

Infusing Tolerance, Diversity, and Social Personal Curriculum into Inclusive Social Studies Classes Using Family Portraits and Contextual Teaching and Learning

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Abstract

As our schools and classroom continue to become increasingly diverse, the task of teaching ALL students within inclusive settings continues to challenge educators. Developing a classroom that respects the diversity of ALL students and facilitates their success is critical, especially at the middle and high school levels. This article describes one successful approach implemented in an inclusive Social Studies class. A Contextual Teaching and Learning (CTL) approach was used to infuse tolerance and diversity education along with Social Personal curriculum into an inclusive Social Studies class in grades 7 and 8. A detailed description of steps for implementing the CTL approach is provided along with a sample lesson and additional resources.

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Diversity should be considered the very patchwork of our society. It is through diversity that the many gifts and talents we possess enrich and touch our lives. As we look around our communities and within our own families, it is not difficult to discover diversity. Accepting and respecting this diversity helps build a more comprehensive understanding of the human experience and a better society.

In an effort to develop lessons that facilitated acceptance and respect for diversity, family photos were used to initiate a Contextual Teaching and Learning approach that infused tolerance and diversity education along with Social Personal Individual Education Plan (IEP) goals and objectives for students with disabilities in middle school inclusion social studies classes. The need for tolerance and diversity education, a description of the Contextual Teaching and Learning teaching approach, and specific implementation steps are presented in this article.

The Need for Tolerance Education

When most people think about the words “diversity,” “racism,” and/or “tolerance,” it is unlikely an image of a school classroom immediately comes to mind. However, this is the very place where educators must ensure that such issues are explored. Through tolerance and diversity education, teachers provide ALL students with a solid foundation on which to build. A well-developed tolerance and diversity education program can enhance and promote acceptance and respect of differences while it encourages acculturation and multiculturalism. In turn, this mutual acceptance and interaction serves to sustain and validate the importance of respect for all humanity.

Breaking down the stereotyping of a given culture, disability, race, gender,

religion, age, medical conditions, or sexual orientation should be at the foundation of tolerance and diversity education. This process helps ALL students understand the role of values and how they help shape character. The process also provides a forum to introduce relationships that exist between history and social change. Are some children lacking when it comes to learning about tolerance and diversity? Regrettably the answer is yes.

Tolerance and respect for people with individual differences requires continuous attention if we are to promote respect for diversity and remove barriers students face in schools or communities. Educators must become knowledgeable about school and community resources. They must reach out to these resources and enable students and families to have broader services and supports when full-service schools are not available (Park, Turnbull, & Turnbull, 2002).

Unfortunately, racism and intolerance towards diversity still exists in our society. Lack of knowledge and education in this area can contribute to intolerance and violence towards members of society. For instance, sometimes the racial comments heard in school warrant discussions and can be a source for lesson plans that incorporate Social Personal Skills. When these episodes occur, students need to know that such issues are real and visible within our school and in our community (Tatum, 2000). As educators, willingly or unwillingly, we play an important role in this process.

An individual who acts in a socially responsible manner to triumph in spite of personal differences can make a positive contribution to our very diverse society. One strategy to accomplish this and simultaneously contest prejudices is to use a multicultural instructional approach that

fosters tolerance and respect for diversity. Such an approach benefits ALL students as well as teachers, parents, and the community at large (D'Angelo & Dixey, 2001).

We must strive to encourage ALL of our students to be tolerant and respectful of differences. This requires educators to help students realize that intolerance and negative attitudes towards others, merely due to their diversity, is detrimental not only to the person in question, but also to oneself.

Stereotypical knowledge and beliefs about ethnic and cultural groups and students with disabilities limit the perspective people have available (St. Amour, 2003). Educators must provide accurate timely information in order to assist students in their formation of attitudes towards tolerance, respect, and acceptance of diversity. It is our view that educators are ethically and morally bound to teach as well as demonstrate tolerance and respect for all individuals. The lessons we provide should include positive effective instruction on how to get along with others who may be different.

