Bridging the cultural gap between home and school

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Bridging the cultural gap between home and school

Abstract
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In addition to becoming more aware of cultural diversity, children will also learn tolerance of children of another ethnic background. If young children are involved with multicultural literacy activities at home and school, they will grow to appreciate and accept cultural differences. Consequently, educators and parents will be able to work together to bridge the cultural gap between home and school.

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Abstract

This journal article explores the significance of the early implementation of multicultural literature in young children's lives. As young children prepare for the transition from home culture to school culture, problems may occur, such as cultural conflict, if both minority and majority children are not prepared for the school's diverse population. By incorporating multicultural literature experiences, both educators and parents can help to raise the awareness and appreciation of cultural diversity. In addition to becoming more aware of cultural diversity, children will also learn tolerance of children of another ethnic background. If young children are involved with multicultural literacy activities at home and school, they will grow to appreciate and accept cultural differences. Consequently, educators and parents will be able to work together to bridge the cultural gap between home and school.
This society consists of people from a variety of different cultures. The background from which all people come from is unique from one another. Everyone who lives within this society needs to be educated on cultural diversity and should be aware of its importance. It should also be the responsibility of the parents and educators in the society to enlighten children with this message. Children should be exposed to cultural diversity and learn from the fascinating qualities of those from another culture. This can be accomplished through the use of multicultural literature. Multicultural literature should be used as a tool to encourage children to learn and experience others’ cultures. Good books are versatile and valuable resources which many educators and researchers perceive as being underutilized by classroom teachers. They have emphasized the importance of promoting multicultural literature.

Bishop (1994) believes, “multicultural literature educates not only the head, but the heart as well. It promotes empathy and invites readers to adopt new perspectives. It offers opportunities for children to learn to recognize our similarities, value our differences, and respect our common humanity. In an important sense, then children need literature that serves as a window onto lives and experiences different from their own, and literature that serves as a mirror reflecting themselves and their cultural values, attitudes, and behaviors” (p. xiv). Rasinski and Paddock (1990) state,” multicultural literature can be a powerful way for children to learn to appreciate other cultures. It presents readers with new worlds, new ideas, new options-- things to reflect upon and to use to better themselves as people, as well as readers” (p.576).

Lee (1995) reveals that multicultural literature may also help children develop the skills to understand others and to thrive in a rapidly changing diverse world. A goal of multicultural education is to give students the skills, attitudes, and knowledge they need to function within their own ethnic culture, the mainstream culture, and across other ethnic cultures. Banks (1993) believes that our survival as a strong and
democratic nation will be seriously imperiled if we do not help our children attain the knowledge and skills they need to function in a culturally diverse future society and world.

Children look first to someone in the family as his or her most important role model. Parents are their children's first and most important teachers. These significant people need to be involved in their children's experiences. Beaty (1997) explains that such support is even more crucial when the home culture and school culture are different. The degree to which care givers use and demonstrate literacy for young learners influences their learning and culturally diverse children who succeed probably do so because of parental intervention. Crawford (1993) states “the parents and primary care givers are the key to the success of their children in school. Their view of the world, views about the status of literacy, the amount of interactive demonstration of literacy modeled and demonstrated for the child can establish a learning course for the child later in school.” (p.25).

Parents are now aware that family literacy is very important, but may not realize that it is also very important to prepare their children for a culturally diverse environment at school. By involving children in multicultural literacy experiences, parents can help to prepare them for the transition from their home culture to school culture. When children connect with characters and situations within multicultural literature, they become appreciative of other ways of life and this also helps them see unfamiliar people as individuals. Parents may want to fill their book shelves with literature featuring a variety of multicultural children.
Preparing for the Transition from Home Culture to School Culture

Research suggests that because bilingual ethnic minority children have home cultures different from the school culture, they may not understand social interactions within the classroom culture. Consequently, Schmidt (1995) explains that cultural conflict often occurs and literacy learning may be adversely affected. The struggles are believed to occur because they must function between two cultures, at home and at school, as they develop their literacies. Additionally, the moment they begin to read and write in school, the cultures of their homes affect their success or failure.

