

## on responding to linguistic and cultural diversity

**Y**oung children and their families reflect a great and rapidly increasing diversity of language and culture. The National Association for the Education of Young Children's (NAEYC) recommendations emphasize that early childhood programs are responsible for creating a welcoming environment that respects diversity, supports children's ties to their families and community, and promotes both second language acquisition and preservation of children's home languages and cultural identities. Linguistic and cultural diversity is an asset, not a deficit, for young children.

### Recommendations for working with families

- **Actively involve families in the early learning program.** Links between school, home, and community are important for all young children, but forging them can be challenging when families and program staff differ in culture and language. Ties to the community, respectful relationships with families, and encouragement of active, culturally meaningful family involvement are essential.
- **Help all families realize the cognitive advantages of a child knowing more than one language, and provide them with strategies to support, maintain, and preserve home language learning.** Families may think that speaking to their children only in English will help them learn the language faster. But home language preservation benefits children's cognitive development, and families with limited English proficiency provide stronger language models when they emphasize their home language.

- **Convince families that their home's cultural values and norms are honored.** Continuity between home and the early childhood setting supports children's social, emotional, cognitive, and language development. Though not always identical, practices at home and in school should be complementary.

### Recommendations for working with young children

- **Ensure that children remain cognitively, linguistically, and emotionally connected to their home language and culture.** Children's positive development requires maintaining close ties to their family and community. If home language and culture are supported, children, families, and communities stay securely connected.

Today, 44 percent of all children are members of "minority groups." By 2050, the proportion will be 62 percent.

- **Encourage home language and literacy development, knowing that this contributes to children's ability to acquire English language proficiency.** Research confirms that bilingualism is an asset and an educational achievement. When children become proficient and literate in their home language, they transfer those skills to a second language.
- **Help develop essential concepts in the children's first language and within cultural contexts that they understand.** Although some children can seem superficially fluent in their second language, most children find it easier to learn new, complex concepts in a familiar language and cultural framework. Once established, these concepts readily transfer into a second language and contribute to later academic mastery.

### Screening and Assessment of Young English Language Learners

As a supplement to its position statement on curriculum, assessment, and program evaluation, and in response to needs in the field, NAEYC has developed recommendations on the screening and assessment of young English language learners. To download English or Spanish versions, visit [www.naeyc.org/positionstatements/cape](http://www.naeyc.org/positionstatements/cape).

• **Support and preserve home language usage.** Whether or not staff are proficient in a child's home language, programs should make every effort to use children's home

Almost three out of ten Head Start children come from families who speak a primary language other than English.

languages and create classroom environments that reflect children's languages and cultures. Within that context, teachers

can model appropriate use of English and provide many opportunities for children to learn and practice a new language.

• **Develop and provide alternative, creative strategies to promote all children's participation and learning.** Creativity and collaboration are needed to ensure that all children, whatever their current language proficiency or culture, have the opportunity to participate fully in the program's learning opportunities. Collaborative work groups, including teachers and families, can develop flexible approaches that are developmentally, culturally, and linguistically appropriate.

• **Provide children with many ways of showing what they know and can do.** Children have already learned a great deal before they enter an early childhood program, even if this learning has been in a different language and culture. Effective curriculum and assessment systems do not underestimate children's abilities. Instead, they create multiple, often nonverbal ways for children to demonstrate interests, knowledge, and skills.

### NAEYC's Engaging Diverse Families Project

Despite the demonstrated value of family partnerships, many early childhood programs struggle to engage families, especially those who are culturally and linguistically diverse. NAEYC's Engaging Diverse Families project (EDF) aims to help by sharing information about successful engagement strategies developed by exemplary, real-life early childhood programs. To learn more, visit [www.naeyc.org/ecp/trainings/edf](http://www.naeyc.org/ecp/trainings/edf).

## Recommendations for preparation of early childhood professionals

• **Provide professional preparation and development in the areas of culture, language, and diversity.** By examining their own cultural background, educators come to see how young children's culture and language influence responses, interactions, and approaches to learning. Competence is further enhanced by professional development in language acquisition, working with diverse families, cross-cultural communication, and other critical content.

• **Recruit and support educators who are trained in languages other than English.** Individuals with multilingual and multicultural backgrounds can be advocates and crucial support for diverse young children and families. We must recruit more bilingual educators, give them appropriate professional responsibilities, and link them in collaborative relationships with others in the field.

The complete position statement is available at [www.naeyc.org/positionstatements/linguistic](http://www.naeyc.org/positionstatements/linguistic)

### For More on Diversity

The **Early Childhood Research Institute on Culturally and Linguistically Appropriate Services** identifies, evaluates, and promotes effective and appropriate early intervention practices and preschool practices that are sensitive and respectful to children and families from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. <http://clas.uiuc.edu/>

The **National Association for Bilingual Education** is devoted to representing bilingual learners and bilingual education professionals. [www.nabe.org](http://www.nabe.org)

The **National Association for Multicultural Education** fosters respect for and appreciation of cultural diversity, promotes the development of culturally responsible and responsive curricula, and facilitates the acquisition of the attitudes, skills, and knowledge to function in various cultures. [www.nameorg.org](http://www.nameorg.org)

The **National Task Force on Early Childhood for Hispanics** endeavors to enhance educational achievement and opportunities for children of Hispanic descent and to influence education policy decisions that most affect this population. [www.ecehispanic.org](http://www.ecehispanic.org)

The **National Black Child Development Institute** aims to improve and advance the quality of life for Black children and their families through advocacy and education. [www.nbcdi.org](http://www.nbcdi.org)

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