



## Strategies to Support a Positive School Climate

# Cultural Awareness

Cultural awareness refers to students' understanding of the differences between themselves and those from other cultures in their shared beliefs, values, attitudes, and behaviours, and how these differences affect how they learn individually and in groups (Davis & Wright, 2009; Earley & Ang, 2003). Cultural self-awareness refers to a person's appreciation of how their culture affects their personal beliefs and actions (Lu & Wan, 2018).



### Why is it important?

- Stronger identification with a culture is positively associated with well-being outcomes, such as self-esteem, sense of life purpose, and self-confidence (Martinez & Dukes, 1997).
- Positive peer interactions around culture can help facilitate the adjustment and school success of those in the cultural minority (Vietze, Juang, & Schachner, 2019).
- Ethnic identity, and the sense of ethnic pride, commitment, and involvement it entails, has a protective effect on one's mental health, buffering any stress brought on by discrimination (Mossakowski, 2003).

## In Practice



### What can schools do?

Schools can strive to develop a school culture that promotes an understanding of how culture affects how one learns individually and in groups. This can be achieved by:

- Creating learning communities where students are encouraged to take risks, share knowledge, and asks questions of each other so cultural identity can be openly expressed (Ortiz, 2000).
- Involving the student body in creating culturally inclusive spaces; thus, facilitating a safe environment for sharing and exploring different ideas and experiences (Vietze, Juang, & Schachner, 2019).
- Providing opportunities for guest speakers from diverse backgrounds and allowing for both curricular and extra-curricular experiences that expose students to a broad range of cultures and perspectives.

Through careful reflection, cultural experiences can contribute to a positive school environment characterized by supportive relationships among students, teachers and staff.



### In the Classroom

For educator's, the development of cultural awareness involves a willingness to explore one's own cultural norms, reflect upon biases, and acknowledge the impacts of cultural background on learning (Moore, 2018).

The following practices will help build cultural understanding in the classroom

- Develop trust by demonstrating a genuine interest in learning about your students and avoid any cultural taboos that may apply to them.
- Use collaborative small group activities that encourage the sharing of personal experiences and perspectives in relation to course content.
- Be sensitive to cultural ways of learning and create opportunities for self-expression through flexible lessons and projects.
- Create safe spaces through open dialogue with students that model how to discuss ethnic and cultural differences in a respectful manner.
- Adapt instructional practices to avoid culturally dependent frames of reference that may not resonate with all students.
- Involve parents and caregivers in diversity appreciation events that give students an opportunity to share a part of their cultural heritage or identity.

Teacher naturally bring their own culture into the classroom through their personalities and teaching styles which can help students feel comfortable with their own cultural identities.

## References

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