

Promoting acceptance of diversity

General information about this item

Diversity in the ECERS- R refers to the differences found in groups of people with regard to race, religion, culture, ability, age, or gender. For example, all races of people do not look the same, in terms of features and skin color. People of different cultures will have different kinds of interaction styles, languages, and traditions. Unfortunately, many people tend to discriminate against one group or another, leading to incorrect assumptions about members of a group, unfair treatment of people in those groups, and closed attitudes about differences. Such attitudes cause many problems in our world's societies.

Young children are not born with attitudes that cause them to discriminate against others. However, they quickly learn such attitudes as they watch and learn from what others do and say. A child who is exposed to messages saying that certain differences are bad, soon learns to believe in and act according to those messages.

Thus, in an attempt to encourage children to view others as individuals, without preconceived notions; to see a positive side to differences, rather than a negative one; and to focus on similarities rather than on differences, high quality early childhood education provides experiences to encourage **acceptance of diversity**.

Acceptance of diversity means that instead of viewing differences as a negative, they are seen as strengths, adding more flavor to life, allowing all to contribute in unique ways. Children learn that differences among groups exist and can be respected and enjoyed, rather than feared and disliked. In addition, there is a focus on the similarities that bind us together as humans, rather than a concentration on how we differ.

In addition to this item, issues related to acceptance of diversity are found in other items of the scale. For example, aspects of accepting diversity come up in assessing the quality of dramatic play, music, and books and pictures. However, this is the primary item in the ECERS- R that looks at how well a program does in counteracting the growth of bias and encouraging constructive social attitudes.

The item focuses on the environmental messages that children receive about different people in the world's societies. It considers the images that children experience as they participate in the program and also whether overt prejudice is handled appropriately.

In some programs where there is little or no diversity represented in the children or staff, people often think that there is no need to represent diversity in materials. Staff may say that since there is only one group represented in the children in their classroom, they do not need to show anyone else in their materials. Certainly this gives the children a chance to see themselves represented, but it does not encourage learning about and accepting diversity. Therefore, *the requirements of this item apply to all programs, whether they include or do not include variation in staff and children.*

All of these dolls are of one race so that children are unable to see the diversity among people represented in dolls.



1.1 A closer look at each indicator

The materials considered in this indicator include all pictorial materials, all toys, and all print and A V materials used by or with the children. Guidance for assessing the diversity in materials is provided in the "Notes for Clarification" on page 36 in the ECERS- R. Examples of the types of things to look for are included in the indicator.

For materials to show racial diversity means that more than one of the races or ethnic groups from the various continents are represented in some way. (See photos 28.1.1 a-b.) For materials to show cultural diversity means that the traditions of at least two different groups are represented in some way.

A careful assessment of all materials is required to score. For example, books must be opened and flipped through, all puzzles should be examined, and the block area should be searched for small people that might represent different races.

However, for diversity to be visible in the materials means that the observer should not have to search beyond what would be obvious to the children as they use the materials. For example, one picture showing diversity, found in a magazine at the bottom of a stack in the art center, would not be readily obvious to the children. An easy-to-see displayed picture, or a picture in a book easily accessible to children would be considered visible.

To score 1.1 "No," there must at least one example of diversity, that would be obvious to the children, found in the materials observed throughout the classroom. This can be visible within a single material (such as several races represented in a poster), or as a combination of two or more separate materials (such as two baby dolls, each representing a different race).

Note that the example observed to score "No" can show either cultural or racial diversity; both are not needed to score "No."

If no examples are found, score 1.1 "Yes."

1.2 For this item, a *stereotype* is a standardized mental picture that is held about any group, representing an oversimplified view of the individuals within that group. Stereotypes cause people to say, "Everyone in that group is like that," without considering individual characteristics.

Examples of stereotypes include:

- o "Blonds" are dumb.
- o Men/boys are strong; women/girls are weak.
- o Old people are not competent.
- o Fat people are lazy.
- o Poor people steal things.
- o Indians wear feathers and use bows and arrows.

Obviously these are not true statements, because if we look at the individuals within these groups, there would be little evidence to support such ideas. Yet, people make assumptions according to stereotypes, causing unfair treatment of many.

