Redleaf *Quick* Guide

Creating Diversity-Rich Environments for Young Children

1. Frameworks for Creating a Diversity-Rich Environment
2. Values and Attitudes
3. Curriculum
4. Physical Space
5. Materials, Books, and Toys
6. Language and Communication
7. Behavior Guidance
8. Families
9. Colleagues
10. Program Leadership

Angèle Sancho Rasse

Creating Diversity-Rich Environments for Young Children

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To all early educators striving to create
diversity-rich environments for young children

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INTRODUCTION

Multicultural, *cross-cultural*, *intercultural*, or *diversity-rich*? Terms change and evolve. It is challenging to find one unique word that fits everybody's vision. For some thinkers, *multicultural* refers to a society that has several cultural or ethnic groups. Even though people live next to each other, they do not necessarily interact deeply with each other. They may enjoy each other's restaurants but not exchange ideas. For other thinkers, *cross-cultural* has more to do with the comparison of different cultures. Many cultures are compared to one another and to one dominant culture. In a cross-cultural mindset, people understand each other but they are not transformed. In more recent thinking, *intercultural* reflects the idea of a search for deeper understanding and respect for all cultures. In an intercultural society, everyone feels a positive impact because everyone learns from one another and grows together. *Diversity-rich* means understanding that everyone is unique and recognizing individual differences. It requires conscious practice of mutual respect, sharing each other's cultures.

In this book, we will use the term *diversity-rich* to acknowledge that our early childhood environments have a vast variety of cultures in the children, families, and staff members. We will also make reference to the term *equity*, as presented in the recently published position statement from the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC): Advancing Equity in Early Childhood Education (NAEYC 2019). It is not enough to embrace diversity. The lens must be sharpened to include fairness and justice in our work with children, families, and colleagues.

To help you keep your focus on equity, a box at the beginning of each chapter correlates the material to specific recommendations of the NAEYC position statement on Advancing Equity in Early Childhood Education. The recommendations in the position statement are divided into several categories: Recommendations for Everyone; Recommendations for Early Childhood Educators; Recommendations for Administrators of Schools, Centers, Family Child Care Homes, and Other Early Childhood Education Settings; Recommendations for those Facilitating Educator Preparation and Professional Development; and Recommendations for Public

Policymakers. The Advancing Equity position statement is available at www.naeyc.org/resources/position-statements/equity. You can scan the QR code to the right to go straight to the statement.

The objectives of this book are the following:

- To examine what a diversity-rich environment looks like and why it is important in early childhood education.
- To recognize the expertise you already have, so you increase your confidence.
- To present practical strategies to use with children, families, and colleagues.
- To help you make a personal plan that you can follow as you continue to grow in your skills.

The word *skill* is important. The topic of diversity is loaded with emotion. In reality, this is the first time in history that big numbers of people of so many diverse cultures must interact with each other peacefully. It is the first time that the law mandates us all to get along and collaborate in a variety of settings, from schools to offices to churches and from private to public places. In a global mindset of welcoming many cultures, we must be conscious of the weight of the endeavor. The emotion must be self-regulated. The wise mind must prevail.

Definition of Culture

Culture is about the daily experiences that shape people's understanding of life. It is the activities, memories, and language we share. Daily experiences for young children include how babies are comforted, the way they are cuddled, how and what they are fed, and where they sleep. For older children, it means the games they play, the books they are read, and the number of toys they have.

Dimensions of Culture

Cultural identity is complex. It is more than ethnicity, language, or skin color. There is not just one way that we think of ourselves. Many aspects describe who we are, like gender, nationality, race, ethnicity, age, language, family background, religion, home/geographic roots, socioeconomic status, physical ability, mental ability, sexual orientation, work experience, and educational background. The list is long. Below are examples to help you ponder the many dimensions your children experience. These dimensions also apply to the families and to the staff members who work with the children and families.

Children may have direct experience with all these dimensions of diversity at home or in your program. They may also have more distant interactions in their neighborhood or community.

Age includes the stages of life from infants to the elderly in the same family. As life expectancy increases, young children now have two generations of elders in their family: great-grandparents and others of the same generation, as well as grandparents, grand-aunts, and granduncles. They may have elderly neighbors or interact with elderly volunteers while in a child care setting. Some may be using canes or wheelchairs. Children may also have younger or older siblings.

Education can be formal and informal. Families have varied levels of formal education and training. That affects children's levels of language development and early literacy. For example, children in households with high literacy are likely to have more opportunities for reading and a more developed vocabulary.

