

Standard III

Fostering Equity, Fairness, and Appreciation of Diversity

Accomplished early childhood teachers embrace diversity. They model and nurture treating others with equity, fairness, and dignity.

Accomplished early childhood generalists are committed to teaching young children in ways that are fair and equitable. They have the knowledge, skills, and dispositions necessary to effectively promote the learning of all children and to address inequities. They model and teach behaviors and dispositions that are essential in a diverse society, and they actively monitor children's behavior to ensure that these skills and dispositions are practiced by all. Accomplished teachers empower children to treat others respectfully and to expect respectful treatment in return. Teachers are fair in their treatment of children and teach children to evaluate the fairness of their own actions. They realize that equitable learning opportunities often require the development of unique accommodations to allow for the full engagement of every learner, and they explain the rationale for such accommodations to children. Accomplished teachers appreciate and respect individual differences and understand the unique needs of each member of the learning community. Teachers view diversity in a community as a benefit that gives community members the opportunity to learn from and about each perspectives of others, and they sensitively guide children to a similar appreciation of diversity.

Demonstrating Knowledge, Skills, and Dispositions

Accomplished early childhood teachers promote fairness, equity, and diversity. They are reflective, and this characteristic enables them to identify and challenge their own assumptions and biases. Their knowledge of human development and learning and their skill as careful observers of young children make them insightful about the diversity in their classroom. Teachers use their knowledge of the unique needs of each child to differentiate instruction in meaningful ways while pursuing the curriculum standards that all children need to achieve. Teachers understand the history of education with respect to the ways in which some learners have been treated inequitably in the past. They recognize that inequalities continue to exist in some learning communities, and they know the areas in which achievement gaps typically develop. They are sensitive to the fact that some communities are still in the healing process from a hurtful past, and they stay abreast of research on diversity issues and apply what they learn in ways that are equitable and effective.

Accomplished early childhood generalists have the knowledge, skills, and courage to promote fairness and equity in their classrooms. They adapt learning experiences and approaches to instruction in ways that ensure equitable participation. When young learners are given the opportunity to select experiences, teachers ensure that the available choices reflect diversity. For example, teachers might provide a range of different skin-tone crayons in the art center, dolls representing various races in the housekeeping center, or clothing from different cultures in the dramatic play area so that all children can make selections with which they can identify. Teachers confront issues of diversity proactively and ensure that each learner—regardless of race, nationality, ethnic group, primary spoken language, socioeconomic class, age, ability, exceptionalities, sexual orientation, family structure, or gender—has access to equal learning opportunities. For example, a teacher may plan a physical education activity such as a relay race by creating teams that are balanced in terms of gender, skill level, and exceptionality so that all children can participate and feel successful. Teachers skillfully guide children through courageous conversations about socially challenging issues, and they actively challenge prejudice, derogatory comments, and stereotypical perspectives. Accomplished teachers employ their skills beyond the classroom in order to effectively support equitable learning opportunities for children. For example, an accomplished teacher who is aware that a child is not receiving proper nutrition at home might discreetly find ways to provide that child with breakfast or might fill a backpack with food for the weekend. Teachers are adept at working within and beyond their immediate institution to secure resources necessary to ensure the learning of every child.

Accomplished early childhood teachers demonstrate appreciation of diversity as well as concern for fairness and equity. Teachers know that their attitudes provide young children with powerful examples that may have long-term effects, and they deliberately demonstrate the behaviors they wish to instill in children. Teachers empathize with the special pressures and frustrations experienced by some families and children, including those learning English for the first time or those demonstrating exceptionalities. Teachers nurture communities in which all children respect diversity and treat each other fairly.

Ensuring Equity

Accomplished early childhood teachers understand the importance of providing high-quality experiences that promote the learning and development of all young children, especially those whom schools have traditionally under-served. When they observe inequities, teachers take situationally appropriate action to correct them. Equitable access includes providing all children with challenging curricula and linguistically sensitive learning materials, including materials with appropriate gender-neutral terminology; adequate and safe educational facilities; and competent teachers. Accomplished teachers advocate for the timely provision of early interventions and identifications. They also strive for an equitable distribution of educational materials, media, and technologies. They remain sensitive to issues related to differing access to technology and continually work to address digital resource limitations by advocating for children. Teachers serve as a bridge between home, school, and community

organizations, including businesses, from which children can gain increased access to developmentally appropriate and culturally responsive supports for learning.

Accomplished early childhood teachers consistently adhere to local, state, and federal policies concerning children with exceptionalities, especially the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). Teachers build relationships with families and school professionals to gain valuable insights into how individual children develop so they can differentiate learning opportunities, make adaptations to the curriculum, and accommodate the unique social, cognitive, linguistic, physical, and emotional needs of children with exceptional needs. They help children to work toward and achieve learning goals and objectives, and they remain open and flexible so that exceptional needs are met.