Our students must be able to work together in order to solve the many problems that they will encounter throughout their lives. Additionally, they will need to take a closer look at how values can be used as building blocks when confronted with barriers and social problems that occur in our diverse society. Facilitating lessons that develop tolerance, respect and appreciation for diversity for ALL students can be accomplished in a variety of ways. One strategy to accomplish this task is to integrate activities that incorporate tolerance and diversity education along with social personal skills into lessons offered in Social Personal and Social Studies classes.

Infusing Tolerance and Diversity Education Through CTL

A successful Contextual Teaching and Learning (CTL) approach (Johnson, 2002; Sears, 2003) used by a middle school Special Education teacher to teach tolerance, respect, and appreciation for diversity by incorporating Social Personal Individual Education Plan (IEP) goals and objectives within an inclusion Social Studies class is described below. The lessons incorporated interests and experiences from the lives of diverse seventh and eighth grade students with and without disabilities. The process involved developing and implementing lessons with hands-on, project-based, and high interest learning tasks that integrate interests and experiences of the students (Franklin, 1992; Sears, 2003; Souders & Prescott, 1999; Volz, 2003). As a result, the content became more meaningful to the students. And through explicit efforts, a medium for infusing tolerance and diversity education components into the curriculum was created. Step by step directions on how teachers might develop or replicate this successful program at the middle and secondary level are provided.

Overview

The need for tolerance and diversity education was apparent as students were exhibiting behaviors of disrespect and intolerance towards one another. However, a practical solution for this problem was not as easy to identify. No models were offered by the school, school district, or in any past college classes on how to directly develop meaningful lessons for the students that incorporated tolerance and diversity education and Social Personal IEP goals and objectives within a Social Studies lesson. Still, something needed to be done, as there was not enough time in the day to develop and teach separate lessons in tolerance and diversity education, Social Personal

Instruction, and Social Studies. The steps taken to infuse the three into Social Studies lessons are presented and discussed in a format such that they can be easily replicated.

The first step involved the self-examination of personal beliefs and biases. The acknowledgement that people tend to act on their beliefs was important for in many respects, we are what we do. It is undeniable that what we do as educators in the classroom is influenced by our values and biases (Lynch & Hanson, 1998). The second step required an assessment of the personal beliefs and behaviors of the students. It was important to take inventory of where the students were in order to determine a course of action. Knowing the cultural background and underlying beliefs of the students provided the opportunity to develop lessons and activities from a multicultural framework. This information was used in the third step to incorporate newly created activities within lesson plans that also infused students' Social Personal IEP goals and objectives within secondary Social Studies lessons. Teaching the lessons was the fourth step. Since the goal was to change student behavior and promote acceptance and respect for diversity, the final step included evaluation measures in the form of student reflections and writings after each class. Comments from students and unsolicited comments from other teachers validated the success of this program. A more detailed explanation of each step follows.

Step One: Examine Personal Bias

The first step began with the self-examination of personal biases towards tolerance and diversity. Before attempting to understand the diversity and the uniqueness of students, teachers should analyze their personal preferences and tendencies. As Creswell (1998) noted: "knowledge is within the meanings people make of it; knowledge is gained through people talking about their meanings; knowledge is laced with personal biases and values; knowledge is written in a personal, up-close way; and knowledge evolves, emerges, and is inextricably tied to the context in which it is studied" (p.19). Table 1 provides the self-examining questions asked during this first step. Teachers may pose similar questions to themselves. The premise for this first step is that individuals must be mindful of their own cultural self-awareness in order to recognize the cultural underpinnings of their professional practice (Harry, Kalyanpur, & Day, 1999; Warger, 2001). Conducting an honest self-inventory to identify personal beliefs and biases is critical. In our opinion, it is crucial that responses to the questions be truthful and candid. Taken seriously, this process helps teachers identify cultural values embedded in their interpretation of a student's difficulty (Ayala & Dingle, 2002; Research Connections, 2001).

