

The Head Start Multicultural Principles for Head Start Programs Serving Children Ages Birth to Five

Principle 1: Every individual is rooted in culture

Principle 2: The cultural groups represented in the communities and families of each Head Start program are the primary sources for culturally relevant programming.

Principle 3: Culturally relevant and diverse programming requires learning accurate information about the cultures of different groups and discarding stereotypes.

Principle 4: Addressing cultural relevance in making curriculum choices and adaptations is a necessary, developmentally appropriate practice.

Principle 5: Every individual has the right to maintain his or her own identity while acquiring the skills required to function in our diverse society.

Principle 6: Effective programs for children who speak languages other than English require continued development of the first language while the acquisition of English is facilitated.

Principle 7: Culturally relevant programming requires staff who both reflect and are responsive to the community and families served.

Principle 8: Multicultural programming for children enables children to develop an awareness of, respect for, and appreciation of individual and cultural differences.

Principle 9: Culturally relevant and diverse programming examines and challenges institutional and personal biases.

Principle 10: Culturally relevant and diverse programming and practices are incorporated in all systems and services and are beneficial to all adults and children.

Funds of Knowledge

What does the term “funds of knowledge” mean?

A review of literature suggests that to be an effective teacher, you need an in-depth knowledge of the subject-matter, plentiful teaching strategies and a deep knowledge of the culture and history of the students you are teaching.

Funds of knowledge is defined by researchers Luis Moll, Cathy Amanti, Deborah Neff, and Norma Gonzalez (2001) “to refer to the historically accumulated and culturally developed bodies of knowledge and skills essential for household or individual functioning and well-being” (p. 133). When teachers shed their role of teacher and expert and, instead, take on a new role as learner, they can come to know their students and the families of their students in new and distinct ways. With this new knowledge, they can begin to see that the households of their students contain rich cultural and cognitive resources and that these resources can and should be used in their classroom in order to provide culturally responsive and meaningful lessons that tap students’ prior knowledge. Information that teachers learn about their students in this process is considered the student’s funds of knowledge.

Why is it important to understand the background of my students?

While it may seem like a silly question to ask why it is necessary to understand the background of each student, it is important to remember that as teachers it is your job to understand something about everyone in your classroom. For students who come from similar backgrounds as your own this will not be a hard task, but for those students who have had an upbringing vastly different than your own this may be more difficult. Funds of knowledge is one way to help you connect with your child and with their family. It is the responsibility of each teacher to attempt to learn something special about each child they teach.

How do I find out what my students’ family backgrounds are and what funds of knowledge come from their households?

In order for teachers to gain this kind of knowledge about the households and social networks of their students, teachers must be willing to go into the homes and communities of their students to observe and learn not simply about, but also from and with their students and the families of their students. Most of the literature on funds of knowledge

involves teachers collaborating with ethnographers and conducting ethnographic fieldwork. These teachers must learn ethnographic methods as well as reflexivity (Moll et al., 1992; Gonzalez et al., 1993; 2005).

For a program with immigrant students or English language learners, where teachers may know very little about the lives and language of their students outside of school, an attempt to come to know their students and better understanding that the households of their students contain rich cultural and cognitive resources is a critical first step.

Many teachers care for their students, but unless they care enough to attempt to learn, understand, and know their students' political, historical, and personal situations — their funds of knowledge — then they are not taking the important steps to use what the students bring from their own backgrounds into the classroom.

References

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