



The Rationale and Guiding Principles for an Evolving Conception of Curriculum

A Word to New Parallel Curriculum Model Readers About This Chapter

There are few professions in which practitioners must make as many decisions as teachers do, or in which practitioners must make decisions as rapidly as teachers must. Teaching is a decision-driven profession. *The Parallel Curriculum*'s authors believe strongly that educators need to build an increasingly stronger rationale for the curriculum they develop or teach. Educators are more confident and more competent when they are grounded in the theory and research that relates to curriculum and instruction. Simply put, they make better decisions when the decisions are well-informed. For that reason, we have elected to begin this book with a brief exploration of the underpinnings of the Parallel Curriculum Model, or PCM.

We also understand, however, that readers new to the model may prefer to learn first about the model itself and to learn about how the theory undergirds it once the model is clearer in the reader's mind. Therefore, while we hope all users of PCM will come to understand and draw upon the model's rich heritage, we invite new readers to decide whether to begin an exploration of the model by first studying its root system—or to defer that exploration for a later time. In other words, you may begin your study of PCM with this background chapter, or with Chapter 2, which introduces the Parallel Curriculum Model itself.

Reasons for Another Curriculum Model

The quest for learning and the desire to create are essential human behaviors. These behaviors are also the key goals of our profession. As teachers, we understand that

it is our responsibility to help young people understand the past so that they might invent a better future.

The same is true about the curriculum model presented within the covers of this book. The authors of this book spent several years asking and attempting to answer their own vexing questions about teaching, learning, and curriculum. As a study group, we examined the structure of knowledge, the characteristics of today's students, research-based instructional strategies, the demands of the future, and our existing structures for writing and implementing curriculum.

Our reading, writing, and conversations resulted in a shared vision for an evolved concept for curriculum. This vision redefines curriculum not as a static set of facts, details, and skills that we expect all students to learn and remember, but instead as a dynamic design process that allows all learners to make powerful and varied connections between their own prior knowledge, interests, and experiences and the essential concepts, principles, skills, habits, and applications within a discipline.

Unlike traditional curriculum models, the Parallel Curriculum Model suggests that the entry point for curriculum decisions should be our knowledge of our learners' characteristics—their strengths, needs, interests, questions, goals, perspectives, and prior experiences. It is our shared belief that high-quality curriculum can honor the essential understandings within a subject area and yet be implemented through a teaching and learning framework that can be modified and adjusted to better meet small groups of learners' essential characteristics and profiles. Used in this manner, curriculum builds a bridge between students' characteristics and the essential content knowledge; curriculum becomes a bridge over which all learners want to cross and need to feel safe and supported in doing so.

A reasonable question prior to an examination of the model of curriculum development proposed in this book is “Why do we need to think differently about curriculum than we have in the past?” Why do we need another model to guide development of curriculum? We suggest at least three reasons that seem compelling to us. We invite readers to add to the list.

1. Our students have different characteristics than they did in the past.

Over the past few decades, both our society and the characteristics of young learners have changed dramatically. Today's society is much more technology-driven, information saturated, faster paced, global, multicultural, consumer-oriented, and pluralistic in its viewpoints and ideas. As such, society demands a greater capacity to adapt to change than was the case in past generations. It also requires workers to be more specialized and more adaptable.

It is not surprising, then, that in order to thrive in such a society, our young people need to be more connected to a wider network of ideas, experiences, people, and support systems than in earlier times. And, it is also not surprising that young people are more demanding and powerful consumers of education than they have been traditionally. They are often open and frank about their need for a relevant, practical, authentic, challenging, and personally rewarding school experience. There is a need for a concept of curriculum to meet these demands.

While we believe there are constant elements in effective curriculum and instruction (described in later sections of the book), we also believe effective curriculum must be proactively responsive to the learner and his or her world. An appreciation of contemporary learners, their world, and the need to maximize the capacity of each learner led us to make conclusions about curriculum design that guided our work.

