



## Framework for a Culturally Responsive and Relevant Pedagogy

1. Classroom Climate and Instruction
2. School Climate
3. Student Voice and Space
4. Family/Caregiver-School Relations
5. School Leadership
6. Community Connection
7. Culture of Professional Development

**Centre for Urban Schooling**  
**Framework for a Culturally Responsive and Relevant Pedagogy**

1. **Classroom Climate and Instruction:** We need to insure that the curriculum in our classrooms speaks to the lives of the students who attend our schools. We can no longer allow the government to mandate a one-size fits all curriculum that we know is based upon a white middle class societal view. All children must be able to see their lives represented in the materials, the books, the pictures, the teachers, the administrators, etc within the classroom and school.
- Does the school have a broadly defined definition of “curriculum”, which includes formal, hidden, symbolic and media curricula? (e.g.: What is required to be taught and thus valued? Who is represented by pictures on the walls and in the books ) Is the curriculum culturally responsive in both content and pedagogy? How is this developed and sustained?
- How are the lived experiences of students, including family and community, valued parts of what is taught and talked about in the classroom?
- Are issues of social justice, including anti-racism, anti-classism, anti-sexism, ableism, and anti-homophobia, central to the classroom curriculum in the broadest sense, thereby ensuring the development of critical-thinking skills for all? Does the curriculum encourage a social justice perspective? In what ways?
- What opportunities for professional development in equity, social justice education, and student engagement are provided to teachers and administrators? If not, what alternatives do the school and/or district seek out?
- Do teachers have high and realistic expectations for their students? Is the curriculum and program academically rigorous? Does it allow for broad definitions of “success” for all students? Are there options for students to produce a variety of answers or just one right answer? What strategies are in place to ensure rigor and success on an on-going basis?
- Do teachers teach to the specific interests, learning styles and abilities of all students in the classroom? Are there support mechanisms in place to support teachers in accomplishing this?
- Is the curriculum presented in ways that integrate materials and subjects so that students are able to see the whole, rather than only seeing things in isolation? Do teachers collaborate with colleagues to make this

possible? Does the school support teachers with the time to plan and implement this kind of programming?

- How are students and teachers collaborating on building curriculum?
  - Is the curriculum participatory, experimental and experiential? Does it encourage student participation in its development and implementation? How is this ensured? Does the curriculum encourage learning through doing, especially through doing things together that make a difference in the world?
  - Are there mechanisms in place that allow and encourage students to become involved in decision-making, in both the classroom and school? Are these decision-making mechanisms equitable? That is, are they student-centred, or are they staff-driven? Is the power to make decisions concentrated within a particular group – or groups of – students? Or, is it distributed more evenly?
- 2. School Climate:** We need to ensure that our schools, by their actions, demonstrate a school climate of inclusion, of celebration, and of action around important school, community and global issues.
- How do schools reflect institutionalized discrimination (e.g. racism, homophobia, sexism, classism, etc.)? How do they respond, practically, to it? Does the school promote a culture in which both students *and* teachers can work together to talk about how to address these issues, and monitor their progress in making school-wide changes towards equity? What role does strong school leadership play in this development?
  - How do we ensure that the policies and practices of schooling (e.g. collective agreements, the curriculum, staffing models, time-tabling, programming, supervision time, etc.) are flexible and innovative to meet the needs of all students (but especially those who are not well-served by conventional schooling practices)? How do the Ministry of Education, teachers' unions and school boards work together to achieve this goal?
  - In what ways is the school a safe space where students can connect to their own identities, and build a foundation of confidence, self-esteem and self-awareness? Are there places where students can talk about their passions and feelings?
  - What is in place in the school to ensure the physical and psychological health of its students? Are there physically safe and aesthetically pleasing spaces to learn and spend time in? Are there natural light, proper ventilation, open spaces, and warm, inviting colours? Is the equipment

(e.g. computers, athletic gear, art materials, and other media technology) in the school kept as current as possible?

### **3. Student Voice and Space**

We need to ensure that schools are places where students matter. Places where students feel and believe that their ideas, opinions, perspectives, wants and needs are the basis for all that happens in the building.

