



Teacher Confessions: I've Never Followed Any Curriculum with Fidelity

By Educator Barnes – October 22, 2019

I know. I just spoke teacher blasphemy. Educators will tell you that any new initiative, model, or curriculum that is rolled comes with the expectation of implementing it with fidelity. In the core of my being, I am a rule follower. I don't want to get in trouble at work, but I'm serving students not adults. The people making these curriculum decisions normally haven't taught anyone for a while, for some, it has been decades. Why should I blindly follow their mandates?

With the exception of my first year in the classroom, I have worked in schools where the majority of the student population is students of color, but unfortunately, the curriculum did not reflect the students in my classroom. I have to choose between being obedient to administration or giving my students the best education. I have to choose my students.

I had a professor that told the class one day she used the literature book she was mandated to use every single day...as a doorstop. Maybe she was exaggerating, but her point was to emphasize how teachers are trained professionals who should know how to create high-quality lessons for their students. I believe I am one of those professionals. This is not the only reason why I strayed from the curriculum. I wanted to give black students the experience I never had.

I'm a lover of literature. Yes, I enjoyed most of the stories my teachers provided in class, but the characters and the authors were mostly white. Sprinkled in would be some Langston Hughes, Maya Angelou, Pat Mora, and Joseph Bruchac. That was not good enough for me. Why is it a generation later, and the curriculum has not changed? The achievement gap between black and white students has failed to shrink, and yet, students are being subjected to curriculum no different than their parents had.

I do believe schools should provide curriculum resources for educators because it is hard to make and put together lessons and a cohesive unit, and it is expensive. I spent many nights finding diverse texts, composing discussion questions, and creating projects that aligned to the state standards that would engage my students. Because I hardly used the textbook, I had to put up a sign to tell students when they needed to bring it to class.

Of course, I had some adversity. I have had parent and colleague complaints. "When my other child was in this grade, they read that book. Why aren't you teaching it?" When I got that complaint, I responded and explained that I teach standards and not books. I can use any text to teach my English/language arts standards. Guess what? Kids can learn the standards perfectly fine even if the author is not a dead white guy.

The worse experience is when a colleague tried to low-key call me out during an English department meeting. "Everyone isn't following what we discussed during these meetings." Everyone knew this individual was talking about me. The department chair started to stutter with an attempt at a response. My principal stood up and addressed my colleague head-on. "When your data looks like Shawnta, then you can have the liberty to adapt the curriculum." On the inside, my sassy little black girl came out with the head cocked to the side with the

finger snap. On the outside, I sat quietly and professionally. I didn't want my colleague to get called out like that because it damaged any potential we had to have any meaningful relationship at work, but I do agree that a person needed to be addressed.

These scripted and packaged curriculums are supposed to ensure quality teaching. If you can't create a quality lesson, then how can you call yourself a teacher? If having teachers on the same lesson on the same day worked, then why are students still struggling academically?

I'm no longer a teacher; this year is my first year as an administrator. I hope I can encourage teachers to find that spark within and not be afraid to add to the curriculum. Our students, especially our black students, deserve to have teachers that are going to go above and beyond to create the best lessons for them.