All curricula are based on such belief systems. The authors suggest that their belief system (that curriculum should respond to the characteristics and needs of the learner) should be collaboratively discussed and analyzed prior to adoption or implementation of PCM. The authors' underlying assumptions follow:

- ▶ Curriculum should guide students in mastering key information, ideas, and the fundamental skills of the disciplines.
- ▶ Curriculum should help students grapple with complex and ambiguous issues and problems.
- ▶ Curriculum should guide students in progressing from novice toward expert levels of performance in various subject areas.
- ▶ Curriculum should provide students opportunities for original, creative, and practical work in the disciplines.
- ▶ Curriculum should help students encounter, accept, and embrace challenge.
- ▶ Curriculum should help students uncover, recognize, and apply the significant and essential concepts and principles in each subject area that explain the structure and workings of the discipline, human behavior, and our physical world.
- ▶ Curriculum should help students develop a sense of themselves as well as of their possibilities in the world in which they live.
- ▶ Curriculum should be compelling and satisfying enough to encourage students to persist despite frustration and understand the importance of effort and collaboration.

2. Changing views of intelligence should influence curriculum development.

Building on the work of predecessors such as Alfred Binet (1916), psychologists like Robert Sternberg (1985), Howard Gardner (1993), and Carol Dweck (1999, 2006) have made convincing cases asserting that we should understand intelligence more broadly and flexibly than we have in the past. A careful review of their work teaches us that intelligence is more fluid and less fixed than we might have once imagined. Environment and opportunity can absolutely affect one's intellectual capacity. In addition, intelligence is developmental, and its development differs among individuals. Therefore, educators should be prepared for variability in the development of intelligence in children and be ready to support a range of developmental stages and needs in a single learning environment. We have also learned that rather than the existence of one kind of "intelligence," there are "intelligences," and they are evident

in the full range of human endeavors. Therefore, we must understand that intelligence is expressed somewhat differently in different cultures and microcultures.

If the assumptions mentioned above are accurate, as psychologists have believed and demonstrated for the better part of a century, then as educators, we are remiss if we ignore our responsibility to nurture and develop any of those intelligences in our students. Education ought to be about providing environments and opportunities to maximize individual capacity. Therefore, educators should be aware of varied intelligences, and subsequently design learning opportunities that honor diverse perspectives and develop multiple aspects of intelligence.

These beliefs about human intelligence lead us to make at least four key conclusions regarding curriculum design. These conclusions guided our work in developing the Parallel Curriculum Model. First, because environment and opportunity affect intelligence, curriculum for virtually all learners should be rich in opportunities for learners to explore and expand a wide range of intelligences and abilities. That is, we should not restrict the highest quality curriculum and instruction to a few students whom we have decided are “smart,” while assuming that other students cannot succeed with—and would not benefit from—such learning experiences. Second, we should design curriculum in ways that both identify and develop high capacity in the broadest possible range of intelligences and learners. Third, curriculum should be flexible enough to address variability in how talent develops over time in a broad range of learners, intelligences, and talent areas. Fourth, curriculum should plan for development of intelligences in ways that are valid for an intelligence area and the domains in which it is expressed.

3. Evolving curriculum should honor the leaders of the past by drawing on their work to build the future.

From the earliest days, pioneering educators have challenged the status quo of teaching and learning in an attempt to ensure appropriate learning opportunities for their learners. In that vein, we offer three assertions related to our work with the Parallel Curriculum Model. First, roots of the past will be clearly evident in curriculum models of the future. Second, curriculum models for the future will differ from the past in ways that are very clear. Third, if the model we propose here has utility in the near term, the time will come when its role will be to join the root system of the past and invite other educators to challenge its assumptions in order to push forward the thinking of the field.

Theoretical and Research-Based Underpinnings of the Parallel Curriculum Model

The Parallel Curriculum Model provides direction for the development of lessons and curriculum units that vary in significant ways from much traditional curriculum. In this era of accountability, it seems appropriate that the authors of *The Parallel Curriculum Model* provide compelling research and a theoretical base

for recommendations that depart from the status quo. This section of the chapter provides that link.

