

6

Textbook Selection and Respect for Diversity in the United States

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All students in public school classrooms have the right to materials and educational experiences that promote open inquiry, critical thinking, diversity of thought and expression, and respect for others. Denial or restriction of this right is an infringement of intellectual freedom.

– International Reading Association/
National Council of Teachers of English

In a multicultural, pluralistic society, the extent of democratic practices and the quality of democratic discourse hinge on citizens' orientations toward diversity.

– Avery and Hahn

The United States is one of the most diverse nations in the world. Its approximately 296 million people represent a wide range of ethnicities, native languages, religions, economic statuses, and political perspectives. Yet U.S. history is replete with institutional injustice. Large groups of people have been persecuted and murdered based on ethnicity, native language, gender, religious beliefs, sexual orientation, or for being poor. Today, the law protects such groups from persecution. Yet de facto racism and sexism continue, and numerous hate groups practice intolerance and violence against those deemed “different” (Southern Poverty Law Center 2003). It is in this context that public education is charged with engaging all children in, and preparing them for, critical thought, productivity, and the ability to fully participate in a pluralistic society (Hatcher 1979; Ladson-Billings 1994).

The importance of textbooks in the United States educational system cannot be overstated. Since the late 1800s, the vast majority of textbooks used in public schools has undergone some form of review and selection by a textbook adoption committee (Chambliss and Calfee 1998; Farr and Tulley 1985). Typically, the materials reviewed include student books and teachers’ manuals. Thus, the textbooks selected may determine not only what but also how teachers teach and what and how students are expected to learn (Allington 2002; Chambliss and Calfee 1998; Jacob 2001). This chapter explores the status of textbook adoption practices in the United States, with particular emphasis on promoting respect for diversity.

Information gathered for this report was obtained primarily from three sources: (1) published literature on the topic; (2) descriptions of adoption policies and practices made

2 Educating for Social Cohesion

available by state departments of education and local school districts, through written documentation, personal correspondence, and interviews; and (3) professional organizations, including the International Reading Association, National Council of Teachers of English, National Council for the Social Studies, National Science Teachers Association, National Council of Teachers of Mathematics, and National Association of Multicultural Educators. The terms used to perform literature searches were “textbook adoption,” “diversity,” and “censorship.”

In the review of documents pertaining to adoption procedures, and in interviews on this topic, I sought information on the overall adoption/selection process and on specific ways in which the process promotes respect for diversity. In-depth information was obtained for eight locales, representing five states, and a mix of urban, suburban, and rural school districts. Key personnel who either oversee or participate in textbook adoption processes in these districts were interviewed for anywhere from 20 minutes to one hour. Some interviewees answered additional questions via e-mail after the interview. The list of interview topics appears in box 6.1.

In this chapter, the term “textbook” is used primarily to refer to the books and teachers’ manuals used to teach reading and language arts, social studies, science, and mathematics. It is used interchangeably with “instructional materials.” “Selection” refers to the binding decision as to which texts to use with all students in a particular school, school district, or state. In the literature, “adoption” usually is used to refer to decisions made for entire states or large school districts. This term often involves the acceptance of multiple texts from which local districts or schools then make their final selections.

Box 6.1 Topics Addressed in Interviews about Adoption Processes

- Timeline for process and outline of activities
- Decision of which texts to consider
- Procedure for developing review committee(s)
- Demographic characteristics of a typical review committee
- Training for review committee(s)
- Timeline and procedure for review work
- Evaluation criteria and sheets
- Role of respect for diversity in evaluation criteria
- Role of respect for diversity in evaluation process
- Role of parent and/or citizen input in review process
- Final decision making authority
- Existing adoption cycles

Findings

In this section, I describe my understanding of current textbook adoption practices in three parts. First, I outline the history of textbook adoption in the United States and briefly describe the current context within which textbook selection occurs. Second, I describe the adoption and selection processes followed in three areas of the country. Finally, I speak to the economics and politics of textbook selection.

Historical and Present-Day Contexts of Textbook Selection

Until the mid-1880s, a relatively small percentage of children received formal education. One-room schoolhouses served children of a wide range of ages, and schoolbooks consisted of whatever each child's parents could supply. When schooling became available to more students, the single-class, mixed-textbook approach proved too cumbersome for teachers. It also proved inadequate in meeting the needs of so many students and so diverse a group of students. In addition, many parents did not have the money to purchase textbooks for their children.

