



# Anti-Bias Education

for Young Children  
and Ourselves



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# Learning About Culture, Language, & Fairness

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*Four-year-old Beth brings in a CD of country music for her teachers to play for her Head Start class. When her mom comes to pick her up, one of Beth's teachers returns the CD to Beth. Her mother looks a little embarrassed, explaining that she hadn't realized Beth had taken the CD to school. "But, Mom," says Beth, "that's my Culture Share!" The teacher chuckles and explains that she encourages children to bring things from home that reflect their daily life: "We call it Culture Share," she says, "and we all enjoyed listening to the music that Beth loves."*

**T**he word *culture* refers to how particular groups of people live. It is the way we eat, sleep, talk, play, care for the sick, relate to one another, think about work, arrange our kitchens, and remember our dead. It includes the language we speak, the religion or spirituality we practice (or do not), and the clothing, housing, food, and rituals/holidays with which we feel most comfortable.

Every day, in every action, we express our particular group culture and our individual relationship to our culture. Nothing is more important within a culture than how its children are raised. In everything they do, families communicate their culture's values, beliefs, rules, and expectations to their children. What is acceptable in one culture may not be acceptable in another.

Most of the time, people do not even notice their culture, just as we do not notice that we live in a sea of air. We only notice when something changes or makes us uncomfortable (e.g., when we travel to a higher altitude or smog makes it hard to breathe). When we are in familiar surroundings among members of our own culture—and thus when everyone around us is acting in accordance with that culture, it just seems like "the way things are," or the way it's

"supposed" to be. But when we find ourselves in the midst of another culture, or when we must interact with someone from a different culture, we discover that the way we do things is not the only way. How we respond to that experience will either limit or expand our understanding (and acceptance) of the idea that there are *many* ways to be human.

In a society as diverse as ours, maneuvering through its multiple cultures can be complex and confusing, as well as rich and delightful. Those of us who work with other people's children are continually juggling our own culture, the culture of our early childhood education program, and the cultures of the families in our program. As we become sensitive to the similarities and differences in our own, the program's, and the families' cultures—and if we are flexible and open to the many ways children can thrive—the work we do with them can be powerful and meaningful.

Learning about culture and fairness involves two dimensions: children's development of a positive cultural identity, and their comfortable, respectful interaction with the cultures of others. Anti-bias education supports both dimensions.

## A word about culture

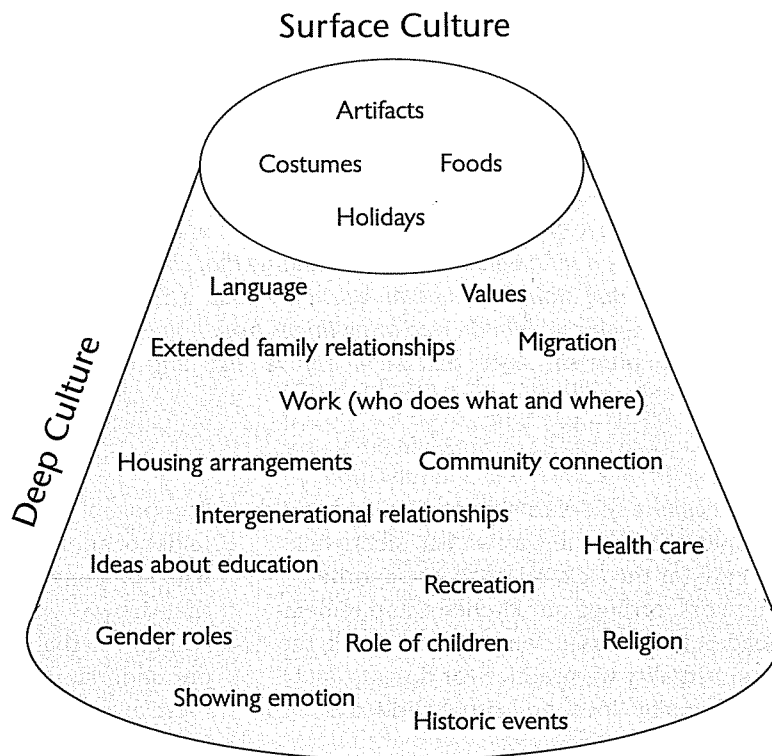
*The world in which you were born is just one model of reality. Other cultures are not failed attempts at being you. They are unique manifestations of the human spirit.*

—Wade Davis, anthropologist

### Goals for Children

- Children will feel pride in and will have the language to express their family's cultural identity, traditions, and heritage. (ABE Goal 1)
- Children will use their home culture knowledge in the group setting, as they also learn to thrive in the culture of the school and larger society. (ABE Goal 1)
- Children will continue to develop in their home language, while also learning to be bilingual. (ABE Goals 1 & 2)
- Children will demonstrate curiosity, enjoyment, ease, and empathy with cultural differences and similarities. (ABE Goal 2)
- Children will identify disrespectful interactions and learn to interact respectfully regarding cultural differences. (ABE Goals 3 & 4)

All too often, when early childhood educators think about culture, they think about the surface things that are easy to see, taste, and define. Costumes, holidays, foods, and the objects that people use in everyday life frequently become the focus of their teaching. But culture is much deeper and more significant than those things, as shown on the diagram below. All the items listed there are elements of culture.



A person's *cultural group* is related strongly to his or her ethnicity, which reflects the place of origin and cultural background of the person's ancestors—whether parents, grandparents, or relatives who lived hundreds of years ago. Within an ethnic group, its members both share some cultural patterns and also reflect cultural differences resulting from generational, economic class, urban/rural, and other influences. A person may be a member of a particular ethnicity without practicing or believing *all* of its aspects. And many people in the United States have multiple ethnic heritages (e.g., Navajo and Irish, Mexican/Filipino and French). For all these reasons, knowing a person's or family's ethnicity does not tell you much about how that culture might actually be reflected in their daily life.

In addition to having a cultural group, each person also has a *cultural identity*, which has three dimensions. The first dimension is how the cultural group(s) to which we belong tries to shape the way we live (a process called *cultural socialization*). The second dimension is about how we learn to name, describe, and feel about our particular ethnic/cultural group membership. A third dimension, which comes into play as we mature and establish an adult life and family, is the decisions we make about what specific elements of our cultural socialization we choose to continue, to modify, or to reject.

Our cultural identity also influences how we live our other social identities (e.g., our economic class, gender and sexual orientation, racial identity). Conversely, our other social identities influence—but do not determine—our cultural identity. Finally, a person may identify with a specific cultural group without embracing *all* of its aspects. For example, a person can identify as Mexican American and not like all Mexican food. A person can identify as White American without believing in its cultural norm that “getting ahead is really important.”

For all these reasons, it is essential to learn how each person defines her or his cultural identity, rather than make assumptions based on generalized or stereotypical ideas about a cultural group’s way of life, how a person looks, or a person’s family name.

The comments of some early childhood education teachers in one of Julie’s anti-bias courses show the complexity of cultural identity, as they tried to define their *culture*, *ethnicity*, and *race*:

**Luz S:** Culturally I’m Mexican American, and probably a Westerner. And definitely Catholic. My ethnicity is Mexican, but also Mixotecan. I’m only beginning to learn about the Mixotecan part of my history. I have dual citizenship in the United States and Mexico. Here in the United States, I’m a woman of color.

**Jennifer E:** Culturally I identify as working class, Californian. I guess I’m also White. My ethnicity is a mystery to me. I’m a true Heinz 57 flavor. My family has been here forever. I am a U.S. citizen.

**Peggy D:** I’m Black, and that’s both my racial identity and my heritage. My culture is Black, rural Arkansas, with more and more California city girl thrown in.