The Parallel Curriculum Model extends the ideas of respected educational theorists and researchers such as Bandura (1977), Bruner (1960), Csikszentmihalyi (1990), Dewey (1938), Dweck (1996), Gardner (1993), Glasser (1969), Piaget (1928, 1955), Sternberg (1985, 2006), Taba (1962), and Vygotsky (1962, 1978). Delineating their theoretical principles and assumptions as they relate to PCM's qualitatively differentiated curriculum is beyond the scope and intent of this book, although readers are referred to the citations listed in the Reference section. However, the following section of this chapter does list the essential principles from these theorists' work that are most closely aligned with the foundation of the Parallel Curriculum Model.

1. Effective curriculum respects the unique characteristics of the learner.

A general principle of education is that curriculum should address and thus respect individual learner characteristics. The work of Dewey, Glasser, Piaget, and Vygotsky referenced above is based upon this tested assumption.

We can characterize the traits of all learners into five categories: cognitive abilities, academic skills and knowledge, social and emotional needs and characteristics, interests, and learning preferences. Our student population reflects a range of abilities, characteristics, and potentials in these five categories. This fact provides a rationale for adjusting the breadth, depth, level, and complexity of content, materials, tasks, and student products. While all students have or can develop a broad range of abilities and interests, they often come to our classrooms with vastly different experiences and levels of prior knowledge in the subject areas we teach. Additionally, in regard to learning preferences, some students learn more effectively with more or less structure or in different environments. Inductive and deductive learning preferences also vary among students.

Evidently, then, an inescapable truth is that learners' characteristics vary. Their abilities may be strong in one area or many. Their interests may be few or many, durable or transitory. The learning preferences they exhibit are influenced by factors such as gender, culture, and general development. Further, their capacities may be blatantly evident or camouflaged. For those reasons, it is essential to stress the fact that no single curriculum can adequately address the needs of all learners. For this reason, the Parallel Curriculum Model provides four unique entry points and an approach to developing appropriate challenge for individual learners that honor the prior knowledge, preferences, readiness levels, interests, and experiences of students.

Even a curriculum that appears to adhere to the essential principles of curriculum design as outlined by Tyler (1949), Taba (1962), Bruner (1960, 1966), and their contemporaries needs to be modified for the abilities, interests, and learning preferences of individual students. That type of curriculum will develop student potential to differing degrees, on varying timetables. Curriculum designed to be a catalyst for developing capacity in young people must be flexible enough to provide students with appropriate challenge and support at all points in their evolution as learners.

2. Theories of knowledge should inform our selection of curriculum content.

There are an untold number of books written about theories of knowledge. Various authors have posed several organizational systems for classifying knowledge and studying it in a systematic manner. Curriculum developers can use one or more of these theories of knowledge as a foundation for selecting and organizing content in any given field. Any one of these systems might serve as an underlying framework for a particular approach to curriculum development. We chose the three-part framework designed by William James.

Levels of Knowing

The American psychologist and philosopher William James (1885) suggested a theory of knowledge based on three levels of knowing. These levels are knowledge-of, knowledge-about (also referred to as knowledge-that), and knowledge-how. Before describing these levels, it is important to note that each of the three levels—and especially the second and third levels—exists on a continuum from the simple to the complex. It is the responsibility of the curriculum developer to determine the degree of complexity within each level that might be appropriate for a given age group, readiness level, and individual. In the final analysis, it is the curriculum developer's understanding of the content field and instructional techniques, plus an understanding of human development, that will guide effective decision making with regard to the level of knowledge that might serve as appropriate content for a particular unit taught to a particular group and to individuals within that group.

