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## The Multiple Layers of Culture and the Multiple Layers of Society

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### Abstract

This article proposes a new process for the development of multicultural music curriculum. It examines the purpose of school, the purpose of music education, the student demographic, and what music they should learn. This article links these four questions together as a necessity for understanding in the thought process of multicultural music curriculum development. It is divided into four sections that support the basis of the proposal: 1. Societies within Societies; 2. Multiple Layers of Society; 3. Cultures within Cultures; and 4. Multiple Layers of Culture. These four sections investigate the multidimensional aspects of society and culture while also investigating the hierarchal levels in which they are designed. Through this investigation, I conclude that the process for multicultural music curriculum development needs to be more thoroughly developed to take into consideration these multiple dimensions. By doing so educators will be able to more thoroughly and comprehensively develop a well-rounded multicultural curriculum.

### Keywords

Citizenship, curriculum, development, diversity, multiculturalism, society

The field of Music Education has such a rich literature that it would be impossible for me to do any justice to those in the field with this philosophical article. Narrowing down in the field, I have decided to explore our literature on multicultural curriculum. In this article, I explored a few of the writings of David J. Elliott, Scott Seifried, David Perkins, Andrew F. Smith, James A. Banks, Ellen J. Langer, Plato and Aristotle. In this article I will use specific writings from these authors, along with my own academic and teaching experience, to combine the thoughts of many to propose a new theory. I have taken and expanded the ideas of many and by doing so I wish to give something new to the field. The purpose of this study is to propose a new thought process for multicultural music curriculum development. The proposition is specifically targeted for, but not limited to, educators in largely populated areas with great ethnic diversity. The need for this study is to make educators aware of the multiple dimensions of culture and society so that a multicultural curriculum can be more thoughtfully and thoroughly developed.

Before beginning with my proposition, I will investigate the questions: Whom are we teaching? What music should we teach them? What is the purpose of school? And what is the purpose of music education? All of these questions are invariably linked together, for the answer to each question affects the next. Certainly, when one understands the demographics in their classroom, the question should be “what will I teach them?” This

question then requires an answer from the next question of “What is the purpose of school?” And from the answer of that question, we proceed to evaluate the purpose of music education. If we agree that these questions need to be answered, then we can carry on with answering them.

This paper links the purpose of music education to the types of “musics” we are teaching our students, and by doing so; will investigate the ideas and layers of cultures and societies. Questions that may arise from this very statement are “whose culture?” and “whose society?”. It is only reasonable to expect that when trying to answer a set of questions, other questions will arise. I briefly answer these questions throughout while still maintaining my focus on the proposed subject. This will then set the stage for my proposition of what I will call the “Multiple Layers of Culture” and “Multiple Layers of Society” theories. The theories of this proposition are intended for use in elementary and secondary school education and may also be suitable, but not limited to, “general music”, “music in our lives”, or any course that covers world music. It is also applicable for performing arts ensembles.

This article does not address the repertoire and rehearsal techniques of concert band, symphonic band, jazz ensembles, choir, orchestra, or other performing arts ensembles at the elementary and secondary level. Although the theories I discuss are not intended for such courses, they could certainly be applied. In the true spirit of philosophy, I leave the content and suggestions of this paper open for discussion and encourage feedback, criticism and an expansion of these ideas through dialogue with experts in the field.

## Questions

The four questions I will address to set up my propositions are: whom are we teaching? What music should we teach them? What is the purpose of school? And what is the purpose of music education? Banks (2004) stated, “The increasing ethnic, cultural, language, and religious diversity in nation-states throughout the world has raised new questions and possibilities about educating students for effective citizenship” (p. 299). It is this idea of citizenship that I will lean on to support my theories about the Multiple Layers of Culture and the Multiple Layers of Society.

