

Diversity in Early Childhood Education

Diversity- Inclusive of all people's racial identity, ethnicity, family culture, gender, class, sexual orientation, and ability. Diversity exists in the differences among people and groups. It is not a term that refers to some people and not to others.

(Definition taken from Derman-Sparks, LeeKeenan, D., & Nimmo, J. (2015). Leading anti-bias early childhood programs: A guide for change. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.)



Most early childhood educators would agree that teaching diversity to young children is important. But how do we make sure our practice reflects that? It requires us to be intentional about our teachings and interactions with children.

The Environmental Rating Scales (ERS) books are a good place to start when thinking of adding some basic multi-cultural materials, activities, and display. Some examples of materials may include dolls of different races, multicultural dress up clothing, play food, menus, and utensils from different cultures, and music from different cultures. When considering books or displays, look for a variety of different races/cultures, ages, abilities, and gender in non-stereotyping roles.

When working to diversify your book corner, there are a few things to keep in mind.

1. Types of books- We want to expose children to a combination of fiction and factual books. Books about real people or events are factual, while fairy tale type stories are fictional. Both types are equally important.
2. Authors- Pay attention to the author of the books in your classroom. Ideally, we want to support authors and their lived experiences.
3. Representation- Think about the children in your program. It is important for them to see books and pictures about children with whom they can identify. We all want to feel seen and represented in our society; children want the same in their classrooms.
4. Avoiding stereotypes- Be mindful of stereotypes or prejudices, especially in fiction books. We want to be sure that we are providing children with accurate representation of all people. For example, "cowboys and Indians" portrays Native Americans in an unfavorable and inaccurate way. It is important for us, as educators, to be intentional in stopping the perpetuation of stereotypes and prejudice thinking.

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The single, most important way to establish a positive climate surrounding diversity is simply TALKING to children. As educators, we must welcome their inherent curiosity about the people and the world around them. Many of us have lived in a society that promoted “color blindness” as the politically correct way to handle diversity. Concerning diversity, “color blindness” refers to people remarking that they do not “see” race, sexual orientation, gender, abilities, etc. This notion implies that we are all the same, which is problematic. On a large scale, we cannot work towards equity without recognizing the different circumstances that we all face. In the classroom, how can we encourage children to celebrate diversity if we pretend it does not exist? The best way to understand one another is to have meaningful, honest conversations.

Let’s start with our children!