Ethnicity includes factors such as nationality, regional culture, ancestry, religion, and language in addition to race.

Family constellation describes varying family size and configuration. Children may live in a single parent or two-parent nuclear family with parents and children living together. Increasingly families are becoming more permeable and fluid with stepchildren, stepparents, and other older or younger relatives. Pets may be important family members too.

Gender is a social concept that defines the attitudes, behaviors, and roles that a society or culture associates traditionally with an individual's sex, such as female and male; current social science is challenging this notion to view gender as fluid. Children or family members may identify with genders such as nonbinary or transgender.

Home/geographic roots is where children live. It may be in the community where they and their parents were born. Others may have moved within the country for practical reasons such as employment or schooling. Other children are immigrants or refugees who come from faraway lands with different customs and languages.

Language is human speech and written expression. Some children are monolingual English speakers, while others are dual-language learners, speaking English and a home language. Some children may even have more than one home language. Exposure to languages may be written or oral. Parents may have varied fluency and literacy levels in the languages of their family.

Mental ability shapes the experiences of people in diverse ways. A condition may affect the ability of the brain to read, think, or make decisions. It may be caused by mental illness, brain injury, or addiction. Children may have a condition that affects their mental ability or know other children or adults who do.

Nationality is the condition of belonging to a particular nation. New immigrants in a country belong to the nationality of their home country. They may be from Somalia or France and live in the United States as permanent residents.

Neurodiversity is the idea that neurological differences are to be recognized and respected like any other human variation. Conditions such as autism spectrum or dyslexia are the result of variations in the human genome. Therefore, acceptance and accommodations help everyone feel respected and productive.

Occupation is the type of work that parents do and where they work. Occupation is usually related to the socioeconomic status of children.

Physical ability shapes the experiences of people in diverse ways. This depends on general health (breathing, mobility, hearing, sight, strength). Children may have a condition from birth or due to an illness or injury that affects the abilities of their body, or they may know other children or adults with such conditions.

Race is a social construct under which people of the same race share certain physical characteristics (skin color, eye color, bone structure, hair). The Census Bureau defines race as "a person's self-identification with one or more social groups. An individual can report as White, Black or African American, Asian, American Indian and Alaska Native, Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander, or some other race. Survey respondents may report multiple races." Note that the concept of race is confusing and controversial. It is mostly a bureaucratic definition in the United States. Race and ethnicity data are used primarily to make funding decisions for education, employment, or health.

Religion is a belief in God or gods. The US Constitution guarantees freedom of religion. Many children live in households who follow a religion. If they do not, they may be atheist or agnostic. The church or temple community is important to many families and a place to gather with others who have the same beliefs.

Sexual orientation describes a person's pattern of attraction—emotional, romantic, sexual, or some combination of these—to another sex, the same sex, multiple sexes, or none. Families may be headed by lesbian, gay, bisexual, or heterosexual individuals or couples or by people who fall elsewhere on that spectrum.

Socioeconomic status impacts the daily experiences of children according to the income levels of their families. Affluence and poverty affect families' access to materials, food, and activities.

Reasons for Optimism

Despite media alarms about lack of respect for diversity, there is reason for optimism. Never before have so many people paid attention to the topic. It is the right time to give practical solutions to early educators so they feel more confident and are more competent in teaching all children well. In an increasingly global atmosphere, cultural issues must be addressed in a matter-of-fact and direct way. You have an important and difficult job. This book offers to make creating diversity-rich environments manageable.

CHAPTER 1: FRAMEWORKS FOR CREATING A DIVERSITY-RICH ENVIRONMENT

Advancing Equity in Early Childhood Education (NAEYC 2019)

Recommendations for Everyone: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6

Diversity is all dimensions of culture interacting with each other. We see it in our classrooms with children, families, and colleagues. We see diversity in our own families too. Take the time to think about your classroom and your program. Reflect on the children, families, and colleagues. Write their names in a column and note how they illustrate the list of cultural dimensions you have just read.

Recognizing diversity is seeing the many ways that people understand daily life. Having a diversity-rich perspective as an early childhood educator is being interested in what families do at home with their children. *Having an open mind* does not mean accepting everything families do as good. *Respecting many ways of understanding daily life* does not mean ignoring what's important for children. For example, research says reading is good for children because it increases their vocabulary, and vocabulary is a measure of reading success. If families do not read to children at home, early educators know it is not best practice. However, they should not blame families. Their job is to explain to families why reading is good for children—and make sure to read extra books to children in their program.

