The Cultural Ambassadors: Becoming Culturally Conscious

New Jersey Center-Based Programs

Thomas Edison State College
THE JOHN S. WATSON INSTITUTE FOR PUBLIC POLICY
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The New Jersey Cultural Competency and English Language Learners Summer Institute and Mentoring Program
About Thomas Edison State College

Thomas Edison State College was founded in 1972 as one of New Jersey’s senior public institutions of higher learning and is regionally accredited by the Middle States Commission on Higher Education. The mission of Thomas Edison State College is to provide flexible, high-quality, collegiate learning opportunities for self-directed adults. The College is dedicated to continuing its work to create academic opportunities designed specifically for adults that serve as alternatives to college classroom study and meet the unique need of adult learners.

The John S. Watson School of Public Service and Continuing Studies at Thomas Edison State College prepares professionals for leadership roles in a wide variety of public service-related settings. The Watson School is preparing the next generation of public policy and community service leaders in the following areas: Urban, Rural and Regional Policy Studies; Nonprofit Management; Environmental Policy/Environmental Justice; Information and Technology Management; Health Policy and Public Health Management; Early Childhood Education Leadership and Management; and Public Finance/Budget and Fiscal Management. The concentration areas of the School have been a direct result of The John S. Watson Institute for Public Policy work across the state with leaders in various sectors.

The John S. Watson Institute for Public Policy is a center of innovation and applied policy within the Watson School offering a new paradigm, applying the resources of higher education to public policy decisions in a practical and hands-on manner, and in response to the expressed needs of decision makers, providing practical research, technical assistance and other expertise. The Watson Institute is considered a “think and do tank,” versus a traditional “think tank.” It strives to develop long-term strategic partnerships that will effectuate the greatest level of change through its four thematic policy-based centers: the Center for Civic Engagement and Leadership Development; the Center for the Urban Environment; the Center for Health Policy; and the Center for the Positive Development of Urban Children.

The Center for the Positive Development of Urban Children (CPDUC) strives to bridge the voices of teachers, practitioners and families with policy initiatives that impact the positive
development of New Jersey's children. The work of the CPDUC encompasses a holistic approach that utilizes best practices, policy analysis and research to improve the health, well being and educational outcomes for children and adults working with families. CPDUC goals are:

- To review and advise on early childhood policy and initiatives that impact the positive development of urban children.

- To utilize evidence-based practices and evaluations to influence best practices in the field of early childhood development, early learning and child health. Such practices focus on children's socioemotional development, teacher preparation and support systems for diverse children and families.

- To identify and promote economic messages to engage nontraditional champions for children within municipal government and the business sector.

- To provide professional development opportunities that focus on parent engagement, socioemotional development, supervision and mentoring of teachers, and working with diverse children and families.

- To provide advisement to early childhood practitioners that guides them to career and academic options for becoming highly qualified and certified.

The New Jersey Cultural Competency and English Language Learners (ELL) Summer Institute and Mentoring Program, established in 2007 by the Center for the Positive Development of Urban Children at The John S. Watson Institute for Public Policy at Thomas Edison State College, was designed to address the rare opportunity educators receive to engage in substantial course work to prepare them to work with the increasing proportion of linguistically and culturally diverse students. The program specifically targets and provides professional development to educators with at least 50 percent English language learner students in their classroom that qualify for the free and reduced lunch program (low-income families). The program is far more than an overview on diversity; it is an eye-opener for the educators' to discover their own cultural identity, biases and misconceptions. Through a three-day intensive learning Institute and nine-month mentorship, participants are provided with a comprehensive pathway to transform their thinking and classroom practices to support ELL students across the curriculum. In order to change behavior, the program challenges how teachers think and behave through the process of becoming culturally conscious.

The program blends content, theory and practice to better equip teachers to use culture and language as anchors for development that directly impact the development of positive children's cultural identities/self-esteem and its connection to academic success. In addition, teams participate in quarterly learning communities via teleconferences, received a tool box of resources valued at $350 and on-going evaluation of the practices and attitude toward change using the Culture and Language 5-Point Assessment Scale and the Children’s Institute Stage of Change Scale.

“We have to give teachers strong, consistent support in the best strategies and methods to reach, inspire and teach English language learner students.”
— Dennis Van Rokel, President of the National Education Association (NEA)
This report presents the findings of the sixth cohort of early childhood professionals that now join the 140 teachers that have graduated from the program. The New Jersey Cultural Competency and English Language Learners Summer Institute and Mentoring Program seeks to change not only the way the early childhood teachers think, but also how they drive cultural and linguistic practices to present curricula, interact with the children and find meaningful new ways for parent engagement.

Program Features

> **Pre-Institute Assessment:** To determine eligibility and selection into the program.

> **Three-Day Intensive Summer Institute:** and a cultural tool box valued at $350.