In 1882 Massachusetts became the first state to mandate free textbooks for all students. Many states followed suit. Statewide adoption was created to provide uniformity in texts used by an increasingly mobile student population, to provide texts free of charge to all students, and to secure relatively low and uniform costs for textbooks across school districts in a state (Farr and Tulley 1985). The number of states that conduct what is known as "statewide adoption" has remained relatively unchanged since the early 1900s. There are 22 such states.

Of the 22 "adoption states," California, Texas, and Florida garner the most attention because they are the most populous. They account for a sizeable market share for any publishing company whose texts pass muster in those states (Chall and Squire 1991). In the remaining 28 nonadoption, or "open states," texts are selected at the level of the district or the individual school. In most large cities, texts are selected or adopted for the entire district. In open states, school districts may choose from among all textbooks on the market. Many school districts, in both adoption and open states, adopt new textbooks in five to eight year cycles (Chall and Squire 1991).

In adoption states, a state-level process is used to determine a list of texts that will be provided to students free of charge. Local districts, and individual schools in some cases, may select their texts from this approved list and have the cost covered by the state. Most states have a waiver policy by which a district may make an argument for purchasing a text not on the approved list. If the waiver is accepted, the state provides funds for the selection. If not, the district must provide its own funds for these texts.

It is helpful to think of statewide adoption as a two-tiered process in which a list of acceptable texts is determined by the state, based on review and evaluation (tier 1), followed by review and selection of a single text by local districts (tier 2). By contrast, open states have a one-tier process.

Historically, textbook selection practices have been criticized for several reasons, including inadequate or nonexistent training for those charged with making textbook recommendations, lack of or inadequate criteria for evaluation, lack of time devoted to the review process, and politics (Allington 2002; Erickson and Formalont 1979; Farr and Tulley 1985; Feynman 1999; Chall and Squire 1991; Jacob 2001; Stein and others 2001). Although textbook adoption processes are highly influential, they have not been extensively studied (Farr and Tulley 1985; Stein and others 2001).

Current Practices

In one of the most comprehensive studies of textbook adoption, Farr, Tulley, and Rayford (1987) noted a great deal of variation in approaches both between and within adoption and open states. Although there have been no recent studies of similar depth and breadth, the same appears true today (Chambliss and Calfee 1998). While it is difficult to point to one set of selection procedures as typical, there are, nonetheless, shared characteristics (Chall and Squire 1991; Chambliss and Calfee 1998; Farr and Tulley 1985; Stein and others 2001; Tyson-Bernstein 1988).

States employing statewide adoption share many common characteristics in their approaches to textbook selection. Compare, for example, the adoption policies of California (California Department of Education 2002), Florida (Florida Department of Education 2003), and Texas (Texas Education Agency 2003). Large urban districts tend to be similar to states in their adoption techniques. In both cases, adoption involves several layers of decisionmaking, much written policy, and the possibility that those responsible for making the critical decisions are removed from the actual use of the materials. In this regard, it is important to remember that some of the largest urban districts in the United States serve as many children as some of the smallest states. Small districts, often those in rural areas, tend to be much less bureaucratic in their textbook-selection procedures. Fewer people are involved in decisionmaking, and they are the individuals who actually will use the materials. Suburban districts seem to vary, with some being more similar to urban districts and others more similar to rural districts.

Centralized selection processes almost always involve a public presentation in which citizens can voice their opinion about the materials under consideration. Larger districts and states are more likely to work on a fixed adoption schedule than are smaller districts, which tend to engage in a selection process when they identify a need for new materials (Lohr 1979). Many adoption processes include opportunities to hear the opinions of a diverse group of individuals, although this opportunity is realized to varying degrees. For example, some procedures call for a deliberate effort to diversify the selection committee by gender and ethnicity. Other procedures include a separate review of materials by a person or group with expertise in multicultural education. Still other procedures rely on voluntary review by parents or other citizens presumed to provide diverse perspectives. In the remainder of this section, I consider an example from each of three locales: California, an urban district in the Midwest, and a rural district in the Northeast. Box 6.2 illustrates various steps of the adoption process as they occur in the three areas.

