

# Celebrating Diversity in Your Early Childhood Program



In early childhood programs, the month of December tends to bring a flurry of activity. Many programs use this as a time to plan family events and special activities for the children. Different holidays are celebrated throughout our programs at this time of year, which makes it a great time to think critically about celebrating diversity while being culturally sensitive. But what does that mean? It means that we want to encourage the celebration of diversity during this festive time but also be mindful of the different cultures and traditions of our families.

Early childhood programs are a great place to expose children to diverse cultures and traditions. Children are naturally curious and love to learn new things, especially about their peers. As educators, it is important for us to take advantage of this time to celebrate our differences before society may send them a different message. Not to mention, there are so many fun activities that can enhance children's learning while broadening their perspective of the world.

## Avoiding Tourist Curriculum

While December provides lots of opportunities for diverse activities, it is important that we incorporate multicultural experiences in our lesson plans throughout the year. We want to be sure to avoid "Tourist Curriculum" during the holidays. Tourist curriculum is an approach that essentially "visits" other cultures for an activity or special event without taking into consideration the daily life of people in that culture (Derman-Sparks & Edwards, 2010). It is important for children to learn more than just special holidays. When we only choose one or two aspects of a particular culture to talk about, we are essentially teaching children that this is the only special or unique thing about that culture. Focusing on diversity once a year can lead to a belief that one culture is dominant over another.



To avoid tourist curriculum, plan ahead for the year! Think about ways to incorporate diversity throughout your lesson plans. Focus on things besides holidays. Talk about different traditions, food, housing, education, etc. Children will likely be interested to learn the routines and habits of children around the world.

## Family Involvement

Another great way to incorporate diversity is to think about the different families in your program. Encourage families to share their own traditions and beliefs. One idea is to include a family culture and tradition questionnaire in your program's enrollment information. Let them know that, as long as they are comfortable, sharing family traditions is encouraged. This will also help with incorporating different cultures throughout the year.

Even though we want to avoid tourist curriculum, we can still incorporate holiday celebrations. Be mindful of the holidays that the children in your program celebrate. This includes holidays outside of December. Involve all of the children in the celebration. This helps them to gain a better understanding of their friends.

## The Spirit of Giving

One common theme throughout this time of year is the spirit of giving. Yes, many of us follow traditions of giving gifts this time of year but we should also focus on the giving of time and resources to those in need. This is something that we can all share regardless of our backgrounds. This is a great time of year to teach our children the importance of kindness. There are many inexpensive ways to do this!

- Have the children in your program make cards for soldiers or nursing home patients.
- Collect canned goods to donate to a local food pantry.
- Collect gently used toys or clothes to donate to a local shelter.

## Resources

### Professional Development opportunities

- Differences Matter: The Diversity of Gender in the Early Childhood Program
- Culturally Responsive Teaching

### Books & Websites for Providers

- Anti-Bias Education for Young Children and Ourselves- By: Louise Derman-Sparks
- Teaching for Change- Teachingforchange.org
- NAEYC- Anti-Bias Education: The October-December Holidays-  
<https://www.naeyc.org/resources/topics/anti-bias/holidays>

### Children's Books

#### Infant/Toddler

- My First Ramadan- By: Karen Katz
- Dim Sum for Everyone- By: Grace Lin
- My First Menorah- By: Salina Yoon
- Cradle Me (Native American)- By: Debby Slier
- Global Babies/Bebes del Mundo-By: The Global Fund for Children

#### Preschool

- Christmas Daddy and Hanukkah Mama- By: Selina Alko
- Sitti's Secrets (Palestine/Arabic)- By: Naomi Shihab Nye
- Light the Candle! Bang the Drum! A Book of Holidays from Around the World- By: Ann Morris
- Bundle of Secrets (Kenya)- By: Mubina Hassanali Kirmani
- Calavera Abecedario: A Day of the Dead Alphabet Book- By: Jeannette Winter
- Bringing in the New Year (Chinese New Year)- By: Grace Yin

#### School Age

- Searching for the Eid Moon (Ramadan & Eid)- By: Thuraya Ali
- Africa is Not a Country- By: Margy Burns Knight & Jim Knight
- Kids Around the World Celebrate!: The Best Feasts and Festivals of Many Lands- By: Lynda Jones
- The Birchbark House (Native American)- By: Louise Erdrich
- Seven Candles for Kwanzaa- By: Lynda Jones

**I hope you have enjoyed the 2019 issues of Coach's Corner!  
Looking forward to the New Year and  
engaging with more providers!**