**Mario V:** I’m Italian American, but I mainly live my day-to-day culture as a gay man. On my mother’s side we’re pretty much Choctaw and Cherokee—and I love learning about those lives. But I haven’t lived my life as an Indian, so I guess it’s my heritage, not my culture.

**Leroy B:** People always think I’m Black. I guess I am, because my grandfather was Black. But I think of myself as Louisiana Creole. That’s the part of my heritage that is alive for me. I guess my culture would be Creole, Californian, and Christian. My citizenship is American.

**Leslie C:** My parents are from China. I am Chinese American. If you have to put me into a larger group, say “Asian American,” but don’t ever call me “Oriental.” Oriental is a rug, not a human being.

## What is dominant culture?

Most modern, complex societies have a “dominant” culture and multiple subcultures of people who live within the dominant culture. Thus, the term *dominant culture* does not necessarily or always mean the culture of the majority. Rather, it is the culture of the people who hold the social, political, and economic power in the society.

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## Stop & Think: Understanding your own family culture

- What is the history of your first name? your family name?
  - What do you know about your family’s history in the United States? If they immigrated, where did they come from? Why? How? How were they treated when they first arrived?
  - When you were growing up, what was most important to your family about your behavior at home and in the community? What did they believe mattered about your behavior as a girl or a boy?
  - What were your family’s beliefs/expectations/rules for adult-child relationships? teacher-child relationships?
  - What did your family expect of you as an adult? To what degree do you still hold to your family’s values and beliefs?
  - What did your family teach you about money? about being on time? about speaking up in a group?
  - What do you want other people to know about your culture from your childhood family? from your current family? How do you want the people you work with to learn about your family culture?
  - What are things you do not like people to say about members of your cultural group? How would you like to address people who behave in hurtful, misinformed, or disrespectful ways?
  - How do both your childhood and your current cultural contexts influence your work as an educator?
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The characteristics of a dominant culture are closely connected to the history of the particular country. In the United States, the roots of our current dominant culture were planted by the English immigrants of the 17th century, especially by those with the power—that is, White, English-speaking, male landowners, political leaders, and Christian religious leaders. The culture they established was very different from the many cultures of the indigenous peoples, who were, to begin with, more numerous than the colonists. The Europeans generally considered the Native cultures “barbarian” and inferior, and there were many attempts to destroy all aspects of them.

As new waves of immigrant groups arrive in the United States, they bring with them their heritage home cultures, which vary more or less significantly from the established, dominant one. In order to survive, and to become part of a common nation, newcomers have been expected to learn and assimilate to the dominant culture. At the same time, some maintain aspects of their original heritage cultures.

The degree to which a particular group, family, or person incorporates aspects of the dominant culture

and maintains a heritage culture varies considerably. Some of this variation is related to the number of generations a group has lived in the United States—but not always. Many factors (economic class, racial identity, religion, political beliefs) influence the balance between heritage culture and dominant culture as expressed in the way a group and its members live. And as culture is always changing, so is the dynamic tension among family/heritage cultures, shifting economic and political times, and the elements included in the dominant culture.

Today, the dominant culture ideal in the United States is easiest to see by watching the advertisements on commercial television. The image is English speaking; well dressed (slim for women); private, neat, well furnished and equipped suburban home; married couple with one or two biological children, each of whom has his or her own bedroom; private, well maintained yard; professional employment; celebrators of Christian holidays. The image conveys the covert message that this is *the* ordinary and desirable way to live.

Many people use the term “mainstream” to describe this cultural image. But *mainstream* implies that most people (the “main” stream) in the society actually live like this, and more importantly, that it is the correct way to live. This “mainstream” image becomes a standard by which people, families, or groups are judged, and the degree to which they differ from it becomes the basis for prejudice against them.

We use the term “dominant” instead, as we believe it more accurately describes the relationship between the idealized image and the far more complex and rich reality of how people live in the United States. The anti-bias approach embraces and respects this diverse richness, as well as fostering the skills for our living and working together in the same larger society.

### **Children’s early experiences and understandings of culture**

The formation of a child’s cultural identity begins at birth. Infants and toddlers absorb the ways their family’s culture touches (and doesn’t); the tones of voice used to express pleasure or displeasure; how close to or far away from one another people stand; who eats with whom; the “right” way to sleep, to dress, to go to the bathroom, to bathe. Long before very young children are aware of or have words for what they are doing, they internalize a profound sense of “rightness” and familiarity with the particular way the people in their culture behave. This sense lies at the core of the child’s evolving cultural identity.

During the preschool years, children begin to sort out which variables are flexible (e.g., it’s okay to ask for candy in one grandma’s house but not in the other’s) and which ones are absolutes (e.g., it’s never okay to spit at someone). These messages about what is and isn’t acceptable are rarely simple, nor is cultural identity itself simple in a diverse society such as the United States.

What’s more, unless adults actively guide them, children can develop negative reactions from encounters with people who behave in unfamiliar ways. Without help, children may come to feel—though often at a subconscious level—that the way their family does things is “natural” and “ordinary” and “right,” and that any other way is at least strange and worrisome, and perhaps even “bad.” Such feelings may turn into prejudice. On the other hand, unless the larger society values and includes a child’s home culture, children as young as ages 3 and 4 may internalize a sense of not belonging and of themselves and their family as somehow being “wrong.”

#### **• Children become aware of society’s attitudes toward their family’s cultural way of being.**

All young children first develop their self-concept within their family, getting their initial sense of place in the world from who their family is and where they fit inside it. By preschool age, they begin also developing group cultural identities and other social identities. Messages from the society’s dominant culture (from media, peers, teachers, religious leaders) are also critical. Children growing up in families that closely match the dominant culture ideal are more likely to feel societal support for their family’s way of life; children growing up in families whose ways of life differ from the dominant culture are more likely to feel devalued and excluded.

Early childhood programs and teachers often are the first representatives of the larger society to regularly interact with children, so they bear an important responsibility to recognize and honor children’s home cultures. Missteps such as continually mispronouncing some children’s names will chip away at those children’s sense of belonging. (A mistake like this looms big for children, even if it seems small to the teacher.) Likewise, the invisibility of children’s home culture in their program’s visual and material environment undercuts their evolving self- and social identities. When children do not see families like their own portrayed in books and play materials and elsewhere in the program, and when their home language is not supported, they can internalize a message that the program thinks there is something unimportant or wrong about their family and therefore about them.

Remember, invisibility erases identity and experience; visibility affirms reality.

Children growing up in families with the culture of the dominant group, while much more likely to encounter positive support for their evolving cultural identity, still face risks to their positive development as they move outside of their home culture. Two possible sources of risk are the social dynamics of racial identity and of economic class, which are both addressed in later chapters.

#### ● **Children struggle with cultural continuity and discontinuity.**

The way a child's family does things feels natural and normal, and all young children bring that feeling with them when they enter care. When an early childhood program's ways of eating, talking, disciplining, nurturing, and playing are similar to his or her family's way, the child experiences *cultural continuity*. Continuity consists of many little things: If you burp at the end of a meal, is that rude, or a compliment to the cook? Do you shake hands firmly and look a person in the eye when you meet them, or are those behaviors disrespectful, even intrusive? Do babies sleep in cribs, in hammocks, in cradles, alone next to their parents, alone in their own rooms, with their grandmother, with their older siblings? To the degree that those and other practices differ between the home and the program, children experience *cultural discontinuity*, especially if the program considers its way "right" and others' "wrong."

While all children experience some degree of cultural discontinuity between their home culture and the culture of the group setting, for some of them the gap is huge. Children whose homes reflect the dominant culture are most likely to find a high degree of home-to-school continuity, and thus to feel most "at home," because the curriculum, materials, and teacher interactions in most early childhood programs reflect dominant culture norms. This continuity supports their positive feelings about their home culture, and therefore, about themselves.

