
Bias Evaluation Instrument

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Preamble

The following document provides educators, consultants, teachers, administrators, librarians, curriculum writers and publishers with an instrument that will enable them to review learning resources for use in the public school system.

It is important to acknowledge a number of considerations that the reviewer must keep in mind.

- Everyone is biased. An individual's views and interpretations of the world are inevitably influenced by personal and social identities, values, and experiences, which in turn influence how the individual assesses and uses resources. By acknowledging and understanding this, learning resources are more likely to be selected that contain fewer biases and are more inclusive of the broad diversity in our society.
- While no materials are bias-free or without a specific frame of reference, taken together the range of resources that are used as part of the public school program should reflect a balanced perspective.
- The structures and expressions used in language are often inadequate to accurately express or explain terms that reflect a specific culture. Consideration must always be given to the author's background and experience.
- It may be necessary to check the accuracy of information or validity of assumptions with other sources.

The following principles of learning provide contextual reference for educators as they evaluate resources.

Principles of Learning

The public school program is based on principles of learning that teachers and administrators should use as the basis of the experiences they plan for their students. These principles include the following:

Learning is a process of actively constructing knowledge.

Therefore, teachers and administrators have a responsibility to

- create environments and plan experiences that foster investigating, questioning, predicting, exploring, collecting, participating in educational play, and communicating.
- engage learners in experiences that encourage their personal construction of knowledge, for example, hands-on, minds-on science and math; drama; creative movement; artistic representation; writing and talking to learn.
- provide learners with experiences that actively involve them and are personally meaningful.

Students construct knowledge and make it meaningful in terms of their prior knowledge and experiences.

Therefore, teachers and administrators have a responsibility to

- find out what students already know and can do.
- create learning environments and plan experiences that build on learners' prior knowledge.
- ensure that learners are able to see themselves reflected in the learning materials used in the school.

- recognize, value, and use the great diversity of experiences and information students bring to school.
- provide learning opportunities that respect and support students' racial, cultural, and social identities.
- ensure that students are invited or challenged to build on prior knowledge, integrating new understandings with existing understandings.

Learning is enhanced when it takes place in a social and collaborative environment.

Therefore, teachers and administrators have a responsibility to

- ensure that talk, group work, and collaborative ventures are central to class activities.
- see that learners have frequent opportunities to learn from and with others.
- structure opportunities for learners to engage in diverse social interactions with peers and adults.
- help students to see themselves as members of a community of learners.

Students need to continue to view learning as an integrated whole.

Therefore, teachers and administrators have a responsibility to

- plan opportunities to help students make connections across the curriculum and with the world outside and to structure activities that require students to reflect on those connections.
- invite students to apply strategies from across the curriculum to solve problems in real situations.

Learners must see themselves as capable and successful.

Therefore, teachers and administrators have a responsibility to

- provide activities, resources, and challenges that are developmentally appropriate to the learner.
- communicate high expectations for achievement to all students.
- encourage risk-taking in learning.
- ensure that all students experience genuine success on a regular basis.
- value experimentation and treat approximation as signs of growth.
- provide frequent opportunities for students to reflect on and describe what they know and can do.
- provide learning experiences and resources that reflect the diversity of the local and global community.
- provide learning opportunities that develop self esteem.

Learners have different ways of knowing and representing knowledge.

Therefore, teachers and administrators have a responsibility to

- recognize each learners preferred ways of constructing meaning and provide opportunities for exploring alternative ways.
- plan a wide variety of open-ended experiences and assessment strategies.
- recognize, acknowledge, and build on students' diverse ways of knowing and representing their knowledge.
- structure frequent opportunities for students to use various art forms - music, drama, visual arts, dance, movement, crafts - as a means of exploring, formulating, and expressing ideas.

Reflection is an integral part of learning.

Therefore, teachers and administrators have a responsibility to

- challenge their own beliefs and their practices based on continuous reflection.
- reflect on their own learning processes and experiences.
- encourage students to reflect on their learning processes and experiences.
- encourage students to acknowledge and articulate their learnings.
- help students use their reflections to understand themselves as learners, make connections with other learnings, and proceed with learning.

