

Standard II **Element B**

LEVEL 2 PRACTICES

THE TEACHER:

Creates a classroom environment in which diversity is used to ensure:

2 *A sense of community among students.*

Social relationships with peers provide children with a range of supports and tacit acknowledgment of their acceptance in the social milieu of the school. Studies of young elementary-age children reveal that positive social relations influence their intellectual, communicative, interpersonal, and emotional development (Asher, 1983; Bates, 1975; Hartup, 1978; Parker & Asher, 1987; Rubin, 1980). During the primary grades, children begin to understand and adopt the core values of their culture, and they develop the social skills needed to act effectively on those values (Solomon, Walson, Delucchi, Schaps, & Battistich, 1988). The public school classroom has particular importance as a context for the development of relationships between groups of children who have little contact outside the school setting. (Salisbury, Gallucci, Palombaro, & Peck, 1995, para. 2)

In his book *Visible Learning for Teachers Maximizing Impact on Learning*, John Hattie writes about the importance of a sense of community among students.

For many students, school can be a lonely place, and low classroom acceptance by peers can be linked with subsequent disengagement and lowered achievement. There needs to be a sense of belonging and this can come from peers. Certainly, when a student has friends at school, it is a different and better place. In the studies looking at what happens to students when they move schools, the single greatest predictor of subsequent success is whether the student makes a friend in the first month (Galton et al., 2000; Pratt and George, 2005). It is incumbent therefore upon schools to attend to student friendships, to ensure that the class makes everyone welcomed, and at a minimum, to ensure that all students have a sense of belonging. (Hattie, 2012, p. 87)

Students need to understand that the classroom belongs to everyone, not just the teacher or a select group of students. This does not happen by accident but requires intentional planning by the teacher. The teacher who creates an environment in which diversity is respected and each student's contribution is valued is laying the foundation for establishing a community of learners within the classroom.

Promoting respect for diversity:

- Create purposeful opportunities for students to collaborate and communicate with peers who are economically, culturally, or linguistically diverse. Provide students with sentence stems or examples of dialogue that demonstrate they are listening and interacting in a respectful manner.
- Facilitate discussions on topics that help students understand the meaning of diversity, such as asking students to discuss their family or community's dress, food, or communication practices. For example, a discussion on communication can help students understand that in some cultures it is considered disrespectful to speak loudly and this might be why some of their classmates choose not to join in loud, lively discussions or celebrations.
- Use moments of conflict between students to discuss the need for tolerance and acceptance. Share stories of culturally diverse individuals who championed for tolerance and overcame challenges.

See also [Standard II, Element A](#) and [Standard III, Element E](#) and [Element F](#).

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Refer to this internal resource for additional information:

- [Strategies for Creating a Sense of Community](#)
Document provides practical ideas for how teachers can create a community within the classroom.

Refer to this external resource for additional information:

- Article: “Building Community in the Classroom” by Ellen Booth Church
<http://www.scholastic.com/teachers/article/building-community-classroom>
Article provides practical ideas for how to build a community in the classroom at the beginning of the school year.

3 *Effective interactions among students.*

The result of an environment in which diversity is respected and a sense of community is established will be effective interactions among students. For students to interact effectively, mutual respect and skills to communicate effectively with one another must exist.

The teacher can establish processes for effective interactions among students by providing opportunities for students to collaborate and communicate. This may be accomplished through the use of technology, but periodically students need to do this through face-to-face interactions.

Students’ face-to-face interactions give them the chance to support each other academically and personally. When students actively invest in and support their groupmates’ learning, they are practicing the skills required to be part of an effective learning team. The combination of personal and academic supports that emerge is termed “promotive interactions.” (Frey, Fisher, & Everlove, 2009, p. 38)

Although technology can be an effective and motivating tool for student communication, students need opportunities to communicate with peers in a manner that requires them to “construct meaning not just from the content of words but also from the gestures, movement and expressions their partners or groupmates use.” (Frey, Fisher, & Everlove, 2009, p. 38)

Refer to this internal resource for additional information:

- [Sentence Starters for Teaching Students Accountable Talk](#)
Document provides ideas for teaching students dialogue that demonstrates respect for others’ perspectives.

4 *Incorporates instruction that reflects diverse backgrounds, experiences, and different points of view.*

Teachers can use diversity to facilitate student learning by modeling for students what it looks like to reflect on one’s cultural identity with a focus on cultural values and norms. As Henry Giroux (1992) points out, “Teachers need to find ways of creating a space for mutual engagement of lived difference that does not require the silencing of a multiplicity of voices by a single dominant discourse” (p. 201). The National Institute for Urban School Improvement (2005) suggests some activities for teachers to engage in this kind of reflection (all can be adapted into activities for students):

- Learn about your own history, heritage, community, family, culture, as well as other groups to which you belong
- Write about your celebrations, traditions, beliefs, and cultural practices
- Reflect on the things you value in your life including significant artifacts, customs, family events, and the ways in which you celebrate them

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- List the things that you do in your classroom that come from a cultural perspective. Check your list with a teaching colleague. How are your lists different and similar?

See also [Standard III, Element A](#).

Refer to these external resources for additional information:

- Article: “Cultural Identity and Teaching” published by the National Institute for Urban School Improvement
http://www.niusileadscape.org/docs/FINAL_PRODUCTS/NIUSI/toolkit_cd/4%20%20Implementing%20Change/OnPoints/OP_cultural_identity.pdf
Article provides practical guidance for reflecting on one’s cultural identity as well as building and presenting culture in the classroom.

Planning/Coaching Questions

- How were you able to obtain information on my students’ cultures, backgrounds, and family structures?
- What changes in procedures or structures will you need to employ to acknowledge the influence of various aspects of background on student perspectives?
- What instructional approaches and materials did you use that reflect students’ backgrounds and enhance student learning?
- How did you develop a sense of community within the classroom?
- How were you able to provide opportunities for students to engage in effective interactions with their peers?
- How do you model a respect for individual differences and ensure students do the same?
- **How will you model and teach students to value diverse perspectives?**
- How do you capitalize on the diversity within your classroom?

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