

**[00:00:00.46] - Speaker 1**

Hello, my name is Tierra Louis, and I want to discuss how representation is important in curriculum and content for our students. So let's start with a quote. Representation is the use of language and images to create meanings about people, places, and things. It can be either reflective or intentional. Reflective representation emulates pre-existing meanings. It reflects meanings already understood. Did you know that many schools in the United States lack curriculum that represents the diverse backgrounds of their students or highlight multiple perspectives on America's complex history? That is a big problem for minority students because they are unable to fully connect to what they are learning. Does that resonate with you? It resonates with me. I can still remember sitting in school as a child, flipping through textbooks because I couldn't scroll on a computer, didn't have laptops or tablets easily accessible because it wasn't a thing just yet. However, I didn't see myself in those lessons. The only times diversity was mentioned was during Black History Month, Martin Luther King Jr. Day, or a quick lesson on slavery. For the rest of the year, my story and the stories of so many others were just invisible.

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I wasn't able to see myself as an astronaut or a teacher or a lawyer because those things were not presented to me. Fast forward to today, I became a teacher and I realized something powerful. Students need to see themselves, not just in the words they read, but in the imagery and examples we use. Research shows that when children see themselves in stories, it builds shared values, empathy, cultural understanding and appreciation for differences. Here's the challenge. When students don't see themselves represented, they feel invisible. Why do they feel invisible? Because they simply don't see themselves in the curriculum that they're supposed to be learning and that they're supposed to be being taught. They don't feel equal. The result? They have lower self-esteem, a weaker sense of belonging, and the heart-breaking belief that their identities don't matter. That means their culture doesn't matter, who they are doesn't matter, what shows and represents them doesn't matter, and we need to change that. So I've had the opportunity to transition from teaching to working into educational technology as an intellectual property acquisition specialist, where I get to research imagery for the curriculum and the content that is being created in-house.

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At our company, we create curriculum for schools worldwide, ELA, math, science, and social studies. And in my role, to make sure the imagery and content reflects all students, every race, every community, community in every socioeconomic background. So that is how we can connect with our students. It's through imagery. Let them literally see themselves in the text, see pictures

of a variety of backgrounds, a variety of races, a variety of cultures, so they can be able to connect with everyone. With the implementation of different demographics and different backgrounds and cultural backgrounds and socioeconomic statuses, it's important for us to track what we research. However, the current system that we are using is not the greatest. That is why we need to integrate AI into our tracking system so we can be able to identify the race and ethnicity more accurately because the human eye can't always do it alone. Artificial intelligence will help us track demographics more fairly and ensure that representation is balanced across our content. So the goal is for balance. There are benefits to having representation and imagery for our students to view. So Some of the benefits include open-mindedness. Students become more open-minded by learning from multiple perspectives.

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Empathy. They develop empathy, reducing prejudice and growing into more compassionate adults. Understanding of Lessons. They gain a deeper understanding of lessons when learning alongside peers with different experiences. And more importantly, confidence. Representation builds confidence. Students feel seen, valued, valued and proud of who they are. There are many digital tools that can help with student representation. However, we're going to dive into two. Dreambox. Dreambox learning provides a fun, personalized experience for students to learn math and reading through differentiation and personalized learning. And ISL learning. It provides personalized learning for pre-K through 12th grade for multiple subjects, including Spanish. So the The main word that I want to stick out to you all is personalized. It's able to personalize learning so that comes with the culture, that comes with demographics, that includes being seen. So if they can have personalization, they can connect and learn better. With every implementation of innovation, there are action steps that needs to be taken. In this case, action steps needs to be taken from the EdTech Company and from the teachers. For the As an ed tech company, they need to be able to leverage AI responsibly. That means use AI to assist demographic tracking, but of course, still pair with human oversight.

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Also have diverse content selection, which is what I'm still doing, which is actively sourcing images, stories, and examples that represent a broad range of cultures and races. And of course, seek community input. Partner with educators, parents, and students. Take surveys to to be exactly what they would like. For the teachers, they need to be able to integrate diverse materials into their lessons. They need to foster discussions on diversity, which means to facilitate conversations that promote empathy, open-mindedness, and respect for differences. Lastly, advocate for representation. Share feedback with the EdTech Company and school leaders when curriculum content lacks balance so we can continue to work with each other. My journey started

as a student who rarely saw themselves in a textbook. Today, I get to help change that by selecting imagery and content that reflect a wide range of races, cultures, and backgrounds. I'm working toward a future where all students feel included. Will it be 100% inclusion possible? Maybe not. But with human intention and the help of AI, we can get closer. Will you implement the change to have better representation in our curriculum and content for our students? I hope so.