

Foundations for Teaching Young Children Diversity
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Overview

The overall goal of my curriculum is to help students learn how to get along with people of diverse backgrounds. I want my students to recognize and accept the differences among people. My students live and attend school with all African American students. The students I teach lack opportunities to interact with people from a mix of cultural backgrounds. Their school environment does not represent the real world.

As an educator I feel I have a significant role in teaching my students to respect diversities. The United States is swiftly becoming a part of the world community in which multicultural knowledge and understanding will be crucial to our future leaders (Van Tassel-Baska 1994). Our students need to be ready to face these challenges in the twenty-first century. They are our future leaders.

During the first half of this century, the national aim was to absorb emigrants into the American cultural as quickly as possible Tiedt (1995). This melting-pot theory has become inappropriate as we come to recognize cultural diversity as strength and not a weakness.

Most of my student will not have any opportunities to interact with a diverse population until they reach high school. By this time they already have preconceived notions of diverse people. The interaction and knowledge of diversity needs to be way before this. High school should not be their first encounter with a diverse population.

I plan to teach a spiraling curriculum which reaches up and out so that students remain proud of themselves and their families while learning to respect the rights of others. In order to achieve this, the curriculum must begin with a study of self to help students become aware of their own cultural background and

belief. By beginning the curriculum this way, students will discover that diversity is fascinating, not threatening. I plan to use multicultural literature that depicts ethnic groups and other elements of diversity to teach diversity among my students. Literature is one of the most powerful sources of ideas, personal values, and wisdom (Norton 1995). Donna Norton says literature plays an important role in helping people learn and appreciate their very own cultural heritages. Carefully selected literature can illustrate the contributions and values of the many cultures. Literature is one of those common denominators found across cultures. We can learn about the ideas, the beliefs, the values, and struggles of daily life in any country around the world through literature.

Joan Glazer (1995) has listed four ways that literature promotes diversity: (1) help children see that other people also share emotions and feelings just like they do, (2) facilitate the exploration of feelings and emotions from a variety of perspectives, (3) show different ways to deal with emotions and feelings; and (4) demonstrate that at times what we might feel might be in conflict with our own emotions.

Rationale

When I look at today's schools I see resegregation occurring again, despite the nation's growing diversity. Census data show that, increasingly, there will be entire metropolitan areas and states with either no majority group or where the majority group will be Latinos or African Americans (2001), School Segregation on the Rise retrieved March 7, 2005 from the World Wide Web: <http://www.Researchmatters.harvard.edu>. White students are now the most segregated group in public schools-attending schools that on average are 80 percent white.

The Civil Rights Project report highlights the rapid racial transformation of U.S. schools. Since 1968, black student enrollment has increased nearly 30 percent and Latino student enrollment is up 283 percent. In contrast, public school enrollment of whites is down 17 percent. In every region of the country the school population has become less white and schools in the South and West have the highest concentrations of black and Latino students. These regions are approaching student populations where whites are in the minority. The Harvard study reports that, on average, white, black, and Latino students all attend schools in which the majority of the student body is composed of students of their own race.

This disturbing trend and lack of diversity among my students led to my decision to do my curriculum on diversity. Our generation of children have many challenges ahead of them. Never has the need for acceptance of diversity been more clearly evident in today's generation of students. There have been persistent

conflicts among people in getting along together, with resulting negative effects stemming from prejudice and discriminatory attitudes toward specific groups within our developing country. Children need to learn to succeed in a multiracial society and diverse college and work setting.

It was Thurgood Marshall who said that children who do not learn together will not know how to live together. As our nation grows increasingly diverse, there has never been a better opportunity to teach our children to learn to live respectfully together and benefit from one another's wisdom and experiences.

As an educator, I have a significant role to play in guiding my students to learn how to succeed in a multiracial society. I want my students to value diversity as well as human commonalities.

The students that I will be working with are third grade African American students. The class size will be 15-20 students including both genders. I will adapt my curriculum accordingly for any inclusive students, who are a part of special education or emotional disability.

