² In addition to taking the course, the principal also provided each teacher with copies of the book *First They Killed My Father: A Daughter of Cambodia Remembers* by Loung Ung.³

While many school districts may not support such in-depth staff development, an alternative approach to a study group could be for teachers to read primary sources and have book discussions. Such an approach requires commitment of considerable time and energy, but the results can be transformative. Many appropriate books and resources are listed at the end of this case.⁴

Whether preparation for curriculum development comes through coursework, reviewing literature, or field research, there is rarely a moment when teachers think they know everything they should to embark on creating a curriculum. On the contrary, thoughtful teachers are intensely aware of the endless boundaries of knowledge on any given subject. Rather than avoid the unknown, a problem-posing teacher launches into the topic by asking the students stimulating questions. Herein lies the tension between over-preparing structured curriculum, which may exclude student voices, and including student questions in the actual development of the curriculum. Teacher preparation as a foundation is essential, and setting some goals for framing students' questions is helpful.

GOAL SETTING

When setting goals from a multicultural perspective for a curriculum unit about a geographical region or specific cultural group, teachers need to think beyond content, facts, and figures to consider the unit of study as intellectual and cultural work. Teachers who plan curriculum with a social justice mindset bring far-reaching goals to the curriculum design by considering what ideas will endure long after the books are closed and years after the students leave their classrooms. Grant Wiggins and Jay McTighe refer to these concepts as *big ideas* or *enduring understandings* and assert that depth of understanding is developed if these concepts are clearly articulated in

the classroom when embarking on a unit of study, as opposed to content only to be tested at the end.⁵

A multicultural curriculum with enduring understandings based on a social justice perspective can help motivate teachers and students to work together toward social change. A unit about Cambodia and the Cambodian American experience could be designed with the following enduring understandings:

- Knowledge about historical events can help us understand current social conditions.
- War, genocide, and forced migration deeply influence people's lives for many generations.
- Recovering, preserving, and renewing cultural identity is an ongoing process of education, artistic expression, and cultural exchange.
- Awareness of the oppression and resistance experienced by a group of people can motivate them, and others, to work toward social change.

These enduring understandings could be taught through many content areas within a range of thematic topics, and they are transferable to other cases of war and displacement. Overarching goals such as the ones listed above can serve as guidelines when teachers get into the nitty-gritty work of planning objectives for their daily lessons and activities to uncover specific content. Team C teachers formulated the following specific objectives for the unit:

- All students will understand the history of Cambodia and its relationship with the United States.
- All students will develop inquiry about the Cambodian presence in western Massachusetts: What do we know? What do we wonder? (What is our knowledge? What are our questions?)
- All students will engage in direct involvement with the Cambodian community: at the Cambodian community garden, at the Buddhist temple with the monks, with high school "buddies" from the Cambodian club, and other community events.
- The curriculum will affirm identity of Cambodian students and families.
- The curriculum will build understanding among all students of all backgrounds.

The first two objectives are traditionally academic in nature, pointing to understanding history and current events. The academic achievement *embedded* in the overarching enduring understandings and in the specific objectives for the content underscores that multicultural education is *basic education*, as emphasized in Chapter 3. Likewise, the editors of *Rethinking Schools* have consistently asserted that multicultural curriculum and classroom practice must be academically rigorous.⁶ The deliberate intellectual work of this unit disputes the misperception that multicultural curriculum is just about making people feel good, as detractors may claim. Each of the objectives addresses academic engagement in a variety of ways. Throughout this curriculum, you will see many opportunities for students to develop and increase skills.

THE WORK OF LEARNING

One of the first questions teachers often ask is, “How long should I spend on this unit?” The unit about Cambodia and the Cambodian American experience was developed and operated as three different schedule plans: (1) events throughout the school year, (2) intensive study for one to three weeks and (3) the focus group week. We will give examples of the activities for the three different schedule plans.

The School Year While the major framework and implementation of the unit work happened within a one- to three-week schedule, many other experiences reinforced the overarching enduring understandings throughout the year. Team C teachers had a great deal of other curriculum on many other topics to teach, yet they viewed the entire school year as having opportunities for teaching and learning about the Cambodian experience unit. Some of the activities throughout the year included visitors and field trips.

Visitors

A Community Member The social studies teacher invited a man who was a teacher in their school and a member of the Cambodian community (Mr. Mao) to visit her classes for four different sessions. The students were captivated by Mr. Mao's memories of his childhood, his family, his village, and his strategies for survival when captured by the Khmer Rouge. He showed the students how he had to trick the Khmer Rouge soldiers into believing he was a peasant farmer by demonstrating that he knew how to make rope from raw fibers. Mr. Mao's visits emphasized the grim tragedies of surviving genocide as well as the resilience of human nature. His warm nature and sparkling wit overcame the seventh graders' discomfort with the difficult topic of genocide, creating a community of honest questioners. The personal accounts Mr. Mao related to the class were reinforced by a series of videos about the history of Cambodia and the devastation caused by Pol Pot's regime, which the students had previously viewed.

High School Khmer Culture Club Other guests included high school students from the district's Khmer Culture Club. The high school students shared their experiences as Cambodian American teenagers. They discussed the challenges of negotiating multiple cultural perspectives and the tension between traditional Cambodian family structure and mainstream U.S. teen culture. Many of the high school students had never been to Cambodia; they were born in the United States or had emigrated as very young children from refugee camps. Their experiences of Cambodia were vicarious, derived from collective memories of the elders in their families. Some teens were second-generation Cambodian Americans. Some were fluent in Khmer and English and some spoke no Khmer. They articulated the responsibilities of being bilingual youth in a culture in which most of the adults with literacy skills had been murdered in the genocide. The challenge of becoming assimilated into the U.S. mainstream while simultaneously maintaining cultural solidarity with their families had often been compounded by their struggles against institutionalized racism and poverty.

The teens also shared and taught traditional art forms, such as Cambodian folk dance and poetry, to the middle school youth. In addition, they talked about their favorite music and forms of entertainment in U.S. popular culture. The high school students' visits provided a dialogue and demonstration of the perspectives of many postmodern youth who are fluent in family language, Hip-Hop culture, Standard English, and multiple ways of expressing their academic and artistic knowledge. By making multiple perspectives visible and embodied, these encounters expanded the notion of what it means to be Cambodian American.

Master Musician Another visitor, provided through the Cambodian Masters in the Classroom Program, played traditional Cambodian music and demonstrated traditional musical instruments to the whole team.⁷

Field Trips

Cambodian Community Garden In the early fall, the entire team took a trip to the local Cambodian Community Garden. The vegetables grown in the garden were sold to restaurants and farmers' markets to raise funds for rebuilding temples and schools in Cambodia. The whole team picked vegetables to contribute to the community effort.

Khmer Dance Performance A combination of serendipity and resourcefulness brought Team C to a performing arts event at a nearby university. The Asian Dance Program was hosting a performance of the award-winning Cambodian Angkor Dance Troupe from Lowell, Massachusetts.⁸ Since the teachers were alert to gleaning from the community all available knowledge related to the Cambodian experiences, and energetic enough to write grants to fund the trip, all seventh graders, including Team C students, attended the dynamic dance performance. The Angkor Dance Troupe features teen Cambodian dancers who are mastering the classical Cambodian traditional dance forms as well as developing hybrid performances that integrate break dance and other Hip-Hop forms into their movements. One of the seventh graders, Eric, made this observation about the performance: “. . . I wish I was a Cambodian dancer. Those guys can break dance mad-cool and then they know their culture, too. I wish I had something like that.”

In lieu of a lucky coincidence of a live performance within walking distance of one's school, teachers can use videos, DVDs, and websites projected onto a large screen to bring the performing arts to their students. For example, *Monkey Dance* is a recent documentary film about three teens from the Angkor Dance Troupe coming of age in Lowell, Massachusetts. The website about the film explains, “Children of Cambodian refugees inhabit a tough, working class world overshadowed by their parents' nightmares of the Khmer Rouge. Traditional Cambodian dance links them to their parents' culture, but fast cars, hip consumerism, and good times often pull harder.”⁹

The Peace Pagoda and the Nipponzan Myohoji Sangha Buddhist Temple Teachers made connections with the monks at the nearby Buddhist temple¹⁰ in Leverett, Massachusetts, where many of the Cambodian families gather for prayer and meditation as well as for education and celebration. A field trip was planned in early April so that Team C students could help clean the grounds and plant flowers in anticipation of

the annual Cambodian New Year celebration. As is not unusual during spring in New England, it had snowed several inches on the day of the field trip and the gardening plans turned into a snow-shoveling project, which also included a snowball battle with the monks! The monks taught Team C students about many of the symbols in the physical space of the temple as well as the role of Buddhism in many Cambodian families.

Team C scheduled these visitors and field trips between September and June. The teachers witnessed a sustained interest in the topic of Cambodia and the Cambodian experience long after the one- to three-week immersion study. Giving the students some breathing room to consider the topic, and the questions throughout the school year, reinforced the intellectual depth of the study.

One to Three Weeks The teachers developed an intensive classroom unit of study that can last from one to three weeks. (These time frames are flexible, depending on how often teachers meet with their classes and the depth of study on the topic. Since this curriculum was enacted in a middle school, each Team C teacher taught in a specific discipline.)

English Class The English teacher led an in-depth investigation of Cambodian and Southeast Asian folk tales. Students read from children's picture books (traditional prose translated into English from the Khmer source) and saw videos of storytellers. Specific attention was focused on how folktales use humor and metaphor to teach lessons. These activities met the state's framework standards and were integrated with a wider body of literature about cross-cultural folktales in the English department curriculum. Students could draw similarities and differences about the literature while viewing the Cambodian folktales as a means for reclaiming and reinvigorating cultural symbols that had been threatened by extinction in the aftermath of the genocide.¹¹

Science Class During the two years that this curriculum was implemented, there were two science teachers. One year, a science teacher led an investigation of endangered species in Southeast Asia. Students developed research projects on specific animals and species. They expressed their findings in text and artistic forms to create over-size classroom books. The books of illustrated scientific research were donated to the local elementary school, which served a large population of Cambodian students. In addition, the seventh graders created bookmarks depicting a synopsis of their research. They sold the bookmarks in a fund-raising effort to purchase protected areas of rainforest acreage in Southeast Asia.

Another year, a science teacher integrated his science curriculum with a study of the local Cambodian Community Garden. While at the garden, the science teacher led groups in measuring the space with global positioning satellite (GPS) devices; students worked in partner groups to map the surface area while learning about technology and computation. At school, they went to the computer lab and learned how to download and analyze the data. These science activities met the state's framework and standards for studying ecosystems and using technology for collection and analysis of data.

Social Studies Class The social studies teacher engaged the students in an exploration of the refugee experience. They scrutinized the legal and social implications of refugee status, giving specific attention to the ravages of war and the conditions that cause a population to be forcibly displaced and become “refugees.” They developed questions about the plight of people in many regions, from Afghanistan and Cambodia to the United States. In addition to studying groups from abroad who have been named political refugees under U.S. policy, they also critically examined the history of American Indian groups and compared their status in their native land as similar to the refugee experience.