Demonstrating Fairness

Accomplished early childhood teachers know that fairness is best served by enhancing each young child's potential to succeed. Teachers are aware not only that each child should contribute according to his or her ability, but also that each young child comes into the educational setting with different and unequal needs. True fairness often involves distributions of resources and time that are unequal. Teachers therefore adapt instruction to meet varying needs while maintaining challenging expectations for all children.

Accomplished early childhood teachers recognize that young children's perspectives on fairness often vary from adults' perspectives. Therefore, teachers not only plan for explicit ways to teach about fairness, but also look for teachable moments in which to model fairness in a safe and caring environment. For example, if a child in the class needs special equipment such as noise-filtering headphones or adaptive seat cushions, an accomplished teacher might allow all classmates to explore or discuss the equipment before allocating it to the child for whom it is intended. Such an approach demonstrates that certain resources should be given to those who need them most, but also allows everyone a degree of participation with a desirable object or experience.

Accomplished early childhood teachers know the importance of establishing a climate of fairness and respect in the classroom. They take active steps towards making such a climate a reality not only by talking about the importance of fairness but also by modeling it to young children, parents, colleagues, and the community. For example, teachers might collaborate with colleagues to offer multiple back-to-school or open-house events so that all family members have the opportunity to attend, regardless of their responsibilities and schedules. Accomplished teachers inform families about the issues of fairness that are being addressed in the classroom so that they have the opportunity to support this learning at home.

Valuing Diversity

Accomplished early childhood generalists recognize and value children's diversity—including the physical, emotional, sociocultural, and cognitive variability of children—as a dimension that enriches the learning environment. Teachers are articulate about their own culture, show curiosity and respect for other people's history and beliefs, and are aware of their own responses and biases in regard to diversity. They actively investigate the culture and history of children, for example, during a family interview. They explore the school community, seeking out people and resources that will help them understand the values, accomplishments, and mores that form the context in which children grow up. (See [Standard II—Partnering with Families and Communities](#).)

Accomplished early childhood teachers show respect and appreciation for each young child's cultural background. They are careful not to make unchecked assumptions about any child's background, and they research current diversity issues and learn about common misconceptions that may affect the child's learning and success. Teachers demonstrate their appreciation of children's cultural backgrounds by weaving attention to diversity throughout the curriculum and the year through various modes, such as movies, stories, and guests. For example, a teacher might invite a woman from a Muslim community who wears traditional dress to visit the classroom to explain the significance of her garments. By nurturing positive links to each child's background, teachers create a more successful learning environment. They invite children to share their cultures and values through their repertoire of songs, games, dances, or stories. They learn to speak some words and phrases in the languages of children and attend community events of different cultures. They may make home visits to understand the children's backgrounds and to develop relationships with the families.

Accomplished early childhood teachers encourage young children to understand their own ethnicities, for example by interviewing their parents and then bringing related artifacts to the classroom or by relaying oral traditions. Teachers also provide young children with opportunities to become familiar with ethnicities other than those represented in the classroom or the local community. They provide materials or experiences that enable children to gain a global perspective, such as using webcams or pen pals to communicate with a classroom in a different part of the world or attending virtual field trips to understand how the people in another country speak, look, dress, and behave.

Accomplished early childhood teachers build a classroom community that fosters young children's curiosity and respect for other people's history, language, values, beliefs, family structures, cultures, and communities. Teachers are welcoming toward diverse issues and challenging perspectives. They understand that group diversity may cause reactions ranging from curiosity to discomfort among children, and they engage in courageous conversations. They address diversity issues affecting instruction, class management, and children's participation, and they encourage children to celebrate one another's accomplishments within the classroom.

Accomplished early childhood teachers respect differences in families and family structures. They actively learn about children's families to ensure that they can respond appropriately to their particular needs. They understand that their own values and their style of speaking and interacting, as well as the public purposes of schooling, may be in conflict with some children's family cultures. For example, many early childhood teachers seek to foster children's abilities to make individual choices and to think independently. In some cultures, however, most decisions are made by elders or by group consensus, and children are expected to conform. Parents in such communities may perceive children's efforts to express themselves and make choices as imposing on adult authority. Accomplished teachers communicate with and respond to families in ways that match language and cultural norms in a respectful manner. They use technology to communicate with families when appropriate, but they also use face-to-face communication when possible in order to build rapport.

Accomplished early childhood teachers acknowledge the commonalities that underlie diversity. They know that children from various backgrounds may share many interests, have similar successes and challenges, and are excited by many of the same kinds of learning opportunities. Thus, while teachers capitalize on the diversity among children as an opportunity for learning and for strengthening individual children's self-esteem, they also build upon commonalities to promote classroom cohesiveness and foster attitudes conducive to participating in democratic institutions and a global society.