

# It's Not Just Black or White!

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## Introduction

Teachers & toddlers began a project where differences were celebrated highlighting the differences within the classroom. As the study began, teachers noticed how children gravitated towards colors around the room and began naming them. Teachers wanted to shift thinking of just in black and white to highlight all shades of colors and acknowledge and celebrate that people are not just black and white. To extend this project work teachers focused work on multiple nationalities, cultures, how garments are worn, and what foods children could try at home.

## Activities in the classroom

- Felt squares comparing different shades to bodies
- Printing a book about celebrating differences, and then coloring the children's version of it
- Adding books of different races and cultures
- Creating a cookbook of foods from around the world
- Exploring music from around the world
- Exploring dances from around the world
- Extending skin project: what it does, and how it works
- Color paint swatches
- Print outs of black inventors as writing provocations
- Highlight games that can be tied back to black inventors



## Literacy

As the project evolved, the children took great interest; they began to explore the new books and immediately began to track the words and point out the pictures they saw. Representation is so important and one easy way to introduce new ideas is through books. Two classroom favorites read daily are *We March* by Shane W. Adams and *Trombone Shorty* by Troy Andrews. The children enjoyed the literacy lessons so much that the teachers helped them to create their own books using printouts from Tar Tichel's website. These were kept in the classroom for about a week and then saved to add to the classroom's hallway documentation board. When the children noticed their books hanging in the hallway they cheered and showed ownership for their hard work.



The teachers began with simple projects using various writing materials and butcher paper. Teachers placed culture representation markers that highlighted different shades on tables. While the children were writing, teachers highlighted colors by stating "hey, this one looks like my color". This enable the children to begin thinking more about the shades of their skin.

## Music:

Teachers would follow the child's lead and noticed a shift from books to music as the project evolved. Children began search out musical instruments daily and marched around the classroom. The teachers highlighted this interest and tied it back in to the celebrating differences project. Teachers took time to create playlists with music from all around the world. The children really enjoyed dancing to Reggae and Tango!

## Let's Dance

With music on their hearts, teachers and children continued to dance and enjoy sharing spaces, friendships, and working together. Music brought the classroom together. As children continued to sing, teachers noticed that they also needed to move, and move they did! Short clips of dances from around the world such as Step dancing, the Flamenco, and Samba were watched.



Talking about differences and having these conversations can sometimes be scary but truth is, more damage could be done by not having the conversation at all. It is important as educators and families to encourage the conversations and create safe spaces for children. Keeping the conversations age appropriate simple and straightforward is the best way to keep the communication going.



## Silence is not the answer

Educators (and all people) must learn to break the silence and to break the silence we must get talking. If we remain silent and avoid these topics, we are forcing young children to navigate and figure out these things on their own or by media. If we continue to stay silent this only teaches fear to our future generations. (Derman-Sparks, Edwards and Goins, n.d) Fear to ask the hard questions and fear of being wrong or not knowing. Instead of staying silent, model acceptance and ask questions to hear and respect children's thoughts.



## Resources:

- Tichel, T., 2022. *Autism Little Learners*. [online] Autism Little Learners. Available at: <https://autismlittlelearners.com>
- Yarborough, E., 2022. *Real Talk Webinars for Parents of Young Children - Ohio's Statewide Family Engagement Center*. [online] Ohio's Statewide Family Engagement Center. Available at: [ohiofamiliesengage.osu.edu/realtalk](https://ohiofamiliesengage.osu.edu/realtalk)
- Derman-Sparks, L., Edwards, J. and Goins, n.d. Anti-bias education for young children and ourselves.