Diamond and Moore (1995) reflect that parents' cultural and social traditions define who and what they are. Children will bring a variety of literacy experiences and learning patterns to the classroom. When these are closely matched with the way literacy is acquired in school, the important link is easy to forge. Effective teachers will want to collaborate with parents in an effort to learn about each child's literacy experiences at home and to involve them in the child's literacy experiences at school, consequently, encouraging home-school compatibility. Schmidt (1995), in a recent study, found children's social interactions during informal work and play settings encouraged development of their English literacy. This study also implied that schools may actually interfere with children's literacy learning if educators do not work to understand the diverse backgrounds of the children in their classrooms. Schools must take the first steps toward connecting with the children's cultures. Young children can see differences between home and school. They need to know that teachers support their families and cultures and they also want to know their parents support their teachers and schools.

The differences between home and school need to be reconciled, so minority children will not struggle with the experiences they encounter at school. Lee (1995) believes that both teachers and parents need to consider all the complexities about
multiculturalism, to find books to give young readers what they need to bridge the gaps linking their family's past and the present, to point out the contributions of all peoples, and to foster respect and mutual understanding for others from different backgrounds. Again, it is parents who are their children's first and most important teachers and it is important that these significant people are involved in their children's experiences. Greenberg (cited in Beaty, 1997) stated, "When a member of a child's family takes part in his school life in a positive manner, even briefly and infrequently, the child's self-esteem appears to soar. Such a positive participation sends a signal to the child. The family endorses this other world... a world very different from the world at home" (p.80).

Beaty (1997) makes the point that multicultural education is not just for people of color. It deals with all Americans, all of their struggles, hopes, and dreams, including those of white Americans. Parents from mainstream culture also have the obligation to teach their children about cultural diversity. Subtle attitude cues from teachers, parents, and other care givers help children to appreciate diversity. They look to the adults in charge to learn how to respond to certain situations.

Parents and teachers can help children appreciate cultural diversity by raising their awareness and appreciation of others who are culturally diverse. They also need to be taught how to be tolerant of those who are culturally diverse. Through the implementation of multicultural activities at school and at home, children can become aware and also learn tolerance of others from another culture. The following suggests goals that teachers and parents can use with minority children and with children within the mainstream population to encourage a smoother transition from home culture to school culture.
Goals for Minority Students and for Children Within the Mainstream Population Involved With Transition From Home Culture to School Culture

The goal of making young children more aware and appreciative of other cultures can be achieved by sharing multicultural literature and activities with them. Children need to see and experience other cultures in order to understand and appreciate them. Multicultural picture books offer children an opportunity to learn about the different cultures and their people. This may be especially beneficial to the students within the mainstream population. Those students may be aware of the physical differences of those who are culturally diverse, but may not appreciate their cultural background. Through multicultural literature and activities, they may learn to appreciate and take interest in ways which respect the attitudes and beliefs of persons from other cultures.

Multicultural education should focus on all cultures without excluding others. When children are taught to appreciate and understand their own heritage they learn to understand the heritages of others in the process. Bieger (1995/1996) believes that this philosophy promotes recognition, understanding and acceptance of cultural diversity and individual uniqueness. People are not born knowing their culture but are initiated into it through the actions of family members and others. Culture is learned (Au, 1993). Children who are more aware of their own culture will be able to interact in a more aware and comfortable manner with those who are culturally diverse. Reed (1996) declares, "multicultural education is for everyone both majority and minority" (p. 38).

The appreciation of diversity should evolve through a foundation of a deep belief in the worth of every child, regardless of cultural background. Parents and teachers should demonstrate an accepting attitude toward each child and an unqualified support for each child's development of emotional, social, physical, cognitive, language, and creative skills. With this foundation, parents and teachers
can instill in children to, not only learn about others' cultural backgrounds, but also to
learn to appreciate them. Again, by incorporating multicultural literature activities in
the classroom and at home will raise the awareness and appreciation of cultural
diversity of all the children, both minority and majority population.

