BEST PRACTICES FOR PLANNING CURRICULUM FOR YOUNG CHILDREN

FAMILY PARTNERSHIPS and CULTURE

California Department of Education Sacramento, 2015

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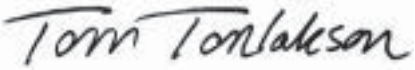
A Message from the State Superintendent of Public Instruction

I am pleased to present *Family Partnerships and Culture,* a publication providing early childhood education program administrators and teachers with guidance on practices that support the development of partnerships with families and inclusion of children's cultural experiences as essential parts of planning curriculum. Families can be invaluable partners in early childhood programs' efforts to enhance early learning and prepare children for school. Because the family's approach to guiding early development is influenced by adult family members' culture or cultures, a key aspect of developing partnerships with families is to be responsive to their cultures. This publication promotes understanding of children's cultural or multicultural experiences at home and helps teachers use those experiences as building blocks for teaching and learning in early education settings. It complements the resources of the California Department of Education's Early Learning and Development System, particularly the *California Infant/Toddler Curriculum Framework* and the *California Preschool Curriculum Framework, Volumes One, Two, and Three.*

Family Partnerships and Culture draws upon both current research and evidence-based practice. This publication offers a comprehensive view of how to include family and culture in curriculum planning. Developing effective partnerships with families involves building on family and cultural strengths and being supportive of families as they try to manage stress in their daily lives. The vision of family members, teachers, and program directors working together to enhance young children's learning holds great promise. Partnerships that recognize family strengths and create a context for supporting families will augment other best practices in early education programs. The result is high-quality early learning experiences that contribute to children's well-being and successful development.



Tom Torlakson
State Superintendent of Public Instruction

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FOREWORD

Even though most families utilize some form of out-of-home care, children under the age of five continue to spend most of their early lives in the family setting. Consequently, families continue to play an especially important role in shaping the course of children's early development. For this reason, families can be an invaluable partner in achieving early childhood programs' goal of fostering early skills and preparing children for school. Underscoring this point, the California Infant/Toddler Learning and Development Foundations and the California Preschool Learning Foundations acknowledge explicitly the central role of families and culture in children's readiness for and healthy adaptation to the early childhood setting.

Guided by cultural beliefs and principles, families provide select experiences, convey attitudes, and impart knowledge to their children to prepare them for adulthood. Accordingly, it is important for program staff to learn to collaborate effectively with families. To develop a partnership and to tap into the family as a primary resource, teachers and program staff must reach out to families, learn about, and develop strong partnerships with them. This process requires openness to learning and an effort to understand the individuality each family and the diversity of the families from which the children come. Culturally competent practices are essential in the early learning setting or environment in order to form authentic partnerships with families that promote children's development. Specific knowledge of the child's cultural or multicultural background and life at home can be the key to effective teaching and learning. This knowledge is a valuable tool for connecting what the child already knows and values to the new competencies that programs seek to nurture. To the extent that a program's policies and approaches are informed by, reflective of, and congruent with the

child's experiences at home, children will find it easier to adapt to the requirements of the program and meet the program's expectations for achievement. Deeper knowledge of the children's social family life will increase the likelihood that teachers will effectively meet children's needs and serve them successfully.

This is a complex yet worthwhile undertaking. Understanding the social conditions that children experience at home is complicated by the broad diversity of the children attending preschool programs. In many early childhood settings, one finds cubicles in which each child stores outdoor clothing and personal objects brought from home. The labels on the children's cubicles may indicate the ancestry of the family and reflect the culturally and ethnically rich backgrounds of the children, although there may be exceptions since California is so diverse. Some names may suggest the likely Anglo-Saxon and Western roots, and others suggest ancestry of Native Americans, African Americans, the original Spanish settlers, or more recent immigrants from Mexico, Latin America, and the Caribbean. Others hint at familial connections to more distant nations in Eastern Europe, Africa, Asia, and the Middle East. These children represent the rich array of ethnic and social groups found in many early childhood programs. Much of this cultural diversity is due to high levels of immigration. Foreign-born persons represented 12 percent (32.5 million) of the U.S. population in 2002, with almost 50 percent of that group coming from Latin America, 25 percent from Asia, and 20 percent from Europe (Schmidley 2003). In 2010, of the more than 2.5 million children under the age of five living in California, about half of these children were Latino (U.S. Census Bureau 2010). It is important to note that Latinas or Latinos may be of any race according to the U.S. Census Bureau. White non-Latino children make up 30 percent of children under five in California, Asian-Pacific Islanders make up 10 percent, African Americans make up 6 percent, and the remaining 3 percent represent a wide range of ethnic groups (Whitebook, Kipnis, and Bellm 2008).

Like the children, the program staff members often reflect the different ethnicities within the state, though not in the same proportion as the children. White, non-Latino educators make up as much as 53 percent of early childhood teachers; Latinos represent 27 percent of the workforce; African Americans, 15 percent; and Asian-Pacific Islanders, 5 percent of the workforce. Members of the early childhood workforce speak a variety of languages. Although English and Spanish are spoken by the overwhelming majority, other spoken languages include Mandarin, Cantonese, Vietnamese, Korean, Arabic, Russian, Tagalog, and Swahili (Whitebook, Kipnis, and Bellm 2008). This rich diversity of people and the divergent cultures they represent constitute an opportunity and a resource. Human diversity offers exposure to a range of educational experiences and worldviews that can broaden the perspectives and enrich the lives of

individuals, particularly those of children. For program staff, this diversity can be a resource that not only enriches, but also brings a set of challenges to grow and expand intellectual horizons.

As noted above, a majority of staff members working in early childhood programs are Euro-American and female, and a majority of the children are Latino. Depending on the teacher's background, this may mean that a teacher cannot rely solely on his or her personal experiences and on common beliefs to understand how children think, perceive, understand, and communicate. Teachers will need to develop a deeper cultural understanding if they are to discern why children act as they do.

Many teachers, by virtue of their personal backgrounds or training, may not have had the opportunity to gain the knowledge or experiences that would prepare them for working with culturally and linguistically diverse children. In light of this possible lack of knowledge and exposure, working closely with families can offer the opportunity to explore new ideas and approaches that improve the overall operation of the program. In turn, this will strengthen staff members' ability to work well with the children they will encounter in classrooms in the twenty-first century. This is especially important because some children are not flourishing in early childhood programs as much as expected. For those children, early difficulties in adjusting to school set them on a track of low academic performance, which may have dire consequences for their lives as adults. Collaborating with families is an important first step in improving such outcomes. Attention to the family's culture and context increases the likelihood of an effective partnership with families that can make a world of difference for the child.

INTRODUCTION

This publication aims to assist early childhood professionals in the development of cultural competence in working with children and families from diverse cultural backgrounds. Specifically, the aims of the publication are to help programs to

- value families and their contribution to children's learning;
- approach cultural diversity with an open mind;
- apply knowledge gained about families, including their values and beliefs, to teaching and learning.

Efforts to educate and serve children are more effective when collaboration with families is involved. The motivation to involve families often arises from an authentic appreciation of the critical role that families play in children's learning. Consequently, collaborations between programs and families are more likely to occur when there is an understanding of families' cultural backgrounds. Deep knowledge of the family and its cultural context can provide teachers with insights about the child's thinking and behavior that may be useful in developmental and educational interventions. Moreover, publicly honoring and celebrating the family reinforces a positive identity for the child and promotes in children the idea that they are valued by staff.

Accomplishing these aims requires of staff members both an awareness of the diversity of the people around them and an understanding of self as a cultural being. The dual goals are to increase awareness of the state's diverse cultures and recognize how one's own culture shapes behaviors, attitudes, and responses to those who are different. Specifically, cultural competence includes learning about the family lives of children and developing a deep understanding of the family's culture. This, in turn, requires insight into the influence of personal culture in relating to persons who belong to a different cultural group.

Attention to Cultural Diversity

It takes an ongoing effort to become sensitive to the differences that are part of the surrounding world. For teachers, this means becoming aware that the children in their care come from a variety of cultures. This awareness must go beyond superficial stereotypes. Teachers must be aware of the ethnicity and national heritage of the chil-

dren they serve: the families' histories, the families' countries of origin, how long they have been here, and what they went through to settle into a new country. Teachers should learn about the languages spoken by the family members in the child's home; how long the family has been in the community; the states or regions from which they came; whether they are newcomers to the United States, long-time immigrants, or second/third generation. This historical and background information can shed light on the families' context, attitudes, and values. This information can also shed light on similarities and historical conflicts among groups that are important to know. When confronted with this diversity, program staff must counter the human tendency to regard favorably those who share the same cultural attitudes and whose behavior aligns with one's cultural standards and, conversely, to view disapprovingly the conduct of groups with beliefs, values, and behavioral standards that differ from one's own.

Cultural Self-Reflection

The process of cultural self-reflection involves knowing one's identity and the cultural community where one developed and learned as a child. It likewise involves awareness of one's own cultural background, including examining how personal principles and beliefs may influence one's approach to working with children and their families. For example, staff members should identify and reflect deeply on their own culture-based assumptions about important aspects of life, such as morality, nutrition, gender roles, child care, parent–child relations, appropriate displays of emotion, intimacy, family loyalty, and discipline. Individual beliefs and values come from many sources, the most influential of which is the family. Assumptions formed over a lifetime and passed down over the generations shape individual views of the world and the judgments staff members make about what is right or wrong, appropriate or inappropriate, and desirable or undesirable. These views are so deeply ingrained that they are taken for granted and can easily be perceived as being universal and absolutely true.

The goal of cultural learning is to counter the human tendency to make assumptions about people who are different from

oneself. It should also open one to the possibility that beliefs different from one's own can offer legitimate ways to view and deal with life. When staff members identify their own cultural assumptions or faulty misconceptions, they may be less likely to criticize or devalue the practices of others. When early childhood educators examine the subjective and personal basis of their views of life and their practices, as this publication encourages, they will likely find it possible to broaden their worldview by approaching others with an open mind.

Finally, moving from reflection to action is important. This publication is a guide for program staff members as they work through the process of learning about self and about the families of the children they serve. This guidance provides a foundation for the work that has to be done, but mastery of the ideas contained here is not enough. Personal reflection on one's own culture and learning about other cultures as discussed herein are the first steps on the path toward effective engagement with diverse children and families. To be effective, program staff members must move along the continuum from theory to practice, from intellectual understanding to attitudinal shifts and a behavioral change.

Understanding of family and culture does not come quickly, nor can it be gleaned from a single source. It involves dual processes: paying attention to the diversity of people around oneself and to self-reflection on one's own culture and family experiences. Applying knowledge to practice is difficult and defies simple formulae, prescriptions, or scripts. Increasing cultural awareness amounts to little without efforts to apply the knowledge gained toward making program policies and practices more culturally responsive. Indeed, this is the most important and, often, the most challenging step. It involves moving from a theoretical appreciation of cultural and familial differences to building relationships and implementing concrete practices that make the program more compatible with and responsive to the families served. It means that program staff members must *approach families* and *establish meaningful relationships with them.* To do this well, staff members must develop an inclusive perspective, devise thoughtful strategies, and sustain implementation of those strategies over time.

Mastering this process involves building on cultural competence that includes authentic understanding and acceptance. It should also include cultural responsiveness characterized by action and application of the theory to program practices and policies and to interactions with families. Such a proactive stance is consistent with the universal design approach to pursue different pathways to make learning relevant to the diverse population of California's children (CDE 2011, 5). This process requires patience and persistence.

Organization of the Publication

This publication begins with a set of guiding principles for moving from theory to practice, from self-reflection to learning about cultural diversity, and then to apply what is learned to teaching and learning. It moves next to a definition of cultural competence and proposes a set of principles to guide efforts to develop the knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors associated with cultural competence. These principles are intended to be a foundation for subsequent discussions of culture, family life, and curriculum.

Part II offers an in-depth discussion of culture itself. It defines culture and identifies the critical dimensions of culture to which early childhood educators need to attend. It provides a rationale for attending to culture and explains how culture is different from ethnicity. Part II then debunks four common myths about culture.

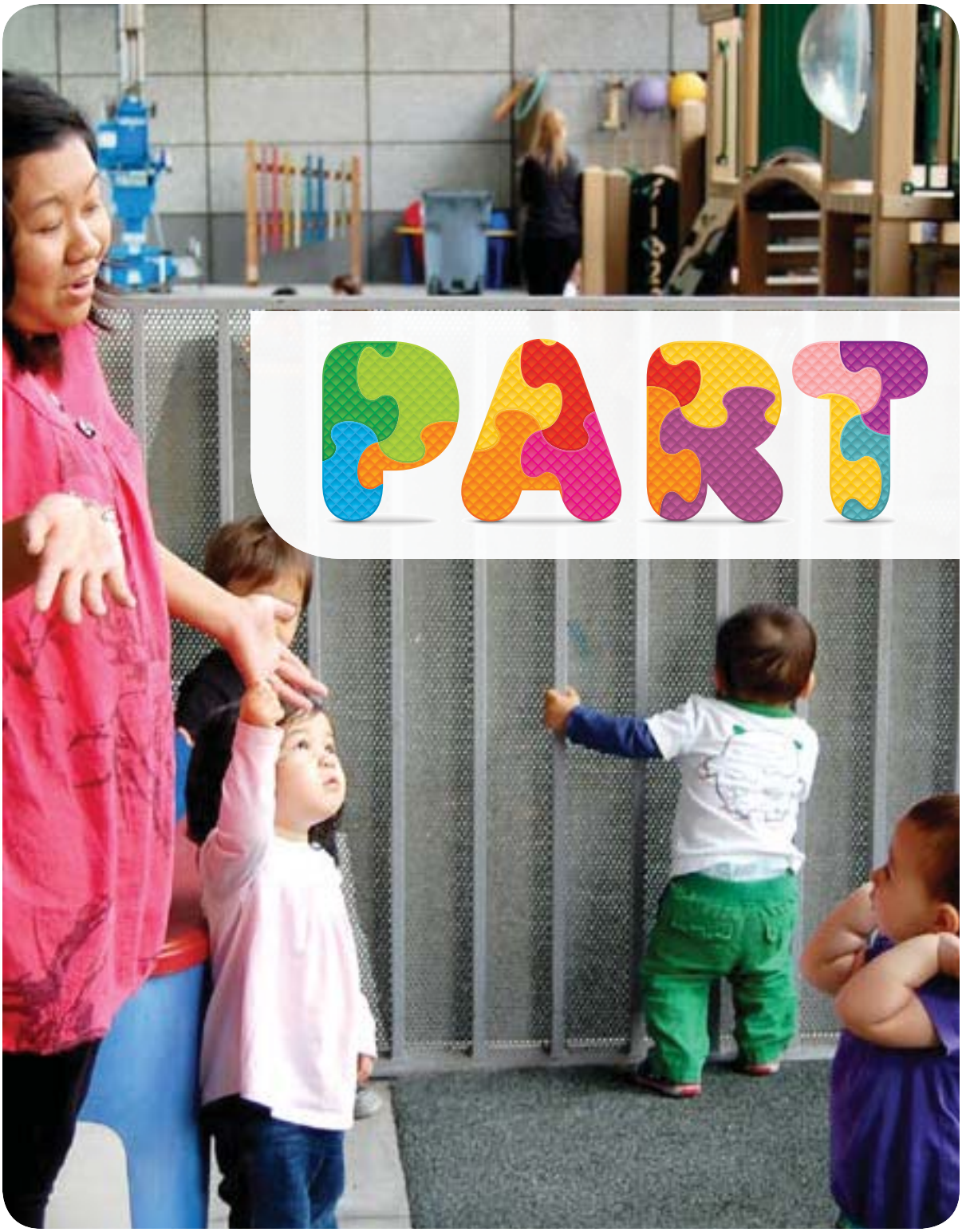
The next section concludes by addressing the issue of language diversity and the value of supporting development of the home language.

Part III discusses the dimensions of family life important for child development. The discussion includes a description of the strains in contemporary family life and the sources of strength that can be nurtured to promote the well-being of children.

Part IV focuses on early childhood curricular domains and how culture and family life might be reflected in the content or teaching methods used in those domains. It provides examples of how notions of family and culture might be incorporated in the implementation of the curriculum frameworks. In this way, it provides a snapshot of what culturally competent teaching and relations with families looks like and links it to the curriculum.

The publication has been prepared with early childhood program staff as its principal audience. Examples of strategies for teachers and program staff members are provided throughout to help readers understand how to apply the information. However, administrators, families, family support agencies, and parent advocacy organizations may find some of the information useful in performing their roles.

Terms in boldface are defined in the glossary at the end of the publication.



PART I

Guiding Principles for Developing Cultural Competence

6

Cultural competence is a multi-faceted **construct** that can have different meanings depending on the purposes for and the settings in which it is used. At its core, cultural competence refers to an ability to negotiate effectively across and to relate authentically to diverse cultural groups through knowledge and understanding of differences. Cultural competence encompasses several components: knowledge, attitudes, and behavior. From a cognitive perspective, culturally competent individuals possess an understanding of the perspectives and worldviews of members of cultural groups different from their own. They display an attitude of appreciation, empathy, and respect for those diverse worldviews. As to behavior, they translate their growing cultural understanding and their acceptance of cultural differences into actions that result in positive interactions with culturally diverse groups. Consequently, they can move with ease in cross-cultural situations. They anticipate and overcome difficulties that might arise from cultural incongruities or differences. In the case of teachers, they develop strategies and hone skills that help children negotiate differences between their lives at the early childhood program and their lives at home in a way that leads to positive outcomes for children. To progress toward cultural responsiveness and competence along each of these dimensions, staff members should consider and embrace several guiding principles. These principles may be used to guide the development of specific strategies to achieve competence in these areas. The strategies are examples and not meant to be an exhaustive list of steps to take.

Cognitive Cultural Competence

The cognitive dimension of cultural competence pertains to understanding both one's own culture and the cultures of others. Building knowledge of one's culture is an essential step toward cultural competence.

Reflect on one's own cultural background. One needs to become more aware of oneself as a cultural being. Self-examination and self-awareness are powerful tools for forming meaningful relationships with others. It is important to appreciate the strengths of one's own cultural group, while recognizing that everyone may not agree with one's views. Openness to differences of opinion about how things ought to be and differences in cultural upbringing and teachings is beneficial throughout one's life. One needs to both understand that not everyone may agree with one's views and to be open to others' ideas. Reflection on one's own cultural background or self-identity establishes a foundation for cultural understanding. Beliefs and attitudes developed over the years about what is right or wrong need to be explored in depth. This requires a candid appraisal and acceptance of self as a product of culture. It also requires an honest, self-critical examination of one's feelings about one's own and others' cultures.

Strategies for Self-Reflection

- **Family tree:** Create a family tree that consists of branches of family members from as many generations as possible. What cultural traditions and ethnic groups are represented in your family? Which traditions and customs have been most evident and influential in your life? What family rules, attitudes and practices have been passed down and maintained in your family? Which are most important? Which do you still maintain in your current living situation?

- **Cultural journal:** Use a notebook or diary to record reflections on your own cultural background. Write your memories of growing up in your family. Describe the rituals, rules, and habitual ways of doing things and life lessons passed on by your family. Include often-told stories, the warnings often given, the rules that governed family life, and the roles of family members. Consider how these reflections of your cultural legacy are similar to or different from those of the families you serve.

- **Family self-examination:** Use the questions in Box 1 on page 29 to reflect on your cultural background. Write your answers and share them with your parents, siblings, and extended family members. See if your family members agree or disagree about the answers to the questions.

Learn about the children in the program and their families. Become familiar with the cultural group with which the children's families' identify, recognizing that each family creates its own "culture" by drawing from their members' interpretations. Over time, gather information about things the families do, their customs, habits, routines, and preferences. Learn how to greet family members respectfully (for example, whom

to speak to first). Understand the signs of respect, such as listening without interrupting. Avoid "Yes . . . but" responses in which you appear at first to agree or approve, but in fact disagree or disapprove. Embrace and value others' cultural perspectives.

Strategies for Learning About Children and Families

- **Home visit:** After building trust with a family, request a visit to the families of the children in the program to get to know the household and the child's physical surroundings (e.g., where the child sleeps, eats, and spends time at home).
- **Conversation with family:** See Box 1 on page 29 for suggestions about subjects for conversations with families.
- **Participation in community cultural celebrations:** Participate in community cultural gatherings that are open to the public. If you are invited, your attendance at other cultural celebrations may provide an opportunity to foster relationships with the children and families.

Examine the belief that one culture is better than another. In societies in which different cultural groups coexist, there is a tendency to believe that the culture of the most powerful, affluent, and educated group has cultural beliefs and practices that are superior to the other groups. Teachers should maintain an objective relationship with their own culture as well so that they are less judgmental when they encounter cultural differences. This is particularly true for members of the dominant culture. Cultural differences are not a matter of which is better or more effective, but there is a tendency to view them in this light. This perspective of cultural superiority is problematic because it suggests that the most adaptive strategy is for everyone to adopt and to espouse the cultural values of the dominant group. Such a perspective diminishes the dignity of families and the respect that is foundational to sound relations. It impedes one's ability to work with families. This principle of presumed superiority might also be applied to the culture of early childhood education that was transmitted to teachers as part of their training. Early childhood education may impart notions of a "right way" to do things

that are not always consistent with families. Some teachers may come to believe that they know best because of their training in child development and early education. The best safeguards against a perspective of cultural superiority are humility, patience, openness, and respect.

