

# Implementing the Culturally Responsive-Sustaining Education Framework in the Prekindergarten Classroom



# Introduction

The Culturally Responsive-Sustaining (CR-S) Education Framework was designed to support educators in creating student-centered learning environments that honor, reflect, and affirm the student diversity found in our classrooms today. This work is grounded in four principles that reflect the hallmarks of a quality education. They include **A Welcoming and Affirming Environment**, **High Expectations and Rigorous Instruction**, **Inclusive Curriculum and Assessment**, and **Ongoing Professional Learning**. Below are the definitions of each principle, as cited in the CR-S Framework, followed by suggestions on how these principles can be integrated into the Prekindergarten classroom. A glossary of important terms, a reflection checklist, and sample resources are included to further support educators.



**A Welcoming and Affirming Environment** is one that feels safe. It is a space where people can find themselves represented and reflected, and where they understand that all people are treated with respect and dignity. The environment ensures all cultural identities (i.e., race, ethnicity, age, gender, sexual orientation, disability, language, religion, socioeconomic background) are affirmed, valued, and used as vehicles for teaching and learning.



**High Expectations and Rigorous Instruction** prepare the community for rigor and independent learning. The environment is academically rigorous and intellectually challenging, while also considering the different ways students learn. Instruction includes opportunities to use critical reasoning, take academic risks, and leverage a growth mindset to learn from mistakes. Messages encourage positive self-image and empower others to succeed.



**Inclusive Curriculum and Assessment** elevate historically marginalized voices. It includes opportunities to learn about power and privilege in the context of various communities and empowers learners to be agents of positive social change. It provides the opportunity to learn about perspectives beyond one's own scope. It works toward dismantling systems of biases and inequities, and decentering dominant ideologies in education.



**Ongoing Professional Learning** is rooted in the idea that teaching and learning is an adaptive process needing constant reexamination (Moll, et al., 1992; Gay, 2010). It allows learners to develop and sharpen a critically conscious lens toward instruction, curriculum, assessment, history, culture, and institutions. Learners must be self-directed and take on opportunities that directly impact learning outcomes.



# Creating a Welcoming and Affirming Environment



In the Prekindergarten environment, this means creating a space where students feel safe, represented and welcomed, expand a sense of themselves, and deepen their appreciation and understanding of others. Including families is an integral part of creating a welcoming and affirming classroom environment.

## Examples in a Prekindergarten Classroom

**Materials such as books, props, musical instruments, puzzles, games and visuals accurately represent the diversity within the classroom, school, and community.**

**Educators nurture curiosity for multiple-perspectives, open-mindedness, and explicitly teach how to agree and disagree in respectful ways.**

**Families are an extension of the classroom community.**

- Ensure open and consistent communication
- Create displays of family photos
- Gather insight into students' cultures, goals, and learning preferences
- Allow opportunities for families to volunteer, read, and teach about their culture

**Educators respond to inaccurate, disrespectful, or hurtful speech in a way that engages all involved.**

- Build on teachable moments with thoughtful teacher-initiated activities
- Use literature to further explore topics of discussion
- Hold class meetings or problem solving circles
- Role play different scenarios
- Ask questions to understand the child's perspective
- Incorporate restorative practices to rebuild relationships, if needed







# Fostering High Expectations and Rigorous Instruction



In the Prekindergarten environment, rigorous instruction means teachers set high expectations for all students, honoring their strengths, identity markers, and cultural assets to provide equitable developmentally appropriate instruction. Teachers use their knowledge and understanding of student's race, gender, sexual orientation, language, abilities, and economic background to differentiate instruction and positively reflect student's growing identities.

## Examples in a Prekindergarten Classroom

### **Maintain high expectations for all students.**

- Use language that reflects students as learners, readers, writers, mathematicians, scientists, etc.
- Promote a positive mindset around differences and highlight similarities across students
- Encourage all students to participate in all activities throughout the day, and provide appropriate scaffolds to ensure equitable access to learning
- Display student work that supports individuality and celebrates all learning styles and abilities

### **Educators reflect on how their implicit bias and their own culture/experiences might impact student expectations and decisions made in the classroom.**

### **Educators recognize students' strengths, different developmental rates of progress, and all areas of development.**

- Give special consideration for Emergent Multilingual Learners (EMLs), students with disabilities and students with varied learning styles/needs
- Provide differentiated opportunities for students to show their understanding



### **Establish open communication with families.**

- Encourage families to have conversations about shared texts and daily activities to support conceptual understanding
- Provide families with current information and resources about the classroom's topics of study to extend learning at home
- Use surveys or questionnaires for families to share information about their child



# Identifying Inclusive Curriculum and Assessment



In the Prekindergarten environment, educators intentionally review the curriculum for opportunities to make connections to children's lives and experiences. Materials are accurate, current, and relevant representations of students' cultures within the class and community. Topics related to diversity, equity, and inclusion are introduced in developmentally appropriate ways to engage young learners in learning about themselves and how to connect across lines of difference.

## Examples in a Prekindergarten Classroom

### **Instructional content is connected to students' lives.**

- Utilize and integrate information learned from families about culture and traditions to intentionally integrate students' backgrounds into the curriculum
- Include music, movies, text, and digital resources that reflect students' culture

### **Use texts, resources, and materials that highlight diverse and traditionally marginalized voices to:**

- Reflect a child's lived experience
- Build perspective about others
- Develop empathy and understanding

### **Create sustained opportunities to learn from families about their culture and experiences in order to intentionally integrate students' lives into the curriculum.**

If home projects are part of the curriculum, consider projects that will invite students to share their family traditions, culture, and background (with directions being translated in home languages, if needed).

