



Elders as Resources – Multicultural and Age Awareness

Multicultural awareness has become increasingly significant. Older people can assist in classroom projects designed to explore this country's great diversity of people and lifestyles. They may help students to realize that community elders often are the caretakers of cultural wisdom, practices and artifacts that have made our country a rainbow of cultures (see Appendix D for resources that are useful in developing multicultural programs). Suggested activities include the following:

Invite older members of ethnic groups to share their knowledge, life experiences, customs and artifacts with students in classrooms.

Team students with elders to explore ethnic traditions in the community.

Select a committee of students and older adults to prepare an exhibit on ethnic culture. Organize an ethnic fair or festival at school. Invite community members to participate.

Ask students to document local customs through photography and video.

Organize an intergenerational demonstration of ethnic song, dance, craft and art.

Select elders to teach their craft to students. Students both report on the process and display their own products with those of participating elders.

Example: Mattatuck Museum, the Naugatuck Valley Project and Stone Soup, a nonprofit organization, cosponsored the annual Waterbury (Conn.) Ethnic Music Festival. Younger and older community members representing the city's ethnic diversity share music, food and experiences. The Mattatuck Museum worked with the Waterbury public school system to bring several festival participants into classrooms to share their cultural talents. These have included an older Russian couple who performed traditional songs in costume and related them to events in their lives; a traditional Irish singer in his late 60s; Puerto Rican musicians who taught Latin percussion techniques and musical concepts; and a Portuguese woman who shared the songs of her native land.