Educators often express concerns about their work with diversity: "I don't know about other cultures," "I only speak English," "I am uncomfortable with the idea of LGBTQ," "I didn't grow up with people of different races." We can never know everything there is to know about other people, so we acknowledge that there is not a magic formula. As you learn more about creating diversity-rich environments, you might be worried about how to do it well. You might be afraid of making mistakes. You might not feel simple neutral acceptance of others. But it is a skill that must be learned and worked at. The result is the immense satisfaction of doing a good job.

A big point of honoring diversity is to add to what families do at home and give them ideas and skills to help them feel confident and competent. Families want their children to succeed in the world in which they live. They have high hopes that their children will be able to be good learners, workers, and productive members of society. Children do not just live in the cultural bubble of their families. They also live in the outside world of school and community.

How Children Experience Diversity

Between ages two and five, children develop their sense of self. They become aware of the gender, culture, ethnicity, family differences, disabilities, and economic class of themselves and others. In the presence of people who are different from them, they may say things like "Why is he Black?" "She looks funny." "Why doesn't she walk?" "I don't like him, he is weird." "Boys can't play here." "Girls are weak." "You can't have two mommies!" "Muslims are stupid." These questions and comments are an expression of curiosity or discomfort. The children may be repeating things they have heard others say.

At the same time, young children become aware of biases against aspects of their own identity. With adult guidance, preschoolers can begin to recognize and challenge biases, unfairness, racism, and sexism that affect themselves and others. This is even more reason for creating diversity-rich environments for all children. We want children to develop a strong self-concept. We also want them to respect and interact in positive ways with people who are different from themselves.

Understanding Bias and Discrimination

Bias is an attitude, belief, or feeling that results in and helps justify unfair treatment of a person because of her or his identity. For example, there is evidence that early childhood teachers believe that young Black boys need to be watched more closely than other children (Gilliam et al. 2016), lest they cause trouble in the classroom. That is a bias.

Discrimination is an action by an institution or individual that denies access or opportunity to people based on some aspect of their identity (such as gender, income, or race). Discrimination is regulated by strict laws in the United States. In the case of the Black boys, it means that their access to early childhood programs is open. There is no legal discrimination against them. However, because of the bias described above, these children are targeted for expulsion from programs at rates two to three times higher than other children (Brown and Steele 2015). According to data from the Office of Civil Rights (OCR), Black children make up 18 percent of preschool enrollment but 48 percent of preschool children receiving suspension (OCR 2014).

Therefore, even though they have access to education, they are denied the opportunity to learn. The implicit bias of educators affects their experience in a negative way.

Children are at risk of being harmed by the biases of educators in other ways too. Other examples include ignoring the languages of immigrant children; high child-adult ratios that make quality care impossible; being friendlier to children from one culture than another; the persistent education gap between children of color and white children; not providing enough physical activities; ignoring that children live in gay and lesbian families; and using classroom management techniques that are harsher for some children than others. But in all of these examples, there is hope. When educators become aware of their biases, they are more intentional in delivering good education to all children.

Useful Resources and Philosophies

There is a solid body of research and ideas to help educators do a good job with cultural diversity. Every state has developed Early Learning Standards to understand early childhood development. Institutions like the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) and the National Black Child Development Institute (NBCDI) provide information and resources. Concepts like cultural pluralism, anti-bias education, cultural guidance, and skilled dialogue are important tools.

An Environment That Helps Black Children Learn

Debra Ren-Etta Sullivan (2016), the author of *Cultivating the Genius of Black Children*, proposes twelve key elements of the learning environment that will best help Black children learn:

1. Active, engaged, synergetic learning
2. Interactive discourse, discussion, and analysis with an emphasis on verbal "play"
3. Opportunities for creativity, individualism, and embellishment
4. Collective/collaborative activity and problem solving
5. Competitive mental and physical challenges
6. Meaningful, mutually respectful teacher-child relationship
7. Meaningful, mutually respectful connection to family and community
8. Educational empowerment/personal responsibility
9. Opportunities for self-reflection

10. Opportunities for connecting with nature and each other for a higher purpose or a good cause
11. An integrated, connected curriculum
12. A sense of community and belonging (p. 75–76)

Reading this list, you might notice that they are the same expectations promoted by early childhood education environmental assessments like the CLASS, the ELLCO, or the ECERS. They are the same as the principles of Developmentally Appropriate Practice (NAEYC) and many other works that describe quality early childhood education. Many children benefit from these positive teachings, but unfortunately these ideas are less often applied when teaching Black children. When these children are creative, interactive, or physical, their behaviors are likely to be interpreted in a negative way by their teachers. The teachers hold the bias that these children do not have the inherent abilities to do well without stricter direction. They work to curb the creativity, interaction, and physicality by insisting on quiet and passive behaviors. In turn, these unfair requests generate resistance from the children, resulting in a negative cycle. The solution is that all these ideas must be applied for all children, regardless of race. And it must happen all day, every day.