At the other end of the continuum are children who experience so much discontinuity that their early childhood setting feels unsafe, which may cause them to feel discomfort or shame about their home culture. In response to such discontinuity, some children feel compelled to take on the dominant culture's ways of being, rejecting their home culture and becoming outsiders in their own family. Other children may hold on to their home culture but feel continually ill at ease, disrespected, or even inferior when in the dominant culture. It takes thoughtful, sen-

sitive support to help children live with comfort and respect in dual worlds.

We cannot know all the consequences of sharp cultural discontinuity for young children's development. We do know that children thrive when an early childhood program respects and integrates their home languages and cultures into all of its aspects. In such programs, children can learn and develop because they feel "supported, nurtured, and connected not only to their home communities and families but also to teachers and the educational setting" (NAEYC 1995, 2).

#### ● **Children start forming attitudes about other cultural ways of living.**

By preschool age, children begin to absorb stereotypes and attitudes about other ethnic/cultural groups from their family and the larger society. These biases are easily absorbed because very young children lack accurate information about the lives of other people, including classmates and teachers. Supplying accurate information is one necessary strategy. For example:

Jane's mother, Ann, tells the teacher that Jane has said she doesn't like Erlinda (a Salvadoran assistant teacher) because Erlinda "talks funny and is too dark." Ann reports that she explained that Erlinda is from another country where people have darker skin and that Erlinda is learning English. And that she told Jane, "I like all of your teachers, and I want you to like all your teachers, too." Jane had listened, but still insisted that she didn't like Erlinda. Ann tells the teacher, "I don't know what else to do!"

The teacher suspects that Jane is uncomfortable because Erlinda is very different from anyone else the child knows. She talks with Ann about how to help Jane learn more about Erlinda, both at home and at school. That night, Ann talks to Jane about El Salvador and shows her some picture books about the country; Jane seems interested.

In school, at the teacher's suggestion, Erlinda talks to Jane's snack group a number of times about her life, showing them photos and objects from her daily life. Ann follows up by inviting Erlinda to their home for a meal. This plan works. Neither her mother nor teacher sees any repetition of Jane's discomfort.

Current events, and the societal issues that result, can also negatively affect young children's evolving feelings about people from particular ethnic/cultural groups. For example:

Margaret, a 4-year-old, refuses to play with Mariam, who wears a traditional Muslim headscarf. "Go away, you no-good Arab," she yells. Mariam backs off, looking first surprised and then near tears.

Their teacher immediately intervenes. She puts her arm around Mariam and hugs her, then firmly says to Margaret, "This is a hurtful and unfair thing to say to Mariam." Before the teacher gets any further, Margaret insists, "My dad told me not to play with her. He says Arabs are no-good." The teacher puts her arm around Margaret, too, and says, "Margaret, in our classroom everyone plays together. I have a different rule than your father. I don't think the same thing he does about Arabs." Margaret looks uncertain and the teacher adds, "I'm going to talk with your father about our different ideas and rules. Right now, Mariam is feeling very sad about your words, and I'm going to read a book to her. You can come with us if you want." Margaret looks confused and turns her back on the teacher.

The teacher quietly asks another teacher to check in with Margaret and then takes Mariam by the hand. "Mariam, I am so sorry that Margaret said such an unfair, untrue thing to you. I'll remind her again that in our classroom we take care of each other and do not leave anyone out."

In this situation, the teacher chose to support Mariam immediately, because she was concerned about the effect of Margaret's behavior on Mariam. The teacher also knew from previous conversations with Margaret's parents that they had strong prejudices against people of Arab heritage. While she tries to support all of the children and their families, she felt it was essential to teach the children that they must not attack each other's identities. After school, the teacher phoned Margaret's parents, related what had happened, and described how she handled the incident. She set up a time for a conference with them to increase her own understanding of what was behind the family's bias and to discuss the principles and practices she saw as vital to the program.

The teacher also spoke with Mariam's family, explaining what had happened and how she responded, and asked them to let her know if Mariam showed any further distress. In addition, the teacher shared her plans to do educational activities with all the children to provide them with accurate information about Arab and Arab American people, and thus enable them to resist stereotyping. She assured the family that she would not put the spotlight on Mariam but rather would use children's books and persona doll stories to accomplish her objectives. The teacher also made clear that she would monitor any further incidents and continue to support Mariam.

● **Children begin to use cultural/ethnic terms and try to sort out what they mean.**

"Are we Jewish? Josh says we can't be 'cuz we have a Christmas tree." . . . "I am not Black. My skin is

brown!" . . . "Is this my Black blood or my Japanese blood?" asks Jamón, who is biracial, as he stares at his skinned knee. . . . "He doesn't speak anything!" exclaims Leah after she tries out the few Spanish words she knows on Ramesh, who has just arrived from India.

Young children pick up words that name their own and others' ethnic and cultural groups, but often with little understanding of what they mean. They do not yet understand which characteristics determine membership in one group or another. The different kinds of ethnic/cultural group names baffle them ("Why is Carmen 'Latina' but Lupe is 'Mexican'?"). The relationship between physical and cultural characteristics also often confuses them. For example,

The teacher notices Priscilla pulling her eyes up at the corners several times during the morning. When she asks why, Priscilla replies, "I want to speak like Seon Jung." Seon Jung, whose family recently arrived from Korea, is her favorite playmate at school.

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**Stop & Think: Remembering belonging and being an outsider**

- What are your earliest memories of realizing that the way your family believed or did things differed from other families? Who, if anyone, helped you think about this?
  - In what situations, if any, did you feel that your family "belonged"? In what situations, if any, did you feel that your family was odd, strange, not as it was "supposed" to be?
  - As you were growing up, did you have words for the things that set you apart or connected you to the majority of people in the community? to the dominant culture of your country?
  - In raising children of your own, what values, behaviors, and attitudes from your family of origin would be most important to you to pass on? to put a stop to?
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**Create a culturally consistent and respectful program**

When young children enter any early childhood setting, their circle of experience widens beyond the cultural rules and practices of their own family. At home, they may sit on Grandma's lap to eat, while at school they must sit on their own small chair. At home, they may play with older siblings and cousins, while at school they play only with children close to their own age. At home, they may nap on the couch snuggled with their cousin, with the television on and busy family life all around them, while at school they must nap alone on a cot in a darkened, quiet room. Perhaps most significantly, at home they may speak a

language that at school no one even knows. Teachers who create learning environments that incorporate and build upon children's home cultures promote healthy social, emotional, and cognitive development and academic achievement.

A culturally consistent learning environment requires teachers to learn about the rules, traditions, and expectations of the families in the program. Gaining this knowledge is a process that progresses in steps, building as it goes. In order to learn about the families, teachers must develop relationships with them. In order to build those relationships beyond superficial interactions, teachers need to understand something of each family's culture. When this happens, families are able to help teachers create environments and approaches that are culturally consistent with children's experiences outside the program. Equally important, teachers can help families to learn the skills of advocating for and supporting their children's school success and to practice the skills of negotiating differences between their ethnic/cultural group and other cultural groups.

As Carol Brunson Day reminds us, *our* way is not the only way:

We can learn principles for creating culturally consistent programs. However, there is no recipe for being there. The *there* is built by you with families and staff. It is always a dynamic process and depends on the people who are together in a program at any given time. It calls on everyone to be willing to negotiate and compromise if necessary. If you stay open to the fact that your way is not the only right way, trust in the ability of people to figure out differences, and really work on it, you can get to where you want your classroom to be. When everyone has access to deciding on a solution that works for them, then there is real equality.

Most cultural differences between the family and the early childhood program can be resolved. Both teachers and families want children to be secure, happy, and able to learn. Both want children to succeed in their school lives and beyond. Teachers and families should work toward developing mutual respect—with families recognizing that teachers may well know more about children in groups and children's development in general, and with teachers recognizing that families know more about their child in particular. Both types of knowledge are necessary for children to flourish.

