The Cultural Ambassadors: Becoming Culturally Conscious

New Jersey Family Child Care Providers Pilot

REPORT FUNDED BY:

THOMAS EDISON STATE COLLEGE

THE JOHN S. WATSON INSTITUTE FOR PUBLIC POLICY

SEPTEMBER 2014

PRINCIPAL AUTHORS:
Ana I. Berdecia, MEd • Caitlin Kosec, MPP

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 of 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
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)

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 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 of 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. This
The Cultural Ambassadors • Becoming Culturally Conscious

The report presents the findings of the sixth cohort of early childhood professionals that now join the 140 teachers that have graduated from the program and the family child care providers pilot. 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.
New Jersey Cultural Competency and English Language Learners Summer Institute and Mentoring Program

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 Family Child Care Providers of the 2012-2013 Cohort

For the first time in the Summer Institute and Mentoring Program’s history, five family child care providers were engaged in the innovative mentoring and training program to create culturally and linguistically competent environments for young children; only four completed the nine-month mentoring program. A family child care provider is an individual who cares for and educates young children in their home. Many providers work with multiage groups including infants, toddlers, preschoolers, school-age and children with special needs. Expanding beyond the traditional center-based environments, the family child care providers represented the following cities throughout New Jersey: Elizabeth, East Windsor, Jersey City and Newark.

The program participants represented New Jersey’s increasingly diverse population, with three educators identifying as Hispanic and one as African American. In addition to speaking English, 75 percent of the educators indicated competency in Spanish as well. The educators ranged in age from 40 to more than 50 years old. Half of the family child care providers possessed a CDA Credential, while the other half was pursuing their CDA credentials as candidates. The Child Development Associate (CDA) Credential is a national credential awarded by the Council for Professional Recognition based in Washington, D.C. Two of the family child care providers obtained the national accreditation for the home-based child care program, awarded by the National Association for Family Child Care.

About Family Child Care Providers
There are more than 3,800 family child care providers registered in New Jersey. Registered family child care homes are independent small businesses that provide care for no more than five children at one time. Providers that also care for their own children or children of their staff can care for up to eight children at one time. County child care resource and referral agencies (R/R agencies) are contracted with the New Jersey Department of Human Services to register family child care homes and provide other supports such as training and technical assistance. In New Jersey, registration is voluntary and, therefore, it is estimated that the provider population is much larger than those who select registration. This growing network of entrepreneurs often works in isolation with very few opportunities to attend professional development training during normal business hours as they strive to meet the needs of families and earn income. Some family child care providers lack the connections with the early childhood workforce and need to see themselves as professionals who provide individualized care for young children. These providers need a sense of being in an extended family within a nurturing environment. The family child care provider network is an essential part of the early childhood workforce.

Family Child Care Program 2012-2013 Cohort: Improvements to Classroom Instruction

The strongest improvements reported by the sole mentor for the 2012-2013 cohort for Family Child Care Providers was in the area of instructional strategies. 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 family child care providers 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 assessments, there are notable improvements across the domain that indicate the adoption of instructional best practices [Refer to Figure 1 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 2.9 points on the 5-point scale, while the mean score for English Language Learner strategies increased by 2.3 points. Similarly, the mean score for developmentally appropriate instruction increased by 1.3 points throughout the course of the program.

Family Child Care Program 2012-2013 Cohort: Enhancing Educators’ Teaching Rhythm and Temperament with Their Floating Assistants

Throughout the Summer Institute and Mentoring Program, the mentors focused on improving the teaching style and interaction between the members of the teaching team. Family child care providers work alone the majority of the time and do not have assistants on a regular basis. However, occasionally they have family members or neighbors that they have trained to assist them as needed. One of our family child care provider has an assistant during the summer months and one has an assistant that works within the program two or three days a week. 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 Assessment Scale for the family child care providers, 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, with the mean score for culturally competent teaching rhythm and temperament increasing by 2.8 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 points.
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 family child care providers.

Family Center Program 2012-2013 Cohort: Transforming Classroom Design

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 family child care providers to apply their cultural and linguistic knowledge to redesign their classrooms and more effectively support the development of diverse children.