Strategies for Challenging Assumptions

- **Self-examination:** Self-reflection is one strategy to use to address the tendency to assume cultural superiority. Expanding horizons is another strategy. Learn about other cultures with an open mind—not to compare which is better, but to increase one's knowledge. "Our way is the right way" is a message that comes automatically and unconsciously to some people, especially if they have little exposure to cultural differences. It is particularly difficult to work on your own views. It is easier to teach others to challenge themselves than remembering to do it yourself. The impact of self-reflection can be increased by sharing insight with others. For example, staff groups can be formed to discuss these issues and to share personal reflections.

- **Existence of many "right ways":** Staff members may show all of the ways they know to hold a baby. Try to demonstrate other ways you have seen babies held. There are many right ways to hold a baby. Think of other practices that have many right ways.

Affective Cultural Competence

Cultural awareness and learning about culture involves much more than an accumulation of facts. Cultural awareness is a way of being, doing, and thinking. More than gaining knowledge, cultural awareness is reflected in attitudes of acceptance toward diversity, openness to practices and views different from one's own, convictions about the value of other cultural practices, and acting in ways that support and defend those who are different.

Adopt a posture of cultural respect. The key to successful work with diverse cultures is respect. **Cultural respect** leads to acceptance of others, embracing them on their own terms without trying to change them. It is important to listen to the ideas of others for the purpose of understanding, not as a means of changing others. In turn, understanding families can lead to a partnership, a true collaboration, with the

goal of educating the child. Respect for cultural diversity does not always mean agreeing with or supporting every difference. However, it does mean appreciating why a family may believe or act as it does. Cultural respect does not mean condoning practices or behavior that are indisputably harmful to the child. Families may be unaware that the practice or behavior is seen as harmful or may not know another way. Children see how teachers respond to and treat their families. How teachers treat families communicates to a child what teachers think of him or her. In this way, what one knows about a culture is less important than the respect and the attitude of openness to the practices, values, and beliefs of others.

When one begins to learn about other cultures, it is important to "suspend judgment"—that is, to separate understanding of each culture from judgments of its values. "If judgments of values are necessary, as they often are, they will thereby be much better informed if they are suspended long enough to gain some understanding of the patterns involved in one's own familiar ways as well as in the sometimes surprising ways of other communities" (Rogoff 2003, 14).

Cultural Responsiveness

Knowing about cultural differences and respecting such differences are necessary foundations for successful collaboration with diverse children and families. However, knowledge alone does not guarantee respect. Teachers need to develop strategies and skills to work through differences with families. The following principles can be used to guide the development of such strategies and skills.

Be a learner before trying to be a teacher. The family is the constant in the child's life. Both the family and you have the best interests of the child at heart. Talk to families about what is really important and what they want for their children. Share what is important to you and what the program hopes to provide for children. Build a relationship with families so that you can talk about difficult things and problems in an affirming way.

Strategies for Communicating

- **Listen and learn:** Listening to families before jumping to conclusions is a strategy for considering them as resources for teacher learning. It is difficult to seek information from families when you are used to giving information as the professional. If you work with infants and toddlers, you already know that it is imperative to get to know each child in order to understand what he or she needs. You are involved every day in a teaching/learning process in which the roles go back and forth between you and the child. It is just as necessary for you to understand the family and learn how their views and the research you know about might be different from what the family believes. Culture may play a strong role in how the family members see their baby and what they want for him or her. So a starting strategy is to get to know the family and be on good terms with them. Observation and discussion are good strategies to learn about family practices, which may be individual or may be influenced by the culture(s).

- **Communicate the program's philosophy:** The program handout should state your philosophy of care and provide examples. Give parents the handout before their children enter the program or soon after so that parents have a beginning awareness of the commonalities and differences between home and school.

- **Acknowledge, ask, and adapt:** When issues come up that may involve cultural differences, use the three-step procedure of Acknowledge, Ask, and Adapt. To *acknowledge* is to communicate one's awareness of the issue, to convey sincere interest and responsiveness, and to involve family in seeking a joint solution. To *ask* is to learn about the parent's precise point of view by restating what one thinks the parent is saying, and paying attention to both verbal and nonverbal responses. To *adapt* is to work with family members toward a solution by searching for areas of common agreement and negotiating around the important issues. (Adapted from Virmani and Mangione 2013, 72–75.)

- **Relate to each family's culture as a resource:** Families from diverse backgrounds are a rich cultural resource for the program. Invite families to bring their culture into the program through cooking, demonstrations of their child care routines (e.g., showing how infants are swaddled or babies carried), storytelling, and book reading.

An anticipated outcome of these efforts is that teachers will come to appreciate how culture, ethnicity, and family life interact and that they are highly relevant to the children's acquisition of the skills and knowledge that early childhood programs seek to elicit, support, and build upon. In that way, cultural differences can be seen as a valuable resource.

It is not possible within the limited space of this publication to cover comprehensively the values, beliefs, and practices of diverse ethnic groups. Nor is it possible to provide a thorough account of what life is like in a wide range of families. However, the questions raised and the frameworks proposed are a starting point for reflecting on ways to incorporate consideration of culture into practice. This reflection is valuable to the extent that it energizes teachers' work with diverse families and helps them to formulate more effective strategies for embracing and collaborating with diverse children and families. Their success will depend on how well they build upon and maintain the integrity of children's cultures and at the same time impart to children the knowledge and skills that are needed for later success in school. By reflecting on the issues covered here, teachers will be able to address them with confidence and be comfortable when working with families who are different from them in culture, ethnicity, or socioeconomic status. The value of cultural knowledge and the misunderstandings generated by its absence are illustrated by the experiences of one preschool program.

Staff members encounter many situations that test their relationships and their ability to collaborate with parents. An example of a challenging situation that occurred in an early childhood program is presented to suggest how some of the principles described earlier might be applied. This is a case of a father concerned about a program contributing to gender confusion in his son.

VIGNETTE: COMMUNICATING AND COLLABORATING WITH PARENTS

Mr. Jones was furious when he arrived to pick up his son, Paul, at preschool. By the time he approached Mrs. Ortega, the head teacher, he could hardly contain his anger. "How could you let my son dress up and play house like he was a girl?" He shouted at her. "You are going to turn Paul into a girl! Is that what we are sendng him to you for?" Mrs. Ortega, not used to such intense emotions from parents, tried in vain to calm him down. Instead he yelled so that everyone could hear: "I never want to come and find him in a dress again!" With genuine respect, Mrs. Ortega calmly said, "Okay, Mr. Jones, if that is your wish, but first can we talk in a private place?"

This situation calls for both diplomacy and self-awareness. Mrs. Ortega and the staff members must first approach the situation with an understanding of their own cultural beliefs about boys playing house in a dress. In the world of early childhood education, this is acceptable and typical behavior. At the same time, they must be open to learning about Mr. Jones and the beliefs that underlie his emotions on seeing his son in a dress. Recognizing that her own cultural beliefs may not be shared by others, Mrs. Ortega would attempt, through open-ended questions, to learn about Mr. Jones's beliefs. She must listen to his concerns and explanation with an attitude of respect and openness while suspending the judgment that her belief is correct and her ways of looking at the situation are "more enlightened." An open mind and active listening convey respect, which is essential to building and sustaining a collaborative relationship with Mr. Jones. In action, Mrs. Ortega should acknowledge Mr. Jones's feelings, inquire about the beliefs and attitudes contributing to those feelings, and adapt her behavior in a way that is consistent with respect and understanding. Specifically, there are many different ways to address this situation. Confronting Mr. Jones at that moment and pointing out the inaccuracies of his gender development theory or suggesting that Mr. Jones is homophobic would be counterproductive and not express cultural respect. Instead, Mrs. Ortega could use some combination of empathy, reassurance, reframing, and deflection through humor.

Empathy. The staff members could also ask for a chance to talk with Mr. Jones in a private setting and listen to his concerns. They could begin with empathy rather than confronting or trying to point out the error of Mr. Jones's thinking. What does his son's being a "girl" mean to him? One response is to acknowledge and show empathy for Mr. Jones's concerns about Paul's not learning that society has dress codes for adult

males and females and this father's fears that others might react to and treat Paul badly if he does not learn to follow those social rules. If Mr. Jones seems to agree that this is his concern, staff members can point to the fact that they have the same goal as Mr. Jones: that Paul grows up with an understanding of social conventions regarding behavior.

Reassurance. Anxiety about the well-being and development of children often is at the root of parental concerns such as those expressed by Mr. Jones. In such situations, offering genuine assurances that the child is developing typically and is not developing differently from other children can help calm parental fears. Mr. Jones could be told that year after year, boys have played in the same way as his son Paul, and they have done just fine. However, parents can tell the difference between genuine and false assurances that exaggerate or distort of reality and disguise true problems. Such false assurances can undermine the kind of trusting relationships that teachers work to build with families.

Reframing. *Reframing* means offering an alternative explanation for behavior or an event. It means offering a different way of looking at the situation that makes the situation seem less threatening, less negative, and more acceptable. Staff members may want to disclose how Paul came to be wearing the dress. If it were his choice, staff members can emphasize that a boy engaging in pretend play and dressing up is not unusual. It may suggest a healthy imagination and creative experimentation. The dressing up has little to do with a disregard for social rules or gender confusion. Instead, it may be a sign of Paul's flexibility and predict future problem-solving ability. Conversely, if he were wearing the dress at the suggestion of another child ("you be the mommy"), this may be a sign of both flexibility and friendship skills. Staff members could also subtly reframe the issue by suggesting that the wearing of a dress during play is a safe way available to boys to express their closeness to their mothers and to imitate the caregiving behavior of the women in his life, including program staff. Reframing is more likely to be effective if the parent is in a receptive state of mind and not agitated and when the person doing the reframing is trusted. Thus, the decision to offer an alternative explanation or way of looking at Paul's wearing a dress should depend on the degree of trust in the staff's relationship with Mr. Jones.

Deflection through humor. Staff members who are experienced and confident might also use humor to defuse the underlying anger and fear. Those who have enjoyed a close, respectful relationship with Mr. Jones could use that relationship and trust fostered with Mr. Jones to explore his fears or concerns.

The importance of trust in resolving a conflict such as this cannot be underestimated. Building such trust requires an across-the-year effort to establish a strong connection with families. A close relationship may prevent or defuse conflict in potentially toxic incidents. If there is not a positive relationship to build on, Mr. Jones's outburst may be an indicator of a deeper problem of mistrust in the motives and methods of the program. If this were the case, more work would have to be done to build bridges to the family before these contentious issues can be addressed effectively and resolved.

Although a conversation between Mrs. Ortega and Mr. Jones may be an initial step to address the situation, other strategies may be useful. Consideration of other strategies and other affected parties, such as the son and other children and their parents, leads to a number of questions that programs might reflect about in handling similar situations.

- What impact might this incident have had on the son? How can the program respond to the son's reactions to the father's anger?
- Should the program members have a conversation only with the children who witnessed the incident to address their concerns and reactions or with the entire class?
- To what extent should program staff meet to discuss the situation, to consider program policies and practices, and to generate responses to Mr. Jones, his son, and other children and their parents?
- Could a program adopt a strategy that anticipates this situation through an orientation or later meeting with parents of all children in which staff members discuss with parents the educational program and the rationale for program elements such as the different learning centers and what they are intended to accomplish?
- Could the incident and the concerns underlying it be the subject of a meeting with all parents? Could this be used as an opportunity to explore family and cultural beliefs and perspectives?

Exploring these questions and coming up with answers will lead to a comprehensive approach to challenging situations that may arise. The answers suggest approaches and strategies based on the guiding principles for culturally competent collaboration between parents and staff.

Whereas the prior example focused on the general issues of communication and collaboration and was not specifically a cultural challenge, the next example has a specific cultural learning focus.

VIGNETTE: CULTURAL LEARNING

The Tender Lee Center had planned carefully for a communal meal to which extended family and community members were invited. The head teacher, Mrs. Sara Pinkwater, welcomed families warmly as they arrived at Tender Lee Center. The children had been taught by staff to introduce family members when they arrived: "Sara, this is my mother, and this is my grandpa," said one of the children to Mrs. Pinkwater. And so it went, child after child following the same script the children had been given earlier by staff. Food was served buffet style. As was customary at the center, the adults were instructed to serve the children and let them eat first. The adults would eat after all the children had been served.

To the surprise of staff, parents were disgruntled and grumbled about what their children were being taught. Although the families appreciated Tender Lee's work in organizing the meal and bringing the community together that evening, many parents left worried about their children being taught bad manners by the program. First, they were shocked that children addressed the teachers by the teachers' first names. The program permitted the children to address the teachers by their first names—not miss, missus, or mister. Parents feared that their children were not being taught to show respect toward elders. Second, by allowing the children to eat before the elders were served, the program did not accord the elders the honor to which they were customarily entitled.

The staff members also held a meeting with parents. Parents expressed concern that their culture was not being passed down to their children and that the program was making the problem worse by its practices. The staff members acknowledged the problem and indicated understanding of parents' perspectives. In a search for ways to accommodate families' views and concerns, staff and families talked about specific ways to address the parents' concern that their children learn to show proper respect for adults and deference to elders. They agreed to honor elders by inviting elders to story time to tell their stories, reinforce aspects of their culture, and pass on their wisdom to the children. In addition, program staff agreed to talk with the children about the important role of elders and ways to show respect to adults. In a meeting about these issues, the staff members decided to talk with children about the role of elders and about the use of last names as a way of showing respect. Together the staff and children came to the decision that the children would address teachers by their last names.

In some groups, respect for adults and elders is a matter of principle that prevents children from being casual with adults and requires formal greetings and deference to elders. Parents were concerned that central tenets of their culture were not being reinforced or honored by the program. This is a case in which teachers adhere to practices that are seen as appropriate in the teachers' culture, which promotes closeness between teacher and child through the use of first names and that views children as tender, vulnerable, and not mature enough to delay gratification of hunger and therefore should be served first. For some cultures, this is a breach of culturally appropriate manners and practices. In such cases, solutions can be crafted to the satisfaction of families and result in integrating family culture and values into the program.

The preceding vignette illustrates how cultural learning can occur in the wake of a misunderstanding that is discussed and resolved. Most early childhood programs and staff have built up a reservoir of goodwill with families that they can tap to overcome oversights or missteps. They can acknowledge and show respect for the perspective of families and search for ways to achieve the families' goals for their children. Finding solutions begins with critical reflection of one's own cultural beliefs and understanding more about the families and cultures of the program's children. In this case, by bringing in the elders, program staff conveyed respect and provided an opportunity for the elders to reinforce the cultural lessons that parents feared were not being passed down to their children.

NAEYC Cultural Competence Project

In light of the cultural diversity of the families served by early childhood programs in California, cultural competence is considered essential to the provision of high-quality services. The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) Pathways to Cultural Competence Project (CCP) is an example of an effort under way in California to assist practitioners and programs in the acquisition of cultural competence. The CCP identifies a set of ideas and approaches that programs should adopt to engage families and their children (NAEYC 2010). The key ideas are as follows:

1. Children are nested in families.
2. Identify shared goals among families and staff.
3. Authentically incorporate cultural traditions and history in the classroom.
4. Acknowledge child development as a culturally driven, ongoing process that should be supported across contexts in a child's life (e.g., school and home).

5. Individuals' and institutions' practices are embedded in culture.
6. Ensure decisions and policies embrace home languages and dialects.
7. Ensure policies and practices embrace and respect families' cultural values, attitudes, and beliefs toward learning.
8. Equalize balances of power; counter stereotyping and bias through intentional teaching.

The eight concepts around which the CCP is structured might best be interpreted as aspirational goals that programs should strive to achieve. For each concept, the CCP identifies a set of strategies that, if implemented, could move programs toward the attainment of competence in addressing the program's cultural diversity. These approaches are entirely consistent with and complement the guiding principles and the practices presented in this publication.

PART II

Understanding Culture

Because development is fundamentally a cultural process, program effectiveness depends on an understanding of the cultural group of which the child is a part. Cultural differences in conceptions of childhood, the roles of families and teachers in socializing children, and even in the purposes of education have forced teachers to rethink many personally cherished assumptions, values, and attitudes about what is the right and proper way to care for, educate, and socialize children. For example, a teacher who believes in encouraging self-help skills in toddlers may have a hard time accepting the fact that the mother continues to spoon-feed her two-year-old. Or, conversely, a teacher who believes that a child is better off if toilet training is delayed until the child is ready (e.g., at three to four years old) will feel uncomfortable with parental pressure to accomplish this by age one. Addressing these differences will involve the development of cultural competence, which is the ability to see cross-group similarities and to understand and appreciate differences.

Definition of Culture

Understanding cultural differences can open program staff to new ways of thinking about themselves and the world. But, what is the nature and source of these cultural differences? *Culture* is a broad concept that refers to the customs, values, beliefs, and practices of a group of people. It incorporates family roles, rituals, communication styles, emotional expression, social interactions, and learned behavior. Culture also refers to a shared way of life that includes social norms, rules, beliefs, and values that are transmitted across generations (Hill, McBride-Murry, and Anderson 2005, 23). Although cultural groups often share ethnic and linguistic backgrounds, these are not what define culture. Culture has

been described as arising from "a dynamic system of social values, cognitive codes, of behavioral standards, worldviews, and beliefs used to give order and meaning to our lives" (Gay 2000, 8). For example, views of whether both boys and girls should be educated, whether they should be taught through intentional instruction or by observing and working with adults, and whether they should learn discrete skills or acquire general knowledge may be prescribed by culture.

Culture infuses and is reflected in routines of daily living. Culture is a primary source of beliefs, attitudes, language, and personal efficacy (belief that one has control over and is responsible for one's life), sense of time (whether time is thought of in large chunks such as hours and days rather than precisely in terms of minutes and seconds), and perceptions of personal space. Culture is the source of the symbols used to capture aspects of life such as important life transitions, relationships, status and power, achievement, group identity, and meaning of life and death. Culture conveys a set of beliefs about how social relationships should be ordered and how the world operates:

> Culture . . . includes all facets of life, such as values, beliefs, behaviors and ideas. Though all members of a group may not share the same ideas or behavior, their cultural orientation provides a common framework for their lifestyles. For example, in American culture (i.e., U.S.), people may differ on political beliefs about the role and size of government, but almost universally believe that individuals should be free to dissent and have the right to express their opinions about government. Culture is learned and passed on through the generations. (Hanson and Zercher 2001, 414)

Each culture attaches value to specific life skills and dictates the practices used to promote them. Some groups show a preference for direct instruction and child-oriented activities, whereas other groups view learning as occurring most effectively through participation in adult or community-oriented activities. Cultural groups promote child development through socialization norms and practices and the emotional relationships they foster. Families differentially reinforce specific behaviors and nurture specific skills, while assigning a lower priority to other behaviors and skills. For example, in some cultures young children are provided with outlets encouraging energetic activities. Others may value and reinforce stillness and quiet. In some cultures, the notion of children's rights is well developed; in others, parental prerogative is more fully delineated.

In some cultures, children are afforded choice in many domains of life such as activities, dress, hairstyle, friends, and nutrition. In others, decisions are made by the adults. For some groups, cultural messages may signal how predictable life events

are and how much control one can have over undesirable life events and achieving success. Some see positive events as a blessing, good fortune, or a reward for virtue. For some cultural groups, stressful life events (such as natural disasters, illness, or economic misfortune) are random and inexplicable. For others, they are viewed as a punishment for misdeeds. In some cultures, unfortunate events are seen as a test and a challenge to be overcome.

Differences in cultural beliefs about the origins of stressful life events are important because they demonstrate how individuals react to and cope with life events. Some approach life events, illness, or disability as controllable and as a set of problems to be solved. Their efforts may focus on gathering information about alternative treatments. Cultural beliefs reinforce the mix of strategies that members of the group use to deal with controllable and uncontrollable strategies: from those considered as active problem-focused, control-seeking, or intentional to strategies considered as passive, emotion-focused, accepting, and surrendering; from individualistic and egocentric to group-centered and collaborative. At its most abstract level, culture embodies a group's identity, its collective aspirations, and the wisdom it has developed over time about life and how life should be lived.

Why an Understanding of Culture Is Important

Early childhood educators have, as their primary mission, the facilitation of child development. At its core, early development is a cultural act (Rogoff 2003, 3). Rogoff argues that development occurs as a result of children's changing participation in the sociocultural activities of their communities. In some cultures, children are not separated from adults and placed in same-age groups for the purposes of child care and education as typically happens in early childhood education settings. Instead, children are integrated into the productive and social activities of the family and community where they acquire adult skills little by little. They learn by observing and being a part of everything.

The idea of children being separated from the family's life may be a strange idea for some cultural groups. For example, for some groups a toddler is not sent to child care, but remains with her mother in the family place of business. The older sister, a teenager, instead of attending after-school functions, comes home right away to help out. Birthday parties present another example of settings that bring together children and adults. The idea of a young child inviting only other children may not make sense at all to some groups. Rather, a young child's birthday is more properly celebrated as an occasion with everybody in the extended family and adult friends as well. Children may be there, but it is not a children's party.

Development through participation in cultural activities also contributes to the strengthening of identity with ethnic group and family. Viewed in this way, development is conceived as a process of introducing a child into a particular way of being, looking at, and acting in the world. From birth, children internalize the perspectives, worldviews, and problem-solving strategies they observe and learn from the family.

What happens in families prior to the time children begin kindergarten lays a foundation for social–emotional and cognitive development that will affect later adjustment in school. Cultural influences on development may be discerned in the array of practices utilized, beliefs expressed, materials and artifacts used, the attitudes conveyed, the routines followed, the expectations given, and the roles defined. Language transmission is one of the most important cultural aspects of development. Culture provides specific experiences that impact children's perspective of the world and fosters specific worldviews that shape their behavior, create expectations about themselves, and point to the prospects of their future. Together these impact how children begin school, the knowledge they possess, the emotions they express, their understanding of social rules, the skills they have acquired, their receptivity to learning, and their acceptance of behavioral limits.

