

Including Diversity in the ECERS-3 Classroom

A Practical Guide for Preschool Classrooms

Reflecting the world children live in through books, materials, and interactions.

Purpose

Preschoolers deepen their understanding of themselves and others through the people, images, and ideas they encounter each day. A high-quality ECERS-3 environment helps children develop empathy, belonging, and respect by representing diversity in authentic and meaningful ways. This guide supports teachers in intentionally including five types of diversity across centers, displays, books, and daily experiences.

The Five Types of Diversity

1. Ethnic and Cultural Diversity

- Include books, photos, and materials showing people of many races and cultural backgrounds engaged in everyday life, not just holidays or special occasions.
- Offer art materials in a variety of skin tones.
- Include dramatic play props (food, clothing, music, instruments, home items) that represent multiple cultures.
- Encourage children to share family traditions, recipes, and songs naturally through play and conversation.

2. Age Diversity

- Use photos and books showing children, parents, grandparents, and community members of different ages working, playing, and learning together.
- Include dolls, play people, or photos representing multiple ages in dramatic play and block centers.
- Talk about aging in positive ways: "Your grandpa likes to garden just like you!"

3. Differing Abilities

- Provide materials and books that feature people with a variety of abilities: using wheelchairs, braces, hearing aids, or sign language, participating in everyday activities.
- Model inclusive language: "Some people use their hands to talk," or "Let's make sure everyone has space to move."
- Offer adaptive materials (tongs, large crayons, varied grips) that allow all children to participate fully.
- Discuss differences in a matter-of-fact, respectful way when children notice them.

4. Different Family Structures

- Include images and books showing families with single parents, same-gender parents, grandparents, foster or adoptive families, and blended families.
- Display family photos of each child at eye level, labeled with their names and family members.
- Use inclusive language in conversation and print materials ("Who are the people you live with?" instead of "What does your mom do?").
- Provide opportunities for children to talk about their families and share stories or photos in a way that honors all home structures.

5. Non-Traditional Gender Roles

- Offer materials that support all children in exploring all roles, boys nurturing dolls, girls building with blocks, everyone cooking, fixing, and creating.
- Include books and pictures that show men and women in a variety of professions (female scientists, male

nurses, female construction workers, male teachers).

- Use language that expands possibilities: “Anyone can be a builder,” or “Everyone can take care of babies.”

Books, Displays, and Materials Checklist

Books

- Include real photos or illustrations that show diversity in race, culture, family structure, age, ability, and gender roles.

- Choose books that reflect everyday life, not just cultural celebrations or stereotypes.

- Keep a balanced collection that represents all five types of diversity.

- Rotate regularly so the classroom library stays fresh and engaging.

Displays

- Place photos and artwork at children’s eye level (ECERS-3 indicator).

- Include family photos, community images, and children’s own work.

- Ensure at least three types of diversity are visible at all times.

- Keep displays current, meaningful, and connected to children’s experiences.

Materials

- Provide dolls, play people, and figures representing diverse skin tones, abilities, and ages.

- Include dramatic play and block props (food containers, fabrics, people figures) that reflect many cultures and roles.

- Use music, art materials, and games that represent varied traditions and expressions.

Putting It Into Practice

Diversity in the ECERS-3 classroom is not just about what children see, it’s also about what they hear and experience.

- Use daily routines to celebrate and discuss similarities and differences naturally.

- Incorporate family stories and experiences into curriculum planning.

- Reflect regularly: Do all children see themselves here? Do they see people who are different from them in positive ways?

When diversity is visible, valued, and lived in the classroom, children learn that everyone belongs.