



**Kindergarten  
to Grade 3**

## Diversity and Social Justice at the Primary Level

In the primary classroom, the application of foundational human and social skills to the development of an appreciation for diversity is self-evident. In some cases, however, the curriculum expectations simply create opportunities for a teachable moment. For example, when students are comparing attributes of people, it can be a natural, though not necessarily obvious, extension to point out the significance or relative insignificance of some differences (e.g., one's ethnic origin, appearance, sex, and socioeconomic status are **not** indicative of one's abilities or particular character traits).

At the primary level, as at other grade levels, selection of learning resources (video or print, in any of the various genres) contributes significantly to the opportunities to discuss diversity and social justice issues. Appendix A of this resource lists a variety of resources that can be used as a springboard for teaching about diversity and social justice.

### **Emotional Responses**

Sometimes, adults (e.g., parents) may fear that raising social justice topics, particularly with early primary students, may only worry and not inform children. But children do not live in isolation from the world, and teachers play an important role in providing appropriate context to enhance children's understanding of the world in which they live. For example, a student teacher described accompanying a group of grade 2 students on a field trip in which they saw some people living on the streets. Some of the children said the homeless people were "scary" and "bad." In a lesson focused on reading and making "personal connections," the teacher took the opportunity to read aloud the book *Fly Away Home* (Eve Bunting and Ronald Himler), a story about a 10-year-old homeless boy and his father who sleep in the airport. In talking about the story, the teacher talked about families and the different factors that might result in homelessness.

At the primary level, modelling is an especially important way of teaching respect and support for diversity. In relation to various curricula (including ELA, HCE, the four fine arts subject areas, PE, and social studies) teachers and students have numerous opportunities to model

- respectful interpersonal oral communication
- inclusiveness with respect to group activities
- appropriate collaborative interaction.

## Curriculum Connections

### English Language Arts (ELA)

The quickest way to introduce social justice content in English language arts may be through the choice of texts used as a focus for student reading and viewing activities. See Appendix A for a list of resources that can be used as a starting point for classroom discussions and activities.

Explicit opportunities for direct teaching re: diversity are provided in connection with the Oral Language (Speaking and Listening) and the Reading and Viewing curriculum organizers—especially in relation to the Purposes, Strategies, and Thinking suborganizers. Throughout the primary years, students are developing abilities to

- recognize hurtful and unfair language
- understand the feelings and motivations of characters in stories
- use respectful speaking and listening skills to facilitate their interaction with others, to collaborate in achieving tasks, and to resolve problems
- suggest solutions for problems in the classroom, stories, or real-life situations
- compare attributes of people (e.g., fictional characters), places, objects, and words
- begin recognizing differing points of view.

Less explicit opportunities to teach about diversity and social justice at the primary level can also be created in connection with the development of writing and representing skills. By the time students reach Grade 3, it is expected that they will be producing simple pieces of personal, informational, and imaginative writing—see Purposes (Writing and Representing). A writing prompt such as, “Write about a time when you learned something new about another person. How did what you learned change your opinions or ideas about that person?” may elicit material that directly addresses social justice goals. Alternately, it may create the opportunity to explore other situations and responses as part of a debrief or individual student conference.

### Fine Arts: Dance, Drama, Music, Visual Arts

From Kindergarten to Grade 3, the four fine arts subject areas (dance, drama, music, and visual arts) provide multiple opportunities for students to learn about and value a wide variety of cultures. Specifically, the fine arts curricula include expectations for students to learn about

- dance, drama, music, and visual arts from a variety of historical and cultural contexts

- purposes of the arts in various cultures
- roles portrayed in a variety of dances and dramas
- influence of cultural and social contexts on art and artists.

Dance, drama, music, and visual arts at the primary level build on children’s innate abilities to use play and exploration to understand the world around them. Fine arts education encourages students to co-operate, develop friendships, and appreciate their own and others’ abilities and identities—all core skills for building a more just society.