Some children are taught a language for giving expression to the range of their emotions and needs, whereas others learn to be more self-contained and do not express visibly the range of emotions they experience. Some children see their teachers as equal partners of activities, whereas others see their teachers as authority figures who need to be obeyed in all circumstances. Some children are used to considering other children's needs first, whereas others are comfortable with asserting their own needs and negotiating for what they want. For some children, exposure to extra-familial settings begins early in life. Even so, family life remains important to the child's formation, families share the care and teaching of children. Some babies are placed in child care from the first weeks of life, so they may already have the experience of crossing cultural boundaries by the time they enter preschool.

Children are primed by their neurological endowment and prepared by their cultural heritage to acquire oral language or sign language. The support of language acquisition by the cultural group is one of its key accomplishments and a principal means through which cultural transmission occurs. Language is important not only because it is a means of social connection and communication, but also because it represents an important way to learn about the culture and reinforce group identity. Before formal education begins, children begin to acquire competencies and skills that the cultural group considers important for maturation and independence as an adult. Sometimes this is conveyed directly through intentional teaching by the family. More often these skills are absorbed indirectly through select experiences provided in family life. For example, an older child may learn to take care of a younger one just by watching her mother or an older sibling.

As a consequence of all these factors, early childhood teachers will best position themselves to promote children's development by deepening their understanding of the changing cultural practices and circumstances children encounter at home and in their cultural communities. Box 2 on page 33 provides a set of domains on which staff members can base their inquiries into cultural experiences of the families with which they work. This means that to understand the perspectives, skills, and behavior of the child, it is necessary to have insights into families' cultures, what families value, and what skills that they attempt to impart. Early childhood educators often acknowledge this point in recognizing the importance of the family as the child's first teacher. Through experience many have learned that cultural differences sometimes mean that families have priorities for skills and competencies that are different from those of early childhood educators. For example, on one hand, families may train their four-year-olds to care for themselves and to assist in the care of infants and toddlers. Preschool programs, on the other hand, may view four-year-olds as dependent and not expect or encourage them to care for others.

Because development is fundamentally a *cultural process,* program effectiveness will depend on an understanding of the cultural group of which the child is a part. Cultural differences in conceptions of childhood, the roles of families and teachers in socializ-

ing children, and even in the purposes of education may force teachers to rethink their personal assumptions, values, and attitudes about what is the right and proper way to care for, educate, and socialize children. This will involve the development of cultural competence, which is the ability to see cross-group similarities and to understand and appreciate differences.

Distinguishing Between Ethnicity and Culture

Culture, language, ethnicity, race, and national origin are related concepts by which individuals are assigned to social groups, but they are not one and the same. For example, persons of African descent living in the Caribbean, Latin America, Nigeria, South Africa, or the United States may be classified as falling within the same racial category, but they belong to different cultural groups. Jamaican or Haitian families living in California may be lumped into the same racial or ethnic category as African American families that have lived in the United States for generations. Although language, ethnicity, and national origin may be associated with culture, none of them alone define a specific cultural group. For example, Spanish speakers in Europe, Mexico, Africa, Central or South America, and the United States share a language with common features, but may have divergent cultures and self-identify with different racial groups.

National origin—such as being from China, Sudan, or Peru—does not sufficiently specify a cultural group because within each of these nations exist groups with several distinct cultures. Racial group is sometimes confused with cultural group. Race is a social construct that has no basis in culture, biology, or genetics. Race is a social category that is based either on self-identification or how individuals are seen by others. This means that the traditional ethnic and racial categories such as those used in the U.S. Census are social categories that fail to specify culture even though they continue to be interpreted by many as cultural categories.

Similarly, a preschool population described as Latino is diverse and complex in ethnic, linguistic, and national origin and cultural perspective. Speakers of indigenous languages are common in Spanish-speaking nations. Many children attending preschool in California are, in fact, from native or indigenous speaking communities in Latin America. Many do not speak Spanish but rely on a native or indigenous language for communication. In addition, they may identify with any race. For this reason, the idea that all Latinos are white or nonwhite is also inaccurate. The idea that a large subgroup all has one big group identity is superficial and does not represent the reality today in California.

Ethnicity comes closer to defining cultural groups than race or national origin, but it is not a perfect match. *Ethnicity* refers to a group's identity and denotes a people bound by a common broad past. Members of an ethnic group often share a common ancestry, history, and sometimes language. To the extent that an ethnic group uses a common language, shares practices and beliefs, and has a common history, members of ethnic groups may be said to share a culture. However, ethnicity and culture are not always the same. Individuals may not necessarily identify strongly with the group to which they are assigned (in the minds of others). Nevertheless, ethnicity is a useful concept because it signals a group identity and a sense of connection and belonging. Culture has a different role in that it encapsulates the wisdom a group possesses regarding how it should live, solve problems, and think about its world.

Sometimes issues arise under the guise of racial or ethnic distinctions or cultural differences, but are really something else entirely. A problem situation in an early childhood program may appear, on the surface, to be related to ethnicity or culture, but upon closer examination it has little to do with those factors.

The issue between Tyrell and Mrs. Branch was not one of racial, cultural, or ethnic difference between family and teacher, but a lack of clarity about the basis of the relationship. Cooperation is the child's reciprocal response to the teacher's devotion to his care and well-being. What Tyrell did not understand but the teacher clarified by

VIGNETTE

Tyrell, a four-year-old boy, says to his teacher, Mrs. Branch, "My mom says I don't have to listen to you 'cause you are white!" After regaining her composure, Mrs. Branch bends over so that her eyes are even with Tyrell and asks him, "Tyrell, do you listen to your mom just because she is black?" With a somewhat puzzled look on his face, Tyrell shook his head, indicating no. "That is right," says Mrs. Branch. "You listen to your mom because she loves you and takes care of you. You don't listen to me because I am white, but because I take care of you, keep you safe, and want only the best for you."

using simple language was the nature of the relation and the implied social contract. The exchange is implicit but important: "Because I demonstrate how much I care for you by all the things I do to meet your needs—teach you and keep you safe—I can expect this to generate a response of trust in you that my directions are intended for your good." The teacher wisely chose to avoid seeing the confrontation as a question of race or of conflict with the mother. She did not assume that the mother had even said this to Tyrell. There is more to consider and perhaps do to nurture the relationship with Tyrell's mother. Mrs. Branch should ask herself a series of questions: *What feelings may come up for the teacher when she heard the comment? What family experiences may have influenced the parent to share such an idea with her child? What are the goals and desires of that parent about Tyrell as he continues his educational journey? How can mom and I work together to help Tyrell to continue to be successful?*

After reflecting on these questions, Mrs. Branch might start a conversation with Tyrell's mother and father. Mrs. Branch might use the questions on page 54 in Box 3, "Dimensions of Family Life Critical to Early Child Development," to guide her efforts to learn more about the family. After building some trust, she could discuss issues such as Tyrell's progress in school and his relations with peers. After some time, Mrs. Branch might share Tyrell's statement and listen to his mother's response. This could open up conversation about what his mother meant if she said it, the experiences that contributed to the beliefs underlying the statement, her goals for Tyrell, and how Mrs. Branch could work with her to achieve those goals.

Learning About Cultures

Culture can encompass a wide range of issues across the entire life span. To educate the child effectively requires an understanding of the whole child, the child's culture or specific family cultural dynamics, and social life at home. In efforts to understand individual or series of cultures within a family unit, the central challenge is to discern over time and adopt a nonjudgmental posture toward the beliefs, values, attitudes, norms, and practices that govern family social life. Authentic attempts to understand families' cultural frameworks help to build

quality partnerships with families that, in turn, reinforce teachers' work to strengthen children's readiness for school. It is especially important to become aware of the competencies that families possess.

The dilemma of Mrs. Peters, the mother who believed that she would foster children's development by not continuing to spoon-feed children old enough to feed themselves (cf. Zepeda et al. 2006, 17), provides an instructive example. Mrs. Peters has several choices. She could speak directly with the mother and "educate" her about the importance of self-help skills that, in her mind, are the pathway to a child developing into an independent individual. After all, there are research studies to back up this view and experts whose opinions were similar to her own. But, on second thought, Mrs. Peters tried to take the perspective of the family and consider the possibility that her way was not the only way to see the situation or necessarily the "one right way."

As a result, she set aside making judgments and simply observed the mother with her two-year-old and noted what she was doing. Mrs. Peters made it her goal to simply understand. If she adopted a posture of understanding the family, she might see strengths in the mother's approach. Mrs. Peters thought she might not recognize such strengths when guided only by her own beliefs. She might ask other people's perspectives on self-help skills—people from a variety of cultures. Eventually she might gently ask the mother, in a way that would not lead the mother to feel criticized and become defensive, why she still spoon-feeds her toddler. Mrs. Peters might get a number of answers, such as: "It's neater. I know how much he's getting. He's not wasting food. He's just a baby—there's no need to rush him." She might even hear the mother say, "Feeding is love." She might learn that there were earlier feeding challenges for this child. The mother might never say, "I come from a culture that values interdependence over independence." She probably would not say, "I think helping others is more important than helping yourself and I'm modeling that behavior for my son."

But the teacher might come to learn that is exactly what the mother is doing. The teacher might also realize that no matter how long a family spoon-feeds their child, there is no culture in the world where the adults are not able to feed themselves the way other adults in their culture do.

Listening to families with an open mind, noting their strengths, and understanding their perspectives offer a surer path to partnership and cultural awareness than teacher-dominated interactions or dismissing parents' views as uninformed. Staff members may find it challenging to adopt a posture of acceptance when encountering parental views such as those expressed by Ms. Elliot in the following vignette.

VIGNETTE

Ms. Elliot drops off her two-year-old daughter Sandra at the parent–child center before going to work. She tells the staff that Sandra is becoming more and more willful and defiant. Sandra dawdles and plays with her food instead of eating quickly so that they can leave the house on time. Sandra throws a tantrum when mother refuses to let her bring "teddy bear" to the center because it will get dirty. Ms. Elliot describes Sandra as mean and spiteful when Sandra cannot have her way. The mother's way to address the problem is to not give in and (in her view) reinforce Sandra's willfulness. She advises staff not to coddle Sandra because she does not want her to become spoiled.

Situations such as these require open and continual dialogue over time. A one-time conversation and reaction will not serve anyone well. Instead, a series of conversations are needed in which staff members listen patiently to the parent's views and concerns and, at the same time, share their observations of Sandra and offer their interpretations of the behavior they see, which may be somewhat different when Sandra is under their care. They may try to place Sandra's behavior in the context of what their experience suggests is typical for children of the same age. By sharing perspectives and experiences, program staff members can also reach agreement about the effectiveness of their strategies in achieving their common goals for Sandra's development.

This outcome is more likely to be achieved when teachers listen more than they talk. As is often said, "We have been given two ears and one mouth so that we listen twice as much as we talk." The pattern of a teacher talking and a family listening is an easy pattern to fall into. For some families, listening rather than talking is a sign of respect for teachers. This "lack of talking" should not be assumed by teachers as not having an opinion to express, or as a lack of English proficiency, or a shy personality trait. There are many reasons, one of which is a family's desire to behave respectfully as expected in their cultural group. *When staff members take time to listen, they tend*

to learn more about what families have to say. They can also practice open-ended questions that provide an opportunity for families to share information rather than say what seems to be wanted. For example, rather than pose a direct question to the family ("Are you still feeding him?"), a better strategy is to say "Tell me about mealtimes at home."

Without listening, early childhood program staff members lack an important tool for gaining cultural understanding and achieving the goal of preparing children for school. Through such an understanding, teachers and program staff members are better able to adapt strategies and approaches that are congruent with family life and culture, thereby increasing the likelihood of engaging families as partners in education for children. Showing respectful curiosity and inquiring about the child's world is a starting point. Engagement with families can grow and be translated into concrete efforts to learn about family history, home language and rituals, how the child spends time at home, what resources children have access to, and what symbols and artifacts children are exposed to, as noted above.

What aspects of culture are important for staff members to know? How should staff members approach the task of learning about the culture of the children in the program? Suggestions for answering these questions are presented next.

Exploring Dimensions of Culture

This section provides questions to ask to facilitate learning about a culture. Because of the diversity and **dynamism** of cultures represented in California's early childhood programs, efforts to profile cultural groups would be quickly outdated. The questions can guide the gathering of useful information about a cultural group. Box 1 identifies dimensions of family culture that can serve as a basis for reflecting on one's own cultural background or self-identity, and for assessing one's understanding of the cultures of the children served by the early childhood program. To assist the reader in understanding these dimensions, explanations and additional details for each of the dimensions are provided in Box 1.

Box 1. Dimensions of Families and Culture

- **Family structure.** The people who are defined to be "family" by the members, their duties, roles and authority, how they are organized, and the processes by which they carry out their functions.
- **Definitions of childhood.** Beliefs about and definitions of what a child is and what it means to be a child.
- **Socialization goals.** The behavior, skills, beliefs, values, and attitudes adults want children to acquire and to exhibit by the time they become adults.
- **Child-rearing practices.** The attitudes that govern child care and the strategies used to socialize children.
- **Gender roles.** The duties, responsibilities, and behaviors that are attributed to individuals primarily on the basis of whether they are male or female.
- **Identity.** Self concept, gender identity, the importance of skin color, beliefs, attitudes about self, groups that individuals see themselves as a part of and with whom they affiliate and have allegiance and loyalty. This can include the family's history and national origin that affect identity.
- **Individualism.** A dimension spanning individualistic to collectivist orientation. It is defined by the extent to which one focuses on self apart from the group, acting and thinking on one's own without deferring to the group. An embrace of the right to be different or to be oneself in contrast to considering group social expectations and gaining support that comes from a sense of group belongingness. At the collectivist end is interdependency, by which family members support each other automatically and provide help without question.
- **Spirituality.** Belief in existence of a nonmaterial world in relation to the child, the family, and the culture. A stance toward life that gives credence to and assigns importance to this nonmaterial world; belief in a higher power or spirit that has a positive influence over what happens in the world.
- **Emotional expression.** This refers to the range of feelings that members are allowed to express in the family context.
- **Social class.** Societies and cultural groups often arrange their members in some order from high to low power and prestige based on certain factors that may differ from culture to culture. These factors often include wealth, education, birth lines, occupational status, role, and age.

Box 1. Dimensions of Families and Culture *(continued)*

- **Celebrations.** The noting or marking of events of spiritual, social, political, or economic significance. Special foods, artistic expressions music, and rituals are often associated with celebrations.
- **Friendship circles.** Involvement in a network of close friends and acquaintances.
- **Civic engagement.** Community life; participation in political social or community decision making; devoting self to activities that improve the lives of others or increase community well-being.

Family structure refers to the composition, membership, roles, and organization of family life. This dimension pertains to who is in the family and how it is organized and defined by the family. Some families are organized with one or two adults in the leadership role. In others, an older sibling may function along with the parents in leadership. Extended and multiple adult structures exist in which the child's biological parents are subordinate to elders or grandparents who make critical decisions. Families operate within these diverse structures to carry out the critical functions of families to provide for the basic needs of its members for food, shelter, safety, health care, nurturance, and affiliation. The bearing and raising of children to maturity is an important function of many families.

Families have different definitions of childhood, beliefs, and attitudes about children and how they should be treated. Cultures vary in the extent to which children are viewed as fully formed, as having independent thoughts and capability, and the extent to which children should be dependent on adults. The extent to which children are seen as vulnerable and in need of watchful protection differs according to the culture.

Socialization goals refer to the aims parents have in raising children, including what they think children should know and the skills children should possess to become successful adults. The skills that should be taught and the manner in which they are taught are a central aspect of socialization goals. Teachers need to know the goals and the dreams or aspirations that families have for their children.

Child-rearing practices are the strategies that families use, the ways they care for and relate to children, and the things they do with children to achieve socialization goals. This may include standards for care, rules, discipline, use of sanctions and rewards, and direct and indirect methods of guidance and teaching. It can include practices such as praise, punishment, offering choices, limiting child autonomy, support, control, correction, and guidance.

Gender roles involve the definitions of a culture for what it means to be male or female. This includes the activities, responsibilities, work, dress codes, protections afforded, and power attributed to each gender. These roles may be tightly prescribed and distinct or flexible and overlapping.

Identity refers to the set of terms persons use to describe and define self. It refers to attitudes and beliefs held by the family and how it sees itself. The characteristics may be those that the group values or ones that set them apart from others as individuals or as a cultural group. This could also refer to an ethnic, racial, or religious group in which the person claims membership or to which the person feels a sense of loyalty and holds beliefs about sharing a common past and future.

Individualism denotes the extent to which there is an emphasis in a society or cultural group on personal freedoms and autonomy versus considering the needs of the group. It has to do with the relative right to be oneself, to be different over the need to conform to social expectations, or respond to the need for unity and acquire the benefits of group "belongingness." It is unlikely that a culture can be described as being purely individualistic or purely collectivist. All cultures vary in degrees of emphasis on individualism versus collectivism.

Spirituality refers not so much to an affiliation with a religious community, but to a set of beliefs about the existence of a nonmaterial world and the relations of the family to it. Spirituality may or may not include religious communities or groups.

Emotional expression refers to the extent to which emotions are suppressed or allowed to be expressed. The feeling tone of some families may be marked by frequent negative emotionality, and for others positive feelings may dominate, and still others may limit emotional expression.

Social class denotes the different ways cultural groups stratify individual members and indicate their status relative to others. In American culture, it is often a combination of wealth, education, occupational prestige, and location on the social hierarchy

in the community. Social class can also include terms like *low socioeconomic status, middle class,* or *working poor.*

Celebrations represent a family's way of marking important events. The events may be individual (birthdays, saints' days, milestones), or group (Sabbath dinner, Thanksgiving). The celebrations may have cultural connections or be unique to the family.

Friendship circles and ***civic engagement*** are concerned with the social relationships and commitments families have to the world outside of the family. This dimension refers to a family's beliefs about how involved it should be in school, neighborhood, or community issues; in local, regional, or national politics; or in supporting institutions that serve the common good.

These areas represent important dimensions of family functioning and beliefs. Understanding how a family's functioning falls in these dimensions provides a window into how the family operates and conveys important clues about what each child may bring into the early childhood center. This can be helpful in creating a bridge between the child's world at home and the child's experiences in the early childhood program. Reflecting on these aspects of family life and learning from responses to queries about them can deepen the understanding of the family and of the values, beliefs, perspectives, and practices of the cultural groups that shape the child.

Box 2 on the next page lists questions that can be posed to obtain information about each dimension. These questions can be used to formulate ideas about one's own and the children's cultures, and to understand their family life. These questions provide an opportunity to reflect on one's own cultural beliefs and the impact of one's cultural perspectives and experiences on judgments about the cultural beliefs and practices of others. The questions are focused on aspects of family life, beliefs, and practices relating to these diverse dimensions. The appendix contains queries that can be used in various settings with families: home visit, parent conference, workshop, parent orientation, or enrollment.

Box 2. Issues to Consider in Learning About Families and Cultures

Below are issues to consider about one's family and culture and the families and cultures of the children served. The questions are phrased in a form that is NOT suitable for an interview of families. Some questions cannot be answered because they operate at an unconscious level. They are not intended to be posed directly, but are for reflection, to help assess one's own understanding of important aspects of one's own family and the lives of the families served. Information and insights relevant to these dimensions can come from many sources: interactions with families, reading, conversations, and observations of families in action.

Family Structure

- Who is considered a member of the family unit?
- How rigid or flexible are the boundaries that define family membership?
- How are responsibilities, privileges, decision-making authority, and power allocated among family members?
- Who are the primary caregivers?
- How are the important functions of the family carried out and by whom (i.e., meeting basic needs for food, shelter, safety, and support; socialization and care of dependent children)?
- To what extent are emotional closeness and communication fostered and with whom?

Conceptions of Childhood

- What is the family's view or conception of children? Who and what is a child? For example, are three- to four-year-olds seen as innocent, vulnerable, and incapable of making choices or as sturdy and independent?
- Do four-year-olds possess intentions, motives, and personalities at this age?
- What capabilities are seen as typical and expected by age three or four?
- How much independence is tolerated and promoted?
- What responsibilities do young children have to the family?
- When is someone no longer considered a child?

Socialization Goals

- What competencies and knowledge are cultivated?
- What traits are considered moral and virtuous?
- How important is it to develop knowledge of the home language and cultural practices?

Box 2. Issues to Consider in Learning About Families and Cultures *(continued)*

- What moral virtues are promoted in its stories?
- How are cooperation, empathy, equity, fairness, and justice treated in daily life?
- What value is attached to formal education?
- What do family members perceive as their role in the education of their children?
- How is the role of the teacher envisioned?
- What is the status of teachers in the minds of parents?
- What is the relationship that families have to program staff?

Child-Rearing Practices

- What are the best and most appropriate methods for raising a child?
- Does the family believe in notions such as "a bad child" or "spoiling" a child?
- What is the content of those beliefs?
- What methods are deemed appropriate for reinforcing desired behavior and for disapproving unacceptable behavior?
- To what extent are practices such as physical punishment and time-out accepted and used?
- What are family practices regarding care of the child such as feeding, cleaning, napping, and dealing with illness?
- What is the place of support, affection, or parental responsiveness to the child's expressed needs and wishes?
- How acceptable is the use of corporal punishment or psychological coercion, and under what conditions and limitations?
- Are there limits to adult authority over children?
- What are the family practices, routines, and norms related to child feeding and napping?

Gender Roles

- Are males viewed and treated better than females?
- Are specific skills, attributes, prospects, and expectations held for each gender?
- Are resources, opportunities, and responsibilities allocated differently by gender?
- Is there concern about gender identity or about sexual orientation?