Stereotyped images are common in society, and can be found in the materials present in preschool classrooms. (See photo next page) Many are seen in old materials that are not up-to-date in terms of current social beliefs and practices. For example, out-of-date pictures of people in jobs often systematically show men in certain roles (professionals, roles associated with physical strength) and women in others (stay-at-home-moms, nurses, teachers). In our current world, any of these pictures would be fine for preschoolers as long as they were

balanced with the alternatives as well, for example, men as stay-at-home parents and women as doctors.

There are many stereotypes shown in children's toys, as well. For example, the traditional "Cowboys and Indians" toys depict both groups superficially, implying that members of the groups only fight with and kill the other. Certainly, this is a limited view of Cowboys and Indians, which does not represent the more positive things that group members might do, either from a historical or current point of view.

To score, look for stereotyped portrayals in all materials used by children. If groups of people are represented *only* as stereotypes, score 1.2 "Yes."

1.3 *Prejudice* means negative treatment of a group, or individuals within a group, because of an oversimplified view of the group's characteristics. The group or the individual is not judged by real evidence, but rather by pre-conceived notions of what they will be like. Examples of prejudiced thinking include:

- o She cannot do the job because she is a woman.
He cannot learn because he is an African-American.
- o She is Jewish, so I cannot be her friend.
- o Children with disabilities cannot function well in the group.
- o They are stupid because they do not speak English.
- o People of that culture do not care for their children well.

It is easy to observe extremely obvious prejudice, but far more difficult to know when more subtle prejudice is being shown. It is difficult to discern whether a behavior is a sign of true prejudice, shows insensitivity about some issues, or is the

If these puzzles were the only images children saw of people from different countries, they would get the message that the people always dress in this way. Other materials are needed to balance this



product of an over-sensitive interpretation by the observer. For example, if a child in a minority group appears to get less attention than other children, is this caused by prejudice on the part of staff, or by other reasons? It could be that the observer is very sensitive to children from minority groups being treated unfairly, and so does not notice that there are many other non-minority children in the group who also get less attention than some favorites. It might also be that the child is truly getting less attention for some reason that is not attached to being in a minority group. However, it is also possible that active prejudice is occurring in the class. It is up to the observer to look at all the evidence, before scoring.

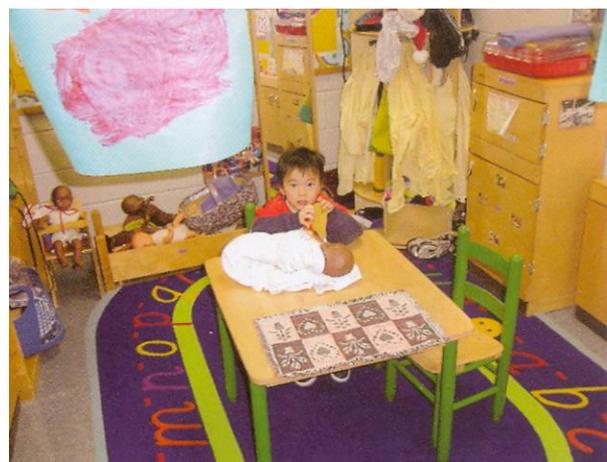
Sometimes it might appear that staff are acting with prejudice, when in fact their behaviors are due to a lack of sensitivity about what is considered correct (political correctness) in our society. For example, in high-quality early childhood programs, it is not considered appropriate to ask children to sit "Indian style" because this is stereotyping the way in which Native Americans sit. It is likely to be insulting to someone who is a Native American. Many staff prefer the term "crisscross applesauce" to remind children to sit on the floor with their legs crossed because it is not potentially offensive. However, naive use of such commonly used terms cannot be considered prejudiced behavior unless a person intends to be offensive and insulting.

If, during the observation, including the staff questioning time, staff say or do anything that is an obvious, clear act of prejudice against others (either children or other adults), score 1.3 "Yes."

However, the observer should be cautioned to consider all evidence. What may appear to be prejudice might actually be a lack of knowledge on the part of the staff or an overly sensitive response on the observer's part. If in doubt about an instance that might be considered prejudiced, asking a question to get clarification from staff without accusing, might help in making a scoring decision.