Knowledge-Of

This level of knowledge supports entry or awareness level knowing. It involves remembering, recalling, and recognizing but does not include more complex sorts of thinking. Because there is certain information that students must simply “know” about any area of study, most curriculum development begins with the knowledge-of level. It is likely that most teachers feel comfortable with the facts and basic data of a topic, but determining which information is essential and which is less so is not always easy. At any rate, unless curriculum planning moves quickly beyond this lower level of knowing, students are unlikely to become engaged in the topic or to find what they learn to be useful or memorable.

Knowledge-About

Knowledge-about involves a more advanced level of understanding than merely remembering or recalling information. It builds upon remembering or recalling and includes more advanced levels of knowing like comparing, analyzing, inferring, finding relationships, and explaining. Being able to explain something might also involve the ability to demonstrate it. At this level, basic “knowing” evolves into “understanding” and is much more durable, relevant, and powerful for the learner than is accumulation of information alone.

It is at the knowledge-about level that learners begin to deal with the key concepts, principles, and skills of a discipline. In order to move from acquaintance with facts to practical comfort in a field, students need to understand the key concepts that organize the discipline, essential principles that govern the concepts, and ways in which professionals in the field see linkages among ideas and examples.

As teachers, many of us are uncertain of the key concepts, principles, and skills of the disciplines we teach. It is of great importance that we invest the time needed to discover these conceptual frameworks and teach through them. Among sources to help teachers develop comfort with conceptual underpinnings of the various disciplines are college textbooks, educational standards documents (the Compendium on the www.mcrel.org Web site) developed by national professional groups, and books on conceptual teaching such as *Concept-Based Curriculum and Instruction for the Thinking Classroom* by H. Lynn Erickson (2006).

Knowledge-How

This level of knowing deals mainly with the application of tools and strategies to create solutions and new knowledge. At this level, the student is transformed from lesson learner or consumer of knowledge to problem solver and knowledge producer. Obviously, the more advanced knowledge-about information an individual has, the more likely he or she is to be able to generate new ideas, procedures, and solutions. Scholars view knowledge-how as the highest level of involvement in a field. This level represents the kind of work that researchers, writers, and artists do to make new contributions to their field. It also relates directly to the demands of the information production era that we are in currently.

While the majority of young learners do not reshape subject areas, they can, nonetheless, replicate, simulate, and begin to work like professionals. This type of authentic work is a part of the progression from novice to expert and should be central in curriculum design. It is also a chief factor in student motivation, effort, and task commitment. Over time, teachers who use curriculum that asks students to use knowledge-how become comfortable creating tasks that help students learn to work like historians (or artists, or mathematicians, etc.).

3. Curriculum should support escalating levels of student involvement in the discipline.

James's three levels of knowing are similar to Alfred North Whitehead's (1929) concepts of romance, technical proficiency, and generalization. According to Whitehead, we first develop an interest in or romance with a particular field. Many learners want to know about a variety of topics and fields as they progress in their education (interest), and may, for a time, involve themselves in one or more of those areas (romance).

Some people follow up this romance by pursuing a field to the point of becoming a proficient practitioner. Most professionals within a field reach their maximum involvement at this level. However, there are some persons who go on to the generalization level, adding new information and contributing new knowledge

and products to their field. This third level is, in many respects, consistent with one of the major goals of programs that support talent development.

A theory of curriculum with the goal of developing each child's potential should place a premium on powerful, authentic knowledge and the application of authentic methodology to problem areas within various content domains. Instructional techniques should emphasize complex thinking skills, less structured teaching strategies, and a concern for controversial issues, values, and beliefs. Curriculum should also reflect content selection that maximizes the transfer of knowledge, understanding, and skill. The accelerated rate at which knowledge is currently expanding accentuates the value of this principle and reinforces the PCM principle that the vast majority of students should have access to curriculum and instruction that enable them to find increasing success in a complex world.

4. Curriculum should be based on the enduring knowledge in each field.

All of the fields of human understanding rest on a foundation of enduring knowledge. This foundation consists of the key concepts, basic principles, and methodologies of a field. This foundation is the "engine" that drives the field forward to the acquisition of new knowledge and supports students' understanding. Although concepts, principles, and methods do change slowly over extended periods of time, they represent enduring knowledge as opposed to transitory topics or information.