Math Class The math teacher worked with concepts of ratio, proportion, and scaling to compare and contrast the amount of space used in a typical house in Cambodia with the amount of space in a typical house in the United States. The math teacher worked with the Cambodian community teacher, who provided lots of photographs and illustrations of houses in Cambodian villages and cities. The students designed a scale model of a house that reflected the typical size and shape of a Cambodian house. Meeting the seventh grade math standards, they worked from their individual design of a flat net that could be folded into a three-dimensional structure.

The math teacher also worked closely with the science teacher on a map activity. Students divided the maps into sections and analyzed Cambodia's ecosystems in science class. In the math activity, they developed an analysis of the total Cambodian population compared to the population densities in specific areas of the country. Using computational skills, they created a visual graph to illustrate their understanding of how people are dispersed regionally. This activity was integrated with the social studies investigation of the refugee experience to learn what the population looked like before and after the war.

Art Class In art class, the seventh graders studied the history, architectural design, and sculptural relief work of the temple of Angkor Wat. Studying the 12th century temple as an example of architectural accomplishment and cultural endurance helped bring alive the intersection of spiritual beliefs, political struggles, and environmental changes in Cambodia's history. Students explored Cambodia's cultural junctions of India and China through the presence of Hindu and Buddhist traditions, multiple language influences, and the stories illustrated by the seemingly endless sculptural murals of the temple.

By studying the symbolism, stories, and mind-boggling technical prowess demonstrated in the construction of the temple, the seventh graders gained insight into the depth of history and the significance of the temple in present-day Cambodia. One student exclaimed, “No wonder they put it in the middle of their flag!”

Continuing with the art exploration, the students, using clay and plaster, created their own relief sculptures depicting the animals they studied in science class and the folktales they explored in English. When some students asked about copying illustrations of the goddesses that are carved on Angkor Wat, they had a group discussion about religious iconography and who had the right to appropriate religious imagery. They imagined what it might be like for a classroom to produce 25 crucifixes or 25 images of the Star of David. They also looked at the work of some contemporary

artists who use religious imagery in their work—whether reverently or irreverently—and noticed that most of these artists have a personal connection with the religious images they use. Such open discussions helped students make informed, deliberate decisions about whether or not they chose to imitate the statues of the goddesses of Angkor Wat.

Focus Groups After their intensive one- to three-week studies in the separate disciplines—visiting each teacher throughout their school day as middle school students usually do—Team C students chose a focus group in which to work. Each focus group worked in a single discipline for a full school week. Students spent the entire day with one teacher, working in depth on a single project. As the seventh graders said, it was “just like elementary school!” Each focus group visited the art room daily to work on a visual art component of the focus group project. Students chose from the following focus group activities:

- The English teacher led a focus group of students to dramatize the folktales the team had studied. Students collaboratively made decisions while directing plays, memorizing lines, creating costumes, and managing props and scenery. In art class, they worked on scenery and props for the plays inspired by illustrations from the picture books and by their study of Angkor Wat.
- The science teacher led a focus group in the construction of a scale model of the Cambodian Community Garden. Students used the data from their GPS activity to re-create the plot of land they had visited on the field trip. To investigate how to grow certain vegetables, they compared the climate and environmental conditions in Cambodia with the conditions in their hometown. In art class, they used materials and techniques to develop the 3-D effect of the scale model garden.
- The math focus group expanded upon the scale-model house design and built three-dimensional houses to reflect their study of the typical architecture of Cambodian houses. They carried their house to and from the art room each day, adding structural and technical details, surface design, and texture to try to depict an authentic-looking Cambodian house. In art class, they compared U.S. houses to Cambodian houses and used images from the book *Material World: A Global Family Portrait* by Peter Menzel, Charles Mann, and Paul Kennedy¹² to consider the implications of consumerism in the United States.
- The social studies focus group decided to write and perform vignettes to demonstrate various refugee experiences throughout the world. Some students took on the role of the United Nations. Others took on the role of the Red Cross and the Red Crescent, while some wrote and performed the parts of the refugees and some took on the role of military guards in refugee camps. In art class, they worked on scenery, props, and costumes informed by their research projects and news media images.

Demonstration Day At the end of the focus group week, Team C students and teachers hosted Demonstration Day to illustrate their knowledge, understandings, and questions about Cambodia and the Cambodian American experience. All fami-

lies, friends, and school personnel were invited. On a rotating schedule, visitors could enter each classroom to get a sense of what the students had learned. The science focus group set up their garden model in the art room, and the math focus group placed their houses in the garden to create a scale model of a Cambodian village. The students welcomed visitors and held discussions about contrasting and comparing the environments and houses in Cambodia to those of the New England valley where they lived. The English focus group performed mini-plays inspired by the Cambodian folktales but adapted by the seventh graders as “fractured fairytales” to reflect the intersection of U.S. popular culture, ancient stories, middle school humor, and symbolism of the Cambodian tales. The social studies focus group also performed their vignettes to “pull” their audience into the experiences of refugees. After each vignette, the group held a question-and-answer session with the audience, drawing upon their research findings.

The seventh grade students of Team C completed Demonstration Day with a feeling of fulfillment and accomplishment. Each student participated fully in the work of the intensive unit and individually evaluated their work. Each seventh grader engaged in self-directed participation within a collective group goal in their focus group. The students increased their skills in every academic content area, yet the teachers and students realized that there was still much to learn. Team C teachers asked the students to evaluate the learning experiences. Students wrote many statements about their challenges, accomplishments, and achievements. One Cambodian student, Prasour, wrote, “I liked this part of school when we studied my own culture. I thought it was awesome. The kids who aren’t Cambodian thought it was awesome. It just makes you feel awesome to be Cambodian.”

RESOURCES FOR TEACHING ABOUT THE CAMBODIAN EXPERIENCE

These resources are listed in two categories: professional and classroom.

PROFESSIONAL RESOURCES from which to draw information or excerpts for classroom curriculum (for adult readers)

Altman, Linda: J., *Genocide: The Systematic Killing of a People* (Berkley Heights, NJ: Enslow, 1995).

“Pol Pot: Secret Killer” *A&E Biography* (New York: A. E. T. Networks, 1997). DVD.

Brown, Karen, *Trauma and Recovery* (Amherst, MA: WFCR, NPR, 2002). Radio broadcast.

Nath, Vann, *A Cambodian Prison Portrait: One*

Year in the Khmer Rouge’s S-21 (Bangkok, Thailand: White Lotus, 1998).

Ung, Loung, *First They Killed My Father* (New York: HarperCollins, 2000).

Ung, Loung, *Lucky Child: A Daughter of Cambodia Reunites with the Sister She Left Behind* (New York: HarperCollins, 2005).

CLASSROOM RESOURCES suitable for student use, including folktale picture books

Bartok-Baratta, Mira, and Roberta Dempsey, *Stencils Indonesia, Cambodia, and Thailand* (Glenview, IL: Scott Foresman, 1996).

(continued)

- Canesso, Claudia, *Cambodia* (New York: Chelsea House, 1989).
- Carrison, Muriel P., *Cambodian Folk Stories from the Gaitloke* (Rutland, VT: Charles E. Tuttle, 1987).
- Chamrouen, Yin, *In My Heart. I Am a Dancer* (Philadelphia: Philadelphia Folklore Project, 1996).
- Chiemruom, Sothea, *Dara's Cambodian New Year* (Cleveland, OH: Modern Curriculum Press, 1992).
- Coburn, Jewell, *Khmers, Tigers and Talismans from the History and Legends of Mysterious Cambodia* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Burn, Hart, 1994).
- Coburn, Jewell, *Angkat, The Cambodian Cinderella* (Auburn, CA: Shen's Books, 1998).
- Criddle, Joan D., *Bamboo and Butterflies: From Refugee to Citizen* (Davis, CA: East/West BRIDGE, 1992).
- Criddle, Joan D., and Thida Mam, *To Destroy You Is No Loss* (New York: Doubleday, 1987).
- Dagens, Bruno, *Angkor: Heart of an Asian Empire* (New York: Harry Abrams, 1995).
- De Silva, Dayaneetha, *Cambodia* (Milwaukee: Gareth Stevens, 2000).
- Ho, Minfong, *The Clay Marble* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1991).
- Ho, Minfong, and Saphan Ros, *Brother Rabbit* (New York: Morrow, 1997).
- Knight, Margy Burns, *Who Belongs Here? An American Story* (Gardiner, ME: Tilbury House, 1993).
- Kodish, Deborah, and Deborah Wei, *Teacher's Guide to In My Heart, I Am a Dancer* (Philadelphia: Philadelphia Folklore Project, 2001).
- Lipp, Fred, *The Caged Birds of Phnom Penh* (New York: Holiday House, 2001).
- Maryknoll World Productions, *Beyond the Killing Fields* (Maryknoll, NY: Author, 1993). Video Magazine.
- Norton, Ann W., *The Spirit of Cambodia . . . a Tribute* (Providence, RI: Providence College, 2002).
- Pastore, Clare, *Journey to America: Chantrea Conway's Story: A Voyage from Cambodia in 1975* (New York: Berkley Jam Books, 2001).
- Ray, Nick, *Cambodia* (Melbourne, Australia: Lonely Planet, 2000).
- Sam, Sam-Ang, and Patricia S. Campbell, *Silent Temples, Songful Hearts: Traditional Music of Cambodia* (Danbury, CT: World Music Press, 1991).
- St. Pierre, Stephanie, *Teenage Refugees from Cambodia Speak Out* (New York: Rosen, 1995).
- Ung, Loung, *First They Killed My Father* (New York: HarperCollins, 2000).
- Ung, Loung, *Lucky Child: A Daughter of Cambodia Reunites with the Sister She Left Behind* (New York: HarperCollins, 2005).
- Wall, Lina Mao, and Cathy Spagnoli, *Judge Rabbit and the Tree Spirit* (San Francisco: Children's Book Press, 1991).

CURRICULAR ADAPTATION 2: TRANSFORMING PEDAGOGY BY DETRACKING MATH

As established in Chapter 5, the structural and organizational issues in schools greatly influence student learning. Educational researcher Jeannie Oakes has consistently reported evidence that the practice of tracking negatively influences most students. Her research findings regarding tracking, especially how tracking in schools stratifies students by race and social class, have been confirmed by many others. This example of a curricular adaptation demonstrates the challenge of taking up the tracking issue in a middle school math department by following the work of a

school principal and some determined teachers to transform the groupings of students for math classes.¹³

BELIEF SYSTEMS

When considering the sociopolitical context of multicultural education to create change—as discussed in Chapter 1—we need to go beyond the classroom to confront the school's policies and practices as well as the societal ideologies that support them. The perspective that some kids can “handle” more abstract thinking and that others must be relegated to “skill and drill” is undergirded by a long-held math-instruction belief that students cannot learn about one concept until they master the “previous” concept. This belief system reinforces roadblocks to a fully integrated math curriculum for heterogeneous groups of students.

In U.S. schools, it is well documented that in kindergarten and first grade, most of the math material that students are learning is new information.¹⁴ Yet, from kindergarten through seventh grade, there is a gradual but steady decline in new information that is introduced. By seventh grade, the larger piece of the math “pie” is review work, while a tiny percentage is new material. This remains the case until a student takes eighth grade algebra, when, rather suddenly, the abstract thinking and symbol manipulation introduced is almost entirely new. This, in turn, creates an even wider chasm if some students have greater access and opportunity to enroll in the algebra course, while others remain in “regular” math, consisting mostly of reviewing old concepts and revisiting skills.