Overall Classroom Design Domain Results

Figure 3: Overall classroom design domain results using the Culture and Language 5-Point Assessment Scale for family child care providers.
young children. Through the Summer Institute, providers 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 in the competency areas of English language learner and cultural competency categories [Refer to Figure 3 for complete results]. The mean score for the culturally competent classroom design increased by 2.2 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.

Measuring Impact to Family Child Care Providers’ Thinking and Practices

Overall, when assessing the transformations in thinking and practice for the family child care providers 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 providers stay within the Getting Ready for Change scale until completing the second supportive visit and then consistently improved to achieve the Consistently Changing and Action Driven phase [Refer to Figure 4 for full results] by the fourth and final supportive visit. The overall average score of the teachers on the Core Program Strategies Checklist during the first supportive visit is 2.4 points on the 5-point scale, improving by 2 points to reach an average score of 4.2 by the fourth supportive visit.
Family Child Care Provider Highlight: Nancy Jimenez, Children’s Garden, Newark, N.J.

Family Child Care Provider Nancy Jimenez was immensely interested and motivated in learning new techniques to engage her provider home classroom’s diverse English language learners as well as incorporate new strategies to be more responsive to her special needs and mixed-age students. Throughout the mentoring period, Nancy consistently improved her classroom design as well as instructional strategies to become more culturally and linguistically competent. Nancy’s dedication to improvement earned strong praise from her mentor, extolling Nancy’s ability to have “an exceptional understanding of the needs of each child” and commended her “rich balance of English and Spanish language.”

At her final assessment, Nancy reflected, “I now see diversity and culture very differently.” This change in thinking was directly reflected in changes to her home-based child care program, which was improved throughout the mentoring program to include more pictures, artwork and labeling to reflect diversity of the children enrolled. Similarly, Nancy’s mentor was also impressed by her consistent individualized approach to instruction, which included consistently creating unique developmentally appropriate activities for her mixed-aged students and incorporating simple sign language as well as English and Spanish language instruction throughout the day. Nancy’s consistently exceptional teaching and learning environment was also recognized by the National Association for Family Child Care by gaining national accreditation through a recent rigorous evaluation.

The evaluation data further supports the Nancy’s transformation of her classroom and instructional practices. Using the Culture and Language 5-Point Assessment Scale, the mentor visits indicated that the teachers’ instructional practices significantly improved throughout the course of the New Jersey Summer Institute and Mentoring Program. The mean score for the instructional practices domain that related to culturally competent techniques both increased by 3.3 points on the Culture and Language 5-Point Assessment Scale from the first pre-Institute assessment and the final assessment. Additionally, Nancy’s English language learner instructional strategies improved by 2.7 points [Refer to Figure 5 for full results].

Figure 5: Nancy Jimenez, family child care provider instructional strategies results using the Culture and Language 5-Point Assessment Scale.
When evaluating the provider’s changes in thinking using the Children’s Institute Stage of Change Scale, an analysis of the assessment data further supports this family child care program’s success. Using the 5-point Stage of Change Scale, it is clear that the overall stage of change for Nancy moved from the Action stage, represented by a score of 3.1 in the first assessment, to the Maintenance stage, represented by a score of 4.7 during the final post-Institute visit [Refer to Figure 6 for full results].

**Changes in Thinking: Stage of Change Scale Results for Nancy Jimenez, Children’s Garden**

![Bar Chart](image)

Figure 6: Nancy Jimenez, family child care provider, Stage of Change Scale, from action to maintenance

**Applying the Core Program Strategies Checklist**, it is clear that Nancy also demonstrated significant gains in transforming her thinking and practices in several core competencies. When analyzing the improvement in core competencies between the first and fourth supportive visits, Nancy illustrated great progress in transforming her classroom design, utilizing children’s culture across the curriculum and expanding vocabulary in both languages. During the first supportive visit, the Core Program Strategies Checklist competency of utilizing children’s culture across the curriculum was assessed to be in the Not Ready to Change phase, represented by a score of 1 on the 5-point scale. By the fourth supportive visit, the provider score in this core competency improved by 4 points, indicating that she was now in the Consistently Changing and Action Driven stage, represented by a score of 5 on the Core Program Strategies Checklist 5-point scale [Refer to Figure 7 for full results].
Family Child Care Provider Highlight: Nancy Jimenez, Children’s Garden