Raising awareness/appreciation of diverse cultures

The mainstream students in the classroom are aware of the differences in the
minority students. The most obvious is their appearance or the way they dress.
The problem that may occur because of this awareness is that the students may begin
to demonstrate biases against the minority students because of their differences.

A study (Schmidt, 1995) was recently completed on cultural conflict in a
kindergarten literacy program. It involved two bilingual ethnic minority boys in a
predominantly white, blond, and blue-eyed school population. The study noted that it
was obvious the boys' appearance in skin, eyes, and hair were unusual compared to
the majority population. Also, their clothing was atypical in color, style, and fit. The
differences in the boys were physically obvious to the other children and they
responded negatively towards them. The minority students were somewhat isolated
from the others because of the negative social interactions that were demonstrated
noted. Neither child developed any friendships in the kindergarten classroom.

Parents and teachers need to find books to share with young readers and
provide activities that encourage acceptance and appreciation of cultural diversity.
These books and activities should be shared on a daily basis.

Parents and teachers could introduce children to other cultures through
activities that involve celebrating our colorful world. Children are often curious about
skin colors, facial features, and hair textures. These features could be discussed
informally while children drew pictures of themselves. Multicultural crayons could also
be used to teach children that “white” skin is rare. Teachers and parents working with children could point out the variety of other shades that could also be used for skin color. In addition to illustrating pictures of themselves, implementing a time for sharing continues to encourage children to listen and learn about other cultures.

Multicultural picture books may be offered as a springboard to activities about children from a variety of different cultures. By picking up a particular culture-based story and reading it to children, a teacher can involve the youngsters in the lives of children from that culture. When children take on roles of the characters in a book, they connect with the characters and they feel a special bond with the characters.

The picture book, *Galimoto* (Williams, 1990), reflects Malawian villagers in appropriate dress. Malawian women wear skirts and dresses made from brightly colored and patterned cloth. They are wrapped around their bodies and are always long enough to cover their knees. The Malawian women never wear shorts or pants. Men in Malawi often wear shorts, and usually will wear a western-style shirt with them. The teacher may want to discuss their clothing and encourage children to compare and contrast this clothing with their own. As a follow-up activity, Abbott & Polk (1993) suggest the students may want to practice balancing baskets the way the people of Malawi did. The Malawi villagers would often carry loads on their heads as a useful technique that would ease the work load and free their hands for other activities. It takes practice and skill to feel comfortable and do it successfully. The experience may be enlightening for young children. It is a very common custom for the people of Malawi and many other cultures to balance baskets on their heads, but for the majority population of young students in the United States, this technique is not commonly used. Therefore, through experience gained from books the students may find a deeper appreciation for others who use this custom.

The book, *Galimoto* (Williams, 1990) could also be shared at home.
reading, parents could converse with their child about some of the important aspects of the story. For example they could ask, "What did you think about the clothing the villagers are wearing?" "How is it the same or different from your clothes?" "What do Malawian villagers wear on their feet?" "Why do you suppose the Malawian villagers go barefoot?" "What types of homes do the Malawian villagers live in?" "What is our house made from?" "Why do you think people around the world make homes from different materials?" By talking with their parents, children will become more aware and understand more about another culture that they were not previously familiar with. As they are learning and becoming more aware of other cultures, children will begin to realize some of the different ways of life. Although other cultures have different ways of living, parents should explain to their children that those ways are equally natural and normal to their culture. They need to emphasize the importance of acceptance of other cultures' differences.