THE PROCESS OF CHANGE

Changing this middle school math department's practices was a long process. To create effective change, it was necessary for the principal and the teachers to be critically cognizant of the belief system on which the old practices had been built. The former practice at the school in the seventh and eighth program segregated students by so-called ability. Students could sign up for “accelerated” math or “regular” math in seventh grade, which would feed into the eighth grade programs of algebra for the “accelerated” students and regular math for the “regular” students.

The principal of the school, who was a former math teacher, initially created structural change within the seventh grade math curriculum. As one step in the gradual process, the administration changed the way in which students would enter their seventh grade math classes. Instead of entering the seventh grade as either an “accelerated” math student or a “regular” math student (which was based on test scores and recommendations from sixth grade teachers), the students would enter seventh grade math curriculum in fully integrated, heterogeneous groups. At the end of the first quarter, after nine weeks of curriculum study and some testing, they would be re-grouped, dividing them into accelerated and regular classes for the second quarter. This was a strategic step in an attempt to meet students' needs in a more equitable way, but there were several pitfalls with the practice.

During the first quarter, the math teachers presented an equally challenging curriculum to all students. They also frequently offered “extensions” or an extra

challenge as a choice for various assignments. During the first quarter, the seventh grade math teachers noted that most students took up the challenge and tried to solve the extensions with spirited enthusiasm. However, they witnessed a marked difference during the second quarter, after the classes had been designated “accelerated” or “regular.” It comes as no surprise that most of the students in the “regular” math class stopped engaging in the extension lessons, while the students in the accelerated classes regularly pursued the extensions. For many students in the regular math class, it took less than one day’s time to shift their perceptions about their possible math achievements from feeling capable of accomplishing the extensions to feeling incapable of meeting the challenge.

The practice of entering seventh grade as an integrated group and then shifting to accelerated and regular classes went on for a few years as the math department continued to struggle with how to make the curriculum more equitable while maintaining a rigorous academic program.

IT’S NOT ONLY WHAT WE TEACH; IT’S HOW WE TEACH

An eighth grade teacher, Mr. Mike Hayes, who at the time worked in the math department at the middle school, took note of the inequities. He witnessed that the accelerated curriculum engaged students in more abstract work and problem solving and the regular math curriculum offered more work on developing concrete skills at a lower level. Mr. Hayes critiqued the practice by noting, “This practice said that we believed kids needed different things to achieve in mathematics. The structures in place sent the message ‘*You* [“advanced” math students] should get an interesting, rich problem to work on and *you* [“regular” math students] should do fractions.’ It said a lot about what we were communicating to students, parents, and guardians. It’s not only what we teach; it’s how we teach”.

Mr. Hayes was inspired by the work of Robert Moses and Charles Cobb documented in the book: *Radical Equations: Civil Rights from Mississippi to the Algebra Project*.¹⁵ In that text and in Moses’ continuing work in public schools, he asserts, “The ongoing struggle for citizenship and equality for minority people is now linked to an issue of math and science literacy.” Moses argues that in the 21st century, the unfinished work of the Civil Rights Movement is economic access. Moreover, economic access is critically dependent on science and math literacy. Mr. Hayes found that reading the work of Moses and Cobb transformed his teaching. He reported, “Reading that book gave my life’s work a new sense of meaning.” In addition to inspiration, the book gave theoretical substance and practical application to the questions about the pedagogy of the math department that Mr. Hayes had been asking and trying to solve.

While the adjustments were evolving in the seventh grade structure, Mr. Hayes was teaching eighth grade math. Building on the momentum of his principal’s vision to detrack the math curriculum, he launched an effort to try to create more access to algebraic ideas for more eighth graders. He teamed up with fellow math teacher Alan Dallmann.¹⁶ The two teachers piloted an approach they called *conceptual algebra*. This approach, which was directly inspired by the work of Robert Moses, strived to bridge the gap for students who were not enrolled in algebra. It offered students in

the regular eighth grade math program the opportunity to participate in abstract symbol manipulation while continuing to develop their computation and arithmetic skills. In part, this teaching strategy built the challenges of more concrete math problems into more abstract-thinking challenges. This approach helped construct a scaffold of success for students who had not previously engaged in algebra. As a teaching strategy, this method also helped Mr. Hayes and Mr. Dallman assess their own teaching and get a sense of where the students were in terms of abstract thinking. The success of the conceptual algebra curriculum convinced these teachers that all students would benefit from engaging in algebraic thinking, regardless of their computational and technical skills. While a responsible curriculum would need to ensure that basic skills were constantly developed, such skill development would no longer be an impediment to participating in more theoretical ideas. These teachers believed and witnessed that students can learn about abstract concepts even when they are struggling with fractions.

This curricular change in the eighth grade math curriculum was one step to opening doors for more students to engage in higher level thinking. While the formal algebra class was still exclusive to about one-fourth of the students, the conceptual algebra approach in the regular math classes shifted practices throughout the math department. The teaching of conceptual algebra in eighth grade took hold throughout the math department as a structural change.

Beyond Math Class While these math teachers were posing problems about the traditional structure of their department, other teachers in the school, outside the math departments, were raising questions about it as well. Teachers in the art, English, science, and social studies departments all noticed that the team of students was grouped by specific classes that reflected the enrollment in the accelerated math class. For example, even though there were no ability groups or “tiered” classes by achievement level in science and English departments, the science and English classes were populated in ways that accommodated the accelerated math schedule. Therefore, the practice of one department was influencing the learning and the administrative structure of all the content-area classes, resulting in what were, for all intents and purposes, tracked classes.

The English and science teachers brought questions to the school governing board called the *Leadership Council*, where issues were discussed and debated. The teachers asked, “Why do we have accelerated math classes in our school? Does the practice of accelerated math match the mission of our school?” Within this wider school discussion, the math department proposed that it was time to detrack the seventh grade math classes.

At the same time, another school structure was undergoing change. The school was adopting the policy of teams of teachers “looping” with students so that one team of students and teachers would remain together as a consistent learning community throughout seventh and eighth grade. Mr. Hayes would be teaching seventh grade the following year and remaining with that team of kids for their eighth-grade year. Envisioning an opportunity, he proposed to the principal that he pilot a completely heterogeneous, untracked seventh grade math program only for his team of students.

Mr. Hayes emphasized that rather than eliminating accelerated math curriculum, the fully integrated program would offer every student an opportunity to participate in accelerated math.

Support for All Students Mr. Hayes realized he and his students would need support to make his plan work. He was determined to increase the skill level of students who would have been left out of the traditional accelerated program and to challenge the students who were already demonstrating strengths. The special education teacher, Blanca Zelaya, co-taught the math classes with Mr. Hayes.¹⁷ They partnered on teaching strategies and techniques. The students viewed Mr. Hayes and Ms. Zelaya as co-teachers rather than perceiving each as the teacher of a certain group. By sharing the classroom and curriculum, they offered a richer curriculum to every student.

The following year, the school followed Mr. Hayes's pilot model and embarked on the practice of every seventh grade student's participating in the full math curriculum. The accelerated component was offered in completely heterogeneous groupings for all students.

The math teachers and administrators realized the importance of the community's support to create sustainable change. Before launching the new seventh grade math approach, they held meetings to discuss every aspect of the change. They knew that each component of the community would need to be included in the dialogue. They met with math teachers from the elementary schools and high school to clarify the goals of the changes within the broader scope of the math curriculum in the school district. At their middle school, they held a faculty meeting that engaged every teacher in the school in a dialogue about the implications of the structural change within the math department, that is, how the change would affect the whole school. The math teachers and administrators also held meetings for the parents and guardians.

The decision to detrack the math curriculum did not reflect a unanimous community vision. Within each of these community groups, there was some support for the new model and some dissent. The most common concern of detractors was that heterogeneous groupings might "water down" the curriculum. This common concern often leads to amplification of voices representing high-achieving students and muting of the concerns of students who have traditionally been marginalized. The public meetings emphasized that by offering accelerated math curriculum to all students, the children who have consistently achieved would continue to engage in robust, creative problem solving and skill development. Simultaneously, the children who had previously been relegated to regular math would be able to participate in higher level thinking and skill development. Moreover, students who need additional support to meet the highest challenge would also be buttressed by a team teaching approach to the curriculum. While disagreements continued, it became evident that most people were eager to get on board when they realized that all children would be more challenged within the new structure.

With every seventh grade math class adopting a heterogeneous approach, the special education teachers co-taught lessons with the math teachers. For students needing to hone certain competencies, the school provided extra support for

sharpening skills in a program called *math tune-up*. The math tune-up class was not a special education program. A teacher of regular math taught the tune-up class during slots in the students' schedules that did not "pull out" the students from their regular math classes. The entire school schedule was examined creatively to create these possibilities.

More Work Ahead The detracking of one seventh grade math curriculum is an ongoing process. The teachers described several promising developments, as well as pitfalls in their department's effort, that generated school-wide implications. The positive aspects were many: Students from all backgrounds, regardless of previous accomplishments, engaged in rigorous math curriculum that pushed the edges of student potential. Academic achievement increased for many students. Perceptions on who gets to be included were expanded by school discourses about "smartness", "intelligence", "good students," and "talent". The teachers reported feeling invigorated by the continual challenge to creatively present material to make it more engaging, understandable, and achievable to a wide range of learners. The limits of the change became clearer as students moved from seventh grade to eighth grade and then from eighth grade to the high school. When the seventh grade students moved to eighth grade, they were grouped into algebra groups or regular math groups. The eighth grade curriculum had changed significantly to offer more abstract thinking and symbol manipulation to the regular math groups, but the course offerings were separate, with little "wiggle room" to move from one course to the other during the eighth grade year.

Additionally, in an effort to create more access to a rigorous curriculum for a wider range of learners, the structure of the high school math department had shifted in configuration. Yet, while the high school math curriculum offered a wide range of courses for math credit, the classes that held more academic sway, such as honors and AP credit, continued to be "gated" by the eighth grade algebra requirements, thus perpetuating implicit messages about who belongs where. Even within a math department and school district committed to making serious structural change to achieve multicultural goals, external forces choke off much of the progress toward equitable change. Teachers who are supported by principals and curriculum directors are still pressured by *perceptions* of what a rigorous math curriculum should look like. College entrance requirements and state and national testing policies shape a great deal of high school math curricula. This middle school math department made significant change within the structures of the school and the wider school district. Yet the struggle to create a more inclusive math curriculum that asserts academic challenge remains contained mostly within the seventh grade program. The forces at play within the broader math department in this school district mirror the struggles of most math departments in U.S. schools concerning math ability and achievement.

The perimeters of social change at the macro level, that is, U.S. public schools, did not prevent Mr. Hayes and his colleagues from pursuing social justice at the micro level, that is, within his department. They looked at the structural limitations

RESOURCES FOR TEACHING AND DETRACKING MATH

Gutstein, Eric, *Reading and Writing the World with Mathematics: Toward a Pedagogy for Social Justice* (New York: RoutledgeFalmer, 2005).

Gutstein, Eric, and Bob Peterson, *Rethinking Mathematics: Teaching Social Justice by the Numbers* (Milwaukee: Rethinking Schools, 2005).

Moses, Robert, and Charles Cobb, *Radical Equations: Civil Rights from Mississippi to the Algebra Project* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2002).

Nasir, Na'ilah Suad, and Paul Cobb, eds., *Improving Access to Mathematics: Diversity and Equity in the Classroom* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2006).

