

How Are We Alike And How Are We Different?

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Creating an anti-biased, multicultural classroom is about building a community of children and adults, a place where everyone is accepted and can feel safe being who they are and what they are. But it is more than a simple community. It is a philosophy that includes awareness of cultural and ethnic diversity, gender, socio-economic status, physical challenges and age. It is an attitude that is open to differences and encourages inclusion of race, ethnicity, abilities and beliefs. It is about building self esteem and awareness of beliefs and biases both personally and with children and adults with whom you work.

There are several steps in beginning this process:

1. Personal Awareness
 - a. Define your biases and prejudices. Decide how you want to handle those biases and prejudices.
 - b. Look at your personal culture. How your culture is the same and how is it different from the families you work with.
 - c. Analyze how you feel about differences and how you might start talking with others about those differences.
2. Evaluate your Classroom Environment
 - a. What happens in your classroom to make differences okay and a subject for discussion? What community building experiences occur in your classroom?
 - b. Do you plan activities and provide materials during the day to explore differences and promote discuss about differences?
 - c. Does your classroom environment reflect the multicultural aspect of your families and your community at large? Is this multicultural viewpoint reflected in the various learning centers such as writing center and dramatic play as well as in pictures, posters, books, even in paint colors?
3. Beginning the process towards a multicultural, anti-biased classroom...a year long process that begins with each new class, using your classroom evaluation
 - a. Make a plan for an inclusive, multicultural, anti-biased curriculum
 - b. Make appropriate changes and/or additions to your environment
 - c. Finds ways to get to know your families cultures. Invite parents and/or extended family (such as grandparents, etc.) in to share their culture such as food, needlework, carpentry, books, stories, etc.
 - d. Be open to change. Continue to learn about multicultural, anti-biased curriculum.

Resources:

- National Association for Multicultural Education www.nameorg.org
- www.Tolerance.org
- www.Diversitystore.org
- New Horizons for Learning www.newhorizon.org
- Article...*Welcoming Diversity-Or Are We?*, Children and Families, Vol. XXIII, No.2, Summer 2009
- Book *Anti-biased Curriculum-Tools for Empowering Young Children*, Louise Derman-Sparks (NAEYC)
- Book *Roots and Wings, Affirming Culture* Stacey York, Redleaf Press
- Book *Alike and Different: Exploring Our Humanity with Young Children*, Edited by Bonnie Neugebauer, Exchange Press

Goals of Multicultural Education

- Recognize the beauty, value and contribution of each child.
- Foster high self esteem and a positive self concept in children.
- Teach children about their culture.
- Introduce children to other cultures through experience.
- Provide children with a positive experience exploring similarities and differences.
- Increase children's abilities to respect other cultures through knowledge and experience.
- Help children to be a group member.
- Help children live happily and cooperatively in a diverse world. Help children notice and do something about unfair behavior and events.

Questions for Changing your Classroom Culture

- How do you deal with sameness and differences?
- Friendship, does everyone need to be "friends"? What might be a more realistic approach?
- How do you encourage and promote your classroom family cultures?
- What do you do regularly to promote community in your classroom?
- How do you handle difficult children? Do you feel differently about them than the other children or do you see helping them with their difficult behavior as a part of their individual goals?
- How is a bully handled? Do you encourage and model for the bully ways to play with children other than bullying
- Do you confront children on their biased remarks and behavior as it occurs in the classroom?
- What is reflected in your dramatic play center? Does it promote sameness and differences? Are their props and materials for girls and boys to play dress-up?
- What do your puzzles, books, toys and pictures represent?
- Do art supplies provide materials for children to reflect their ethnicity? Are People color markers, crayons, pencils or paint available daily?
- Have you checked your class environment and removed materials that reflect negative stereotypes including books and posters?
- Do you approach culture like a tourist, only celebrating holidays or 'exotic' practices?
- Do you act in a way that is anti-biased and multicultural in your classroom?

Resources for excellent self assessment checklists:

* A checklist to promote cultural and linguistic competency is available from Tawara D. Goods at the National Center for Cultural Competence,
www11.georgetown.edu/research/gucchd/nccc/documents/Checklist.EIEC.doc.pdf

* Creating an anti-biased learning environment, Anti-Defamation League,
www.adi.org/education.anti-bias.pdf