

## Collecting, Displaying, and Analyzing Potentially Sensitive Data

It is important that researchers collecting demographic and ethnographic data do so in an ethical, respectful, and unbiased fashion. Analysis of potentially sensitive data requires awareness on the part of the teachers. Before students embark on surveying a group concerning their culture, heritage, ethnicity, or other aspect, ask the students to consider why and how they will use the data. Ask them to consider:

- Why do you need that information?
- Why is it important to gather statistics on different groups?
- Is the language of the survey instrument respectful and appropriate?
- How will you analyze the data to ensure that it is done in a fair and respectful way?
- What do you need to know about the groups' social context, historical experiences and other factors to be able to interpret survey results fairly?

Ensure that you and your students respect the right of individuals to privacy and to not participate in the survey. Ensure that you do not make stereotypical judgements about group membership and respect individuals' rights to self-identify their ethnic, cultural, linguistic, or other aspect of group identity.

Discuss in advance questions such as; what contextual information must be given to ensure a fair and respectful presentation of the information should the information to be reported present a negative or unfavourable view of a particular group of people? For example, reporting and studying different rates of unemployment across different groups in society will be more meaningful and relevant if there is a discussion concerning factors which could influence employment opportunities for different groups by creating barriers for some and privileging certain groups and disadvantaging others, thereby resulting in inequities.

The following information has been adapted from Manitoba Social Studies, *A Foundation for Implementation, Overview, Social Studies as a Curriculum of and for Diversity and Equity* <http://www.edu.gov.mb.ca/ks4/cur/socstud/index.html>

### Dealing with Controversial Issues

The following guidelines will assist teachers in dealing with controversial issues in the classroom:

- approach all issues with sensitivity
- protect the interests of individual students by finding out in advance whether any student would be personally affected by the discussion
- help students clarify the distinction between informed opinion and bias

### Cultural sensitivity

Classrooms that are places for critical teaching and learning are built on the premise that teachers “don’t know it all.” Each new class presents opportunities for teachers to learn from students, and requires teachers to be good researchers and listeners. Teachers will often work with children of diverse cultural origins and ethnicities, and may need to call upon parents and others in order to understand the needs of their students. Teachers must also draw on the cultural diversity of their colleagues and community resources for insights into the communities they seek to serve.

### **Identity, Culture, and Race**

Educators also need to consider the social dynamics and patterns of intercultural interaction in the classroom in developing inclusive, multicultural, and pro-social justice learning experiences. The ethnocultural identity and self-concept of students play an important role in determining their response and willingness to engage in meaningful learning experiences related to diversity. Social and ethnocultural identity is characterized by a number of factors, including the following:

- An individual’s identity is complex and composed of various dimensions.
- Every individual has multiple identities, with ethnicity, class, gender, language, religion, racial origins, political beliefs, and other factors defining who we are.
- Not all factors have the same impact on our identity, and their relevance may change according to personal and social conditions and social context.
- Race, while it is a socially constructed concept, forms part of our sense of identity.
- Racial identity development is the result of the racialization of society, and is a complex and dynamic phenomenon.

### **Isolation and Identity**

The exploration of Canadian and world history, and issues related to discrimination may be particularly challenging for students of marginalized or minority groups. A student may find herself or himself as the only one, or one of a small group, in an otherwise relatively homogeneous classroom setting. Such students may be at different stages of social or ethnic identity, and the overall classroom attitude and awareness of racism will greatly affect the dynamics in the classroom. It is important for teachers to recognize that

- racism and other forms of discrimination adversely affect student involvement in the classroom.
- experiences with racism and other forms of discrimination affect students’ lives and the lives of their family members.
- dealing with issues of race and racism and other issues of bias and discrimination is a deeply personal and emotional experience that may stimulate recall of repressed memories or emotions.
- for many students of visible minority origins, and other students of diverse origins, a sense of isolation or alienation is not uncommon.

- in such situations, even if the intent is anti-bias in nature, raising issues of racism and inequality in a classroom presents a challenge for most students. Very often students will feel as if “all eyes” are on them when racial incidents occur, racist language is expressed, or other issues related to prejudice and discrimination are discussed.
- being of visible minority origins may be an experience in diversity itself. Students are often of interracial and intercultural backgrounds. Teachers need to be sensitive to students’ personal definitions of their “identity” and group membership.
- students may not be comfortable with the role of representing or “speaking for” their particular cultural group. Depending on personal circumstances and social conditions, students may just be beginning, or have yet to begin, to explore their cultural origins.

### **Strategies to Develop Positive Attitudes towards Diversity**

- Initiate educational activities and discussions to build a positive racial and/or cultural self-identity.
- Initiate activities and discussions to develop positive attitudes toward diverse racial/cultural groups—encourage the exploration of groups different from students’ own reference groups.
- Always answer student questions about race, ethnicity, and cultures when questions are asked.
- Listen carefully and in a relaxed manner to student questions and comments. Be sure to understand what a student means and wants to know.
- Pay attention to feelings.
- Provide truthful information appropriate to students’ level of understanding.
- Help students recognize racial, cultural, social, and other stereotypes.
- Encourage students to challenge racism and other forms of discrimination by being a positive role model and displaying inclusive attitudes and behaviours.
- Cultivate understanding that racism and other forms of discrimination do not have to be a permanent condition—that people are working together for positive change.
- Remember that learning about racial and cultural identities is a lifelong process.

(Council for Interracial Books for Children, 1980)