### Attend to differences between the early childhood and home cultures

The field of early care and education has its own set of rules, values, and acceptable behaviors. Some of the field's beliefs about what children need to develop and grow do not necessarily match what's considered

acceptable or "normal" across all ethnic/cultural lines. Much of the child development research and writing about early childhood education are based on premises and children from the privileged group—that is, White, affluent, suburban. As with any research-based practice, the more children's backgrounds match the research sample group's, the more applicable are its conclusions—and the reverse is also true. As teachers learn about each child's home culture, they will find that some practices must be adapted or rethought for children and families from some cultural backgrounds.

Unthinkingly accepting all early childhood practices as universally applicable can be damaging to children's cognitive, social, and emotional development. NAEYC (2009) recognizes this fact in specifying that for any practice to be developmentally appropriate, it must take into account not only a child's age group and individual characteristics but also the social and cultural contexts in which the child lives. Once early childhood staff begin to discuss these factors openly with one another, it becomes possible to figure out how to adapt our teaching to *all* children, whatever their home and community cultures. Here are examples of practices commonly found in early childhood programs in the United States that conflict with the practices of some cultures. Think about whether they match *all* of the home cultures of the children in your program:

#### ● Early childhood practice has tended to promote children's independence, autonomy, and initiative.

All families want their child to become competent and confident. However, in many cultures (e.g., some Native American, some Southeast Asian), it is important for the adult to first model how to perform a task or how to use materials before children are allowed to put their own ideas into action. This is seen as teaching respect for the materials as well as for adult knowledge.

#### ● Many early childhood teachers make a practice of acknowledging individual children for their efforts and achievements as a motivation technique.

However, some cultures emphasize the importance of *interdependence* among peers and do not agree with singling out one child for praise as if that child's activities existed outside of the group. In this case, families want their child to learn and achieve—in order to contribute to the group's well-being as well as his or her own.

#### ● Early childhood practice tends to focus on individual "rights."

For example, if one child is using a toy and a classmate also wants to play with it, early childhood

teachers usually set up a schedule of turns. However, some cultures feel strongly that learning to share with others is far more important than a child getting his own way—and may ask teachers to have the two children play together right away, instead of waiting to take individual turns.

● **Early childhood teachers typically expect that a child will speak directly to them, look them in the eye, ask questions freely, and freely express thoughts or desires.**

However, some cultures consider such behavior disrespectful; children are expected to wait for the adult to acknowledge them before speaking and to be thoughtful about what they say. These families want their child to feel safe and assured around adults—but to be respectful at the same time.

### **Use what you learn to individualize your curriculum**

A fundamental principle of developmentally appropriate practice is to individualize curriculum in all areas—physical, emotional, social, and cognitive—to meet the learning and developmental requirements of each child. For young children, individualizing and adapting your curriculum according to each child's home culture is as essential to healthy development as substituting cream cheese for peanut butter is for the child who is allergic to peanuts. Moreover, explaining your adaptations to children as "each of us has different needs" is what we already do in developmentally appropriate approaches.

Individualizing according to each child's home culture always requires striking a balance. In this example, staff devised a plan that was both responsive to the family and consistent with the principles of developmentally appropriate practice:

Two sisters, recently arrived from Mexico, join a program that, like many centers, organizes children by age. Day after day, the older child keeps coming into the younger child's classroom, and the teacher keeps sending her back to her own. The problem, their aunt explains, is that the older sister has always watched over the younger one, and neither girl feels safe separated. After brainstorming together, staff in both rooms agree that the older child may join the younger one at specific, reliable times during the day and whenever the younger sister asks for her.

By using information about these children's home culture to individualize its age-based policy, this program went a long way toward reassuring the family—who were leaving their children with strangers for the first time, and in a new country. The decision also significantly helped the girls adjust to their new setting.

### **Create a third space between school and home**

The concept of *third space* means that when two parties do things two different ways, neither party simply gives up its ideas; instead, both parties seek a new way, a compromise that incorporates what is important to everyone. The notion of finding a third space in the early childhood context means creating a learning community that accommodates the ideas and approaches of both the staff and each family. Such a learning community is the result of ongoing discussion between them. It evolves and changes as the composition of the program (children, families, and staff) changes and as the two groups learn more from each other. Thus, no class or center looks like a "universal" or "model" program; nor does it replicate any child's home culture. It is a new way—hence a *third space*.

Here is one example that center director Antonia Lopez often shares (e.g., in Bredekamp & Copple 1997, 47):

Families are giving gifts to center staff to show their appreciation and respect for all that the teachers are doing. However, gifts violate state regulations. Moreover, the individual gifts are creating competition among the teachers (and some of the families), which runs counter to the kind of center the staff want to provide. Still, the teachers do not want to disrespect the families and their generosity, which is an integral part of the families' ethnic/cultural tradition.

To prompt a solution, the center's director tells the teachers: "Here are my two rules: You cannot refuse the gifts, and you cannot accept them. Find another way." After their initial surprise and laughter, the teachers figure out a workable, respectful solution: They explain to the families that they appreciate and accept the gifts in the name of the whole center. Everyone shares food gifts. But gifts of jewelry and art objects they put on display, along with short written, bilingual explanations of that family's history in regards to their gift. Thus, the objects become tools for the children, staff, and families to learn about one another.

Carol Brunson Day shares another example of creating a third space, in an infant/toddler program:

Licensing rules [and NAEYC's Accreditation Criteria] require that children nap in their own cribs. However, some of the babies served by the center sleep in hammocks at home, and they will not go to sleep in the cribs. So the staff get creative. They tie hammocks diagonally from the crib posts. The result: The infants sleep and licensing requirements are satisfied, because the infants are still "in the cribs."

This program's third space solution worked for everyone because the teachers were able to make a change while meeting the licensing requirement. Each baby was indeed in his or her own crib. And the licensing agency could see the advantage of allowing the babies to sleep in a way consistent with their families' practices that was still healthy and safe. (For more on

integrating children's home and community cultures with early childhood principles, see *Culture and Child Development in Early Childhood Programs*, by Carollee Howes.)

### When no resolution can be found...

Sometimes it is not possible for a program and a family to reach agreement on a matter. This may happen for a variety of reasons. It can be because of regulations (e.g., licensing requires children to be vaccinated, but the family does not believe in inoculations). It might be because of the program's basic health and safety policies (e.g., the family wants care when their child is feverish and sick, but the program cannot risk other children being infected). Or it can be because of issues tied to caring for children in groups (e.g., the family wants their 3-year-old to be fed by an adult, but the program has eight children at a table and cannot hand feed each child).

Usually, if staff have made clear how much they care for the child and respect the family, creating a mutually acceptable solution is possible. But sometimes, despite everyone's best efforts to find a third space, the discussion between program and family may reach one party's nonnegotiable "bottom line." In some cases, the issue may be tied to anti-bias principles. An anti-bias educator cannot, for example, agree to abide by a family's desire to prevent their White child from playing with a child of color or with dark-skinned dolls. Perhaps the family insists that their son should not have to do any type of cleanup tasks, or that *all* the children should pray before each meal as their child does.

Whatever the issue, when it becomes clear a family cannot stay in the program, it is important that the director help the family identify other options in the community, and handle the departure as respectfully as possible.

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### Stop & Think: How does your individual culture affect your teaching?

- What beliefs from your own cultural background about working with children are most important to you?
  - Which principles and beliefs in early childhood education are most important to you?
  - Are there any practices from your home culture that you think could be adapted or rethought? Any from early childhood education?
  - Which practices are "bottom line" for you—that is, principle-based practices you are unwilling to adapt?
  - What kind of balance do you have between practices you are willing to adapt and ones you consider "bottom line"?
- 

## Respecting all children's home languages and developing bilingualism

The United States has always been a nation of many languages. Now, in the 21st century, new waves of immigration, as well as migration within the country, mean that early childhood programs are serving increasing numbers of children whose home language is not English. All children need English in order to thrive in their new country. They also need support in maintaining their home language in order to stay deeply connected to their families, as well as for the many advantages of being bilingual.

