BEYOND DIVERSITY DAY PLANNING GUIDE

Created by:
Great Lakes Equity Center

December 2015

About Great Lakes Equity Center

Great Lakes Equity Center is one of ten regional Equity Assistance Centers funded by the U.S. Department of Education under Title IV of the 1964 Civil Rights Act. The Center serves the public educational agencies in Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Minnesota, Ohio, and Wisconsin by providing a wide range of technical assistance supports.

The mission of the Center is, to ensure equity in student access to and participation in high quality, research-based education by expanding states' and school systems' capacity to provide robust, effective opportunities to learn for all students, regardless of and responsive to race, sex, and national origin, and to reduce disparities in educational outcomes among and between groups.

About This Tool

Districts and schools often use cultural festivals or "diversity day" events as ways to demonstrate an appreciation of diversity and as a strategy for students, families and staff to learn about different cultures. Recognizing and appreciation difference is a key fixture in creating culturally responsive and sustaining learning communities. And, while hosting learning opportunities such as diversity days may be a fun way for people to learn about various aspects of people's cultural backgrounds, if not carefully planned, cultural festivals or diversity days can lead to and reinforce cultural stereotypes. Furthermore, hosting a one or two-day cultural event is insufficient for truly increasing cultural awareness and creating culturally sensitive learning communities.

The purpose of this Equity Tool is to assist planners of diversity day type events in the design and development of event activities that will engage participants in authentic opportunities to recognize, appreciate and learn about the various personal identities, cultural practices, lived experiences and funds of knowledge reflective of the people who make up their school community. In addition, the tool offers some planning support to extend opportunities for school personnel to demonstrate an appreciation of differences beyond the festival experience. This equity tool is divided into six sections: Introduction, Event Framing, Defining Event Goals, Event Planning, Event Content Dos and Don'ts, and Appreciating Difference Beyond the Diversity Day Event.

Introduction

Recognizing cultural differences in the process of schooling provides opportunities for teachers, counselors, administrators, parents, and students to better understand and affirm differences (Lipkin, 2003). In efforts to increase awareness and to promote a valuing of cultural differences, districts and schools may host diversity day events. Diversity Day events are sometimes referred to as a "tourist" approach to learning about cultural difference because these events often focus on outward manifestations of culture (Wessinger, 1994), and typically represent content from the perspectives of dominant groups (i.e. male, White, middle class, non-disabled, Christian, heterosexual etc.). Focusing only on these superficial aspects of culture without situating customs, traditions and practices in the appropriate context, and without authentic input from the groups represented in the event, can lead to cultural distortions, trivialization, and marginalization (Cornelius, 1999; Banks, 2004; Ladson-Billings, 2004; Wills et al., 2004).

In order to create learning communities that cultivate an appreciation of difference and are culturally affirming, school systems most move beyond taking a "Tourist Approach" to difference (Wessinger, 1994), and create opportunities for continuous learning that present concepts, issues, and events from the perspectives of non-dominant racial, ethnic, economic class, linguistic, dis/ ability etc. groups (Banks, 2003). If a district or school chooses to host a diversity day event, educators, students and families must have opportunities for deep reflection; time and space to engage in authentic learning and conversations about difference should be provided both during the event itself, and in daily classroom and non-classroom settings (Boud, 1985; Cowan & Westwood, 2006; Cowan, 2014; Schon, 1983; 1987).

The content of diversity day events should take into account the complexities and intersections of peoples' personal identities, e.g. gender expression, race, dis/ability, religious, sexual orientation, nation of origin, etc., have an inclusive and holistic approach to representing difference (Lipkin, 2003), and should represent culture as dynamic and socially mediated (Vygotsky, 1978).

PART ONE: PLANNING FOR A "DIVERSITY DAY" EVENT

Framing the Event

Prior to planning a diversity day event, planners should establish a set of standards that frame the event content development. All contributors to event activities should be clear on these standards and information presented during the event about different groups of people should adhere to the framing standards. Below is a set of considerations for framing the event content.

Event Framing Standards

	Within each exhibit/activity, as well as for the overall event, there is a clear message that each individual is unique and their differences are accepted and respected.
	Event activities or exhibits are inclusive and present multiple dimensions of difference including: race, ethnicity, national origin, language, gender expression, sexual orientation, socio-economic status, age, dis/abilities, religion etc.
	People's differences are presented as assets to the learning community and the rich dimensions of diversity contained within each individual are embraced and celebrated.
	The groups represented in the event reflect the population demographics represented in the district and/or school community.
	Culture is framed as dynamic, contextual, and socially mediated, i.e., culture is not static, but is malleable and ever-changing over time and space.
	Content shared about each group represented in an event is authentic and derived from the perspectives of the people being represented; e.g., content about the cultural traditions and practices of Menominee Indians reflects information learned from members of the Menominee nation.
	The event includes opportunities to surface and educate people about social justice issues faced by non-dominant groups, and discuss people's civic responsibility to redress social injustices.
	The event is part of a more comprehensive, strategic, multi-prong approach to cultivate appreciation of difference, and to advance the implementation of culturally responsive and sustaining practices in the school and/or district.