Oakes, Jeannie, *Keeping Track: How Schools Structure Inequality*, 2nd ed. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2005).

Sinclair, Nathalie, *Mathematics and Beauty: Aesthetic Approaches to Teaching Children* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2006).

Stavy, Ruth, and Dina Tirosh, *How Students (Mis)Understand Science and Mathematics: Intuitive Rules* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2000).

Webb, Norman L., and Thomas A. Romberg, eds., *Reforming Mathematics Education in America's Cities: The Urban Mathematics Collaborative Project* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1994).

of their K-12 program and made changes specifically within their spheres of influence: the grades they taught at the middle school. The determination and achievements of these students and teachers demonstrate the qualities of social justice education that we outlined in Chapter 1. The ongoing efforts of the math department provided all students with the *material resources* necessary to learn to their full potential. The changes in the seventh grade math curriculum also provided students with *emotional resources* by demonstrating a belief in students' ability and worth; maintaining high expectations of them; imposing rigorous academic standards; and providing essential social and cultural capital to negotiate the world. By transforming the way in which students perceive themselves and their peers as mathematical thinkers, this case also exhibits a social-justice learning environment that promotes critical thinking and agency for social change.

CURRICULAR ADAPTATION 3: EXPANDING DEFINITIONS OF FAMILY

Another approach to transforming a curriculum is the strategy of examining a particular theme from a variety of perspectives. In the case study that follows, we offer a glimpse into a study of *family* as the theme. The concept of family has always been both deeply political and intimately personal. The political framework for defining family has become a contentious issue in recent years because of the lesbian, gay,

bisexual, transgender (LGBT) community's struggle to gain legal marital status. The voices of political parties and special interest lobbying groups that claim ownership of the definition of *family values* have punctuated the controversy.

This case is divided into descriptions of three approaches to curricular adaptation. The first two examine the topic of family in two settings: first grade and middle school. These two approaches set the stage for an innovative approach to curricular adaptation in a third setting: a high school English literature course.

WHY THE TOPIC OF FAMILY?

The topic of family is an attractive theme for teachers because it offers many promising possibilities. The promise lies in the idea that every student from preschool through high school may be able to tell a story about family and relate to ideas about family change. Such stories and ideas provide ways for teachers and students to collaborate and involve every student in the curriculum. Yet, if these attributes are not approached with a problem-posing multicultural perspective, a curriculum about family can prove to be problematic—and even damaging to students. What is often thought to be a “universal” theme requires acknowledgement of multiple experiences and perspectives, with specific attention to deep-seated myopic views of the definition of *family* that may work to support institutional oppression of some people.

WHO IS INCLUDED?

For example, families who are headed by lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people have been the specific target of recent oppressive political campaigns, and they are frequently ignored or deliberately silenced in school curricula. Also, families who are headed by adults who are not married, whether homosexual or heterosexual, are excluded from traditional definitions of family, and the children of these families may be questioned about the validity of their family structure. Families headed by single parents are still not affirmed in many curricula. Students who have family members who are incarcerated rarely see a welcome opportunity to share their story, and they are silenced by some teachers if they attempt to raise the topic. Families caring for members with mental illness may be reluctant to participate in a classroom invitation to share stories from home. The perspective of children of adoption is frequently omitted in classroom discussions about heredity and family trees. There are as many pitfalls in approaching family as a theme as there are families in our schools, so how does a teacher develop a curriculum about family that embraces the potential to draw from the strength of one of the most elemental human experiences and simultaneously lead students to fight oppression, develop critical thinking skills, and affirm all community members?

When teachers embark on the study of family with clarity about the long-term goals of the unit, it helps students tap into the shared understanding of human experience. Long-term goal setting may help avoid activities that exclude some students from the classroom community. In its most effective form, a curriculum rooted

in big ideas or enduring understandings will lead students to actively pursue human rights for all families.

AVOIDING PITFALLS

A common activity in curriculum about family includes students' researching the history of their names. While this can be a powerful community-building activity, it is also rife with difficulties, especially when it is not grounded by an overarching long-term goal. Many students may know the family story of their name or may have easy access to it by asking family members who are eager to share the story. However, many children may not. Children of adoption and children in foster care may not know the origin of their name and may feel that such an assignment will lower their status as a classroom community member. Other students may have painful associations with the history of their name, such as one student we met who reported that he was named after a family member who had been incarcerated for abusing him.

Rather than discard the assignment about researching one's name and relegate such potentially robust activities to the "untouchable" category, teachers may develop a menu of various assignments from which students can choose. For example, if the big idea of the assignment is to *engage in research skills related to naming and personal history*, the menu of activities might include:

- Research the name of the street on which you live (or the name of the building, housing community, neighborhood, the name of the building in which your faith community, or the land on which your tribal community lives). Find out when it was named and why. Tell us something about its history, and if you choose the place where you live (building, street, housing community, or tribal community land), find out when your family moved there or started living there. Some "family moves" are exciting and celebratory. Other "family moves" may be a response to family and community difficulties such as economic strife, natural disasters, or political oppression. Tell us only what you and your family would like to share.
- Research the name of our school and compare it to the name of another school in our district that you have never attended. Tell us something about the history of the school between the time it was named and the time you began attending the school.
- Research the name of an important person in your family, your religious community, your tribal community, or your cultural community. Tell us something about what the name means. Tell us something about the history of the person between the time she or he was named and the time you were born.
- Research your name and its origins. Find out who chose your name and why. Tell us something about what your name means. Tell us something about the history of your family between the time you were named and the time you began attending this school.

A culminating activity may involve each student's creating an artistic representation of his or her own name to display as a heading for his or her research presen-

tations. The artistic representations may provide another way for students to demonstrate knowledge while simultaneously bringing a unifying activity to a classroom where students have been engaged in an assortment of research projects.

The pitfalls and promises of the history-of-your-name activity are examples of why it is critical to begin a curriculum with big ideas or enduring understandings rather than simply planning activities. This curricular activity also exemplifies the delicate balance inherent in a teacher's role. Even the most thorough multicultural curriculum cannot solve personal crises that some children face. When students reveal painful memories or dangerous situations, it is critical that teachers tap into the resources in the school and community through guidance counselors and social workers to keep their students healthy and safe.

What follows are examples of curriculum for three different grade levels: one created by first grade teachers and students, another created by a middle school team of teachers, and the last developed by a high school English teacher.

FIRST GRADE CURRICULUM BASED ON BIG IDEAS

The first grade curriculum about family stems from the following four big ideas—or enduring understandings and essential questions:

1. There are all kinds of families.
 - What is a family?
 - How do we know a group of people make up a family?
2. Families have “wants & needs”:
 - What do families need? (Food, water, clothing, shelter, love).
 - What is the difference between a need and a want?
 - What are some things that you must have to survive?
 - Is money a want or a need? Are some things “in between”? Do all families need a way to exchange goods?
3. Responsibilities
 - What are the responsibilities that parents and guardians attend to while kids are at school?
 - What are the responsibilities of each child in the family?
4. Experiencing *change* is common to all families. (Examples of change: marriage, divorce, getting older, moving, illness, getting well, death, birth.)
 - Does change happen in all families?
 - Why do we like or dislike change?
 - Can we prepare for change in families?

With these enduring understandings in mind, the first grade teachers start each school year with the integrated social studies unit on family and spend approximately six weeks incorporating these big ideas into all aspects of the curriculum. Additionally, as the year unfolds, they study other units in specific content areas that

reinforce and revisit many of the enduring understandings that were established during the unit on family. The other units in the social studies and science curricula throughout the year are anchored in the big ideas concerning the family unit.

All Kinds of Families The teachers deliberately take an anti-bias approach throughout the six-week unit on family as well as through the school year, by teaching first graders that there are all kinds of families. Through children's literature, the daily calendar, math problems, and other activities of classroom life, the students consistently see images of, and learn about, family diversity. Specific attention is given to affirming the particular families of the children in the classroom while simultaneously expanding the students' views of what family can be. Some of the many examples of "all kinds of families" include families headed by gay dads and lesbian moms, families experiencing divorce, families created or expanded through adoption, single-parent families, families struggling with financial resources, multiracial families, foster families, families experiencing illness or death, families in which the grandparents are raising the children, families with stepparents and step siblings, families from a wide range of different racial, ethnic, and religious backgrounds as well as those that may be defined as *nuclear* or *traditional families*.

Families in the Classroom In many schools, the practice of bringing family members from all walks of life into the classroom as helpers and experts has had more support in recent years. In a unit about family, this is certainly a dynamic component. Teachers can develop many creative means for parents, guardians, and extended family members to be present. However, making *all* families "visible," and the diversity of their life experiences honored, is a challenging endeavor. To explore the big idea about families and responsibilities, one teacher developed an activity that rises to the challenge.

At the beginning of this activity, the classroom community discusses the idea of responsibilities. The students complete a series of assignments to explore and document the responsibilities of adults and children in the family. The assignments are designed to raise awareness of responsibilities but also to make every child's family visible in the classroom. The students in the class make a list of responsibilities that they have in school or "jobs" they need to accomplish. This simple task expands the notion of what it means to have a "job" beyond a place of work where one gets paid money. Especially for children in families struggling with unemployment, this wide view of jobs and responsibilities affirms the work of all family members. The class also makes a list of jobs that kids do at home such as making their beds, walking the dog, carrying their plates to the sink, helping to carry groceries, folding towels, etc.

After developing their understandings of responsibilities, each first grader conducts a family survey by interviewing the adults in the family, asking questions such as: What responsibilities do you have while I am at school? What jobs do you do, either at home or away from home? These interview questions allow for a range of replies to be respected, as opposed to the more narrow question that children frequently hear: "Where do your parents work?" The first graders learn more about

what their caregivers are doing and about the assortment of possibilities of adult responsibilities, and the teacher gains an intimate view into the complex workings of each student's family. The assignment results in adult replies such as caring for younger children or elders, searching for employment, cleaning or fixing up the home, taking care of the yard, volunteer work, going to school, resting to go to the night shift at work, and much more. The students hear about a variety of places that people call *work*: the office, the school, the fire station, the bakery, the construction site, the chemistry lab, the home, the sandwich shop, the hospital, grandma's house, the cafeteria, the hotel, and more.

Part of the interview requires the students to ask the adults what they have to be "good at" to accomplish their responsibilities. This kind of questioning affirms the multiple intelligences required for everyday life. Children hear about skills such as talking to people, knowing when the baby is hungry, using special tools, keeping things organized, being a good listener, making food taste good, knowing different kinds of plants, figuring out when a burning building might fall down (in the case of a parent who is a firefighter), etc. The assignment continues with students' researching the jobs for which all the children in their home have responsibility. Eventually, they investigate what the adults in their families imagined they would be when they grew up and how this compares to the adult responsibilities they now have.

Finally, the students spend time drawing, writing, and presenting their investigations, culminating in imagining several kinds of responsibilities they would like to have when they grow up.

The work of multicultural education is not only to affirm students about who they are, but also to challenge them about who they may become. This variation on a common early childhood activity of "What do you want to be?" is designed to provide multiple models, unleash imaginations, and expand the possibilities these first graders imagine for themselves. All the while, every family "comes to life" in the class, even if the adults in the family could not enter the classroom door.