> **Nine Months of Mentoring:**

  - **Four Supportive Visits** - The mentor and the team build rapport and plan on what actions they will tackle together.

  - **Three Assessment Visits** - Using two scales it helps the mentor and team to reflect on the learning that has occurred and what types of supports are needed for the team to continue to make progress.

> **Quarterly Learning Communities:** Teleconferences that allow all participants to share lessons learned.

> **Cultural Conversations - Directors Institutes:** A two-day intensive Leadership Institute for directors and supervisors to impart the principles of the program so they can continue to mentor their staff after the mentoring process has ended.

**Tools for Measuring Program Impact**

> **The Culture and Language 5-Point Assessment Scale** measures across three competency areas that include developmental appropriate practices, English language learner strategies and cultural competency strategies using 26 categories across three domains: classroom design, teachers’ rhythm and temperament, and instructional practices.

> **The Children’s Institute Stage of Change Scale** measures teachers’ general dispositions and readiness for change using seven indicators that ranks the teachers’ overall stage of change using the following stages: Precontemplation, Contemplation, Preparation, Action and Maintenance.

> **Supportive Visit Narratives with Core Program Strategies Checklist** measures what specific strategies teams are thinking about implementing and what supports are needed to help them go to the next level using language and culture that closely related to the Stage of Change terminology.

> **Final Program Evaluation (Likert Scale)** measure what component of the program have been most effective in changing teachers’ thinking and practices.
Core Programs Strategies Checklist

**Classroom Design**
- Classroom contains diverse photos that reflect the students in the room.
- The classroom has rich print and labels in two or more languages that represent the children enrolled.
- Learning centers are well-stocked and contain ample items that reflect the diversity of the classroom.

**Solid Routines and Transitions - Seven Strong Transitions Every Time the Activity Changes**
- A consistent and predictable routine.

**Literacy Moments**
- Literacy moment as modeled.
- An enhanced story (props and gestures).

**Coteaching and Codecision Making**
- Both teachers are involved in circle time and instructional time using the children home language(s) and culture.
- The team seems to balance its strengths/skills to be culturally and linguistically responsive to the children.

**Utilization of Children’s Home Language**
- Attempts to use survival phrases and other frequency used words from the children's home language are being made.
- The children's home language(s) are used for directions and content.
- The children’s home language(s) are used for daily interaction and instructional time.

**Expanding Vocabulary in Both Languages**
- Creating rich block of time for the children to hear their home language via a native speaker, a book on CD or music.
- Creating bilingual or multilingual word walls.
- Utilizing rich vocabulary in literacy moments, interaction and discussions.

**Utilization of Children’s Home Culture Across the Curriculum**
- Greater parent involvement.
- Children engaged in learning.
Meet the Teachers of the 2012-2013 Cohort

In 2012-2013, New Jersey Cultural Competency and English Language Learners Summer Institute and Mentoring Program engaged and prepared traditional center-based teaching teams from eight classrooms in the following cities throughout New Jersey: Irvington, Montclair, Bloomfield, Perth Amboy and Trenton, and from five child care providers (see separate report). The program participants represented New Jersey’s increasingly diverse population, with nine educators identifying as African American, six as Hispanic, five as Caucasian. Five other educators identified as multiracial, Indian, Trinidadian or declined to identify [Refer to Figure 1 for ethnicity information]. In addition to speaking English, 27 percent of the educators indicated competency in a language. Seven of the participants indicated competency in other languages such as French, Creole and Hindi, and six in Spanish. The educators ranged in age from 25 to more than 50 years old.

The teachers participating in the Summer Institute and Mentoring Program ranged broadly in educational background. Thirty-eight percent of the teachers possessed a bachelor’s degree (10 of the 26 participants). Similarly, six teachers were CDA candidates and four held CDA credentials. One recently graduated high school, one held an associate degree, while another educator held a master’s degree. Similarly, one educator had completed some college and one declined to report his/her background.
Center-Based Program 2012-2013 Cohort: Transforming Classroom Design

The strongest improvements reported by the mentors for the 2012-2013 cohort for traditional child care centers was in the area of classroom design. An analysis of the Culture and Language 5-Point Scale data indicates that the New Jersey Cultural Competency and English Language Learners Summer Institute and Mentoring Program was highly successful in empowering the teaching teams to apply their cultural and linguistic knowledge to redesign their classrooms and more effectively support the development of diverse young children. Through the Summer Institute, teaching teams learned about the unique needs of young English language learners and applied this knowledge to transform their classroom environment to become more culturally competent and welcoming to all learners and their families. Successful improvements included adding photos and posters representing all students’ cultures as well as labeling classroom objects in the children’s home languages and English.

