

SCCS Annual URI Training

Creating Diversity and Family Culture in the Preschool Classroom while bridging the gap between home and school

Magic Lantern Montessori Preschool

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Title: Assistant Director

Objective:

By the end of this training, teachers will be able to:

- Recognize the importance of integrating children's family cultures into all areas of the classroom.
- Reflect on personal biases and understand how culture impacts teaching practices.
- Create a Home and School Culture Shelf that reflects the diversity of your community's backgrounds.
- Design classroom environments (dramatic play, language, and daily routines) that are culturally responsive.
- Engage families in meaningful ways to bridge home and school experiences.
- Foster an inclusive environment that honors every child's identity.



Home and Culture shelf

The Home and Culture Shelf is a foundational element—a dedicated space that reflects their diverse cultures, traditions, and family stories, creating a visible bridge between home and school. This shelf can also be geographical, representing different countries and cultures that are not represented by staff and community.

Key Components:

- Family photos
- Cultural artifacts (clothing, fabrics, tools)
- Books, music, and instruments
- Recipes or images of foods from home

Best Practices:

- Place at child height for accessibility
- Use labels with names and descriptions
- Rotate items regularly
- Integrate into storytelling and discussions

Reflective Discussion:

- Share a time when a child's culture was not represented
- Discuss the impact and how it could have been more inclusive



Community Resource Area/Parent Shelf

The Parent Shelf is a meaningful way to connect families to the classroom and make cultural learning visible and ongoing. This space highlights monthly cultural celebrations, heritage months, and family contributions, helping children and families feel seen, valued, and included.

Unlike a one-time activity, the Parent Shelf is dynamic—it evolves throughout the year and reflects both the broader community and the unique cultures of the children in the classroom. It also serves as a bridge between school and home, inviting families into the learning experience.

What the Parent Shelf Can Include:

- Monthly cultural celebrations (e.g., heritage months, holidays, traditions)
- Books, photos, or artifacts connected to the focus
- Family contributions (photos, stories, items)
- Simple written explanations for families and children
- Invitations for participation (“Share your family traditions!”)

Reflective Discussion:

- How does this shelf reflect both the classroom and the broader community?
- How will families see themselves represented?
- How will this go beyond just decoration?



Expanding Cultural Representation Across the Classroom Environment

Creating a culturally responsive classroom goes beyond one shelf—it should be embedded throughout all learning areas and daily routines.

Dramatic Play Area:

- Include diverse dolls representing different races, cultures, and family structures
- Add real-life items from children's homes (cooking utensils, fabrics, dress-up clothes)
- Incorporate culturally relevant play themes (family gatherings, cooking, celebrations)

Language & Literacy Area:

- Provide books in children's home languages
- Include stories that reflect diverse cultures and family experiences
- Create a family photo album with pictures of each child's family
 - Children can revisit this independently
 - Supports emotional connection and identity development
- Classroom Environment & Materials
- Display photos of children and their families throughout the room
- Include multicultural art, music, and visual materials
- Ensure representation is authentic and meaningful—not stereotypical

Reflective Discussion Questions:

- What is the difference between authentic representation and stereotypes in classroom materials?
- Do the books and materials in your classroom reflect your current group of children? Why or why not?



Embedding Culture into Daily Routines (Mealtimes & Beyond)

Mealtime is a powerful opportunity to honor children's home experiences. Mealtimes are a great time to have discussions, ask questions, talk about the foods they are eating and generally just connecting with children on a different level.

Educators can:

- Learn about and acknowledge foods children eat at home
- Discuss different cultural foods in a respectful and curious way
- Incorporate familiar foods when possible
- Respect cultural eating practices (e.g., use of utensils, eating styles, shared meals)
- Encourage conversation about family traditions related to food
- Use different cultural foods in dramatic play; create restaurant/shops that incorporate culture:
 - Sushi Restaurant
 - Ethiopian Restaurant
 - Bodega shop

Other Daily Routines:

- Greeting children in their home language
- Incorporating cultural songs and music into transitions
- Recognizing cultural traditions and celebrations in authentic ways

Reflective Discussion questions:

- How can mealtimes be used as an opportunity to build cultural awareness and connection?
- What are some cultural eating practices we should be mindful of and respect?
- What are some other daily routines you can implement in your classroom?



Engaging Families in the Classroom

Building Authentic Partnerships

Families are essential partners in creating a culturally inclusive classroom. Their knowledge and experiences enrich the learning environment.

Strategies for Engagement

Cultural Sharing Days: Families share traditions, music, or stories

- Family Surveys: Learn about languages, values, and routines
- Take-Home Projects: Children bring back stories or artifacts
- Family Storytelling: Invite families to read or speak in their home language
- Ongoing Communication: Share classroom experiences and invite participation
- Key Focus: Build ongoing, reciprocal relationships—not just one-time involvement.

Refelctive Discussion Questions:

- How can we move from one-time events to ongoing relationships?
- What barriers might families face in engaging, and how can we reduce them?



Classroom Environment Checklist

Creating Diversity and Family Culture in the Preschool Classroom and Bridging the Gap between Home and School

Teacher Name: _____

Classroom: _____

Date: _____

Home Culture Representation

- ☐ A Home Culture Shelf is present and accessible to children
- ☐ Items reflect multiple children and families
- ☐ Materials include photos, artifacts, books, or cultural items
- ☐ Items are labeled with names and descriptions
- ☐ Shelf materials are rotated regularly
- ☐ Children interact with and discuss items

Family Presence in the Classroom

- ☐ Family photos displayed at child level
- ☐ Family photo album accessible to children
- ☐ Displays reflect all children and family structures
- ☐ Families contribute materials/photos
- ☐ Communication reflects family voice

Dramatic Play Area

- ☐ Diverse dolls representing races, cultures, and families
- ☐ Cultural dress-up clothes/materials included
- ☐ Real-life items (utensils, fabrics, containers) present
- ☐ Play reflects home experiences (cooking, celebrations)
- ☐ Materials are culturally authentic (not stereotypical)

Language & Literacy Area

- ☐ Books reflect diverse cultures and identities
- ☐ Books include home languages (if possible)
- ☐ Stories reflect diverse family structures
- ☐ Labels/visuals include multiple languages
- ☐ Children see themselves represented

Classroom Environment Checklist

Classroom Environment & Materials

- ☐ Posters/art reflect cultures authentically
- ☐ Materials go beyond holidays
- ☐ Real photos are displayed
- ☐ Music/media reflect diverse cultures
- ☐ Diversity is integrated throughout the classroom

Mealtime & Daily Routines

- ☐ Foods from home are acknowledged and discussed
- ☐ Cultural eating practices are respected
- ☐ Opportunities to explore different foods
- ☐ Mealtime includes cultural conversations
- ☐ Daily routines include inclusive practices

Family Engagement & Communication

- ☐ Families invited to share traditions/stories
- ☐ Family input informs classroom practices
- ☐ Communication is ongoing
- ☐ Families feel welcomed and represented
- ☐ Participation opportunities are inclusive

Teacher Reflection

- ☐ All cultures are meaningfully represented
- ☐ I reflect on my own biases
- ☐ I adapt environment based on family needs
- ☐ Children are encouraged to share experiences
- ☐ I build home-school connections

Action Steps

One strength in my classroom:

One area for growth:

Next step I will take: