



Valuing Differences, Celebrating Diversity

Challenge or Opportunity?

Trends in U.S. Census statistics reveal that our country and our state are becoming culturally and ethnically more diverse. This does not mean it has a large population of one ethnic group, but that it has many groups represented. It is not uncommon to find school districts with multiple languages spoken by the families of the children attending. This emphasizes the need for understanding and valuing differences.

The issue of “diversity” is sometimes a controversial one. Some see it as a problem, an intrusion by others. We in 4-H prefer to see it as an opportunity. The wealth of knowledge, experiences, and resources that are available through diversity allows our youth in South Carolina to grow in a way that promotes acceptance and understanding of differences.

Growing up in a community where people are alike in many ways can seem secure, but it also promotes a narrow focus. The more differences that children are exposed to, the more open and accepting they are as they grow up. Activities and programs that provide children the opportunity to explore and experience differences is multicultural education.

The goal of multicultural education is to increase individual’s self-esteem, understanding, and appreciation of others in our society, and deepen concern for the needs of all people in the United States culture and the world.

Melting Pot Theory vs Tossed Salad



Written by Ginny Powell, 1990-1994. Revised for use in South Carolina by Keith G. Diem, Director of 4-H Youth Development, 2005. Used by permission.

During prior immigration waves in the 1900's, we believed that assimilation of all children into “American” culture was essential for success. They were expected to speak only English, and become just like everyone else, thus the melting pot theory. Today, we recognize that cultural differences are strengths, not weaknesses. We encourage everyone to contribute to the national culture, yet maintain their own distinct identity. This is the tossed

Mini-activities to reduce prejudice and stereotypes

salad theory, where each item in the salad is separate and has a distinct taste. Blended together, each ingredient enhances the other's flavor.

Here are some activities you may wish to try with your 4-H members to help them learn to value differences.

- **A “Me” Bag**

This activity will prompt members to see similarities and differences they have with other members. Collect newspapers (for pictures) and magazines. Give each member a small paper bag that will be a “me” bag. They should select photographs that represent:

- their family.
- what they feel like when they are with friends.
- what they enjoy doing.
- what makes them different.

All of these cutout photos should be placed in their “me” bags, which can be decorated with their name and anything else they wish to put on them. In small groups, members should share the contents of their “me” bag.

- **What’s in a name?**

This activity helps everyone get to know each other a little better, and can prompt discussion about ethnic heritage or even how first names were chosen. Ask each member in your club to share a story about his or her name. Make this assignment at one meeting for the next so they may go home and talk with parents about their names - first, middle, or last. Ask each person to share the story or history.

- **Unique as a snowflake (for younger members)**

This activity helps members realize that each person is unique. Ask the group if they think that everyone is alike. If they say no, ask them to identify some characteristics that make people different. If they say yes, then share with them some examples of what makes us different (see group identity exercise). Give each person a piece of paper (use as many different colors as possible) and have each create a snowflake. They can do this any way they wish. If they need some assistance, have them try the method of making many folds, cutting notches along the fold, then unfolding the paper.

If All the Trees Were Oaks ...

- **Group Identity**
This activity is designed to help members realize they belong to many groups and to encourage interaction between groups. Have members stand when their group is identified. Use groups that are appropriate for your club. Examples are: gender, race, grade in school, area where they live, favorite school subjects, hobbies, hair color, etc. Older members may be asked to share a little information about what it feels like to be a member of that group. Give others the opportunity to ask questions of the group standing up.
- **Exploring your neighborhood or community**
This activity will help members get acquainted with their own community, and what it has to offer them. Give them an assignment for the next meeting to go home and learn about their community. Ask them to draw a map of their block, town, street, or whatever is appropriate. Tell them to have their parents help identify who lives in each house or apartment, and what other buildings are in the area, such as a store, library, school, church. When they share their maps, discuss different ideas of what makes a community, and how they could make their own community better. Encourage each member to get to know one more neighbor, or one neighbor a little better.

Share this poem with members to help them understand the importance of valuing differences.

If All the Trees Were Oaks

What if all the trees were oaks,
How plain the world would seem;
No maple syrup, banana splits,
And how would orange juice be?

Wouldn't it be a boring place,
If all the people were the same;
Just one color, just one language,
Just one family name!

-But-

If the forest were the world,
And all the people were the trees;

Palm and pine, bamboo and willow,
Live and grow in harmony.

Aren't you glad, my good friend,
Different though we be;
We are here to help each other,
I learn from you, and you, from me.

— Author Unknown

References

Multicultural Teaching - A Handbook of Activities, Information, and Resources.
Tiedt, P.L. & Tiedt, I.M., Allyn and Bacon, Inc, Boston, 1986.



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