Diversity is not a new concept in our globalized society and it is no new concept in the field of education. Banks (2004) also says, “Multicultural education was developed, in part, to respond to the concerns of ethnic, racial, and cultural groups that felt marginalized within their nation-states” and “A delicate balance of diversity and unity should be an essential goal of democratic nation-states and of teaching and learning in democratic societies” (p. 300). It is for this reason that I believe every educator has the responsibility to understand the demographics of their population. Ethnic and religious backgrounds, home and social culture are all important aspects of multicultural education. To effectively teach a multicultural curriculum, educators have the responsibility to understand the students in their classroom, not just to know musical content about several cultures. This of course means the subject and content matter will change per classroom, as the demographics of the population are likely to change. In the secondary school, the class demographic may change per “block,” thus making the ability to understand the population in such depth more difficult. The fundamental idea should not be turned away because of this complication. Rather, it should be embraced in the same way music educators embrace teaching outside of their expertise. The way the field of music education currently functions in the United States, singers can teach concert band, trumpet players can teach orchestra, violin

players can teach guitar and guitarists can teach choir. The common response to this hypothetical situation is to get a fingering chart or simply to learn the trade. After all, we are all musicians. It is this same logic that I wish to apply to population and demographic understanding. Educators should take the time to learn the musical culture of the population in each one of their classrooms. Music educators should undergo intense training and education for world music in order to become more adequately acquainted with the music and musical practices of multiple cultures. If we can agree to use this logic, we can continue to further develop this philosophy.

What music should we teach? Elliott (1996) says, "...no musical practice is innately better than any other" and "while no Music is innately superior to any other, some musical practices may be educationally more appropriate than others" (p. 8). Since no music is better than another, the process of choosing music in the multicultural curriculum for educational purposes in school should be made clear. I would like to apply this logic to my theory of the Multiple Layers of Culture. Because each student has their own culture, and each culture has its own music, the music we choose to teach should start with the corresponding musical cultures of the population in our classroom. As Langer (1997) suggested:

*Perhaps the very notion of basics needs to be questioned. They are not useful, however, as first learned, for everyone across all situations. If they are mindlessly overlearned, they are not likely to be varied even when variation would be advantageous. Perhaps one could say that for everyone there are certain basics, but that there is no such thing as the basics. (p. 15)*

Let's apply this idea to the *certain* basics of music. Since every culture has its own basic music style and every style of music has its own set of basics, then each culture must have its own set of basics. This transitive relation is certainly valid, for since each culture has its own music with its own basics, educators should then take the task upon themselves to become more educated in these areas. This approach may in turn create a more encompassing atmosphere in the classroom, where students can educate their peers and the teacher about their own culture and music heritage. However, a point I will make later when discussing my Multiple Layers of Culture theory is, just because someone is of an ethnic background does not mean that the person is educated in their ethnic background or its musical practices. In the multicultural curriculum, you cannot just teach students music from any random culture without relevance and call it "multiculturalism". Taking the time to perform this classroom investigation will provide students with a more emotional attachment to their studies and will therefore give students motivation to further their own musical education. It is also my intention to challenge the "foundations" of music courses that choose Western classical music as the starting point for music education. Seifried (2006) quoted Cutietta (1991) as saying "popular music is typically used only for social ends or as a bait-and-switch technique to get the students involved in classical music" (p. 196). This is not the purpose of my proposition. In no way do I mean for educators to simply start with the students' backgrounds and interests and then use this knowledge to turn them to classical music. Why is it that the music curriculum avoids popular cultures? It is also not my intention to go in depth into this question, however it does need to be considered because the "popular culture" music in all cultures should be taken into account when pursuing a fully developed multicultural curriculum. In fact, I address this idea later in

this paper in order to suggest that classical music be placed farther in the scope of curriculum development, which brings me to my next question.

What is the purpose of school? Through this chain of questioning, we must understand *why* we are teaching our students before we can determine *what* we will teach them. However, this process is simultaneous and not necessarily linear. By educating the youth, we are preparing them to become adequate members of society, or as Banks earlier stated, effective citizens. Schools are not necessarily training people for specific jobs. That is the domain of a trade school. Schools, however are not training students for work and therefore, music educators are not training professional musicians. Just like in athletics, some students will pursue their interest to become professional athletes. However, this is not the goal, and as in music, the rest of the class cannot be left behind to tailor to the needs and desires of the few. If we agree that the purpose of school is to prepare our students to become effective citizens and members of society, we must then question, at what level of society? Is it the society of the community, the state, the nation, or some other abstraction? I will expand on this idea later, but first, if we are questioning the purpose of school, we must question our specific role as music educators.