In addition to picture books, folktales also help create a cultural bond between home and school. Hopson and Hopson (cited in Beaty, 1997) declare: "Folktales demonstrate that whatever our skin color or cultural background, we share many if not all the same values that from the dawn of humankind have enabled civilization to progress. Offering stories is subtly yet effective way of teaching children that the rainbow generation of the twenty-first century has much to appreciate, enjoy, and share" (p. 80). The Rough-Face Girl (Martin, 1992) is an example of a folktale that discourages children to judge people by their appearance, but encourages them to appreciate and accept people for who they are inside. This Algonquin version of a Cinderella tale proves once more that true beauty lies within. The children may want to rewrite their own version of this tale each child choosing a different culture. They will need to be reminded that the details in the story need to match the culture that they have chosen. When their tale is completed they may want to retell it to their
classmates. Illustrations may also be very important when sharing folktales. The children may want to include illustrations with their tale.

Folktales are not stories that should just be shared in a classroom. Folktales make wonderful family stories. Parents may want to read or retell tales to their children at home. Being that there are many folktales from different countries around the world, they could choose a tale based on a particular country. This way the children would be exposed to a variety of different folktales from all over. This foundation is important to not only children’s literacy learning, but also their background for the appreciation of cultural diversity.

Some folktales parents may want to share with their children are *The Empty Pot* (Demi, 1990), *Moon Rope: A Peruvian Tale/Un Lazo a La Luna: Una Leyenda Peruana* (Ehlert, 1992), and *Dream Wolf* (Goble, 1990). If families would wish to share a collection of folktales, folk songs, poems, and essays they would also enjoy, *From Sea to Shining Sea: A Treasury of American Folklore and Folk Songs* (Cohn, 1993). These multicultural folktales all reflect stories that would assist parents in teaching their children the importance of the awareness and appreciation of cultural diversity.

Not only are students in the classroom aware of the diverse appearance of others of a different culture, but language or the way in which others communicate is also different from what the mainstream population is accustomed to. Again, through literature, activities, and other tasks students will learn to appreciate and bond with those who speak another language.

*Abuela* (Dorros, 1991) is a story about a young girl, Rosalba, whose imagination takes her on a journey over New York City. Spanish terms are woven smoothly into the text, and a glossary is also provided. After reading this book, Beaty (1997) suggests children play the Abuela game. Challenge each child who plays the role of Abuela or Rosalba to say at least one word in Spanish as they “fly” around the
classroom. They may want to use a Hispanic cultural doll for this game, but will need to speak for her in a Spanish word or two. Discuss as a group what the words mean throughout the game. If there are any Spanish-speaking children playing this game, they may try speaking a word or two in English.

When reading Abuela (Dorros, 1991) at home, parents may want to take turns reading with their child. A line of Spanish is spoken on almost every page, and is translated by Rosalba as she narrates the tale. Parents (or grandparents) may want to read the Spanish line and their child may want to read Rosalba’s translating narration. They may want to read it again switching roles the second time through. If the child is too young to read they may want to retell the story, mimic or demonstrate an echo reading of the story, or just listen as the parent reads aloud. Families will enjoy sharing this story that emphasizes adventure and imagination from a different cultural perspective and through the experience of using another language they will learn to appreciate the language difference.

Another picture book that also offers children the opportunity to appreciate another language, is Sachiko Means Happiness (Sakai, 1990). Sachiko, a Japanese American girl, is upset with the change in the loving grandmother who gave her her name. She eventually reaches a new understanding which gives her patience to treat her grandmother with kindness and love. As a follow-up activity, the children may discuss the importance of their own names and also tie in their family’s language background. This discussion could be an appropriate introduction to the game, “What’s In A Name?” Each child writes his/her name on a name tag and shares their name’s history, its meaning or significance, a nickname, and their feelings about their name(Cech, 1996). The teacher may also ask, “Is there anyone who would want to change their name?” The students should also be given the opportunity to explain why they would or would not change their name. Also, classroom teachers should be
reminded not to change a child’s name in her native language. Names, which are an important part of communication, have a strong influence on a child’s self-image. All children have names that are a part of their identity. Accepting a person’s name is the first step in accepting each individual as a worthy person. Through picture books children learn to gain respect for those who speak another language.

