

Chapter Four

Developing a Skilled, Ethnically and Linguistically Diverse Early Childhood Workforce

adapted from *Getting Ready for Quality: The Critical Importance of Developing and Supporting a Skilled, Ethnically and Linguistically Diverse Early Childhood Workforce*

Introduction¹

Helping children enter schools “ready to learn” is a prominent focus of national, state, and local initiatives and policies throughout the United States. Most school readiness efforts share an explicit commitment to reducing the disproportionately poor educational outcomes experienced by low-income and cultural and linguistic minority children and families.

While these poor educational outcomes in large measure are the consequence of poverty and its impact upon health and family security, blocked economic opportunity, and environment², many of these efforts to improve school readiness for low-income and cultural and linguistic minority children have focused on providing additional pre-school and child development opportunities.

In part, this is because research shows that offering high quality early childhood and school readiness programs can improve educational outcomes for low-income and cultural and linguistic minority children.³ Half of the educational achievement gap between poor and non-poor children already is evident at the time they enter kindergarten.⁴ At the same time, there has been insufficient attention provided to developing these high quality early childhood and school readiness programs with a specific focus upon the culture, language, and ethnicity of the children and families being served. To do so requires attention to all of the following:

- Redefining what is quality care and education in a culturally and linguistically diverse society;
- Promoting diversity and inclusion of ethnic, cultural, and language diverse educators in the workforce; and
- Improving the working conditions and professional status for all early childhood educators, with special attention given to providing appropriate career ladders and opportunities to educators within low-income, immigrant, and minority communities.

Such attention is critically important at this time, when many states and communities are developing new standards for child care and creating new pre-school programs. Color-blind approaches simply will not produce the gains that are needed to close the gaps that children in poor, immigrant, and minorities communities experience at the time of school entry.⁵

This chapter discusses each of these three needs in more detail and concludes with a set of policy recommendations. First, however, it provides a brief description of the current status of the early childhood workforce, in the context of the children being served.

Where are we Now? Current Demographics of the Early Childhood Workforce and the Children and Communities Being Served

While the United States has always been a diverse society, recent waves of immigration, especially from Latin America, Asia, Eastern Europe, the Middle East,

the Caribbean and Africa have made it even more so. Nearly 41% of the entire child population in the United States is of Latino, Asian, or African American/African descent. By 2020, the percent of ethnic, cultural, and language minority children is projected to grow to 47%.⁶ Nationwide, one out of five school-aged children now lives in an immigrant family.

Over the past two decades, the percentage of school-aged children speaking languages other than English at home has nearly doubled. One child in ten is now an English Language Learner.⁷ Further, young children represent the most diverse part of the U.S. population. According to the 2000 census, 41.5% of children under 6 are Hispanic and/or of a race other than White; which compares with 30.4% of the working age (18-64) population and 16.4% of the retirement age (65+) population.⁸ As the Appendix shows, these children also disproportionately live in the country's poorest and most vulnerable neighborhoods.

Data on the demographics of the current early childhood workforce (see chart) show that child care workers are fairly reflective of the young child population. That holds considerably less well for preschool and kindergarten teachers, however, and much less well for elementary and secondary teachers.

Unfortunately, the Bureau of Labor Statistics does not break out preschool and kindergarten teachers separately, so preschool teacher information is mixed with kindergarten teacher information. Currently, the preschool category includes teachers who may or may not have early childhood teaching credentials. Some preschool teachers, particularly those employed by schools, have such credentials and are paid at a level fairly comparable to kindergarten and elementary

schools. Others, including those employed by Head Start and other nonprofit preschools, are much less likely to have formal, post-secondary early childhood education degrees or to receive salaries much above those for child care workers. In general, as compensation and credentialing expectations increase, the proportion of minority teachers goes down substantially.