Box 2. Issues to Consider in Learning About Families and Cultures *(continued)*

Identity

- What is the content and what are the markers of the cultural group identity?
- What activities, characteristics, and beliefs define who belongs and who does not belong in the cultural group?
- What themes surface in the narrative or history of the family's cultural group?
- Are there themes of persecution, **exceptionalism,** prosperity, deprivation, glory and stature, superiority with respect to other groups, **communalism,** respect for the environment, spirituality?
- Who are the heroes?
- Are music and the creative arts important to self-image?
- What place does work life and career development have in the formation of personal identity?

Individualism

- Is individual autonomy valued in the cultural group?
- Are the rights and preferences of the individual allowed to trump the needs and preferences of the group?
- Are individual freedoms recognized and respected?
- Can individuals go their own way, follow their own path, or must they defer to the wishes of the group?
- Are violations of group norms by individuals tolerated or punished severely?
- Are individual behaviors thought to reflect negatively on or have consequences for the entire family?
- How are individual rights balanced against responsibilities to the collective?
- To what extent are individual wishes and needs seen through the lens of the family's well-being?

Spirituality

- Does the family express a set of beliefs about the nonmaterial aspects of existence?
- What is the nature of the family's spirituality? What **metaphors** are used to understand, note, or celebrate life transitions?
- Is there a notion of good and evil?
- What is the relation of humans to nature, and what level of respect must be accorded to the natural world and all forms of life?

Box 2. Issues to Consider in Learning About Families and Cultures *(continued)*

Emotional Expression

- Are emotions and their expression, for example, tolerated, accepted, or encouraged?
- Are children permitted to express feelings openly? If yes, under what conditions are they permitted or discouraged from the expression of feelings?

Social Class

- Does the family make social class distinctions?
- On what bases does the family categorize others as members of a particular class?
- With which social class does the family identify itself?
- Does the family cross the boundaries of social class in its social affiliations?
- How rigid are these social class distinctions?
- What are the family's attitudes about members of other social classes?

Role of Work/Career

- What is the role of work and career in the life of the family?
- How important is work/career?
- Does family life take precedence over career advancement?

Celebrations

- Does the family commemorate the anniversary of any event or regularly mark any day of the year as special?
- In what ways are these occasions celebrated or marked?
- Does the family celebrate these occasions with others not of their group?
- Does the family prohibit celebration of events, such as birthdays, recognized by other cultures?

Friendship Circles

- What relationships exist with people outside the family?
- Who is considered a friend?
- How extensive is the family's circle of friends and who belongs to that circle?
- What functions do friendship networks serve for families?

Box 2. Issues to Consider in Learning About Families and Cultures (continued)

Civic Engagement

- What importance is attached to engagement in civic life? For example, participating in groups for community improvement, exercising the right to vote and to petition government for a redress of grievances, donating goods or money, or volunteering time to meet the needs of others in the community?
- What level of involvement in civic life do they see or want for their children?

Collectivist Versus Individualist Cultures

A feature that has often been used to distinguish societies and cultural groups is where they fall along a continuum from individualist to collectivist orientations. This refers to a tendency in some cultural groups to consider the family, group, or clan as the basic unit rather than the individual person. In societies at the individualist end of the continuum, the focus is on self rather than the group. In decision making, priority is given to the needs, wishes, and desires of the individual person. Personal autonomy and freedom are valued. Individuals assume the right to make choices free of unwanted external influence based on what is good for the person.

In collectivist societies, the self is defined principally in terms of identity with the group (Roland 1988). The good of the whole takes precedence over what may be good for the individual at the expense of the collective. In societies at the collectivist end of the continuum, children are imbued with the sense that their behavior will reflect for the good or the bad on the rest of the group. They may be instilled with a sense of shame if they behave in a way that reflects badly on the group. In a family with an **individualist cultural orientation,** each child has his or her own possessions. In some families with a more collectivistic perspective, private ownership is downplayed and everything is shared. When the family has that perspective, they may require sharing from infancy on; whereas someone with a child development background or a more individualistic orientation might hold the view that the child must understand the concept of

ownership before he or she can become a truly sharing person and that understanding usually starts in the second year of life. Sharing of the program's toys and materials is expected; however, if the child brings something from home, possessiveness is expected and there may be different rules about that in the program.

When the group's position tends toward the individualist end of the continuum, the child's behavior is seen principally as a reflection of his character and is controlled by the natural consequences that fall on the individual child. If the child does well, it is considered an achievement of the individual child and reflects the child's growing competence. If the child in an individualist society does poorly, it is a sign of lack of competence. As an example of child-rearing perspectives in an individualist society, a child who is overactive and disruptive in an early childhood program may be seen to have a neurodevelopmental difficulty such as attention deficit hyperactivity disorder. Family members may feel bad, but the disorder may be seen as residing within the individual child. In a collectivist society, the overactive behavior may be seen as reflecting the child's stubbornness and disrespect for the teachers. Because the behavior is viewed as the manifestation of an attitude and is something within a child's and family's control, parents perceive it as reflecting negatively on the family.

Along the same line, teachers and parents may have different approaches, different developmental goals, and different expectations about the future for children with disabilities. In the United States, school culture is typically individualist in nature. Individual differences are emphasized, as reflected in testing, penalties, and rewards. Teachers may think that all children learn differently, and children with disabilities need to learn in individualized ways. Parents may think that these children should just put in more of the same efforts as the other children. Teachers may regard developing independent learning and life skills as the priority for children with disabilities. Parents may insist on the same goals for children with disabilities as for typically developing children, or they may expect children's lifelong dependence on them (Hwa-Froelich and Westby 2003).

In individualist societies, the consequences of behavior fall on the individual child. The impact on family may be considered but is not the primary concern. In a **collectivist culture,** the implications of a child's behavior apply to the entire family group. In collectivist cultural groups, the notion of *person* or *individual* is a foreign one. People think in terms of the group. Actions, choices, and decisions are driven and motivated by the impact on the group. Conformity to the group's norms and attention to group needs, wishes, and desires are primary. Typically, it is adults, especially the elderly, who give voice to and interpret group aspiration and needs and establish

consequences for failure to put the group first. Collectivist views have several features associated with them, including a view of self based primarily on the perspective of the "familial self," in which individuals are seen not as isolated entities, but as embedded in family and community contexts (Bhattacharya and Shibusawa 2009). These views and beliefs are often reflected in the value and priority attached to family relationships that are made explicit in living arrangements built around extended family living together or being in frequent contact (Gurak and Kritz 2010). These ties are reinforced by financial and psychological interdependence among family members and through respect and deference accorded to the elderly (Nandan 2007; Yee et al. 2007).

Individualist versus collectivist orientation should be understood as a tendency in a society rather than an absolute characteristic. Few would claim that pure forms of individualist and collectivist societies exist. Both orientations exist in most cultural groups, to varying degrees. This tendency is especially relevant in the context of teaching and learning, where children whose families emphasize a collectivist orientation may be more familiar with learning settings that focus more on group experiences and learning, while individualist orientations focus on individual work and learning, not in relation to the group. Individualist and collectivist orientations coexist within the same society. In the end, these are not yardsticks that provide an accurate measure of a society, but a set of lenses that help in understanding some aspects of a cultural group.

VIGNETTE

Ms. Lind enrolls her eighteen-month-old daughter Petula in the Lasay Fair early childhood program. She tells Señora Garcia, the head teacher, that Petula has been taught to share since birth. At Lasay Fair, staff members do not expect children of that age to understand sharing. They allow the children to work out their issues in struggles over toys, with a teacher close by to be sure that no one is hurt.

From day one, Petula seems to overlook the lessons about sharing she mastered at home. She adapts quickly to what appears to be an environment in which anything

VIGNETTE *(continued)*

goes. Petula grabs toys right out of the other children's hands. Señora Garcia and Pepe, her assistant, respond merely by saying, "Paul doesn't like it when you grab the toy." Ms. Lind is horrified when she sees this. In a parent–teacher conference, Señora Garcia and Ms. Lind talk about their different ideas about sharing. Señora Garcia acknowledges that there is a problem related to the differences in the approach at school and at home. She asks Ms. Lind to elaborate on her concerns. Ms. Lind explains that she comes from a big family, and ownership was not part of her upbringing. Personal property is downplayed in her home, and she does not want Petula to learn to be selfish and possessive. Señora Garcia reassures Ms. Lind that she understands and agrees with her concern that Petula learn to share. She notes that children at the age of three do not understand the idea of sharing at first and that the program's experience has been that children gradually learn to share from the give-and-take that goes on with peers. She asks Ms. Lind's permission for a trial period of a few months to see if Petula responds to the program's approach just as other children have in the past. Señora Garcia promises to revisit this issue in the next parent conference to discuss how things are going.

Myths About Cultures

Answers to questions about cultural groups must be examined carefully for common intellectual traps: essentialism, overgeneralization, assumption of stability, and uniformity.

Myth 1, Essentialism: It is possible to learn all there is to know about a culture by studying its traditions, beliefs, practices, and attitudes.

Essentialism is the belief that the complexities of culture can be adequately captured in a finite set of facts. In truth, it is nearly impossible to reduce the essential and distinguishing features of any culture or cultural group to descriptive statements or lists of characteristics. For example, the fostering of children's autonomy in individualistic cultures and relatedness in collectivist cultures may be an oversimplistic description of cultural differences. Some parents in both types of cultures may endorse both autonomy and relatedness.

Some may consider early relatedness between family members as a path to future autonomy, or early autonomy as a path to the goal of future relatedness (Tamis-LeMonda et al. 2008). In learning about a cultural group, it is easy to believe that what one has learned about a group, such as values and

practices, captures the essential nature of that group and that the group is distinguished from all other groups by that characteristic. Unless caution is exercised, discussions of cultural differences can easily slip into reinforcing stereotypes about a group. So descriptions provided in response to queries should be interpreted loosely as a partial depiction and not as capturing the essence or a distinguishing feature of a group. Any feature or characteristic ascribed to one group can often be applied to other groups. Just because a feature is ascribed to one group does not mean that other groups cannot be similarly characterized. Traits or behaviors attributed to one group may be found in other groups, but that does not necessarily mean they are a basis for distinguishing one group from another.

Myth 2, Overgeneralization: Cultural practices and beliefs apply in the same way to all members of a cultural group.

Cultures are dynamic and constantly evolving in response to such factors as environmental conditions, new challenges, technology, and acculturative pressures resulting from close encounters with other cultural groups. Cultures that are in proximity borrow from and are influenced by one another. Historically, the United States has been a beacon of multiple cultures. For example, the African cultures during the slavery period of the country strongly influenced Anglo and European culture in the United States. The Spanish and Mexican period of the U.S. Southwest and California transformed and helped shape the American culture to take on practices, food, and music from the Latino culture. Numerous examples highlight the cultural contributions of many other immigrant groups as well. Within a group, cultural shifts may occur as a group rises in economic and social status to take on behaviors and attitudes of the new social class. Once someone has made the effort to learn about a group, it is convenient to believe that it will apply to all members of the group under all circumstances and over time. Even though a particular characteristic may be accurately ascribed to an ethnic group, many members of the group may lack that feature or behave in a different way. This is the intellectual trap of **overgeneralization.** In forming an understanding of families, one *must avoid reliance on stereotypes.*

Families who belong to a single cultural group do not necessarily behave, think, and feel the same way. No matter how much is learned about a particular group, it is essential to remain open to the possibility that things may be different for some families. Some cultural beliefs or assumptions may not be applied generally to every family belonging to that group.

A fund of knowledge about a group is just a starting point. A set of assumptions can be tested, clarified, and changed as one learns more about an individual family. For example, on the question of gender roles, one may start with the assumption that a member of a particular cultural group holds traditional beliefs about gender roles or about education because of one's past experiences with that group. This assumption might be inaccurate. A family belonging to this group may encourage the women in the family to go beyond the expectation and limitations imposed on female children. The point to be emphasized here is that there are differences within cultural groups or ethnicities. For example, just because some families identify as Chinese does not mean that they are of the same ethnicity. In addition to the majority Han population, China officially recognizes 55 ethnic groups with distinct cultural identities. Even within the same ethnic groups, families may not employ the same practices or adhere to the same values.

In most cultural groups, there are important social class distinctions that lead to profound differences in practices and values. Customs, language, beliefs, and values associated with social class are not the same as the attributes ascribed to cultural groups across class. It is sometimes difficult to discern the difference between factors attributable to cultural differences and those that are more properly attributable to social class differences that may cut across cultural groups.

It may not be possible to distinguish a clear line between the two. However, it is possible to reduce the confusion by understanding that both culture and social class contribute to families' beliefs, attitudes, and ways of life. Culture may be confounded with social class, especially among immigrants, because the poor are more often motivated to move by the promise of a better standard of living. Which actions are attributable to poverty, and which are properly attributed to cultural difference? The effects of poverty are not the same as the effects of ethnicity.

Parents of the same culture vary in many ways, such as their educational level, family income, as well as experiences and knowledge of other cultures. As a result, not all parents behave in the same way. For example, some groups of parents (e.g., Chinese) have been found to adopt a more authoritarian style of parenting than other groups of parents (e.g., North American). However, research has shown that many Chinese mothers of two-year-olds had an authoritative style by using low-power parenting strategies such as information exchanges, suggestions, and explanations, while other mothers showed high-power parenting behaviors such as strict rule enforcement and prohibitory strategies. Parents who were more educated tended to adopt low-power strategies. These parents tended to have children who participated more in mother–child communication and were less resistant and defiant. At preschool age, these children were found to be less aggressive in social situations (Chen et al. 2000, 2001). Perhaps the best protection against the tendency to overgeneralize from information about a cultural group is to concentrate on developing a relationship with the family, focusing on what is interesting and unique about them.

Myth 3, Assumption of stability: Cultures are static, constant, and stable.

The shared system of beliefs, morals, values, attitudes, practices, roles, artifacts, symbols, and language that make up a culture are adaptive, dynamic, and in constant flux in response to changes in the social context. Customs, beliefs, and practices develop in a specific context of challenges, and life problems to be solved. Old solutions give way to new ones in the face of new experiences, new knowledge, and the failure of old ways. Old ideas must be revised to accommodate emerging trends and changes in settings, environmental conditions, and across generations in families. Cultures change in response to strains, opportunities, and altered social landscapes. Learning and relearning must take place continually. In describing cultures, the best that can be achieved are time-limited snapshots.

Myth 4, Single-culture assumption: Within a home and family, a single culture predominates.

Many people assume that families and all the members of the family subscribe to a single culture and identify with one ethnic or cultural group. This is not always the case. Barriers between cultural groups are breaking down, and the number of families with more than one cultural identity is

increasing. Factors such as migration, cross-group contact, acculturation, and marriage across cultural groups have contributed to this trend. The result has been a blending of several distinct cultures and ethnic identities within a single family. This means that individuals living with a single family may reflect not one, but several cultural traditions. In these families, there are divergent values and an amalgam of practices and beliefs from different cultural traditions. This engenders a rich mixture of cultural perspectives, mores, norms, and approaches to solving problems of daily living. One can only speculate about the benefits for children of exposure to diverse perspectives on the world. This mixture of cultural perspectives should be embraced, of course, by teachers in the early learning setting or classroom.

Some children have parents who come from two or more cultures. Each parent may unconsciously implement practices that flow from his or her own culture but which may be inconsistent with the cultural practices and expectations of the partner. For example, one parent may feel that it is natural to feed the child until an older age, whereas the other parent prohibits such behavior. One parent may totally avoid using physical punishment, while the other parent routinely uses physical punishment. Sometimes both parents adopt the same cultural values and practices, but the other regular caregivers of their child, such as children's grandparents or extended family, may adopt a different approach. Such differences may arise from the different levels of cultural adaptation that have occurred among these individuals. Such differences may create tension among caregivers if not carefully resolved.

When working with families with these experiences, one needs to be aware of the various cultural forces present in the family, learn the different roles each caregiver plays, and facilitate communication among the family members.

Support Development of the Home Language

Language is not the same as culture. Persons speaking a common language do not necessarily share a common culture. For example, persons speaking Spanish in the United States are culturally distinct. They have different histories, different immigration patterns and legal status. In addition, there are even linguistic differences in accents, idioms, vocabulary, and speech cadence. The Spanish spoken in the United States varies across generations and has evolved as a result of the sociopolitical relationship developed in their communities (New Mexico, Texas, California, New York, Florida); Spanish dialects, national, and regional differences reflect nations or regions of origin (Mexico, Guatamala, Panama, Cuba, Chile, Peru, and so on). Chinese (Chinese spoken in the United States) across the generations varies from the Chinese spoken by newcomers from China and Southeast Asia. Nevertheless, language is often a central element and sustaining feature of culture. Reliance on a common language is a principal means through which culture is conveyed and cultural identity maintained (Barth 1969). Language, with its vocabulary and idioms, provides a common way of thinking about and representing shared experiences. It reflects how groups frame common experiences. Language is a deep symbolic representation of culture.

Language is one, though not the only, means of establishing identity with a group. To that extent, language is a feature of culture. But, in the case of a dual language learner, language is more. For children growing up in homes in which the spoken language is not the language of the program and the dominant culture, language is a source of mystery and ambivalence. Language embodies the merger and the clash of two cultures, an occasion for ambivalence and divided loyalties and a child's unconscious fear that embracing the language of the family or the school may mean abandoning the other.

Program staff members have an important role to play in helping children and families in this situation navigate the language issues and attain the goals families have for children regarding language competencies. For many families, language is not an easy issue to resolve. In some families, children grow up as monolingual English speakers—even though their home language was not English. Some parents stress English because they worry more about their children's need to be fluent in English than in maintaining the home language. Staff members may be helpful to parents in making this choice by pointing out that it is possible for children to become competent bilinguals as well as the advantages of continuing to develop in their home language. One advantage may be that interactions between young children and parents or other adult family members have a playful quality that bonds children to adult family members. If the adults are not fluent in English, the playful interactions may be lost.

Below are a set of insights and practices suggested by the California Department of Education in *Preschool English Learners: Principles and Practices to Promote Language, Literacy, and Learning* (CDE 2009b). These ideas and suggestions are not specific to second-language learning, but provide ideas about fostering language development in general in preschool programs.

Young children use language for different social and cognitive purposes and learn not just the language, but different forms of it with certain people or in certain situations. Children may employ more formal usage when speaking to elders, teachers, and child care providers and less formal language in other social settings, such as at the playground, with siblings, and with other children at a child care center. For example, a child anticipating the visit of grandparents to the child's preschool program might say to other children on the playground, "Mama and Papa want to come see me 'round snack time. I be glad to see 'em." The same idea might be expressed in a slightly more formal way to teachers: "My grandma and grandpa said they are coming this morning at around 10. I'll be happy to see them." Academic language, the language used at school and in books, is still different in vocabulary and form from language that is spoken on the playground and at home. The academic version of the same idea might be expressed this way: "My grandparents plan to arrive at approximately 10 a.m. I look forward to their coming with great excitement." Programs can help children learn these different uses. Knowing different usage of a language can be very helpful to children and valuable in their social relations (CDE 2009b, 17).

Because not all children have had the same experiences in learning how to talk, they may have different expectations about how they should interact with adults or other children. "Heath (1983) found that children used to being asked unknown-answer questions at home were baffled as to why teachers would ask known-answer questions when the response was usually so obvious. As a result, these children participated less in class" (CDE 2009b, 27).

Preschool English Learners: Principles and Practices to Promote Language, Literacy, and Learning (CDE 2009b) discusses strategies that teachers can use to offer children a variety of experiences in talking with adults:

- Structure activities so that children can engage in telling stories or recounting events by expressing themselves through various means, such as speech, pantomime, pointing, and role-playing (CDE 2009b, 28).
- Remember that children benefit from experiencing different types of interactions with adults and with peers, including cooperative and peer-oriented activities as well as more independent activities (CDE 2009b, 28).
- Accept silence or quiet observation as a proper way for some children to participate, especially when they first join your class (CDE 2009b, 28).
- Remember that ways of expressing feelings, such as excitement, anger, happiness, frustration, and sadness, differ in various cultures. For example, children may show excitement by shouting and jumping for joy, by smiling and offering a coy look, by showing no outward signs while inwardly experiencing anticipation, or by sharing with a friend or a trusted adult the fact that they are excited (CDE 2009b, 28).
- Note that children from different cultural backgrounds may interpret a single action by the teacher to have contrasting meanings. For example, a teacher may point to signal where she wants the children to go. But, some children may think she is reprimanding them, singling them out for some reason, or saying she wants "one" of something (since she has one finger out) (CDE 2009b, 28).
- Vary wait time, the amount of time you allow children to respond. Children from certain cultural backgrounds find the pace of verbal interactions in U.S. schools very different from what they are accustomed to (CDE 2009b, 28). Some children need the time to process the information.
- Make sure that your classroom environment reflects the children's cultures and languages in each learning center; on walls, windows, and bulletin boards; and in educational and play materials (CDE 2009b, 28).
- Draw children into conversations as much as possible by exploring the meaning of their ideas. Be a good listener and promote the children's talk by smiling, nodding, and saying "hmm," "really," and the like. Respond to what the children have said by showing that you understand and prompt more speech or communication. Parents and teachers also help by using open-ended questions, restating what children have said and elaborating with additional descriptors and more complex language, modeling complex language.

Encourage children to role-play and engage in extended language activities with one another. Let the children talk about their feelings. Model this practice by sharing your feelings with them. Model language by playing imitation games in which the child has to do or say what the adult or a puppet says. It is important to speak clearly and to model appropriate language for the children. Use puppets and flannel-board stories to encourage children to participate orally. Encourage children to bring objects from home that can be described and talked about at school. In this way new vocabulary can be tied to the children's experiences. Verbalize what you are doing as you carry out activities. If the activity is repetitious, repeat your verbal description. This approach helps the child link language to the activity (CDE 2009b, 40).