This seminar will help me to be well prepared to infuse multicultural education throughout the curriculum because of its focus on cultural assimilation, acculturation, cultural conflict, prejudice, discrimination, race, racism, ethnocentrism, values, self-concept, social protest, socialization, intercultural communication, historical bias, power, social protest, collective struggle, colonialism, migration, and immigration. This seminar will also help to introduce me to multicultural/multiethnic units of instruction.

This unit will integrate very well with the curriculum for the Pittsburgh Public Schools. Part of the curriculum focuses on the diversity of ethnic groups in the local community, and the contributions made by members of diverse cultures.

Objective: There are various objectives for this unit. I will state them in this section, which also will include identifying the standards. The overall goal of education for diversity is teaching children to be productive members of a culturally eclectic society (Robles de Mele'ndez and Vesna Ostertag 1997).

- The students will respect, accept, and appreciate the rich diversity of our world's culture, our forms of expression and ways of being human.
- The students will identify "culture."
- The students will explore their own cultural identity by knowing their roots and sharing their pride and heritage with other.
- The students will make respect for diversity a core value.

- The students will read books that promote the understanding of different cultures.
- The students will respect and appreciate cultural diversity as characteristic of the population of the United States and of the world.
- The students will interact positively with diverse individuals regardless of race, gender, and or abilities.
- The students will role-play and empathize with the perspectives of different groups.
- All students demonstrate that they can work effectively with others.

The students will achieve these objectives by reading, research, writing assignments and class discussions. The objectives will be taught over a period of time.

These are the standards that will be addressed: **Communication 2, 3, 5 and 6.**

All students read and use a variety of methods to make sense of various kinds of complex texts.

All students respond orally and in writing to information and ideas gained by reading narrative and informational texts and use the information and ideas to make decisions and solve problems.

All students exchange information orally, including understanding and giving spoken instructions, asking and answering questions appropriately, and promoting effective group communications.

All students analyze and make critical judgments about all forms of communication and separating fact from opinion.

Citizenship 7 and 8

All students demonstrate skills of communicating, negotiating and communication, negotiating and cooperating with others.

All students demonstrate that they can work effectively with others.

Strategies

A classroom is a very important place of learning for young students. I will discuss strategies on how to build a classroom for a multicultural society. If you want your students to learn about diversity, you have to create a classroom environment that will guide the students to learn about diversity. The strategies I will discuss should become classroom practices. The multicultural classroom is a place where the teacher attempts to guide the young students through the process of learning to live with diversity. Teachers have to make their classrooms become exciting environments where learning about diversity can take place.

There are several resources that can help the teacher answer the question: “What characteristics of the classroom make it suitable for teaching about diversity?” I will emphasize the importance of several specific areas. As educators, we must realize and understand that diversity does exist. Humans are in the billions and we truly do come from all walks of life, all backgrounds.

- **Learning Materials**-Good multicultural classroom materials need to be free of biases, stereotypes, and misrepresentations regarding diversity.

Wilma Robles de Mele’ndez and Vesna Ostertag (1997) establish guidelines for selecting materials that include all the aspects of diversity. They recommend observing to determine if materials:

1. Present the contributions of groups other than European Americans; reflect a cross-cultural perspective of what women have contributed.
2. Portray people, including women, across socioeconomic classes and religions that are free of stereotypes.
3. Depict religious issues appropriately “when religion is integral to the context of the subject.”
4. Give socially balanced views of “famous people”; include the outstanding people from both the privileged and the working class.
5. Reflect the cultures and ethnicities of the classroom children and their community.
6. Exhibit and include the native languages present in the class.
7. Are at the developmental level of the children and offer challenges with opportunities to experience success.

- **Art**: Art serves the purpose of offering the children opportunities to explore the ways to use the materials to represent what they

perceive through their senses. Art is a powerful source for learning that can also facilitate learning about diversity. The colors of paint are the first art objects that should be changed. Adding more browns, tans, and black induces the child to notice other skin tones.