The New Jersey Cultural Competency and English Language Learners Summer Institute and Mentoring Program opened my eyes to a different world, rich in culture. The exceptional mentors taught me how to include every culture into my daily routine and classroom setup, so that every child and parent feels included and thrive. The New Jersey Cultural Competency and English Language Learners Summer Institute and Mentoring Program should be implemented in all the daycare centers and schools, so that we can understand the impact we can have on children when cultural inclusion is part of a curriculum.
Program Acknowledgment

Program Financial Partners
> New Jersey Department of Human Services-Division of Family Development
> Family Strength Associates, Inc.
> TD Bank Charitable Foundation
> The John S. Watson Institute for Public Policy of Thomas Edison State College

John S. Watson School of Public Service and Continuing Studies
> Joseph Youngblood II, JD, Vice Provost and Dean

The John S. Watson Institute for Public Policy
> Barbara George-Johnson, MPH, JD, Executive Director of The John S. Watson Institute for Public Policy
> Ana I. Berdecia, MEd Senior Fellow/Director, Center for the Positive Development of Urban Children
> Caitlin Kosec, MPP, Independent Evaluator for the Project
> Natalie Gomez and Patrick Spitzer, Program Assistants

Summer Institute Faculty and Program Mentors
> Ana I. Berdecia, MEd, Program Director
> Dee Bailey, Mentor/Coach
> Ramata Choma, MA Family Strength Associates, Inc., Advisor
> Odessa Davis, Mentor/Coach
> Lilliana Gomez, Mentor/Coach
> Kamili Leath, Mentor/Coach
> Merlene Taylor, Mentor/Coach

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.
> Trenton Head Start (Team 2), Trenton, N.J.
> True Servant Preschool Academy, Trenton, N.J.

2012-2013 Family Child Care Providers
> Patricia Bonilla, Bonilla Family Child Care, Elizabeth, N.J.
> Yolanda and Kevin Dean, Kreative Kids, Daycare, LLC., Jersey City, N.J.
> Adria Janni, Adria’s Family Child Care Center, West Windsor, N.J.
> Nancy Jimenez, Children’s Garden, Newark, N.J.
> Laura Talvera, Union, N.J.

Special Thanks to:
> Lynne Azarchi, Executive Director of the Kids Bridge Tolerance Museum
> Dr. Blythe Hinitz, Distinguished Professor of Early Childhood and Elementary Education at The College of New Jersey
References


**Principal Researchers and Writers**

**Ana I. Berdecia, MEd**, is the senior fellow/director of the Center for the Positive Development of Urban Children (CPDUC) at The John S. Watson Institute for Public Policy of Thomas Edison State College and the founder/program director for the New Jersey Cultural Competency and English Language Learners Summer Institute and Mentoring Program. Ana has extensive experience working with diverse families and children as an administrator, college professor, program developer, trainer and consultant. Prior to joining the College, Ana served as the executive director of the Puerto Rican Community Day Care Center, Inc. in Trenton, N.J. Ana is an adjunct faculty at Mercer County Community College where she teaches Intro to Early Childhood Education; Infant and Toddler Development; Curriculum and Methods; and the Educational Field Experience courses. Ana earned her BA in sociology with a minor in women studies and a master in education with a specialization in early childhood both from The College of New Jersey. She also holds a New Jersey Standard Teaching Certificate in preschool through 3rd grade. In addition, Ana has a post-graduate certificate in Infant Mental Health from the YCS Infant and Preschool Mental Health Institute and Seton Hall University. In 2013, Ana became a certified coach, trainer and speaker through the John Maxwell Team in the areas of leadership and personal development.

**Caitlin Kosec, MPP**, currently serves as the grants manager at Interfaith Community Services in Escondido, California. 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.