As we discover how to better teach and apply the principal of equity in our schools, we are placing increasing emphasis on cultural pluralism. This means moving away from the “melting pot” philosophy, in which it was thought desirable for different people to give up their differences in order to blend together.

It means a move toward what has been called the “salad bowl” philosophy, in which differences are preserved and contribute to the desirability of the whole. This “salad bowl” philosophy incorporates the belief that the diversity of race, custom, color, religion, age, physical appearance, gender, gender expression and identity, and sexual orientation is a positive and essential characteristic of our nation and its heritage. It makes room for all.

The schools, of course play a highly significant role in promoting or negating this constructive view. The curriculum by which students learn shares this role with the teacher and other school staff. Attitudes expressed or modeled in materials, as well as by people, work against the development of culturally pluralistic education if they relegate groups of people to secondary or inferior status. A curriculum may perpetuate these attitudes and the behaviors they cause (including hate violence), if it omits the history, contributions and lives of a group, if it demeans a group by using patronizing or clinically distancing language, or if it portrays a group in stereotyped roles with less than a full range of human interests, traits and capabilities.

*Adapted, with permission by Beth Reis for the Safe Schools Coalition from “Washington Models for the Evaluation of Bias Content in Instructional Materials” originally published in 1992 by OSPI, the Office of the [Washington State] Superintendent of Public Instruction.
Stereotypes

Example
Members of each identity group are presumed to share the same "exotic "lifestyle" which does not include such mundane acts as doing the laundry, watching TV or going to work.

Alternative
All identity groups are depicted in diverse contexts reflective of their internal diversity, as well as their everyday lives.

Example
African Americans are depicted as violent; living only in ghettos; employed only as servants, or as unemployed.

Alternative
All identity groups are portrayed as equally independent/dependent, leaders/subordinates, peaceable/militant, open/private, thoughtful/impulsive, etc.

Example
Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender people are portrayed only as asexual protesters; only in Mardi Gras-type sexually provocative parade costumes; or only in the context of HIV/AIDS. Native Americans are depicted as people of the past; as savages; or only in the context of alcoholism or fetal alcohol syndrome. Japanese American people are mentioned only in the context of World War II. Latinos are depicted only as sleeping; or in the context of migrant farmwork.

Alternative
People of both genders are depicted in traditional as well as non-traditional gender roles in the family, at work and at play; both as capable of taking sexual responsibility, both as having sexual desires.

Example
Only nuclear families with heterosexual parents and two to four children are portrayed. Couples are always portrayed as young, able-bodied, heterosexual and parenting.

Alternative
In addition to the traditional nuclear family, families are depicted in which there are single parents, foster children, step-parents, same-sex parents, and/or relatives living with the family. Extended families are depicted, and emphasis is placed on roles and relationships, rather than physical proximity. Couples that do not have children are still described in some cases, as "families." People of all varieties are depicted as capable of loving.

Language

Example
Materials encourage majority students to help non-majority people, who are spoken of as less fortunate, needy, disadvantaged, and victimized — all terms which are patronizing and depict non-majority people in terms of the ways in which they may have less than majority people, with the implication that perhaps they are to be pitied.

Alternative
Non-majority people are spoken of with equal spirit, with equal respect; with equal right to society's benefits, and, when appropriate, as being victimized unfairly or unjustly treated by majority customs and institutions which fail to acknowledge the human dignity of all. The right of non-majority people to decide what is best for themselves is acknowledged; the right to protest injustice is honored.

Example
Humankind is referred to by the generic he and an appropriate term-of-choice is still in flux, but not as Negro, except in a historical context. Women are called women of the family, of the home or of the household. The term of choice is still in flux, but not as Negro, except in a historical context. Women are called women or girls; Gay and Lesbian people are ascribed as women or girls.

Alternative
African Americans are identified as such, or as Black, since the term of choice is still in flux, but not as Negro, except in a historical context. Women are called women or young women or teenage women, unless they are prevented. The terms Gay and Lesbian are used most, if not exclusively; when referring to people who are primarily attracted to members of their own gender. The term homosexual might be used when referring to a kind of touch, rather than a human being. When terms made and female are used as nouns, they're reserved primarily for species other than human ("ten chimpanzees, all males").

Example
Some non-English phrases are miseducated. The term macho is misused to designate chauvinism. The term siesta is distorted patronizingly to indicate a time of laziness during a normal working day.

Alternative
The Mexican word machismo or macho is properly used to mean masculine pride, bravery and responsibility. The term siesta is properly identified as a noon break in tropical climates, after which work is resumed into the normal working day.