- **Literacy:** Literature is one of the most powerful sources of ideas, personal values, and wisdom. Carefully selected literature can illustrate the contributions and values of many cultures. We can learn about the ideas, the beliefs, the values, and struggles of daily life in any country around the world through literature.
- **Music and Movement Experiences:** Another of the universal traits that characterizes human culture is music and its counterpart, movement. Because of the appeal these activities have for the child, they also serve as an avenue of learning about themselves and about others.
- **Games and Play Activities:** Play is a natural and inherent characteristic of individuals found across cultures. Children respond spontaneously to any game-like activity. The role of play has a common learning strategy and a central channel for knowledge formation about the world. Educator Leonard Davidman (1997) believes play “enables children to grow out of their egocentric and ethnocentric picture of the world.” Play and the games children learn offer an excellent foundation for developing and increasing the awareness about human diversity.” He contends that the attributes of play make it a vital resource for teaching about diversity.

As teachers begin to create a classroom environment that will guide the students to learn about diversity, they should also consider developmentally appropriate content and curriculum. The content and curriculum should identify meaningful issues identified by the particular groups of which the children are members, and of the society at large, and should be integrated into the instructional content, as well. A content based on the interest of the child, the needs of society, and the concerns of the teacher is considered child-centered and integrated” (Shiman 1997). This same rules applies to selecting topics for teaching about diversity.

There are two things that are important for teachers who are trying to define the content of the multicultural curriculum.

1. First, accurately observe the actions and interactions of children in the learning areas.

2. Second, become a proactive teacher and bring the multicultural issues into the classroom. Discard any misleading and inaccurate views about children and consider them individuals capable of facing situations when appropriately presented.

Thematic teaching is also an appropriate way to develop curriculum for diversity. Theme-teaching is defined as “a student-centered, coherent, and holistic approach to learning through the study of broad themes rather than compartmentalized subject areas (Shiman 1997). Developed around the topics that are of interest to children, theme studies present an opportunity to create a curriculum that addresses the reality of the classroom. Theme teaching also places balanced attention on both the content and the process and encourages social interactions among the students. Most importantly, theme teaching provides students with an active process where the child takes the responsibility in finding sources, examining information, and arriving at conclusions.

Early childhood classrooms must become supportive environments in order to promote diversity. In this section I will examine what cognitive and developmental characteristics teachers must consider as they prepare the classroom experience for teaching diversity.

Piaget’s research on how children learn revealed that knowledge building is a process resulting from the dynamic interaction of the child with the environment. The students in my class range from the ages of 8-10. According to Jean Piaget, they are operating in the stage of concrete operations. This stage of learning is very conducive to teaching children the concept of diversity. During the stage of concrete operations, a child’s reasoning processes become logical. The child evolves logical thought processes (operations) that can be applied to problems that exist (are concrete).

The child at the stage of concrete operations has no trouble solving conservation problems and providing correct reasoning for his or her answers. When faced with a discrepancy between thought and perception, as in conservation problems, the concrete operational child makes cognitive and logical decisions, as opposed to perceptual decisions. The concrete operational child’s thinking is not egocentric. They are aware that others can come to conclusions that are different from theirs. According to Piaget, liberation from egocentrism comes about primarily through social interaction with peers, as the child is forced to seek verification of ideas. Children in this stage are able to exchange information with one another in their conversations and learn to view events from the position of others.

Whether children grew up in Africa, Oceania or in this country, children of the same ages share the same physical, sociomotional, and cognitive milestones. All children experience and share the process of development in much the same way regardless of where they live.

The four levels of the cycle of learning are: awareness, exploration, inquiry and utilization. Each experience is built upon the previous one. This section will examine how the circle of learning and teaching can be used to set up your classroom. The first level consists of awareness and exploration phases. At this stage, the child is presented with what is new or an issue.

- Awareness: The child becomes familiarized with the existence of an idea or issue. There are some questions to guide the teacher's planning in this phase. How can the child become cognizant about the issue/idea? In what ways can the environment be set up to engage the child's interest?
- Exploration: The child begins to search for elements that define the issue or idea that captured his/her attention. The child is actively using his/her culture baggage to filter what is meaningful. Questions to guide the teacher's planning are: How can I facilitate and support the student's investigation? What questions should I ask the students to verify their progress and understanding? What activities, materials can help the children in the process?

