

Adoption in the Classroom

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Highlights

- What to are you hoping to learn?
- Experiences with teachers and schools
- Communicating with teachers and schools
- Teachers as Curriculum Makers
- Curriculum ‘Hot Spots’
- Parents Helping Teachers and Schools

Communicating with teachers and schools

- Communicating with school personnel is an excellent opportunity to model appropriate language.
- What would you like the school to know?
- What would you prefer that the school did not know?
- Privacy vs. protection: Some information is important to share
- Your child may share information or stories at school

Teachers as Curriculum Maker

- Teachers often have no formal training with adoption or foster care
- Assignments often reflect traditional families
- Parents can explore with teachers how diversity is practiced in the classroom
- Creating classrooms of choice for ALL children

General Guidelines and Helpful Hints

- What is the goal of the assignment?
- Any assignment should respect the privacy of students and families
- Parents should be asked to be informed of upcoming assignments
- Assignments and activities should be expansive and inclusive for ALL children
- No assignments should be tailored for particular children
- Teachers need to understand and be prepared for children's reactions to certain assignments

Potential Curriculum 'Hot Spots'

- Baby Pictures
- Study of Family/Family Tree
- Personal Writing Assignments
- Study of Immigration
- Study of Genetics
- Sex Education

Baby Pictures

- Goal: To show stability & change overtime
 - Challenge
 - No photos or traditional photos available
 - Children unprepared for questions about pictures and history
 - Alternative Ideas
 - Baby & grown animal collage
 - Metamorphosis of butterflies
 - Seasons and change in weather

Study of Family/Family Tree

- Goal: To trace heritage and family connections
 - Challenge
 - Can create uneasiness for children who have non-traditional family configurations
 - Confusing for children to try to incorporate birth and adoptive families connections
 - Children may not be comfortable with their feelings of birth families
 - Distress with sharing family differences or being asked questions by others
 - Alternative Ideas
 - Important people in a child's life: VIPs
 - Give children choice about how to depict family connections
 - Have children trace a well-known family

Personal Writing Assignments

- Very important academic exercise
- Goal: To develop the skills and ability to write autobiographically
 - Challenge
 - First memories or autobiographies can be distressing for children with difficult histories or incomplete information
 - Difficult to articulate intense information related to known information
 - Emotions/distress could interfere with learning opportunities
 - Alternative Ideas
 - Allow choice of a list of components to include in the essay
 - Memory versus future essays: Let children choose type of memory
 - Biographies of people they know or can research

Study of Immigration

Goal: To understand the history of the US and the variety of cultures in the world

– Challenge

- Teachers may ask children to trace their families immigration story
- Teachers can be tempted to draw on knowledge of children from other countries
- Children may know very little about country of origin or are not comfortable sharing with others
- Children may feel pressure to know information and this can impact self-worth

– Alternative Ideas

- Take a field trip to naturalization ceremony
- Study the people who came through Ellis Island
- Study a well-known family who immigrated to the US

Study of Genetics

- Goal: Tracing genetic links or traits
 - Challenge
 - Children who were adopted cannot draw genetic lineages for their traits
 - Children adopted from foster care may feel uneasy recalling inherited traits in situations where information is scarce or has been difficult
 - Children unable to draw genetic links may feel markedly different from peers who can and feel singled out
 - Alternative Ideas
 - Study the work of Gregor Mendel
 - Have children draw their own punnett squares to show generations of traits
 - Have students debate the social, legal, or ethical issues related to genetic engineering (e.g., plants, food) or cloning
 - Research the Human Genome Project

Sex Education

- Sex education is a part of all school curricula
 - Challenge
 - Uncomfortable for all children, especially children who were adopted
 - May cause some children to reflect on their birth stories
 - May raise fertility questions about their parents
 - For some children, may be the first time they think how they are the result of people having sex.
 - Alternative Ideas
 - There aren't any!
 - Teachers and school personnel should be aware of the powerful emotions these discussion may raise for children who were adopted
 - Teachers and parents should be prepared for children's reactions and the potential discussion that results regarding their birth and adoption stories.