Children's Literature The first grade teachers use children's literature to emphasize that there is not one "normal" way to experience family, but rather that diversity is normal. While reading lively and engaging children's literature such as *1,2,3: A Family Counting Book* by Bobbie Combs and illustrated by Dannamarie Hosler, students see paintings that depict families headed by gays and lesbians, including two dads reading a bedtime story to their kids, two moms sharing popsicles with their kids on the porch, and several families gathered in community activities.¹⁸ Using children's literature that includes encounters with families with same-sex parents deliberately combats heterosexism in early childhood and provides opportunities to teach explicitly about human rights for all families. When students learn accurate, respectful language and vocabulary regarding the LGBT community, they may ask questions that uncover anti-LGBT perspectives.

While the selection of children's literature that depicts families headed by LGBT people is still limited, it has grown significantly in breadth and depth since 1989, when Leslea Newman wrote and self-published *Heather Has Two Mommies*.¹⁹ With the 20th anniversary of that book approaching, Newman and many other authors

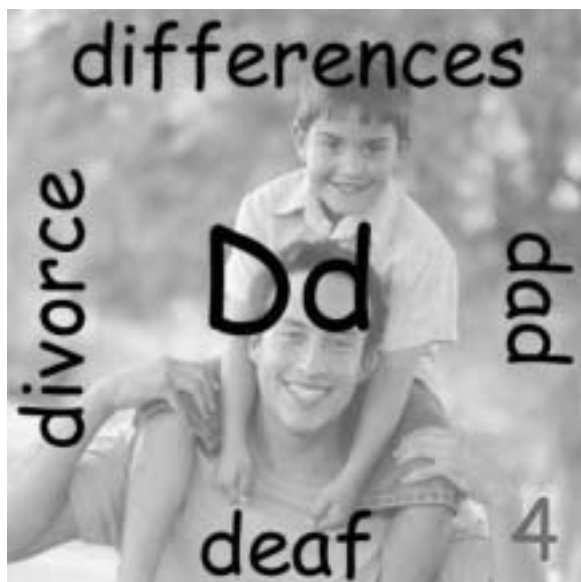
and publishers have expanded children's literature selections with texts that affirm families headed by gay and lesbian couples, single people, and LGBT parents who have separated. Some recent titles for early childhood literacy activities that include a more inclusive definition of family and affirm families headed by lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people are listed on the GLSEN website.²⁰

There is a growing list of titles in children's literature that affirm LGBT identity. Early childhood teachers and students who are engaging in the "dangerous discourse" we discussed in our assertion of multicultural education as education for social justice in Chapter 3, use these books and other similar resources.²¹ Dangerous discourse becomes common practice and unthreatening when these books are integrated into daily literacy activities that develop reading and listening skills, motivate class discussion, and make interdisciplinary connections. Along with books that depict many other kinds of families, a rich children's literature collection affirms diverse family structures and questions those who exclude families headed by gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender parents from fully participating in a democracy.

Early childhood is an essential phase of development in which to address heterosexism by integrating this literature. Children are on the cusp of what Louise Derman-Sparks calls *pre-prejudice*. They are asking questions that may be naive about society's oppressions or they may be ventriloquating social epithets without understanding the meaning behind the words. First grade is an educational stage ripe with opportunity to expand a child's world.²²

Problem-posing teachers realize that developing a children's literature collection is an ongoing, organic process. We are not suggesting that a first grade book shelf or a unit about family diversity should focus only on families headed by lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people. Such an approach would obviously not affirm the families of all students in the class. However, given the sociopolitical context of the human rights struggles of the LGBT community, a critical component of a multicultural curriculum confronts the negative ways that LGBT people are depicted by the popular media. An expanding children's literature collection may act as a counter-narrative to oppressive acts and highlight the positive role of LGBT-headed families in the classroom. These books broaden the scope of a curriculum that also includes quality literature depicting families with diverse ethnic and racial identities, religious practices, socioeconomic situations, disabilities/abilities, languages, and so forth, as well as the myriad ways that families are shaped through birth, adoption, foster care, extended families, and more.

Daily Calendar and Family Concepts Every day in these first grade classrooms starts with a morning meeting and calendar activity. Using a model created by teacher Val Penniman and parent Debbie Shumway, the teachers introduce alphabet skills, vocabulary, math patterns, and concepts about the current unit through the calendar activity.²³ For the family unit, the teachers designed daily calendar pieces (using clip art) to delve into concepts and vocabulary with which the children are familiar but which they may not always have the opportunity to use to develop academic knowledge.



Calendar piece from Gina Simm's and Susie Seco's first grade class. Design inspired by Val Penniman's and Debbie Shimway's *Calendar Connections*. www.calendar-connections.com

For example, on calendar day number 4, the alphabet letter is D and the vocabulary words are *difference*, *dad*, *divorce*, *deaf*. By including words such as *divorce*, *difference*, and *deaf* along with words that may be more typical of a family unit such as *dad*, the classroom curriculum is normalizing experiences so children may engage in academic skill development while some who are usually marginalized are being affirmed in their family experiences. Simultaneously, other children are challenged to expand their perspective of families. Integrating vocabulary words such as *divorce* and *deaf* provides a means for students to ask questions and share stories in an emotionally safe and academically rigorous environment. Abilities, disabilities, and family change are studied through stories and studying vocabulary.

All Kinds of Family Portraits Artistic expression is honored in these classrooms as a form of sharing knowledge. Every student creates a family portrait. By studying various examples of family portraits from contemporary and historical

artists, the first graders gain a panoramic view of the multitude of ways that the concept of family can be expressed. A curriculum that expands the definition of *family* also expands the notion of what is included in a family portrait. The book *Honoring Our Ancestors: Stories and Pictures by Fourteen Artists*, edited by Harriet Rohmer, is illustrated with lively paintings by various artists who depict “ancestors” in poetic and metaphorical ways.²⁴ The paintings in this book represent family memories, spiritual stories, family quotes, and even a room with nobody in it to remind the viewer of the loss of a loved one. Each painting is accompanied by an artist's narrative in very “kid-friendly” language, which leads first graders through robust literacy activities that integrate the visual image with the written word.

In another strategy to connect visual imagery and text, teachers and students study the books created by *Family Diversity Projects*, in which many different kinds of families are portrayed in captivating photographs with accompanying interviews of family members. Resources that use photography and interview text to depict the true stories of real families are powerful tools for developing critical thinking. In addition to using the books as curriculum resources, many teachers and schools display the touring photo-text exhibits, which can be rented from the Family Diversity Projects collection. Currently there are four traveling exhibits:²⁵

- *In Our Family: Portraits of All Kinds of Families*
- *Love Makes a Family: Portraits of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender People and Their Families*



Michael Warren, in Gina Simm's class. *Family portrait*. Mixed media, 2005.

- *Nothing to Hide: Mental Illness in the Family*
- *Of Many Colors: Portraits of Multiracial Families*

Throughout the study of family, first graders see images and hear stories of families that remind them of their own. These images and stories serve the concurrent purpose of stretching their understanding of what other families are like. The work of multicultural education for social justice begins in the earliest grades with the most elemental of human experience to help students imagine a fair world for “all kinds of families.”

MIDDLE SCHOOL INTEGRATED CURRICULUM

The exhibits and books of the Family Diversity Projects also serve as an anchor for the integrated middle school curriculum about family. The middle school teachers developed big ideas to expand skills and inquiry across all content areas. The enduring understanding is that *oppression and resistance are experienced and acted upon in diverse ways by families in our society*, the essential questions are:

- How do we create an inclusive definition of family?
- What is family?
- Where do I belong?

Bearing in mind the difficulties that some students may encounter with a curriculum about families, the teachers did not ask students to bring in family photographs. They knew that many children would not have family photos and that some children would feel uncomfortably exposed by a requirement to share family photos. Instead, the team focused on the materials in the Family Diversity Projects photo-text exhibit *In Our Family* and on books as points of departure for research, as well as the discussions about the teachers and staff members' families. Thus, all teachers brought their own family photos to share with the students at the beginning of the unit. These family photos provided opportunities to discuss the various ways of defining family and to share with the middle school students some aspects of the teachers' lives beyond the classroom walls.²⁶

Diversity Within Groups At first glance, it would appear that the team of teachers who undertook this unit was a group of middle class White people. This is true, but it is not the whole story. The teachers were critically aware of the dominance of their identities and asserted that their students deserved to see many different kinds of families modeled in class discussions. So the team presented their family photos to the students, and the classroom community discussions pointed out the many ways in which the teachers' families were different.

In this case, one female teacher was married to a man who had children from a previous union, so she had stepchildren. One male teacher was married to a woman and had no children. One female teacher had three sons: one from her first marriage, one from her second marriage in which she was still partnered, and one foster son who was different racially from her other family members. One female teacher lived with her lesbian partner and was adopting a child of a different race. One White male teacher was married to a White woman and they had two biological children—the only “nuclear” or “traditional” family among the teaching team.

These differences opened up opportunities for considering other kinds of diversity. Teachers invited other school faculty and staff members to visit their classrooms and bring some of their family photos. The faculty and staff visitors included a Jewish woman who told the story of her parents' surviving the Holocaust and the loss of her husband to cancer, as well as the triumph of her niece over cancer; an African American man who is married to a woman and raising their grandson; and a biracial gay man who had been adopted by a white family.

These conversations about the families in which the adults live provided models for students' consideration of the topic of family as an academic subject, rich with research possibilities. The students saw the teachers as full participants in the unit of study rather than simply as “deliverers” of information. The unintended consequence of this activity was that students witnessed different adults sharing their family experiences at varying levels of disclosure with distinct styles of storytelling. It gave students a range of models from which to embark on their academic work.

Studying Our Own Assumptions The social studies teacher launched the study by bringing each class to the Family Diversity Projects photo exhibit before the accompanying text was installed in the display. (A similar activity could be designed

by looking at books and photocopies of pictures of families.) The students examined each photograph and wrote responses to prompts such as:

- Find a family with whom you think you have something in common.
- Find a family with whom you think you have nothing in common.
- Pick a photo that makes you curious; write your questions.
- Pick a photo that makes you smile; tell us why.
- Pick a photo that makes you sad; tell us why.

The social studies students compared each other's responses to the photos. They began to look critically at assumptions they were making on the basis of a photograph. Then the teachers added the companion text to each photograph, and the students revisited the exhibit, with plenty of time to read the text.

The reading and analysis of the text pointed to the sociological objectives of the unit. Students uncovered ways in which they made assumptions about some families and how those assumptions may stem from, or lead to, stereotypes. Students also learned ways in which they made accurate guesses about some of the families. For example, Jeffrey pointed out a family of four—comprised of a mom, a dad, and two sons who were both wearing baseball caps—as one that was similar to his own family. The family structure and the love of baseball were similar traits to those of Jeffrey's family. Upon reading the text, Jeffrey learned that all four people in the photo are deaf and communicate in American Sign Language, which is different from Jeffrey's family's hearing and language abilities.

Group Membership and Responsibility These activities eventually led to a study of how people group themselves and how society groups people. The students started with examining their membership roles in family and then expanded to examining their membership in other groups such as basketball teams, lunch-table groups, after-school clubs, religious communities, racial groups, ability groups, and so forth. This examination included analyzing group behavior and social influences on groups. When juxtaposed with the histories of various groups, these analyses helped to flesh out stories of historical oppression and resistance in the minds of these middle school students. Rather than demonizing one group or romanticizing another, students began to see the links of social power, social position, and group power. Ultimately, the students critically analyzed their own group membership and their social responsibilities within groups. They worked cooperatively to develop strategies to take responsibility when these groups dominate other groups in the microcosm of the middle school as well as in the larger society.