Further, many public preschool programs are designed to serve low-income children, where the proportion of racial and ethnic minorities is much higher. As the Chart shows, while two in five young children are non-white or Hispanic, two in three poor children are non-white or Hispanic. Studies of state pre-school programs have shown a substantial mismatch between the ethnicity of the professionally-trained teaching force and that of the students served. For example, a recent survey of state administrators of early childhood programs concluded that the lack of Latino or

	White, Non-Hispanic	African American	Latino	Asian/Other
child care workers	63.9%	15.5%	18.1%	2.5%
preschool/ kindergarten teachers	71.9%	14.7%	10.4%	3.0%
elementary and middle school teachers	82.1%	9.6%	5.9%	2.4%
0-5 population	58.5%	14.7%	19.2%	7.5%
6-12 population	61.0%	15.6%	16.7%	6.7%
0-5 population under 100% poverty	33.4%	29.0%	30.1%	7.5%

bilingual teachers is one of the most urgent challenges in serving the Latino population.⁹ Data specific to practitioners working with infants and toddlers show that this group of caregivers appears to be most reflective of the children served. Early Head Start, for example, has done an exemplary job of hiring staff that mirror the ethnicity and language background of the children served. Like their clientele, Early Head Start child development staff are 42% White, 27% African American, 21% Latino, 3% Native American, and 3% Asian or Pacific Islander. Twenty-three percent (23%) are proficient in a language other than English, a number comparable to the percentage of children speaking a language other than English in the home.

Children between the ages of 0-2 not enrolled in Early Head Start also may be more likely to have culturally and ethnically congruent care, as they are more likely to use family or relative care than center-based care. At least 26% of infants and toddlers (versus 14% of preschoolers) spend time in a family child care home and 46% (versus 27% of preschoolers) are cared for by relatives and neighbors (both paid and unpaid).¹⁰ Often located in the same neighborhood and connected by social networks, anecdotal information suggests that family child care providers as well as kith and kin caregivers generally reflect the ethnic and linguistic background of children and their families, especially in low-income communities. Relative care (which is by definition reflective of a child's family and culture) is especially common among African Americans and Latinos.¹¹

At the same time, these caregivers often face the same economic and educational challenges that the parents of the children in their care do. The compensation they receive, either through child care subsidies or direct payments, rarely provides sufficient economic support

to get above poverty level wages.¹²

Meanwhile, the more formally-skilled, credentialed, and better-compensated early childhood workforce is both much less diverse and currently in very short supply. It is estimated today that 27,778 preschool teachers have college degrees.¹³ Research frequently is cited that the best way to assure quality in preschool programs is to require a college degree (preferably in early childhood education) for all lead pre-school teachers.¹⁴ Assuming that the United States offered a voluntary universal preschool program serving 95% of all four year olds today, experts estimate this country will need a total of 200,556 preschool teachers, more than 8 times the current supply of those with degrees. A movement toward requiring all lead preschool teachers to hold or obtain BA degrees in early education will require explicit and concerted attention to supporting the participation of low-income, non-traditional, culturally and linguistically diverse students in order to produce a new workforce. It also will require explicit attention to providing education that ensures cultural appreciation and competency for all persons receiving that education, as discussed in the next section.

Defining High Quality Early Childhood Education in a Diverse Society

Quality early childhood education and school readiness programming includes the following commonly accepted elements:

- Skilled and effective teachers who are sensitive and responsive to children and know how to build upon children's emerging understandings and skills.
- Low teacher-child ratios and appropriate group sizes.
- Age-appropriate practice and curriculum that

supports all aspects of children’s development – cognitive, physical, social and emotional – and capitalizes upon children’s natural curiosity and the many ways in which children learn.

- Engaged parents and families who are integrated into the overall program and regularly informed about their children’s progress and developments.
- Well-designed facilities that, at a minimum, protect the health and safety of children and staff.
- Incorporation of the child’s home language and culture into program practices both with children and their parents.
- Access (through referral or on-site provision) to comprehensive services designed to ensure children and families can obtain other essential supports, including medical and dental care, social services, and, in some cases, developmental screenings.

In a diverse society, each of these needs to be examined through multiple cultural lenses that acknowledge and accept different customs and cultural norms and values. Quality needs to be defined in terms of its cultural competence within each of these elements.

