

# LAYING THE FOUNDATION FOR CROSS-CULTURAL AWARENESS IN EARLY CHILDHOOD

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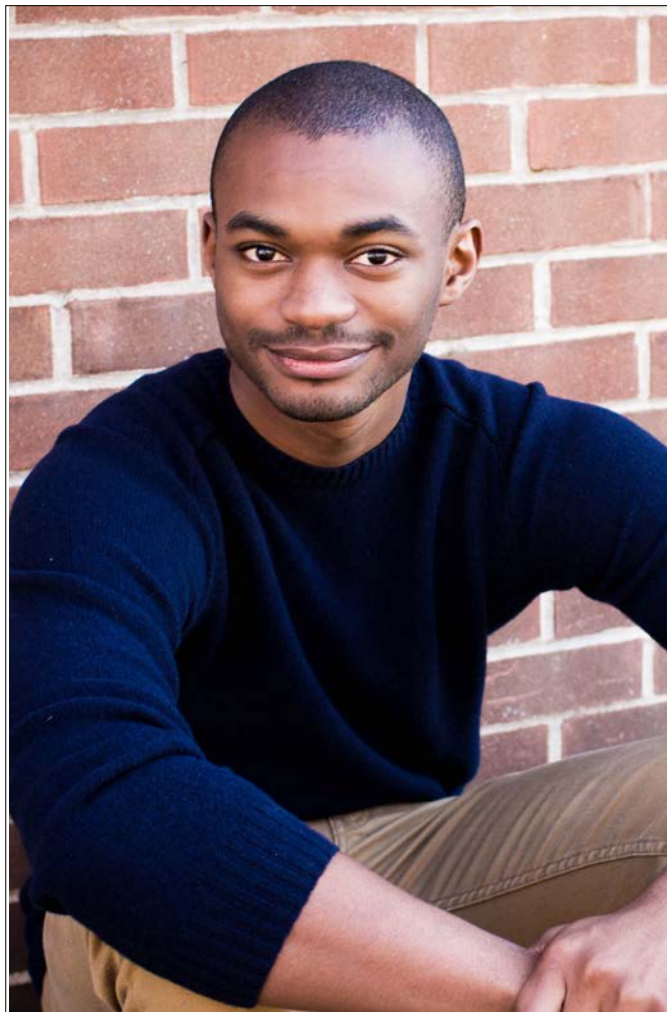
*Leslie Whitfield and Andrew Williams*



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## OVERVIEW

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- We will explore the importance of accurate cultural representation and ways that teachers can utilize early childhood literature to celebrate diversity.
- We believe that laying the foundation for cultural competency in early childhood classrooms will equip learners with the skills they need to navigate in today's complex and ever-changing world.

## OVERVIEW

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- Why is cultural representation important in early childhood classrooms?
- How can educators craft a literacy curriculum that lays a foundation for cultural awareness?
- What tools can educators use in early childhood to create an environment that fosters cross-cultural understanding?



## FAQS

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- Why are we talking about this?
- When is the right time?
- What happens when we ignore cultural competency in the classroom?
- How do these conversations affect our students?
- How do we define cultural relevancy?
- Why should it be taught across all content levels?



**IMPLICATIONS OF PIAGET'S AND  
VYGOTSKY'S THEORIES FOR TEACHERS**

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## PIAGET'S THEORY OF COGNITIVE DEVELOPMENT

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- Piaget identified four factors that all interact to influence changes in thinking:
  - Biological Maturation
  - Activity
  - Social Experiences
  - Equilibrium







## BIOLOGICAL MATURATION

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- Biological Maturation is one of the most important influences on the way we sense the world.
- Parents and teachers have little impact on this aspect of cognitive development except that children get the nourishment and care that they need.

