Cultural Conversations:

Linking Culture and Language in Early Childhood Classrooms

Principal Authors:
Ana I. Berdecía, M.Ed.
Caitlin Kosec, M.P.P.

Editor:
Barbara Eklund

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The Center for the Positive Development of Urban Children 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:

1. To review and advise on early childhood policy and initiatives that impact the positive development of urban children.
2. 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 socio-emotional development, teacher preparation, and support systems for diverse children and families.
3. To identify and promote economic messages to engage non-traditional champions for children within municipal government and the business sector.
4. To provide professional development opportunities that focus on parent engagement, socio-emotional development, supervision and mentoring of teachers, and working with diverse children and families.
5. To provide advisement to early childhood practitioners that guides them to career and academic options for becoming highly qualified and certified.
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Introduction

Five year old Jose was asked by his teacher, “Where are you from? Jose answered, “Blackwood, New Jersey.” “No,” said the teacher, “Where are your parents from?” “They are from Blackwood,” Jose says. The teacher digs deeper and rephrases, “Are your parents from Guatemala, Costa Rica, Ecuador?” With much excitement, Jose exclaims, “You’re right, you’re right, we are from Ecuador.”

This cultural conversation is the hallmark of the New Jersey Cultural Competency and English Language Learners Summer Institute/Mentoring Program. The program aims to address a critical gap by providing cultural competency training, English Language Learners instruction, and on-going mentoring to early childhood teachers working with diverse children and families. Through professional development and nine months of intensive mentoring, teachers are translating their new knowledge into sound cultural and linguistic practices. As second language acquisition expert, Lily Wong Fillmore, explains, there is almost nothing that a person can do while interacting with children under three or while caring for children under three, which is not cultural. Everything we do with children is cultural (York, 2003).

The Summer Institute/Mentoring Program immerses early childhood practitioners in best practices and effective strategies for becoming culturally and linguistically competent. The program provides an extraordinary opportunity for early childhood teachers to dig deeper into the frame of culture and language, and experience the wonder of cultural conversations from the perspective of very young children who are acquiring English as a second language. As classrooms become more diverse in cultures and languages, teachers need specialized skills to shape children’s development and engage families. Teachers in culturally responsive classrooms understand that culture and language are tied to children’s emotional and cognitive development and can provide the foundation to ensure positive early development.

Every family welcomes their child into the world with a cultural conversation filled with expectations. These expectations are important to each family as they strive to preserve the rich heritage that is embedded in their family’s cultures and languages. From childhood melodies beside the crib, to learning body parts and animals, all learning is cultural and affirms the essential truth of the social identity and cultural values of diverse families across the nation.

From birth to age three, diverse children invest a total of 9,100 hours acquiring, practicing, and interacting in their home language (Alexandra Figueroa, presentation on the release of Threads of Cultures Report 2008). This is a substantial investment that is not always valued in early childhood programs or seen as an asset for learning. However, research demonstrates that children who are fluent in two languages possess certain cognitive benefits in comparison to children who only speak one language. Bilingual children are better at problem solving, demonstrate greater
creativity, and express more tolerant attitudes towards others than monolingual children (Genesee, 2008). English Language Learners who are exposed to systematic learning experiences in their home language from age three to eight years old consistently perform higher academically on English assessments than those who attend English-only educational programs during middle and high school (Espinosa, 2008).

A small scale study of 24 bilingual children conducted by two Boston College professors showed that when young children practice telling well-organized stories in Spanish, within a classroom setting or at home, that this skill might carry over to corresponding storytelling skills in English (Ucelli, 2007). This is further supported by the Teaching Strategies Video Series: Starting Points: Working with English Language Learners, that demonstrates children do not need to learn what a floor, table, or house are, they just need to learn how to say these items in the new language.

According to the National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition and Instructional Education Programs, one in five students who enter school in the United States speaks a home language other than English. This trend can also be seen in New Jersey classrooms, where the number of English Language Learners and culturally diverse children continues to grow. In the 2007-2008 academic year, approximately 21 percent of all New Jersey public school students spoke a home language other than English. In low income school districts, more than one third of students possessed a native language other than English.