Skilled and effective teachers. Early childhood staff of all backgrounds need strong early childhood development skills. In addition, they need professional development explicitly aimed at helping them understand and address issues related to diverse racial, cultural, and linguistic experiences and their impact on the development of young children and families. Unfortunately, many programs and practitioners engage with their children in practices that only reflect the values and norms of the dominant Anglo-European Christian culture.¹⁵ For example, staff typically speak English and act in accordance with dominant cultural practices, such as using verbal versus non-verbal cues to give directions and engaging in activities that

emphasize individual versus collective action and responsibility. Parental involvement is valued when it occurs in “standard” ways that reflect the Anglo/European worldview of such involvement. Customs from the dominant culture routinely are recognized and incorporated into programming, often with minimal recognition and incorporation of customs from other cultures.

Practices and the curriculum must respect and reflect the child and family’s home culture by using and adapting teaching strategies that are compatible with the child and family’s home-life and context of everyday activity. The curriculum must create a safe, affirming learning environment that respects and recognizes the key role of a child’s culture and language to the child’s social-emotional and identity development, and supports young children in bridging across and integrating home and school contexts.¹⁶

Regardless of the teacher’s own cultural, language, and racial background, developing skilled and effective teachers requires explicit training, professional development, and monitoring and supervision overtly geared to understanding differences in child development practices across culture and language and how to incorporate those differences into effective practice.

Age Appropriate Practice. Working effectively with young children starts with countering the widely accepted myth that young children are “color-blind.” Children can and do see differences at a very young age. Noticing differences is normal. The challenge is that, as children grow older, their attitudes about the human differences they observe all too quickly begin to reflect adult prejudices that exist in their world. Studies have shown that by the time children are three,

they already are beginning to respond differently to people of varying skin color and other racial clues.¹⁷

Teachers need to recognize that they have a tremendous impact on how young people interpret and react to the differences they notice between people and that this is part of a child's development process. Helping young children recognize such differences and value differences and diversity needs to be reflected in practice and curriculum. Children notice if adults speak disparagingly or positively about people of other backgrounds. When adults ignore or appear troubled by a child's cues of interest in this area, they may convey that the child has stumbled upon something potentially unspeakable or worrisome.¹⁸ Professional development should provide teachers of all racial, ethnic, and language backgrounds with skills to help minority children, in particular, develop a positive sense of self-identity and combat the development of biased attitudes among all children. While children are young, teachers have an unparalleled opportunity to teach them to value differences and ensure that they do not perceive themselves or others as less valued because of a difference.¹⁹

Engaged Parents and Families. Outcomes for young children cannot be separated from family origins and circumstances. Family members provide the earliest and closest relationships that children have with adults and they serve as the primary system for promoting children's physical, social, emotional and cognitive development.

Different cultures have different roles for family members, with the dominant Anglo/European culture generally assuming that there is a nuclear family that provides the primary care for the children and therefore acting accordingly regarding family involvement strategies. At the same time, many other cultures stress extended families and place particular

importance on the role of elders and the grandmothers in child-raising. Child care programs which provide messages that reach out only to mothers and fathers may exclude a very important part of the child's family network and culture.

In addition to the different roles individual family members play, it also is necessary to recognize cultural differences in the expectations family members have in the education of their children and their involvement with teachers. This is best achieved when families contribute their knowledge and expertise and staff work with them to incorporate practices that recognize different customs and cultures that support child development. This means that programs and staff must be equipped to:

- Reach out to families across differences in ethnicity, language and class.
- Treat parents with respect and as valuable sources of knowledge about child-rearing, especially when the practices in the home are different from dominant culture.
- Take an active role in helping parents develop the confidence and capacity to use their assets, including language and culture, to support their children's cognitive, social-emotional, physical, and literacy development in the home.
- Help parents, especially recently arrived immigrants, understand how the U.S. educational system works and develop the leadership skills they need to advocate on their children's behalf.

