

Valuing Diversity in Your Classroom

None of us is born with prejudice, but children learn bias at a very early age. According to Dr. John Huxsahl, child psychiatrist at the Mayo Clinic, children may notice skin color as early as the age of two; begin stereotyping by age four; and develop prejudice by age seven. As a teacher, you can help promote understanding and teach tolerance. Here are some tips:

- ❖ **Actions speak louder than words.** Ensure that pictures in the classroom represent diverse cultures. Make available a wide variety of books celebrating diversity in your classroom and school libraries. Gather artifacts from different cultures to display in your room.
- ❖ **Invite guest speakers who reflect the diversity of the school and society.** Don't just invite an African-American lawyer when it's Black History month; invite her when your discussing careers or other relevant subjects.
- ❖ **Walk the talk.** Show that you value differences and model respect for all people. Live the belief that all children can learn.
- ❖ **Weave diversity into all aspects of the curriculum.** Special weeks and months are a great opportunity to celebrate, but don't isolate diversity to a once-a-year event.
- ❖ **Implement activities that raise cultural awareness among your students.** There are many examples at the web sites listed on this handout.
- ❖ **Be sensitive about making a child feel different.** For example, think about your single-parent families when planning special events or sending a message home.
- ❖ **Celebrate the individuality of each child.** Give children the opportunity to share their cultures, customs, and holidays.

- ❖ **Consciously involve minority parents in committees, planning parties, and etc.**
- ❖ **Don't assume that everyone has the same values and beliefs.** Take time to learn about your students' cultures. How does the culture impact student learning and achievement? For example, in some cultures, it's impolite to make eye contact.
- ❖ **Understand that different cultures have a different way of communicating.** For example, some parents are not comfortable with student-led conferences because they believe that young children should not have that kind of authority. Other parents may bring the extended family, including grandparents, along for an important meeting.
- ❖ **Make sure key information is translated if parents in your classroom do not read English.**
- ❖ **Learn about religious holidays.** Don't schedule major exams, special events, field trips, and etc., on religious holidays of students who have other religious beliefs.
- ❖ **Use current events as opportunities to talk about stereotypes and diversity.** How are different ethnic groups portrayed in the media?
- ❖ **Take a class in culturally responsive teaching.** Learn to identify your own biases and to understand how culture influences how children learn.

Useful Web Sites for Tolerance Education

- Southern Poverty Law Center: www.tolerance.org. This group is also the publisher of *Teaching Tolerance Magazine*, found at www.teachingtolerance.org
- Anti-Defamation League: www.adl.org
- Facing History and Ourselves: www.facing.org