**Table 1: Knowing Yourself & Your Students:
Questions To Guide Discussion & Learning**

Tolerance And Diversity Self-Assessment Questions	Response Options
1. I am influenced by stigmatizing misconceptions & assumptions?	Yes No Sometimes
2. I engage in segregation practices (albeit considered benign)?	Yes No Sometimes
3. I refer to children with the special education label first?	Yes No Sometimes
4. I think or refer to students by social economics status and/or ethnicities?	Yes No Sometimes
5. I internalize stereotypes based on race or ethnicity?	Yes No Sometimes
6. I engage in professional development on tolerance education?	Yes No Sometimes
7. I differentiate violation of civil rights from personal views?	Yes No Sometimes
8. I identify and differentiate exclusionary and inclusionary practices?	Yes No Sometimes
9. I believe inferiority complexes are associated with certain cultures?	Yes No Sometimes
10. I use stereotype statements and terms when referring to diverse groups?	Yes No Sometimes

**Table 2: Knowing Your Students:
Questions To Guide Discussion & Learning**

Tolerance And Diversity Self-Assessment Questions	Response Options
1. I tend to play with and trust people who are similar to me versus people who are different from me.....	Yes No Sometimes
2. I use names (i.e., retard, dork, dumb, etc) to refer to a student with academic problems?	Yes No Sometimes
3. I think or refer to others by where they live?	Yes No Sometimes
4. I try hard to understand people from different races, cultures & beliefs?	Yes No Sometimes
5. I believe I can make a difference?	Yes No Sometimes
6. I believe attitudes are associated with certain cultures?	Yes No Sometimes
7. I use stereotype statements & terms when referring to diverse groups?	Yes No Sometimes

Step Two: Assess the Students

Modified versions of the teacher questions appear in Table 2. These questions were used as discussion points in initial class sessions at the beginning of the school year. The discussions provided students the opportunity to examine and identify their biases and potential misconceptions in an informative and thorough manner. This assessment and awareness process resulted in students and the teacher clarifying their respective personal values as well as those of their community and society at-large. As the class engaged in the values clarification process, it was vital that no one set of values

or bias dominated the discussion. Fortunately, the process brought about a conscience effort to understand and respect tolerance and diversity. The underlying assumption for this step was that the better the students understood their personal and classmates value systems, the more likely they would be to resist making unfounded and rash judgments about others. Furthermore, the dialogue would allow ALL students to openly acknowledge and recognize difference identified amongst them. The goal was to establish a foundation for respect of one another's cultural and racial differences.

Contextual Teaching and Learning

Contextual Teaching and Learning (CTL) is based on the premise that students will learn better and remember more when they are able to find meaning in academic lessons (Hall, 1993; Johnson, 2002). Inherent in this is the belief that students seek to make sense of new information in the context of their existing knowledge and experiences (Sears, 2003). As many students with learning disabilities experience difficulty processing and organizing new information during academic lessons, it makes sense to apply a CTL approach that allows for a greater opportunity to grasp and retain content.

The concept and guiding principles of CTL are rooted in brain research and the notion that when presented with information, the brain seeks patterns to link new information with familiar knowledge (Kotulak, 1997; Johnson, 2002). As a tenet of CTL is learning will come alive when new information is presented in a systematic manner that takes into consideration the existing schema of the learner, the goal of a teacher using CTL is to connect academic content with the social, cultural, physical and psychological experiences of the students (Hall, 1993). In doing so, the meaning for learning is discovered. This meaning then provides motivation and reason for learning.

The CTL system emphasizes learning by doing. It is a holistic approach consisting of the following components: (a) making meaningful connections, (b) doing significant work (projects service learning activities, etc), (c) self regulating learning, (d) collaborating, (e) critical and creative thinking, (f) nurturing the individual, (g) reaching high standards, and (h) using authentic assessment. An explanation of each component is available in Elaine Johnson's 2002 book entitled, *Contextual Teaching and Learning: What It Is and Why It's Here To Stay*.

Step Three: Develop the Curriculum

This step involved following up the informal assessment and open discussion conducted in step two with reflective thought on how to implement and create a

respectful and meaningful learning atmosphere in the class. The goals at this stage were to: (a) create an inclusive and accepting environment for all the diverse learners present; (b) develop meaningful

lessons and activities that presented new knowledge in context of the students' existing frame of reference; and (c) infuse targeted Social Personal IEP goals and objectives within the Social Studies unit and lessons. Since one of the original reasons for adopting the CTL approach was to reduce

problem behaviors and increase respectful behaviors of students, the notion that acting in the role of a bystander who does nothing can be as hurtful and distressing as committing an injustice or callous act, served as a guiding tenet for the lessons and activities developed.

