

A Checklist for Evaluating Multicultural Materials

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Look for the following in any resource to be sure it is as authentic, accessible, and practical as possible, while at the same time it respects the integrity of the culture.

- Prepared with the involvement of a culture bearer (someone raised in the culture). In many cultures, music and other arts are an integral part of every aspect of the culture, and need to be placed in context by an insider who has the depth of knowledge necessary to increase your understanding. (Their presentation may be assisted by a student of the culture.)
- Biographical information about the contributor(s) including their personal comments about the selections.
- Each piece/work should be set in cultural context, including the source, when it is performed, by whom, circumstances etc.
- The work should include historical/geographical background, maps, specific locale (not identified only by continent or ethnic group).
- Original language with pronunciation, literal translation, interpretation of deeper meanings/layers of meaning. In this way, if a singable translation or version is included, you know how it deviates from the actual meaning.
- Photographs, illustrations (preferably by someone from the culture).
- Musical transcriptions if at all possible. (Sometimes a skeletal or simplified transcription is best, but you'd be amazed at how many songs are presented with lyrics only.)
- Companion audio recording of all material in the collection featuring native singers or their long-time students, and employing authentic instruments and arrangements. (There is no substitute for hearing the nuances and subtleties or styling and pronunciation. These cannot be written down and must be heard. In many cultures, learning music is primarily or entirely an oral/aural experience.)
- Games include directions.
- No sacred materials (ritual, holy: this does not refer to hymns or spirituals) in a collection intended for casual school/community use. It is inappropriate in many cultures to use these out of context unless the tradition is your own and you can make any necessary alterations: e.g., among the Navajo, the songs of the Blessingway, Beautyway, and Nightway chants ARE the ritual, and are not sung out of context without changes even by the Navajo. In many cultures, the singer of such songs would have spent a lifetime learning them, and would never use them casually. Use the guideline: If someone from the culture observed my group while I was teaching or performing this song, would they be offended?

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