

Pathways to Cultural Competence

Teachers

4 Underlying Principles

1. **Teacher Reflection**

- A) Reflect on how teachers' individual values, beliefs, and practices regarding children's learning are influenced by aspects of their own personal culture and linguistic experience.
- B) Reflect on how the programs within which teachers work are influenced by culture and language.

2. **Intentional Practice**

- A) Identify shared childrearing goals with families; align your classroom decision-making and practices with these goals.
- B) Plan ahead to address potential language or cultural barriers.

3. **Strength-Based Perspective**

- A) Acknowledge that teachers can learn from families.
- B) Recognize that diversity enriches and provides depth to the overall learning experience.
- C) Understand that different does not mean dysfunctional.
- D) Respect and support the preservation of children and families' home languages, cultural backgrounds, and childrearing beliefs, goals, and practices.
- E) Incorporate aspects of children's cultural and linguistic backgrounds in daily learning activities. Highlight strengths that exist across cultures.

4. **Open, Ongoing, Two-Way Communication** between teachers and families.

- A) Ensure that families have opportunities to give input to teachers. Families should not solely be recipients of information.
- B) Plan ahead to address language barriers.

Teacher Checklist¹

Concept 1: "Children are nested in families."

- Know the primary caregivers for the children in your program and do not assume they are mothers and fathers.
- Take time to learn about each family's aspirations for their child.
- Encourage two-way communication with families by (a) scheduling regular conference sessions or informal gatherings, (b) utilizing drop-off and pick-up times as opportunities to communicate, and (c) agreeing upon effective modes of communication (e.g., notes, phone, email).
- Ensure that families have opportunities to give input to teachers (i.e., they should not solely be recipients of information). Plan ahead to address language barriers.

¹ = Adapted from "Are We Supporting Diversity? A Tool for Reflection and Dialogue" Work/Family Directions, Inc. and California Tomorrow, Copyright 1999, Revised 2006 by Hedy N. Chang.

- Provide families with information and resources about topics the children are investigating during the day in your classroom.
- Welcome all interested family members to meetings, program events, and activities regarding the child.
- Conduct home visits, if families are comfortable, and learn from families about children's home environments, interests, early language experiences, and preferred learning styles. Integrate this information into classroom learning activities.
- Greet all families at drop-off and pick-up throughout the year using non-verbal and verbal communication.
- Create space and opportunities within the classroom for families to visit, spend time, and exchange information about their children.

Concept 2: "Identify shared goals among families and staff."

- Communicate to families that your goal is to have a partnership with them in which each of you can learn from each other.
- Identify families' short and long term goals for their children. Align their goals with classroom objectives and developmentally appropriate practice. Incorporate families' goals into classroom curriculum where appropriate.
- Discuss with family members differences in childrearing beliefs and identify strategies for negotiating different approaches.
- Include families in making decisions related to their children's education.
- Explore and support meaningful ways in which family members can contribute to the learning of the class.

Concept 3: "Authentically incorporate cultural traditions and history in the classroom."

- Highlight the presence of all families and children in the classroom. Example strategies include hanging pictures on the walls of children and families or highlighting their presence in classroom activities.
- Invite family members to share information about their cultural backgrounds (e.g., history, traditions, and home language).
- Equip classroom with educational materials (e.g., books, posters, utensils, kitchen & apparel items) that reflect value for diverse languages, ethnicities, and cultures.
- Encourage families to share artifacts, music, stories, or other culturally-relevant information in the classroom.
- Represent relevant historical events and traditions of children, families, and their communities in classroom daily activities.
- Teach nursery rhymes, songs, extended vocabulary, and early literacy skills that originate from and are practiced in the cultures represented in your classroom and community.
- Incorporate into the curriculum cultural artifacts and music that reflect the cultures of the children served by the program.

Concept 4: “Acknowledge child development as a culturally-driven, ongoing process that should be supported across contexts in a child’s life (e.g., school and home).”

- Invite families to define their ethnicity or culture; do not assume based upon appearances.
- Use a variety of appropriate resources such as books and stories to expose children to role models from their own and other cultural backgrounds.
- Ask role models from diverse cultural backgrounds to visit or volunteer in the classroom. Role-models may come from the community or may be family members of children in the program.

Concept 5: “Individuals and institutions’ practices are embedded in culture.”

- Encourage co-workers, families, and children to learn about each other’s racial, linguistic, and cultural backgrounds by having a variety of year-round activities. Activities could include sharing songs, stories, finger plays, and dandling rhymes, or creating international cookbooks with the families represented in the classroom.
- Interact with children and families outside of the school setting in the communities where they live.
- Ask families for feedback on classroom activities, policies, and materials. Use this information to modify classroom practices where appropriate.

Concept 6: “Ensure decisions and policies embrace home languages and dialects.”

- Use children’s home language for multiple learning purposes, not just in giving directions or managing behavior.
- Find ways to communicate with children and parents in their home language (e.g., translators, interpreters, gestures).
- Encourage children to speak their home language to other children, staff, or parents from the same backgrounds.
- Provide opportunities for children to learn curriculum in home language (e.g., book reading, small groups, and personal stories).
- Correctly pronounce and know how to spell each child’s name.
- Make available books, tapes/CDs, songs, print, and other materials in children’s home languages.

Concept 7: “Ensure policies and practices embrace and respect families’ cultural values, attitudes, and beliefs toward learning.”

- Understand the policies and resources your program has in place on respecting diversity, addressing bias, and communicating with families in their home languages. Be a resource of knowledge on these policies for families and colleagues.

- Share strategies and ideas with colleagues about how they can support children’s identity, honor home language, and address issues of bias. Use your colleagues as resources for addressing issues of race, language, and culture.
- Work together with colleagues to create daily classroom activities that integrate appreciation and respect for diversity (e.g., songs, stories, finger plays, rhymes).
- Collaborate with colleagues on ideas for ensuring that the classroom and center environment reflects an appreciation for diversity. Examples include (a) developing a collage of heroes from cultures represented in the program, (b) display flags of all countries represented in the program, or (c) creating learning settings used by different cultures.

Concept 8: “Equalize balances of power; counter stereotyping and bias through intentional teaching.”

- Invite role models across various language, cultural, and racial backgrounds to lead classroom activities with children. It is important for children not to associate one single language, race, or culture as the most powerful.
- Guide children in recognizing stereotypes, stereotypic images, and bias toward other language, racial, and cultural groups. Correct- if applicable- any misperceptions that children in your class may have toward other groups.
- Intervene if a child displays a biased response to another child or staff member.
- Teach children how they can support each other and themselves in face of bias.
- Self-reflect on any potential discomfort or stereotypes you may have toward other language, racial, and cultural groups.

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