- Allow trial-and-error speech. Accept mistakes in pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammar. Children should experiment with the sounds of the language just as they do with other components. Serve as an English-language model for all children, especially those learning English as a second language. Expand the children's utterances. Repeat the correct grammar and vocabulary without correcting the child. Encourage the children and model ways to elaborate or expand their utterances in the home language and in English. These elaborations can happen during social and instructional conversations, reading activities, or play (CDE 2009b, 41).

- Celebrate a child's attempts in using a new language. Learning a new language requires effort by a child. Children need support. Like adults, they do not enjoy being laughed at when they make mistakes in the new language. Point to objects as you name them and coordinate actions with language. Emphasize key words in sentences. Repeat important words in context (CDE 2009b, 41). Preschool teachers who do not speak a child's language can team with family members and other staff members who speak that language to establish ways in which the development of the home language can be continued (CDE 2009b, 43).

- Learn how to say "hello" in each of the languages represented in your classroom. Build this multilingual greeting into arrival or circle time. Teachers can use the same strategy for any other highlighted vocabulary, such as the word of the week or the month. For example: "How do you say *car* in your home language?" Share information on the development of first language, second language, and bilingual language with parents and family members throughout the year to ensure that they are aware of what they can do to foster home-language and (when appropriate) second-language development (CDE 2009b, 43).

- Share information with families about interaction techniques used in the preschool program, such as listening, following the child's lead, expanding the child's utterances, and showing interest and attention. Encourage family members to read to each other literature that is valued in their home, including stories of their culture (e.g., parent to child, sibling to other sibling, child to parents, grandparent to child). Have English learners and English-speaking children teach each other a few phrases in their home language (CDE 2009b, 43). If a child's family uses sign language, that too can be taught to others in the program.

- Point out to the children the many advantages of being able to speak two languages or communicate through more than one system, such as speech and signing. Have classroom objects labeled in English and the children's home languages (CDE 2009b, 43).

PART II

Understanding Contemporary Families and Households

Similar to cultures, the nature and forms of family life are dynamic and change over time. In the United States, many common forms of family life and household arrangements evolved in response to changing social and economic conditions. Each has strengths and challenges, but all are significant to understand in terms of their unique contributions as settings in which children are being raised. When viewed as systems nested within community networks, families give rise to life experiences that vary considerably in ways that can have important implications for how children present, act, and view the world by the time they enter early childhood programs (Barbarin 2004). What are the most important things early childhood staff should know about factors that affect lives and outcomes of children in the families and households in which they are being raised?

This publication identifies three dimensions of family life critical to early childhood development: family composition, social strains, and resources (see Box 3 on the next page). Family composition addresses how households are organized and family relationships are ordered. Culturally based family strengths refer to the resources that help families cope with stress and determine the extent to which they thrive. Social strains are the serious stressors and daily difficulties that families encounter and with which they must cope. Resources refer to the cultural strengths that help families cope with stress and determine the extent to which they thrive. In the face of seemingly overwhelming odds and signs of family difficulties, it may be easy to overlook cultural strengths and underestimate their importance in working with families. Each of the three dimensions can be used to pinpoint key features of children's experiences at home that shape children's development (Barbarin et al. 2006). Together they provide a way to organize information about family functioning and its impact on child development.

Box 3. Dimensions of Family Life Critical to Early Child Development

Family Composition

- Single-adult household and the "support networks"
- Multiadult household
- Multigenerational household
- Complex multifamily households
- Extended family; **fictive kin** (i.e., persons who are not related by blood, but who are viewed and treated the same as blood relatives)
- Grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins as primary caregivers
- Foster families
- Adoptive or blended families
- Families headed by gay or lesbian couples
- (In)Visibility of fathers, men
- Role of siblings in household and care of the young
- Stability/instability of family composition and household membership

Culturally Based Family Strengths

- Assurance of support from extended kin networks in time of need
- Ethnic or cultural group identity, solidarity
- Bilingualism/Multilingualism, Multicultural
- Believing in personal control over outcomes in one's life and simultaneously aware of the impact of discrimination
- Spirituality
- Oral traditions; storytelling
- Family values transmitted across generations
- Social, economic, spiritual, health, and emergency support provided by ethnic and linguistic communities
- Formation of community enclaves consisting of groupings of families that come together to provide support to one another

Family Strains

- Economic hardship, unemployment, poverty
- Vulnerability to socioeconomic status-related risks such as poor health, crime victimization, and lack of knowledge about how to gain access to resources
- Experience of stigma, prejudice, discrimination; linguistic isolation

Box 3. Dimensions of Family Life Critical to Early Child Development *(continued)*

Family Strains

- Exposure to violence; trauma
- Immigration status: documented versus undocumented; anti-immigrant sentiment
- Acculturation, assimilation
- Residential instability, homelessness
- Disability, chronic health issues, mental illness
- Military deployment
- Incarceration of family member
- Death of significant family members
- Level of education in the family; limited literacy

Family Composition

Who is family? There is increasing diversity in the ways that families and households are structured and in the criteria used to determine family membership. In an analysis of household composition reported in a representative sample of American families, more than 70 different family household configurations were reported. These configurations were defined in terms of the number of generations present and the relationship of people living within a single residence (Barbarin and Soler 1993). In addition to the family forms that include two biological parents and their children, these family configurations include single adults raising one or more children; households in which multiple adults of the same generation such as siblings or friends raise children together; single-gender couples with children; households in which children live with parents, grandparents, and great-grandparents and any combination of the above. Families often respond to economic recessions and downturns by home-sharing in which two or more families (some unrelated by blood) live together, sharing household expenses and duties and exchanging child care. Often these arrangements are temporary and shift as economic fortunes wax and wane with employment. These variations in family composition do not mean variations in parental commitment to children or parental ability to support and participate in the child's preschool experiences.

VIGNETTE

In the Tender Lee Center, children live in a variety of households and are growing up in a range of family structures.

Sammy lives in a traditional extended household with two siblings, his biological parents, paternal grandparents, aunt and uncle, and three cousins.

Sara and Thomas live with their two mommies, Cora and Tracy.

Juan and his five siblings live in a nuclear family with his two biological parents, but it becomes an extended family when his grandparents come and stay to care for them for months at a time when both parents have to work long hours or travel a lot.

Peter lives in two blended households. He spends three days a week with his mother, her husband, and new baby. He spends the other four days with his father, his father's girlfriend, and her daughter.

Paul lives in a group foster home with eight foster children. His own siblings are scattered around different foster homes. His father is in prison, and his mother is in a drug rehabilitation program.

Johan's family is homeless. He does not live anywhere consistently. He and his three siblings use his grandmother's address for school, but he is there only some of the time. He moves to an aunt's home for a couple of days and then may stay at another relative's home. He cannot remember living anywhere consistently since his mother lost her job and her apartment and had to move in with a friend.

In some families, very close friends not related by blood are elevated to the position of a relative and accepted as part of the family. These fictive kin may be **comadre** (godmother), **compadre** (godfather), may be called an Auntie, or just a friend with whom the family has had a close, enduring relationship. In some single-parent families, the mother's **"girlfriend"** acts as a confidante, a source of help, and a person whose advice and opinions are highly influential on the mother.

One family restricts its definition of family to the three members living under the same roof and consisting of a mother, father, and one biological child. Another family describes their family has having multiple members—almost too many to count—and include many extended family members. If others are asked, they are likely to count people who have passed on as well as those still living. Some people even include pets as family members. For example, a grandmother is the head of the family, and she had six children, four of whom are still alive. The three children have different fathers, two of whom are still involved with their children and grandchildren. The grandmother has 16 grandchildren, and not all of them are blood relatives. She also has five great-grandchildren so far. Aunts and uncles of the children include blood relatives and family friends and are also great aunts and uncles of the children. The numbers change sometimes, but the extended family and kinship network remains as mutual support for the family members. Another family consists of a gay man who is father to the child of a lesbian, who has a partner. The two birth parents, though they do not live together, are raising the child together, along with their partners.

Grandparents as primary caregivers. There has been an increase in the number of elderly persons who have been thrust by circumstances into caring for young children. When biological parents are not able to carry out their roles, grandmothers are the surrogate parents of choice. For example, in the wake of an epidemic of drug addiction and incarceration that occurred since the 1970s, grandparents have increasingly been pressed into service as primary caregivers for their children's offspring. Grandparents—particularly grandmothers—also play an especially important role in many families by providing support for mothers caring for their children.

In some cases, grandparents take on the role of primary caregivers. This occurs in cases where the mother or father is not available to care for the child. For a number of reasons, such as death, substance abuse, imprisonment, chronic illness, military deployment, remarriage, deportation, excessive work hours, and so on, a parent is not able to be involved in the day-to-day care of the child. When there is a case of abuse or neglect, grandparents will often step in as the parent to prevent the children from being placed in nonrelative foster care or to keep the siblings in one household. Some-

times the child may be thrust into the role of caregiver. For example, a child may be sent to live with a grandparent to forestall loneliness or to help in interacting with the English-speaking world. Grandparents face many difficulties. They are often strapped financially. They may be less knowledgeable of the world and less able to maneuver around it. They may not be able to monitor children as closely as needed due to fatigue or physical limitations.

Families headed by gay or lesbian couples. Increasingly, programs may serve children growing up in families headed by a same-sex couple. The children may be the biological offspring of one of the partners, or the child may be adopted. In either case, many of the questions and developmental issues that arise in adoption or in blended families may be evident here. They are like other families that have to organize themselves to care for and support their children. One member of the couple may take greater responsibility for relating to the center and serve as the point of contact and communication because that person transports the child to the early childhood program. Depending on the composition of families attending the program, they may experience social difficulties as a part of the program community. Staff members should be vigilant and look for ways to smooth the family's entry into the social environment of the program as they would for other families. More pressing may be the likelihood that the children or the families may be the target of prejudice and discrimination. Other children may take a cue from their parents' discomfort and shun the child. These situations become teaching opportunities for program staff just as they are when discrimination is based on ethnicity, social class, or special needs. Perhaps the key operating principle is that families headed by gay or lesbian couples want what everyone else wants: to be treated fairly and with respect, to be supported in educating their child, and to contribute where they can to the program's community life.

(In)Visibility of fathers and men. There is wide variation in a father's role in the family between and within cultural groups. In some groups, fathers are omnipresent and take a leadership role in relation to the early childhood program. In some families,

men adopt more flexible gender roles and take on a much broader array of household duties and may have primary responsibility for the care of children than is true in other groups. Although the proportion of single-adult households headed by women is high, men continue to play key roles in their families and contribute significantly to the effectiveness of family functioning. Even in the household structure that is nominally female-headed, men in general, and biological fathers in particular, often play an important role. In other families, it is sad to say that fathers are often invisible to the child and have little contact with staff.

Census data pointing to increasing rates of births to unmarried women among all ethnic groups often overlook the functional emotional importance of nonresidential biological fathers to their children. The relationship between mothers and the biological fathers who do not reside with their children often dictates the level of involvement that noncustodial fathers have with their children. When mothers report that the relationship with the child's biological father is good, it is often a sign that fathers have a relationship with, or care for, and provide a level of financial support for the child. If biological fathers are minimally involved, other figures such as stepfathers, grandparents, uncles, cousins, and nonmarried partners may be instrumentally and regularly involved with the children. They can be an important resource in how the program works with the children and should be explicitly invited to events or meetings intended for children's families. Another phenomenon is the increase in the numbers of single men who have taken responsibility for the raising of their children. Though the increase is small in number, early childhood professionals should be aware of this trend and address it in their programming.

At all socioeconomic levels, fathers' involvement is significantly related to young children's development. At age 24 months, children with fathers who were didactic, positive in affect, responsible, and emotionally attuned to children showed enhanced play and cognitive skills (Shannon et al. 2002). Fathers who have more education, who have more of a supportive relationship with mothers, and who have strong family values tend to be more involved in their children's lives.

Some fathers become less involved in their children's lives at different times. Longitudinal research has shown that prenatal and preschool periods are the two most likely periods for this to happen. Thus, finding ways to support fathers' parenting and to get fathers more involved during the preschool years can significantly benefit children's development (Shannon et al. 2009).

Older siblings caring for younger siblings. In many families, siblings make important contributions to family functioning that affect the well-being of young children. When partners, grandmothers, or other adults from the extended kin network are not available in the household, older siblings, especially female siblings, may take on the responsibility to assist the parent in the care of the household. When single parents are required to work multiple shifts and be away from home during nonschool hours, siblings supervise, feed, admonish, and protect younger siblings. Sibling caregiving may occur for a reason other than children taking the place of a missing adult. In some cultural groups and families, acting as caregivers for younger siblings or elderly, infirm relatives living in their homes is a typical and expected role for children. That is how the family works. Responsibilities delegated in this way to children promote early maturation and independence. Children used to being responsible and caring for others face interesting dilemmas when they bring these behaviors and approaches to early childhood settings. They are used to serving others and making decisions about activities for themselves. Consequently, they may be deemed inappropriate, bossy, impatient, or even oppositional because they are expected to defer and wait for adults to meet their needs or the needs of their peers and direct movement from one activity to another.

Summary. The concept of the family as the "child's first teacher" takes on a broader meaning when family composition is considered. It should be noted that some families do not see themselves as the child's first teacher because they see the teacher's role as "teaching." Instead, they may see their roles as socializing agents to rear a well-behaved child. Culture and family circumstances influence which adults are most involved in a young child's learning and development as well as the degree to which they see "teaching" as their role. The adults who are responsible for a child on a day-to-day basis have a deep understanding of the practices, beliefs, and values that guide a child's developing behavior. Accordingly, staff members will need to expand their view to include these extended family members, fictive kin, and "friends" when they reach out to parental figures caring for the children served in early childhood settings. For example, a grandparent in the family's fictive kin, an aunt, or an uncle may be able to give insights into the life of a young child and work together with teachers to support the child's continuing learning and development. To build

connections between home and the early childhood program, teachers need to partner with the adults who are most active and influential in a child's life.

As noted earlier, the family compositions represented in the populations served by early childhood programs are quite diverse. Staff members typically develop strategies for accommodating this diversity. Sometimes problems arise for staff members because the children and families they serve have not yet acclimated to the social changes this diversity represents. The problems can sometimes emerge in the interactions among the children who are puzzled by and react negatively to the differences or the stigmatizing comments made by some parents about others. A situation in one program may be an example: Katie is overheard by staff members saying to Martin: "My mommy says I can't play with you because you have two mommies living together at your house." It is unclear whether Katie really understands what she is saying, but the situation represents a teachable moment for the children and the staff.

A series of books may be read in circle time that introduce children to different types of families and point out what is common to all (i.e., adoptive families, foster families, single-parent families, multigenerational families, and families led by a grandparent or a gay or lesbian couple). These families represent different ways that adults come together to take care of and love the children they have the responsibility to raise. For some families and staff members, this may represent a complex issue in which they are caught between creating a safe and supportive environment for children who have two mommies and respecting the concerns of parents who, for religious or other reasons, promote a different view at home. In such cases, staff members may need to check with families and meet with them before circumventing what is said at home.

Culturally Based Family Strengths

Resilience and coping. Many families must deal with the stressors associated with economic hardship, residential instability, and immigration. Most are resourceful and resilient and have faced the difficulties by relying on a range of coping strategies. In times of difficulty, families often turn to personal and cultural resources that include culturally based spirituality, ethnic group identity, social support from extended kin and community, and interpretive frameworks or worldviews that help them to adapt to problems psychologically by placing them in a broader context (Barbarin 1983). For example, the parent in one family with a child who is seriously ill spends a good deal of time in church praying. The parent in another family with a child who is seriously ill studies the various alternatives to Western medicine to figure out what can be done that has not yet been tried. The parent in a third family with a child who is seriously ill turns to her close relatives and circle of friends for emotional support and for help

with her other children. The parent in the last family with a child who is seriously ill schedules extra visits with a therapist to help her through this hard time. One of the most important aids to successful coping is access to social support. As noted earlier, many families are grounded in extended family and community social support systems that provide emotional and instrumental resources to assist in coping with life problems. Additionally, the child care center can be an important part of the social network and resources for a family.

For some, religion and spirituality are another critical resource for coping. They provide a foundation for coping by connecting families to a providential and protective higher power with which they have developed a personal and comforting relationship (Taylor and Chatters 1991). In addition, spirituality and religious faith provide additional benefits through participation in a social network of members who belong to the same spiritual or religious communities and who provide instrumental aid and emotional support.

Coping with racial slights and other forms of discrimination also forms an important part of the socialization experiences of some children. Children may be taught about the existence of discrimination and shown it will affect expectations about them and others' efforts to limit their success. They can overcome the effects of discrimination by not blaming themselves for the experience, but by maintaining a positive view of self, rejecting negative representation of their people, and working harder to overcome stereotypes. By knowing who they are and in identifying strongly with their ethnic group, families forge a strong sense of identity by which they buttress themselves and join with others to overcome the challenges of racism. This perspective on the self and sensitivity to discrimination help them to sustain efforts when times are difficult.

Cultural resources, such as kin support, spirituality, and ethnic identity, have been important factors over time in strengthening the capacity of some families to cope with adversity. The critical point here is that staff members should look to see what things families (under any stressful conditions) do well, particularly with fostering the development of their children. Program staff can be uplifting when families feel beleaguered by the strains in their lives. Staff members can note and highlight for the family how well they are doing in providing a stable, supportive environment for their children. They can organize family appreciation events for struggling parents so that the parents know that there is someone who appreciates their efforts to make a better life for their children in spite of obstacles.

Use of extended kin networks. The extended family is made up of the myriad of relatives outside the immediate nuclear family and includes aunts and uncles, cousins,

and grandparents. This network of relatives can be essential to the capacity of families to cope with adversity. This is especially true of households headed by single mothers. Even when single mothers and their children do not reside with other kin, the money, time, child care, and emotional support that kin folks lend substantially enrich single-parent households. The extended family is the most likely source of social support and instrumental aid. However, when needs are great, the resources of extended kin may be depleted, leaving families on their own or to the generosity of nonfamily friends and strangers.

Valuing achievement, effort, and persistence. In some ethnic groups, the value of effort and the importance of hard work are explicitly expressed. Children raised in these cultural traditions tend to exhibit learning styles strongly oriented toward learning and achievement. In the face of competencies that are difficult or challenging to acquire, such children need relatively little encouragement to persist in their effort in spite of early failure. For other groups that do not provide explicit feedback about progress, feedback and positive reinforcement may be needed to move children beyond initial discouragement and frustration to help them sustain efforts during learning difficulties. With a keen awareness of the reality of racism in their lives, families in some groups exhort children to recognize what must be opposed and understand the necessity of working twice as hard to succeed in life. Children and their family members will experience greater success in early childhood programs that acknowledge and respond to these differences in worldview and approaches to motivation used by the family.

Family Strains

Contemporary families undergo strains that often affect the well-being of their children.

Economic hardship, poverty, and unemployment. Economic downturns have a way of accelerating and highlighting a disturbing trend in the economic status in America: the impoverishment of children. Poverty implies insufficiency of economic resources to meet basic needs for food, clothing, and shelter. In 2008, about one in five American children were growing up in families whose household income fell below the federal poverty line. More than a third of African American and Latino children were growing up in families that face hardships associated with low income. The deprivation associated with poverty is challenging enough in itself, but poverty contributes to a host of other troubles:

- Maternal depression, which often deprives children of responsive, available mothering

- Low educational attainment
- Limitations of coping resources
- Residence in distressed and sometimes dangerous communities
- Frequent moves and food insecurity
- Physical illnesses and inadequate medical care

All of these have dire consequences for children's health, well-being, and development of skills needed for success in school. That said, the message here is not that being poor is bad. The message is that it is difficult.

In various cultures, well-educated and higher-income parents have the information, the time, the financial resources, and the social connections to achieve family goals. Parents with lower incomes or less exposure to formal education may do it differently. They may not be aware of safety rules (e.g., how to use fire escapes; wearing helmets while riding a bicycle) if the rules did not exist in their native countries. They may not have learned the relation of oral health to general physical health. Alternatively, they may understand these issues very well, but not have the time or financial resources to take advantage of what they know.

Socioeconomic status also influences children's nutrition intake. Parents in lower socioeconomic groups may buy inexpensive foods that tend to be less nutritious, sometimes because their local food stores carry more processed food and fewer fresh vegetables or fruits. They may not be fully aware of the harm some foods or drinks can do to their health. For example, Olvera-Ezzell et al. (1994) found that Mexican American children (four to eight years old) in California knew little about how soda can be bad for them. Mexican American children from low-income families have higher rates of obesity, diabetes, accidental injuries, and poorer oral health than other ethnic groups do (Barker and Horton 2008).

However, most issues linking poverty and stressors for young children point to noncultural sources such as lack of health insurance and access to health care professionals. Parents with low incomes have been reported to have even lost their jobs because they needed to take time off from work to take their children to medical or dental appointments.

Early childhood educators can play an important role in helping families to address the effects of poverty. Barker and Horton (2008) mentioned that often it was the preschool teachers who referred their Mexican American students from low-income families to see dentists.

VIGNETTE

A group of teachers in a program providing service to children from low-income families complained about parents. "Some parents just don't care about their children," one said. They all agreed. A social worker overheard the conversation and asked them to elaborate on why they thought some parents did not care about their children. They were quick to reply: "They don't come to open houses." "They never volunteer in the classroom." "They don't volunteer for field trips, either." "They skip meetings, even when it's a parent–teacher conference." The social worker asked, "So why do you think they behave that way?" Their answers were: "They just don't care" or "they are too lazy." The social worker asked another question: "How did you get to work today?" It turned out that almost all of them drove their cars except for a couple of them who lived close to each other and took turns driving.