Reading, Writing, Researching, and Reflecting The language arts curriculum explored the experiences of diverse families through a range of literature. The middle school students selected books from an array of titles. Like photo-text exhibits, literature offers students an opportunity to engage in other families' experiences, some that may resonate with their own and some that may open new worldviews to their early adolescent minds.

Poetry was a central vehicle for expression and questioning in the English class. Building on the curriculum advanced by Linda Christensen in *Reading, Writing and Rising Up*, each student composed a poem called “I am From” to articulate the multiple dimensions of identity within family.²⁷

While the work of poetry writing and literature circles was evolving in the English classroom, the students embarked on homework research projects to investigate their family histories. Again, if such a project is undertaken, it is advisable to provide a menu of assignments from which every student may choose to find meaningful, affirming work that also expands their academic skills. For example, a common project may be to assign students to research and report on when their family immigrated to this country. But when a teacher approaches the curriculum with the big idea in mind (*Oppression and resistance are experienced and acted upon in diverse ways by families in our society*), the exclusion of Native American children in an assignment about immigration becomes more obvious. Approaching the big ideas with critical pedagogy, the classroom considers multiple views of what immigration means to various families. This array of perspectives may include the forced migration and extermination of Native Nations, the forced immigration of enslaved people, immigration to escape war and political oppression, refugee experiences, the circular migration/immigration families in U.S. territories (called colonies by some) such as Puerto Rico, and the ongoing political oppression and resistance of families caught in the crossfire of U.S. immigration restrictions. When research findings based on each student’s own family’s perspective are integrated in a critical classroom context, voice is given to stories that have been silenced, encouraging students to question narratives that exclude some family experiences.

Measuring, Reflecting, and Representing In math class, the middle students spent a two-week period that the math teacher called *A Day in the Life*, carefully measuring how their time was spent. They created circle graphs (“pie charts”) and bar graphs to analyze the percentage of time spent with family, comparing this percentage to time spent on homework, extracurricular events, friends, and other details such as grooming. (Grooming was a substantial piece of most middle school students’ pie charts and graphs!) Students learned critical time-management skills as well as gained an understanding of the diverse ways that their peers’ families spend time.

Genetics, Probability, and Critical Pedagogy Starting with two essential questions—*What is family?* and *Where do I belong?*—the science curriculum was integrated with math to study probability equations related to genetics and human traits such as eye color. By studying the science of genetic structure and the mathematical strategies to predict human traits, students of all family backgrounds and configurations are affirmed. Rather than starting with what each student knows about their heritage, teachers can start with what they *do not* know and what they are curious about to form hypotheses about their ancestor’s genetic composition. Science teachers can pose a variety of examples from which students may choose to develop their equations and predictions. This activity is more welcoming to children of adoption and

others who may have no information about their biological heredity. The students learn academic skills for analyzing data and pursuing deeply personal questions.

Old Arguments, New Knowledge, and Social Justice A scientifically grounded study of genetics also provides well-informed arguments against racism and ethnic oppression. A critical pedagogy examines misinformation about intelligence and ability and replaces it with methodologically rigorous academic knowledge. With race-based and ethnic-based hate crimes and genocides across the globe, from the United States to Rwanda, Darfur, and Iraq, students can develop accurate, rational, and scientifically sound refutations to historically and ethnically rooted oppressions. By integrating their sociological research findings on group behavior and group membership with scientific and mathematical skills, middle school students can make assertive choices about human rights issues that affect their own families. They can become activists about global concerns.

Research Questions The development of students as activist scholars was woven throughout each subject, and social studies objectives were evident in all content areas. In one of the final social studies assignments, students chose a research question to pursue through a variety of methods. For example, one student's question was "What gets families through hard times?" She practiced social science research methodologies such as reading the photo-text exhibit, interviewing her own family members, and interviewing friends and neighbors. She contrasted these real-life families' experiences with those of families she saw on TV. Many students were compelled to compare their research data with the representation of families in the media. Students learned how to organize their data by themes and write essays with a critical eye toward the media's representation of family.

Visual Art and Visual Culture To address the many visual and verbal messages regarding what families look like in visual culture, the interdisciplinary art curriculum was integrated with the social studies skills the students had developed. By examining images of families in film, web media, print media, and various expressions of popular culture, students can develop skills in critical and visual literacy. Within this dialogue, the middle school students consciously drew a self-portrait in the context of a family portrait. By developing confidence in art-making skills, this lesson encouraged student expressions about diverse families while expanding concepts about art and the powerful role of visual culture.

Identity and Beauty Critical understanding of facial features and value systems was underscored in the context of a visual arts drawing lesson stemming from the big idea of the unit. The art teacher and social studies teacher integrated concepts surrounding physical anthropology that also drew upon the math and science research in genetics. They studied skin color and other various human traits. They asked why certain groups in specific geographic locations developed unique adaptations that we see today in the diversity of the human form, which is most obvious in facial features, hair texture, and skin color. Exploring these concepts in the process

of self-portrait drawing deepened students' critical perceptions. The class discussion sharpened analytical questions about who gets to define *beauty* and how judgments about physical appearances in U.S. society may be shaped by commercially driven aims and conformist values. The culminating works of art created by the students communicated many messages that stemmed from their understanding of oppression and resistance based on discussions throughout the unit. Students used layers of collage, glue, papers, paint, and oil pastel to express academic research, scientific and mathematical skills, poetic insights, and socially active engagement with their multiple and inclusive definitions of family.

A Family Celebration As a culminating event, a celebration of the students' accomplishments and a demonstration of their knowledge was held, and every student on the team invited their families to school for the event. A huge art and text display was mounted wherein each student exhibited a collaged frame of three items: a self-portrait, a family portrait, and an "I am From" poem. Every social studies essay, mathematical graph, and scientific research project was on display. Parents, grandparents, caregivers, guardians, and siblings listened intently as students read poetry and excerpts of essays. Many family members who had never before entered the school building attended the event. Students grabbed the hands of loved ones to escort them to each exhibit. The teachers noticed how students proudly "showed off" their work to their visitors, but on a surprising note, many students were eager to point out the work of their classmates as well. Teachers overheard students telling the stories of their peers' families and how they related to the research assignments.

The most popular display was the dessert table; every family had contributed a favorite family dessert! Excited students urged peers and teachers to taste the snacks such as Jalissa's grandmother's flan or Ari's uncle's favorite chocolate-chip concoction. After the families and children went home and the last paper plates were cleaned up, teachers reported a feeling of transformation precipitated by the Family Dessert and Demonstration Day that closed the unit. Teachers described knowing their students more deeply and intimately.

Students wrote self-assessments of their work and told of making connections with teachers and peers in unexpected ways, "wanting to work [their] hardest," and feeling that the project was "awesome". The sense of accomplishment and community bond among the team of teachers and students continued to grow throughout the school year. Teachers talked about their growing knowledge about oppression and resistance as well as their expanding definitions of family, and students and teachers cultivated an enduring sense of belonging.

CURRICULAR CHANGE IN HIGH SCHOOL LITERATURE

This portion of the case presents another example for multicultural changes in the curriculum. The deliberate anti-bias work that we saw in the first grade and middle school unit on family paves the way for students to engage in inclusive high school curriculum. The following example is the curriculum for a high school English literature course called *Gay and Lesbian Literature*.²⁸

SNAPSHOT

Eugene Crocket

Usually I think of my family as an adoptive family more than a gay family.

Eugene Crocket,¹ a soft-spoken Irish American ninth grader, carries himself in a poised manner that commands respect. He has a slight build and longish brown hair that falls into his eyes, which become animated and sparkle as he speaks. Eugene grew up in the rural New England community of Hilton and attends a regional high school in nearby Howardstown, with students from a variety of backgrounds. Eugene spoke at length about his best friend, a Tibetan student, and described how they are both active in an after-school club, Students for a Free Tibet.² In this snapshot, Eugene focuses on his experience of being adopted and raised by two gay dads.

There are six people in my family. I have three brothers and two dads. [Both dads are European American]. One of my dads, Tom, lives in Puerto Rico right now and sells real estate. My other dad, Ted, cleans houses. I call Tom *Dad* and Ted *Poppy*, like *Pop* but *Poppy*.

I am the youngest in the family. My oldest brother Ronnie is 21. Then there's Michael. He's 19. Mark, he's 17, and I'm 15. Ronnie lives in Howardstown and has his own apartment. Michael is getting his own apartment soon. Mark is going away to college, so pretty soon it's going to be just me at home. Ronnie and Mark are more into sports, but me and Michael like to play video games more.

Most people, if they look at my family, they might think it's weird or something. They might think it's odd because it's not the so-called ordinary family. Personally, I don't see being in my family as too much different, because it's my family and I've known them my whole life. It's just regular to me, being in my family.

All four of my brothers are biological brothers. My dads adopted all of us at the same time. I was six months old, and the others were three years old, four, and six. Ronnie probably remembers it most. Basically, our parents were getting into drugs, and not able to take care of us. My oldest brother Ronnie was pretty much, like, he would feed me the bottle and change my diaper and stuff. My parents just weren't able to take care of us. I'm not really sure if they

sought the adoption agency, or if they were reported by a neighbor or something. We were foster kids and then we got adopted. There was a whole controversial thing in the community, because my dads were in the newspaper a lot. They had to argue for being two gay men to get us. I guess they got threatened sometimes. I know they were in the newspaper a lot. This was in the early 1990s.

These days, I'm pretty comfortable talking about it. Not too many people ask, but my close friends pretty much already know about my two dads. I've told them why we were adopted. If I make friends with someone, and they get to know my family, then they might ask questions.

When I was around the age of 11 or 12, I would notice people looking at us. They could probably put together what our family is, like, "Huh, look at that." I felt different, and I didn't like it. Now if that happens, I don't really care.

Usually I think of my family as an adoptive family more than a gay family. In Hilton, there were three adoptive families in my grade, including me. I did feel different, because the three of us were adopted, but I was the only one that had two dads. I didn't really mind that people knew I was adopted and stuff. But sometimes it was a little awkward telling them about my parents. So I felt different, and I didn't like having both my parents come to school. I wasn't ashamed, but more embarrassed. I don't know, I didn't want people to think of me as different. Now, my dad Tom, he lives in Puerto Rico, and Ted, he's not really involved with school or the PTA or whatever. Usually Ted is the one who goes to parent night. I know one other kid at my school now who has two moms, and I know this other girl who was adopted who also has lesbian moms.

At home everything is normal, like everyone else's family. Going out in public is a little more different. I was going to have a class get-together one time, in seventh grade. I wanted to have a bunch of friends over, but I was, like, "How about not at my house, guys," just because I didn't want them to see pictures or something. The sense of stress was only for that moment, so I just kept it to myself. If we're ever talking about family, I usually just say "my dad," rather than "my dads." Usually I try to get to know people well before I tell them that I have two dads, so I already know what their opinions are, and stuff. I have to be pretty sure I can trust them before I can tell them. I did have one friend who was Christian. I used to be better friends with him, but now I'm not as good friends with him. I made sure not to tell him, be-

cause of the Bible and all that. I don't know what he would have done, so I thought it best not to tell him.

