Trell’s first-grade teacher asked him to research the life of one of his grandparents for a Black History Month project. Trell enthusiastically collected photographs, old letters, and newspaper clippings of his favorite grandfather. He asked his parents for anecdotal information; he also remembered his favorite times with his grandfather. He spent hours preparing.

Before the important day, Trell went over the report with his teacher. He knew she would be as excited as he was about his grandfather, who had been a famous politician in his day. Much to Trell’s disappointment, his teacher rejected the report. Trell, a biracial boy, had chosen to tell about his white/Carib grandfather. The teacher wanted only black people presented. Trell was devastated.

Anti-bias, multicultural education has found a permanent place in our early childhood programs. Psychologists have recognized that a crucial part of children’s self-esteem is contingent on a positive view of their racial and ethnic heritage and that children with a high self-esteem do better in school. So programs now provide materials, books, dolls, activities, content, and discussion to help support the ethnic and racial identity of their children.

Multicultural approaches place children within five distinctive groups: African American, Hispanic, Native American, Asian American, and white. Programs then respond to children on the basis of the group to which they belong. For children like Trell, whose parents represent more than one of these categories, this does not work. And teachers who work with the growing number of multiracial and multiethnic students find themselves without tools to support these children. Where do they fit in? How should teachers support and nurture their identities?

Children of mixed heritage—multiracial and multiethnic—have a racial and cultural heritage that includes both biological parents’ complete backgrounds. Educators must carefully help these children develop a pride and positive self-esteem in their total multiracial heritage, culture, and identity.

There are no multiracial holidays, no heroes, no puzzles, no multiracial families, very few books, no posters, and no curriculum activities. Here are a few suggestions to help teachers begin to fill this void:

- Use interracial and interethnic families in your program to help with information, photographs, holidays, stories, histories, and curriculum resources.
- Create your own posters, materials, and books that show interracial families (including foster, adoptive, and blended families).
- Pressure companies that provide books and curriculum materials to include multiracial and multiethnic materials in their selections.
- Provide an immediate response to any language or behavior that in any way negates a multiethnic or multiracial child’s identity, heritage, or pride. This includes comments implying that the child cannot embrace his full multiracial identity.
- Research multiracial and multiethnic heroes (e.g., composer Gottschalk, ornithologist Audubon) and present material to your class.
- Never celebrate an activity that requires a child to select only part of his heritage. If you celebrate cultural days, such as Cinco de Mayo and Martin Luther King Day, present them in a way all children can benefit. Make sure a multiracial child is comfortable identifying both with Cinco de Mayo and Martin Luther King Day, if the child has those combined heritages.
- Contact a local multiracial support group to get ideas, information, and advice.
- Do not teach about race, ethnicity, and culture in a way that excludes children and people. We should teach about culture and heritage as a way to give individuals strength, traditions, and values, not to group and exclude people.

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