

## 3. UNIT ACTIVITIES

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### 3.05 UNIT ACTIVITIES FOCUSING ON SOCIO-CULTURAL AND LINGUISTIC DIVERSITY AMONG EXCEPTIONAL CHILDREN, YOUTH AND ADULTS

CEC recognizes the special and unique needs of members of diverse socio-cultural and linguistic groups, and encourages all units to engage in activities that will promote full and equitable participation and membership in society for all individuals. CEC has adopted a broad view of diversity that incorporates a wide range of characteristics. This includes (but is not limited to) ethnicity, race, language and communication, social class, physical, psychological and cognitive abilities, gender, sexual orientation, age, religious and spiritual values, and geographic location. CEC further recognizes that all individuals—students, families, as well as educators—are simultaneously members of multiple groups which influences their identity and shapes their world view.

The goals of these activities are to identify some of the issues related to serving exceptional children and youth in a multicultural society as well as issues experienced by educators from diverse socio-cultural groups, and to give members ideas on how they might learn more and become involved in some of these areas. As a result of engaging in meaningful dialogue and activities related to issues of diversity, equity, and social justice we hope that CEC membership will be positioned to assume a leadership role in enhancing the quality of life for all individuals with exceptionalities.

#### **Cultural Diversity**

Educators need to be aware of the increasing cultural and linguistic diversity within our society and the need to effectively serve exceptional students and their families who have historically been underserved or inappropriately served by educational and related service agencies. Educators must also be qualified to provide culturally and linguistically responsive services to exceptional learners and their families.

#### **Suggested unit activities include:**

- Learn about how the social fabric of the country is changing.
- Examine the cultural make-up of your state/province and local community.
- Find out how this is affecting the state/province and local school systems and their future planning.
- Identify the range of values, assumptions, beliefs and perceptions that are reflected in the local community, as well as those which characterize the organizational culture of schools and related service agencies.

#### **Valuing Diversity**

CEC recognizes the need to understand that ethnic, racial, linguistic and other cultural differences have the potential to enhance our social, peer and professional relationships. Schools should strive to provide enriching learning experiences to all children by linking the students' home experiences to those at school, and should ensure that learners who are members of non-dominant cultural groups have equitable opportunities to experience successful educational outcomes. Similarly, related agencies should ensure meaningful access to services for underserved populations, and deliver services in ways that are culturally and linguistically appropriate.

**Suggested unit activities include:**

- Provide professional development opportunities for educators to examine their own personal beliefs, values and assumptions about diversity, and to foster a view of diversity as a resource and strength.
- Promote educators' understanding of the influence of culture on teaching and learning, and support their use of differentiated instructional practices that are inclusive of the learning styles, abilities, and needs of all groups.
- Identify and learn about the contributions of different groups to the growth and development of the community, country, state/province, etc.
- Discuss successful activities for bridging home and school experiences.
- Create opportunities for family and community members to share their cultural heritage and resources as part of the educational experience for all students, in ways that integrate experiences into the curriculum.
- Review your school's curriculum to determine the inclusiveness of the materials used.
- Promote the acquisition, use and maintenance of languages and methods of communication other than English.
- Make sure that parents, family and community members feel welcomed when visiting their children's school, by providing information and materials in the language(s) and methods of communication of the home and/or parent, and by providing interpreters.

**Culturally Diverse Educators and Educators with Disabilities**

In spite of increasing diversity among the general population and particularly among school-age children and youth, educators as a group continue to be predominantly white, middle class, and female. CEC recognizes the importance of increasing representation of under-represented groups among teachers, related service providers, paraprofessionals as well as educational leaders.

**Suggested unit activities include:**

- Visit local high schools and present on the reward of teaching exceptional students.
- Establish a Club for Careers in Special Education and encourage members to enter the teaching profession.
- Participate in job fairs and career days to encourage students to enter careers in special education.
- Provide incentives for members of under-represented groups (e.g., bilingual paraprofessionals) to complete certification requirements.

**Parental/Family Involvement**

CEC acknowledges that parents and family members from non-dominant groups have often been excluded from full participation in their children's education including the special education process. CEC also recognizes that families from these groups may participate in the educational process in ways that differ from traditional views of parent involvement. Effective strategies must be used so parents are viewed as and feel like full partners in the education of their children.

**Suggested unit activities include:**

- Invite parents to meetings and ask for their input on various issues.
- Sponsor presentations on how to reach out to families in a multicultural society. Focus on different cultural groups in terms of family structure, child raising practices, social norms and institutions, place of individual in society, perception of disability, etc.
- Become familiar with the "stages of acceptance" experienced by parents.
- Review materials sent to parents to determine if they are written in an appropriate manner and level for different cultural groups. If not, revise the materials, possibly in a language other than English.

**Identification of Ethnically, Culturally, and Linguistically Diverse Children**

Disproportionate representation in special and gifted education among African American, Hispanic, American Indian and Asian children and youth continues to be of serious concern to CEC and to the profession. This warrants specific actions to prevent continued underachievement among these groups.

**Suggested unit activities include:**

- Examine the curriculum and instructional practices of the school to identify areas in which some groups of students may be underachieving when compared to others.
- Systematically investigate potential factors which may be creating inequitable learning opportunities for underachieving students.
- Learn about prereferral strategies for identifying disabilities among students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. Provide professional development activities that are ongoing and sustained over time, to support educators in implementing effective strategies to prevent underachievement, and to provide early interventions to struggling learners.
- Increase awareness among educators of factors which may lead to under-identification of students with disabilities in gifted education as well as specific categories of special education.
- Explore ways special education programs can integrate services with other programs to appropriately identify and serve culturally diverse students who are being served through bilingual education, migrant education, Indian education, or Head Start programs.