Teachers must be skilled in forging relationships across cultural lines with parents and family members. Without this two-way exchange, valuable keys to children's development and success are lost. Immigrant families are particularly vulnerable to the judgment of "experts" because they need information about how

things are done in American society and because their own cultural ways are so often devalued. If not treated respectfully, they lose a sense of their own power and competence in supporting their child's growth and development – and school readiness efforts remain one-sided. This requires that teachers continually reach out and see their role as learning from parents and family members as well as providing instruction and support.

Incorporation of the Child's Home Language. One clear weakness of the dominant culture approach to child development is its limited focus or orientation to supporting dual language learning. Research shows that dual language learning, starting at birth, enhances children's ability to learn multiple languages and has benefits in strengthening executive brain functioning that supports self-regulation and discipline.²⁰ Many cultures place much greater emphasis on dual language learning in the early years, which is increasingly important in a world economy.

While not all staff can be bi- or multi-lingual in order to reflect the home languages of the children and families they serve, programs need staff who can support children in the spoken and written language used in the home, as well as those who can provide English language development. Research shows that if teachers in early childhood settings can communicate with children in their home language, they are more likely to establish close relationships with the children in their care.²¹ Unless children from non-English speaking households receive strong support for their home language, their overall language development may be impeded and their likelihood of school success diminished.²² Even for teachers who are not bi-lingual, learning and using some words in the child's home language helps show respect for that

language both to the child and the child's family. Teachers must understand that ensuring children can speak the home language is critical to family communications. Parents, especially if they are low-income, often have few chances to learn to speak English well even when they are highly motivated to do so. Language minority parents often are in jobs where talking is not important or English is not used. Working multiple jobs, parents have little time for English classes. As a result, when language minority children lose their family language, their parents often lose their ability to provide verbal comfort and support, offer guidance and discipline, or transmit family values, hopes and traditions. Parents find themselves feeling more and more inadequate and ineffective and children often grow alienated from their families, especially older family members who may not speak any English at all.²³ This not only affects the passing on of family traditions and customs, but the involvement of parents and extended family in children's educational achievement in the larger community.

Teachers also need to be aware that the challenges facing African American children who use African American Vernacular English (AAVE) parallel those who speak entirely different languages. Like other languages, AAVE is a critical vehicle for the transmission of culture and for retaining a sense of connection to family and community. When African American children are constantly corrected or humiliated about their speech, they can become silent, self-esteem can suffer, they can develop shame about their family and language, and they can become alienated from the school experience.²⁴ They also lose an important and rich source of expression and cultural connection that can strengthen their overall education.²⁵

Finally, it is critically important than any assessments conducted of children and their development should not have a language bias. To ensure a complete understanding of each child's learning and development, assessments should be conducted in both the home language and English.

In short, to be effective, teachers must become knowledgeable and skilled in: a) the process of first and second language acquisition; b) effective teaching strategies for promoting bilingual development and acquisition of standard English; and c) how to work with parents and family members who don't speak English to provide the strongest possible language development and literacy base for their children. Wherever possible, early childhood educators should maintain or develop proficiency in communicating with children and their families in their native languages.

Access to Comprehensive Services. Child care programs and staff can be strong collaborating partners with parents and children and be a source of early identification and referral to other needed services, particularly important in poor and minority communities. These other essential supports include medical and dental care, social services, and, in some cases, developmental screenings. Such services should be linguistically and culturally appropriate, affordable, and conveniently located. These supports, however, also may be subject to a lack of cultural awareness or sensitivity and parents and family members may need help in navigating them. While not solely responsible for this assistance, child care programs and staff can help identify providers more attuned to providing culturally appropriate services and serve as additional advocates with the family and child in ensuring that services and supports provided do not undermine

cultural values.