In order for children to play this game, they must first have some background about their name. Families could read this book together at home. Their children would be very interested in finding out about their name’s history, what their name means, how their parents decided on the name, and any other additional family history that would be significant to them. Parents may want to share past family photographs or other items that would be important to the children.

Also, this picture book may encourage the children to continue reading other books that would enhance their learning about others’ names and cultural backgrounds. Parents and children could make trips to their public libraries to research more information. This could be another opportunity for parents to teach their children about people who are from other cultures. Some titles they may wish to share are Cleversticks (Ashley, 1991), Tikki Tikki Tembo (Mosel, 1968), Little Eagle Lots of Owls (Edmiston, 1993), Jaffa (Lewin, 1981), and Sabrina (Alexander, 1971).

Hopscotch Around the World (Lankford, 1992) would be an excellent non-fiction book to share with young children at school or at home. This book presents nineteen versions of hopscotch. All variants come with diagrams and directions for play. The different versions of hopscotch come from places as diverse as Aruba and China, Nigeria and Alaska. Although patterns vary, the basic rules are similar worldwide. Although hopscotch is usually considered an outdoor sidewalk game, educational supply companies now make indoor hopscotch carpets. Masking tape can also be used to make lines on the floor. Younger children may not yet be ready for “games
with rules" or even hopping, but they nevertheless enjoy trying to hop on one foot and sometimes landing on two. Older children who know the rules for American hopscotch can have fun learning other versions of the game from this book. Again, this book emphasizes that this game, as many children's games, is surprisingly similar to other hopscotch games around the world, making the connection between cultures seem stronger than ever.

Music and dance can be another option for students to make cultural connections (Foltz-Gray, 1995). *Gift of the Tortoise* (Mambazo, 1994) is a children's album featuring a storytelling tortoise, Fudgazi. Fudgazi introduces songs and stories from South Africa. Mambazo combined with children's voices creates a medley of Zulu and English lyrics. It also contains African American spirituals and children's songs, tunes from West and South Africa, and counting songs in English, French, Japanese, Spanish, and Swahili. The teacher may encourage the students to teach the others in the class a multicultural song they've learned at home. The other students would enjoy learning and gain an appreciation for the various languages. The students could also research how to count in different languages. They may even want to write music to go along with their counting. In small groups, they could tape record their counting song. The tapes could be placed in a listening center for the classroom to enjoy. This would provide another opportunity for the students to gain a feeling of ownership and pride through a multicultural literacy activity.

*Gift of the Tortoise* (Mambazo, 1994) incorporates a variety of different languages. The children may find it enjoyable to learn some vocabulary from different countries. For younger children it would be more appropriate to learn basic words, such as a greeting. Students could be shown how to say goodbye in another language. For example, au revoir (French), adios (Spanish), or sayonara (Japanese). An extension of this activity could be to have the children locate the country of their
own ancestry on a classroom map. Students would also take pleasure in locating a variety of different countries on a map. This would enhance the children's knowledge of not only the location of the country, but it would also continue to encourage the children to make cultural connections.

This activity could be implemented at home as well. Parents may want to choose one particular culture to focus on. The children would enjoy learning a new language along with their parents. It would be more meaningful for families if they were to choose vocabulary words that would fit in with their daily activities at home.

Beaty (1997) recommends that a classroom be filled with activities involving spoken language, dramatic play, mealtime conversations, visiting speakers, oral book-reading, storytelling, chanting, tape recorders and blank tapes, language tapes, play telephones, and computer software in as many languages as the teacher feels is appropriate. This is necessary if children are going to learn to become more aware and learn to appreciate cultural diversity on a daily basis. Teachers need to communicate to children the importance of multiculturalism through the use of a variety of techniques.