## Health and Career Education (HCE)

The health and career education curriculum at the Kindergarten to Grade 3 level provides multiple opportunities for teaching diversity and social justice. HCE K-3 provides opportunities for students to

- learn appropriate and responsible ways of sharing, expressing, or acting on feelings
- learn about responsible and caring behaviours in families, and recognize that those behaviours are common across all structures of families
- begin to recognize bullying behaviour and its consequences for those who bully and those who are bullied.

Specific HCE curriculum requirements related to diversity and social justice at the primary level include the following.

Kindergarten	Grade 1	Grade 2	Grade 3
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• sources of support and information at school</li> <li>• emotional health practices (e.g., identifying strengths, making friends)</li> <li>• thoughtful, caring behaviours in families</li> <li>• appropriate ways to express feelings</li> <li>• positive and negative behaviours in friendships</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• sources of support at school and in the community</li> <li>• emotional health practices (e.g., giving and receiving compliments, maintaining healthy relationships)</li> <li>• ways families provide support and nurturing</li> <li>• appropriate and inappropriate ways to express feelings</li> <li>• positive and negative behaviours in friendships</li> <li>• strategies for dealing with common interpersonal conflicts</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• emotional health practices (e.g., doing things for other people, recognizing own and others’ feelings)</li> <li>• strategies for effective communication</li> <li>• positive ways to initiate and maintain friendships</li> <li>• strategies for dealing with common interpersonal conflicts</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• sources of support in a variety of situations</li> <li>• attributes of people they admire</li> <li>• emotional health practices (e.g., positive self-concept, developing problem-solving strategies)</li> <li>• skills for maintaining and building positive relationships</li> <li>• nature and consequences of bullying</li> </ul>



*For many teachers, a helpful first step is assessing the extent to which their existing practice optimizes the social and affective comfort levels of students who might have reason to feel marginalized or disadvantaged.*

In addition, opportunities for addressing diversity arise in relation to

- work and jobs (inclusion of individuals representing diversity in ethnicities, ages, mental and physical abilities, etc.)
- healthy food choices—specific food items representing a range of cultures and belief systems (e.g., religions, ideologies such as vegetarianism); comparing foods represented in the various cultural food guides (e.g., Aboriginal food guides, Vietnamese food guide, Punjabi food guide).

## Mathematics

Although there are no specific curriculum expectations in the mathematics curriculum related to social justice, there are many opportunities to provide classroom learning experiences that help develop students' appreciation for the diversity represented in the community and in the world around them. In particular, consider activities such as the following:

- Ensure that diverse examples are included when conducting number operations and statistics activities (e.g., representing diverse cultures, family structures, socioeconomic levels, etc.)
- Provide opportunities for students to learn about the significance of particular numbers for specific cultures (e.g., the number 4 for many Aboriginal cultures, the number 8 in Chinese cultures), and incorporate examples of how the numbers are represented in each culture.
- Provide opportunities for students to learn about the significance of particular geometric shapes for specific cultures, and incorporate examples of how those shapes are represented in each culture (e.g., in architecture, textiles). Or, use a text such as *The Tortoise Who Bragged—A Chinese Tale Told with Trigrams* (adapted by Betsy Franco, illustrated by Anne-Marie Perks) to have students explore how geometric trigram shapes can be used to recreate the human-made and natural images found in the story (e.g., houses in the village, flying egrets, tortoise, fish, mountains, ox, rabbits).
- As students are introduced to the concept of mathematical equality (beginning in Grade 1) it is also possible to begin examining equality and inequality with reference to real-world situations that have a social justice aspect. For example, students can look at numbers that reflect inequalities of income or resource distribution. To extend discussion arising from observations about such inequalities, students can be asked to speculate about possible reasons for some of the disparities identified.

## Physical Education (PE)

In physical education, opportunities for addressing diversity and social justice exist within the Safety, Fair Play, and Leadership curriculum organizer. Specifically, the curriculum includes learning outcomes related to

- following rules and directions
- working co-operatively with peers
- respect and encouragement for others.