What is the purpose of music education? In Book III of Plato's Republic (I. A. Richards, 1966), Socrates is in dialogue with Adeimantus and Glaucon. In this dialogue Socrates said:

*Good language and good harmony and rhythm are all dependent on a "good nature" or "good form" – not the sort of thing commonly named "good nature" or "good form", but a mind which is truly made in its inner being (p. 57).*

Socrates later states that arts and music education are important for it will allow the citizens to be "in harmony with the beautiful measure of reason". Glaucon agreed and responded, "Such an education would be by far the best", which then incites Socrates' response: "That, Glaucon, is why music is so all-important in education. Because rhythm and harmony go down most deeply into the depths of the soul, and take the strongest grip upon it (p. 58)".

Aristotle wrote in Poetics (1967):

*Epic composition, then; the writing of tragedy, and of comedy also; the composing of dithyrambs; and the greater part of the making of music with flute and lyre: these are all in point of fact, taken collectively, in imitative processes (p. 15)...they all carry on their imitation through the media of rhythm, speech, and melody. (p. 16)*

These two excerpts are both just small fragments of the philosophical ideas known as the Doctrine of Ethos and the Doctrine of Imitation, respectfully attributed to Plato and Aristotle. Combining these philosophies with the purpose of school, we must agree that our purpose as music educators, and the purpose of music education at the elementary and secondary level, is not to train professional musicians, but rather, to prepare our students to become adequate members of society. We must therefore ask the question, what is the

music of “our” society? Is it Western classical music? It is not. However, the music from each individual student's culture is not the music of our society, just as popular music is not the music of our society. Rather, they are *all collectively* the “musics” of our society. With this conclusion, we must take it upon ourselves to develop a curriculum that addresses all of these musics of “our” society and of each culture represented in our classroom. Society however, is subjective; for there are more layers than just the society “we” live in. What does it even mean to say, “our” society? It may be better to look at society in a multidimensional way.

## Society within Society

The process of multicultural curriculum development needs to take into account multiple societies. Smith (2002) stated,

*Rapid and widespread political, economic, and military changes after World War II gave rise to issues that were global in scope, and many people became aware of the impact that events outside U.S. borders had on domestic affairs. Yet the U.S. public education system remained largely unchanged. (p. 251)*

Because the demographic of the community or the demographic of the school changes, the curriculum should change as well. The educator needs to be able to evolve with the school and community population, not to appease the students and only teach them what they like, but to take the role as educator in better preparing students for the society in which they will take part; But which society? I suggest that there are more dimensions to society than taken into consideration when curriculum planning. Meaning, there exists societies *within* societies. The four layers of society I am proposing are: community, state/regional, national and the ultimate abstraction of the world society. I organize this purposefully from small to large because multicultural curriculum development should take into account the musical practices of each culture from the smallest layer to the largest layer of society. I specifically call these “layers” because music choices will overlap in each layer. Perkins (2004) wrote, “The knowledge arts include communicating strategically, insightfully, and effectively; thinking critically and creatively; and putting school knowledge to work out in what educators sometimes humbly call the ‘real world’” (p. 33).

This “real world” idea is what I want to address, because this too has various factors that determine which real world? Or, better yet, whose real world? The “real world” will vary from student to student based on numerous factors including, but not limited to: race, ethnicity, social class, political affiliation, religion, and so on. To suggest that there always be one starting point in multicultural music education would do a huge injustice to the student population. Instead, I suggest an evolving curriculum that is based on taking into consideration the population of students based on the multiple layers of culture and multiple layers of society. This is to build off of the “dynamic multicultural curriculum” concept from Elliott (1995) who says, “*all* music education programs (general music and otherwise) ought to be organized and taught as reflective musical practicums. Of course, the precise details of each music curriculum-as-practicum will differ according to local circumstances” (p. 241). Let's examine the four layers of society I have proposed.

### *Multiple Layers of Society*

At the community layer of society we must take into account the culture of each neighborhood. From where are your students coming? Inherently this idea immediately opens the way for world music curriculum, for if any students in the community population are of ethnic background then we also must consider world cultures in our curriculum development. To effectively perform this kind of curriculum development, the educator must be active in knowing and understanding the population of the community in which the school resides.

