

TABLE 6.5 Beginning of the Year Survey for Families

1. What does your child like to do at home? What do you like to do together?
2. Does your child like to read or be read to? What does your child like to read?
3. What kind of activities does your child do at home that requires work with numbers or math?
4. How do you help your child learn different things that are important to your family, such as your family's values and beliefs?
5. How does your child contribute to your daily family routines? What special jobs within the family does your child do?
6. What hobbies or sports does your child enjoy? Do other family members participate in these hobbies or sports? If so, who?
7. What goals do you have for your child this year?
8. What else would you like me to know about your child or your family?

Note that the recommendation that culturally responsive educators actively participate in the community and connect with community members in meaningful ways. This can be a powerful tool to strengthen partnerships with families (Villegas & Lucas, 2002). If the community that your students come from is having a celebration, by all means attend. It is painfully clear when parents realize that some teachers avoid involvement in their cultural events, whether at school or in their community setting. For example, Latino parents noticed with surprise and sadness that both new and veteran teachers sometimes appeared to be afraid to venture into their communities and wanted to leave quickly (Griego Jones, 2003).

Developing a Classroom Cultural Audit

Another important aspect of culturally responsive family involvement involves your classroom environment. You can send a subtle message of acceptance or rejection each time a student or family member walks into your classroom. During your first year of teaching, seek to create a classroom community that values the cultural contributions of all families and is a risk-free environment where students respect different cultures. Your attitude, tone of voice, and behavior as you interact with students and families will serve as a model for your students and is the essence of **culturally sensitive caring**, where teachers are placed in an ethical, emotional, and academic partnership with ethically diverse students who are anchored in honor, integrity, resource sharing, and deep belief in the possibility of growth (Gay, 2002). When children feel accepted (or rejected) at school, they will communicate this to their families.

In addition to your behavior in the classroom, the environment should also clearly represent the children's lives through home, school, and community connections (McIntyre, Rosebery, & Gonzalez, 2001). Gay (2002) described the hidden or **symbolic curriculum** that is communicated through classroom materials and displays. By portraying a wide variety of age, gender, ability, race, ethnic, religious, and social class diversity through the classroom environment, the message is given that all people are valued. Rotating classroom displays, portfolio collections, photo albums or scrapbooks, bulletin board exhibits, student projects, tape recordings, or videos that represent family diversity can draw attention to the

step-parent's shoes. . . . We'd been pretty much running wild and having a good old time for close to a year, and now we were suddenly told we had to conform to rules set forth by our parents along with their new significant others. Did this go over well? NO—I don't THINK so. We were all convinced that the changing of the rules were due to the new wicked step-parents. We didn't like it one bit. We decided to stick together and rebel. (Goebel, 2001)

As noted in Chapter 5, students who transition from a single-parent family to a blended family have to adapt to new rules, roles, and boundaries, as well as the possible instant addition of new family members, such as stepsiblings, stepgrandparents, and other members of the extended family of the new parent. The transition may be more challenging for children if it has the characteristics of difficult transitions listed earlier, such as occurring too quickly after parents' separation and divorce, the child having no choice or input into the parents' decision to remarry, and the child feeling a loss of status, such as having to share his or her bedroom with a new stepsibling.

Suggestions for Working With Children and Families Experiencing a Separation, Divorce, or Remarriage

Teachers and schools can also provide support for students from families experiencing a separation, divorce, or remarriage by helping children deal with their feelings and encouraging all parents to stay involved with their child's schooling (Frieman, 1997). The following specific suggestions for teachers may be helpful:

- Allow students to talk about their feelings, but do not quiz them about their family situation. Help them express their feelings in acceptable ways.
- Respond to students in a way that shows you are willing to listen and care about them and their family.
- Be alert to changes in behavior or schoolwork and stay in contact with parents about these changes.
- Be sensitive to problems with getting work completed, concentrating in class, or acting out behaviors, as students are sorting through the many psychological, emotional, and physical changes occurring in their lives.
- Encourage noncustodial parents to remain active in their child's schooling and extracurricular activities.
- Send all communications, such as newsletters or notes, to both parents' homes, rather than forcing the child to communicate information to the noncustodial parent.
- Be as neutral as possible when parents separate and remember that it is not your role to judge either parent.
- Include both parents and stepparents in conferences or meetings; offer separate conference times if parents do not want to meet together.