The social worker's next question was, "How many of those parents that you're talking about have cars?" The teachers were silent. The social worker knew some facts that they were ignoring—(1) Few of the families owned a car, and the vehicles they owned were subject to frequent breakdowns; (2) the bus system was inadequate. The social worker had more questions. "How many of you can get off work during the day to go to your child's school?" That started a big discussion among the teachers about the problem with coverage, issues with substitutes, and program policies. The conversation ended with the teachers reconsidering their earlier complaints. They had a greater understanding of some of the issues facing the families in the program.

Residential instability and homelessness. Without employment and subsidized housing, families experiencing poverty have increased odds of residential instability and becoming homeless. Coping with low incomes means that families may have to move often as they fall behind in rent or mortgage payments and are forced to relocate to less costly housing. Initially, some families cope by moving in and doubling up with another family.

As a long-term strategy, moving in with others often proves unworkable and is a stop-gap short-term solution to a long-term problem that, if not resolved, leads to homelessness. Moving in with family members is not necessarily unworkable—often children can spend more time with relatives, get more care and attention, and if this housing arrangement translates into parents' finding work, then it can have benefits.

In the direst of circumstances, unemployment not only means losing one's livelihood, but also losing a home and a way of life. It is very difficult to rebound and resume one's previous life once a person becomes homeless. Homeless people often become

ineligible for social services because of the lack of a permanent address. Children face a difficult time enrolling in preschool or remaining in one after their families have lost a place to live. Within the space of a single year, it is not uncommon for children to move multiple times, sometimes doubling up with relatives or family friends. The movement goes two ways: It may also mean having relatives or friends move in when they have lost their homes or income. The composition of a given household may fluctuate as children and adult kin are shifted from one household to another. This is sometimes reflected in the short-term verbs children use in response to questions about their residence. When asked about their address, children may use the word "stay with" instead of "live at," as in "I stay with my grandmother" to convey that it is an **episodic, transient,** or temporary arrangement and that they are without permanent roots.

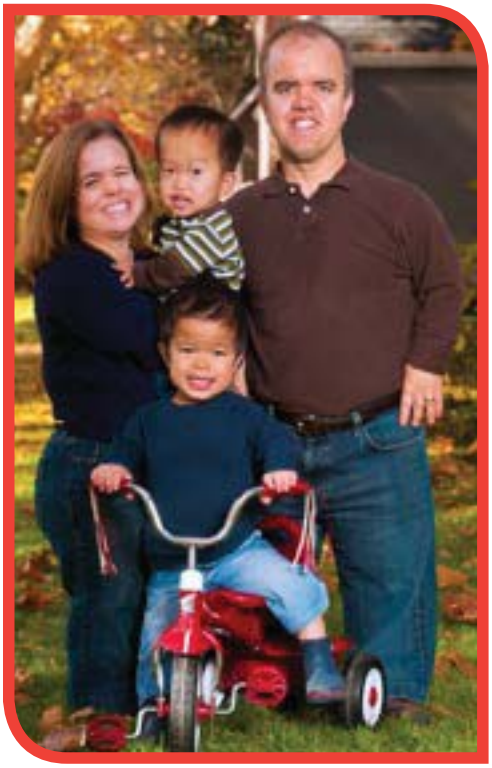
Families of children with special needs or special health care needs. Special needs and special health care needs include a variety of conditions such as birth defects, developmental disabilities, neurological disorders, and chronic illnesses that can be life threatening or impact daily living (e.g., cancer, sickle cell disease [or anemia], cystic fibrosis, hemophilia, AIDS, diabetes, juvenile rheumatoid arthritis). A more comprehensive definition of who is included in the rubric of children with disabilities or other special needs is found in *Inclusion Works!* (CDE 2009a, 4):

- Children with a specific diagnosis or disability by medical or educational professions
- Children who may not have a diagnosis but whose behavior, development, or health affect their family's ability to maintain child care services

Regardless of the disability category, the demands on families of children with special needs and chronic illness are considerable and cut across domains that include medical, financial, social, and existential (Chesler and Barbarin 1987; Hanson and Lynch 2004). Program staff should appreciate the extraordinary time demands and frequent financial strains experienced by a family caring for a child with special needs. This means that families sometimes may not be available to participate in program activities or that their financial resources and employment opportunities may be constrained by the requirements of caring for the child (Chesler and Barbarin 1987). To work well and collaborate with families of children with special needs, program staff members need to understand how families see themselves and the strains and adverse conditions they endure.

Families' expectations of life for their children and themselves may be based on their own experiences while growing up, their interactions with professionals and friends after a diagnosis, and the way their children are treated. Sometimes families

encounter people with good intentions who look on them or the child with pity, who see the condition of the child and think only of the child's fragility, or of the potentially tragic consequences of the chronic condition. Others may view the child as a gift, a blessing, and a source of joy. In fact, families of children with special needs respond in a variety of ways. Many come to value the child for who the child is and focus on what the child can do rather than on the chronic illness or disability. Whereas people outside the family may look at the child and see a "disability," these families see a child with unique capabilities.



In any case, family members will have to develop a vision of the future for their child and for themselves. Powerful resources for families include adults with disabilities and disability-specific organizations. Many organizations work to inform and empower persons with disabilities and provide an understanding of the "disability cultures" that exist. One parent mentioned the organization Little People of America (LPA) as having a significant positive influence for her and for her son who was born with dwarfism. She felt that the cultural values promoted by the LPA helped parents develop a renewed sense of who they are as a family and who their child is in the world. Many groups are national, often with local chapters (e.g., National Down Syndrome Association, Autism Society of America, National Association of the Deaf).

Families raising a child with a disability or other special needs often absorb the values and norms of the disability organization, which helps to shape and define the family culture in a positive way. Other families find support from other parents whom they meet or from general family support organizations, such as the Parent Training & Information Centers available in every state or Family Resource Center/Networks in California.

Many families of children with special needs strive to provide as typical a life for the child as possible, filled with inclusive opportunities to participate in the activities of childhood. Teachers who collaborate with these families become partners by helping the family participate in a broad range of activities and contexts as full members of

families, communities, and society. The desired results of inclusive experiences for children with and without disabilities and their families include a sense of belonging and membership, positive social relationships and friendships, and development and learning to reach their full potential. High-quality early childhood programs exemplify the defining features of inclusion of children with disabilities or special needs: access, participation, and supports (DEC/NAEYC 2009).

Inclusion of the child in the activities and life of the program is just a start. Just as important is helping other children to see the person, the personality, and the capabilities of the child with special needs. Programs can work with families to clarify expectations and expand the opportunities for what is possible physically, socially, and educationally for the child with special needs.

VIGNETTE

Davy was enrolled in a child care center at the age of 10 months. He stayed in the infant center until he was three years old. During that time, he was diagnosed with autism. Both his parents were college students and worried that the infant care teacher might not be able to support his needs. The early intervention program was able to provide inclusion support visits twice a month and help the teacher learn ways of recognizing how Davy communicated and ideas for helping him participate in small-group activities. He also received home visits twice a month.

Davy made progress, was most comfortable playing by himself or close to his teacher, was using only one or two words, and seemed very wary of new people. The center intended to have him transition to the preschool classroom in the same center after his third birthday. The local school district recommended that Davy come to a classroom setting for some focused intervention during the morning hours. Davy's parents were concerned about so many transitions for him. They wondered why he could not stay with the younger children. They worked with the child care center director, who had experience with including other children with special needs, and made a plan for the transition.

The director shared her thoughts about the benefits of Davy being with some older children. The family preferred that suggestion rather than move him to a program in the school district because they would still need care in the afternoons. They requested that he stay at the child care center full time for at least the next six months after his third birthday. In the IEP (individualized education program), it was agreed that the family and the child care center would receive regular visits by the special education teacher and the speech therapist, who would provide suggestions and support. The special education teacher and speech therapist would visit him on alternate weeks. His parents agreed to take him to speech therapy at the school district two afternoons per week.

VIGNETTE *(continued)*

In the child care center, the family, the infant care teachers, and early intervention staff members were able to share what Davy enjoyed, what upset him, and how they had supported him. The center director, preschool teacher, and his father were able to visit an inclusive preschool setting and see the types of interventions used. They noticed many visual supports, including pictorial schedules, visual prompts for many of the daily routines, and much preparation for transitions throughout the morning. They also approved of the idea of integrating speech therapy activities into the classroom. The special education teacher showed them many examples, and they brought those ideas back to the child care center.

The parents worked with the infant care teacher to make a book about Davy moving to the preschool classroom, and they included the schedule as part of the book. The same pictures were used as a visual schedule in the room. The preschool teacher identified one of the older children, Tomas, in the room to be a potential "buddy" for Davy. It was arranged for Tomas to make some visits to the toddler room and play near Davy, then Davy was brought to the preschool classroom for some visits. After about one month, he was spending all of his time in the preschool classroom.

The speech therapist had many suggestions for ways to use pictures to encourage Davy to communicate in school, and soon Davy was using pictures actively with the teacher and Tomas. After the six months, everyone agreed that Davy was doing well in the center, and plans were made to continue supporting him there.

Long-term parental absence. Many families experience the separation of a parent from the home for periods long enough to have an impact on the child's life. These events can have an adverse effect on the parent's meaningful involvement in the child's life and the parent–child relationship and interfere with the parent's connection to the family. The separation may be voluntary or involuntary and due to diverse causes:

- Incarceration
- Military deployment
- Hospitalization
- Migration for the purposes of employment

Children may experience confusion, sadness, loneliness, bereavement, and feelings of abandonment as a result of this separation. The nature of the impact will depend greatly on how the family interprets the separation to the child and the steps taken to maintain the connection to the missing parent.

Child care programs can play a facilitative role in helping families to cope with long-term separation by providing the child with ways to reach out to the distant parent. The first goal of such intervention would be to give the child multiple opportunities and venues through which to express feelings and beliefs about the separation. The child may have worries about the safety and well-being of the parent and should be allowed to express them. Teachers can provide support in correcting misperceptions and providing reassurance that the child is loved, cherished, and will be protected. Through letters, drawings, or other means, children can be given opportunities to express their love and affection for the parent.

The goal is to help the family maintain the child's connection with the parent and help the parent to remain a part of the child's life. This connection can be maintained by keeping the parent informed about the child's activities and newly acquired skills. The child's artwork and photographs could be sent to the parent along with notes that teachers help the child to "write." If more sophisticated technology is available (such as digital audiotape and video recordings), the child could record messages, and videos of the child's activities could be made to keep the absent parent connected.

Immigration status. Immigration represents another form of uprooting that is a significant source of strain for many families. Immigration, whether it is voluntary or involuntary, poses challenges to families and children. Sheer environmental change and the pressure to acculturate to the United States place significant burdens on families and children. Mastering a new language, learning new ways, adjusting to new customs, and understanding and conforming to different legal systems are just a few of the challenges facing new arrivals. If these were not burdensome enough, immigrants are often stigmatized and experience disrespect and discrimination. Immigrant families are also at the center of a contentious public debate. This debate brings with it tensions and hostilities that place immigrant families under intense scrutiny, giving rise to anxieties about their own physical safety and the well-being of their children.

Immigrant parents struggle with many issues that impact their young children. High on the list is the lack of English-language skills. Immigrants from cultures in which parents

rely extensively on relatives for child care may send their infants back to their home country to be cared for by relatives for an extended period of time. Or, unable to understand English at a basic level, they may not learn about the educational and health resources in the community. For example, a mother who wants to bring her toddler to attend activities in the local library may not be able to do so because the activity announcement flyers are in English.

Acculturation and fitting in seem adaptive, but they create ambivalence about the loss of the culture and society that nurtured them. Another strain exists for families who lack documentation of their immigration status and may live with constant fear of deportation of one or both parents.

Immigrant parents may have to rely on strangers met on the playgrounds (who speak their language) to find an early childhood program for their children simply by hearing which program the stranger's child goes to. A grandparent may be embarrassed each time she sees her grandchild's teachers because she does not know how to pronounce the multisyllabic names of the teachers as her language has mostly monosyllabic words. Parents from some cultures may not understand at all the concept of fund-raising, and the practice remains alien to them when the system is not explained to them adequately in their native language (Hwa-Froelich and Westby 2003).

The socialization of children represents another dilemma that families face. For those concerned about the adjustment of their children to a new setting, questions arise about how much to immerse the child in the language and customs of their new home versus supporting the language and customs of their country of origin. *Should they spoon-feed their children and toilet train them early, as back in their home country? Should they not use physical punishment when their children misbehave? When their children talk back to them, should they be engaged in a discussion or be reprimanded? Should fathers become their children's playmate or keep a distance from their children to maintain authority? Is there a midway point between the different practices in the two cultures? What is the best for their children in the new environment? These are just some of the questions that preoccupy the minds of new immigrant parents.*

Decisions about how to maintain and support the home language often pose difficulties for families. Families are not certain about what is best for their children. Because learning one language does not impair the ability to learn a second one in the long run, and fluency in multiple languages is an asset, it seems reasonable to encourage retention of the home language at the same time the child is learning English (CDE 2009b). Fear about making the wrong decision often paralyzes families, so they avoid making a choice and do not seek resources or support. As a consequence, they may not choose

or know how to ensure that the child is developing appropriate literacy skills in both languages. However, when the approach to supporting a young dual language learner's development is left to chance, the child may not develop adequate skills in either language. Early childhood programs can make important contributions by assisting families with information in both languages so that the child develops proficiency to communicate with their family in the native language and use English in the early childhood program and interactions with peers. Programs can support the child's development of the home language by encouraging the family to continue use and teaching of the home language and providing or directing families to books and activities supportive of that goal. The program should also make sure the family receives, in the home language, the information needed to remain involved in the child's school.

Impact of Family Stress

There are several implications of family stress for program staff and the potential for success with children whose families are affected by it. The effects of stressors are cumulative. Stressors such as economic hardship, unemployment, homelessness, and immigration status may make it more difficult for families to establish a strong relationship with program staff. The instability caused by the stressors and lack of resources may mean that families are unable to take part in activities and programs designed for parents and families. Residential instability affects the child's routines for eating and sleeping. Stressors may impact children's attendance and their behavior and attitude toward learning when they do attend the program.

To serve a child effectively, program staff members need to be aware of disruptions in the child's life due to economic conditions and other difficulties the family faces. In these situations, program staff members may need to go beyond the typical methods for reaching the family to make sure they establish contact with families who are difficult to reach. They should reach out to parents when they see changes in the child's behavior, fatigue level, grooming, and disposition. When the family is in distress, program staff members should do everything possible to keep the child in the

program. The program may be the one place in the child's life that is free of turmoil and may make a significant contribution to the child's ability to cope with family distress.

The situation of a family about to lose its apartment is a telling example. A reduction in the mother's hours at work makes it impossible to pay the rent. This is a highly stressful situation for the adults, but no matter how much the adults try to keep their concerns from the child, the child may sense the tension and be strongly affected. Because the family is unsure where they will live, the mother shares with the center staff that she may not be able to keep her child at the center. In such a case, the staff tries to identify resources to help. Staff members may find a nonprofit organization that handles low-income housing in the neighborhood and can help the family. These extraordinary efforts on the part of the staff are motivated by the importance of keeping the child's life as normal as possible and maintaining the same routines. This has proven to be the most successful strategy in helping children weather the storm of disruptions in family life (California Childcare Health Program 2004).

PART IV

Culture, Family Life, and Early Childhood Curricula

In what ways can knowledge about the diversity of children's experiences in family and culture be used in curriculum planning? Can convictions that these early experiences are important for school readiness guide efforts to make curriculum more responsive to ethnically and culturally diverse children? Such issues will be considered in this section, which addresses insights about family functioning and culture as they relate to the *California Infant/Toddler Curriculum Framework* (CDE 2012) and the *California Preschool Curriculum Framework* (CDE 2010, 2011, 2013) domains. The purpose of this section is to review research findings and scholarly insights that may be useful to early childhood educators who are implementing the components of the curriculum framework domains established by the California Department of Education (CDE). In particular, the section will summarize findings and insights about what families do (family practices); what they believe (their perspectives) about the skills children need to be ready for school; and the methods families use to guide, socialize, and explain phenomena to their children.

General help in this task came from the work of Bernal, Bonilla, and Bellido (1995; Bernal et al. 2009), who proposed a model to guide the modification of educational interventions to make them more culturally responsive. The value of this model is its identification of the places where curricular adaptations might be made. This publication translates the elements of their model into a checklist that program staff members may use to guide and evaluate their efforts to make their practice more culturally relevant (see Box 4).

Box 4. Guides for Enhancing Cultural Responsiveness of Teaching and Learning

Relationships initiate and build open, socially meaningful connections and emotionally close relationships with the families of the children served.

- Move from thinking in terms of child-centered programs to family-centered programs. When the focus changes, it is possible to build the kinds of honest relationships that support both teachers and the family. When you have a relationship with the family, you are in a position to learn more about that family and the child. It will be hard to learn though, if you set yourself up as experts. You may know much about child development and educating young children, but you cannot possibly know everything about every family and every culture in the program. Put yourself in the role of a learner. However, be careful about going beyond professional boundaries. One may be friendly, of course, but there are some pitfalls in becoming a friend to each family in the program.

Content take time to become familiar with the values and beliefs of the cultural groups in the program.

- Learn about the culture of each family though observations, discussions, and questions. Teachers are not anthropologists, but they can learn some approaches that anthropologists use. You can learn about the values and beliefs of the cultural groups in the program only by understanding individual families. Patterns may be noticed, but one must be careful not to overgeneralize. Check what you learn about families and be willing to make mistakes, which are bound to happen.

Context Identify the ways in which the preschool program's culture is different from home culture.

- Teachers' observations, discussions, and questions can help reveal the cultural issues. You may have to "read" beneath the parents' polite conversation, but if you are open to learning, you are sure to find some places where what is happening in the early childhood program collides with what the parents want to have happen. Parents may respect your position as a teacher too much to tell you outright what displeases them. You may have to be like a detective and figure it out.

Persons think deeply and often about the role of culture in personal relationships with a particular child or group of children.

- Consider your own culture when you pay attention to personal relationships with a child or a group of children. Are you aware of your own culture? How have you incorporated "early childhood" culture, such as developmentally appropriate practice, into your beliefs, values, and

practices? You need to reflect: How well does the program and what happens in it fit teachers' culture? Teachers are also cultural beings. That fact matters.

Language Use culturally respectful language and alternative modes of communication to promote understanding.

Think about how hard you work to use the language that is most meaningful to each child. If you work with infants and toddlers, you read many nonverbal cues and use both nonverbal cues and spoken words. Some teachers get very good at using and reading nonverbal cues. That skill is an asset in working with older children who speak a language that teachers do not speak or who use alternative communication systems.

Metaphors Incorporate culturally meaningful symbols, sayings, and images of persons into the program; bring in family pictures, posters, and ways in which families communicate in everything that is done and in the environment created. It is important to be inclusive and ensure that the symbols are incorporated into the early childhood setting. Representations and symbols of children's culture can be included in the physical space. Children need to see reflections of some of their cultural materials or symbols of their presence in the environment. Centers with little diversity of culture should still represent cultures and families that are not a part of the center.

Goals Frame child-learning objectives in ways that reflect the values and goals espoused by the children's culture. For example, in early childhood, some parents focus on social skills more so than on cognitive goals. They may want their children, at this age, to learn to get along with others, gain practical information, and acquire self-care skills more than they care about learning in areas such as numeracy, literacy, or drawing. Other parents may focus on learning objectives that place greater emphasis on numeracy, literacy, or drawing than on social skills.

Methods Consider how the teaching methods used in the preschool program fit within the children's cultural context and values. Ways to modify teaching and communication strategies to match those of the children may be explored. For example, Western approaches to teaching and learning often emphasize achievement as an individual enterprise in which children's abilities are measured in relation to the achievement of others, thus setting up implicit comparisons and competition. In other cultures, achievement may be viewed more as a group outcome, and cooperative strategies are employed instead. Success comes not in the form of individuals who master specific skills, but in the form of group progress at mastery.

Implications of Cultural and Family Experiences for Teaching and Learning

The concept of young children as meaning makers is woven throughout the infant/toddler and preschool curriculum frameworks. Young children actively make sense of their experiences and search for connections. As teachers observe and listen to children, they discover children's minds at work and find ways to join in children's diverse learning experiences. Understanding the context from which children's meaning making arises allows teachers to deepen their understanding of children and offers experiences that facilitate exploration and learning. The context includes all of the factors described in the preceding section: The family's culture and ethnicity, its composition, strains or stresses on the family, and its resources blend together and uniquely contribute to the individual child's learning and development.

As children develop relationships in the program, they form a sense of belonging and become aware of their teachers' interest in them. Supportive, responsive relationships with teachers encourage children's play, exploration, and meaning making and create the possibility for sharing meaning and learning together in all developmental domains. For example, a teacher may observe a four-year-old child in the dramatic play area talking with another child about how important it is not to waste food. The teacher knew that this child came from a family with little income. She used this observation as an opportunity to explore with the entire group of children how mealtimes are handled in the preschool classroom. A child asked why he received only one portion at a time. The teacher explained that the practice existed in order not to waste food. This social science lesson reflected a value that is especially meaningful to some children in the group without drawing attention to them.

Box 4 on page 72 delineates several dimensions that should be included in considerations of culturally responsive educational practice: content, context, persons, language, metaphors, goals, and methods. As a starting point, teachers are to learn as much as possible about the content of the child's culture, especially the history,

arts, values, and practices. What people communicate and how they communicate are closely linked to culture. Because of cross-cultural differences in communication styles, it is necessary to identify the methods of communication that work best with the cultural groups served.