## ACTIVITY

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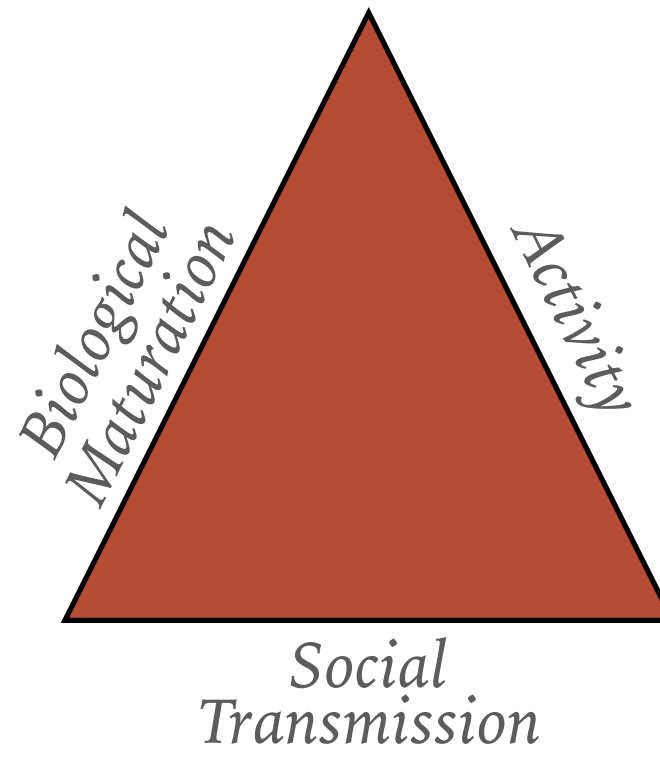
- With physical maturation comes the increasing ability to act on the environment and learn from it.
- Our cognitive development is influenced by social transmission or learning from others.



As we act on the environment we explore, test, observe, and eventually organize information--we are likely to alter our thinking process at the same time.

People are born with a tendency to organize their thinking processes into psychological structures.

A person's thinking processes become more organized and new schemes develop, behavior also becomes more sophisticated and better suited to the environment.



## PIAGET MOVIE CLIP

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Stage 2: The Pre-Operational Stage  
About 2-7 years

## ACTIVITY: THINK, PAIR, SHARE

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- Take a moment to reflect on the ways in which you incorporate cultural competency in your classrooms.
- Does it span the curriculum or is it simply another box to check off?
- Are there certain cultures of your students that you want to learn more about?
- Now turn to your neighbor and share.
- Share one idea or comment that was said in your small groups or with your partner.



# CULTURALLY RELEVANT TEACHING

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## CULTURALLY RELEVANT TEACHING

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- ▶ Children must see themselves in the books we read at the youngest ages.
  - ▶ Affirms their identity.
  - ▶ Gives them a feeling of belonging.
- ▶ We find it critical for students of color and white students to see many different cultures in the books we choose to read.



## CLASSROOM ENGAGEMENT

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- Children's engagement and reading performance improves when they read books, hear stories and engage in conversation in which their stories are told and honored.





## DANGER OF A SINGLE STORY

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## ACTIVITY: THINK, PAIR, SHARE

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- ▶ Jot down three characteristics that you value in your students of color.
- ▶ Take minute to think about what characteristics that they bring to morning meetings.
- ▶ What do they say? What do think they leave out and why?
- ▶ Now turn to your neighbor and share.
- ▶ Share one idea or comment that was said in your small groups or with your partner.

## MAJORITY/ MINORITY

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- In **2030**, the United States will be majority people of color.
- According to NAIS statistics most independent schools depending upon the region, are currently **18-35 percent students of color**.
- If teachers are unfamiliar and thus, not utilizing authors addressing themes from the different cultural perspectives that reflect our students background, we will have missed a critical opportunity for all students to grow and for all students to connect and maximize learning.

# MY STORY

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## SHAPING IDENTITY

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- Making students aware that one single text or celebration of a culture does not represent all individuals from that culture.
  - Example: If you invite a parent in to celebrate a cultural tradition make students aware that all families do not celebrate that cultural tradition in the same way.
- Teachers help students shape their identities as well as the identities of others.
- It is important to choose text that does not just have characters that demonstrate cultural inclusivity but are authentic representations of cultures.
- We want to represent culture in accurate and genuine ways.