## Science

Although there are minimal specific curriculum expectations in the science curriculum related to social justice, there are still opportunities to provide classroom learning experiences that help develop students' appreciation for the diversity represented in the community and in the world around them. For example, when studying the needs of living things (Grade 1), help students see the parallels with the needs of all humans.

## Social Studies

Specific curriculum connections related to diversity and social justice at the K-3 level include the following.

Kindergarten	Grade 1	Grade 2	Grade 3
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• co-operative participation in groups</li> <li>• belonging to groups</li> <li>• similarities and differences in families</li> <li>• roles and responsibilities</li> <li>• human needs</li> <li>• responsibility for caring for their environment</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• co-operative and productive participation in groups</li> <li>• strategies to address problems</li> <li>• similarities and differences in families</li> <li>• social structures</li> <li>• roles, rights, and responsibilities</li> <li>• human needs</li> <li>• responsible behaviour in caring for their environment</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• solutions to problems</li> <li>• ways individuals contribute to a community</li> <li>• factors influencing identity</li> <li>• language and cultural characteristics of Canadian society</li> <li>• roles, rights, and responsibilities</li> <li>• how decisions are made</li> <li>• responsibility to the local environment</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• responses to problems</li> <li>• importance of communities</li> <li>• cultural similarities and differences</li> <li>• characteristics of Canadian society</li> <li>• how roles, rights, and responsibilities affect community well-being</li> <li>• how needs and wants are met</li> <li>• responsibility to the local environment</li> </ul>





## Sample Lesson Plan

### *Drama and HCE Grades 2-3*

Prepare the classroom as an open space so that students can move freely around the room. Pose a question such as the following, and have students who can answer “yes” to the question move to the middle of the room and link arms:

- Who has ever lived in another province?
- Who has ever been to another country?
- Who has more than two brothers or sisters?
- Who speaks a language other than English at home?
- Who can say “hello” using sign language?
- Who has ever done volunteer work?
- Who loves Japanese food?
- Who likes to swim?
- Who takes part in a cultural dance or music program in the community?

Continue asking questions such as these until all students have had multiple chances to show how they are connected to each other.

Discuss as a class: Did you find out anything that surprised you? Which of these things do you share with your best friends? In what ways are you different from your best friends? Can you still be friends with someone who has different likes and dislikes than you? Who is different from you in other ways?

Divide the class into groups. Challenge each group to prepare a short story drama about several people meeting for the first time, and how they learn about each other and become friends. (Note: you may wish to provide students with puppets to portray their drama to help them take on different personal characteristics.)

## Using Existing Curriculum-Based Materials

The following Ministry-developed instructional and assessment materials from the current IRPs are also available to support diversity and social justice teaching at the primary level:

### ***English Language Arts K to 7 (2006)***

- Grade 3: Oral Language—Generating Solutions to Playground Problems (p. 497)  
This unit suggests a strategy for using language and communication processes to resolve conflicts and other interpersonal problems (including the use of racist, sexist, homophobic, or other hurtful taunts) should the need arise.

### ***Health and Career Education K to 7 (2006)***

- Kindergarten—Unit 2: Getting Along with Others (p. 129)
- Grade 1—Unit 1: Caring Friendships (p. 136)
- Grade 1—Unit 3: People Who Help Me (p. 140)
- Grade 2—Unit 3: Relationships (p. 154)
- Grade 3—Unit 1: Growing Up (p. 162)
- Grade 3—Unit 3: Safe and Caring Schools (p. 166)

### ***Social Studies K to 7 (2006)***

- Kindergarten—Identity, Society, and Culture (p. 121)
- Kindergarten—Governance (p. 122)
- Grade 1—Identity, Society, and Culture (p. 130)
- Grade 1—Governance (p. 131)
- Grade 2—Community and Culture (p. 139)
- Grade 2—Work and Decision Making (p. 140)
- Grade 3—Community Builder (p. 148)