Compounding this linguistic diversity, New Jersey students identify 168 different languages as their home language. The five most common home languages of students with limited English proficiency are Spanish, Korean, Arabic, Portuguese, and Gujarati. The most common home language is Spanish, with 61 percent of all limited English proficiency students identifying Spanish as their native language (New Jersey Department of Education, 2009).

English Language Learners bring a cultural heritage that is distinct from their schools’ culture and often are faced with the double task of learning a new language and a new culture. This can be seen in the cultural conversations that young children have with their peers, teachers, families and communities. These conversations need to be valued and celebrated, although they may not be understood by everyone. But, to bilingual and native speakers of the home language, these are rich cultural conversations that link culture and language. These linkages are essential for students to feel safe and confident in the classroom and allow English language acquisition to occur without the rejection of the home language and cultural experiences.

Prohibiting the use of home language is often perceived by its speakers as a rejection of their social group and their culture (Kramsch, 1998). With this kind of rejection, how can a diverse English Language Learner feel supported in their emotional and cognitive development? The answer is they do not feel supported and development may be hindered or even derailed due to the amount of stress that the students’ experience. Brain research shows that stress can compromise learning and the emotional and cognitive development of children (Starting Points: Working with English Language Learners, 2008). If care-
givers discourage the use of a child’s home language, a child can feel unwelcome and apprehensive in their learning environment. Loss of home language has potential negative long-term consequences for the ELL child’s academic, social, and emotional development, as well as for the family dynamics (Espinosa, 2008). A culturally responsive classroom sends a powerful message to children that their home language and culture is not only accepted, but also viewed as an asset in learning.

Culturally responsive classrooms and caregivers have the power to nurture a child’s self-concept and self-esteem, as well as provide the child with confidence to explore the world. Building this confidence is essential especially for children whose home language and culture are different from that of their peers. Research affirms that children who perceive their environment and instruction as affirming their cultural heritage are more likely to become engaged in learning (Ferdman, 1990). Preschool programs for English Language Learners should view children’s home languages and cultures as valuable assets to be fostered. Creating a nurturing environment is critical to children’s social and emotional development (Coltrane, 2003). This cannot be emphasized enough in supporting positive early development.

A national study of 40,000 children with home languages other than English found that when children were deprived of developing their home language at an early age, their academic achievement was severely impacted. Children who were allowed to develop their home language to high levels of proficiency as they simultaneously acquired English matched the levels of academic achievement of native English speakers after only four to seven years of schooling. However, students who were forced to learn exclusively in English during preschool or kindergarten took seven to ten years just to reach the 50th percentile on academic achievement tests (Sanchez, 1999).

Early childhood teachers need to possess the skill-sets necessary to address the intersection between culture and language. Teacher preparation programs and professional development opportunities seldom address how cultural and language issues can impact classroom practices, teacher effectiveness, parent involvement and outcomes for children. Only 12 percent of required coursework for early childhood certification addresses diversity issues and English Language Learners (Daniel & Friedman, 2005). Hence, the creation of this program addresses multiple gaps in the teacher preparation program, and assists many early childhood practitioners to move away from their prior bias that did not allow them to embrace culture and language as an asset for learning. The need to become sensitive and attuned to the cultural conversations of diverse children continues to be a significance force in engaging families while supporting child development.

"Do you know what gandules (pigeon peas) are? Yes, I do, my Mami puts them into the rice and they are so good. Where is your Mami from? Puerto Rico. Do you speak Spanish at home? Yes, I speak Spanish to my Mami and she speaks Spanish to me."
Although there is a new national debate as to what is the best educational term to use when referring to children that are non-native speakers of English, the most popular term has been English Language Learners. Through the data collection of our participants in the New Jersey Cultural Competency and English Language Learners Summer Institute/Mentoring Program, we have found that students in our participating classrooms are learning multiple languages that may include more than two languages and/or dialects. Our mentors report that Latino, Caribbean, and Asian Indian students have strong vocabularies in their home languages and sub-dialects.