Box 6.2. Three Processes for Adopting Textbooks

<i>Statewide adoption: California</i>	<i>Local selection: Large urban district in Midwest</i>	<i>Local selection: Small rural district in Northeast</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Invitation to submit • Development of evaluation criteria • Appointments to three 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chair’s selection of materials to review • Appointment to two review panels 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Committee’s selection of materials to review • Delegation of review to existing committee

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> review panels • Committee training • Review conducted by instructional materials advisory panel/content review panel • Public review • Review conducted by legal and social compliance review panel • Recommendation to curriculum commission • Review and recommendation by curriculum commission • Decision by board of education (multiple texts) • Local review processes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development of evaluation rubric • Committee training/orientation • Review conducted by evaluation committee • Review conducted by multicultural education specialist • Parent review • Recommendations to board of education • Decision by board of education (one text) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Selection of evaluation criteria from publisher • Review conducted by evaluation committee • Piloting • Review of specific questionable selections by Native American Service Provider Committee • Recommendation to board of education • Decision by board of education (one text)
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Statewide Adoption: California

In the state of California, an estimated 6 million children are affected by the kindergarten through eighth grade (K-8) statewide textbook-adoption process (U.S. Census Bureau 2002). Here the adoption process begins even before the textbooks have been written, with the publication of selection criteria at least 18 months prior to the time of adoption. These criteria include specifications regarding the physical durability of the text, the deadline for receiving submissions, and reference to the state curriculum and testing standards. A fixed adoption schedule ensures that the state and the publishers adhere to a predetermined timetable for requesting and submitting materials, respectively. The review process involves four groups: an instructional materials advisory panel/content review panel, legal and social compliance review panel, members of the public, and the curriculum commission (California State Board of Education 2002).

In a recent adoption of reading/language arts texts, the California instructional materials advisory panel and the content review panel consisted of 103 members, including classroom teachers, school administrators, local school board members, and parents/guardians. Members of the panels were appointed by the state board of education based on advice from the curriculum commission. Members of the panels are volunteers who are not compensated for their work. According to the state board of education, the application process for participation on the panel is widely advertised. The goal is a panel that includes teachers from a range of districts – urban, suburban, and rural – who represent a range of K-8 grades, geographical regions in the state, and experiences. However, this seemingly open panel participation is limited to school districts that will provide the two

weeks of release time so that their teachers can get the needed one week of training and one week of committee deliberation.

Generally, the instructional materials advisory panel is comprised of those who work with children in the classroom and are concerned primarily with the usability of the text, whereas the content review panel consists of experts in the field, often university professors or practicing professionals, who review the materials for accuracy. In the recent reading/language arts adoption, these panels were trained together for one week during which they focused on the state's English-language arts content standards and reading/language arts framework, the board-approved evaluation criteria, and the adoption process. In addition, they heard presentations by publishers whose programs were under consideration. The very detailed evaluation criteria, described in 15 pages of single-spaced text, were divided into five categories: (1) alignment with the content of the English-language arts content standards, (2) program organization, (3) assessment, (4) universal access, and (5) instructional planning and support.

Following training, committee members spent approximately two months conducting independent reviews of the materials. They then met for a week of group deliberation. The result of this deliberation was a report, written for each submitted textbook, which included a summary of the instructional materials, a recommendation, and reference to each of the five categories of the evaluation criteria. After these reports were written, the textbooks underwent a legal and social compliance review. Thirty-nine volunteers from around the state were selected to review the programs to ensure that they met standards for evaluating instructional materials for social content (California Department of Education 2001). These standards reflect the state education code and board of education policy. They also address the promotion of respect for diversity in instructional materials.

As panelists were being trained for their review process, textbooks under consideration were displayed at various centers throughout the state for public review and comment. At this time, citizens were invited to make written comments on the textbooks. Later in the process, before final actions were taken, public hearings were held.

Final recommendations were made by the curriculum commission; the final decision rested with the state board of education. At the end of the process, six textbook programs were adopted. Local school districts then conducted their own review processes to select textbooks from among these six. The timeline of the state adoption process was arranged to allow time for local school districts to pilot textbooks as part of their review process.