In level two children discover the views of others, as well as the ways to apply the acquired knowledge. The levels are inquiry and utilization

- Inquiry: The child begins to consider his/her own beliefs while comparing them to the beliefs held by others. Questions to guide the teacher's planning are: What are additional experiences that will help the child see the idea from the point of view of others? What other areas, information, and resources would he/she need to examine?
- Utilization: Activities and opportunities are offered to help the child apply what has been learned. This occurs as the child finds its usefulness in daily life. Questions to guide the teacher's planning are: What opportunities can I create in the classroom for the child to apply/demonstrate what was learned? What real-life situations can I use to illustrate the knowledge that is learned?

In teaching about diversity, leading the child to examine the perspectives of others will create endless situations where the cycle of learning will be repeated over and over again. As this happens, you will see how the child's consciousness about diversity will grow and become more concrete.

Classroom Activities

Activity: 1

Book Bibliography:

Chicken Sunday by Patricia Polacco

Book Summary:

Every Sunday, Miss Eula, her grandchildren Stewart, Winston and Patricia would go to church together. When they would return home, they would always enjoy dinner that included chicken.

Easter was coming and Miss Eula has been admiring a beautiful pink hat in the window of Mr. Kodinski's shop for many Sundays now. More than anything, her grandchildren wish to earn enough money to buy Miss Eula that hat.

Unfortunately, they must ask the cranky mysterious shop owner for help. They get an idea.....Let's ask Mr. Kodinski if we can work in his shop to earn money!

Themes: love, friendship, honesty, respect and courage.

Objective: To realize that being different does not always make someone less able to participate in various activities

Activity

1. Pair up the students in your class, and have them face one another
2. Make one person the first leader and tell him or her to pantomime an activity—smile, jump up and down, pretend to eat or sleep. The second person must mirror what the first person is doing. Then allow the other person to lead. You may decide to have the children change partners a few times.
3. End the activity, and ask if there were any problems in mirroring the activities or if everyone could do the same thing as their partner. Make a list of activities that the students had pantomimed that everyone could do
4. Explore with the students when our differences might prevent us from doing certain things from certain activities (e.g. a Jewish person who eats Kosher won't eat pork). However, come back to the activities that people share. Remind everyone that even though we differ, we all enjoy doing many of the same things.

Activity: 2

Book Bibliography: Amazing Grace by Mary Hoffman/Caroline Binch

Book Summary: Grace is a girl who loves stories and acting them out. She wants to try out for the school play. Grace wants to play the main character, Peter, in the play Peter Pan. Her classmates tell her she can't play Peter because she is a black girl. Grace becomes sad and her mom and nana try to tell her she can do anything she sets her mind to. Grace does end up winning the part of Peter and doing a great job.

Themes: Self-confidence, family support and self-concept.

Objective: Understand that the differences among people have a positive value to society and the differences add to the quality interest, and value of our lives.

Activity:

1. Put the apples in front of the class. Have each student in the class choose an apple. Tell them to get to know their apple real well. Suggest they notice their apple's special characteristics.
2. Have them make up a story about their apple and tell it to a friend. (Modeling this step is helpful with younger students.) Allow the students to share their stories with the rest of the class.
3. Mix the apples up and ask the students to come back and find their apple. When they return to their seats ask how they knew which apple was theirs (they will indicate things like color, size, shape, special features). Ask what this has to do with people. Make a list of how people are different. Discuss why this is important.
4. Make a list of how people are the same. Discuss why this is important. Make a list of how people are the same. Discuss why this is important. The list may be done in cooperative groups and then shared with the entire class.
5. Summarize the importance of individual differences and similarities in people. Suggest that one way in which all people are similar is that they all have a star inside them (something special that makes them shine, that they especially like about themselves), just like each apple has a star inside it. Cut each apple in half (don't cut the usual way, but through the center the other way). Let each child see the star inside their apple. While the students eat the apple, allow them to share something about their star, their strengths, and their individuality.

Activity: 3

Book Bibliography: Shades of Black by Sandra Pinkney

Book Summary: It is a positive reflection that affirms African-American children. Through the use of poetic language and inspiring photographic portraits it describes the varied skin tones, hair textures, and eye color to convey a strong sense of pride in one's African-American heritage. It's a book to celebrate children and invites readers of all ages and cultures to explore and appreciate the rich diversity among African-Americans.

Themes: Self-awareness, concept, pride, acceptance and tolerance.

Objective: To recognize the contribution of individual parts to the whole.