Parents Helping Teachers and Schools

- Be proactive with teachers and schools
- Be non-confrontational
- Find opportunities for teachable moments
- Review assignments with teachers and identify those that can be challenging
- Ask teacher for letter or phone call before personal info assignments are made
- Help teachers to create opportunity for choice in most assignments
- Offer alternative approaches to challenging projects

Parents Helping Teachers and Schools

- Discuss and help your child navigate challenging projects
- Share the list of well-known people who were adopted or experienced foster care with your child or child's teacher
- Offer books or websites that are particularly helpful for parents, and to provide resource information to teachers interested in learning more
- Identify appropriate books to donate to your child's classroom or school library
- Offer teachers suggestions for classroom bulletin boards or community resources

Language: Choosing Words Wisely

What we say and how it is heard...
word choice makes a difference!

“Why was he given up?”

“What do you know about her real mother?”

The choice of one word instead of another has a significant impact on how people interpret interactions.

Language plays a key role in constructing perspectives.

<i>Hurtful Choice</i>	<i>Wise Choice</i>	<i>Explanation</i>
Gave up Given up Put up Surrendered for adoption	Chose or made an adoption plan. A child for whom an adoption plan was made.	The decision to make an adoption plan is extremely difficult and thoughtful.
Keep the child	Parent the child	People who choose adoption are not discarding their children but are unable to parent them.
Real/Natural parents	Birth parents	There are no imaginary or unnatural parents.
Real/Natural child Illegitimate child	Birth child Child born to unwed parents	All children are real, natural, and legitimate. Lack of a genetic link does not make someone unnatural or illegitimate.

<i>Hurtful Choice</i>	<i>Wise Choice</i>	<i>Explanation</i>
Own children	Birth children or children who were adopted	All parents consider their children their own regardless of how they became a family.
Foster Child Foster Youth	Child or youth who is living with a foster family or who has experienced foster care.	The emphasis should be on the child/youth and not the foster status.
Neglectful Parent	Parent who is unable to meet the needs of a child.	Children who have experienced foster care or adoption do not want or need to hear their birth parents criticized. It is important for children to understand what their parents were unable to do that resulted in their separation.
Abusive Parent	Parent who is unable to manage his/her own behavior.	See Above

<i>Hurtful Choice</i>	<i>Wise Choice</i>	<i>Explanation</i>
Drug Addict/Alcoholic parent	Parent who abuses substances which impacts their decision making and ability to be responsive and responsible.	Children who have experienced foster care do not want or need to hear their birth parents criticized. It is important for children to understand what their parents were unable to do that brought them into state custody.
Unfit parent	Parent who is unable to meet the needs of a child	There are many reasons that parents are not able to adequately care for children. Children would benefit from having a clear sense of those reasons.
Unwanted	Unable to be parented by a birth parent.	There can be a variety of reason people are unable to parent their children. Desire is usually not a common reason and being described as “unwanted” is detrimental to a child’s sense of self.

<i>Hurtful Choice</i>	<i>Wise Choice</i>	<i>Explanation</i>
Taken away	Placed in state custody	The state, guided by law, has decided to remove the child from their home for specific reasons.
Tracking down relatives	Search for information or relatives	Tracking down people could imply that they are unwilling to be found. Conducting a search can take many forms and can mean searching for information, people or both.
Reunion	Making or keeping contact with a birth parent	Having contact with birth parents and relatives can take many forms and does not always lead to being reunited.

<i>Hurtful Choice</i>	<i>Wise Choice</i>	<i>Explanation</i>
Adopt a highway Adopt a whale Adopt a playground Adopt a school	Sponsor a highway Sponsor a whale Sponsor a playground Sponsor a school	Parents may be uncomfortable and these may be confusing or hurtful to children. This use is for temporary relationships and fundraising purposes.