Local Selection in an Open State: An Urban District in the Midwest

In a large urban district in the Midwest, roughly 50,000 children are affected by textbook-adoption decisions. The 12–18 month process is coordinated by content-specific curriculum coordinators. In this district, there is no adoption schedule. Rather, new texts are considered when there is a felt need for new materials and the financial resources to purchase them. The review process consists of an evaluation conducted by the evaluation committee, which includes the multicultural education specialist. If there are questions about the content of materials with regard to multicultural perspectives, the materials are further reviewed by

others in the district who specialize in reviewing materials for multicultural, gender-fair, disability-aware content.

In the most recent adoption of K–8 reading/language arts texts, the reading/language arts curriculum coordinator was responsible for making committee appointments, developing evaluation criteria, providing training, and chairing the committee (DeLapp 2003). She invited textbook submissions from all major and all supplemental publishers listed in a directory of educational publishers. An open invitation was issued to teachers within the district to apply to participate on the evaluation committee. To get equal representation from each of five major geographical areas in the district as well as from the primary and intermediate grades, and to obtain a diverse committee with respect to gender and ethnicity, the chair actively recruited teachers and principals for committee membership. In addition, the committee included specialists in areas such as multicultural education, gifted-and-talented education, and the education of English-language learners. In all, the committee represented four ethnic groups, at least two religions, two sexual orientations, and two genders. The committee members' teaching experience ranged from 2 to 30 years. Teachers on the committee were paid for their time. Committee members with administrative classifications were not.

The chair developed a rubric for evaluating the textbooks and divided the task of evaluating materials among committee members, with three members reviewing each textbook under consideration. This rubric was heavily influenced by state and district grade-level expectations and standards. Guided by district policy, the committee used a separate checklist to assess the degree to which materials were multicultural, gender fair, and disability aware. The district multicultural specialist trained the committee members in this aspect of the evaluation. In addition, she personally reviewed materials from publishers that were not in use in the district as well as any materials that other members questioned.

After an initial round of reviews, some texts were eliminated. Publishers of the remaining texts were invited to give a presentation, which also was rated by committee members. After a second round of eliminations, the publishers whose materials still were in the running were invited to make a second presentation, which included a sample staff development session. All schools in the district were invited to send representatives to this presentation, and all representatives were given an opportunity to evaluate this aspect of the process. At this point, teacher teams visited school districts with similar demographics to see various programs that were using the potential selections in action. The district and the respective publishers shared the cost of these visits. Parental opinion was sought as well. These experiences led to the final recommendation made by the committee, which was acted on by superintendent and the board of education.

Local Selection in an Open State: A Rural District in the Northeast

In this school district, serving 1,500 students, textbook adoption does not occur in a regular cycle (Pascarella 2003). Furthermore, adoptions within a particular content area may be building-specific or grade-level-specific. The written protocol is sparse, and committees have quite a bit of latitude in determining their process. An intact committee, such as the K–12

curriculum committee or the science department, usually takes responsibility for the review process, with the involvement of at least one school principal. In a recent adoption of reading/language arts texts, publishers were invited to make presentations at the beginning of the process; the evaluation form used during the review process was theirs. Materials were reviewed during the time normally set aside for staff development. The entire process took approximately nine months, including more publisher presentations and a short period for piloting. Then a recommendation was made to the school board. Although not always the case, this particular committee represented the ethnic diversity of the community, which is 30 percent Native American. In addition, a Native American Service Provider Committee provided outside judgment on stories that featured Native American characters.

Economics and Politics of Textbook Selection

The publishing industry, textbook content, and selection procedures are intertwined. While publishers provide the supply from which adoption and selection committees must choose, states and large school districts provide the demand and, with it, the rules by which they decide what to purchase (Chambliss and Calfee 1999; Farr, Tulley, and Powell 1985). The strong influence that large adoption states such as California, Texas, and Florida have on textbook content and, therefore, on what is available nationwide, is widely documented (Berlak 1999; Honig 1991). The closed-door methods that are sometimes used, which override the hard work and inclusive voices represented by selection committees, also have been discussed in the literature (Ladson-Billings 1994; Jacob 1991). Other authors are more optimistic, suggesting ways that the processes of adoption and production can be used proactively to design the most effective curriculum and instruction for the nation's children (Chambliss and Calfee 1998). Indeed, Reutzell, Sudweeks, and Hollingsworth (1994) found that the majority of statewide textbook adoption committee members whom they surveyed felt that their work had a large, positive impact on the quality of reading and language arts programs in their states.

