

8 Tips to Promote Diversity Education in Your Program

HOW TO INTENTIONALLY INCORPORATE DIVERSITY IN NON-DIVERSE SETTINGS

By Colleen McLaughlin

As an assessor, I have the opportunity of peeking into many classrooms and early care environments around Illinois. Similar to the national perspective, Illinois is diverse when taken as a whole, but there are many areas of the state where the majority of the children and staff have similar cultural backgrounds. **It is important for all children, regardless of the makeup of their own neighborhood, to have experience with diversity at a young age.**

I have encountered many providers who find it easy to teach about diversity when the children they serve are diverse. In these instances there may be a family member who can act as a guide for the provider or who can visit the classroom and share some traditions with the child's classmates. On the other hand, when all the children are of the same background, providers may have a more difficult time incorporating diversity into their program. These are the environments, however, where it is most important to intentionally teach about the diversity of humans because it is out of the child's everyday experience.

If you are not sure where to begin, you are not alone! Below is a list of ideas to get you started:

1. Display materials, books, and pictures in your program that represent diverse people. Be intentional about including representations of people of differing race, age, gender, culture, and ability.
2. Provide books for teachers to read to the class that feature diverse main characters. If there are words that you are unsure of how to pronounce, a Google search of "How do you say..." will often bring up an audio file so you can hear the correct pronunciation.
3. Encourage teachers to have fun learning a few songs/rhymes in a language other than English. When I taught, I loved to use [Ole! Ole! Ole! by Dr. Jean](#). This fun CD has each song sung in English and then Spanish. I do not speak Spanish, but I found it easy to follow along with.
4. Reach out to a nearby college or community college. A community college is a great resource to find experts on many topics close to home. An instructor or student there may be able to come in and read a book in another language.
5. Take your program on a field trip to a local nursing home or assisted living home. Experience with older adults can help children see past medical devices.

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6. Host a program-wide food tasting day. Try food, especially fruits and vegetables from different cultures and talk about where they are grown. As a teacher, I enjoyed hosting tasting parties in my classroom. When learning about the color green, we tried fruits and vegetable of that color. We included tomatillos and kiwis.
7. Provide teachers with resources to use in lesson planning. A great example is this Pinterest Board by Tara Bailey: [Multicultural Preschool Lessons](#).
8. Encourage your teachers to participate in professional development that will strengthen their skills in teaching about diversity. When teachers return ask them to share what they learned with their colleagues and then ask them what support you can provide so that they can put the things they've learned into practice.

Are you interested in learning more about how to incorporate diversity into your program? Check out the book [Leading Anti-Bias Early Childhood Programs: A Guide for Change](#).

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