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Developing a high quality early childhood workforce requires attention to all these elements, as examined through a multi-cultural lens. Early childhood staff of all backgrounds need professional development explicitly aimed at helping them understand and address issues related to diverse racial, cultural and linguistic experiences and their impact on the development of young children and families. This means that both pre-service education and training and in-service training and professional development contain rich content on the issues discussed above – much more so than they do today. Currently, most teacher training programs do not require teachers to gain much knowledge about topics related to the education of children from communities of color and immigrant families. A study of college programs found that less than half of current BA-level early childhood programs required a course in working with ethnically diverse families and only ten percent required students to take a course in working with bilingual children.²⁶ The Erickson Institute has found that, on average, the current bachelor's degree teacher program requires about 12% of the 67 semester hours of coursework to address issues related to diversity.²⁷ This figure includes requirements for courses that explicitly use diversity terms in their titles and for courses that simply reference addressing diversity related topics in the course description. While it is encouraging to see that some attention is beginning to be paid to including issues of diversity in teacher training, the current level of preparation is far from adequate in this area and much more needs to be done.

While the absence of addressing these issues can have

a devastating impact upon children of color, addressing these issues benefits all children. It is important for children and families from the dominant culture to be in early childhood settings where the curriculum, physical space, teaching methods, and teacher practices provide them exposure to diverse cultures and experiences and offers the opportunity to understand and value diversity.

Promoting Diversity and Inclusion of Ethnic, Cultural, and Language Diverse Educators in the Workforce

All early childhood educators should engage in culturally appropriate practices, even though any educator is likely to have deep personal experience in only one or two cultures. In order for the field of early childhood education as a whole to be culturally and linguistically competent, however, the field needs to better reflect the cultural background of the children and families it serves.

Further, when staff are from the community served and reflect similar backgrounds, they may be better equipped to form meaningful relationships with families and help parents develop their skills to prepare their children to succeed in school. Often, they possess knowledge about the culture, traditions, and behaviors of the children and families because they were raised in a similar manner. They can help families learn strategies for negotiating differences between the values and beliefs of their own unique ethnic and cultural communities and those of the mainstream culture. Knowing about these issues by virtue of experience makes a staff person a much more credible and useful source of information about early care and education and parenting. They also can be translators to and teachers of other early childhood educators who do not have this background.²⁸

As an earlier section showed, the current low-paid early care workforce (child care workers and home based providers) is quite reflective of the young child population in terms of its ethnic, language, and racial diversity – but the higher-paid, credentialed pre-school workforce is not. Currently, there is much attention to increasing the quality of preschools, with a major thrust on increasing the professional credentials of preschool teachers. Even if successful in expanding the professional workforce, a “color-blind” movement toward requiring all lead preschool teachers to hold or obtain a Bachelor of Arts (BA) degree in early childhood education can, without careful policy attention to prevent it, result in decreasing the diversity, and therefore the cultural quality, of the preschool teaching workforce.

While there is universal agreement that teachers should be well-educated and trained, not everyone agrees that a Bachelor’s degree requirement is the only option or that a Bachelor’s degree should be used as the primary indicator of teacher quality, particularly as it is applied to teaching children from diverse backgrounds.

First, coursework required under current four-year Bachelor programs typically does not require students to acquire sufficient attitudes, skills, and knowledge for working effectively with children from immigrant families or other marginalized cultural and linguistic communities. A requirement to acquire understanding and skills to support bilingual language development and second language acquisition is commonly missing from degree programs. The poor educational outcomes for ethnic, cultural, and language diverse students in public school K-12 programs, where almost universally teachers have at least a BA degree, is a clear example of how a Bachelor’s degree, in and of itself, does not

ensure a quality teaching force.

Second, obtaining a Bachelor's degree requires substantial investment. Without scholarships, reasonable timeframes for completing degree programs, and academic and non-academic supportive services, individuals with high quality potential who are knowledgeable about the lives, languages, and strengths of immigrant and other marginalized cultural and linguistically diverse communities will be excluded from obtaining such degrees and credentials and therefore from lead teacher positions in the early care and education workforce. Moving to a much more diverse, professionally-educated and trained early childhood workforce will require explicit attention, marketing, and a long-term commitment to create career pathways for people of color, starting from elementary school through the university system. Alternatively, simply reproducing the current K-12 workforce at a pre-K level can actually do harm. Early care and education jobs provide important sources of employment and income in culturally and linguistically diverse communities that are frequently without other major employers. Jobs in early care and education have long been a major source of stable employment for people living in low-income neighborhoods. Displacing this workforce not only weakens the cultural diversity of caregiving, but also can have negative impacts upon the economy in the community.