Promoting Respect for Diversity: Recommendations for Major Stages of the Selection Process

Clearly, U.S. textbook-selection processes have room for improvement. Still, what has evolved since the beginning of the twentieth century is a set of general procedures, from which lessons can be learned and for which recommendations can be made. The remainder of this section provides recommendations for the promotion of respect for diversity in the textbook-selection process, as related to major components of the process.

Composing the Evaluation Committee

Recommendation 1. Compose evaluation committees to include diverse perspectives, representative of the diversity in the community, subject-specific knowledge, and pedagogical knowledge.

Most of the work of evaluating textbooks is done by evaluation committees. In adoption states and in large school districts, there usually is an effort—at least a purported

one—to compose a committee that is representative of the state or district as a whole, although it appears that committees often are homogeneous. Researchers have argued the importance of all individuals having the opportunity to participate in discussions related to the selection process (Erickson and Formalont 1979). Chambliss and Calfee (1998) suggest that ideal committee membership includes teachers who are knowledgeable in the subject-matter content and pedagogy, from diverse ethnic backgrounds, and educated and experienced in teaching a wide variety of students. Parent participation on the committee would represent the diversity within the student population.

Recommendation 2. Consider maintaining continuity from one adoption cycle to the next and providing some type of reward or payment for committee service.

The fact that selection committees generally do not make a deliberate effort to retain members from one adoption cycle to the next interferes with committee effectiveness. In addition, the volunteer status of the committee is not commensurate with what often is an overwhelming task. Providing payment for committee service might enhance the pool of teachers interested in participating and might increase the quality of their participation.

Developing the Evaluation Criteria

Recommendation 3. Include items related to respect for diversity in evaluation protocols.

Criteria for evaluation vary widely. Most school districts incorporate a uniform evaluation form, checklist, or rubric, while others allow evaluators to frame their evaluations entirely on their own. Most sets of criteria for evaluation focus on accuracy of content; scope, sequence, and pacing of content; usability for teachers; and alignment with state or district curriculum or testing benchmarks. Too often, attention to diversity is mentioned during the orientation process but is not included on the formal evaluation sheets, which are used to inform final recommendations and written reports.

Recommendation 4. Use evaluation tools that require more than a checkmark.

In some cases, evaluation forms are designed to require reviewers to comment or rate materials on quality. In others, reviewers are checking for the existence of certain characteristics rather than the quality of these characteristics. Forms also vary in level of detail. Some provide general guidelines left to the individual interpretation of committee members, while other forms are more specific. It is generally agreed that checklists promote only cursory attention to issues of quality (Tyson-Bernstein 1988). The more powerful tools require the reviewer to rate or write.

Recommendation 5. Test and revise evaluation tools before conducting the review.

To increase the probability that evaluation tools create the desired effect, it is important to test their use among reviewers. Those who coordinate the review process can accomplish this by having reviewers use the tools with selected materials, then engaging reviewers in a discussion of how they used the tools and what difficulties and ambiguities they encountered. Of course, this use testing requires that adequate time be built into the review process to accommodate the development of strong evaluation tools.

Preparing/Training Evaluators

Recommendation 6. Provide committee members with adequate time to learn the review process and ample time to conduct their reviews.

Preparing the reviewers to evaluate textbooks effectively is critical. Yet, Tyson-Bernstein (1988) found that it is not uncommon for evaluation committee members to have no prior experience and receive no formal training. According to Muther (1986), training should not be limited to an orientation. It also should include a review of the latest research in the subject of study.

It is also imperative that sufficient time be provided for the review to enable reviewers to read and evaluate entire units of study. It is better for individual reviewers to evaluate small sections in depth and “planfully” than for reviewers, overwhelmed with the charge of reading several complete texts, to engage in the “flip test.” Of course, the ideal is for individuals to read entire texts in a systematic manner.

Recommendation 7. Provide committee members with specific examples for each criterion, discussing both good and bad examples, and provide time for practice with the evaluation tools.