Early Learning Standards

The Early Learning Standards guide educators in understanding child development and design curriculum and activities that best meet the needs of children. Every state has Early Learning Standards as a tool for knowing how children grow in different areas of development: social-emotional, physical, and cognitive skills; language and literacy; arts; and approaches to learning. Before the age of three, children learn about themselves. Then they begin to know about others.

NAEYC Code of Ethical Conduct and Developmentally Appropriate Practices

As a field, we have the guidance of NAEYC, which gives a clear path for doing the right things for children, families, and colleagues in the Code of Ethical Conduct and in the Developmentally Appropriate Practices Model. As the NAEYC Code of Ethical Conduct (2011) states:

> We shall not participate in practices that discriminate against children by denying benefits, giving special advantages, or excluding them from programs or activities on the basis of their sex, race, national origin, immigration status, preferred home language, religious belief, medical condition, disability, or the marital status/family structure, sexual orientation, or religious beliefs or other affiliations of their families. (p. 3)

Most importantly, the first item in the NAEYC Code of Ethical Conduct states:

> We shall not harm children. We shall not participate in practices that are emotionally damaging, physically harmful, disrespectful, degrading, dangerous, exploitative, or intimidating to children. (2011, 3)

Early educators must reflect on the "harm" aspect of bias, which results in not teaching all children with fairness. It harms children when the following occurs:

- They hear their home language only when the teacher scolds them.
- They are picked last to go to lunch because they were the wiggliest at circle time.
- Expectations are lower because their family is below the poverty line.
- They have two fathers and there are no books about families with two dads on the bookshelf.
- The teacher ignores the multicultural richness of their classroom.

Cultural Pluralism

Janet Gonzalez-Mena describes cultural pluralism as "the notion that groups and individuals should be allowed, even encouraged, to hold on to what gives them their unique identities, while maintaining their membership in the larger social framework." She adds, "The goal of diversity is unity. Only when we can come together freely, as we are, feeling good about who we are, can we create a healthy unity among all the people of this great society" (2008, 14).

Cultural pluralism

- gives guidance in planning curriculum;
- gives guidance in designing the environment;
- relates to the Early Learning Standard of Self and Emotional Awareness;
- relates to the Early Learning Standard of Building Relationships; and
- gives guidance in choosing books for the library center.

Anti-Bias Education

Anti-bias education was pioneered in the early childhood setting by Louise Derman-Sparks and her colleagues (Derman-Sparks et al. 2009; Derman-Sparks et al. 2015; Derman-Sparks et al. 2011). Children are aware of differences in themselves and others at a very young age, and

anti-bias education is a positive way to teach about diversity. Young children are also capable of addressing unfairness at their level of development. They can find solutions when educators and parents teach them how to do it. For example, in one classroom, children examined books on the shelf and discussed if the families in the books looked like theirs. Over the course of one month of study, they determined that there were no books with Asian characters (there were two Asian children in the group) and no books with families with two moms (there was one such family in the group). Based on their investigation, they wrote a request to the director to buy books that reflected their classroom community. In addition, the program added to the curriculum a family activity night during which they made books with pictures of all the children and their families for the classroom.

Anti-bias education

- becomes a practice for choosing learning and teaching materials;
- addresses the experiences of monocultural groups of children;
- helps children learn the difference between feelings of superiority and feelings of self-esteem surrounding their heritage;
- gives tools to talk openly about the various family structures of children in the classroom; and
- helps address the stereotypical beliefs that parents or guardians who are low income are not good parents.