For example, a child might hear her grandmother speak the Dominican Spanish while her mother speaks Peruvian Spanish. When entering an early childhood program, this student would have already been exposed to two distinct versions of Spanish before learning English. Another example of multiple languages learning in the lives of young children is when Asian Indian children are raised by two parents who speak a particular dialect such as Guajarti, and then are exposed to the related Hindi language when interacting with family members in their communities. Children with proficiency in a home language, as well as one or more dialect, cannot be narrowly defined as dual language learners because they are often simultaneously learning three or more languages or dialects when entering early childhood program, not just two. Therefore, these students possess different levels of linguistic knowledge when learning the English language and must also grasp the cultural nuances associated the cultures of their family. While some experts in the field have used interchangeably English Language Learners and Dual Language Learners, English Language Learners continues to be the preferred term of the New Jersey Cultural Competency and English Language Learners Summer Institute and Mentoring Program and the John S. Watson Institute of Public Policy of Thomas Edison State College.

Similarly, we do not support the term “minority language students” because it is has a negative undertone that implies that culture and language are not assets for learning. Some early childhood researchers use the term “minority language” to describe the home language of students and refer to English, or the language used in an education setting, as the “majority language.” This term inaccurately labels students’ home languages as a minor and inferior part of the child’s linguistic makeup. The home language of preschool children defines their self-identity and emotions and therefore should be described in the most positive manner.

Language is the principal means by which we conduct our social lives; it intertwines with culture in multiple and complex ways. In both cases, language expresses cultural reality. Members of a community or social groups do not only express experiences, they also create experiences through language. Language is a system of signs that is seen as having a cultural value. Speakers identify themselves and others through the use of language; they view language as a symbol of their social and cultural identity (Kramsch, 1998). Each child’s home language and culture

The Frame of Culture and Language
provide a foundation to learn about the world and shape his or her classroom experiences. A student’s home language should be celebrated and nurtured to be fully developed as an integral part of the student’s self identity and unique capacity. Early childhood researcher and teacher educator, Karen Nemeth, states “As time goes on, new terminology may come and go. What is most important, regardless of the terminology used, is for all early childhood educators to continue their commitment to professional development in this critical area. The focus of early childhood education should not be on terminology, but rather on proven instructional strategies that are linguistically and culturally responsive.” The New Jersey Cultural Competency and English Language Learners Summer Institute and Mentoring Program agrees with this statement and strives to provide effective professional development opportunities that focus on best practices for early childhood practitioners who are working with diverse children and families.

Summer Institute Class of 2008-2009
Program Overview

“Student’s achievement will not improve unless and until we create schools and districts where all educators are learning how to significantly improve their skills as teachers and instructional leaders” (Wagner et al, 2006).

The New Jersey Cultural Competency and English Language Learners Summer Institute and Mentoring Program was established in 2007 to transform the thinking and practices of early childhood teachers working with diverse children learning English as a second language. During the second year of the program in 2008-2009, the Summer Institute/Mentoring Program provided three days of intensive training by experts in second language acquisition and cultural competency followed by an intensive nine-month mentoring program.

The program is designed for both the lead and assistant teachers in classrooms to be trained together and grow professionally as a team. The program infuses content, theory, practice, and simulations coupled with mentoring and coaching; the perfect formula for the achievement of ideal classroom settings for diverse children and their families.

Each participant received an assessment visit prior to the Summer Institute, followed by three supportive/mentoring visits and three observation visits, to measure successful transformation of theory to practice. Each teaching team received a tool box (one per classroom) filled with materials to assist them in creating a culturally responsive classroom. Participants were assigned to a mentor who actively supported the infusion of culture and English Language Learners theory and practices into the classroom. In addition, participants had on-going opportunities to discuss the link between culture and language through learning communities via quarterly teleconferences. This unique feature of the program allows for the continued discussion of classroom strategies as well as peer learning as participants shared their successes and tested new ideas with their peers.