At my high school, there's lots of using the word *gay* and the f-a-g word, like, "That's so gay." They don't actually mean it, but it's become like an insult or something. So homophobia isn't that bad in our school. It doesn't make me too uncomfortable, but it bothers me a little bit, though. If I know the person saying it, I might say something. It matters who says it.

At our school, we have a gay and lesbian literature class. We also have a Gay-Straight Alliance.³ I think it's a good idea. I know some people in it. People might assume you were gay or lesbian if you joined it. I don't really know what the GSA does. It has maybe ten people in it, maybe more.

One time in Spanish class, we were doing the family words. My teacher was asking everyone about their mother and their father, and I didn't want to get called on. I didn't want her to be, like, "Oh, what does your mom do?" "I don't have a mom, I don't know." I didn't get called on; I lucked out. I probably would have just said, "I don't have a mom." Another time in high school, we had to do a family tree. The teacher said we didn't have to do our parents, we could do our grandparents and our aunts and stuff. I only put in one of my parents. But in fourth grade, when we had to do a family tree, I did put in both my dads. I always felt more comfortable in elementary school. We were doing the family tree on our heritage, and I did it based on my adoptive parents, because they're the parents that I know.

Being in this family, I have learned to, if I see someone who is different, to not think of them as odd or weird, but to accept people for who they are. I try not to make stereotypes, like not ask people about their mom's name and their dad's name, because I know that not everyone has a mom and a dad. Stuff like that. If I have to fill out a form at school and it says "mother's name," I just cross that out and write "father's name." I haven't ever seen a teacher react to that.

My sixth grade teacher, Ms. Kamp, she really helped me a lot. She made me more comfortable. I was really shy and she made me a lot more comfortable speaking to groups. Academically, I got better. If we had a topic like this, she would ask me if I felt comfortable with it, like if we talked about gay/lesbian stuff. She would ask me in private—like when people were talking, she would come over and whisper it to me. She was also my neighbor.

COMMENTARY

Eugene's snapshot raises the issue of how children of gay and lesbian parents must negotiate "outing" themselves—and their parents—as mem-

bers of families headed by gay parents. Even in liberal Howardstown, with its GSA and gay and lesbian literature class, issues of homophobia and limited understanding of what makes a family arise in school, causing students like Eugene to feel uncomfortable, if not unsafe. At the same time, Eugene reported feeling particularly supported by one teacher, Ms. Kamp, who perhaps knew him better than most, since she was also his neighbor in their small town.

As one of four brothers who were all adopted as a sibling group, Eugene benefited from built-in emotional support at home. Other adopted children may feel more isolated, particularly if they are the only adopted child in their family. Even with his family support and his relatively tolerant school environment, Eugene's anecdotes about offensive put-downs and questions from insensitive teachers and classmates sharpens the discussion of homophobia in schools. Teachers can do a better job of monitoring the school environment for offensive language that sets students apart. They can take care to incorporate flexibility, openness, and inclusivity in their approaches to both the pedagogy and curriculum.

Finally, Eugene's participation in the Tibetan club underscores the importance of choice. Whereas, concerned adults might assume that students like Eugene would be better served by joining the Gay-Straight Alliance or even a group specifically for children of gay/lesbian parents,⁴ in this case, Eugene took comfort in his close friendship with a Tibetan student and preferred to join Students for a Free Tibet as one of only two white students in the group. Perhaps as he progresses through high school, Eugene may be drawn to GSA or another student group. The important note for school officials is making certain that schools provide a variety of outlets that address diverse student interests and various comfort levels.

NOTES

1. We appreciate the work of our friend and colleague Dr. John Raible, who interviewed Eugene and developed the introduction and commentary for the snapshot.
2. Students for a Free Tibet is an international organization on college and high school campuses committed to nonviolent direct action

(continued)

in solidarity with the Tibetan people. For more information go to www.studentsforafreetibet.org/

3. The Gay-Straight Alliance Network provides resources and information on how to start a Gay-Straight Alliance in your school or com-

munity group at www.gsanetwork.org/index.html

4. One such group for children of gay/lesbian parents is GLSEN (Gay, Lesbian, Straight Education Network).

The course was conceived and designed by an English teacher, Ms. Sara Barber-Just. Initially, it was Ms. Barber-Just's research, creativity, and commitment to education for social justice—backed by a supportive department chair, principal, and superintendent—that brought the curriculum to the classroom. Eventually the English department at the high school and the school board approved this course as an integral part of the school curriculum.

Imagining Possibilities Ms. Barber-Just was teaching in the English department of a high school that offered a range of familiar high school literature courses such as Foundations of American Literature, Masterpieces of Ancient and Medieval Worlds, and Masterpieces of the Renaissance and Modern Worlds as well as more assertively multicultural courses such as Women in Literature and African American Literature. Teachers in the department had developed these courses over the years and they had become integrated into the school's course offerings. Ms. Barber-Just imagined that the models in place for the African American Literature and Women in Literature courses could be applied to a course called *Gay and Lesbian Literature*. Both of the former courses dealt with identity issues, and the African American Literature course was organized chronologically by historical time periods.

Ms. Barber-Just developed a proposal for a course combining a wealth of research from her graduate studies and her experiences with the department's curriculum. Her research portfolio reflected an extensive review of gay and lesbian literature with a theoretical grounding in social justice education. In planning the Gay and Lesbian Literature course, she used a course structure that paralleled those of the two courses that were already offered, focusing on group-specific content from a social justice perspective. Her course mirrored the high academic standards within the department, with expectations for students to read thoroughly and critically, write expressively and analytically, and discuss the work passionately and fairly. The following is an excerpt from the proposal she wrote, which became part of the course description:

Students in public schools have been reading literary classics by gay, lesbian, and bisexual authors for more than a century; however, gay authors' lives are often concealed rather than rightfully explored. This course closely examines the struggles and triumphs of these artists—as well as the historical periods during which they wrote—allowing readers to more deeply analyze their diverse literary contributions. *Gay and Lesbian Literature* is split into five major sections, moving in chronological order from

the early 1900s to the 1990s. Class readings include works written by gay and lesbian authors during eras of severe legal and social oppression; conformity and self-loathing; anger, activism, and radicalism; and, finally, pride and acceptance. The course focuses on renowned modern and contemporary American authors such as Willa Cather, James Baldwin, Rita Mae Brown, and Michael Cunningham, and concludes with an examination of Sri Lankan author Shyam Selvadurai and a study of short stories from around the world. Each unit includes a combination of critical essays, poetry, short story, and/or film, providing a rich cultural and historical context for the featured literature.²⁹

Sara Barber-Just explained that for purposes of this course, she would base the definition of *gay and lesbian literature* on two criteria: (1) literature written by LGBT people and (2) literature including gay themes in the content. (A list of some texts, films, and websites from the course is included in the resource section at the end of this chapter section.)

With several caveats, the curriculum director and the principal quietly agreed to offer this course during the pilot model. It would be offered for independent study credit only. Students could sign up for the course if their schedules allowed and they would acquire credit for it, but the credit would not count toward the English credits required to graduate. To teach the course, Ms. Barber-Just would need to fit it into her free period and continue to carry a regular English teacher's course load. She would not earn any additional pay. That is how the course was offered during its first term. As a matter of fact, Ms. Barber-Just dropped her teaching contract down to less than fulltime to make space for the Gay and Lesbian Literature course in her schedule. She was teaching the same amount of courses and numbers of students for less pay.

Student Requests and Requirements Word spread like wildfire among the student body about the new Gay and Lesbian Literature course, and the class quickly filled up, with a waiting list of students eager to take the course. During the first term that the course was offered, the students were excited and engaged in the work. They began to question why they were not gaining English department credit for the rigorous academic work. By the second term that the course was offered, the students urged Ms. Barber-Just to appeal for English credit on their behalf. It did not seem fair to them that they were reading five major novels, producing high-level writing, attending all the classes, and yet not being awarded department credit. After reviewing the syllabus and the impressive academic accomplishments of the students in the class, the English department voted unanimously to award English department credit for the course.

A vote by the school board was needed to add a new class to the program of studies. Ms. Barber-Just compiled portfolios of student work to be reviewed by the school board. The student portfolios included analytical and reflective writing about the five major units of study and the accompanying five books, short stories, poetry, essays, films, and course discussions. The board approved the addition of the course to the official English department's study program.

Student Voices The literary products in the student portfolios were superior by many standards. The knowledge of historical events, social influences on literature, and writing techniques that they reflected were remarkable. But the most compelling facet of the students' work was the consistency with which they mentioned the power of giving voice to unspoken realities. Students wrote about their own biases and their own sexual orientations: gay, straight, and bisexual. They reflected on the importance of this course to support LGBT and questioning youth and build understanding among heterosexual teens. They spoke of lack of information about the LGBT community and critiqued the misinformation of the mass media. Consistently, student reflections mentioned the safety of their classroom community and their commitment to be engaged in social justice. In some of the most moving pieces, students wrote their reflections in the form of letters to their parents.

EVOLUTION OF CURRICULUM

Multicultural curriculum is a process, as we described in Chapter 3; it grows organically along with the needs and struggles of the community. This is true of the Gay and Lesbian Literature course launched by Ms. Barber-Just. In response to student demands, the school added an extra section of the course each year. Moreover, advanced placement recognition (AP credit) may now be achieved through the Gay and Lesbian Literature course. What started out as an independent study offering became socially sanctioned knowledge—a school course—as English department credit, and optional AP credit, through the determination of high school students and the courage of a teacher.

One teacher and her students could not have made these changes in isolation, however. As Christine Sleeter points out, “While teachers have varying degrees of agency to construct multicultural curriculum, teachers also work in systems that institutionalize particular concepts of curriculum, learning, teaching and relationships.”³⁰ While maintaining high academic standards, a stalwart department chair, a supportive principal, and ultimately a visionary school board recognized the needs of a community and acted with resolve to reshape the school curriculum, which continues to become more just and inclusive.

The Gay and Lesbian Literature course reflects the needs and identities of students and families in the immediate community of the school, including LGBT and their straight allies. Perhaps more significantly, the curriculum is responding to the urgency of nation-wide social change. Melinda Miceli's statement affirms this reality: “Today, LGBT and straight ally students are in a position to imagine the possibilities of change that they can accomplish by capitalizing on the progress made by the gay rights movement.”³¹ The “imagined possibilities of change” accomplished by Sara Barber-Just with so many students, families, colleagues, administrators, and school board members provides a model of fierce hopefulness in the ongoing process of making school curriculum—and society—more changeable.

RESOURCES FOR TEACHING ABOUT EXPANDING DEFINITIONS OF FAMILY

These resources are divided into three categories: early childhood, middle school, and high school.