Activity:

1. Play a piece of recorded music for your students and have them list the different instruments they hear (guitar, voices, drums, violins, etc.)
2. Explain that although each instrument is different, they all belong to one orchestra and they all make an important contribution to the orchestra.
3. Ask the students to write a list of some people who are close to them and make up their community. These people can include family, teachers, babysitters, neighbors, and friends. Have the students put an asterisk next to the people who are of a different culture, race, and religion.
4. Ask the students to pick one person from that list and write how that person contributes to the student's life.

Activity: 4

Book Bibliography: Stellaluna by Janell Cannon

Book Summary: Stellaluna is about a bat that becomes separated from her mother in a terrible accident. She lands in a bird nest. Stellaluna knows that she is different but tries to act like a bird. She is not very successful. Finally, Stellaluna finds her mother and learns that although she doesn't make a very good bird, she makes a great bat.

Themes: Pride, similarities, differences and acceptance and courage

Objective: To recognize that there are many differences among people and those differences are a natural part of this world

Activity:

1. Have your students go outside and select a leaf from the ground. (If it not possible for your students to leave the classroom, then bring in a selection of leaves.)
2. Ask the students to lists ways in which their leaves are different (color, shape, size, etc).
3. Mount the leaves on paper to create a “leaf forest.” Explain that despite their differences, all the trees live together in a forest.
4. Explain that just as there are many different trees in a forest, there are many types of people in the world. Ask the students to list differences among people (physical, cultural, etc.)
5. Have your students cut out pictures of people from magazines and then mount the pictures on paper to create a “people forest.” Emphasize that differences are natural and that they are good because they add to the richness of the world.

Activity: 5

Book Bibliography: All the Color of the Earth by Shelia Hamanaka

Book Summary: A seven year old girl learns from her mother that brown comes in many different shades. The story is told from the point of view of a seven year old. People of different colors learn to hear the message of respect and peace as the different colors begin fighting and hurting each other. Although they have different feelings and like different things, they can still be friends.

Themes: Friendship, differences, similar likes & dislikes descriptive words, poetry, and self-awareness.

Objective: To identify similarities between themselves and other students

Activity:

1. Tell your students that although people are different in many different ways, there are also many similarities among us.
2. Ask your students questions such as, “Who has a cat?” “Who likes to play baseball?” “Who likes to eat pepperoni pizza?” For each questions, have the students who answers yes stand up or move to one side of the room. Do this several times so that everyone will be part of several yes groups.
3. Ask the students how they felt when they found out other people like the same things they do. Were they surprised to learn which students shared

their interest? Discuss how sharing things, such as a liking of music, can help people form friendships.

Activity: 6

Book Bibliography: The Patchwork Quilt by Valerie Flourney

Book Summary: It is a heart-warming story about a contemporary African-American family. Tanya's grandmother is making a patchwork quilt from scraps taken from the family's clothes. When Grandma becomes too ill to work on the quilt, Tanya and the rest of the family pitch in to help. After months of hard work, the quilt is finished.

Themes: Some themes that can be discussed are family values, family customs and families.

Objectives: The children will explore their ethnic and cultural backgrounds by interviewing one another. Students will gain appreciation for their experiences by linking other cultures to their personal lives.

Activity:

1. Questions: How do our families reflect world cultures?
2. Students share with a partner their family's photo album or photographs. The partner acts as an interviewer and takes notes on the worksheet.
3. Both students plot the other's origin on a map placing their name at the birth origin.
4. Make a brief oral report to the class telling some of the information to the class emphasizing the partner's strengths. (Introduce partner to the class)
5. Closure: What were the most common reasons for the immigration of our ancestor? In what ways does our class share origins?

Activity: 7

Book Bibliography: The Name Jar by Yangsook Choi

Book Summary: Having just arrived from Korea with her family, Unhei is anxious about making new friends and worried that no one will be able to

pronounce her name. She decides to pick a new name. The only problem is that she doesn't know what to choose. When a large glass jar filled with names appears on her desk, Unhei happily discovers that her classmates want to help.

