

TEACHING CULTURALLY DIVERSE STUDENTS: RECOMMENDATIONS FOR TEACHERS

Create a physical environment that affirms differences. Consider using pictures, posters, art, books, maps, flags, etc.

Create an emotionally positive classroom climate. This type of setting enables children to feel worthwhile and cared for, despite their cultural differences. A caring classroom lets children relax and focus on learning.

Promote positive peer interactions among students in your class. If needed, devote class time to developing social skills and to role-playing various positive interactions. Conduct class meetings which emphasize the interplay of the members of the classroom community.

Emphasize unity through human similarities to reduce racism, prejudice, and discrimination.

Maintain high expectations for all students. Often children with accents or dialects are considered to be less academically competent. This misconception can have unfortunate effects. Children who are expected to fail often do. Genuinely believe that all students can learn and achieve. Regard students as individuals first, with membership in a cultural group as only one factor in understanding that individual.

Emphasize cooperative learning in your classroom. Children of different cultures will have opportunities to learn together, and to know each other as learners and as people.

Foster critical thinking in your class discussions. Encourage students to see issues from multiple perspectives. This process enables students to respect and to view more favorable other points of view, including those of culturally different students.

Welcome parent volunteers into your classroom. Culturally different parents will have the opportunity to see how you conduct your classroom, and their children will see them as valued and accepted members of the school community.

Ask students to share. Encourage them to speak from their own experiences and share information about their family's ethnic background to increase cultural awareness.

Familiarize yourself with basic cultural differences. You might begin by talking to parents of children in your class. Often, parents will allude to the way they were brought up, including how they were expected to behave in school. Use this information in your teaching environment. For example, Native American children are not accustomed to asking permission to do things that are part of normal living, such as using the bathroom. While this can create a conflict with authority figures in a traditional school environment, being familiar with this difference can alleviate problems. Work together to establish

classroom rules that may be different from home rules, and explain the reason for the differences.

Become acquainted with community resources (people and organizations) in the area that can provide knowledge about nations or ethnic groups.

Use ethnographic procedures to learn about culturally diverse students. Observe students in settings outside your classroom.

When holidays are approaching, make sure to include a variety of holidays and celebrations in your curriculum. For example, the winter months can prove very helpful for introducing students to the values of the African community by learning about the celebration of Kwanzaa, the Jewish community by studying Hanukkah, and the Christian community by studying Christmas. Researching these holidays from a historical perspective is a nice way to incorporate the lessons into a Social Studies curriculum. This is also a wonderful opportunity to get parents involved, because many of them will gladly take pride in their culture and volunteer their time to share the culture's reasons for the celebration. Take care that these lessons are not presented as religious, but more as cultural lessons.

Learn students' names and pronounce them correctly. Recognize names with unique meanings.

Use a communication style that is consistent with the values of students' cultures. For example, Mexican-American children need to teacher to establish a carino, or caring relationship, with them. Reinforcing norms of politeness and respect, as defined by the child's culture, is effective in creating this environment, which leads to more learning. Each culture has its own learning style and standards. Taking the time to identify these different styles will help you tailor your curriculum to your students.

When children speak a language other than English as their primary means of communication, it is best to teach them in a bilingual environment until a mastery of the secondary language's spoken and written word has been accomplished. Once in a regular classroom environment, having the children share knowledge of their first language with others is an effective means of breaking down cultural barriers between students, and can be fun too!

Include second language learning in the classroom for all students. Students can learn a few words in another language, or even learn how to count to ten. Incorporating other languages in the classroom validates bilingual students, and expands the academic horizon of the monolingual students in your class.

Evaluate teaching materials for bias, and adjust materials accordingly. For example, if studying famous scientists, include a racial mix, a nationality mix, a gender mix, etc. By discussing the differences in each person's backgrounds, students will end up seeing the similarities of strength, perseverance, and dedication to one's work. The cultural

differences will become less important, and will therefore reduce the amount of cultural tension among the students in the classroom.

Have literature from different cultures and ethnicities, and time-periods available for free reading. Lists of multicultural books, listed by grade level, are available from IRA, as well as numerous other services. Include examples of different family styles in reading materials. Not everyone lives in traditional families. Also, try to avoid stereotypes in reading materials.

Because the background knowledge of each child is different, do not assume that all of the children will have heard of a “common” topic before. For example, some children may not be familiar with various farm animals, while others may have had no experience with city transit services. When reading different texts, discuss the topic to develop a basis for learning. The ETR (experience-text-relationship) method, which emphasizes discussion of background knowledge prior to reading, has proven effective with culturally different students.

Be aware of cultural differences as a source of problems in learning to read. Accents and dialects seriously affect a child’s ability to read and write, especially in the early stages of these processes. Students should not be interrupted during the oral reading process; corrections are best done after the reading is over. When a word needs to be sounded out, it may not sound the way the child usually says it. Find ways of accommodating for these differences, like discussing the appropriate times and places to speak standard (businesslike) English.

Take your class into the community. One way to emphasize the validity of diverse cultures is to participate in the local community. Planned field trips and interviews of local community members are two examples of community involvement.

Additional Resources:

- Bennett, C. (1995). *Comprehensive multicultural education: Theory and practice*. Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon.
- Frisby, C. (1997). Ethnic and racial diversity. In G.G. Bear & K.M. Minke, Children’s needs II: Development, problems, and alternatives. Bethesda, MD: National Association of School Psychologists.
- Gardner, P. (2001). *Teaching and learning in the multicultural classroom*. London, Eng: David Fulton Publishing.
- Miranda, A. (2002). Best practices in increasing cross-cultural competence. In A. Thomas & J. Grimes, Best practices in school psychology IV. Bethesda, MD: National Association of School Psychologists.
- Rasool, J. & Curtis, C. (2000). *Multicultural education in middle and secondary classrooms: Meeting the challenge of diversity and change*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.

www.edchange.org/multicultural/papers/buildingblocks.html: The First Steps of Creating a Multicultural Classroom.

www.ericdigests.org/1995-2/diversity.htm: Valuing Diversity in the Classroom.

www.prel.org/teams/multicultural-ed.asp: Multicultural Education Resources.

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