Children's Literature Resources for Early Childhood*

- Combs, Bobbie, *ABC: A Family Alphabet Book* (Ridley Park, PA: Two Lives, 2001).
- de Haan, Lisa, *King and King* (Berkeley, CA: Tri-cycle Press, 2002).
- Elwin, Rosamund, and Michele Plause, *Asha's Mums* (London, England: Women's Press, 2000).
- Garden, Nancy, *Molly's Family* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2004).
- Hoffman, Eric, *Best Colors/Los Mejores Colores* (St. Paul, MN: Redleaf Press, 1999).
- Newman, Leslea, *Felicia's Favorite Story* (Ridley Park, PA: Two Lives, 2002).
- Newman, Leslea, and Diana Souza, *Heather Has Two Mommies* (Boston: Alyson Publications, 2000).
- Parr, Todd, *The Family Book* (New York: Little, Brown Young Readers, 2003).
- Richardson, Justin, and Peter Parnell, *And Tango Makes Three* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2005).
- Settingington, Ken, *Mom and Mum Are Getting Married* (Toronto, Canada: Second Story Press, 2004).
- Simon, Norma, *All Families Are Special* (Morton Grove, IL: Albert Whitman, 2003).
- Skutch, Robert, *Who's in a Family?* (Berkeley, CA: Tricycle Press, 1997).
- Valentine, Johnny, *The Duke Who Outlawed Jelly Beans and Other Stories* (Boston: Alyson Publication, 2004).
- Wickens, Elaine, *Anna Day and the O-Ring* (Boston: Alyson Publications, 1994).

*Special thanks to Nancy Alach from Cambridge Friends School in Cambridge, MA, for this suggested bibliography of children's literature.

Resources Used in the Middle School Curriculum

- Beard, Jean J., Peggy Gillespie, Kay Redfield Jamison, Kenneth, Duckworth, and Gigi Kaeser, *Nothing to Hide: Mental Illness in the Family* (New York: New Press, 2002).
- Gillespie, Peggy, and Gigi Kaeser, *Of Many Colors: Portraits of Multiracial Families* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1997).
- Kaeser, Gigi, and Peggy Gillespie, *Love Makes a Family: Portraits of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Parents and Their Families* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1999).
- Kaeser, Gigi, and Peggy Gillespie, *In Our Family: Portraits of all Kinds of Families* (with Curriculum Guide). (Amherst, MA: Family Diversity Projects, 2003).
- Rohmer, Harriet, ed., *Honoring Our Ancestors: Stories and Pictures by Fourteen Artists* (San Francisco: Children's Book Press, 1999).
- Rohmer, Harriet, ed., *Just Like Me: Stories and Self-Portraits by Fourteen Artists* (San Francisco: Children's Book Press, 1997).

Film and Literature Resources Used in the High School Gay and Lesbian Literature Course

- Baldwin, James, *Giovanni's Room* (New York: Dial, 1956).
- Brown, Rita Mae, *Rubyfruit Jungle* (Plainfield, VT: Daughters Inc., 1973).
- Cather, Willa, *A Lost Lady* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1923).
- Cunningham, Michael, *The Hours* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1998).
- Far from Heaven*, Dir. Todd Haynes, 2002.
- Forster, E. M., *Maurice* (New York: Norton, 1971).

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Ma Vie en Rose, Dir. Alain Berliner, 1997.

Shyam Selvadurai, *Funny Boy* (Harvest Books, 1997).

The Celluloid Closet, Dir. Rob Epstein and Jeffrey Friedman, 1995.

The Trial of Oscar Wilde, Dir. Ken Hughes, 1960.

Woolf, Virginia, *Mrs. Dalloway* (Richmond, England: Hogarth Press, 1925).

◆◆◆ To Think About

1. What is the difference between discussing the facts and descriptions of current events in the classroom and cultivating a critical perspective on the power structures that surround current events? Consider these two approaches in the context of a current event in the news this week.
2. When you hear a student use the word *gay* as a put down (or pejorative term sometimes invoked to insult LGBT identity), what is your response? What does that student learn from your response? What do other students learn from your response? How can you make it a teachable moment about vocabulary, human rights, and courage?
3. Many school structures that divide students by so-called ability appear to be impenetrable to a single teacher's efforts. If such structures are in place in your school, how can you adapt your curriculum to challenge those structures? Do you have to do it alone? What will be the long-term effects of the changes you make to your approach, your classroom, and your curriculum?
4. When students name racism that they see in society, mass media, curricular materials, or the school hallways, how do you respond? How can you affirm and make student voices audible while cultivating a classroom discussion around social justice in which all students feel welcome to participate?
5. Do you call on families to participate in the curriculum? When does it happen? Is it around holiday celebrations? Heritage festivals? How can you expand the role of families in your classroom while including and honoring the families who may not be able to participate in school activities?

◆◆◆ Activities for Personal, School, and Community Change

1. Study the demographics of your classroom, your grade level, your team, or your school. Think about students' heritages and cultural backgrounds. Take note of a specific group about which you may have little knowledge or experience and commit to implementing some curriculum about it. How might you create a unit of study to deepen the understanding of this group's experience? How can you do this in such a way that does not "exoticize" the group or create greater isolation for the members of that group? The teachers of the unit about Cambodia started by educating themselves; they also realized that they would learn more by diving in, researching, and teaching with their students. Where will you begin in your own

classroom? Draw in colleagues for support, co-teaching, content integration, and expansion of this idea.

2. Many teachers are challenged by the notion of implementing multicultural curriculum in the current standards-based climate. Start a teacher book-discussion group based on Christine Sleeter's book *Un-Standardizing Curriculum: Multicultural Teaching in the Standards-Based Classroom* (see note 18). Ask your principal, superintendent, curriculum director or PTO to purchase the books. Meet at least once a month throughout the school year with the end goal of each teacher designing a new unit, or re-designing a former curriculum unit with their fresh ideas inspired by Sleeter's practical, yet revolutionary approach.
3. LGBT identity continues to be a target of institutional and personal oppression. Collaborate with colleagues to make your school a "safe zone" for LGBT students and their families. Collect resources from GLSEN and PFLAG (see appendix) and create an action plan in your school for students to feel affirmed and protected. Educate yourself, colleagues, students, and administrators. Plan curriculum and community events to welcome, affirm and express solidarity with LGBT students, family and communities members.



Companion Website

For access to additional case studies, weblinks, concept cards, and other material related to this chapter, visit the text's companion website at www.ablongman.com/nieto5e.

Notes to Chapter 10

1. We would like to thank the teachers of Amherst Regional Middle School, Amherst, Massachusetts: Margarita Bonifaz, Sarah Lange Hayes, Gale Kuhn, Lynn Podeseck, Sokhen P. Mao, Paul Plummer, and Maura Neverson, whose work and dedication made this unit of study about Cambodia a success for all of their students. Patty also worked on this curriculum team as the art teacher.
2. Ronnie J. Booxbaum, PhD, and Sokhen P. Mao, MEd, developed this staff development course and wrote a handbook to accompany it.
3. Loung Ung, *First They Killed My Father* (New York: HarperCollins, 2000).
4. See Luong Ung, *Lucky Child: A Daughter of Cambodia Reunites with the Sister She Left Behind* (New York: HarperCollins, 2000) and Molyda Szymusiak, Jane Hamilton-Merritt (translator), and Linda Coverdale, *The Stones Cry Out: A Cambodian Childhood, 1975–1980* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999).
5. Grant Wiggins and Jay McTighe, *Understanding by Design*, 2nd ed. (Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD), 2005).
6. Bill Bigelow, Brenda Harvey, Stan Karp, and Larry Miller, eds., *Rethinking Our Classrooms: Teaching for Equity and Justice*, vol. 2 (Milwaukee, WI: Rethinking Schools, 2001).
7. The Cambodian Masters Program supports revival of the traditional art forms of Cambodia and inspires contemporary artistic expression. They have visiting artists, lecturers, and performances. Available at: www.cambodianmasters.org/masters/index.htm
8. The Angkor Dance Troupe helps Cambodian young people navigate the balance between contemporary youth culture and their cultural heritage. See www.angkordance.org
9. *Monkey Dance* is a documentary film by Julie Mallozzi about three teens coming of age in Lowell, Massachusetts. See www.monkey-dance.com/ and www.juliemallozzi.com/monkey.html
10. The Peace Pagoda Nipponzan Myohoji Sangha Buddhist temple was created as a collaborative effort by Vietnam Veterans Against the War and

- the Cambodian American Community. See www.peacepagoda.org
11. See the Resources for Teaching About Cambodia at the end of this case study, which includes many of the folktales that Margarita Bonifaz used in this unit.
 12. Peter Menzel, Charles C. Mann, and Paul Kennedy, *Material World: A Global Family Portrait* (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1995).
 13. We are grateful to Michael Hayes for being so generous with his time to help us create this case study. Michael recently left the classroom and became a co-principal at Amherst Regional Middle School, Amherst, Massachusetts.
 14. See National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (NCTM) at www.nctm.org. Also see Jeannie Oakes, *Keeping Track: How Schools Structure Inequality*, 2nd ed. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2005).
 15. Robert Moses and Charles Cobb, *Radical Equations: Civil Rights from Mississippi to the Algebra Project* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2002).
 16. We are grateful for Alan Dallmann's role in the transformation of this curriculum and in this case study.
 17. We are grateful to Blanca Zelaya for her critical role in the math curriculum and the development of this case study.
 18. Bobbie Combs and Dannamarie Hosler, illus., *1,2,3: A Family Counting Book* (Ridley Park, PA: Two Lives, 2001).
 19. Leslea Newman and Diana Souza, Illustrator, *Heather Has Two Mommies* (Boston: Alyson, 2000).
 20. GLSEN (Gay, Lesbian, Straight Education Network) is a national organization working to end anti-gay biases in schools. The group is striving to assure that each member of every school community is valued and respected regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity/expression. GLSEN's website (www.glsen.org) has innumerable resources for teachers of students of all ages.
 21. Ellen Bigler, *American Conversations: Puerto Ricans, White Ethnics and Multicultural Education* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1999).
 22. Louise Derman-Sparks, *Teaching/Learning Anti-Racism: A Developmental Approach* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1997).
 23. Val Penniman and Debbie Shumway's "Calendar-Connections," which helps teach critical thinking in a classroom curriculum, may be found at www.calendar-connections.com
 24. Harriet Rohmer, ed., *Honoring Our Ancestors: Stories and Pictures by Fourteen Artists* (San Francisco: Children's Book Press, 1999).
 25. Family Diversity Projects is a nonprofit organization co-founded by Peggy Gillespie and Gigi Kaeser. It produces and circulates photo-text exhibits to educate people about the many facets of diversity. The exhibits tour nationally and internationally. See www.familydiv.org
 26. We are grateful to the teachers who developed this curriculum and gave it their heartfelt attentions for three years at Amherst Regional Middle School. They are Beth Adel Wohlleb, social studies teacher; Phil Covelli and Gale Kuhn, science teachers; Mari Hall, health teacher; Esther Haskell, English teacher; and Robert Lord, math teacher. Dr. John Raible worked as a consultant on the curriculum. Patty worked as an art teacher with the team. Also, Kristen French provided feedback with a critical multicultural perspective for the unit.
 27. Linda Christensen, *Reading, Writing and Rising Up* (Milwaukee: Rethinking Schools, 2000).
 28. We are grateful to Sara Barber-Just for her inspiring contributions to the field of high school English language arts teaching, and for the time she spent helping us to develop this case study.
 29. Sara Barber-Just, "Curriculum Proposal for Amherst Regional High School" 2001.
 30. Sleeter, *Un-Standardizing Curriculum: Multicultural Teaching in the Standards-Based Classroom*, 179.
 31. Melinda Miceli, *Standing Out, Standing Together: The Social and Political Impact of Gay-Straight Alliances* (New York: Routledge, 2005): 12.