Assessing Learning Resources

To support the goals of public education and to advance the principles of learning, it is necessary to assess learning materials for bias. In being able to clearly name and define various types of bias, we can provide opportunities for teaching and learning.

Learning Resources should

- be responsive to the diversity in schools, classrooms, and society.
- provide information and opportunities for students to think critically so they can counter prejudice and bias.
- provide students with opportunities to demonstrate respect for themselves, other individuals, and groups while helping them develop the skills that foster co-operation and teamwork, responsible citizenship, respect for human rights, social justice, and building healthy inclusive relationships.
- help students understand that all peoples and cultures are interrelated and interdependent.
- play an important role in helping students acquire a positive self-image and ensuring that the identities of all peoples are valued.
- contribute positively to the students' perspectives on the world, their values, and their attitudes toward others as they recognize and internalize the implicit and explicit messages they receive about themselves and others.

This document addresses the following types of bias:

Appearance

Belief System

Ability/Disability

Family Structure

Gender

Race and Ethnocultural

Socio-economic Status

Learning Resource Assessment Process

The process...

- Read and/or view the learning resources in their entirety to get an overall sense of the content and approach.
- Check for specific biases, using the information and rating on the individual bias sheets.
- Rate the learning resources.
- Make recommendations and decisions for suitability.

Keep in mind that...

- You may find training in detecting bias worthwhile.
- In order to increase your understanding, it is useful to work with colleagues and communities who are more versed in a particular area.
- It is necessary to check the accuracy of the information or the validity of the assumptions with other sources.
- Technology may inappropriately represent data as being original.

What to look for...

- subtle and overt biases such as distortions, inaccuracies, omissions, stereotyping, undue emphasis
- representations that are fragmented, emphasizing only parts while excluding the whole
- tokenism as an attempt to address inclusion

Assessment Criteria for Evaluating Resources for Bias

Appearance

Making judgements about others based on external appearances such as physical attributes and age can lead to assumptions about a person’s character and abilities.

Learning materials should

- portray all age groups and races with a full range of human traits, attributes, and capabilities.
- reinforce that a person’s ability to lead a productive life and contribute to society includes many factors.
- present people with a variety of body images.
- provide opportunities to counter prejudice and stereotyping with regard to body image.

Rate the learning resources according to the following Analytical Questions:

(Please check appropriate box)	Yes	No	N/A
1. Are people from different races, ethnicities, age groups, and social classes portrayed with a variety of physical attributes, range of abilities, and accepted in society?			
2. Are people of all shapes, sizes, and appearances portrayed as having a wide range of abilities and being accepted in society?			
3. Are children and youth represented in roles that portray them as capable of assuming home and community responsibilities appropriate to their ages?			
4. Are elderly people proportionally involved in a full range of activities?			
5. Does the resource take into consideration that certain mannerisms, body language, and speech patterns have different connotations in various cultures?			
6. Are members of all groups shown to be capable of independently making decisions and solving their own problems?			

RATING	Check Here
Recommended	
Needs revision	
Unacceptable	

Notes:

Belief System

Belief systems are organized sets of doctrines, attitudes, values or ideas about some philosophy, being, or phenomenon that influence how people live.

Learning materials should

- recognize and validate the diversity of belief systems in Canadian society and acknowledge their commonalities and differences.
- describe the characteristics of a specific belief system accurately.
- present the visual symbols of a specific belief system clearly and accurately.
- avoid language that evaluates or subjectively compares the diversity of belief systems.
- reflect the positive contributions and influences of diverse attitudes, values, and behaviours on Canadian society.
- acknowledge the differences in interpretation and in the practices within a particular belief system.