3.1 Racial and cultural diversity in materials is discussed in 1.1. Examples are provided in the indicator. Some means at least one example of racial diversity and one example of cultural diversity is observed. One of each must be present to score "Yes."

The examples must be easily seen by the children, and in the space that is used for a large part of the day, to give credit. For example, they must be located in the classroom where children spend most of their time, rather than in the hallway, or in another classroom used for a short period.



3.2 Diversity in materials can be shown positively or negatively. Positive images give good messages about the characteristics of people; negative images give the opposite. For example, if toy soldier figures are only shown as people who use weapons to kill, and this is not

balanced with other materials that show the wide range of soldiers' roles (protecting, helping others, as family members, in other job assignments), children see only one message about what soldiers do—they kill others. Similarly, if members of certain groups are shown only as being poor, in certain types of jobs, or as people who take part in illegal activities, these are also negative portrayals of diversity.

Materials show diversity in a positive way requires that the messages about people depicted are good and do not stereotype members of any group. People are shown as humans who are pleasant, capable, and to be valued.

These small people toys found in the block area show diversity in a positive way



Score 3.2 "No" if any examples of negative images are included in the materials used by the children. Score "Yes" if all images are positive.

3.3 The meaning of prejudice is discussed in 1.3. For staff to intervene appropriately to counteract prejudice requires that:

...Staff do not ignore any prejudice that they observe.

...Staff are aware of situations involving possible prejudice (e.g., child who speaks another language, child with disability, child whose family celebrates different holidays from those of others in

the group), and give those situations special attention.

...Staff take action when they observe prejudiced behavior, either by children or other adults, and make it clear that such talk and/or behavior is not acceptable. Examples are provided in the indicator.

It is more likely that staff will respond to prejudice being shown by children in the class. The most constructive response staff can have with children is to stop behavior and discuss it in simple terms, explaining why it is not acceptable. Children should be helped to see the feelings of others and the effects of their actions. Modeling the appropriate behavior is very effective as well.



In this program, children representing diverse groups get along very well because staff consistently help children better understand one another.

It is more difficult for staff to handle the prejudice shown by other adults. However, this must be handled if prejudice by adults comes up during the observation. For example, a parent might say to the staff, "Well, what do you expect of the child? Those people are always like that!" In this case, the teacher would be required to discuss the inappropriateness of such a statement with the offending adult, making it clear that prejudice is not shared or

tolerated. This would have to be handled in a nonconfrontational, constructive, professional manner.

If **no prejudice** is observed, and the observer sees plenty of evidence that such behavior would be very unlikely, score 3.3 "Yes."

If prejudice is observed during the observation and staff are (or should be) aware of it, score 3.3 "No" if staff do not intervene appropriately.

5.1 Information about materials considered in this item (including books and pictures) is discussed in 1.1 and 3.1. Accessible means that children can reach and easily use the materials (books and toys) or if materials are displayed, they are easily visible to the children.

Stereotype is defined in 1.2. Non-stereotyping roles require that people are shown in their roles with no assumptions or oversimplifications made regarding individuals within any group. Examples are provided in the indicator.

Many means that there are enough examples so that it is easy for the observer (and children) to experience some of them, without having to complete a difficult search. In looking at displayed



These puzzles represent the categories of diversity positively.

materials, dolls and people figures, puzzles and other pictorial toys/games, and some of the books that children are most likely to use, the presence of diversity should be obvious. For example, the observer should not have to search through 30 books to find one picture showing diversity. However, the observer does need to look at all the materials generally accessible to the children for their use.

For this indicator, there need to be many books, many pictures, and many materials accessible to the children, and all categories of diversity listed in the indicator (races, cultures, ages, abilities, gender) need to be included to some degree. However, there do not need to be many examples of each category.

Pictures and posters in the classroom show a range of diversity.



Materials must be located in spaces children use for most of the day, such as their main classroom. If no main classroom is assigned to the group being observed, materials in all spaces used should be considered to score.



Puppets represent diversity in race, gender and ability.