Event Planning

When organizing a diversity day event, planners must guard against content or activities that lead to tokenism, distort groups' histories and customs, and trivialize people's traditions or   rituals. Having an event planning team that is inclusive, collaborative and focused on ensuring equitable practices helps to prevent content or activities that may marginalize particular groups from occurring. When organizing the event planning team the following essential questions should be addressed.

Essential Questions for Planning Team Membership and Participation

	Is the planning team representative of our community demographics?
	Do we have diverse representation on our planning team in terms of roles, e.g., educators, community members, students etc.?
	Do we have student, parent, and community member representation on the planning team?
	Do the team meeting locations, dates, and times ensure access and participation of all team members without undue hardship on any one member?
	Does everyone on the planning team have access to pertinent information?
	How are diverse opinions and perspectives sought out, acknowledged, and valued during planning meetings?
	How are we ensuring each planning team member has equitable voice in team decisions?

Defining Event Goals

Establishing clear goals is the first step in planning a successful event. Goals provide clarity on the vision that planners have for the event. In order to ensure that your diversity day event achieves the vision of supporting culturally responsive and sustaining learning communities, event goals should address the following essential questions.

Essential Questions for Establishing Event Goals	
	What is our reason or purpose for the diversity day event/ program?
	How does the event/ program align with our district equity goals and improvement plan?
	What do we want staff, students, community members to learn from this event about our school community?
	What are our valued outcomes for this event/program and how do these anticipated outcomes align with other district outcomes related to advancing culturally responsive and sustaining practices?
	How will we measure whether we met our goals and outcomes?
	How have we used district, school, and community data to inform our event goals and our anticipated outcomes?
	Have we written our goals and outcomes using the SMART criteria: Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic and Timely?
	How have we ensured the voices and perspectives of historically under-represented groups are central to creating the event goals and outcomes?

Event Content

Event activities can educate people about the rich diversity represented in their school community, inspire people to learn more about the contributions groups make to the community, inform people of the inequities faced by many groups, and motivate participants to work to redress social injustices. However, planners must be intentional in their organization of the event to ensure no unintended negative consequences occur as a result of event activities. Planners should consider the Dos and Don'ts of planning a diversity day event.

Event Content Standards	
	Be inclusive of all students or student groups in the school community, and reflect the diversity among the student and staff populations
	Confront monolithic representations of groups by reflecting the diversity within groups, e.g., Latino Puerto Rican, Chicano, Peruvian etc.
	Use authentic informational text and testimony as resource materials in developing content, e.g., information authored by a Shawnee Indian for information about the Shawnee experience in Bellefontaine, Ohio
	Showcase current, contemporary representations of diverse cultural groups
	Identify, address, and avoid perpetuating stereotypes about, and simplistic, inaccurate, or incomplete representations of diverse cultural groups
	Illustrate an appreciation of difference that moves beyond race or ethnicity, e.g., include religion, gender expression, sexual orientation, national origin, economic backgrounds, dis/abilities etc.
	Ensure all planners receive appropriate guidance for developing content, activities, and experiences that includes learning about common representations and activities that reflect racist, sexist, ableist, homophobic etc. ideals about diverse cultural groups
	Surface issues of social justice in the content, activities, and experiences

PART TWO: APPRECIATING DIFFERENCE BEYOND THE "DIVERSITY DAY" EVENT

Hosting a diversity day event may be an engaging way to begin the process of raising awareness of the diversity within your school community, however, districts/schools leaders must think beyond an one-day event to create and sustain culturally responsive school environments. Valuing and appreciating differences should be a part of daily experiences and practices. Below is a planning template for brainstorming ways of integrating information that celebrates and recognizes the experiences and contributions of diverse people in three core aspects of the school community.

In the spaces in the planning template, brainstorm actions each stakeholder group can take to demonstrate a valuing and an appreciation of difference in learning materials, learning activities and the learning environment. Below is a blank template, page eight provides an example.

	LEARNING MATERIALS	LEARNING ACTIVITIES	LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS
ADMINISTRATORS			
TEACHERS/ STAFF			
STUDENTS			

Beyond Diversity Day Planning Guide

Below is an example of a completed planning matrix for appreciating difference beyond diversity day events.

	LEARNING MATERIALS	LEARNING ACTIVITIES	LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS
ADMINISTRATORS	Ensure that district/school print and digital media depicts positive representations of the diversity reflected in the district/school community.	Plan regular opportunities for stakeholders to come together and discuss issues related to educating diverse learners.	Promote diversity in hiring teachers and staff.
TEACHERS/ STAFF	Use content that incorporates viewpoints and experiences of individuals from different racial, ethnic, language and economic backgrounds, gender identities and individuals with dis/abilities.	Use Anti-Discrimination activities such as Teaching Tolerance Lesson based on the book The Sneetches written by Dr. Seuss, in class.	Demonstrate that language and learning differences are assets to the classroom environment and incorporate different languages and learning strategies into the classroom environment.
STUDENTS	Use inclusive materials that reflect non-stereotypic images of people from diverse racial or ethnic background, gender identity dis/ability etc.	Encourage peers to interact with each other across peer groups, differences, and cliques.	Display diverse images throughout the school including people from different racial, ethnic, and economic backgrounds, people with disabilities, gender and gender expression.

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