An anti-bias approach includes finding ways to support children's home language as an essential component of respecting and integrating home cultures into early childhood programs. It also assumes that the development of bilingualism is important for *all* children, who are growing up in an increasingly multilingual world.

It is beyond the scope of this chapter to describe the specific techniques of how to teach English language learners or how to help all children acquire a second language, although effective approaches for doing so are vital (see the box "Additional Resources about Culture and Language"). Instead, this section focuses on the attitudes and beliefs that support a welcoming, affirming environment that respects and makes visible all languages and supports bilingualism as an important aspect of cognitive development.

### Learning English and continuing development in the home language

For young children, the language of the home is . . . the language they use to make and establish meaningful communicative relationships, and the language they use to begin to construct their knowledge and test their learning. . . . For the optimal development and learning of all children, educators must accept the legitimacy of children's home language, respect (hold in high regard) and value (esteem, appreciate) the home culture. (NAEYC 1995, 1–2)

Early childhood programs serve as a two-way bridge between the dominant culture and the child's home culture. When the programs support children's home language while also helping them learn the language of the larger society, teachers convey the important message that the child's home language matters as part of cognitive, social, emotional, and bilingual language development. When this principle is not honored, we run the risk of undermining children's positive identity and connections with their families. Consider the following story told by a student in an early childhood education class at East Los Angeles

College about her experience in the preschool where she was student teaching:

I taught the children a song in Chinese. One child, who is Chinese himself, covered his ears and said, "I don't like Chinese songs. I like English songs only." I asked him if he heard Chinese songs at home. He replied, "My grandma always listens, but I don't like to listen to that." I know that the child was in another preschool last year where he wasn't allowed to speak any Chinese. I wonder if that is why he now says he doesn't like it.

Of the 40 students in this college class, one quarter of them then related that they had similar experiences with children in their preschools.

English-only schools and programs, however well meaning, immerse children in a world they do not understand. In these programs, children are at risk of absorbing the message that the language of home is of lesser value because it has no presence in their school. Disrupting preschool children's continued development of their home language can also lead to the rejection or loss of their "mother tongues." This loss risks cutting the children off from their family and community, often ending close relationships with elders and making them outsiders in their home cultures (Wong-Fillmore 1991).

Furthermore, while young children in English immersion programs may initially perform well in some aspects of English, there is evidence that shifting from their first language to a new, unfamiliar language too early may actually have a negative effect on English fluency, comprehension of text, and academic achievement from preK to third grade and beyond (Espinosa 2008). Such children develop "playground" English but cannot use English effectively for academic learning (Garcia 2006).

Numerous studies confirm the benefits of early childhood programs that nurture children's home language while also fostering English learning. Most focus on Spanish-English language learners, but these studies still offer educational implications for all children whose home language is not English.

The Society for Research in Child Development has found that encouraging prekindergarten attendance in dual-language programs rather than English-only programs improves learning opportunities for English language learners and increases their chances of success (SRCD 2009). Furthermore, helping children continue to develop in their home language while beginning to learn English has been shown to foster earlier development of academic skills, lead to more proficient English (Crawford 1991), and support children's ability to communicate with their families (Wong-Fillmore 1991; Hakuta, Goto Butler, & Witt 2000).

One study that collected data on more than 700,000 language-minority students from 1982 to 1996 in schools that were using different kinds of well implemented bilingual programs found that children who remained for the longest time in programs that supported their home language and provided strong, content-based English as a second language instruction showed the most academic success. It is significant to note that students who received English-only instruction without any home language instruction in the early years of schooling fared the worst academically (Collier & Thomas 1997).

### Bilingualism for children whose home language is English

In the United States, most conversations about bilingualism focus on children who need to learn English, yet there is ample evidence that integrating other home languages into early childhood programs benefits English-speaking children in several ways. It teaches them respect for other languages, while also helping them to feel comfortable learning a new language. They gain the skill of learning a second language in this global economy and increasingly multilingual society. In most industrialized countries other than the United States, children become at least bilingual, and many speak three or four languages. There is no reason why children in the United States shouldn't have this same advantage.

Families and teachers sometimes worry that if a classroom includes languages other than English, the children who are native English speakers won't get the support they need for their continuing language and cognitive development. Research by the National

### Additional Resources about Culture and Language

- Baker, C. 2007. *A parent's and teacher's guide to bilingualism*. 2d ed. Buffalo, NY: Multilingual Matters Ltd.
- Chang, H.N-L. 1993. *Affirming children's roots: Cultural and linguistic diversity in early care and education*. Oakland, CA: California Tomorrow.
- Chang, H. N-L. 2006. *Getting ready for quality: The critical importance of developing and supporting a skilled, ethnically, and linguistically diverse early childhood workforce*. Oakland, CA: California Tomorrow.
- Howes, C. 2009. *Culture and child development in early childhood programs: Practices for quality education and care*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Tabors, P.O. 2008. *One child, two languages: A guide for early childhood educators of children learning English as a second language*. 2d. ed. Baltimore, MD: Paul H. Brookes.

Association for Bilingual Education (NABE) showed that in two-way language programs in which English-speaking children learn Spanish and English language learners learn English, *both* groups show stronger achievement in language fluency and academic progress compared with children in monolingual programs.

### Home language support—Challenges and concerns

NABE (n.d.) has found that sentiment against supporting a home language often stems from the mistaken belief that “bilingualism threatens to sap our sense of national identity and divide us along ethnic lines [ . . . or] encourage immigrants that they can live in the [United States] without learning English.” However, this belief reflects a serious misunderstanding of bilingual education, which in fact has learning English as its primary goal. It is also a misconception that people whose home language is not English do not want their children to learn English. Most families look to early childhood programs as a place for their children to begin to learn the language they need to succeed in school and the larger society.

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### Stop & Think: Uncovering your ideas and experiences about second language learning

- What languages did your ancestors speak? Are these languages still part of your life? What is that like for you? When and why did those languages disappear from your family, if they did?
  - Have you had any experience being in a setting where people did not speak your language? How did you feel? What do you think that is like for a small child?
  - If you have experience in learning to speak a second language, what has that been like? What was it like to make yourself understood? How did it feel?
  - What connections do you make between fluent English speaking and intelligence? Between people who speak English with an “accent” or a dialect different from your own? How might your beliefs/feelings affect your work with families?
  - What are the challenges for you to implement strategies that support children’s home languages while also fostering English learning? What will support you? What new knowledge and skills do you think you need?
- 

In fact, some families may challenge programs that support home languages at school because they think such programs may undermine their child’s English learning. This is yet another misconception that reflects a lack of awareness of the dangers posed

for children when early childhood programs ignore home languages. Once families understand the dangers inherent in English-only programs and recognize that young children can learn English while also continuing their home language, they generally come to value bilingual education.

### Valuing the whole family across lines of language

In spite of considerable evidence pointing to its benefits, supporting a home language in school can be a daunting challenge for many early childhood teachers. Many teachers feel overwhelmed by how to actually do this, especially if multiple different home languages are represented in their program.

Fostering children’s home language begins in our relationships with families. We must demonstrate that we value and respect the languages they speak and that we are eager to communicate with them to share information and make decisions about matters affecting their children.

This means teachers have to find ways to speak and write to families in their home language—which requires us to make connections with others who speak the home languages of the children we care for. It requires us to focus on the family member (rather than the translator) during a conversation that is being translated and to address our comments directly to him or her. We show our respect by presuming that parents are intelligent and loving, even when we do not have words we can share, and by never making the mistake of assuming that those who don’t speak fluent English are ignorant or incapable or uncaring. (See the box “Why Don’t They Learn English?”)