Materials located in spaces used only for relatively short periods (e.g., hallways, entry way, lunch room, early AM or late PM classroom) are not counted to meet the requirements of this indicator.

No specific required number of examples is provided, because this will vary based on the obviousness of the materials and number of children in the group.

This poster represents diversity in ability.

5.2 Props are materials children use in their dramatic or pretend play.

This indicator requires that props for dramatic play include items that represent different cultures. Examples are given in the indicator. Additional examples include:

- Dress up clothing representing different countries and customs, such as hats, shoes, pants, shirts, and dresses
- Puppets representing people of different cultures
- Small toy people representing various ethnic groups, for use with blocks
- Play food representing different cultures
- Baby carriers from different cultures
- Play money from different countries
- Pieces of fabric or blankets typical of different cultures
- Real equipment used by people with disabilities
- Equipment for dolls representing certain disabilities

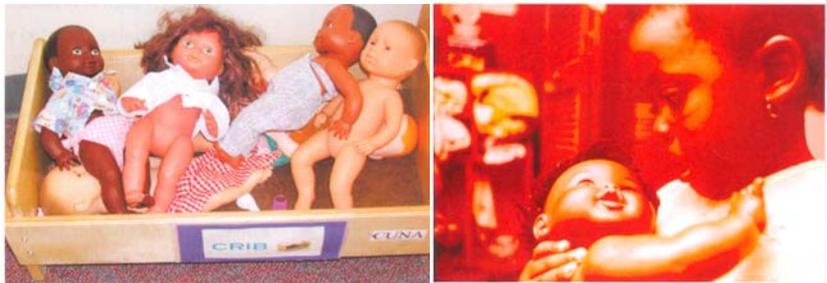


To give credit (score "Yes"), more than two examples must be observed. The examples must be accessible and obvious within the props children regularly use for dramatic play, either indoors or outdoors.

Adaptive equipment for use with dolls is accessible for dramatic play.



Children can choose dolls to use that look more or less like they do.



7.1 Inclusion of diversity as part of daily routines and play goes beyond having materials showing diversity displayed or accessible for children to play with. Instead, representing diversity is a regular part of the daily experiences that children have throughout the day, each day. These experiences are the usual rather than the unusual.

Examples of including diversity as part of daily routines and play are included in the indicator. However, more specific examples include:

As part of routines:

- Ethnic foods are served often as meals or snacks.
- Staff use some words in different languages to talk about routines.
- Music from varying cultures is used at naptime.
- Staff say hello or goodbye in different languages.
- Family traditions and utensils are provided at meals and snacks, if desired.

As part of play activities:

- In cooking activities, foods representative of other cultures are prepared by children.
- "Bingo" is played in different languages.
- Children regularly dance to music from various cultures.
- Art materials associated with different cultures are used, such as colored sands for sand paintings, clay for making pottery, and origami paper for simple paper folding activities.
- Musical instruments representing varied cultures are accessible.

To give credit (score 7.1 "Yes"), at least one example should be observed during the observation, since such experiences are supposed to happen throughout the day, every day. Watch carefully to be sure such practices are noticed when observing. For example, consider foods served regularly (see menus), and remember that many foods we regularly enjoy actually represent the contributions from many cultures.

7.2 Activities included to promote understanding and acceptance of diversity can be within daily activities or special activities that do not take place on a daily basis.

Therefore such activities do not have to take place during the observation.

These activities would be expected to have the specified goal of helping children to learn about diversity. It is likely that when the activities are offered to the children, staff would be quite obvious in their intentions—they would point out and talk about the characteristics of countries, cultures or the other categories associated with diversity, including differences and similarities.

Examples of these types of activities are included in the indicator. Additional examples include:

- For a cooking activity, children prepare and eat a food representative of a certain culture.
- Children celebrate winter holidays of many different cultures.
- Children do art activities associated with varied cultures.
- People come in to teach children folk songs of different countries.
- Children learn dances from different countries.
- Children see a video of games children play in other countries.

Since it is not required that the activities for this indicator are observed, staff should be asked the question provided for 7.2 in the ECERS-R. Score the indicator based on staff report.

To give credit, staff should answer that such activities are done with children at least four times a year, and be able to give examples of what has been done or is planned.