By involving children in multicultural experiences with picture books and activities using a variety of techniques, they consequently learn awareness and appreciation of cultural diversity. Although this may be true, conflicts may arise when minority children and children of the mainstream population socially interact with each other within the classroom. The mainstream students are aware of the cultural diversities and may appreciate the uniqueness of the different cultures, but if the students are not taught how to deal with the biases and feelings of intolerance, the gap between home and school cultures will not be forged. The following reveals that young children need to be taught the importance of acceptance of those who come from a culture different from their own, in addition to their awareness of those cultural
differences. Through engaging in multicultural activities where young children can learn and practice being tolerant of cultural diversity will discourage negative beliefs and prejudices of those who are from a different culture.

Building tolerance towards others of a different ethnic background

By raising cultural awareness and teaching appreciation for diversity, students will learn more about other ethnic backgrounds. But this may not be enough. Students will need to also be taught the importance of acceptance of those from a different culture other than their own. Without the ability to accept others, regardless of their cultural background, children will develop beliefs of prejudice and intolerance of those who are culturally diverse. Schwallie-Giddis (cited in Aronson, 1995) found, “Those persons who have high self-esteem have fewer inhibitions and can relate to and accept others far more easily than those who do not. Also, those who display vengeful, intolerant behaviors reflect poor self-esteem” (p. 28). Therefore, feelings of intolerance can lead to low self-esteem and can eventually cause pain and emotional distress.

Aronson (1995) states that tolerance has been defined as the capacity for or the practice of recognizing and respecting the beliefs or practices of others. Parents, teachers, school counselors, and psychologists need to help children become more tolerant and accepting at the very earliest ages. Ramsey (1995) explains that, unfortunately, it is virtually impossible to grow up in this country without absorbing some of the prevalent racial, cultural and economic stereotypes and attitudes. She suggests, rather than suppressing these perceptions and related feelings, teachers need to recognize and analyze the biases. This can be done by implementing the teaching of similarities and differences in the classroom through classroom discussions of cultural attitudes, sharing multicultural literature with children, and
involving children in activities that promote acceptance or tolerance of a variety of cultures. Multicultural education should start at the beginning of formal education and should be incorporated into the lessons that are taught each day. Parents may also teach their children about acceptance of tolerance by implementing activities involving multicultural literature at home.

Aronson (1995) suggests that each activity begin by introducing or reviewing specific rules for speaking and listening: Listen and respect one another’s thoughts, ideas and feelings, share, when comfortable, any thoughts, ideas, or feelings, and when appropriate, anyone who does not wish to share should be given the option to pass until they feel more comfortable. By providing a supportive environment the children will feel good about being like some of their classmates while also feel good about being different.

Since the study of colors and similarities and differences are part of early childhood learning, *Angel Child, Dragon Child* (Surat, 1983) would be an appropriate picture book to share with children. This story deals with a Vietnamese girl and her sister coming to an American school for the first time. In the beginning they are teased because of the way they are dressed. By the end of the story a special friendship develops between the Vietnamese girl and one of the children who teased her and her sister. Beaty (1997) points out that stories like this one are important to every American class, whether or not foreign students are present. She believes they set the stage for important learning about empathy toward others. Children can experience the character’s feelings through a “story reenactment” of this tale. The children may be assigned roles, with more than one child playing the same role. The teacher can be the narrator, letting children reenact the story with actions and dialogue. He/She may prompt them or they can make up their own words if they are familiar with the story. The children will probably want to repeat the play more than once until everyone who
wants gets a chance to play a role. For preschoolers this story may be too lengthy. The teacher may choose to retell it rather than read it to them, but they would also enjoy reenacting the story.

Since this story introduces a new child to the class and she is ridiculed because she looks different, playing the game, “This is my Friend,” may be appropriate at the beginning of the year if there are new students, or for the students who were there the previous year, it could be a back-to-school activity. This “introduction” game can help children learn others’ names. To begin, the children sit in a circle and hold hands. If the children do not know the name of the child sitting on their immediate left, they ask. One child begins by introducing the person on his/her left to the group: “This is my friend, ____.” When saying his/her name, the child raises her friend’s hand in the air. His/her friend then introduces the person on his left in the same way. The game continues until everyone has been introduced and all hands are in the air. A robust round of applause can signal the end of the game. Repeat the activity until the children know each other fairly well, encouraging them to sit by someone different each time (Valentine, 1995). This is a positive way to begin a new school year, especially for new students. It reinforces the importance of acceptance of all the children in the classroom.