When comparing the classroom design assessment results of the Pre-Institute assessment with the results of the final post-Institute and Mentoring Program assessments, there are substantial improvements across domains that indicate the adoption of best practices [Refer to Figure 1 for complete results]. The greatest improvement within the classroom design domain represents the increasing incorporation of culturally competent strategies. The mean score for the culturally competent classroom design increased by 2.7 points on the 5-point scale throughout the course of the program. Similarly, the mean score for English language learner classroom design increased by 2 points, while the mean score developmentally appropriate classroom design increased by .9 points.

Overall Classroom Design Domain Results

Figure 1: Overall classroom design domain results using the Culture and Language 5-Point Scale for center-based teaching teams.
Center-Based Program 2012-2013 Cohort: Enhancing Educators’ Teaching Rhythm and Temperament

Throughout the Summer Institute and Mentoring Program, the mentors focused on improving the teaching style and interaction between the members of the teaching team. The teaching rhythm refers to how the lead and assistant teachers work cooperatively to support students’ culture and language development during moments of coteaching and within small groups. A successful teaching team applies the skill sets of each educator to provide all students with the maximum attention and support.

When comparing the teaching rhythm and temperament domain results from the pre-Institute assessment with the assessment results of the final post-Institute assessment using the Culture and Language 5-Point Scale for the center-based teaching teams, the data demonstrates improvements in all three competency areas [Refer to Figure 2 for complete results]. The greatest improvement was demonstrated through the increasing incorporation of culturally competent strategies. The mean score for culturally competent teaching rhythm and temperament increased by 2.6 points on the 5-point scale throughout the course of the program. Furthermore, the mean score for English-language-learner-appropriate teaching rhythm and temperament increased by 2.1 points. Overall, the data clearly demonstrates improvements in the areas of student and parent interaction as well as coteaching and codecision making within the teaching teams.

Overall Teaching Rhythm and Temperament Domain Results

Figure 2: Overall teaching rhythm and temperament domain results using the Culture and Language 5-Point Assessment Scale for center-based teaching teams.
An analysis of the Culture and Language 5-Point Assessment Scale data indicates that the New Jersey Cultural Competency and English Language Learners Summer Institute and Mentoring Program was highly successful in empowering the center-based teaching teams to apply their cultural and linguistic knowledge to support the development of diverse young children. When comparing the instructional strategies assessment results of the pre-Institute assessment with the results of the final post-Institute and Mentoring program assessments, there are notable improvements across the domain that indicate the adoption of instructional best practices [Refer to Figure 3 for complete results].

The greatest improvement within the instructional strategies domain represents the increasing incorporation of culturally competent instructional strategies. The mean score for culturally competent instructional strategies increased by 2.6 points, while the mean score for English language learner strategies increased by 2.1 points on the 5-point scale throughout the course of the program.

**Overall Instructional Strategies Domain Results**

![Figure 3: Overall instructional strategies domain results using the Culture and Language 5-Point Assessment Scale for center-based teaching teams.](image)

**Measuring Impact to Teachers’ Thinking and Practices**

Overall, when assessing the transformations in thinking and practice for the center-based teaching teams across the four supportive visits during the 2012-2013 program cohort, it is clear that the teachers’ thinking was transformed and that classroom practices had improved to become more linguistically and culturally responsive. When averaging the Core Program Strategies Checklist results for all the classrooms, the teaching teams appear to stay within the Getting Ready for Change and slowly moved toward the Ready for Action phase [Refer to Figure 4 for full results] throughout the nine month mentoring period. The overall average score of the teaching teams on the Core Program Strategies Checklist during the first supportive visit is 2.3 points on the 5-point scale, improving by 1.5 points to reach an average score of 3.8 by the fourth supportive visit.
Center Highlight: Little Kids College, Trenton, N.J.

Little Kids College teaching team Jennifer Seals and Lisa Massaro were highly motivated to start learning new techniques to engage their classroom’s diverse English language learners when entering the New Jersey Summer Institute and Mentoring Program. Throughout the mentoring period, the teaching team excelled in transforming their classroom and engaging their diverse students.

Overall Instructional Strategies Domain Results for Little Kids College Jennifer and Lisa

Figure 5: Little Kids College instructional strategies results using the Culture and Language 5-Point Assessment Scale.
with culturally and linguistically competent learning experiences. Their dedication earned strong praise from their mentors and, during the final assessment, the mentor commented “Since the beginning of the mentoring program, both teachers showed willingness to make the necessary improvements in order to provide a special environment for all their students.”

Both teachers were dedicated in their efforts to create a culturally and linguistically welcoming environment for their diverse learners by displaying multicultural items that represented the unique cultures of the student in their class. Their mentor reflected on their diligent efforts, “This classroom keeps improving visit after visit. It’s always a great pleasure for me to observe how caring and lovely the teachers are with their students, they are always smiling at their children, making them feel welcome and comfortable in the learning environment.” The teaching team worked to incorporated additional Spanish language vocabulary into their routines and instructions. Demonstrating significant progress, the team began to incorporate the many ways to say ‘hello’ in different languages into their daily morning meeting activities as well as teach a new word every week to enrich students’ understanding of different cultures around the world.