Concepts, principles, and methods should be viewed as tools that help the learner understand any and all selected topics of a content field. For example, understanding the concept of reliability is central to the study of testing, and therefore is an example of an enduring idea in that field. The specific reliability of any given test, however, is more transitory because it changes over time. It is that kind of information that we can always "look up."

5. Topics for study should represent the essential concepts, principles, and processes within a discipline.

One of the biggest issues in curriculum theory is determining what teachers should teach. Most curriculum experts concur that curriculum should focus students on the knowledge, skills, and understanding that best represent the essential structure of the discipline. In any given field, there is an almost endless amount of information on which teachers and students could focus, and it becomes the task of the curriculum developer to determine what knowledge is of most worth.

Philip Phenix (1964) suggests that educators focus on what he calls "representative topics." These topics emerge from the content of a field and are highly representative of numerous, similar topics that are found in that field. For example, a study of the cell as a system with interdependent parts paves the way for understanding systems of the body, the body as a system, ecosystems, and so on. This is the case because studying the cell as a system provides learners with knowledge, concepts, principles, and tools that facilitate understanding in a vast number of related topics.

A teacher or curriculum developer realizes that students cannot study all possible information and topics. For this reason, it becomes critical to select study topics that illustrate the essential concepts and principles and thus have connections to other topics in the subject area.

While representative topics are important in the development of high-quality curriculum, another critical feature is the use of process skills. The objectives of process skills include a wide array of competencies that range from comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis, to evaluation. They also incorporate opportunities for students to make inferences, learn inductively and deductively, seek varied perspectives, develop and use empathy, become aware of and regulate one's own thinking, generate and maintain standards of quality in work and thought, and develop persistence (Bloom, Englehart, Furst, Hill, & Krathwhol, 1956; Costa & Kallick, 2000; Marzano, 1992; Wiggins & McTighe, 1998). Process skills allow students to do something with what they know—beyond remembering and retrieving information.

6. Because of the greater transferability of the process objectives than knowledge alone, it is important to use representative topics as vehicles to develop both core knowledge and process skills. Process development is discussed further in Chapter 3. A focus on methods and tools supports active student involvement and motivation to learn.

Each content field includes the methods and techniques that are essential to practitioners and experts in that field. A theory of knowledge that has, as its goal, helping learners experience and appreciate real-world applications for the knowledge they learn in school should also emphasize the appropriate use of methods, tools, and techniques used by experts in and contributors to a field.

Although the use of these skills and methods sometimes requires advanced understanding of a field or sophisticated equipment, young students can learn and apply some of the entry-level methods (Bruner, 1960). Engagement with methodology also helps learners develop a positive attitude toward challenge and empathy for contemporary concerns. A focus on learning and using the methods of a discipline also encourages active learning—an effective way to ignite student interest, curiosity, and participation.

7. A product orientation to a curriculum encourages the authentic application of abstract and sophisticated ideas.

We believe that a curriculum that supports high levels of achievement for all learners considers both concrete and abstract products. These two kinds of products generally work in harmony.

Concrete products include the specific segments of knowledge students learn, process skills, and student work (e.g., reports, research projects, stories, timelines, dances, editorials, musical compositions, and community service activities). These concrete products are not intended to be ends in themselves. Instead, they are vehicles for the development of various abstract products.

Abstract products include more enduring and transferable outcomes of learning. Examples of abstract products are ideas, strategies, attitudes, beliefs and values, and

personal and social development. Abstract products also include aesthetic appreciation, self-efficacy, and movement toward self-actualization. In most cases, achieving the most mature level of abstract products takes many years. However, each curricular experience should contribute to one or a combination of these more enduring goals of curriculum. Taken collectively, the concrete and abstract products represent the overall goals of a theory of curriculum.

