Multicultural backgrounds; age-appropriate knowledge and behavior; the student culture at school; family backgrounds; linguistic patterns and differences; cognitive patterns and differences; and social and emotional issues

Multicultural Backgrounds: Cultures are different in many ways that affect how a learner approaches school. Some cultures are very individualistic while others are collective. These terms refer to a set of different values. Individualistic cultures value personal distinction, feeling good and independence. Collective cultures value group goals, interdependence, and harmonious relationships. Even though all individuals need to feel a positive sense of self they learn that sense of self differently, based to a great degree on their culture. Learners must feel welcome and valued to make school a successful learning experience. All teachers need to interact effectively with learners, parents, teachers, and others from many different backgrounds. Multicultural education is education about values diversity and includes the perspectives of a variety of cultural groups on a regular basis. Teacher must understand that a child may come from a background of many cultural messages; indeed perhaps so did that child’s parent(s).

Age-appropriate knowledge and behavior: Learners develop intellectual abilities (move from concrete to formal thinking) as they get older. They also gather personal experience that adds to all that they know. As one gets older he/she can learn content that is more complex and connected to many life experiences. Children’s attention spans lengthen as well, allowing a longer focused time on task. These things all determine age-appropriate behavior. Children and young adults are expected by their culture to know and be able to do certain things at certain ages (drive at 15, know the states and capitals by 12, look an adult in the eye by age 4, etc). Teachers must learn what a sixth grader is likely to know and what a freshman in high school is likely to say. This is influenced by one’s culture, family, socioeconomic status. Even though there are behaviors and knowledge that are typical for most learners to have, it is still important for a teacher to
learn about each child and his or her culture to give the child a chance to start learning from where they come.

**The student culture at school:** The students’ culture at school is not monolithic. There are groups of kids within any school and a child is in one group or a variety of groups. These groups have rules for behavior and rules for interacting with each other and adults. Hopefully the groups value and respect all individuals, respect the chance for all to learn, respect authority, and are willing to take appropriate risks and work well with others. Regrettably, this is rarely the case.

Teachers and school administrators set the stage for this culture and influence it regularly. The learners also help establish the school culture. Learners’ groups are based on many things but a school should help all students expand their horizons in productive ways as they prepare for their futures and learn the ways of interacting outside their home culture.

**Family backgrounds:** Nearly all children have a family backgrounds and, again, it is appropriate to value and acknowledge diversity. A family background is unique to each individual. The family history, values, socioeconomic status, family work, relationships with extended family members, interests, traditions, religion, communication styles all make up the learner’s family background. Teachers must remember that all their learners do not have a background that is just like the teachers. Not all parents have work schedules like that of a school teacher. Not all families have as much money, work ethic, value for learning, or college background. This diversity affects what motivates a learner as well as what the learner already knows. Teachers need to be open and sensitive to the diversity of a child’s background and know that most kids value their background even though it may be very different from the teacher’s.

**Linguistic patterns and differences:** The patterns and syntax of language use in different cultures vary a great deal. All cultures are verbal however the rules that govern when one speaks and how one communicates, asks questions, answers questions and addresses others varies. This makes it hard for some minority students to
participate effectively in school-based learning and teachers must be aware and guide school based linguistic development. It is important to value the home language patterns of an individual and allow a child to add skills rather than lose skills. A learner needs to learn that he/she needs to be able to use different skills for different environments. A teacher’s reaction to a learner’s speech patterns sets the stage for future learning.

**Cognitive patterns and differences:** Cognitive pattern diversity is often compared to learning styles. Some learners like to see the big picture first and others like to see the details and then put it all together. Some learners are very eager to take risks and others want a great deal of direction so they feel safe when trying new things. Some learners like to seek patterns; others want the information clearly diagramed. These differences will shape the way a learner begins a task and the tasks the learner most enjoys. Teachers must be aware of these differences and not expect that all learners will do tasks the same way.

**Social and emotional issues:** All learners are influenced by their social and emotional development. All learners need to be able to interact with others using effective social skills. They also must understand how their own emotions affect them on a daily basis. A child is a whole individual, one who is influenced by others and by his/her own feelings and thought processes. The more mature an individual is the more likely he/she will be able to understand both personal feelings and the influence of others and the more likely he/she will be able to do perspective taking and understand others. Peers and healthy adult relationships help young people develop social skills and emotional well-being. The whole child comes to school and if the school does well, the child continues or begins learning to manage his/her emotions. It is important for teachers to be sensitive and kind to learners as they deal with various social and emotional issues. There are many things teachers do in terms of group activities and classroom management that support learners in their journey of social and emotional development.