Beyond the improved instructional strategies and classroom design, the teaching team also excelled in implementing several monthly projects that the students and their parents could work on together at home to provide an opportunity for shared learning and quality family time. These activities created powerful connections with the children’s families and to enhance the representation of the diverse cultures in the classroom. These improvements earned high praise from their mentor, who stated “[The team] is excellent in almost all areas. I am especially pleased with their parent involvement, and the effort they have made to have parents to feel a part of the school environment... I was pleased to see so many elements of the English Language Learners program being used in the classroom.”

The evaluation data further supports the teaching team’s transformation. Using the Culture and Language 5-Point Assessment Scale, the mentor visits indicated that the teachers’ instructional practices significantly improved throughout the

### Changes in Thinking: Stage of Change Scale Results for Little Kids College

Jennifer Seals and Lisa Massaro

![Figure 6: Little Kids College, Stage of Change Scale, From Preparation to Maintenance](image)
course of the Summer Institute and Mentoring Program. When comparing the first pre-Institute assessment with the final assessment, the mean score for the instructional practices domain that relates to culturally competent techniques increased by 3.1 points on the Culture and Language 5-Point Assessment Scale. Additionally, the Little Kids College teaching team also achieved a nearly perfect ‘excelling’ rating of 4.7 points in the both the quality of their developmentally appropriate instructional practices, the incorporation of English language learner strategies and culturally competent techniques, as evidenced by the average scores for their final assessment [Refer to Figure 5 for full results].

When evaluating the teaching team’s changes in thinking using the Children’s Institute Stage of Change Scale, an analysis of the assessment data further supports the teaching team’s success. Using the 5-point Stage of Change Scale, it is clear that the overall stage of change for the teaching team moved from the Preparation stage, represented by a score of 3.0 in the first assessment, to the Maintenance stage, represented by a score of 4.9 during the final post-Institute visit [Refer to Figure 6 for full results].

Applying the Core Program Strategies Checklist, it is clear that the Little Kids College teaching team also demonstrated significant gains in transforming their thinking and practices in several core competencies. When analyzing the improvement in core competencies between the first and fourth supportive visits, the team made great improvements in incorporating routines and transitions, utilizing children’s home languages and culture across the curriculum, increasing parent involvement as well expanding children’s engagement in learning. During the first supportive visit, the Core Program Strategies Checklist competency of utilizing children’s home languages was assessed to be in the Thinking About Change phase, represented by a score of 2 on the 5-point scale. By the fourth supportive visit, the teaching team score in this core competency improved by 2 points, indicating that they were now in the Ready for Action stage, represented by a score of 4 on the Core Program Strategies Checklist 5-point scale. Similarly, in the Core Program Strategies Checklist competency of routines and transitions was assessed to be in the Getting Ready for Change stage, with a score of 3 on the 5-point scale. This score improved by 2 points during the fourth supportive visit and were determined to be in the Consistently Changing and Action Driven stage, represented by a score of 5 on the 5-point scale [Refer to Figure 7 for full results].

**Stages of Change in Implementing Core Strategies**

**For Little Kids College Jennifer and Lisa**

![Figure 7: Little Kids College, most improved strategies using the Core Program Strategies Checklist.](image)
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2012-2013 Participating Centers
  > Family Day Nursery, Bloomfield, N.J.
  > Little Kids College (Team 1), Trenton, N.J.
  > Little Kids College (Team 2), Trenton, N.J.
  > Neighborhood Child Development Center, Montclair, N.J.
  > Tiny Love Day Care, Irvington, N.J.
  > Trenton Head Start (Team 1), Trenton, N.J.
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References


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Caitlin Kosec, MPP, currently serves as the grants manager at Interfaith Community Services in Escondido, Cali. Throughout her career, Caitlin has worked in nonprofit sector to advance education reform as well as improve services for low income and diverse communities. Before joining Advancement Project, Caitlin was the scholarship director of the Carson Scholars Fund, where she managed a national scholarship program to promote college access and academic achievement. She also served for the past five years as a program evaluator for The John S. Watson Institute for Public Policy at Thomas Edison State College, publishing several evaluations examining the efficacy of the New Jersey Cultural Competency and English Language Learners Summer Institute and Mentoring Program and raising awareness of the unique needs of English Language Learners. Caitlin holds a Master of Public Policy degree from Johns Hopkins University with a concentration in education policy and nonprofit management as well as a Bachelor of Arts degree in history from the University of Mary Washington. Caitlin has worked with the program for eight years.