Rate the learning resources according to the following Analytical Questions:

(Please check appropriate box)	Yes	No	N/A
1. Are diverse belief systems and practices presented sensitively and respectfully?			
2. Are the contexts for the references to belief systems clear, for example, the time period, social setting, geographical location? Are individuals shown as having the right to hold whatever religious or political beliefs they choose?			
3. Does the writer's tone avoid bias toward the belief system(s) described, i.e. use of verb tense, language?			
4. Are the visual portrayals and symbols of the belief systems presented with respect and in appropriate contexts?			
5. Are the learning resources free of implied or overt messages of hate or intolerance?			
6. Are there subtle or overt influences directed toward materialism, consumerism or specific businesses or brands?			

RATING	Check Here
Recommended	
Needs revision	
Unacceptable	

Notes:

Ability/Disability

Ability is the capacity to perform or accomplish something.

A disability is a condition which provides challenges to a person's capacity to perform or accomplish something.

Learning materials should

- reinforce that a person's ability to lead a personally productive life and contribute to society is not limited to physical and cognitive abilities but involves many factors.
- depict individuals in roles unrelated to their disabilities and as people who lead active, productive lives in a wide range of occupations.
- represent people with disabilities as individuals who have the knowledge and expertise to help other people.
- reinforce that people with disabilities are capable of making decisions about how they live and what they need.

Rate the learning resources according to the following Analytical Questions:

(Please check appropriate box)	Yes	No
1. Are people with a variety of abilities/disabilities portrayed in positive contexts as being capable, self-reliant, intelligent, creative, and independent individuals?		
2. Are accommodations for people with physical disabilities included as a natural part of the environment depicted?		
3. Are individuals seen in roles and situations unrelated to their disabilities?		
4. Are people with disabilities included throughout the resource rather than only included to give token recognition?		

RATING	Check Here
Recommended	
Needs revision	
Unacceptable	

Notes:

Family Structures

A family is an extended group of related people. There are a variety of family structures such as single parent, two parent, extended families, blended families, families with no children, biologically unrelated families, families with same sex parents, families with interracial and interfaith parents.

Learning Materials should

- show how various cultures meet the needs of children and family members inside and outside the home environment—in the extended family, through community activities, and through family relationships.

Rate the learning resources according to the following Analytical Questions:

(Please check appropriate box)	Yes	No	N/A
1. Do the learning materials portray a variety of family structures?			
2. Are the various kinds of family structures portrayed positively?			
3. Does the material show various ways families demonstrate love and provide security to family members?			
4. Do the learning materials show family members assuming a variety of roles and responsibilities?			
5. Do the learning materials recognize that the roles and responsibilities of family members differ within cultures?			
6. Do the learning materials portray families involved in various forms of conflict resolution and problem solving?			

RATING	Check Here
Recommended	
Needs revision	
Unacceptable	

Notes:

Gender

Both genders must have equitable opportunities for personal achievement and success without the constraints of gender-role stereotyping. Both genders need information and opportunities to think critically to be able to counter prejudice based on gender.

Learning materials should

- contain equitable representation of both women and men as important figures who deserve recognition and respect.
- present authentic role models in a variety of careers, demonstrating that successes are achievable by both genders in all racial groups.
- show female and males confronting and solving problems with equal skill and resourcefulness.
- represent the potential of girls and boys, women and men accurately, and apply attributes such as confidence, decisiveness, willingness to take risks, empathy, kindness, generosity, and courage equally to both genders.
- include the historic and social contributions and achievements of both women and men.
- acknowledge that an individual's sexual orientation does not reflect his or her ability to lead a satisfying, productive life.

Rate the learning resources according to the following Analytical Questions:

(Please check appropriate box)	Yes	No	N/A
1. Do the learning resources emphasize gender-inclusive examples and activities such as girls and boys playing a variety of sports or engaged in a variety of activities with both genders?			
2. Do family scenes and the range of occupations, inside and outside of the home, show both women and men fulfilling a wide range of roles and functions?			
3. Do the learning resources equitably acknowledge the contributions and achievements of both women and men in society, and acknowledge the broad range of occupational and life pursuits for all?			
4. In historical material, are both women and men portrayed in ways that accurately reflect society at the time?			
5. Does the language avoid making judgements about female and male behaviour (e.g. oversensitive women, assertive men) and use gender neutral terms (e.g. firefighters, fishers, postal carriers)? Is the language gender inclusive? (e.g. both genders are represented in the text).			