Third, the current early care and education workforce is heavily represented by individuals who are cultural and linguistic minorities, who often provide high quality early care and education as a result of years of classroom experience and both formal and informal education and training, sometimes attained in other countries. Four-year degrees are not easy for working

adults to obtain, especially if they are combining family and work responsibilities. They are especially difficult to obtain for low-income adults with limited proficiency in English or weak academic skills due to low-quality elementary and secondary education experiences that did not prepare them for college. Additionally, non-traditional students (older, part-time students who work and have families) generally are poorly served by most four-year degree granting institutions.

What is needed are multiple pathways for these existing teachers to enhance their skills and demonstrate their ability as teachers and for broadening the opportunities and incentives for individuals who might come into the field to obtain skills and credentials in early care and education. In particular, before degree-based mandates for lead teachers are cemented into place, all current educators must have access to a system of workforce development that includes multiple pathways to quality teaching and to qualifying for lead teacher position. Formal two- and four-year degree granting programs must include adequate resources to support the participation of low-income non-traditional culturally and linguistically diverse students.

In addition, other assessments and credentialing programs must be developed based upon demonstrated teacher competencies, including classroom evidence related to culturally and linguistically appropriate practices. Mississippi's Blueprint for Quality is one of a number of exemplary (but too often marginally funded) efforts to support skill-building for providers with all formal educational backgrounds.²⁹ A study of predominantly African American and Latino teachers found that better, more responsive teaching could be predicted when teachers were mentored early in their

careers, received on-going supervision, and were committed to staying in the field because they felt it benefited their community.³⁰ Such mentoring and support, including development of peer networks, is key to improving quality, but it is typically not recognized as a vehicle for quality improvement or supported through public funding.

Many of the recommendations provided in Section VI are directly tied to building this skilled workforce through both traditional and non-traditional channels.

Improving the Working Conditions and Professional Status for All Early Childhood Educators (with special attention given to providing appropriate career ladders and opportunities to educators within low-income, immigrant, and minority communities)

All young children need nurturing and developmentally appropriate care throughout their early years, starting at birth and extending to entry into school. Since there has been so much policy emphasis upon preschool, the previous section focused upon developing a culturally and linguistically diverse early childhood workforce primarily in the context of preschool, which generally serves three- and four-year-olds.

In fact, however, equal attention needs to be given to all caregiving provided for young children, including infant and toddler care and care in child care centers, family day care homes, and with family, friends, and relatives. Poor teacher compensation has long been a major challenge for the field of early care and education. In 2004, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the median annual salary of a child care worker was just under \$18,000.³¹ The vast majority of child care workers qualify as low-income or living in

poverty.

Such low worker compensation is extremely harmful to program quality. Low worker wages are directly correlated to increased rates of turnover, often ranging in child care centers to annual rates of 25% to 50%. A constantly changing staff makes it difficult for children to form solid social and emotional relationships with the adults who have primary responsibility for them. Low wages also mean that workers seldom have the discretionary resources they might use to invest in their own career development. These low wages are tied to the absence of sufficient public subsidies to increase wages and professional development supports. Most working families simply are not in a position to pay enough out of their wages for child care both to provide for decent wages for child care workers and to make their own work pay. In short, there is a mismatch between what parents can afford to pay for child care and what is needed to ensure decent wages that can support quality care.

Current state efforts to develop quality rating systems and tie enhanced reimbursement to those systems are one means for raising compensation, with an attention to quality. As these are developed, however, they must recognize the importance of developing a quality workforce through the multicultural lens provided in an earlier section in this chapter. As an example of the current lack of attention to these issues, few quality rating systems being established in states assign any value to teacher bi-lingualism or to cultural congruity in determining what rating level programs achieve.