At the heart of making educational practice culturally sensitive are language and metaphors. Using culturally compatible methods of communication and incorporating cultural symbols or metaphors are two of the most powerful ways to increase the cultural relevance of education practice. The use of familiar language, communication styles, and symbols conveys a sense of acceptance of the other culture and goes to great lengths to communicate acceptance and valuing of the other. *How is this achieved? How does a teacher become familiar with communication styles?* The first step is to listen to how families use language: words, phrasings, intonation, inflections, pauses, metaphors, and conventions. It has been said that imitation is the most sincere form of flattery. Sometimes flattery works with families. Follow their lead in the use of language. For example, make sufficient pauses in the flow of conversation to give children and parents an opportunity to frame their thoughts. When families speak, give undivided attention so that they know that what they have to say is the most important thing in the world to you at that time.

The final and the highest level of cultural adaptation is in the area of teaching practice. Considering culture in establishing learning goals and in the teaching methods used for achieving those goals is not easy and requires constant rethinking and imagination. Collaboration with families in interpreting their children's efforts to make sense of the world of people and things will help teachers identify new possibilities for extending learning in the various domains addressed by the learning foundations.

In the end, it is expected that these efforts will reap significant benefits in the improved performance of culturally diverse groups of children. Comparisons are inevitable and help in understanding others. It is also helpful for staff members to reflect on how the context of the early care and education program's environment is similar to and different from the home environment as a result of cultural differences. It is essential to compare with respect and without criticizing. This is important because relationships with specific children or groups of children may be inadvertently influenced by unexamined cultural differences.

Curriculum Frameworks

The following section summarizes information relevant to the infant/toddler and early childhood curriculum framework domains established by the California Department

of Education. There is overlap and continuity between the *California Infant/Toddler Curriculum Framework* (CDE 2012) and the *California Preschool Curriculum Framework* (CDE 2010, 2011, and 2013) for Perceptual and Motor Development, Language Development, and Social–Emotional Development. The Cognitive Development domain is included as a domain in the *California Infant/Toddler Curriculum Framework* (CDE 2012), but it is not specifically designated in the preschool domains even though it is a foundation for language, mathematics, science, and other domains in the preschool curriculum framework.

This section presents inferences drawn from observations and research on culture and family life for teaching in the infant/toddler and preschool curriculum. The goal is to consider how the content, materials, and process for teaching and learning might be configured to build on and be responsive to the cultural and family experiences of the children. Specifically, it reviews what is known about what families do, what they believe (their perspectives) about the skills children need to be ready for school, and the methods they use to guide, socialize, admonish, train, and explain phenomena to their children.

Social–Emotional Development

How might differences in cultural values and family experiences be reflected in social–emotional development? Early social–emotional development is most apparent in self-understanding, relationships with others, and acquisition of social–emotional competence (Thompson and Goodman 2009). Ethnic, cultural, and family differences have been observed in the outcomes that families valued and in the methods they deemed appropriate for attaining those outcomes. As noted earlier in the discussion of collectivist cultures, in some families the sense of self is subordinated to the sense of belonging to a family. Individual well-being is judged in terms of how well the family unit is doing. This means that the good of the family as a whole is paramount and that satisfaction of individual desires and needs must not be pursued if indulging them would result in harm or adversity for the family. These families control misbehavior by pointing to the obligation all members have not to bring shame to the family (Ballenger 1999). In other families, individual autonomy is paramount. The ability to make personal choices is highly valued, and individual misbehavior is not viewed as a reflection on the family.

As for the methods of achieving desired outcomes, Deater-Deckard and Dodge (1997) observed that some groups of parents emphasized strict discipline and valued unquestioning obedience to adults. Unquestioning obedience, respect, and deference to adult caregivers and teachers were primary (Delgado-Gaitan 2001). The practices associated

with conservative, adult-focused beliefs involve strategies by which adults direct, redirect, and involve themselves intensely in the details of the child's life. Authoritarian practices involved control of the child's behavior based on parental authority alone in the absence of explanation or negotiation. In such cases, the guidance provided to children is direct, intensive, and highly controlling. The approaches often arise out of and are adaptive in situations where children are valued highly, where environments are risky, where children face frequent exposure to hazards and high probability of harm, and where families feel that their ability to monitor, supervise, and protect children is not adequate to the challenges. Strict discipline often is carried out in a context of warmth, support, and affection. For example, in some families, this combination of warmth with strictness tends to moderate the negative impact that coercive regimes and physical punishment would otherwise have if implemented alone (Deater-Deckard and Dodge 1997).

Authoritarian approaches may contrast with the indirect and autonomy-promoting strategies taught in many early childhood training programs. An authoritarian perspective emphasizes compliance with rules, but behavior is controlled not by coercion and physical punishment, but by the natural and logical consequences of the choices children make when they violate established rules and expectations. Moreover, compliance is gained through adult explanations of the rules and expectations, respect for personal autonomy, and the freedom of the child to negotiate exceptions to meet personal needs (Rogoff 2003). The assumption is that children will learn best when they are permitted to make choices. When children choose poorly, they must abide by the outcome and learn from the consequences of their decisions and actions. The important point here is that children from these families with authoritarian approaches to guidance come into the preschool programs with different expectations about their relationships with adults and about the form and content of rule setting and behavior control. Informed by an awareness of these differences, program staff members can share these differences with families, orient children to their approach, and help children to make transitions from one disciplinary regime at home to the one under which the program operates.

Family differences also exist in rules that govern expression of emotions and aggression. Some families have relatively relaxed rules about the range of emotions children are permitted to express, while in others, children are expected to keep the overt expression of emotions such as anger, frustration, or sadness to a minimum. In some families, it is unacceptable to express anger or fear. There may be especially stringent rules about emotional expression in boys. Acknowledgment of physical pain, injured feelings, and crying by boys incurs harsh consequences. Families discourage crying

and sometimes shame boys who cry. This is reinforced outside the family by peers who are often merciless in ridiculing and shunning young boys who cry. Directly and through innuendo, boys are sent the message that little boys are little men who are not supposed to cry. Only girls and babies cry. By not allowing them to express how they feel, families are socializing boys not to recognize and acknowledge what they genuinely feel.

Teachers can allow a child to express his emotions through the opportunity to talk alone and away from peers when needed. Recognizing that children might not want to talk about their feelings in front of others is important. Taking a child aside and asking him, "How did that make you feel when your friend called you a baby?" This approach can help give children the ability to express their emotions, when they are ready to, in a safe way. This also provides the opportunity for the teacher to model behavior and to help a child practice dealing with emotion without the child "losing face."

The extent to which children are permitted to display physical aggression also varies widely among families and cultural groups. Some families encourage socially acceptable assertiveness. However, assertion by a young child may come close to what others would call aggression. Some families tolerate and permit children to employ physical aggression in interactions with family members and peers. Aggression within families is accepted as a natural expression of frustration. Some groups condone and even insist on the use of physical aggression with peers, as long as the child did not instigate a fight. Children are told and—in some cases advised—to defend themselves. In such cases, parents implicitly convey to children, "You can't rely on adults so you have to learn how to take care of yourself." Their advice to children: "If you don't fight back, you are inviting other children to continue to bully you." This advice is seen as a way of the child's defending herself against bullying when adults are not around or are unable to provide protection. In order to support a safe environment, teachers need to speak to families in advance about acceptable behavior of children. Including families in setting the program goals and asking them to help teachers maintain the policies of the program can help a parent to recognize that the program policies concerning aggressive behavior are in place for the safety of all children.

Independence—the ability at a young age to take care of oneself and younger siblings—is treated as a virtue in some families. For others, early childhood is a time of extended dependence when children rely on adults to have their needs met (Barbarin et al. 2008). These alternative views reflect differences in how childhood is conceptualized and in values about cooperation and competition. For some groups, competition is discouraged, and cooperation is encouraged. Excelling at school or in other aspects of life is discouraged in some groups. In such cases, children are given the message that they should avoid standing out and being seen as better than anyone else. They should not bring attention to themselves by standing out and performing better than their peers. These beliefs may arise out of a sense of humility and a concern that the child fit in with and be accepted by others.

It is important to note that families of some cultural groups value and promote competencies that early education programs encourage and regard as adaptive in that setting: the ability to sit still and focus, follow rules that contribute to order and decorum in the classroom, communicate needs by using words, dependence on adults, and a high capacity for behavioral and emotional regulation. Other families may place little value on those attributes. Moreover, some families adopt a style that may appear authoritarian, strict, and coercive and involve the use of physical punishment. Many early childhood staff members will find it difficult to embrace these approaches. In such situations, the staff is caught in between two conflicting values, resulting in unacceptable choices of joining with the family or rejecting its approach. The most effective strategy lies somewhere between these two options. Communication with families about such differences is essential. Through such conversations, the program may find ways to adapt its approach while still following the families' principles of socialization and guidance. Even so, differences between the early education program and home are likely. Both teachers and parents can help children to bridge and adapt to the two different discipline regimes when home and the early education program are not fully congruent. It is a major challenge in many programs (Barbarin et al. 2010). However difficult, it is important to teach children that there is a home culture as well as a culture in the group away from home and that they need to learn to navigate both.

Language and Literacy

Brody, Stoneman, and McCoy (1994) have proposed a cultural context model to account for variations in children's literacy development. They assert that families possess and follow developmental goals and expectations that promote literacy and influence the availability of the literacy-related activities at home and patterns of family interactions around literacy.

Asking about family literacy practices and goals is a useful first step in building on family involvement. It may be useful to know what printed materials and children's materials are available in the community. How common are conversations with the child? Do family members watch TV or read with the child and talk about the program or book? Family practices such as these may engender a habit and love of reading. Thus they can play a significant role in the development of reading competence. Most notably, regular joint reading between family members and child, encouragement to read, access to books in the home, and modeling by adults who use printed materials, positive attitudes toward reading, and frequent conversations between adults and child promote love of reading.

To be sure, there are cultural differences in how oral language skills are developed—some skills are developed through children communicating with adults who use child-directed speech, and others through children overhearing other people's talk; in some cultures, adults talk and elaborate a lot, while other cultures do not believe in such a practice. Siblings and other adults in the household also play an important role. Staff members can make an important contribution to children's literacy development by helping parents to understand the importance of oral language skills. For example, a case can be made to parents that, from talking and from joint reading and discussing what is read, children develop oral language skills and attention at an early age that predict elementary school literacy skills (Snow, Burns, and Griffin 1999).

The family's emotional climate is important as well. A positive emotional climate in the family engenders favorable sibling relationships in which older siblings are more willing to engage younger siblings in reading and other literacy activities. In general, creating a positive emotional climate around literacy activities means that children will be more likely to attend to and engage in informal reading and respond more positively to formal instruction. If a family is intimidated by reading to their children at home, having a "family reading circle" once in a while can help them to be a part of a reading program that supports adults' efforts and models reading aloud to children. Inviting parents who feel comfortable reading books aloud or telling stories in their home language can be another way to encourage literacy development in the family.

Joint storybook reading has been considered an especially helpful introduction to skilled reading, but it appears to be effective principally when reading is truly interactive and a creative experience. In many homes, when families start reading with very young children, this typically is marked by interruptions and dialogue about issues extraneous to the narrative. But, all is good; even these off-topic conversations are helpful in that they engage the child actively around the use of words and the

expression of ideas, which ultimately is fundamental to reading. As the children get older, families may begin to be less tolerant of interruptions and are more directive (Pellegrini, Brody, and Sigel 1985). This transition from reading as fun and creative to reading as directed and sanctioned may be an unfortunate development—one that should be discouraged by staff.

Cultural differences were found in the purposes attributed to reading. In some groups, reading is a form of entertainment; and in others, it is utilitarian, instrumental, or an occasion to master a skill. For the latter group, the common focus of literacy and reading is to solve practical problems, to conduct affairs of daily life (e.g., bill paying, use of resource directory), or to maintain social relationships through the writing and reading of personal communications such as letters, notes, cards, and the like (Taylor and Dorsey-Gaines 1988). For children, it is an occasion for skill-acquisition activities replete with the use of learning aids such as games or manipulatives. Some family members may not be literate in English or even their native language. In that case, the family member may be unaware of how nonreaders can support literacy. It is important for staff members to emphasize that oral language builds literacy skills in children and that picture books can be enjoyed by having the adult and child describe the pictures.

For some groups, oral experiences are key to children's development of language and foundational reading skills (Brody, Stoneman, and McCoy 1994). For example, some families engage frequently in oral language activities such as singing, enactment of plays and dramas created by family members, and mealtime conversations. The combination of family practices and beliefs about the importance of literacy play major roles in children's early literacy development. In many ethnic groups, children are growing up in families with a strong oral tradition in which storytelling and singing are central to their experiences at home. The oral and listening skills associated with singing and storytelling provide a rich base of experience with narrative that is an important and often-overlooked resource in the promotion of language, literacy, and reading in children.

Although the practices of reading and the use of printed material vary among different families, it is necessary to understand and learn about their choices of literacy experiences through conversations with families about what happens at home. For example, in families using sign language or braille, it is important for staff members to understand how these relate to language and literacy. Families are often open to suggestions about things they might do, and they graciously accept materials that early childhood programs might give or lend to promote reading skills in their children. Program staff members might also be open to incorporating different family traditions in the early childhood program. However, parents who come from an oral tradition, who never learned to read, or who struggled in school with reading may find such a practice challenging. Some adults are self-conscious about reading aloud and will be reluctant to do so even if encouraged to do so by program staff. Respecting parents' concerns and preferences is essential when family traditions are incorporated in the program.

English-Language Development

Dual language learning is a critical issue that has relevance for literacy and language curriculum.

> For all children, the home language is the vehicle by which they are socialized into their families and communities. Children's identity and sense of self are inextricably linked to the language they speak and the culture in which they have been socialized, which takes place in a specific family context (Crago 1988; Johnston and Wong, 2002; Ochs and Schieffelin 1995; Vasquez, Pease-Alvarez, and Shannon, 1994) . . . Loss of the home language may diminish parent-child communication, reducing a parent's ability to transmit familial values, beliefs, and understandings (Wong Fillmore 1991b). (CDE 2008, 103–4)

However, families may not be aware of such a deep connection between language and other domains of child development. In addition, some parents, just like some professionals, may confuse bilingual status with low academic performance when they see that certain bilingual children perform as a group at a lower level than monolingual children on certain academic subjects. Therefore, parents may be ambivalent and undecided about various issues related to language. Should they speak only their home language or introduce some English also? What are the benefits and risks of each approach?

Staff members can help families by reassuring them that developing the home language will not hurt the child's ability to learn English, but will actually help the child's ability to learn English. Children who have a stronger foundation in their home

language are found to learn English faster and more efficiently. Given a consistent and rich language environment, children have the ability to become fluent in two or more languages. For example, some bilingual children's skills in one or both languages are stronger than that of monolinguals. Along the same vein, some dual language learners may lack proficiency in either language, but developing two languages is not the reason. Instead, insufficient experiences with language in the home or the early learning setting, or underlying cognitive, speech, or language impairments may contribute to difficulties.

Staff members can support bilingual language development by suggesting or providing specific strategies. They can guide parents in helping children to make the transition. Switching from a predominant home language user to becoming bilingual takes time, and children move through several stages (CDE 2008, 105) during which they seem to develop second-language skills more slowly than children who are monolingual. Staff members may refer parents to resources about home language (e.g., books, activities, TV, or radio channels). Staff members may also legitimize the home language and enrich the language experiences of all children by using vocabulary in the home languages for names, numbers, and games to all the children in the class.

Mathematics

Children's early mathematical knowledge and skills develop and are strengthened through the math-related experiences they have at home (Benigno and Ellis 2008). As a result, a majority of children from all ethnic and cultural groups possess basic and preverbal number competencies by the time they enter the early childhood setting. Partly as a consequence of differences in cultural emphases and home experiences, children do come to preschool with different sets of skills and a different sense of what numbers are all about (National Research Council 2009). This is particularly true with respect to understanding of number words and symbols. Moreover, children differ in their ability to determine set size, to compare quantities, and to carry out

calculations. It is important to note that these differences are principally a consequence of different experiences and emphases by families rather than limitations in the child's capacity to learn. Barbarin et al. (2008) found that some families accorded relatively little priority and attention to development of math skills beyond the ability to recite the number string from one to ten. Families regarded reading and social competence as more critical to school readiness than mathematical knowledge. Though emphasizing memorization of the names and symbols for numbers, few emphasized an understanding of the conceptual and abstract elements of early math such as the sequential nature of the number string, the nature of numbers as representing quantity, the concept of cardinality, and one-to-one correspondence. Teachers should supplement what occurs at home by frequently using number words and names of shapes and processes. Exposure to number words increases children's familiarity with number concepts.

To be clear, children of all ethnic groups display fundamental mathematical competence (e.g., recognize small quantities and distinguish common shapes), but differences in other math skills have been observed. Differences in language and language development are central to the ethnic differences observed in children's early mathematical performance. For example, ethnic differences are greater on mathematical tasks dependent on vocabulary or verbal knowledge than those independent of word knowledge. In addition to ethnic variations in using math to express with precision everyday experiences in family life, ethnic differences occur with respect to the ability to use words to describe what is perceived and can be done mathematically or to comprehend what is required in verbally mediated math tasks. Differences in children's performance of mathematical operations are less striking when verbal knowledge is not required. This effect of differences in verbal skills on early math competence is one that can be balanced by appropriate learning experiences. Such experiences introduce and highlight vocabulary for numbers, quantities (*big, little; tall, short; heavy, light*), and spatial relations (*near, far; above, below*). For example, early childhood curricula could supplement what the child experiences at home with frequent exposure to symbols for numbers. This type of curricula can

increase familiarity with words for shapes and numbers, provide opportunities to count things and experiment with number relationships and comparisons, and help children develop and understand that in counting a set of objects the highest number represents the quantity of the set. Without understanding this principle, children will have difficulty with other number operations such as addition and subtraction.

Visual and Performing Arts

Visual and performing arts are closely linked and often are an expression of culture. As such, they may become closely identified with a particular ethnic group and with a family member who belongs to that cultural group. Consequently, art, dance, and music, as part of visual and performing arts, offer remarkable opportunities for highlighting cultural groups by providing a venue in which to perform or display talents and perspectives. Curriculum for visual and performing arts should be open to forms of performance and visual representation reflected in different groups. In some families and cultures, singing and music are central to their daily lives.

The visual and performing arts can be used to increase positive interactions between diverse families and preschool programs. Dramatic presentations, poetry readings, music shows, and art displays offer helpful ways to build bridges between diverse cultures and curriculum. This understanding can be used to build on what the child knows and believes to develop the skills and knowledge needed for academic success. For some groups, for example, drumming is a traditional form of performance that is especially suited to early childhood. For others, graphic arts, weaving, quilting, sewing, and writing are endemic to the culture and are common forms of self-expression and social cohesion. These events can offer wonderful opportunities to expand an understanding of children's experiences at home by bringing in family performers and artists. Another way for teachers to learn more about the cultures of the children and to share them with other children in the program is through media such as popular films and books.

One dilemma to be resolved is the question of how to determine what is developmentally appropriate and inappropriate without offending a group. Some cultures may have art forms that may be problematic in the preschool setting due to adult-oriented content. Resolution of these situations should depend on a community-oriented decision, in which teachers and staff consult with parents and community members. The key is to make sure the content is developmentally appropriate, as many forms of "street art" are defined by themes of violence, substance use or abuse, inappropriate language, and so on.

*Physical Development**

Researchers have not documented consistent cultural differences in physical development. However, various cultural practices and socioeconomic status (SES) level may be factors in physical development. Research has shown that the development of motor skills highly depends on the amount of motor movements children are permitted or encouraged to engage in. Some infants are held physically close to parents in snugglies or other carriers in which they can indulge their curiosity about what is going on around them, but may have less freedom to move their arms, legs, and head. Some infants may spend more time lying on their backs. Some toddlers may be permitted to crawl extensively to wander over a wide range of their physical environment. For safety, walkers, which may permit wide-ranging movement, are highly discouraged. Other toddlers may be restricted by the amount of safe space or available floor space or held to within arm's reach of parents. The effects of these seemingly minor differences may be cumulative in their impact. A young child who spends most of the time in a very tight living space (and limited outdoor space) may have delayed motor skills. Some children from low-income households who live in tight quarters may be severely delayed in physical development due to the lack of indoor movement space. Cases of delayed development have also been reported for children spending the first few years in orphanages.

In some cases, children live in an area where there is a lot of outdoor space. As a consequence, the child's motor skills may be advanced. However, a family's ability to facilitate their children's use of outdoor space may vary due to the following factors: lack of time (may be at work), lack of awareness (may not know the importance of moving around), or perceived hazards of the outdoor space (may not think a park is safe). For children whose opportunities for physical activity are limited by the family's living arrangements or children who show signs of early delays in motor

*This section includes both the Perceptual and Motor Development domain of the *California Infant/Toddler Curriculum Framework* (CDE 2012) and the Physical domain of the *California Preschool Curriculum Framework, Volume 2* (CDE 2011).

development, the early childhood setting can offset limitations. By looking carefully at the physical development of children as a diagnostic for potential motor delays, program staff may provide certain equipment and environments, such as balance beams, obstacle courses, and the like.

Fortunately, most young children can respond quickly to changes in the physical environment and overcome earlier disadvantages related to physical activity. Staff members can advance physical development and help children to overcome limited early experience by encouraging them to be more physically active. Movement and exercise in routines and various outdoor activities may be introduced. Learning letters and numbers can be associated with movement and rhythms. Dance is a physical activity most children enjoy. If children come from an environment where their activity is extremely limited, a program of formal exercise can be introduced into the program. Early childhood programs might develop programs of exercise that could be fun for parents to do at home with their children. Many cultures have their own preferred physical activities (e.g., kite flying, knitting, and sewing) and children's games (e.g., drop the handkerchief). Teachers can bring such activities into the early childhood program.