8. Effective curriculum is clearly focused, well organized, engaging, and appropriately challenging.

Leaders in education have delineated the best of what we currently know about curriculum and instruction (e.g., Brandt, 1998; Costa & Kallick, 2000; National Research Council, 1999; Schlechty, 1997; Wiggins & McTighe, 1998). These leaders suggest that high-quality curriculum and instruction for all learners:

- ▶ have a clear focus on the essential facts, understandings, and skills that professionals in that discipline value most
- ▶ provide opportunities for students to develop in-depth understanding
- ▶ are organized to ensure that all student tasks are aligned with the goals of in-depth understanding
- ▶ are coherent (organized, unified, sensible) to the student
- ▶ are mentally and affectively challenging and engaging to the learner
- ▶ recognize and support the need of each learner to make sense of ideas and information, reconstructing older understandings with new ones
- ▶ are fresh, rich, surprising, and joyful
- ▶ provide appropriate choices for learners
- ▶ allow for meaningful collaboration
- ▶ are focused on products that matter to students
- ▶ connect with students' lives and worlds
- ▶ seem real, purposeful, and useful
- ▶ deal with profound ideas
- ▶ call on students to use what they learn in interesting and important ways
- ▶ aid students in developing a consciousness of their thinking
- ▶ help learners become competent problem solvers
- ▶ involve students in setting their learning goals and assessing their progress
- ▶ stretch the student

9. Curriculum should support Ascending Intellectual Demand (AID) for diverse learners.

While the vast majority of learners would benefit from curriculum and instruction characterized by the features noted above, it is also the case that learners vary in their cognitive development as well as in interests and preferred learning modes. There is a substantial body of theory and research to suggest that a student will learn best when curriculum and instruction are congruent with a learner's particular needs. Thus, while most, if not all, learners share a common need for high-level, meaning-focused curriculum and instruction, there will be variance in how students will need to encounter and interact with the curriculum if those encounters are to support continuing success as learners.

Vygotsky (e.g., 1962, 1978) helped us understand an individual learns when a teacher presents tasks to the student at a level of difficulty somewhat beyond the learner's capacity to complete the task independently. When a teacher presents tasks in the student's "zone of proximal development" and then scaffolds, coaches, or supports the student in successfully completing the tasks, the student's independence zone ultimately expands. This causes the need for new tasks at a greater level of demand. For advanced learners in a subject area, the implication is that tasks will need to be more complex than would be appropriate for students who are less advanced in their capacities at that time. The opportunity to work with the key concepts, understandings, and skills of the discipline generally does not change across students. What needs to change is the support system that enables a student to work with those things at a level of challenge appropriate to that student's current development.

More recently, brain research (e.g., Howard, 1994; Jensen, 1998) suggests that students learn best when they are neither over challenged nor under challenged but, rather, when tasks are moderately challenging for the individual. When tasks are too difficult for a child, frustration results. When they are too easy, stagnation and apathy result.

In addition, there is ample evidence that a student's motivation and learning improve when curriculum attends to a student's interests (e.g., Amabile, 1983; Collins & Amabile, 1999; Csikszentmihalyi, Rathunde, & Whalen, 1993). Studies also suggest that matching instruction to a student's preferred mode of learning, gender, culture, and intelligence preferences enhances learning (e.g., Delpit, 1995; Dunn & Griggs, 1995; Grigorenko & Sternberg, 1997; Sullivan, 1993).

Our current knowledge about teaching and learning suggests that we should provide virtually all learners with curriculum that asks them to make sense of and apply the seminal ideas and skills of the disciplines. However, we need to adapt that curriculum to the variability among our students. This means curriculum and instruction must be suited for the prior knowledge of the learner, tap into student interests, and be offered in a style and modality effective for each individual. As students become more advanced in their knowledge, understanding, and skills, the challenge level of materials and tasks must escalate. In this book, we call that escalating match between the learner and curriculum Ascending Intellectual Demand.

