



Families & Practitioners: Working Collaboratively to Support Cultural Identity in Young Children

Culture is a fundamental building block in creating children’s identity. Quality early learning and child care supports the development of identity by providing experiences that are in harmony with the culture of the home, practitioners who are able to understand diverse perspectives and appropriately interact with members of other cultures in a variety of situations, and curriculum that is developmentally, culturally, linguistically responsive. Use the self-assessment tool below to discover what you and your program are doing well and areas for improvement.

Use culturally, linguistically appropriate and effective teaching approaches that enhance each child’s learning and development. Start by identifying the unique early learning needs of children within the context of their families, and taking this information into account when planning the curriculum and pedagogy of the program.

Practitioners	Ways this is done well	Ways it could be improved
Encourage children and their parents to share aspects of their culture and lifestyle with the other children.		
Build an understanding the child’s culture and the values and beliefs within that culture.		
Learn key words in the first language of the children.		
Provide a learning environment with books, print materials, and other artifacts in home languages that respect and promote language and literacy learning, and that reflect diversity in unbiased ways.		
Recognize that children may be dealing with complex changes.		
Build knowledge of family dietary practices.		
Actively identify and counter any practices, curriculum approaches or materials which reflect a degrading bias toward language, race, religion or culture.		

Adapt programs to the needs of diverse families. Respect the home languages and cultures of all children served and find meaningful ways to incorporate diverse languages and cultures into everyday curriculum. Give families input into the design and development of early learning programs and content.

Practitioners	Ways this is done well	Ways it could be improved
Make extra efforts to include newcomers in programs.		
Create opportunities to learn about childrearing practices from families that have different backgrounds.		
Provide information about relevant resources.		
Provide information in first languages		
Support the development of informal social networks among families with young children		
Because many children live in newcomer families, collect information on migration experience		

Increase culturally competent staff.

Employ and support culturally competent staff. Recruit and adequately compensate qualified practitioners from immigrant and language minority communities as well as increasing the culturally relevant training for staff currently working with diverse families. Professional development standards for current staff should include access to training in cultural sensitivity and second-language acquisition strategies.

Directors/Staff	Ways this is done well	Ways it could be improved
Actively recruit practitioners who reflect gender, ethnic, cultural, and linguistic diversities.		
Support the child's home language.		
Become knowledgeable about more than one culture		
Provide opportunities for practitioners to rethink their assumptions and consider life's issues through the lenses of people who come from cultural backgrounds different from their own.		
Acquire an understanding of socio-cultural and economic issues pertaining to the communities the program serves.		

Provide access to comprehensive services.

Knowledge of and access to comprehensive services is a critical component of high quality early childhood programs serving diverse families. As someone who has established trust with families, you are well-positioned to help them access services, including parenting education and ESL classes. Some newcomer groups may prefer activities that focus on parents and children together. Community services should be linguistically- and culturally-appropriate, and easily accessible in neighborhoods where families live.

The program	Ways this is done well	Ways it could be improved
Establishes relationships with, and uses the resources of, the children's communities.		
Helps families connect with needed resources to further each child's healthy development and learning.		
Facilitates parent to family literacy experiences.		

Quality rating systems (QRS).

Programs can use these evaluation tools to incorporate new standards into EC programs, in order to encourage the recruitment of culturally competent providers, create and implement culturally appropriate standards and practices, and provide financial supports to help them meet these goals. In addition, the standards can be used to educate and inform parents and other advocates about high-quality programs.

The program	Ways this is done well	Ways it could be improved
Reassesses its philosophies regularly to ensure they reflect shared values and current thinking about preferred practice and research on child development.		
Regularly assesses its quality and effectiveness using a tool(s) that highlights strengths and identifies areas for improvement.		
Uses a performance appraisal process in which directors observe individual staff, then review and discuss the observations with individual practitioners, acknowledging areas of strength, and identifying specific strategies for improvement.		