Cultural Guidance

Lisa Delpit (2006) advanced the notion that some members of society do not have inside knowledge about how to access the culture of power. This may be the case for families of color, immigrants, or people with low education. Even at the early childhood level, the jargon of our field is complicated for parents to understand. While it may be clear to us, they may not know the path to kindergarten. In that case, Delpit says that educators need to be "cultural guides." She makes the distinction between being a cultural guide rather than being a cultural invader. A cultural invader says, *your language and culture are wrong. If you want to be successful, you need to adopt the dominant culture and forget yours*. Educators may deliver this message with or without words by failing to acknowledge home cultures. A cultural guide, on the other hand says, *your language and culture are valuable. They are part of who you are. I will help you keep them up. At the same time, I will show you how things are done here so you learn the rules and ways of contemporary American culture.* The cultural guide acknowledges home cultures and understands deeply that all families share the universal values of love, protection, and nurturance. A cultural guide knows that these values are expressed and

lived differently. Guides also understand that such differences may need to be discussed and navigated with diplomacy and compassion.

Cultural guidance

- respects the confidence of teachers in their own skills;
- allows teachers to give parents information about the field of early education in a respectful way;
- encourages parents to choose how they want to acculturate; and
- teaches children how to adjust to the rules and demands of life in child care or school, which may be different from home.

Skilled Dialogue

Isaura Barrera developed the model of skilled dialogue (Barrera and Corso 2003; Barrera and Kramer 2017). It is an approach that honors cultural beliefs and values. Educators value the earlier experiences of children and families and use them as the foundation for learning new ways. In a reciprocal relationship, educators tune in to families' hopes, dreams, and definition of success for their children. They listen more and find ways to collaborate successfully.

Skilled dialogue

- encourages educators to develop a relationship with families based on common goals for children;
- asks educators to suspend judgement;
- promotes respectful and responsive interactions;
- reframes differences between educators and families as complementary rather than contradictory.

Personal and Professional Experience of Educators

Educators often ignore their own personal and professional experiences as part of the cultural community of their classroom or program. In my work as trainer and coach, I hear educators, especially white educators, claim they don't have a culture. Yet your culture is important too. As you acknowledge your own culture and add it to the culture of children, you create a diverse community where everyone appreciates one another. You also know a

lot about child development and teaching. You have characteristics that predispose you to be good at creating a positive, diversity-rich environment. More information may be necessary to make you more aware and to go deeper, but your foundation is strong.

It's important for you to remember and acknowledge that

- you are a good person who cares about children;
- you have studied early childhood development;
- you attend conferences and professional development workshops to enhance your knowledge;
- you are skilled at teaching young children; and
- your culture is part of the diversity in your classroom or program.

CHAPTER 2:
VALUES AND ATTITUDES

Advancing Equity in Early Childhood Education (NAEYC 2019)

Recommendations for Everyone: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6

Recommendations for Early Childhood Educators:

- Create a Caring, Equitable Community of Engaged Learners: 1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9, 10
- Establish Reciprocal Relationships with Families: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5
- Observe, Document, and Assess Children's Learning and Development: 1, 2, 3

In a child care center, an immigrant father asked that his son not play in the housekeeping center of his classroom. He worried that his little boy would learn behavior inappropriate for a male of his culture. The teacher, a man, listened to the father carefully. He knew about the practice of skilled dialogue, where the objective is to consider the family's view and the educator's view and combine both to arrive at a solution. The teacher explained to the father that, in his classroom, he follows the philosophy of developmentally appropriate practice and that all the children must have access to all the materials and spaces in the room. He stated that while he heard the concerns of the father, he could not deny access to the housekeeping area to the boy or to any other child. The father and the teacher had several conversations about the choices each could make at home and at school. They concluded that the family could control play at home, but school was a diverse, developmentally appropriate learning environment, and therefore the child had the right to play everywhere in the classroom. The father decided that he would not

let his son "play kitchen" at home, but he wanted the child to continue his American education at school with the same teacher.

Examining Values and Attitudes in a Diversity-Rich Environment

Early education is all about relationships. Working with children also means working with their families. And of course, it means working with colleagues. All that occurs in very intimate ways. We hear details about children's family life every day. Families ask for our advice, but they do not always take it. Educators feel frustrated because their view of the world does not always jibe with the reality of children's lives.

Values are a person's principles or standards of behaviors. These standards are often shared with a cultural group, but they may also be an individual's judgement of what's important in life. That means that there are many values, with many variations.

Attitude is a settled way of feeling or thinking about someone or something. It is often shown with behavior. Therefore, one could say that our attitudes are an expression or consolidation of our values. If I hold the value that children learn though play, and I hold the value that children must learn the alphabet before kindergarten, I will teach the alphabet with songs and engaging activities rather than rote repetition. I will do so intentionally. This intentionality is my attitude.

