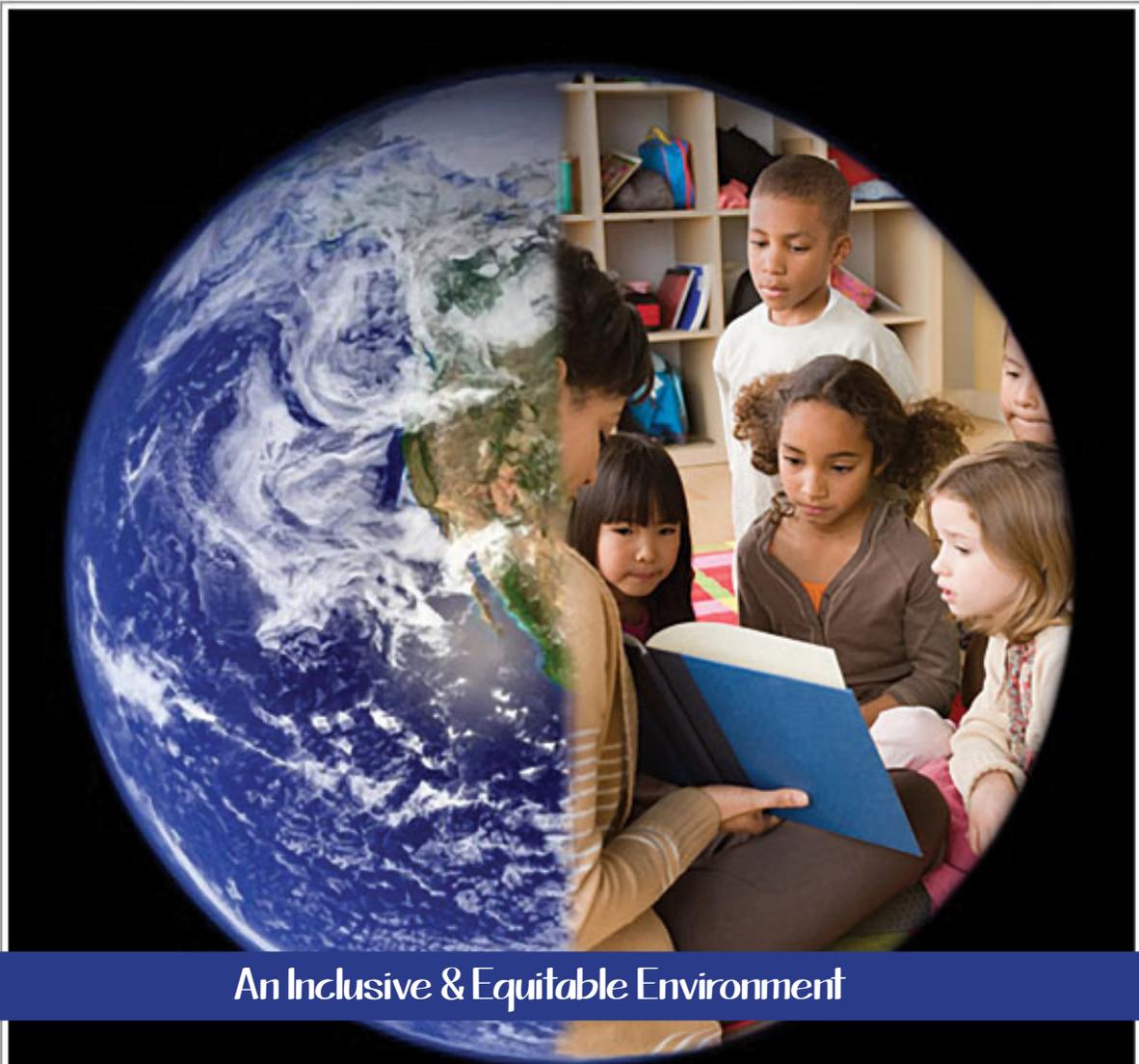


FRIDAY FREEBIE

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Teaching Fairly in an Unfair World



An Inclusive & Equitable Environment

An Inclusive and Equitable School Environment

I had the opportunity to teach a three-year Additional Qualifications course (described later in the book) with a group of anti-racist educators: teachers, principals, vice-principals, and consultants. As we worked together during the course, we got to know each other well and we spent a lot of time discussing the classrooms in which we taught. During the time that we spent together, the participants in the course changed schools, grades, subjects, and responsibilities. Over time, we began to develop a way to describe what an inclusive, equitable school environment should look like, sound like, and feel like for everyone. We used our imaginations to enter various kinds of rooms in the schools in which we taught and we asked ourselves critical questions about the appearance, content, use, and access associated with those rooms. Here are some of the questions we created together:

HALLWAYS

1. Are the signs, notices, posters, motivational comments, and displays in the school building multilingual, and do they reflect a variety of cultural perspectives?
2. Are students' home languages used in school announcements?
3. Is there a private place where students can pray if they wish to?
4. Are the hall monitors seen as part of the school staff? Are they invited to staff meetings and offered appropriate professional development?
5. Are teachers present in the hallways during breaks?
6. Is material that is on display representative of different cultural and racial groups?

SCHOOL LIBRARY

1. Is the library open after school so that students who do not have access to computers and the Internet at home can do their homework and research?
2. Is there a wide range of materials that reflect the diverse population in the school?
3. What kinds of activities are the students engaged in?
4. Is there a system in place for students to get the help that they need?
5. Are students allowed to talk and interact as long as they do not disturb others?
6. Are there breakout rooms for student meetings?

CAFETERIA

1. Is there a wide variety of food available that reflect students' cultures?
2. Are there enough chairs for all students to sit and eat?
3. Are there enough garbage cans and recyclable bins so that the tables can be cleaned up quickly?
4. What kind of music is playing? Does the kind of music change regularly?

SCHOOL OFFICE

1. Are translation services available for parents who do not speak English?
2. How long do visitors have to wait before they are looked after?
3. Are students treated with the same respect as visitors, parents/guardians, and teachers?

Besides imagining the physical attributes of the rooms in the school, we also looked at the inclusiveness of school activities, the varying attitudes of people in the school and their relationships to each other and to the students, and finally, the conversations that took place amongst and between individuals and groups. We focused as well on the conversations that happened in the classroom, the kinds of activities that were included in the curriculum, and the amount of engagement on the part of the students. We asked ourselves how special events, extra-curricular programs, and community and parental involvement could be re-envisioned and made more inclusive.