Raising compensation for child care center and family child care home providers also can have a positive economic impact on poor, immigrant, and minority communities by increasing the assets in those

communities. Numerous child care economic impact studies have shown that early care and education is big business, rivaling industries such as the insurance and financial services industries in the job generation and income they produce. Not only do they enable parents to work in other jobs, but they are a significant part of the local economy, particularly in poor, immigrant, and minority communities. Therefore, raising compensation as well as skills and career pathway opportunities can have a positive economic impact on whole communities.³⁴

In addition to the formal child care provider system (home care providers and child care centers), there are a large number of family, friend, and neighbor (FFN) caregivers who also play a critical role in children's development. Almost by definition, these FFN caregivers come from the same cultures and backgrounds of the children and their parents. Such care is particularly prevalent in poor, immigrant, and minority communities and for children birth to three, but half of all care in the United States is provided by FFN caregivers, the majority of which on an uncompensated basis and by grandmothers.³² Such care is the care of choice of many families, but it also often is care provided by necessity and lack of affordable access to other care. In poor, immigrant, and minority communities, family, friend, and neighbor caregivers themselves often are themselves impoverished and under stress in providing care, including health conditions that limit their activity.

Experiences from Sparking Connections, a national initiative to study and support FFN caregiving, have shown that explicit attention to developing FFN networks both can strengthen FFN caregivers in nurturing and providing developmental environments for the children in their care. In addition, providing

resources for FFN networks creates new community leadership promoting better resources and support for all children. Key to supporting FFN care is providing the time, space, and opportunity for FFN caregivers to get together, get information, and support one another, often while the children in their care are engaged in developmental play activities. Creating these networks is akin to creating community libraries, rather than offering direct professional development experiences. These networks serve as voluntary places in the community where FFN caregivers, their children, and other family members can go to get what they want. Again, this creates an opportunity for connection both within and across cultural, ethnic, and linguistic lines.

Several states (Colorado, Washington, and Minnesota) are now exploring how states can support and resource this FFN caregiving.³³ Particularly in poor, immigrant, and minority communities, this can serve to create more physical spaces at a neighborhood level that are truly child and family friendly. Again, supporting such FFN caregiving is an additional means to transmit cultural values and value diversity while providing opportunities for becoming integrated into the larger society.

Recommendations

There is no single strategy to developing a diverse workforce that can meet the needs of America's children and families. This section offers a set of principles to construct multiple pathways and a scaffold that will support the development of a highly qualified, bilingual, multicultural workforce. These principles should be used together to develop effective national, state and local infrastructures and policies.

- Redefine the core competencies for providing high

quality care and education to include effectively addressing the development and learning needs of ethnic, minority, and foreign-born children.

- Invest in multiple delivery systems and alternative pathways that help teachers, especially from under-represented backgrounds, further their education. A key component is ensuring articulation between non-credit granting training, two- and four-year degree programs.
- Build capacity within community colleges, four-year colleges and training institutions to provide effective coursework and training for quality early childhood education appropriate to an increasingly diverse population of young children.
- Provide adequate resources, support and time for people (and particularly low-income, non-traditional and immigrant students) to pursue and successfully complete the pathways toward a degree.
- Link the creation of new workforce standards with the financing of the early childhood system and appropriate compensation levels that support the retention of a high quality, well-trained early childhood education workforce.
- Monitor and track the impact of professional policies on the diversity of the early childhood education workforce.

To implement these principles, local governments, institutions of higher education, state and federal policy makers, and advocates all have important roles and responsibilities. The following outlines some specific roles for each and some common roles for all (these are covered much more fully in *Getting Ready for Quality*).