Our Students

The New Jersey Cultural Competency and English Language Learners Summer Institute/Mentoring Program provided professional development for 19 teachers in nine classrooms throughout New Jersey. Of the nine classrooms, two were infant/toddler classrooms; six were preschool classrooms with traditional three-and four-years-olds; and one was at the kindergarten level. Approximately 117 children were instructed by educators participating in the New Jersey Cultural Competency and English Language Learners Summer Institute/Mentoring Program. Approximately 89 of the students, representing 76 percent of the total number of students, were English Language Learners.
Nearly all of the participating classrooms were non-Abbott funded classrooms, representing the three regions of the state: North, South, and Central. While 13 of the teachers were of Latino or Hispanic ethnicity and six of the teachers were African American, other ethnicities were represented including Native American, Polish, and Irish heritage. The educators ranged in ages from 18 to over 50, with eight of the participants reporting to be between 41-50 years of age. More than half of the participating teachers possessed between 3 to 9 years of experience in early childhood education and had been teaching at the same center for 6 to 9 years. The education range of participating teachers was mixed: two teachers possessed a Master’s Degree, four a Bachelor’s Degree, and two an Associate Degree. Three teachers possessed a CDA Credential and eight teachers were pursuing a CDA Credential.
With the goal of creating culturally responsive classrooms that support the linguistic development of English Language Learners, mentors provided feedback on instruction, demonstrated effective techniques, modeled lessons, and provided additional culturally competent materials for instruction. The mentors that provided professional development support to the participating teachers were selected for their extensive background and knowledge of early childhood development, their significant work with diverse children and families, and their experience as trainer/mentors in various capacities. All mentors possessed a standard certification in preschool to third grade early childhood education from the New Jersey Department of Education and/or a Master’s in Early Childhood Education.

The mentors played an integral role in shaping the instructional practices and classroom design features of the participating teachers. They challenged their mentee’s thinking and gave them new cultural and linguistic lenses to use when working with diverse young children and families. The mentors were trained and received a mentor’s guide to standardize their procedures when mentoring the early childhood teaching team assigned to them. In their training, the mentors were asked to work and challenge their teaching teams’ practices in the areas of teacher rhythm and temperament, classroom design, and instructional practices. Mentors made significant efforts during the nine-month mentorship to make personal contact through telephone check-ins, e-mail, and face-to-face meetings, etc.

Although the mentors were required to spend at least two hours per visit in each assigned classroom, the mentors reported spending four to six hours per visit supporting the development of English Language Learners strategies and making recommendations to create culturally enriched environments that supported child development. Participating centers received collectively 382 hours of mentoring, not including person calls or other unplanned interactions. This investment of time is clearly reflected in the classroom evaluations that showed steady improvement in each of the participating classrooms. The goal of each interaction is to assist teachers to become more culturally and linguistically responsive to diverse students in their classrooms as well as create a learning environment that uses culture and language as an asset for learning.

The program mentors continued to meet monthly throughout the program year to discuss the program’s philosophy and principles as well as strategies for each of the teaching teams they were mentoring. These meetings allowed the mentors to remain consistent in their supportive approaches and evaluation of their teaching teams. The mentors also used the meeting time to share culturally competent lesson plans that could be shared with their teachers and brainstorm ideas to improve their mentoring techniques. For example, one meeting included a presentation on “literacy moments”
that entailed using one book across the curriculum areas that infused culture and language. Literacy moments incorporate materials/information from the book into circle time, songs/transition, and learning center activities that connect and expand concepts. Also, the mentors participated in a one day retreat to learn new strategies from the Teaching Strategies DVD Series entitled, “Starting Points: Working with English Language Learners in Early Childhood Settings.”

Program Design Features

1) Recruitment of Teaching Teams: The program purposely recruited teachers from classrooms that had 50% of students identified as English Language Learners. The center director had to agree to allow both the group teacher and assistant(s) in the classroom to attend the three-day Institute, to ensure they were trained together. It was essential for both the group and assistant(s) teachers to attend so they could begin to accept the concepts the program emphasized such as co-teaching, and use small group instruction for greater one-on-one with the children. The requirement of the entire teaching team to attend the Institute is a unique design feature of the program because it is typically the group teachers who attend professional development seminars and the group teachers who lead all instructional activities. [Refer to Appendix A for the program application and program criteria.]

