

Families and Communities in the Classroom & Curriculum

Here is a list of some practical ways to integrate the child's family (culture) and community into the classroom.

Curriculum

1. All about me poster (learning about families in at the beginning of the program year)
2. Parent questionnaire at enrollment about child's family/home
3. Creating culturally sensitive communication (considering all family types)
4. Show and Tell
5. Career days – ask parents to come in
6. Holidays around the world
7. Food activities (foods around the world)
8. Serving culturally diverse foods on the menu
9. Cultural materials, activities or games (i.e., Punchinello)
10. Creating culturally sensitive take-home activities (considering education levels and linguistic abilities)
11. Hold activities and events where all family members are welcome
12. Be sensitive to mother'/father's day activities & projects for children that have a father/mother figure
13. Invite speakers from community to talk to/engaged with children (zoo, police, health department, poison control, etc.)

Classroom

1. Turn the dramatic play area into a community store (i.e., Winn Dixie)
2. Add menus, or fast food containers to the dramatic play area
3. Turn the writing center into a community book store or library
4. Turn the classroom into a community location (i.e., Jax Beach)
5. Use culturally diverse music
6. Bring in cultural instruments for music time
7. Make cultural crafts, instruments or toys or dolls
8. Use dual language labels in the classroom (English, Spanish)
9. Teach dual languages in the classroom (English, sign language)

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.

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.

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