In their examination of 70 criteria sheets, Farr and Tulley found an average of 73 items per sheet, with equal weight given to all factors. With regard to each criterion, they state, “There is no discussion of what differentiates a good example from a bad one.” (1985: 470). Committee members benefit from concrete examples of respect for diversity contrasted with examples of inaccuracy, disrespect, or intolerance.

Role of Frameworks and Standards

Recommendation 8. Build respect for diversity into frameworks and standards and in any bid specifications for publishers.

As previously indicated, state curriculum frameworks and standards play a central role in the evaluation of textbooks. In many states, such standards reflect those put forth by national professional organizations. For example, the National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS 1994) includes respect for diversity in several of its themes, including those of culture and global connections. In addition, standards one and nine of the Standards for the English Language Arts pertain specifically to respect for diversity (IRA/NCTE 1996). According to the National Association for Multicultural Education (NAME 2001):

State curriculum standards designed to guide public education need to include the particular contributions, distinct heritages and values, as well as the multiple ways of knowing that represent our diverse population. Curricula should be designed to facilitate the development of individuals who appreciate the complexity of the human condition and who can effectively negotiate the diverse cultural contexts of U.S. society.

NAME has established curriculum guidelines corresponding to five areas of concern: inclusiveness, diverse perspectives, accommodating alternative epistemologies/social construction of knowledge, self-knowledge, and social justice.

Public Opinion and Piloting

Recommendation 9. Develop systematic methods of collecting public opinion and piloting textbooks under consideration.

Most school districts and states provide a forum for public response to textbooks that are under consideration. Those with the most persistent and organized voices have held greatest sway in selection proceedings, even when their opinions have not been representative of the larger community. Therefore, it is important to seek public opinion in ways that ensure representation from *all* constituencies. Likewise, piloting of textbooks should be done in an organized manner, with similar units of study tested across books and for a specified and equal period of time.

Designing and Reviewing the Selection Process

Recommendation 10. Invest time and resources in the careful design of selection procedures and include diverse voices in this process. Within this design, allow adequate time for each phase of the process and include a plan for regular, periodic review of the effectiveness of the process.

The first nine recommendations contribute to the overall design of the selection process. In this regard, Chambliss and Calfee (1998) make a clear distinction between “responders” and “designers.” Responders tend to be superficial in their review of instructional materials. Less methodical and systematic than designers, they tend to react to what is on the market. Designers, on the other hand, attempt to shape the market. By using well-planned, thorough selection processes based on a strong sense of what they want, designers help drive the production of texts to meet their needs. The school districts that report the greatest satisfaction with their selection processes are those whose procedures were well planned and reflect current thinking in the areas of curriculum and instruction. By revisiting the process on a regular basis, educators open themselves to continuous growth related to promoting respect for diversity.

Final Thoughts and Suggestions for Further Research

An in-depth look at textbook adoption practices and policy brings forth several important issues. One such issue is the relation between textbook adoption and pedagogy (Farr and Tulley 1985). First, the textbooks adopted play a significant role in shaping teachers’ understandings of what it is that they are teaching and of effective teaching practice. Second, school districts increasingly are relying on textbook publishers to provide staff development for their teachers.

A recurring theme in articles that question the effectiveness of current textbook-adoption practice is that of critical thinking versus rote memorization, and higher order thinking versus basic skills. Several writers note that the more discrete and controlling the curriculum frameworks and standards for a state or a district—and thus the more textbook publishers work to create books that meet such discrete skills—the less cohesive the texts are as a whole, the less engaging, and the less motivating. There are two important points here. First, critical thinking would seem to be paramount to the acceptance, encouragement, and presentation of multiple social perspectives. Second, poorly written books may have the most

detrimental effect on those students most reliant on public schooling and textbook content for their intellectual growth.

We all are aware of the respect-for-diversity mirage. With regard to textbook content, there are numerous examples of the peripheral treatment of “diverse groups” in lieu of the true integration of diverse perspectives (Cornbleth and Waugh 1999). Certainly, the selection process is not immune to such surface-level approaches. Yet, the dearth of research on textbook adoption, both generally, and specifically related to issues of diversity, is striking. Clearly, there is a need for research in this area, with particular attention to promoting respect for diversity as it occurs in both policy and practice.

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