2) Pre-Assessment: Before the teaching teams attended the three day Summer Institute, each classroom was visited to interview the teaching team. A Pre-Institute assessment was completed for each teaching team to gather baseline data on the classroom practices. On the last day of the Institute, mentors reviewed the teams’ assessment and developed goals for their first supportive visit. [Refer to Appendix B for the classroom observation and assessment tool.]

3) Training Modules: The Institute’s training program included one day on culture, one and a half days on English Language Learners, and a half day on creating an action plan to implement when returning to the classroom. Topics covered by early childhood experts included facilitating culturally responsive home and school relations, creating culturally responsive classrooms, and best practices to support English Language Learners. To illustrate the impact of cultural perception and bias, participants experienced the AWAKA simulation, which demonstrates how two unique cultures can interact and make assumptions about each other’s culture and language. Cultural storytellers further expanded the group’s knowledge of how to incorporate two languages within read aloud activities. Participants earned 21 hours of professional development in cultural competency and strategies for English Language Learners.
Mentoring and Coaching: Each teaching team received four supportive visits in which the mentor observed classroom instruction and shared feedback on how the teaching team could improve their classroom design, rhythm and temperament, and instructional strategies. Program mentors would adapt their techniques to the temperament of each teaching team, while also expanding on the existing routine and management of the classroom.

Identifying the teaching team's strength and weaknesses was an essential part of creating an action plan for improvement. The mentor would work with the teaching team to develop a plan and prioritize areas for improvement with each classroom. Besides giving honest feedback on the progress of the teaching team, the mentor would also make recommendations for areas of improvement, and offered encouragement when effective techniques were utilized.

During the supportive visits, mentors would also demonstrate effective techniques and lessons that were both culturally and linguistically competent. For example, mentor Liliana Gomez demonstrated a lesson by reading *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* by Eric Carle. While she read the story in English, the classroom assistant read the story in Spanish. She also incorporated a

4) **Tool Box:** Each classroom received a tool box of bilingual and culturally competent materials, books, and posters that assisted the teaching team in transforming their classroom. Mentors also supplemented their classrooms' original tool boxes with a variety of instructional materials during their supportive visits to demonstrate lesson plans and to encourage the continual use of culturally and linguistically competent materials. Diverse classroom materials aid children in feeling positive about racial and cultural differences and reinforce the belief that their cultural heritage is important. Furthermore, students feel more comfortable when they are in an environment that encourages cultural diversity (Stern-LaRosa, 2001) and reflects people that look like them. The tool boxes are valued at $350.00 each. [Refer to Appendix C for a listing of Tool Box materials.]
flannel board into the lesson to visually present the actions represented in the story. Liliana modeled a follow-up activity to build comprehension, as well as gave ideas for props, songs, and games that could be used to extend the story. This modeled lesson provided a clear example of a culturally and linguistically responsive lesson that the teaching team could expand upon in future classroom activities.

6) **Evaluation and Post-Assessment:**
While the supportive visits were exclusively for the support and development of best classroom practices, the mentors also performed three observational visits. During observational visits, the mentors assessed the efficacy of the teaching teams. These visits were conducted using an Assessment Tool to determine the progress obtained by each team in becoming culturally and linguistically responsive educators on the established five point scale. At the end of the visit, the mentors would share their findings with the classroom teachers to identify areas of improvement, and create a plan for the next supportive visit.

The first observational visit was performed after participants had attended the three-day Summer Institute, participated in the first teleconference and received two supportive visits (during the fourth month of the program). The second observational visit occurred, after participants received three supportive visits and participated in two teleconferences (during the sixth month of the program). The third and final observational visit occurred after the participants had received four supportive visits, as well feedback from the prior two observational visits. Each visit would generate a narrative that would capture what the mentors saw anecdotally, commendations, and recommendations. [Refer to Appendix B for the assessment tool.]