Simply put, the Parallel Curriculum Model suggests that most, if not all, learners should work consistently with concept-based curriculum, tasks that call for complex thinking, and products that ask students to demonstrate and use what they have learned in meaningful ways. As a student's knowledge and skills become more advanced, task "demand" will escalate to ensure challenge and progress toward expertise. This concept of Ascending Intellectual Demand is discussed in chapters throughout the book—most fully in Chapter 8.

One premise of the Parallel Curriculum Model is that students will develop along a continuum of knowledge and skill, with some students far advanced beyond age expectations, some moderately or slightly advanced, some in the general range of age expectations, and some slightly, moderately, or acutely behind those expectations. A second premise of the model is that by offering each learner the richest possible curriculum and instruction at a level of demand appropriate for the learner—linked to learner interest and mode of learning, and escalating as the learner develops—we assist each learner in developing his or her capacity to the maximum.

10. Attention to student affect can dramatically enhance the power of curriculum to support challenging learning.

In discussing curriculum design, it is easy to focus on content, process, and products that educators will use with students without acknowledging the role of affect in student growth and success. A lesson or unit plan may look elegant on paper but in practice be of little worth if, in the ends, it fails to touch students' affective needs. We believe that an effective teacher continually tries to develop a learning environment, designs curriculum, and uses instructional approaches with the goal of fostering both cognitive growth and affective engagement.

Such teachers are

- ▶ reflective about the needs of each student, continually seeking a deeper understanding of both individuals and the group
- ▶ responsive in using what they learn about students to craft curriculum and instruction that are better matched to learner needs and interests
- ▶ respectful of students' common and distinct cognitive, physical, social, and emotional profiles

Teachers who are students of their students, as well as of their content, seek to ensure that all learners' classroom experiences lead to

- ▶ security and the students' sense that the classroom is a safe place to be—the students know that their teacher understands who they are, asks questions that matter to them, allows them to express their ideas, and makes the errors that are an inevitable part of learning and growing
- ▶ affirmation—the students' sense that each of them is actively supported by the teacher and their peers in the classroom

- ▶ validation—the students’ belief that each of them has a valuable and valued role in the classroom
- ▶ affiliation—the students’ sense that each of them belongs to and fits in with the group
- ▶ affinity— each student’s sense of kinship and common ground with the group (Mahoney, 1998)

Teachers who work actively to develop learning environments, curriculum, and instruction that honor all aspects of their learners understand the need each learner has to achieve security, affirmation, validation, affiliation, and affinity. These teachers continually guide their students to become more

- ▶ respectful of their own contributions, needs, ideas, and products as well as of the contributions, needs, ideas, and products of others
- ▶ responsive in their work and relationships, as well as responsive to their own need for challenge and quality
- ▶ reflective about what they learn, how their learning affects who they are, what they believe, what they can do, and how their attitudes and behaviors affect the development and options of other people

Teachers who do their best to be reflective, respectful, and responsive support their students in developing these same traits. These teachers constantly assess the impact of environment, curriculum, and instruction on the security, affirmation, validation, affiliation, and affinity of each learner. As a result, these teachers are more likely to make a major impact on the learning and lives of their students than are teachers who undervalue any of these factors.

A particular challenge for teachers is to ensure that students from all cultures and economic backgrounds feel security, affirmation, validation, affiliation, and affinity. Because so many teachers represent the majority culture and a stable economic background, and an increasing number of students represent an array of minority cultures and low-income homes, it is vital that teachers understand and appreciate the backgrounds of all their students. We must make classrooms flexible enough for a variety of learning modes. We also need to ensure that language and economy do not create learning barriers. Including materials, people, and perspectives that represent a range of cultures and helping students learn to value multiple cultures supports this change, as does ensuring that students who lack fundamental learning experiences and skills find support for developing a sturdy framework for learning in their schools and classrooms.

Complex as it is to respond to all learners, doing so is imperative. In no other way can we make learning personal and relevant. It is simply impossible to overstate the interconnectedness between learning and affect in the classroom.