Another appropriate activity to encourage acceptance would be “Web of Friendship.” The children sit on the floor in a large circle. The teacher offers a ball to a chosen student. He/She begins the activity by holding onto the end of the string and throwing the ball across the circle to another student. After the ball is caught, the person who threw it says something positive about the person who caught it. The person who caught it repeats the process. Each person who has caught the ball continues to hold onto their part of the string. After everyone has participated, the teacher has the group stand and admire the intricate web they formed by their respect
for each other (Bullard, 1995). Respect is an important variable in building healthy relationships in a classroom.

Again, sharing multicultural literature adds meaning and enriches children’s learning. Parents should involve their children in multicultural literature at an early age. A story parents could read with children who are having difficulty accepting themselves is *Kelly in the Mirror* (Vertreace, 1993). The African American girl becomes upset when she looks in the mirror and thinks she does not resemble anyone in her family. This experience can become more meaningful to the children listening to the story if it is read to them by a parent or another family member. This could also lead to a discussion about past heritages, including discussions about relatives or ancestors. Children would find it interesting to listen to stories about their family’s history. They may also want to discuss or ask questions about the story. Children may want to look into a mirror and discuss how they resemble other members of their family.

Another activity Beaty (1997) suggests to families is to make a feelings photo album. In a photo album, they would place a photo on one page and have the children add a line or two telling how they felt in their own photos. They can print it, scribble it, or dictate it for their parents to write. This would make a memorable scrapbook for the children to reflect upon. This activity provides children with the opportunity to become more aware of their feelings and encourages them to feel good about themselves.

Most importantly, parents need to focus on instilling in their children, that before they are accepted by others they need to learn to accept themselves, likenesses and differences, for who they are.

In the photo essay, *How My Family Lives in America* (Kuklin, 1992), the author introduces three children from African American, Puerto Rican, and Chinese American backgrounds. The author uses the children’s words to describe their everyday lives
and shows how their heritage reflects their daily activities. The book provides portraits of the children and their communities. The story culminates with a special ethnic recipe from each family. This book offers children from the mainstream culture an opportunity to see and understand how children, from a cultural background different from their own, live each day. The teacher could ask the children to bring a photo of their family to school. As a writing activity, the students could describe in their own words how their heritage affects their daily activities. All the students could benefit from this activity because all families are alike in some ways and are different in other ways. They could compare how their own family is similar and different to their classmates'. This would encourage children to listen and learn about other families' ways of life. Also, by participating with this writing activity, children gain a sense of pride towards their heritage and this will help towards building their confidence and self-esteem. These stories with the photographs could be displayed on a bulletin board entitled, "How My Family Lives in America."

Children enjoy sharing things from home. As another writing activity the children may want to bring their family's favorite recipe to school. They could be compiled into a classroom book. This way they would have the opportunity to check it out and share the recipes with their families.

Another activity parents may want to implement after reading the story is "Special Meals." Parents, with their children, plan and prepare special meals for the family. Each meal should include foods from a different culture. When planning the meal they should discuss appropriate rituals that may take place during mealtime. During the meal the family could discuss the special meal that was prepared and casually converse about the particular culture. The children would not only learn more about the different cultures, but they would also, in a sense, be experiencing the culture.
The Rag Coat (Mills, 1991) would offer the children an additional opportunity to experience a different culture. It is an excellent picture book to share with children who are learning to be tolerant of other children who may be different from themselves. The story's setting captures the beauty and atmosphere of Appalachia. The main character, Minna, wants to go to school more than anything. But first she needs a winter coat. The Quilting Mothers, who work every day sewing and telling stories, offer to make her a coat from their scraps of quilting material, and Minna chooses the ones that have the best stories behind them. She eventually wears her new coat proudly to school. The other classmates tease her and make fun of her rag coat. At the end of the story, Minna shares with the children, the stories behind all the quilting scraps that her coat is made from. The story has a very warm message about love and friendship.