Health

Volume 2 of the *California Preschool Learning Foundations* covers topics related to health habits, safety, and nutrition (CDE 2010). The Health domain points to differences in families' practices and beliefs surrounding food and food choices. The practices influence children's eating habits and what children regard as desirable food. In this way, the home has a major impact on children's burgeoning understanding of nutrition and on their eating habits.

Children come to preschool programs with a variety of habits, knowledge, and beliefs about health and health-protective practices. Children's reasoning about health is shaped by their own experiences at home and by their observations of the adults' choices regarding food and drink. They are influenced by families' choices regarding nutrition, physical activity, oral health practices, and injury prevention (CDE 2010, 72). In some cultures, children are discouraged from making independent food choices. Adults make all the decisions regarding the type and quantity of food to be eaten. In other cases, families may have few options for food because of economic constraints or the limited availability of healthy foods in the neighborhood. In families that have experienced extreme economic hardship and persistent food insecurity, children have exhibited behaviors such as gorging and hoarding of food.

Including food that is familiar to the children can help them to acclimate to the program. Asking families to visit the program and share a mealtime with the children is another way to connect with families. It can give teachers a glimpse of the families' mealtime behaviors in order to better understand the children in their care. Rising rates of obesity among children point to the need for programs to determine how families obtain information about nutrition and health. Resources such as the health literacy program at the University of California, Los Angeles, may be especially helpful to share with families.

The diversity in health habits and safety knowledge and behaviors mainly stem from SES levels (sometimes associated with immigration status and English-language abilities) rather than culture. For example, Mexican American children from low-income families have higher rates of obesity, diabetes, accidental injuries, and poorer oral health (Barker and Horton 2008; Olvera-Ezzell et al. 1994) than other individuals in their ethnic groups. However, the reasons point to sources unrelated to culture, such as lack of health insurance and access to health care professionals. Low-income parents have reported that they have lost their jobs because they needed to take time off from work to take their children to see health care providers. Lack of adequate English skills to communicate with health care professionals is another major barrier reported by many ethnic minority groups. For example, though Asians fare better as a group than Latinos in health status, when Asians are divided into high and low English proficiency groups, those with poor English abilities have significantly higher rates of health problems (Saha, Fernandez, and Perez-Stable 2007).

History–Social Science

Ethnicity and ethnic identity are conceived as topics in the domain of history–social science. Ethnic identity development is in its early stages during the preschool years. Children are aware of ethnic diversity and differences in cultural practices related to food, music, symbols, and celebrations. A key implication of culture and family life is that children must be supported in learning about their own culture and valuing their own ethnic identity while avoiding the danger of disparaging or criticizing others. This support can be provided by emphasizing the many similarities among diverse cultural groups and exposing children to the cultural practices and celebrations of children in the program who come from a culture different from their own. It may also be helpful to sensitize children to the idea that not all children have the privilege of food security and housing stability. Awareness of this idea may lead to notions of sharing and helping to others. For preschool, it is more focused on recognizing differences and celebrating connectedness as a group. An understanding of family differences may

focus on family decision making. For example, children and staff members may discuss how family members make decisions together as a group and how it might be different from how decisions are made in an early childhood program.

A suggestion from *Preschool English Learners: Principles and Practices to Promote Language, Literacy, and Learning* (CDE 2009b, 27) may be helpful to teachers:

> Cazden (1988) suggests a way to apply this knowledge to a social studies lesson titled "Our Community":
>
> - Use photographs of different sections of the local community; public buildings of the town and surrounding areas, such as the countryside; beaches; and so forth.
> - Ask the children such questions as the following:
>
> "What's happening here?"
>
> "Have you ever been here?"
>
> "Tell me what you did when you were there."
>
> "What's this like (pointing to a scene or item in a scene)?"
>
> As a result of using these types of questions, teachers may get more active and assertive and complete responses than if they had asked the students only the following:
>
> "What kind of building is this?"
>
> "Where is this located?"

The social science portion of the curriculum is especially relevant to parental involvement in the program. Parental involvement can center around stories about the past accompanied by photographs or activities with artifacts that may no longer be in use (e.g., butter churn, rotary telephone, and the like).

Science

Children's understanding of the natural world begins at home. Through routine experiences in family life, children are first exposed to physical elements such as water, earth, and fire; heat and cold; motion and gravity; liquids and solids; living and inanimate objects; and day and night, including time and its passage. They become acquainted with motion and with objects falling and sometimes bouncing back, with some things disappearing and not returning, with things breaking apart, and with some dying. In the context of the family, these phenomena are given names, interpretations, and explanations.

Cultural groups have beliefs, values, and worldviews that, in turn, shape how the family views the physical world and the laws that govern it. Families hypothesize cause-and-effect relations for the child and, on that basis, influence the naïve theories children develop about the natural world. Starting from this foundation, the child has experiences with the natural world and labels for an understanding of it. The program must strive to deepen children's understanding and ability to use scientific methods of observing, recording, and interpreting phenomena they encounter in the natural world. Educating children in science is more likely to be effective when teachers understand the conceptions of the world that children bring from home.

Studies have found that a signature difference between a Western approach and approaches to nature adopted by some Asian cultures is that the former dissects, analyzes, and classifies nature, whereas the latter experiences, perceives, and lives nature (e.g., Atran and Medin 2008). The perspective of the American indigenous cultures is also shared by East Asian cultures such as Chinese and Japanese. Children from cultures taking the latter perspective may be more comfortable with and prone to thinking of human and animal or plant interactions rather than classifying or decomposing objects.

Members of certain cultures (such as Native American, Asian, and Mayan) have been found to take a more animistic view of plants and other inanimate objects. So, when children from such cultures express an animistic view about objects, that view may not accurately reflect the children's scientific understanding of these objects. This is just one example of how cultures may differ. More important is the similarity among cultures in the effort to describe the world, account for the phenomena observed, and understand the extent to which humans shape and influence these phenomena: periods of rain and drought, weather, the human body, growth, and death. Families may be brought into the discussion of children's efforts to explore the world around them. For example, children may be encouraged to ask science questions and then bring home objects from activities to show

families what they learned—such as how some rocks are softer than others, what roots look like, and so on. In this way, families have an occasion in which they can convey to the child their own cultural understanding of the world and how it operates.

Conclusion

Cultural competence is central to authentic partnerships with parents. For teachers and providers, engaging with families, learning how to resolve a cultural misunderstanding, and building close working relationships with families are as important to being an effective educator as good pedagogy. It is not enough to proclaim that family and culture play a critical role in child health and development. It is necessary to consider what cultural diversity means for early childhood teachers. Cultural diversity should not be viewed as a potential source of conflict to be managed, but as an opportunity for program staff to think creatively about how cross-cultural differences can enrich their work, their lives, and the education they provide to the children in the program.

To make the promise of diversity a reality and incorporate it into the day-to-day operations of education programs, it is necessary to learn about families' circumstances and experiences and develop a sense of the conditions that children face in their daily lives at home. It is also essential to develop an intuitive appreciation of how the home influences children's skills and attitudes toward learning. Teachers must understand, in a realistic way, how families function and appreciate the extent of their capacity to further the learning goals of early childhood programs for children. Cultural differences such as those in educational goals, discipline practices, and worldviews may create tension and contribute to misunderstandings between families and program staff.

Responding to and understanding cultural differences in a positive way begins with the critical examination of one's own culture or self-identity and the dilemmas that differences present. For example, having preconceived notions of a cultural group or accepting cultural stereotypes of a group usually tends to diminish efforts to provide a high-quality and culturally responsive environment. In contrast, acknowledging differences and recognizing similarities may lead to a deeper understanding of self and others.

Teachers must look for strengths in families that may be concealed. Deeper knowledge and understanding of the experiences of children at home are needed. Only then can program staff build on the strengths of families and value families as true collaborators in the education of their children. Early childhood programs need to work steadily at

building a culturally competent staff and incorporating an understanding of family and culture into their educational practice. Programs should develop in-service training opportunities to help staff members address issues raised in this publication and implement the recommendations for making children's cultural experiences an essential part of the curriculum.

To summarize, early childhood programs' staff members must develop knowledge of families and cultivate strong relationships with them. Staff members must also be responsive to the diversity of cultures they encounter. To become culturally responsive, teachers must

- develop awareness of self and others as cultural beings;
- nurture personal bonds to those belonging to other cultural groups;
- communicate and connect with others on a regular basis;
- integrate cultural competency into teaching and learning.

How do teachers know if they have done these things? Evidence of cultural responsiveness is related to the following indicators:

- Awareness of self and others as cultural beings
- Sensitivity to the influence of culture and social environment on one's behavior and attitudes toward oneself and others (i.e., worldviews, implicit motives and goals, social attributions)
- Perspective taking
- Appreciation for similarities and differences among all people
- Warm, positive regard for others and a genuine interest in them
- Ability to reframe for oneself qualities once viewed as deficits as potential for growth and achievement in oneself and in the family

Additional suggestions that could increase effectiveness in the classroom are as follows:

- **Continually increase the visibility of ethnic or cultural groups represented by the population served.** All multicultural groups should receive increased attention. No group should be left on the margins and in the shadows of programs. Inclusion may mean hiring people from those groups, inviting them to share cultural traditions, such as storytelling, or utilizing artifacts and photos that represent that group.

- **Expand the presence of men in early childhood settings.** Efforts should be made to reach out to the men in children's lives—fathers, uncles, grandfathers, brothers, and cousins. Telling stories about them is important. Men should be a significant presence in the program, and support should be provided for their role in the lives of children. Special events to recognize the connection and the importance of their role in the lives of the children should be created. This can be a difficult task. In some cases, years of effort may be needed to build the relationship with men and to change the culture of the program so that it is more receptive and inviting to men. Hiring men to fill teaching positions may help them to see themselves as welcome in the program.

- **Collaborate with families.** Successful partnerships are by no means assured on the basis of good intentions. Continual effort, outreach, mistakes, and forgiveness are necessary elements in building relationships that work for children (Swick, Head-Reeves, and Barbarin 2006). There are several specific steps programs can take to strengthen the working relationship:

  - Inform families about program expectations, academic standards, and transition to kindergarten. Families should be included in discussions of academic standards and transitions to kindergarten or from one class-

room to the next. Families need to be informed in advance about the program's expectations and given opportunities to have their questions clarified.

- Hold an Open House or potluck dinner for families so that parents and family members can share their skills with staff members, the children in the program, and other families. At Open House, one center provided a staff nutritionist to welcome families at the front lobby with some food samples from the center's menus. This gives the families an opportunity to talk to the cook about food and have a hands-on approach to meal planning with the staff. The program also asks for permission to take photos of the families with their children to include in the classrooms.

- Provide families with descriptions of activities that allow children to practice at home what they learn at school.
- Determine how language learning, home language support, and communication goals will be addressed for all students, including students with disabilities.(Adapted from CDE 2009b, 16)

Be and do good for others. Why programs have been created and the needs they are intended to serve should be kept in mind. The development of cultural responsiveness in working with families can be a source of joy, especially if cultural responsiveness is not easy. Mistakes will certainly be made.

APPENDIX

Questions to Expand Understanding of Families

A home visit, parent—teacher conference, parent visit, parent workshop, or even a chance visit can help staff members learn more about the culture and families of the children served. The sample questions in this appendix focus on valuable information necessary to understand family life. Some questions ask for basic information that is not controversial or personal. Some ask intimate questions. They should be posed only after familiarity, comfort, and trust have been established between staff members and family.

Explaining the motive for asking questions (e.g., a desire to know the child's life so the family can be better served) lays the groundwork. The first step is to start with the external and observable aspects of family life that family members are likely comfortable sharing before asking parents to disclose more personal information about the inner workings of their family. It is preferable to avoid covering all these domains in a single session with families. Ideally, such conversations take place over time. The conversation should always end on a positive note—a compliment, an affirmation of what seems to be working well, a positive note about the child; something humorous. If all else fails, some food or a piece of chocolate may work! The most intrusive and personal questions should be saved for the end.

Family structure: The people who belong to the family; their duties, roles, and authority; how they are organized; and the processes they use to carry out functions.

- With members of the family, draw a family tree that includes three generations of the members of the family, indicating names, ages, educational level, and occupation. Indicate who lives in the same household as the child.
- Who takes care of the child: feeding, bathing, putting to bed, taking to school, when ill? To what extent is one person (the mother, father, or grandmother) the sole caregiver?
- Who else participates or helps in the caregiving?
- Do caregivers agree about the best way to feed, bathe, discipline, and soothe the child?

Decision making: How are decisions made and whose opinions carry the most weight in decisions about (a) the child's activities and care, (b) disciplining the child, (c) where the family lives, and (d) major expenditures?

- What is the relationship of friends to the family system?
- How much time does the infant spend away from the primary caregiver?
- To what extent do employment or problems related to housing impact care for the child?
- Does the family communicate with each other in a direct or indirect style?
- Does the family tend to interact in a quiet manner or a loud manner?
- Do family members share feelings when discussing emotional issues?
- Does the family ask teachers direct questions?
- Does the family value a lengthy social time at each home visit unrelated to the early childhood services program goals?
- Is it important for the family to know about the home visitor's extended family?
- To what degree is the family proficient in English?
- Is the family member comfortable with the interpreter?

Celebrations: The noting or marking of events of spiritual, social, political, or economic significance.

- How do you celebrate or note special events such as parties, weddings, births, graduations, holidays, becoming an adult, deaths, and so on?
- What occasions are treated as special by pausing from work, gathering together with family and or friends, preparing special foods?
- What special foods do you prepare for celebrations or gatherings?
- Does music or dance play a role in these occasions?

Socialization goals: The behavior, skills, beliefs, values, and attitudes that adults want children to acquire and to exhibit by the time they become adults.

- What are your hopes for your child?
- What are your child's strengths?
- What qualities are you trying to instill in your child?

- What would you like your child to be like as adults?
- What do you like best about your child?
- What, in your opinion, makes a high-quality preschool program? (Prompt: What distinguishes a very good preschool from a mediocre or poor preschool?) What specifically were you looking for in a preschool program? Which of these qualities would you say are ***essential*** for a preschool program to have (that is, these qualities are an absolute must)?
- Which qualities are ***desirable*** (that is, you would like it if the program had these qualities, but they are not an absolute must)?
- In your opinion, what must your child know or be able to do by the time she or he starts kindergarten?

Child-rearing practices: The attitudes that govern child care, feeding, and the strategies used to socialize children such as praise, punishment, offering choices, permitting child autonomy, support, control, correction, and guidance.

- Do you regularly speak a language other than English at home?
- In general, what are family practices around food and feeding?
- How do meals take place? When, where, and with whom are meals taken?
- What types of foods are eaten?
- What are the beliefs regarding breastfeeding? When and how should a mother stop breastfeeding?
- How do you decide when to introduce or feed the child solid foods?
- Which family members prepare food?
- Is food purchased or homemade?
- Which family members feed the child?
- What does the family believe about when children should begin feeding themselves?
- Do all family members agree on how and what to feed an infant/toddler?

Family sleeping arrangements and patterns

- Does the infant sleep in the same room/bed as the parents?
- At what age is the infant moved away from close proximity to the mother?

- Is there an established bedtime?
- What is the family's response to an infant when he or she awakes at night?
- What practices surround daytime napping?
- What is the family's response to a crying infant?
- How long does it take before a family member picks up a crying infant?
- How do family members calm an upset infant?

Discipline

- For what behaviors are children punished or disciplined?
- What is the family's response to disobedience and aggression?
- What form does the discipline take?
- Who takes responsibility for discipline?

Early learning and development

- To what extent do you read to your child?
- Do you go over letters and numbers?
- Do you expect your child to read by kindergarten?
- Who is most responsible—the family or the preschool—to prepare the child for kindergarten?

Gender roles: The duties, responsibilities, and behaviors that are ascribed to individuals purely on the basis of whether they are male or female.

- Are the boys in your family treated better than the girls?
- Should boys be raised differently from girls? If yes, how?
- What type of man do you want your son to be?
- What type of woman do you want your daughter to be?

Spirituality: A stance toward life and reality that acknowledges, gives credence to, and assigns importance to the nonmaterial world; belief in some high power; or spirit that has influence over what happens in the world.

- Is religion or spirituality important in your family? How?
- Do you belong to a religious, spiritual, or faith community such as a mosque, synagogue, or church?

- Are there religious or spiritual factors that shape family perceptions of the world?
- Does the family have an explanation for why good things or bad things happen to the family?
- How does the family view the role of fate in their lives?

Relation to the external social environment: Friendship circles and civic engagement; involvement in community life; participation in political, social, or community decision making; devoting self to activities that improve the lives of others or increase community well-being.

- With whom does the family socialize or celebrate important events?
- Does the family belong to political, social, or civic groups?
- Do family members volunteer or offer services to the community?

Family's perception of health and healing

- What is the family's approach to medical needs?
- Do they rely solely on Western medical services?
- Do they rely solely on holistic or home country approaches?
- Do they utilize a combination of these approaches?
  - Who is the primary medical provider or conveyer of medical information? Family members? Elders? Friends? Folk healers? Family doctor? Medical specialists?
- Do all members of the family agree on approaches to medical needs?
- What is the family's perception of seeking help and intervention?
- From whom does the family seek help—family members or outside agencies/individuals?
- Does the family seek help directly or indirectly?
- What are the general feelings or attitudes of the family when seeking assistance: shame, anger, need to demand a right, viewing assistance as unnecessary?
- With which community systems (educational, medical, social) does the family interact?

- How are these interactions completed (face-to-face, telephone, letter)?
- Which family member interacts with other systems?
- Does that family member feel comfortable when interacting with other systems?

Family's perception of disability

- Are there cultural or religious factors that would shape family perceptions of disability?
- To what or to whom does the family assign responsibility for a child's disability?
- How does the family view the role of fate in a disability?
- How does the family view their role in intervening with their child? Do they feel they can make a difference or do they consider the situation hopeless?

Note: Much of the content in this appendix is adapted from Wayman, Lynch, and Hanson (1991) and Lynch and Hanson (2011).

GLOSSARY

classroom culture. The values, assumptions, socialization goals, norms, and practices that are inherent in the way a school or center operates. Culture is reflected in the goals, practices, curricula, language usage, staff roles, schedules, rules, and social climate of a program or center.

collectivist culture. A group or society in which life is centered on the collective, clan, or family. The good of the whole group predominates meeting individual needs. In fact, the good of the individual is defined almost solely in terms of what is good for the whole group. The very notion of the individual identity as distinct from the clan is foreign. Collectivist culture is analogous to familism.

communalism. A system of sharing resources and governance to benefit the interests of a highly localized community group or a small group whose members have a common identity.

construct. An idea or theory, often comprising several simpler elements. The validity of a construct can be studied indirectly by gathering empirical evidence.

compadre/comadre. *Compadre* usually means godfather. It can refer to a man who is distant kin, close friend, or a family member who has the role of back-up father, a surrogate, or assistant parent who contributes informally to the child's welfare and who is expected to assume the role of father to a child whose father is no longer able to care for the child. *Comadre* is a parallel term for godmother or female surrogate. This term originated in a religious context as someone who would take over the responsibility of educating a child in religious ways if the parents became incapacitated or died. Current use of the term has lost much of the religious connotation and taken on a secular meaning that, at its core, still involves a relationship with parents in the care, education, and protection of children.

cultural competence. Awareness of one's own cultural value, practices, custom mores and theories, how these influence personal beliefs, behavior, and social relations. This knowledge of self is coupled with continual efforts to learn about the culture of others and how it shapes their behavior and attitudes.

cultural respect. An individual's attitude in which there is openness to the validity and value of different cultures such that no culture is seen as better than any other.

dynamism. A quality attributed to culture whereby it is understood as in motion, constantly transforming itself and adapting to keep up with ever-changing circumstances; a creative energy.

episodic. Periodic, every once in a while, not continual; occurring occasionally.

essentialism. A theory of culture that defines a social, ethnic, or cultural group according to a fixed set of attributes or characteristics. Essentialism assumes that all members of a group can be defined by the set of attributes and that the defining attributes do not vary within the group.

exceptionalism. The perception or belief that a cultural group sees itself as unique, distinct, or in some way extraordinary as compared to other groups.

familism. A characteristic of groups whereby loyalty and dedication to family is supremely valued; family is the center of social life; obligations to family have priority over other demands of other roles or obligations at work, school, or in the community; family cohesion is valued; sacrifices are made by individuals for the good of the family. This is a more narrow version of a collectivist orientation.

fictive kin. A person who has a close relationship and widely accepted role as a family member even though she or he is not related by blood.

girlfriend. A close friend and confidante who acts like a sister, but who is not related by blood. The relationship is reciprocal and often involves a range of mutual supports concrete, social, psychological, and financial.

individualist cultural orientation. A group or society that assigns greater importance to fulfillment of individual needs than what is good for the whole group. The sense of self and personal well-being are important. The primary focus is on self apart from the group, acting and thinking on one's own, not considering or being influenced by what is good for the group.

metaphor. A symbol or term that is usually concrete and easily grasped is used to represent, illuminate, illustrate, or clarify an abstract or subtle idea or word. "Waving a country flag" captures two metaphors in which the flag represents the country and the waving represents patriotism (love of country).

overgeneralization. A common error in reasoning in which a broadly applied statement is not fully true in all instances. Overgeneralization may obscure understanding of cultural differences within a group.

transient. Temporary, not permanent or lasting; waning, passing or fading away over time.

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