Relating historical events to current events and classroom activities energized even the most reluctant student.

The concrete and often hands-on lessons that evolved helped the students in three specific ways. First, students became aware of views outside their original box of beliefs. Second, the activities served to increase exposure and a knowledge base for grasping the content. Finally, the activities provided students with knowledge and strategies for use in our ever-increasing diverse world.

Designing the units and specific lessons required a thorough understanding of the traditional Social Studies Curriculum and then identifying which current events, student interests, and specific Social Personal objectives to infuse, teach, and/or reinforce. To accomplish this, a pool of

activities was developed that infused specific Social Personal Curriculum objectives within the Social Studies lessons scheduled to be taught in upcoming units. Alignment of the activities to the content involved thinking through and linking current issues and student interests with historical events. Specific state standards and learning objectives were also identified for each lesson. Instructional strategies put into practice included the use of flexible peer and cooperative grouping, scaffolding and remaining open to the need for adaptations and modifications. Establishing classroom ground rules and exercising time management was critical during discussion stages. Table 3 provides several examples from lessons taught.

Table 3: Content, Goals, Activities, and Strategies

Content/ Topic	Goals	Learning Activities	Strategies
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cultural Awareness-Thematic Units (i.e., Latin America, etc...) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop appropriate responses to situations encountered daily Express relationship between history & change 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Create mosaics, playettes, pyramid, dioramas, masks, Parental involvement and lecturers from civil rights organizations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Think-aloud method Hands-on researched projects Collage Posters
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Human Rights Religious Wars Holocaust 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use strategies to handle conflict Articulate how one person can make a difference 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Gallery Walk Mock court cases / Simulations Time capsule with predictions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reciprocal questioning Scaffolding Hands-on projects
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Slavery In America / Black History Month/ Equal Justice 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increase ability to express self in written forms Describe an agent of change and socially responsive actions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Single out students wearing purple for preferential treatment Writing poetry, songs, & publish in class newsletter 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Brainstorm Graphic Organizers Student journals Role-playing
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> American History 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consensus building Describe experience of early American settlers in 1600s 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Create travel packet to advise new settlers on what to expect upon arrival. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Project based Cooperative Learning
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Clean Air Act 1970 Analyzing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify ways to help the environment Describe impact of clean air act 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Create and Clean Air Act news story for the national TV news Set up a recycling program 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Project based learning Graphic organizer - story board
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Multicultural Nation; Immigration Art Interests 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increase understanding and contributions of immigrants Enhance cultural appreciation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Organize program to help migrant children Write a headline story & display student's work 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Critical thinking - analyze jobs, & deficits Analyzing Information
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Current Events Continuity & Change 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Interpret views and propaganda through political cartoons Respect yourself 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Write interpretation of political cartoons Develop cartoon for a local current event Create timelines 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Summarizing

For each lesson academic and social personal goals were developed. The tolerance and diversity education components were embedded within the

lessons. While not all Social Studies topics and lessons lent themselves to incorporating the social personal and tolerance education components, it has been our experience that in a majority of Social Studies lessons,

Social Personal IEP objectives, and tolerance and diversity education components can be infused with minimal

effort. A sample lesson is presented in Table 4.