The state/regional layer will also determine the population of a school within a community. In this layer the educator should examine the culture of the city, county, community and all aspects of what makes up the region in which the school resides. By understanding the culture of the city/county and the communities within, the educator will have a better understanding of whom future students will be and from what backgrounds they come. Suburban band programs often have “feeder” programs. These feeder programs allow the teacher to know what students will be coming into the band and what instruments they play. With this knowledge the teacher can plan music choices and curriculum around the incoming population. This however, primarily takes into account instrumentation. Let’s now use this logic for the regional layer of my proposition. If a teacher knows the makeup of the community, the culture of the area and the city/county, then the teacher can plan curriculum and musical choices around the population that will be entering the school.

At the community and state/regional levels we were specifically looking at the cultures of the students in the classroom and tailoring the curriculum to them. However, this is not 100% academically appropriate for numerous reasons that I will not go into here. It is the responsibility of the teacher to introduce new and unfamiliar material to the students with the conscious goal of making the society in which they will enter a better place. This concept is also subjective to any society in question. These first two stages may very well do that, for one student’s culture may be unfamiliar to another student. This still takes into account world society even from the earliest stages; however, more branching out is needed into more unfamiliar music. The layer of national society will incorporate all aspects of the community and state/regional level. It is at this level that I propose the introduction of nationally appropriate and relevant music. This should include popular music and orchestral music. However, the factor of time is still an issue. So far, everything I have proposed is in the present tense. Meaning, when orchestral music is introduced at this stage of the curriculum, it should be newly composed orchestral music from living/breathing composers. I will propose a “spiral” to this layer theory that allows the concept of time to be a contributing factor.

The world layer will take into consideration the culture of each of the previous layers and all aspects there of. Because of the nature of culture, the world layer should exist from step one, taking into consideration the cultures of each of the students in the classroom first. To differ this layer from the rest, the world layer should then branch out to musics of cultures that are not represented in the overall population of the community layer. By doing this, a more general world music education can be achieved while still engaging the students emotional attachment to the material and content of the class. Elliott (1995) said, “music education is not a neutral enterprise. Music curricula can and do function socially and culturally in powerful ways” (p. 293).

It is important for educators to remember that we are first and foremost educators of people. Music is our trade, but most importantly we are educating the person. As students and teachers, we exist now, and therefore the order in which the curriculum is developed should be most relevant to who the people are *now*. To better understand who the people are in the classroom, I also propose a theory about the Multiple Layers of Culture and the concept of cultures *within* cultures.

## Culture within Culture

What is culture? Elliott (1995) stated:

*Culture is a term that various fields of inquiry apply in various ways. In addition to its use in biology and physical development, the term culture is often used by sociologists and anthropologists in the process-sense to mean a people's ongoing way of life, including the language, customs, and preferences of a particular social group. In this sense, most (if not all) people are "cultured" because everyone belongs to, or is inducted into, some human society. (p. 185)*

During the development of multicultural curriculum we must take into account the very people we are teaching and their cultures. Because many cultures are present in the classroom, it is necessary to understand how the students perceive information and how they hear music. Elliott (1995) also stated,

*"Listening is mediated by cultural beliefs, associations, and values. We understand particular sounds as tones-for-us (or not) because we construct musical patterns in relation to culture-specific principles of musicing and listening" (p. 89).*

For this reason, we must look deeply as educators into the cultural values of our students and the musical practices of those cultures. Elliott (1990) described multiculturalism as referring to "the coexistence of unlike groups in a common social system. In this sense, 'multiculturalism' means 'culturally diverse'" (p. 151). When investigating the culture of a person, one will find that a person is not so simple. Multi-dimensional complexities exist within a culture. A culture can exist *within* a culture. For example, the Greek culture is different from the Greek-American culture. Although these two cultures are similar, because one comes from the other, the existence of the host nation (America) in Greek-American culture contributes to the development of cultural differences within the base culture. The more generations the base culture exists within the host nation, the more the culture shifts towards the host rather than the base. Often we see this idea in the foods of a culture. For example, Mexican food is always Mexican food, however, Mexican food in the United States is *different* from Mexican food in Mexico. It is this same logic that I am applying to the person and to music. From my first example, a Greek-American is *different* from a Greek. The culture is different because the understanding of "local" customs and traditions are not as present when a host nation is factored into the equation. Also, the idea of "local" customs is a changing factor since the presence of a host nation has changed the *location* of the base culture. Applying this logic to music, music within Greek culture

will be different from music in Greek-American culture. Harmonic and melodic structures will vary. For example, in the Rembetika music (Greek blues) the bouzouki player often improvises. Due to the history of this music, which I do not have time or space to explain here, the improvisation usually utilizes Middle Eastern modes. With the host nation now as a factor, the improvising musician has more choices of scales. For example, commonly Greek-American bouzouki players will use pentatonic scales and include the “blue” note, which is traditional of American blues. This practice, however, is uncommon in the Rembetika music of Greece and therefore shows a difference in the musical practices of one culture and the musical practices of that same culture in a hosting nation. Elliott (1990) stated,