Themes: Friendship, differences, similar likes and dislikes, and self-awareness

Objective: To examine different cultures of the world

Activity:

1. Define the word "culture" on the board. Have the class give examples of things that make up American culture (music, clothing, food, etc.) Then ask if all people in the United States are alike; lead the class into a discussion of "subcultures". For example, Vietnamese immigrants might espouse the American culture while holding on to parts of their original culture as well.
2. Break the class into small groups. Have each group make a poster-size "half and half collage. On one side of the paper, they should paste articles, pictures and ads representing the general American culture. On the other side they should attach items that represent the wide variety of subcultures in America, including varied ethnic and regional groups. Students who themselves are part of a particular subculture might want to focus entirely on that subculture.
3. Students should strive to find examples of several categories named in the definition for culture-music, clothing, government, etc. Afterwards, hang the posters around the room for a one-of-a-kind cultural display.

Annotated Bibliography

Banks-McGee, Cherry and Banks James. Multicultural Education-Issues and Perspectives. Needham Heights, MA: Viacom Company, 1997.

This text teaches about cultural practices of other people.

Baska-Van Tassel, Joyce. Comprehensive Curriculum for Gifted Learners. Needham Heights, MA: Simon & Schuster, 1994.

This text teaches life ways of other people by emphasizing the variability of culture within social groups and the continual presence of cultural change.

Bennet, Christine. Multicultural Education-Theory and Practice. Needham Heights, MA: Simon & Schuster, 1995.

This text teaches teachers to take risk and deal with controversial topics such as prejudice, racism, social justice, and cultural pluralism.

Boden, Margaret. Jean Piaget. New York, N.Y.: Viking Press, 1979.

This text focuses on Jean Piaget's research on what children understand and how thought develops.

Bullard, Sara. Teaching Tolerance. Broadway, New York: Bantam Doubleday Dell Publishing, 1996.

This text suggests ways parents can educate themselves and their children to be more tolerant and live more harmoniously in our diverse community.

Byrnes, *Deborah*. "Teacher they called me a _____!" Needham Heights, MA: Simon and Schuster, 1995.

This text teaches children how to live comfortably with all kinds of people.

Davidman, Leonard. Teaching with a Multicultural Perspective. White Plains, N.Y. Addison Wesley, 1997.

This text discusses concepts such as culture, cultural group, ethnicity, ethnic group, and multiculturalism.

Melendez de Wilma Robles and Osterdag Vesna. Teaching Young Children in Multicultural Classrooms. Albany, NY: Delmar, 1997.

This text looks at the historical, theoretical, and practical aspects of multicultural education as it relates to young children.

Tiedt, Pamela and Tiedt, Iris. Multicultural Teaching- Handbook of Activities, Information, and Resources. Needham Heights, MA: Simon and Schuster, 1995.

This text addresses current and future trends of multicultural education and practical classroom activities.

Shiman, David. The Prejudice Book. White Plains, NY: Addison Wesley Longman, Inc., 1997.

This text is an invaluable sourcebook to teach teenagers about how to stop prejudice and hate. The classroom activities raise students' awareness and understanding of prejudice and how it affects our society.

Wachs, Harry. Piaget's Theory in Practice-Thinking Goes to School. Oxford University: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1974

This text shows how we can prepare our children to develop their full potential as "thinking" human beings.

Wadsworth, Barry. Piaget's Theory of Cognitive and Affective Development. White Plains, NY: Longman Inc., 1971.

This text introduces Jean Piaget's work on cognitive and intellectual development and his studies on affective development.

Web Sites

www.teacher.scholastic.com

Two early childhood experts share tips on teaching diversity in the classroom.

www.everythingsl.net

This web site includes lesson plans for teaching about peace, tolerance and respect for diversity

www.parentsource.com

This web site teaches parents how to teach their children, tolerance and differences.

www.esmetro.org

This web site includes engaging, interactive techniques to teach children skills in celebrating diversity.

Appendices-Standards

Academic Standards for Reading, Writing, Speaking and Listening

- 1.1 Learn to Read Independently
- 1.2 Reading Critically in All Content Areas
- 1.3 Reading, Analyzing and Interpreting Literature
- 1.5 Analyze and make critical judgments
- 1.6 Speaking and Listening

Academic Standards for Citizenship

- 1.7 Communicating, negotiating and cooperating with others
- 1.8 Working effectively with others.