Notes:

RATING	Check Here
Recommended	
Needs revision	
Unacceptable	

Race and Ethnocultural

Race is a classification of groups of people of common ancestry distinguished by physical characteristics such as skin colour, shape of eyes, hair texture, or facial features. An ethnocultural group is a group of people who share a particular cultural heritage or background. Every Canadian belongs to one, or more, ethnocultural group.

Learning materials should

- portray Aboriginal cultures as a living and dynamic part of Canadian life and clearly present Aboriginal peoples as descendants of the original inhabitants of the Americas.
- distinguish between facts and value judgements when presenting information.
- ensure that the history of racism and exclusion is presented honestly and with a balanced perspective.
- use primary sources so that people describe themselves using their own words and images.
- reflect the positive, creative contributions that diverse racial and ethnocultural groups make to Canadian life - economics, arts, politics, community life.

Rate the learning resources according to the following Analytical Questions:

(Please check appropriate box)	Yes	No	N/A
1. Are a variety of ways of life, beliefs, occupations, economic, and geographical situations shown for the racial and ethnocultural groups portrayed?			
2. Are racial and ethnocultural groups described accurately with reference to language, national or geographical origin, customs, and belief systems?			
3. Are people's physical characteristics such as skin tone, facial features, hair colour, texture, and style presented authentically?			
4. Are people from all races and cultures portrayed in positive contexts as being equally capable, resourceful, intelligent, creative, and independent?			
5. Does the resource portray the diversity and uniqueness of Aboriginal peoples and cultures, and contribute to a deeper understanding and appreciation of Aboriginal peoples in both past and present contexts?			
6. Are experiences and/or historical events presented, analysed, and/or represented from more than one point of view?			
7. Does the learning material use examples from a variety of cultures to illustrate basic concepts, i.e., geometric form and pattern found in art forms from around the world, the use of poetic language?			
8. Does the material authentically represent the multi-racial and multi-ethnic groups present in Canadian society?			

Notes:

RATING	Check Here
Recommended	
Needs revision	
Unacceptable	

Socio-economic Status

Indicators such as education, wealth, inheritance, and occupation establish a person's socio-economic status.

Learning materials should

- reflect the broad range in standards of living, expectations, and achievements of people in Canada and throughout the world.
- depict people from all socio-economic groups as making valid contributions to Canadian life.
- sensitively include the perspective and situations of both advantaged and disadvantaged populations.
- include the perspective of people from a broad range of geographic regions in Canada and throughout the world.

Rate the learning resources according to the following Analytical Questions:

(Please check appropriate box)	Yes	No	N/A
1. Is there an acknowledgement that the basic needs of people (shelter, privacy, food, rest, recreation, ...) exist in relation to all areas of diversity?			
2. Does the material recognize the achievements and contributions of people from a range of socio-economic groups in different regions of Canada and throughout the world?			
3. Are there examples and references to rural as well as urban life and are they accurate?			
4. Is success presented as dependent on many factors, not limited to just a few such as formal schooling and material wealth?			
5. Are a variety of homes, clothing styles, food, and leisure activities in evidence?			
6. Are a variety of types of employment and careers, including full-time work in the home, valued?			
7. Do the learning resources include role models that reflect all socio-economic groups in Canadian society?			
8. Is individual worth/value portrayed as independent from material acquisition?			

Notes:

RATING	Check Here
Recommended	
Needs revision	
Unacceptable	

Summary

Title & Author of Resource, ISBN #:

Name of Evaluator(s):

Date: _____

Bias	Strengths	Weaknesses Ways to Address Weakness (If Appropriate)
Appearance		
Belief System		
Ability/Disability		
Family Structures		
Gender		
Race and Ethnocultural		
Socio-economic Status		

Recommended for use: Yes No

Comments:

Evaluator(s) Initials: _____

Principal's/Supervisor's Signature: _____