7) **Learning Community:** Teachers participated in two teleconferences that maintained a learning community through case studies and the discussion of best practices. The learning communities allowed the teachers to spend time collectively and to act as a sounding board for each other’s ideas. Through this active engagement, professional knowledge can increase and student learning can be enhanced (Vescio, Ross, & Adams, 2006). Teachers who participated in both learning community teleconferences earned an additional four hours of professional development. Topics discussed during the teleconference included classroom practices, curriculum, respecting children’s home languages and cultures, and classroom management techniques.

8) **Final-Assessment:** Each classroom was visited for a final assessment that was compared with the pre-Institute assessment. This allowed for the evaluation of the full impact of the Summer Institute and Mentoring Program by comparing the results with previous assessments. In addition, participating teachers were interviewed by an independent evaluator to capture how the program transformed the teachers’ thinking and practices.
The overall results of the New Jersey Cultural Competency and English Language Learners Summer Institute/Mentor- ing Program are based on an analysis of assessment scores from the three post-assessment visits [Refer to Figure 1, 2, and 3 for overall program results.] The program mentors used the assessment tool to evaluate the teachers’ instructional practices during the three post-assessment visits. The efficacy of the teacher practices was measured on a five point scale, with five being the highest score, and one being the lowest. A score of one indicated not evident, two indicated needs improvement, three indicated somewhat evident, four indicated evident, and five indicated the teaching team was excelling in the measured category.

The program data shows improvement in three core competencies of early childhood education: developmentally appropriate practices, English Language Learner instruction, and cultural competent strategies. These three competencies were assessed across the curriculum using 26 categories to evaluate the classroom design, teachers’ rhythm and temperament, and instructional strategies of the participating classrooms (see Appendix B for a detail list of categories). The data indicates that the New Jersey Cultural Competency and English Language Learners Summer Institute/Mentoring Program had a positive effect on increasing the efficacy of English Language Learner instruction and culturally competent instruction across the curriculum.

The mentor assessment results indicate that the classroom design of the participating classrooms improved greatly over the course of three post-Institute evaluations when compared to the pre-Institute classroom assessments. While there were improvements shown in each of the post-assessment evaluations post-Institute, the largest increases in assessment scores occurred during the final post-assessment at the end of the program.
Participants attending the Summer Institute not only gained substantial knowledge concerning English Language Learners and cultural competency, they also applied this knowledge by implementing positive changes in the design of their classrooms. When comparing the assessment results of the pre-Institute observation with the assessment results with the final post-Institute observation, the classroom design of each participating classroom improved in all three competency areas. The data reflects improvements in the participating teachers’ capacities to display diverse pictures and photos, utilize effective learning centers, and include culturally competent materials and supplies from the program tool box. [Refer to Figure 1 for complete results.]

On a five-point scale the mean score for developmentally appropriate classroom design practices increased by 1.5 points, while the score for English Language Learners classroom design practices increased by 2 points. The mean score for culturally competent classroom design demonstrated the largest increase with an increase of 2.4 points between the pre-Institute observation and the final post-Institute observation. The large improvement in the classroom design practices represents the teachers' willingness to change and incorporate new practices after receiving professional development and mentoring, as well as the use of the variety of culturally competent materials from the program tool box.

![Figure 1. Overall Classroom Design Results](image)
Program mentors focused on improving the teaching style of the participating teachers during the supportive and assessment visits. Teaching rhythm refers to how the lead and assistant teachers work cooperatively to support culture and language through co-teaching and small group instruction. The teaching temperament refers to the teachers’ degree of empathy towards diverse learners as well as the teachers’ disposition towards students and parents that do not speak English. For example, a culturally competent instructor would use gestures and visual cues or props to communicate with a non-English speaking parent instead of just raising their voice in an attempt to improve understanding.

When comparing the teaching rhythm and temperament assessment results of the pre-Institute observation with the assessment results of the final post-Institute observation, the data demonstrates improvements in all three competency areas. [Refer to Figure 2 for complete results.] The mean score for developmentally appropriate, teaching rhythm and temperament increased by 1.3 points on the five point scale throughout the course of the program. The mean score for English Language Learners and culturally competent teaching rhythm and temperament both increased by 2 points on a five point scale. The data clearly demonstrates improvements in the areas of discipline strategies, interaction with children, and co-teaching/co-decision making between the teaching team as the participating teachers received increased training and mentoring through the New Jersey Cultural Competency and English Language Learners Summer Institute/Mentoring Program.