*Culture is generated by the interplay between a group's beliefs about their physical, social, and metaphysical circumstances and the linked bodies of skills and knowledge they develop, standardize, preserve, and modify to meet the intrinsic and extrinsic needs of the group. (p. 149)*

The existence of the host nation with the base culture alters the culture and musical culture the more generations the base exists in the host nation. However, someone whose heritage is not of the base culture will not necessarily notice the existence of the host nation's cultural influence on the base culture. More likely, a person of the base culture from the base nation who is newly introduced to the culture of the hosting nation will notice the existence of these differences between base culture and base-host culture.

There is also the factor of mixed cultures. For example, a person of Brazilian decent that mixes with a person of Italian decent. The home culture is immediately fused between the two. Add a different hosting nation as a factor, for example the United States, and we have the fused culture interplaying with the culture of a society. Borrowing a concept from set theory in mathematics, if we think of this as a Venn diagram inside a circle it may become clearer. The circle on the left of the Venn diagram represents the Brazilian culture while the circle on the right represents the Italian culture. The middle connected section represents the interplay between the two cultures. The circle surrounding the Venn diagram represents the culture of the hosting nation, the United States. This picture creates an even more complex three-dimensional concept of culture that would be Brazilian-Italian-American. In terms of musical practice, a third dimension has been added to the equation as previously explained.

Elliott (1995) wrote, “different societies and different groups within societies tend to identify themselves with particular kinds of music” (p. 197). Lets now incorporate the idea that groups in a society within a society identify with particular kinds of music. Lets also incorporate the idea that cultures within a culture of a society within a society identify with particular kinds of music. If a cultural group identifies with a particular kind of music, does a cultural group within a culture identify with the same particular kind of music, a similar music, a different music, or a variation of all the types of music mentioned? The layers that I propose educators need to consider are divided into three groups: Group 1 consists of the layers: culture of the classroom, culture of each student and culture of school; Group 2: culture of neighborhood, culture of city/county and culture of state/region; and Group 3: culture of nation, culture of neighboring nations and culture of world. This is a coarse



structure of the layers to maintain a tangible division. Establishing a coarse structure upon the layers is necessary such that the demarcation lines are better highlighted. The weight of this proposal requires way more explanation than I have time or space to write here, so I have grouped these individual pieces and only briefly explain each. This process should be executed in a multidimensional way, where looking at many layers at the same time is necessary. This is not to be treated as a linear process.

### *Multiple Layers of Culture*

I purposefully list the considerations of cultural layers from smallest to largest, for it is more important to make sure we are educating the people in front of us, rather than a “national” or “world” ideal first. I start with the culture of the classroom over the culture of each student because we cannot begin to understand the culture of each student without examining the whole classroom first. Once the culture of the classroom is assessed the culture of each student should be looked at. This includes all of the previously mentioned ideas about cultures within cultures.

The culture of the school and the culture of the neighborhood should then be looked at as contributing factors to the culture of the classroom, which is all determined by the culture of the student and community society. What are the musics belonging to the overall makeup of the school and the neighborhood? Knowledge of the population of the neighborhood will contribute to knowledge of school, unless in areas where secondary students can choose and apply to which schools they attend. In this case, the culture of the city/county should be more carefully examined.

Knowledge of the culture of the city/county allows the educator to understand how the many cultural groups in the overall society interact and coexist. The cultural groups within the city/county makeup the societies within the larger society. This interplay then creates one overall culture, belonging to the city/county and is comprised of the mixture of all the cultural elements of the groups in coexistence. On a larger scale, this also exists for the culture of the state/region. Each state/region has its own general culture, which is comprised of all of the elements contributing to the composition of the culture of the city/county, neighborhoods, schools and population. The spiral effect here is that students begin learning about the society and culture right outside their door, rather than a culture in a country they have no connection to or previous knowledge of. By this time we begin to reach the culture at the national level.

