

December and Managing all the Holidays

Tip: Celebrate Throughout the Year

For teachers, December lesson plans and days can be jammed with activities and events, adding to the stress and busyness that often feels like it can spiral out of control. At the same time, we want to give voice to all children and families with opportunities to celebrate traditions that are important and meaningful to them.

Culturally responsive teachers know that to build strong relationships with children: we value the diversity of holidays and celebrations; we honor and acknowledge our own cultures in a way that is self-aware; we recognize the value of knowing about diverse cultures, and we intentionally make our programs inclusive. How then can we enjoy the celebrations instead of feeling overwhelmed and then care for and teach children who are equally overwhelmed with information, celebrations and questions?

One of the ways suggested by Heather Bickley, Professional Development Manager, Catapult Learning, is to think of celebrating culture all through the months and not just in December. There are many traditions and holidays that fall in the days of December; however, doing a little of each of them is not necessarily honoring the values and beliefs of various cultures. The connections often get lost in the sheer volume and the fact that then we only give them a "nod" instead of being able to make sincere connections.

If we loop back to them in meaningful ways throughout the months, with the many holidays to choose from, we may not be so compelled to do as much in one month. Instead of "ramping up," we "level out" the joy of festivals.

Another way to manage the December frenzy of Christmas, Kwanzaa, Winter Solstice, Hanukkah, New Year's (to name but a few) is to focus on one aspect of them. For example, focus on either music, OR decorations OR foods/cooking. Then have the children deeply engage in this one element of celebration, with the ability to compare, write about, discuss and create in a meaningful way. The following year you can focus on a different aspect. This lends itself to the added dimension of memory, bringing out the photos and scrapbooks and having children tell stories of the past celebrations while trying out new ideas.

Culturally responsive teaching is a mindset that happens every day of the year. It is truly about making programs and classrooms culturally relevant and, as Bickley states, "...having a chance to learn about different people and cultures (to) create an open and welcoming learning environment where all students are held to high expectations and given an equal opportunity to achieve."

Add to that, you are providing children the opportunity to be embraced and to embrace others as community. If community can be the focus, then "less may be more" in the actual celebrations, allowing for children to deeply connect and engage with each other.

For more information and ideas, check out DIEEC's workshop [Culturally Responsive Teaching](#).