Figure 2. Overall Teaching Rhythm and Temperament Results
One of the overall goals of the New Jersey Cultural Competency and English Language Learners Summer Institute/Mentoring Program was to increase the use of linguistically and culturally responsive instructional strategies in the participating classrooms. The use of these practices has the potential to create more welcoming and effective environments for diverse students to acquire English and thrive in their educational experiences. When comparing the instructional strategy assessment results of the pre-Institute observation with the assessment results of the final post-Institute observation, the data demonstrates improvements in all three competency areas for instructional strategies [Refer to Figure 3 for complete results.] The mean score for developmentally appropriate instructional strategies increased by 1.6 points on a five point scale at the completion of the program. The mean score for English Language Learners instructional strategies increased by 2 points, and culturally competent instruction increased by 1.9 points on a five point scale. The data demonstrates improvements in the areas of using props and gestures, extending conversations in both languages, and using repetition.

**Figure 3. Overall Instructional Strategies Results**
These data analysis results clearly demonstrate that the New Jersey Cultural Competency and English Language Learners Summer Institute/Mentoring Program was effective in improving specific instructional strategies in the participating classrooms. The data demonstrates overall improvements in the English Language Learners instructional strategies used within the participating classrooms. However, when conducting a closer analysis of the observational results for English Language Learners instructional strategies between the pre-Institute and final post-Institute observation, several key areas of instruction demonstrated notable improvements. For example, the use of English Language Learners literacy activities increased by 2.8 points on a five point scale. The use of extending and expanding children’s prior knowledge and language skills increased by 2.3 points on a five point scale. The instructional strategy of ‘talking while doing’ which refers to physically demonstrating the meaning of the words and language being used in order to aid the comprehension of English Language Learners increased by 2 points on a 5 point scale. [Refer to Figure 4 for complete results.]

Figure 4. Focus on ELL Instructional Strategies Improvements

![Figure 4](image_url)
Despite significant improvements in teacher and classroom design practices, there were still several areas that could be further supported and improved with additional on-going professional development and mentoring. While all areas of instruction and classroom design improved overall, the data analysis results indicate that the participating teachers still need to focus on improving English Language Learners and culturally responsive instructional strategies. For example, teachers only improved an average of 1.9 points on a five point scale in the competency of extending conversations in both languages. This 1.9 point average was determined by comparing teacher’s assessments from the first pre-Institute visit with the final post-Institute visit. The average score of 3.1 on the five point scale indicates that the English Language Learners instructional strategy to encourage students to extend conversations in both languages is only somewhat evident in participating classrooms at the conclusion of the program. [Refer to Figure 5 for complete results.]

Figure 5. Focus on Areas for Improvement: ELL Responsive Instructional Strategies

Needs Improvement: ELL Responsive Instructional Strategies

- Extended Conversations in Both Languages
- Using Props and Gestures
- Involve Parents in a Meaningful Way
Similarly, the culturally responsive instructional strategy of using props and gestures only increased an average of 1.1 points on a five point scale when comparing pre-Institute assessment scores with the final post-Institute assessment. The final post-Institute assessment score of 3.1 points on a five point scale indicates that instructional activities using props and gestures are only somewhat evident in participating classrooms. This result suggests that more demonstrations on how to use props and gestures to represent speech in English could be helpful to improve instructional strategies.

Building vocabulary in both English and the home language as culturally responsive instructional strategy only increased by 1.8 points on the five point scale. The final average score of 3.4 points demonstrates that building vocabulary in both languages was still only somewhat evident in the participating classrooms at the conclusion of the program. This instructional strategy must be improved in order for students to fully develop their linguistic skills in both languages. More focus must be placed on demonstrating and providing ideas on how to extend vocabulary building activities in participating classrooms. [Refer to Figure 6 for complete results.]
The final post-Institute results of the participating classrooms were compared with the results of the assessment tool performed with teaching teams that did not participate in the New Jersey Cultural Competency and English Language Learners Summer Institute/Mentoring Program. Three classrooms that did not participate in the program were observed using the assessment tool to determine baseline results of a control group. The three control group classrooms strived to be as similar to the participating classrooms as possible in order to accurately compare the results of the assessment tool. The three control group teaching teams taught in the same centers as the teaching teams that participated in the New Jersey Cultural Competency and English Language Learners Summer Institute/Mentoring Program and were observed by the same program mentors. The control group teaching teams also served students of similar ethnic and linguistic diversity and possessed educational training equal to the participating teaching teams. While this control group was a small and limited sample of only three classrooms, it still provided an accurate insight to determine the program effectiveness.