I. Local government should work together with training institutions (community colleges, four-year

colleges and universities, research and referral agencies, and other community-based training institutions) and child care agencies (school districts, Head Start grantees, non-profit providers, and family child care providers) to:

1. Collect and analyze data on the ethnicity, language background, educational status, wages, benefits and tenure of the current early childhood workforce.
2. Provide aggressive outreach to foreign-born and ethnic minority early childhood professionals and help them to secure financial assistance to continue with their education.
3. Develop comprehensive career ladder programs for childcare workers and teachers that offer social, financial, and economic support.
4. Assess the extent to which local training institutions currently offer a) classes and supports for professionals who are most comfortable learning in languages other than English and b) courses aimed at better equipping early childhood professionals to meet the needs of diverse children.
5. Increase access to professional development for family child care providers.
6. Reach out to kith and kin providers and offer the information and support to help them in their caregiving roles.

II. Institutions of Higher Education (community colleges, four-year institutions, universities) should work together and with community-based training providers to:

1. Build internal capacity to provide teachers with the skills to work effectively with an increasingly diverse population of children and families.
2. Improve articulation between training institutions to help ensure transfer of credits and recognition of skill acquisition through other training and education.

3. Make teacher education more accessible, especially to low-income immigrant and minority teachers.

III. State and Federal Policy Makers should:

1. Create a professional development commission at the national level to define core competencies needed to deliver high quality, culturally responsive and competent early childhood education and identify effective ways of assessing the quality of teaching by teachers of diverse backgrounds.
2. Institute state-level systems for tracking the composition of the early childhood workforce.
3. Support the development of state infrastructures for coordinating training resources, developing training program standards and curricula, promoting aggressive outreach and recruitment, and evaluation effectiveness of programs.
4. Expand the capacity of community colleges and four-year institutions to meet the demand for better trained, more highly credentialed teachers who reflect the diversity of the children served and have the skills to promote the well-being of all children, especially children from immigrant families and low-income communities of color.
5. Offer financial assistance or loan forgiveness programs to cover the costs of obtaining more education.
6. Improve teacher compensation and reward teachers for obtaining teacher education.
7. Ensure that quality rating and reimbursement systems incorporate culturally and linguistically appropriate practices as part of the systems and reimbursements.
8. Provide resources to ensure that family, friend, and neighbor care is supported and those caregivers have access to information, networks, and activities that assist them in their nurturing and caregiving roles.

IV. Early Childhood Advocacy Groups and Professional Associations should:

1. Ensure diversity is explicitly included as a topic in recommended early childhood teaching standards.
2. Create and support opportunities to improve the cultural appropriateness of commonly used tools for assessing the quality of child care programs and teaching.
3. Advocate for the collection of local, state and federal data on the demographics of the field.
4. Identify and publicize success stories and promising practices for maintaining diversity of the early childhood workforce as standards rise.

V. All Leaders in the field should:

1. Educate themselves and their peers and colleagues on different child-raising practices across culture and language.
2. Ensure that people of color – particularly those with backgrounds and experiences in working in poor, immigrant, and minority communities – are enlisted at the outset as part of all planning activities and as members of advising and decision-making groups.

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This chapter has emphasized the importance of valuing diversity and recognizing differences across race, language, ethnicity, and culture in young children's development and education. At the same time, there are many more similarities than differences regarding child development across race, language, ethnicity, and culture. All cultures value children and see their own future in their children's healthy development. All children need healthy families and communities to thrive – which includes access to good health care, safe places, constant supervision and watchful eyes, and opportunities and encouragement

to explore their world. The differences in development within cultures among individual children are greater than the differences across culture.

Early childhood also is the time for the transmission of critical values and beliefs and orientations to responding to difference. As the United States works to develop an early learning system, it has the opportunity to much better value diversity and recognize commonality across race, class, language and culture within this system than we have in our other social, economic, and educational systems. It may well be that, in constructing this early learning system, we have the best opportunity to truly begin to eliminate the inequities and divides that have too long have blocked opportunities for children of color and diminished our country's overall wealth and potential.

Endnotes

- 1 This chapter is excerpted and adapted from a longer report prepared by the School Readiness, Culture and Language Working Group of the Annie E. Casey Foundation and published by California Tomorrow. Readers are encouraged to go to the original document for additional detail and discussion, particularly around the recommendations.
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