### Supporting children from different linguistic backgrounds

Each early childhood program will have a unique mix of language learners. Do the majority of children come from families speaking the same home language? Are several different languages spoken? Do only one or two children speak a language other than English? Do you have any staff who speak the children’s home languages? Do you have access to people who can help you with the children’s home languages? What available resources can you use, and what further resources do you need?

There is no “one size fits all” learning environment to support the English learners and the native English speakers on their important path to bilingualism. Whatever combination of strategies you choose

## "Why Don't They Learn English?"

by Luis Hernandez

This is a frequently heard question from teachers and families who speak only English. They forget that learning a new language is extremely difficult for almost all adults and that it takes years to develop fluency, even when the learner is given support and approval for trying instead of scorn for "not doing it right." As anti-bias educators, we should:

- Respect each family's steps in learning and using English.
- Keep in mind that parents may not be literate (i.e., able to read and/or write) in their first language.
- Consider each family's amount of exposure to and opportunities to study and practice the new language during a typical day, and find out the levels of English use and proficiency at home among family members.
- Provide encouragement, praise, and modeling. It takes courage for language learners to use a new language with people who may be judgmental. Show your own spirit of adventure by learning and using basic words in the families' home languages.
- Remember, speaking English loudly will not make you easier to understand!

to use in your program, the commitment to address this issue is one of the central principles of effective anti-bias education. Here are a few ideas for supporting children's home languages (SRCD 2009):

- Hang welcoming signs in all languages, label classroom materials, and display pictures labeled in each child's home language for each curriculum area and for food, water, and the bathroom.
- Provide home language books, stories, and songs on tape (which families and other community members can help make).
- Learn key words and phrases (greetings, requests for help, terms of comfort and encouragement, etc.) in each child's home language. If many home languages are represented in the class, different staff members can learn key words for different languages.
- Regularly invite family members (nuclear and extended) who speak the child's home language to your classroom.
- Make sure you intentionally promote the inclusion of children who are English language learners in all activities. (Some children may stay on the sidelines unless they receive encouragement to participate.)

- Plan part of each day when English language learners are supported in their home language. If you have sufficient staff (or volunteers), you can plan snack time or a special story time in home language groups.
- If you do not yet have bilingual teachers for each classroom, but you have one or two staff members who are bilingual, consider having at least one of them serve as a "rover" in all the classes to help monolingual teachers. Group English language learners together in fewer classes so they have support from other children who speak their home language and also have more time with the bilingual staff. Invite community volunteers who speak the children's home languages to come regularly to your class.
- Organize a group of people to help you translate your program's handbook, forms, newsletters, or other ongoing written communications into children's home languages. Use photographs of all the activities and daily procedures, labeled in the home languages to communicate what is happening in your program. (Family members and community volunteers can help with this.)
- Encourage families to continue to develop their child's home language, including by reading to their child in that language. Create a lending library of children's books, and invite families and friends to help you create some books in languages that are not currently available commercially.
- Especially when many families share a language—Spanish, for example—give priority when feasible to hiring staff who speak this language and to finding ways to enable other staff to learn the language.

Finally, two very creative and integrated multilingual approaches come from child care programs in Sydney, Australia, that serve working-class families in a culturally diverse district. They show what can be done when there is the will.

In a center serving 3- to 5-year-olds, and with four main home languages as well as English, several staff members are fluently bilingual. Major learning centers (e.g., blocks and manipulatives, dramatic play, music, art) are located in different rooms of the center, are supervised by these staff on a rotating basis, and are available to all children for a large portion of the day. This way, as children choose activity centers, they are also able to choose to be with a teacher who speaks their home language as well as English and still spend time in all the various activities. Family members, delighted with the program, also volunteer to help each day.

In another center, where two home languages are spoken in addition to English, the staff have organized a multilingual literacy curriculum. Children meet in lan-

guage family groups with a bilingual staff member for a designated period of time every day. They also sometimes, at their choice, visit another group. Children's early writing, visible on the walls, reflects their literacy development in their home language and in English. An additional benefit is the significantly increased participation of the children's family members, including grandparents, because they see their home language respected in the classrooms.

Planning for how your program will include staff who speak the home languages of the families in your community calls for commitment and strategic thinking. Our profession needs to find ways to enable teachers to become fluent in languages other than English and to recruit more people who speak languages other than English to become early childhood teachers. Continued research to determine the most effective methods for implementing bilingual or multilingual approaches in varying settings will also help us support children's home languages in all of our programs.

### **Make cultural sameness and difference real**

No matter how homogeneous your program appears to be, it is essential to explore the many cultural differences and similarities represented among its families and staff. Remember that all children have a home culture and each family has its own style of daily living. Even when all or most of the children come from the same racial group (e.g., White) or ethnic group (e.g., Mexican American), differences exist in how each family lives. When early childhood programs foster comfort and respect with regard to differences, they create a foundation for children's ability to thrive in our culturally complex world.

One approach to supporting children's understanding of human diversity is to develop the theme "We are all the same; we are all different." Given young children's difficulties in understanding abstract ideas about things they cannot touch, taste, or experience, it is important to ground your teaching about culture in everyday issues. The same/different theme can be built into the ongoing curriculum throughout the year, with a tone of delight, interest, respect: "All people eat, but they eat different foods." . . . "All babies are carried, but they are carried in different ways." . . . "All people sleep, but they sleep on many objects." . . . "We all have words, but we have different words, different languages (even so, we all say *Mama!*)."

At the center of this theme is *family* as the basic unit: "In some families Big Sister cooks dinner, and in some families Daddy cooks dinner, and in some families everyone cooks dinner together."

Conversations about human sameness and difference can take place during many teachable moments throughout the day. For example, "All the children are painting, but you each made different pictures." . . . "Everyone at the table wanted a drink with snack, but some of you liked the orange juice and some of you wanted water."

### **Principles for planning activities**

There are many activities that work for exploring cultural diversity and similarities as long as those activities adhere to a few basic principles. We will discuss those principles here and get into more specific ideas for activities in the next sections. Following these principles will facilitate your helping children to feel proud of their own culture and learn respect for others (see chapters 1 and 4). The principles will also help you to avoid the traps of a tourist curriculum (described in chapter 4). Remember to address any and all signs of misinformation, discomfort, fear, or rejection of cultural differences. Use both immediate and long-term interventions and teaching strategies (see the sections "Positive Interactions with Children" and "Curriculum Planning, Including Persona Dolls" in chapter 4).

#### **● Connect cultural activities to concrete, daily life experiences.**

Culture is not an abstraction to young children. It is lived and learned every day through the way family members interact: through language, patterns of communication, family stories, family routines, religious practices, music, household customs, and the responsibilities of family members. Talk about these family interactions with children to develop the theme of "We are all the same; we are all different" (e.g., "Yes, in your house children watch a video before bed, and in Micah's house children listen to a storybook"). Talk about the similarities and differences among children's everyday experiences (e.g., "Saresh's mom isn't wearing a costume. We call her dress a *sari*. It's a different kind of dress than the one your mama wears." . . . "You went to the St. Patrick's Day parade with your family this weekend. Mickey and his family spent Sunday at a church picnic. And I was at home making playdough! We all do such interesting things on the weekend").

#### **● Be intentional about including the cultural life of all families in your activities.**

Remember that every child has a home culture and every family in some ways is both different from and the same as every other family. Do not make the mistake of focusing on only the culture of children

from so-called "ethnic minority" groups. Children from White ethnic/cultural backgrounds, including those children whose families have lived in the United States for many generations, are cultural beings, too.

