



Strategies in Action: Classroom Environment

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PreK Language Model: English Language Development with Home Language Support

Setting:

Teacher Fumiko is Japanese-American. Her family has lived in the United States for several generations. Growing up on the Eastside of Los Angeles, Fumiko was surrounded by Spanish speakers and learned to speak more Spanish than the few words of Japanese that she uses with her family members. Recently, Fumiko was employed as a preschool teacher by a school district that enrolled many Latino families. The changing neighborhood demographics have also brought in many families whose home languages are Korean and Mandarin. In Fumiko's classroom, there are children whose home languages reflect the diversity of the communities close to her school. It is a few days before the start of the school year and Fumiko's mind is focused on how best to arrange her classroom.

Fumiko is aware of the need for a developmentally appropriate physical space that accommodates the learning needs of 4- and 5-year-old children, such as room to move comfortably in the classroom, easy access to learning materials, and learning centers that encourage cooperation and collaboration among children. She is also aware of the important need to reflect the language and culture of the children and their families.

Teacher Behavior:

Fumiko feels most familiar with Latino language and culture, but she is less familiar with Korean and Chinese language and culture. She is a bit nervous about what images, artifacts, and symbols are appropriate for Korean and Chinese children. Fumiko asks the director of her program for her advice about making sure the classroom environment is welcoming of all the children. Together, they brainstorm various strategies. The director suggests adding Korean and Chinese labels on classroom centers, furniture, and objects in different colors for each language, as well as illustrating the classroom schedules with small photos representing the various activities in the routine. Teacher Fumiko thought about asking children's families for pictures to display on a family bulletin board and photo albums. She also agrees to search for books and recordings reflective of children's languages and cultures. In addition, the director suggests having a quiet space in the classroom, where children can take a break from the possible stress of having to speak in a language that they do not know very well. Talking through these strategies helps Fumiko feel a little more confident about supporting children who speak languages with which she is unfamiliar.

In order to find appropriate materials such as books, posters, and artifacts representative of the Korean and Chinese culture of her children, Fumiko decides to do some research on her own. A first step is to look for information via the internet to identify materials. In addition, Fumiko speaks with school staff and parent volunteers who are of Korean and Chinese heritage to ask for some advice. This experience motivates Fumiko to start speaking to other teachers about where they find instructional materials for students who are from Korean and Chinese cultures.

Fumiko is also aware of the important need to reflect the language and culture of the children and their families.

She is particularly interested in understanding which stores, music, and materials might be interesting and meaningful to the children. Fumiko also discusses with the director the potential need for interpreters and the director commits to seeking out community-based organizations that work with Korean and Chinese families. They may be able to assist in finding interpreters.

Reflection questions

1. Why is it particularly important to provide a comfortable environment that ensures a sense of safety and security for Multilingual Learners?
2. When a teacher has a child from a linguistic and cultural background that they are very unfamiliar with, what are some strategies they can use to broaden their understanding of the family's culture that will help them promote a sense of belonging for the child?
3. When culturally and linguistically appropriate materials are not easily available for a particular group of linguistically diverse children, what can a teacher do to acquire and/or develop appropriate materials?
4. Consider the children in your classroom. Are the languages and cultures of all children represented in the labels, materials, displays, and books in your classroom? How will you ensure that the classroom materials are accessible to Multilingual Learners?

Excerpted from: The Multilingual Learning Toolkit. (n.d.) "Classroom environment: PreK & transitional kindergarten." Retrieved from: <https://www.multilinguallearningtoolkit.org/vignette/classroom-environment-prek-transitional-kindergarten>.