The national level is often where “national standards” are applied. I will not refer or reflect in any way on the national standards of education or music education. Instead, I continue on the path outwards to broader multicultural curriculum development. Students should learn the music that is identified with the national culture. However, the culture of a nation is comprised of the cultures from each state/region, city/county, neighborhood and so on, including the factor of time. It is for this reason that I begin at the most specific place for multicultural curriculum: the classroom. The culture of the nation is defined by the societies and cultures within each state/region, city/county, all the way down to the classroom. It is here that the coexistence of all the represented groups forms one overall culture.

The final two layers of this multidimensional multicultural curriculum development theory are: culture of neighboring nations and culture of world. The cultures of neighboring nations and several world nations will be present in the classroom culture from the start.

Therefore, they will most likely have already been taken into consideration. Once incorporated into the curriculum, I suggest that not represented world cultures then be incorporated into the curriculum. By incorporating these cultures last, students will have already achieved a sufficient amount of information about the cultures around them, thus achieving the goal of better understanding the world and society around them. This process will allow students to become adequate citizens of *their* societies across *all* layers. Elliott (1995) wrote:

*Listeners come to hear musical patterns as tones-for-them-as musical patterns expressive of their social affiliations, homelands, beliefs, values, cultural convictions, and ideals. Hence a fundamental enjoyment for many listeners is the match that occurs between individual cultural-ideological beliefs or values and individually cognized musical expressions of these beliefs or values. This matching of knowledge and musical challenge not only results in self-knowledge and enjoyment, but tends to place or locate listeners in definite contexts of social-cultural communities.*  
(p. 192)

Keeping students engaged and connected with the course material is necessary in creating a successful classroom environment. Elliott (1990) explained, “to ‘live’ a music culture...students must participate in or *make* a music culture” (p. 158). By making a music culture and learning of the social-cultural communities surrounding them, students have the ability to engage in an encompassing atmosphere in the classroom.

## The Evolving Curriculum

Elliott (1995) tells us that:

*Practical curriculum making holds that the most important solutions to curriculum problems will not be found in highly specific written plans of the abstract conjuring of curriculum theorists. Solutions will be found, instead, in the professional reflections and judgments of individual teachers engaged in specific teaching learning situations.* (p. 254)

The theory that I have provided certainly leaves room for wonder about the ability of implementation. The teacher in the specific situation needs to have the ability to maneuver through any set of curriculum standards in order to more highly tailor to the educational needs of the students. Things change over time. If societies change over time, and the students in the classroom change over time, then the curriculum should change over time as well. I propose that the curriculum be allowed to evolve with societies and cultures to better stay in touch and up to date with these changes. Since the theory I have proposed is meant to initially take all things considered in the present tense, this theory allows the curriculum to evolve with the societies in which it desires to be implemented. How long should it take for the students to cover all of the desired material that can be drawn from this theory? The answer is, however long the teacher has, needs, or wishes to implement a

multicultural unit of study or curriculum. If the music class is a quarter or half a school year, then this theory should be condensed to only the most important musical aspects. This is something that should be left to the judgment of the teacher to decide. This theory merely provides a framework in which to maneuver when planning. In a performing arts course, this theory could be applied over several years, while in a general music course the theory would have to be more condensed if the time frame is more constricting.

Music is not just a present tense subject though. Music has a long history and that history is relevant to the understanding of music creations today. So how does time factor into the equation? The concept of time can then be applied to the Multiple Layers of Society and the Multiple Layers of Culture theories by going through each layer as previously explained in the present tense but in a backward spiral throughout history. This will allow the teacher to cover all relevant information while covering music throughout history.

## Conclusion

Society, culture, and human beings are complex entities that cannot be summarized in a few words. All three together need to be looked at when developing a multicultural curriculum. However, these concepts are not simple, and therefore need to be examined fully before engaging in the educational process. Having students learn about each other's cultures and learn to perform each other's music allows students to engage in an encompassing environment in the classroom and truly prepares students to enter society with a better understanding of their environment. Understanding that society and culture are multidimensional concepts allows the educator to plan curriculum in a multi-layer way, which suits the purpose of the education we wish to provide our students.

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