● **Explore the similarities that exist among people across all their differences.**

Everyone laughs, cries, eats, works, and plays because we are all human beings. Yet people do all these activities in different ways. No group's way of doing things is superior to others, nor is one culture's behavior the standard and all others simply variations from that norm. For example, sleeping in a bed together with siblings is just as "normal" as sleeping in your own room is. Likewise, speaking languages other than English is equally effective for communication (e.g., "Tomás asked for *leche*, and Tommy asked for *milk*. You both wanted the same thing!"). In our culturally diverse world, there are many ways to meet the common human needs that all peoples share.

● **Avoid the editorial "we" when talking with children about cultural practices.**

"We do such and such" makes assumptions about homogeneity that may not be true. Say, "This is what I do," or "This is what we do in our classroom; you do it differently at home. Both ways are okay."

● **Avoid singling out one child or only a few children in your program whose cultural backgrounds differ from the rest.**

Remember that children in the cultural minority in your program are in a vulnerable position. They may not want to be different from the other children and will need teacher support to be comfortable with who they are as they find ways to connect with their peers. Make learning about these children's families part of learning about every child's family. Help the children learn that there are many other people like their classmates. Before beginning activities that address the culture of a child who is in the program's minority, talk with the child and family about what you plan to do. Tell the child, for example, "I want the other children to know more about people who are Vietnamese like you, so I'm going to read some books, tell a story about our doll Trang, and invite some friends of mine to school."

● **Always begin by exploring the cultural similarities and differences among the children, families, and staff in your program. Then expand to cultural groups beyond your classroom.**

This principle is vital to building children's understanding that differences and similarities are part of and enrich all of our lives. This is the bridge to

respectfully learning about cultural ways of life with which the children do not have direct experience.

## Activities to get you started

Now that we've explored basic principles for planning activities, here are a variety of activity suggestions to get you started exploring the diversity among the families in your program. We'll look at how to engage children in learning about several specific areas of a family's daily life. Additional areas of cultural life are discussed in chapters 6 through 11. In particular, the many ways family members work are explored in chapter 8, and how families celebrate holidays is explored in chapter 11.

As you read our activity suggestions below and create ones of your own, remember that cultural diversity exists even when families are all members of the same racial and ethnic/cultural group. If you look for diversity, you will find it!

### The many people in our families

This is a good starting place to explore similarities and differences. While the structure of families both within and across cultural groups varies greatly, all families carry out many similar tasks.

● Borrow and take photographs of all the people who live with each child and any others seen by the child as part of the family. Make a bulletin board of "The People in Our Families." Label each photo with the person's name and relationship to the child. Talk with children about the similarities and differences among their families in terms of who lives in each household.

● Make a class book about "Our Families" for children to take home to share. Make a page for each child and each teacher about who lives with them and what work their family members do in and outside of the home. For the children's pages, get information from family members and from the child. For example, Maurice's page might say:

"This is Maurice's family. He lives with his dad and his grandma. His aunt and uncle sometimes take care of him, too. Maurice's dad goes to college to learn to be a teacher, and he cooks dinner for Maurice and puts him to bed. Maurice's grandma brings him to school and works as a secretary. A dog named Gruffy lives with Maurice and his family."

Focus on what the child's family members *do* on any given day, not on where they are employed. Be aware that some children's family members may be temporarily or chronically unemployed. And some children may have a family member who is incarcerated (see the box "When a Child Has a Parent in Jail" in chapter

9 for suggestions on how to support children in this situation).

- Create a family shelf for families to take turns displaying objects they use in daily life and on special days. Or ask families to bring in an object that fits a specific theme, such as "Things we use to make our homes pretty." Intervene if a child makes fun of any object. Explain that it is hurtful to make fun of an object another child's family uses, even if he has not seen it before. Ask the child if he wants to learn about how his friend uses the object, and invite the friend to show him how it is used.
- Read children's books about families that are reflective of the ethnic/cultural groups in your class. Always use more than just one book about a particular group—no matter how accurate and respectful that book is. Talk about the differences and similarities between the children's lives in the books and the lives of the children in your program (e.g., "Is this how you make dinner in your family?"). Eventually, expand your selection of books by reading about cultural groups that are not represented in your classroom but that are present in your larger community or visible in the media.
- Tell persona doll stories. Have the dolls' stories reinforce specific families' ways of living, introduce new variations on a group's cultural patterns, and provide opportunities for the children to explore similarities and differences within and among families (e.g., "How is Luisa's family like yours? How is her family different? Isn't that interesting?").

### **The many ways our families speak**

Learning about the many languages spoken by children's families is one part of exploring cultural similarities and differences. (This curriculum area, learning about language diversity, is not the same as supporting home language development and bilingualism discussed earlier in this chapter.) Even if all the children in your program speak English as their home language, people speak English in different ways. In addition, English-speaking children need to become comfortable with the reality that people in the larger community outside their classroom speak other languages.

None of the activity suggestions that follow requires you to know another language well—although it does help, and learning a second language as an adult will give you a wonderful way of connecting with families who themselves are learning English. If you choose to learn another language, however, plenty of resources are available, including friends,

dictionaries, CDs, and college and community college faculty. You can even learn along with the children in your classroom.

The following activity ideas suggest possibilities for both multilingual and monolingual groups.

- If your group is multilingual, you will already be incorporating their home languages into your program through writing as well as speaking. You likely already have labels, children's books, signs, and so on, in their languages. All children can learn the words for common objects, numbers, days of the week, and so on, in the languages represented in your program. The families and children are resources to help staff do this. At snack time, refer to food in more than one language. Make a poster and a book about "The Ways We Speak" featuring four or five words children commonly use: names of family members and pets, *thank you*, *water*, *play*, and the like.
- If your group speaks only English, then use some of the methods just described to introduce a language that the children are likely to hear in their community. Display different writing systems (e.g., Chinese, Hebrew, Braille) to broaden their understanding that there are many ways to write the same words.

### **Respecting the English Language Learner**

I used to go in early to the center to pick up my daughter, Amanda-Faye, so I could stay to observe. One day I decided to stay for story time. Mohammed, one of the teachers, was reading a book and mispronounced some of the words. When the preschool-age children started giggling, he put the book down gently and said, "I want to tell you that I come from a country called Iran, and we speak Farsi there. English is my second language, and many of the words are difficult for me. When I make a mistake and people laugh at me, it hurts my feelings. It's okay if you will help me say them right."

He was so gentle in his delivery. From the look on the children's faces, I could see that they understood. From then on, when I would hear Mohammed reading and making a mistake, I would also hear the children say, "Mohammed, that's not the right way. This is how you say it." Then he would thank them for their help.

I realized that it didn't matter that I still mispronounced words. I decided to try Mohammed's technique with adults and children and found that it really generated respect and understanding.

**Source:** Adapted from L.I. Jiménez, "Finding a Voice," in C. Alvarado, et al., *In Our Own Way: How Anti-Bias Work Shapes Our Lives* (St. Paul, MN: Redleaf, 1999), 32–34.

Consider introducing American Sign Language if you know it or know someone who does.

- Ask friends or staff who speak other languages to teach you how to sing a simple song in those languages. Luz Cardona, a preschool teacher, had parents help her learn to sing “Where, oh where, is our friend [child’s name]; way down yonder in the paw paw patch” (a favorite song game) in English, Spanish, Croatian, Russian, and Japanese. The children would call out the language they wanted her to sing and would then sing with her, adding their names in the appropriate place.

Teach all children respectful ways to interact with people who speak a different language or speak English differently than they do (see the box “Respecting the English Language Learner”). Never let children tease or make fun of someone about how he or she speaks.

### **The many religious beliefs and practices of our families**

As children learn about one another’s families, they may note differences in religious practices. Families worship in various places—in churches, synagogues, temples, mosques, perhaps outdoors. Some families do not worship at all. Accept children’s talk about their religious ideas as part of their family’s way of life. Explain that each family has its own ideas about what and who God is (or isn’t), and that all deserve respect in the classroom.