### **Instructional content is enhanced through a variety of active learning opportunities within and beyond the classroom.**

- Take field trips within the community to connect learning to the current unit of study
- Incorporate cooperative learning activities that promote interaction, teamwork and encourage students to consider multiple perspectives
- Empower students with opportunities to identify issues in their community and research ways to solve them as a class





# Engaging in Ongoing Professional Development and Support



In the Prekindergarten environment, educators are committed to continuous learning to reexamine and expand upon their beliefs and practices for supporting diverse learners. Educators set professional goals and participate in ongoing learning opportunities to develop more culturally responsive practices within the Prekindergarten setting.

## Examples in a Prekindergarten Classroom

**Educators engage in a variety of ongoing professional learning activities to further develop culturally responsive practices.**

- Participate in inquiry groups and professional learning communities with peers and mentors
- Set professional goals related to CR-S practices

**Educators take time to reflect and learn about their own identity markers, considering how these intersect with the identities of students and families.**

**Educators participate in professional learning activities that specifically build an understanding about the community in which students live.**

- Invite families to provide professional learning opportunities around their cultures and languages

**Determine patterns and trends across students' sub-groups in order to identify any strengths, biases, areas for growth, and professional development. Collaboratively collect and analyze data in the areas of:**

- Discipline
- Academics
- Social-Emotional
- Parent Engagement/Communication





# Reflecting on Culturally Responsive Practices



This checklist can be utilized as a reflection tool to determine areas of strengths, possible next steps, and goals in developing culturally responsive practices for the Prekindergarten environment.

Reflection Question	Yes	In Progress	Not Yet
<b>Creating a Welcoming and Affirming Environment</b>			
Do I have toys, books, and learning materials that represent every child in my classroom?			
Do the books in my classroom accurately portray diverse cultures and are free from stereotypes?			
Do I observe and listen carefully to students' conversations and actions to understand their perspective and guide all students in problem solving while learning about other's point of view?			
Do families feel welcomed and viewed as a resource within the classroom community?			
<b>Fostering High Expectations and Rigorous Instruction</b>			
Do I reflect on my own experiences, and culture, and try to become more aware of my implicit bias and how it may affect the students and families in my classroom?			
Do I recognize students' strengths and needs to tailor learning towards the differing abilities, backgrounds, and interests in my classroom?			
Does my language communicate high expectations for all students to model a positive and flexible mindset towards learning and interacting with others?			
Is my communication with families open and encouraging, allowing families to easily share information about their child with me?			

# Reflecting on Culturally Responsive Practices



Reflection Question	Yes	In Progress	Not Yet
<b>Identifying Inclusive Curriculum and Assessment</b>			
Do I participate in reviewing the curriculum to look for opportunities to include diverse materials, texts, and voices that reflect my students' experiences and lives?			
Do I use texts, resources, and materials that highlight diverse voices and perspectives to build empathy and understanding for differences and similarities across students' cultures?			
Are instructional units and lessons enhanced through active, cooperative, and authentic teaching methods to engage students in developmentally appropriate ways?			
Do I intentionally learn from families across the entire year and use what I have learned to enhance units of study and lessons for students?			
<b>Engaging in Ongoing Professional Development and Support</b>			
Do I self-reflect on my own identity markers and how they intersect with the similarities and differences of my students and their families?			
Do I value the role that ongoing professional learning plays in helping me to grow as an educator?			
Do I actively participate in various professional learning opportunities and then implement what I have learned to help me cultivate culturally responsive practices?			
Do I make time to analyze classroom data to determine areas for professional growth that support creating a culturally responsive classroom?			



# Glossary of Terms



- **Educators-** a professional who teaches and/or guides and informs a child's education, such as a teacher, paraprofessional, principal, occupational therapist, etc.
- **Identity Markers-** categories that help a person identify and describe who they are in this world; for example: race, gender, nationality, language, ethnicity, and political affiliation, etc.
- **Implicit Bias-** an unconscious belief or attitude that a person holds towards a specific social group
- **Scaffolds -** a temporary instructional practice that supports students in becoming more independent and skilled in a specific area, skill or task; scaffolds are changed or removed in order to support a student's ongoing growth and development

## Sample Resources

Culturally Responsive-Sustaining Framework



Resources include the Culturally Responsive-Sustaining (CR-S) Education Framework, CR-S Framework Briefs, and a CR-S Implementation Roadmap.

**The Culturally Responsive-Sustaining Education Framework Website**



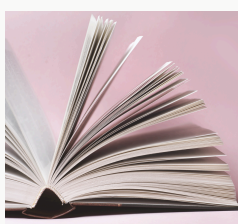
**A compilation of culturally responsive resources and tools**



**The NYSED Office of Early Learning Video Series is designed to support educators in creating a culturally responsive learning environment**



**A tool to search for diverse books**



**Reading Your Way to a Culturally Responsive Classroom**

**A resource from NAEYC including a sample list of selected children's literature with racially diverse characters and themes**



**PBS Kids - This video collection focuses on food, folktales, and other aspects of cultural heritage**



**Link to the P-3 Virtual Summer Institute includes multiple presentations about Culturally Responsive Practices**