Important Considerations for Educators

Be Aware, Be Alert, Be Intentional

The first part of examining our values and attitudes is to be aware of our biases. Everyone has biases, and we must always bring them to our consciousness so we don't blindly act on them. The consequences of ignoring our biases are always negative.

Believe That Families Want the Best for Their Children

Depending on their level of education and knowledge, families have diverse ways of viewing early childhood education. Highly educated families tend to do a lot of research to choose the program that best fits their needs. These parents feel confident in their ability to advocate for their child, so they ask about the curriculum or teacher turnover. Immigrant families, families in poverty, and families with low educational levels are less familiar with the culture of education. They are not as aware of their choices, and they may not know how to conduct the

search. They expect that educators will provide the best for their children. Even though they may have different traditions and practices, all families want their children to succeed.

Embrace the Concept of Universal Family Values

No family wants their child to be sad, sick, poorly adjusted, or unready for school. Protecting, educating, and nurturing children are universal core values of the family. Throughout the world, all families want children to become productive adults in their own culture. In a diverse society, knowing the "code for success" is difficult. It may have been simpler in the past when there were fewer life choices and when people lived in smaller communities or groups. Educators with a diversity-rich mindset must embrace this idea of universal core values. That belief enables us to support families even when we disagree with their practices.

Know That Values Are Demonstrated through Practices and Traditions

Families have ways of doing things that may be part of the larger culture or may be specific to their small unit. This happens in how they celebrate cultural or religious holidays like Christmas or the Fourth of July or private holidays like birthdays or graduations. Families also have their own daily routines such as mealtime and bedtime. They handle illness, vacations, gatherings, and prayers in thousands of different manners. Sometimes they make pragmatic decisions. For example, Muslim Somali families in the United States may take part in the Christmas gift giveaways. In this case, parents see the benefit to their children of getting new toys, independent of religious beliefs.

Be Curious about Other Peoples' Values and Practices

As early educators, we get a glimpse into the children's lives when they or their parents tell us stories. We may be surprised by what we hear. Curiosity is a healthy attitude. Not in a judgmental way, but in an open way that celebrates the richness of expression for those universal values of protection, education, and nurturance. We also want to remember that values and practices or traditions may change with new experiences. It is always possible to add or drop some. This may start with concrete experiences such as a potluck at your child care program where families share their favorite dishes. And it may go deeper, as when a teacher honors the many languages of the children in her classroom by learning fingerplays in each of the languages to routinely integrate them into her lesson plans.

Children Must Learn the Skills to Be Successful in the Country Where They Live

For a school district, I conducted focus groups to find out what parents wanted for their children's education. The goal was to get information from a wide variety of families. The groups had different socioeconomic, language, ethnic, and educational characteristics. They were American-born white people and people of color, immigrants, refugees, teen parents, and older parents. To the question, "What do you want for your children when they grow up?" all answered that they wanted their children to succeed in life and at work in the United States. The more affluent and educated families had a map of the path to their vision of success, including the education needed and the desired livelihoods their children might pursue. The less affluent, the less educated, and the immigrants had the same vision of success, but they did not know the path. That is an important concept for educators to remember. It is tempting to jump to the conclusion that some families do not value education when they don't attend parent-teacher conferences. This assumption is a dangerous bias. It lowers our respect for families. It diminishes our ability to teach the children the skills they need to succeed.

Practical Applications

Strategies for Creating a Diversity-Rich Environment with an Equity Lens

- **Be aware of your personal values and professional responsibilities.** Personal values and professional responsibilities may sometimes be in conflict. In a professional situation, your professional responsibilities as an educator come first. Early educators must follow best practices in early childhood education, and they must follow the law, regardless of their personal views.
- **Respect the personal values of families.** This point is not in contradiction with the previous statement. Respect does not mean doing everything that families want. In the vignette, the teacher respected the father's values by listening to his perspective. In this way, a level of mutual trust could be established that allowed all parties to continue the conversation.
- **Dialogue without imposing personal values.** The teacher in the vignette may not have understood in his core where the father was coming from, but he did not impose his personal values. The conversation happened over several meetings. The father's values were juxtaposed with the ethical responsibility of educating the child in a way that is developmentally appropriate. The teacher was confident in his skills and in his knowledge of early childhood education.
- **Use the NAEYC Code of Ethical Conduct to guide your work.**