

Lesson Plan: Top-Down and Bottom-Up Approaches to Curriculum Reform

Today's Purpose: Today we will consider how curriculum reform is often shaped by top-down policies that voice societal and political concerns for teaching and learning. Teachers, students, school administrators, and other school community members experience the curriculum as an interaction of life experiences that occur in school and throughout the community. Bottom-up curriculum reform that voices the school community concerns can be an opportunity for empowerment. We will examine this issue through the example of school desegregation efforts in Kansas City, Missouri.

Activity 1: Whole Class Discussion

- In your opinion, should the curriculum be shaped by the government?
- What kind of role do you think that teachers, school leaders, students, and family members or other community stakeholders might play in forming learning environments?
- Whose voices should be attended to in creating learning plans and learning communities? Who gets to decide which voices to listen to?
- Is it possible to attend to the concerns of all school community members in shaping teaching and learning?

Activity 2: Watch Video Clip: [Brenda Harris](#)

School desegregation occurred in Kansas City, Missouri as a result of mandatory laws for school reform. As you watch the video take notes on information regarding the following questions. Discuss responses as a whole group following the video.

- How did Brenda Harris describe the purpose of school desegregation in Kansas City, Missouri?
- How did Brenda Harris describe the response to school desegregation among members of the African American community in Kansas City, Missouri?
- Why do you think that there might have been a difference between the stated purpose and the response to efforts to adopt mandatory curriculum reform for school desegregation?

Activity 3: Small Group Discussion

Brenda Harris underscored the importance of meeting the needs of students in schools.

- a) Brainstorm in a small group for 10 minutes to create a list of ways to find out the academic, social, and emotional needs of students in a school. Report responses to the larger group.
- b) As a whole group, consider some of the opportunities and challenges for top-down and bottom-up curriculum efforts aimed at meeting students' needs.

Activity 4: Envisioning Teachers as Change Agents

In describing the impact of school desegregation on students in Kansas City, Brenda Harris stated that: "It was a great thought in terms of diversity, but I don't think the process worked."

- a) Discuss the following as a whole group:
 - Why do you think that the process put into place for school desegregation in Kansas City might not have worked?
 - How might the process have been modified for more effective school change?
- b) Brenda Harris emphasized the need for the process of curriculum reform to concentrate on the preparation of all teachers to work in urban schools. Work in pairs to create a Vision Chart. Use a combination of words and/or pictures to display how teachers might learn how to become bottom-up curricular change agents in schools. You might draw pictures, use available magazines and newspapers, or make use of royalty free images from the internet if computer resources are readily available for this activity. Report Vision Charts to the whole group for discussion and comparison.