Table 4: Sample Lesson

1. *Background Preparation for Lessons:* Begin by asking: Have you ever experienced unfair treatment? If so please explain... Then discuss a few stereotypes people might have about one another's age, race, and economics.
2. *What to do:* Review with students the relevant vocabulary to your topic (i.e.: humanitarian, discrimination, appalling, boycotts, decree, segregation, withering)
3. Students take turns reading aloud the reproducible copies of a speech or text relevant to the topic to be discussed (i.e. "I Have a Dream" speech by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.). This should be read in its entirety, pausing for clarifications and questions.
4. Ask students to name and discuss social changes they observed and what they feel needs to be improved. Discuss how history is full of people/agents for change. Single out and have a class discussion on individuals who changed the world by making choices that influenced not just their own lives but those of others in the world (i.e. Mother Teresa, Mahatma Gandhi, Anne Frank, Cesar Chavez, Oprah Winfrey, Michael Jordan, and Bill Gates).
5. Instruct students to write a poem, paragraph, or a short story expressing their thoughts on the factors they think led to these individuals making Good life choices. Product should include effects on tolerance and diversity acceptance in the world.
6. *Evaluation:* Upon completion ask students to share their work. Create poetry books that include students' preferred selections so that everyone can enjoy at their leisure.
7. *Follow up Activities:* Have students research and create a report, banner, quilt, or science board display on a topic related to people who became agents of change throughout history.

Step Four: Teaching Lessons & Getting Started

We believe it was important to begin teaching the concept of diversity with concrete examples. Keeping the initial lessons concrete and focused on the diversity within the classroom allows ALL individuals in the classroom, including the teacher, to become familiar with the respective culture each person brings to school. This provides an opportunity to discover common ground for

communication among ALL individuals in the classroom. In our case, the initial lessons on diversity and tolerance started with the teacher showing a selection of her family portraits to the class. The class enjoyed talking about the family photos. The rich discussions centered on the subjects of character, integrity, citizenship, discrimination, and resiliency. The ethnic and racial differences within the family provided the visual representation needed to bring home the importance of tolerance and

acceptance of diversity, especially in this ever changing world filled with nontraditional families. The photos and discussion served as a springboard that allowed students to open up and share their personal stories. Students then created autobiography displays to present to the class. As a result of the discussions and subsequent lessons, over time a classroom culture of tolerance and acceptance for ALL the students emerged.

The establishment of rules on acceptable ways to interact in the classroom provided order and civility in the classroom. And as lessons moved to focus more on Social Studies content there was an increased level of confidence that students understood and could relate to the relevant vocabulary terms and key concepts.

Step Five: Does it Work? Determining the Lesson Learned

The learning tasks and instructional practices designed to bridge student cultures, interests, and experiences with the Social Studies curriculum had a noticeably positive effect. The tailored lessons allowed for student input and ultimately increased student participation. Relating historical events to current events and classroom activities energized even the most reluctant student. As a result, during lessons it was critical to keep one eye on the clock and maintain good time management as discussions occasionally ran over the time allowance. In step 5, the evaluation/assessment component required students to write a reflection after each class session. The impact on the academic and social personal growth was evident in the feedback. Comments received from students were very telling. A 7th Grade female wrote, "This really helped me deal with my family differences." A 9th grade male student wrote, "Now I understand why my mom wants me to work hard and succeed."

Perhaps the response from a ninth grade male is most telling, "It is about time we have a class that is real."

Teachers in the school have noticed a difference in the students. The 8th grade language arts teacher commented, "I don't know what your class did but they were fired up when they came to my class and wanted to continue talking about justice and human rights violation." A home economics teacher stated, "I noticed your students are sweeter towards one another." The exceptional student education placement specialists at the school noticed the improvement in the special education students and commented, "I think what you are doing is wonderful!"

Recommendations

The authors hope the following recommendations will lead others to a strategic approach as they implement tolerance and diversity education initiatives. It is important to allow students to express themselves in order to understand why they might believe a stereotype, and then calmly challenge the assumptions in a positive but factual manner. Make sure students understand the concepts of tolerance and diversity and talk candidly about these concepts. Bring the talks alive and personal by giving instances where you, a family member, or individual in the community or history might have experienced a situation of favoritism, discrimination, or intolerance. One may also choose to provide current topics from the media to discuss and link with past events or historical concepts.

Patience, an effort to understand, and respect for others, can serve to foster an atmosphere of compassion, acceptance and mutual respect. We have to teach our students to respect and accept others ***not regardless*** of their differences, but ***because*** of their differences. Educators are encouraged to talk openly and positively

about diversity and tolerance. Likewise, ALL students are encouraged to respect, celebrate, and appreciate each person's unique differences. In an effort to promote acceptance and not "*just talk the talk, but walk the walk,*" educators should challenge students to make new friends from cultural backgrounds different from their own. It has been long acknowledged that well-designed group activities can encourage cross-cultural friendships (Franklin, 1992). Fortunately this outcome was realized as the school year progressed.