- How are students involved in decision-making in the school?
- What real impact do their decisions have?
- How do extra-curricular activities represent the interests and skills of the diverse student body?
- How do you know you are meeting the students' interests?
- How does the school come to understand the ideas and experiences of the students you serve?
- Is there a regular and on-going process for gathering information?

### **4. Family/Caregiver-School Relations:** We need to ensure that our schools recognize and acknowledge that the parent community knows a great deal about their own children. We must move away from the top-down, one-sided approach that the “professionals” need to inform the parents of how to best educate their children. We need to move toward a model that allows for true collaboration based on mutual respect. In communities where people have not always had the best experiences in school themselves, trust needs to be established and nurtured, and it is incumbent upon the school to take the first steps.

- If there is no supportive parent in a student's life, does the school look for services to allow another adult (e.g. family member, legal guardian, community advocate<sup>1</sup>) to act in the student's best interests?
- Are schools able to recognize both the small- and large-scale political effects that shape P/F/A involvement (e.g. changes in labour law, housing policy, job restructuring/outsourcing, immigration policy, market fluctuations, etc.)?
- Are P/F/As consulted on key aspects of a students' school life? Are P/F/As involved in key decisions that directly affect students' school experiences?
- Is the communication between teachers/administrators and P/F/As respectful and validating? Are the forms of this communication invitational, accessible, multilingual and timely?

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<sup>1</sup> For the purposes of this project, we use the abbreviation “P/F/A”, for Parent/Family/Advocate.

- Does the school honour P/F/As as an educational resource, by valuing their personal and/or professional knowledge of the student? Does the school use innovative outreach strategies to make P/F/As feel welcome?

## **5. School Leadership**

We must ensure that our schools recognize and acknowledge that the parent community knows a great deal about their own children. We must move away from the top-down, one-sided approach that the “professionals” need to inform the parents of how to best educate their children. We need to move toward a model that allows for true collaboration based on mutual respect. In communities where people have not always had the best experiences in school themselves, trust needs to be established and nurtured and it is incumbent upon the school to take the first steps.

- How does the school administration communicate their vision to all other stakeholders?
- What methods are utilized to identify needs and issues important to other stakeholders?
- How is the power in the leadership shared in the building?
- In what ways does the leadership challenge the practices and policies of the board and the ministry when they do not align with the best interests of the students they serve?
- How are teachers and staff leaders in this school?

## **6. Community Connection**

In communities where poverty creates barriers to success, it is essential that schools learn from the knowledge of community agencies and community members who know the needs and cultures of the community in ways that the schools do not. Not to be trite, but when we say “it takes a village” to educate a child, that means *it takes a village*. There is much to learn about the children in the school from the interactions and partnerships with various participants in the community.

- Do schools open up spaces for students to discuss the issues that affect their community, as well as provide opportunities for students to get involved in community advocacy, as part of their curriculum?
- Do schools reach out to the community, and establish collaborations with community agencies whose mandates include serving school-age children, youth, and their parents?
- Are teachers and school administrators provided with the tools to become aware of existing demographic trends in their school’s neighbourhood?

## **7. Culture of Professional Development**

This culture of professional development applies to administrators, teachers, support staff and teacher candidates. In schools where teachers have very different life experiences from their students, we as educators must question our “common sense” assumptions about: (for example) our students and their parents; our roles as teachers; our purposes for education; and what constitutes learning and assessment. It is necessary that bridges be built, nurtured and sustained in order to allow for a genuine and respectful sharing in the construction of knowledge. This demonstrates the need for a new and different kind of professional development, focused on learning about our students and their families. It means figuring out how to creatively incorporate our students lives and identities into the curriculum in meaningful and non-stereotypical ways. It means learning how to use these understandings to ensure that our students and their families can begin to see school as an institution which supports them and their issues with regard to the systemic changes essential to creating a more socially-just society.

- How does our school determine its priorities for professional development?
- How do we allow teachers to explore areas of particular relevance to their interests and students’ needs?
- How does the school create and embrace spaces to challenge ideas and practices?
- How does the school demonstrate that work in areas such as inclusive education demands discomfort and that is accepted as part of the process?