Religion often comes up when children are trying to understand issues of life and death. One 3-year-old asked her teacher if she could visit her grandfather in heaven. The teacher asked her what her mother said about that. The child replied she hadn’t asked. “Let’s ask her together when she gets here,” her teacher said. This conversation inspired another child to announce that if they all said a prayer before eating, they would go to heaven. The teacher replied, “Some families say prayers before eating, and some families don’t. Here at school you can say a prayer if you want, or you don’t have to.”

Religious beliefs are a central part of many families’ home cultures and can provide direction, focus, and comfort for family members. Although public programs cannot teach a particular religious perspective or utilize religious icons, children often bring those objects into a classroom. For example,

Stefania and Betina arrive at the center from a homeless shelter, where the sisters and their mother had taken refuge after an earthquake, shaken both emotionally and literally. Each child comes with a white satin Bible and instructions from their mother to keep it with them at all times. The staff aren’t sure at first how to respond, but it is clear the Bibles are a source of comfort and reassurance. The teachers help the girls find clean places to put the Bibles during art and snack. Over the weeks, as the family recovers, the Bibles are left in the girls’ cubbies for more of the day and eventually at home.



Children may make biased comments about religious beliefs. Handle such incidents as you would any other attack on a child's identity. In an anti-bias curriculum, every family has the absolute right to believe as they wish. At the same time, no one has the right to insist that one belief is better than another or to reject someone because of his or her family's religion. For example:

Five-year-old Andrew casually announces at circle time, "All you kids are going to hell." His teacher asks, "Why do you say that?" Andrew replies, "Because they didn't go to my church like I told them to." The teacher calmly answers, "Everyone does not go to the same church, and this is okay. You cannot tell others which church to go to. It hurts their feelings when you tell them they will go to hell."

In a religious school, where a particular belief system is part of the curriculum, anti-bias activities would include teaching respect for people who do not practice that religion.

### **The many ways our families eat**

Activities involving food should be part of a larger exploration of the many ways children's families are the same and different. Whenever possible, provide what children normally eat at home for snacks and lunch. Include foods eaten by every child's family.

- Cooking and food preparation activities provide one way to build pre-literacy and pre-math skills, to encourage healthy eating, and to infuse anti-bias education into the program on a regular basis. Ask families to help with recipes and ideas for places to get ingredients. Choose easy-to-prepare foods that are appealing to young children and healthy such as salsa dip and vegetables, bean curd sticks, and *dolmas* (rice in grape leaves). Check out local farmer's markets for sources of interesting foods that reflect the cultural diversity in your community.

- Do not stereotype. For example, if you cook black-eyed peas, emphasize, "This is one of the things that Selena eats at home with her family. I like them, too." Do not say, "This is what African American people eat." If other children from the same cultural group eat different things, point that out.

- Do not mix up specific cultures. Families from Guatemala do not eat the same food as families from Mexico. Families recently from Mexico may not eat the same foods as third-generation Mexican Americans.

- Teach children ways to decline food without disparaging it. Invite, but do not force children to try new foods. Help them understand that "sometimes we

like new things and sometimes we do not." Intervene immediately if children make fun of the food or call it "yucky," explaining that it is hurtful to make fun of the food another child likes. Teach them to respond considerately by saying things such as, "I've never tried that before; what does it taste like?" or "It tastes different to me." Teach them to say, "No, thank you. I don't want any today," when they really do not want to try a food.

### **The many ways our families sing, dance, and make music**

Regularly play music from the children's home cultures and from the cultures in your community at movement and dance times, for relaxing at rest and nap times, and as background music at eating times. Also have this music available in the listening area. Use songs from all the cultural groups in your community that people from those groups really sing and listen to, not songs made up by a person from outside the group. Ask family members for suggestions. Choose songs that reflect concrete aspects of life that interest young children: work, lullabies, adventures, funny stories. Gather a collection of rhythm instruments used by those groups. Sharing one another's music not only helps children enjoy other cultures but it also contributes to building a sense of community among the whole class.

### **The many important people in our communities**

Children thrive on stories about heroes—female and male, past and present—who have made important contributions to society. These heroes can include people in the larger society that children hear about, but it is important to begin with those people closest to the children's lives and families. Children often see especially beloved family members as heroes, as well as people in their neighborhoods who help their families with various tasks or who tell wonderful stories. Some children know people who work with others to improve their community. For example, Louise's mother worked with people in the housing project where Louise grew up to get a new school for the neighborhood.

When discussing well known people, be very concrete and tie their contributions to children's interests and everyday life. For example:

"Stevie Wonder is a composer and singer who has made many people happy with his music. He is also blind. He wrote a special birthday song for Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., now sung by many Black families on the birthdays of their own children."

"Dolores Huerta helped farm workers and their children have better homes, food, toys, and education."

"Maria Montessori was a doctor and a teacher, and it was her very good idea to have chairs and tables that are just the right size for you to use!"

Be sure to include the heroes of every child in your class.

## Introducing diversity beyond the classroom

Once you have established a classroom culture that honors the diversity *within* your group, then you can begin to add learning opportunities about cultural groups beyond your program. Choose people from cultural groups with whom the children are most likely to interact in the broader community and when they go on to elementary school. Learning about people of even one new ethnic/cultural group helps children to think more broadly about human differences and sameness. You are also modeling respectful ways to learn about people with whom the children are not yet familiar.

- Get to know people—Invite in members of ethnic/cultural groups you want to introduce to the children. Choose people who are able to participate regularly in your program so the children can get to know them. Guests can tell the children stories about their families and their work, show and explain household and art objects, and teach songs and new words (if they speak a language other than English). They can also join in the children's activities. You may want to include people who are artists, as well as people who are especially respected for their contributions to their communities.

- Read children's books—Put together and use a selection of accurate books about children and families from the cultural group you plan to introduce. Most of the books should focus on current life in the United States (unless the group is transnational and travels back and forth between the United States and their home country on a regular basis; then you want books that show both lifestyles). Look for books that discuss themes that are common in the children's

lives. (For ideas on where to get books, see the "Anti-Bias" section of the NAEYC website: [www.naeyc.org](http://www.naeyc.org).)

- Create your own materials—Give one or two persona dolls the cultural identity of the cultural group you are introducing. Tell stories about the dolls' lives that relate to the lives of the children in your group. Interview people from that cultural community and make a poster or Big Book with photographs about them.

- Use folktales appropriately—Folktales (fairy tales, fables) are stories that come from the oral tradition, and every culture tells some. However, folktales do not teach children about the current, daily lives of people. Because the illustrations in most folktale books depict past times, using them to introduce new cultures can reinforce young children's misconceptions. Would you use *Cinderella* or *Sleeping Beauty* to teach children about current European or American life? Then don't, for example, use an African folktale to teach children about people's lives in today's Africa. Instead of misusing folktales in that way, use the many beautifully written and illustrated folktale books as a way to help children explore the many moral dilemmas these stories portray. Ask children, "How would you solve this problem?"

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Fostering children's development of a positive cultural identity and their comfortable, respectful interaction with the cultures of others is the foundation of all anti-bias education work. In the following chapters, we look at several additional areas of identity and fairness—race, gender, economic class, family structure, abilities, and holidays.

As you move from one chapter to another, think of a kaleidoscope. Like the glass at the kaleidoscope's center, the core elements of anti-bias education are unchanging. Yet each turn of the kaleidoscope—like the diverse perspectives we hope to support as anti-bias educators—shifts those unchanging elements to create a new pattern. The values of anti-bias education will never change, but the perspectives on it are endless.

Remember to do culture and language activities that cultivate all four anti-bias education goals