Final Thoughts

It has been said that students who develop an appreciation of diversity and tolerance in quieter times are more likely to recognize the gravity of limiting civil liberties in times of crisis (Avery, 2002). Imagine how the world would be if everyone saw diversity as a wonderful and exciting aspect of being part of our humanity. Regrettably this is not so, we oftentimes encounter negativity and intolerance. Sticks and stones hurt for a time, however words can hurt for a lifetime. A few memorable examples of these extreme prejudices and irrational intolerances were the Holocaust, and more recently September 11th, 2001.

The no acceptance of diversity can divide families, countries, and the world. In

teaching tolerance and respect for diversity we must emphasize the need for people to see others as individuals free from special education labels, racial discrimination, and stigmatizing connotations. Whether it be black or white, yellow or green, small or large, educated or not, rich or poor, with a disability or without a disability, tolerance and respect is about accepting people for whom they are, not for what they are. Future research on student achievement and failure must continue with a deconstruction of cultural relations and how difference is constructed in school, it must also strive to assess the interdependence of cultures in and out of schools to determine how school can foster cultural harmony and intellectual, social, political and economic gains for all (Pena, 1997). Throughout the roller coaster ups and downs of human development, there is a sense of pride when you find out that your life has a priceless purpose, in that of being an educator and making a difference in your students' lives. We must never lose sight of the fact that values, which our students choose to live their lives by now, will ultimately become the values by which they will make future life decisions. Developing a greater understanding of diversity among students will likely lead to a safer and friendlier school environment, community and society.

Table 5: Suggested Websites For Developing Lessons

- Anti-bias programs and activities for teachers, parents, teens, and children being implemented in schools across the country www.tolerance.org/teach
- Interactive website to address prejudice www.usdoj.gov/kidspage/index.html
- Brown v Board of Education www.brownmatters.org
- Articles on teaching tolerance - type tolerance search feature in www.ascd.org
- Teaching students with disabilities visit www.cec.sped.org
- Teaching students with learning disabilities visit www.ldonline.org
- Ignoring distractions/ tolerating annoyances www.ldonline.org/ld_indepth/social_skills/soc-skills.html
- Lessons & materials to teach tolerance- Tolerance Project www.ccsf.edu/Resources/Tolerance
- For curriculum ideas and a multicultural calendar www.kidlink.org/KIDPROJ

Table 6: Suggested Literature and Reading Materials

Title	Author	Subject
<i>Ellington Was Not A Street</i>	Ntozake Shange	Picture book of African Americans in history
<i>A Child Called It</i> <i>The Lost Boy</i> <i>A Man Named Dave</i>	Dave Pelzer	Story in an abusive home/ for Younger years 10-12/ Adolescence to adulthood
<i>Stealing Home: The Story Of Jackie Robinson</i>	Barry Denenberg	Story of success amidst diversity
<i>Divorce</i>	Beverly Cleary	Dealing with divorce
<i>The Vulnerable Child: What Really Hurts America's Children And What We Can Do About It</i>	Rick Weissbourd	Impact of contemporary cultural trends on children
<i>Playing A Poor Hand Well</i>	Mark Katz	Book about children and their disabilities
<i>Knots On A Counting Rope</i>	John Archambault	Generation Exchanges
<i>Why Are All The Black Kids Sitting Together In The Cafeteria?</i>	Beverly Daniel Tatum	Racer relations and the need for connection
<i>I Never Saw Another Butterfly-Children's Drawings & Poems From Terezin Concentration Camp 1942-1944</i>	Hana Volavkova	Article on Children's drawings and poems
<i>Hope</i>	Isabel Munk	A bi-racial child's account
<i>Class Pictures: Representations Of Race, Gender And Ability In A Century Of School Photography</i>	Eric Margolis	Examines photographs taken of American public school classes
<i>Cultural Diversity: Towards A Whole Society</i>	Mara Hurwitt	Embracing diversity

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