

Practical ways to embrace cultural diversity and support inclusion in schools

Transcript

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Sheralee Fordham

Some practical things that I've seen in schools in terms of embracing cultural diversity - multilingual signage. I was at a school where we had three or four different languages on our signage and then creating spaces for that cultural expression. So one of the schools I worked at had footprints painted in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander colours, all the way down to our Aboriginal education officer's space. And so that was great.

And then being open to embracing that student voice, as we've mentioned across the conference before, how really important that is in terms of connecting students together and creating that sense of belonging.

Ziyad Serhan

I think, yeah, I think understanding a few, a few practical things would be first of all, explore what the cultures, well, the insights the cultures provide on what wellness and wellbeing is for them. And then I think it's a collegial process. So you're, co-designing alongside the community as opposed to assuming what you think will work best. So I think, yeah, I think understanding that it's not just something that you, you necessarily impose on a group within the school setting. It's something that you, you also need kind of constant feedback with them. I know, for example, working within Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities that the relationships that are built from the get-go was so important in building trust within a community. And that happens, it's a two-way street. It's not necessarily something that's imparted on but it's something that you both co-design and work together on.

Sheralee Fordham

Look, we talk about that in our Cultural Actions Catalogue as well. The idea of walking softly and working together and moving together.

And I, I like the idea of moving slowly to move fast later on. So building that trust, building that relationship, having that as your focus, because once you've got that established, then being able to achieve your goals or your actions can be much faster.

Tasneem, there's a question here which says: For students who are new culturally and coming into a place where there are students that are not as open-minded, do you have any strategies that might help them feel more included or ways they might be able to share their culture with a bit of strength and a bit of, I guess, without feeling intimidated by the culture that they're coming into?

Tasneem Chopra

Yeah. I would say again, a mental health expert might be better at some of this response but what I would say from a cultural inclusive lens is find the areas of commonality to do exist. So while they might be like question has posed issues of more openness versus more conservativeness in certain issues. Leave those issues aside, for the sake of at least immersing the child, immersing the kids into a level playing field. And find things that they're both interested in. Is it food? Is it music? Is it sport? Is it a TV program or is it a YouTube? You know, what is the thing that you can bring them on to so that they can realise that they do have something in common. And then once you establish that rapport you build on that to then appreciate those differences beyond there. So while they might be different, you certainly got something in common too.

Sheralee Fordham

That's great. Actually, it reminds me of some of the lunchtime clubs we used to have at my school, where students would come together about the things that they loved. We had an anime club and it was an opportunity for some of our students to share their passion about their culture, but also for students who are curious about the culture to engage with it as well in a non-threatening space. So that was great.

Ziyad Serhan

I think we're running out of time. So we're going to move along. One thing I did want to draw your attention to is the Be You Professional Learning that you can find on the Be You website, and that's specifically looking at the Mentally Healthy Communities domain, and going through modules and checking out the tips that are available on the website in terms of building more inclusive spaces for your students and young people within your learning community.

Sheralee Fordham

Some of the other great resources we have on the Be You website, we've got a number of different fact sheets around inclusion but we also have a lot of fact sheets around partnering with families and I think, when it comes to connecting around cultural considerations, that partnership is really important. And I think as educators, sometimes we can sit back in that place where we're like sharing information. I share information with you. You share information with me, but partnership is actually coming together and working alongside. And so I think that's a really important way of looking at our connection with families as educators, but then that's also something that we can do from that cultural perspective too, I think, where we can come alongside and share together and learn together.

So I think that's really important when it comes to learning and embracing cultural diversity in schools.