A follow-up activity that could be done at home or at school is quilt-making. After reading the story, the students could be given a square piece, either paper or fabric. They should be asked to decorate their square focusing on using illustrations that tell a story about themselves. Markers or fabric paints could be used when designing their square piece. For review, reflect back to the story, reminding them about the stories Minna's rag coat told. When they are finished with their square piece, they will need to be connected together somehow, either glued or sewn, depending on what kind of material was used. The teacher should emphasize that in order to make their classroom quilt, everyone will need to participate by designing their own square piece and it will not be a complete quilt until everyone is included. Respect and acceptance for everyone involved is an important part of this activity.

When quilt-making at home, parents could make a quilt that would represent their own heritage or ethnic background. This would give the children more background about who they are and where they come from. They should plan and discuss what they are going to include when making their quilt. The quilt, like “The
"Rag Coat," should tell a story about their culture. For example, they may want to use pieces of material that come from their native country, sew or glue special beading that have special cultural meaning onto the pieces, or draw unique designs or characters that come from their particular culture. Quilts are often used as heirlooms, passed down from generation to generation and this one would not need to be an exception. Parents need to keep in mind that they will be doing this activity as a family and will be modeling for their children that their culture is important to them just as other cultures are important to other families.

Another option that could be offered is to invite children to bring and share handmade quilts from home. The children should be prepared to share the significance of the fabrics and designs used. The special memories that the quilts represent also should be shared with their classmates. The students who are listening may have questions or positive comments about the quilt being shared. This is an important factor in learning about other's backgrounds and showing support for the other children in the classroom is also very significant. Children need to feel comfortable in order to open up and share with their peers. This supportive environment needs to be modeled by teachers on an ongoing basis. Families also need to show their support to their children.

In the story Amazing Grace (1991), Mary Hoffman writes about a young African American girl who does not have the support of her classmates. The young girl, Grace, wants to play the part of Peter in her school's production of Peter Pan. Her classmates say that she cannot be Peter because Peter is not a girl, and Peter is not black. When Grace returns home she explains to her Mama and Nana what had happened and it is Nana who convinces Grace that she can do anything she puts her mind to.

As a culmination activity, the class could retell the story of Peter Pan using
multiethnic puppets. Puppets can be very effective in promoting positive role-playing. The classmates could take turns using a variety of puppets from different cultures to play the part of Peter. The children will begin to see that changing the ethnic background of character does not change the main idea of the story. They may then begin to learn about acceptance or tolerance of those who are culturally diverse. This example shows that through literature activities students begin to understand how sameness and difference are a part of life, and that all people are the same in some ways and different in others (Aronson, 1995).

Conclusion

Multicultural education assumes that ethnic diversity is a positive element in a society because it enriches a nation and increases the ways in which citizens can perceive and solve interracial problems. Ethnic diversity also enriches a society because it provides individuals with more opportunities to experience other cultures and thus they become more fulfilled as human beings. Banks (1993) reveals, "when individuals are able to participate in a variety of ethnic cultures, they are more able to benefit from the total human experience" (p. 44).

Educators and parents need to bridge the cultural gaps between home and school so that young children grow to accept and appreciate the diversity of this world. By parents preparing their children, at a young age, for the transition from home to school will only encourage their awareness and acceptance of cultural diversity. If schools continue to implement multicultural activities on an on-going daily basis and model behaviors of acceptance of all children, the children will learn to appreciate others' cultural differences and also learn the importance of tolerance of those who are culturally diverse. Through these practices and experiences young children will grow to become healthier, more tolerant adults.
References


Books for Children