What are they?

Why are they important?

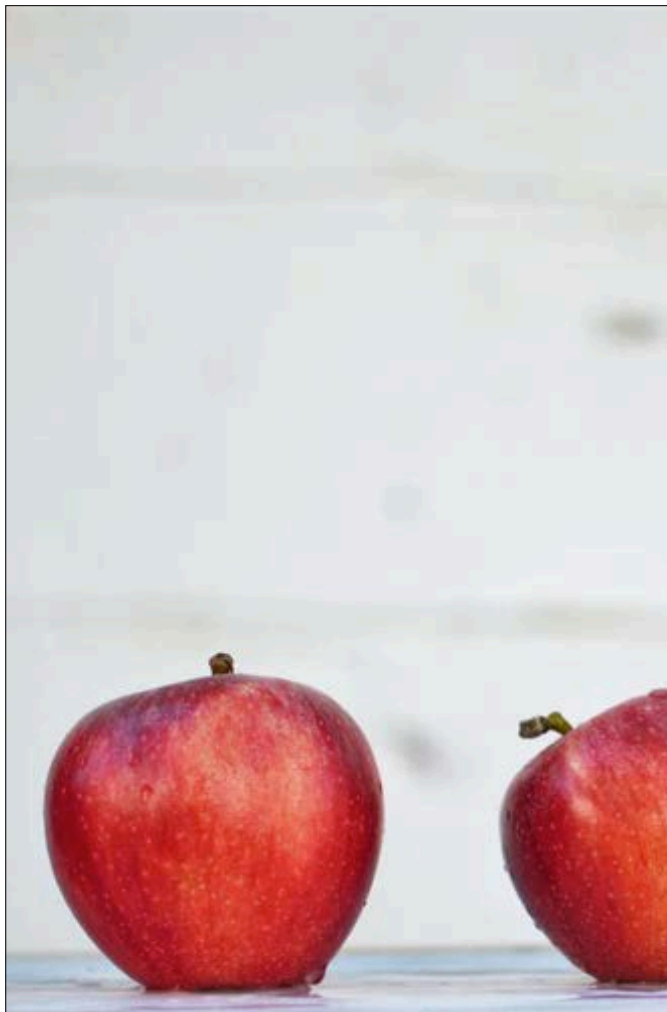
How can they be critically integrated into the curriculum?

Culturally appropriate instruction leads to increased participation and achievement in reading lessons.

## WINDOWS AND MIRRORS

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- Books and other classroom materials serve as windows and mirrors reflecting one's own world.
- The windows, providing entryways into the world of others. When all stories and illustrations are windows, children do not see their stories belong in the classroom and school.
- When there are no mirrors and all windows, children may perceive one culture as worthier and believe that those not represented are not valued.
- When children have text that is all mirrors, they develop an exaggerated sense of themselves and their place in the world and can fail to develop empathy and understanding for different perspectives.



## FACTORS THAT EFFECT TEACHERS

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- Access to materials
- Lack of cultural understanding
- Fear of engaging in culturally relevant text
- Lack of time



## CONCLUSIONS

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- Involve parents and community members in cultural studies as appropriate.
- We are now more aware of our blind spots and rely on trusted colleagues to see the whole picture.
- Read widely and beyond the typical Honor books. Learning is a lifelong adventure!



# BREAKOUT ACTIVITIES

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## BREAKOUT ACTIVITIES

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- Image/Video Search
  - Search Google for positive images and videos of an identity of yours. Is it easy? It it difficult?
- Mirrors and windows search
  - Search for children's books that are mirrors of your personal experiences and windows into experiences of others.

## TOOLS AND TAKEAWAYS

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- [unsplash.com](https://unsplash.com) - free stock images with an array of cultures
- [leeandlow.com](https://leeandlow.com) - largest U.S. publisher of multicultural children's books
- [lakeshorelearning.com](https://lakeshorelearning.com) - great resource for arts and crafts that



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