When comparing the final post-Institute observation results with the assessments of the control group classrooms, the data indicates that the New Jersey Cultural Competency and English Language Learners Summer Institute/Mentoring Program had a positive effect on increasing the efficacy of English Language Learners instruction and culturally competent instruction across the curriculum. [Refer to Figure 7, 8, and 9 for overall program results.]

In the area of classroom design, the most noticeable differences between the final post-Institute assessment results and the control group assessment results were in the use of cultural competency strategies. The data indicates that while the control classrooms had an average score of 1.5, indicating that the area is not evident or needs improvement, the participating classrooms demonstrated an average score of 4.1 on the five point scale. The use of culturally competent displays representing the students’ diversity in the participating classrooms was determined by the mentors not only to be evident, but also to represents a 2.6 point improvement over the classroom design of control group classrooms. [Refer to Figure 7 for detailed results.]
In the area of teaching rhythm and temperament, the most noticeable differences between the final post-Institute assessment results and the control group assessment results were in the use of English Language Learners strategies. The data indicates that the control classrooms obtained an average score of 1.6 using the assessment tool while the participating classrooms achieved a score of 4.1 on the five point scale. The difference of 2.5 points on the five point scale between the participating classrooms and non-participating classroom indicates that the program was effective in transforming English Language Learners teaching rhythm and temperament when compared with a control group. [Refer to Figure 8 for detailed results.]

Figure 8. Comparing Teaching Rhythm and Temperament between Participating Classrooms and Non-Participating Control Group Classrooms
In the area of instructional strategies, the greatest difference between the non-participating classrooms and the final post-Institute results of participating classrooms were demonstrated in the area of ELL strategies. The data indicates that the control classrooms obtained an average score of 1.6 using the assessment tool while the participating classrooms achieved an average score of 3.8 on the five point scale. The difference of 2.4 points on the 5 point scale between the participating classrooms and non-participating classroom indicates that the program was highly effective in introducing cultural competent instructional strategies when compared to non-participating classrooms. [Refer to Figure 9 for detailed results.]

Figure 9. Comparing Instructional Strategies between Participating Classrooms and Non-Participating Control Group Classrooms

![Comparing Control Group Instructional Strategies](image-url)
The participating teachers were interviewed after they completed the three-day Summer Institute, received two supportive visits, one observational visit, and participated in two teleconferences. The results from these interviews confirm that the early childhood teachers felt more knowledgeable about implementing linguistically and culturally responsive practices in their classrooms after participating in the New Jersey Cultural Competency and English Language Learners Summer Institute/Mentoring Program. When teachers feel more empowered and knowledgeable in their teaching, they are more likely to be confident in making successful improvements in their instructional practices.

In fact, 100 percent of the interviewed teachers responded that they felt they had more knowledge about English Language Learners and cultural competency after they completed the initial three-day intensive Summer Institute training. One teacher describes her shift in thinking towards creating an accepting environment for linguistically diverse students by stating:

"I was originally against students speaking other languages and I was raised that in the United States you need to learn English. Now, I think about being on the other side of the fence. The program made me feel that I can put myself in my students' shoes and think in a different way. Going to school doesn’t mean you have to shut down your home language."

Also, 100 percent of the interviewed teachers also agreed that their mentor’s supportive visits and evaluations had been helpful in creating change in their classrooms. A participating teacher describes the changes in her instructional practices by explaining:

"Before my students were afraid and did not want to talk in their [home] language. Now, I work on incorporating a lot of English and Spanish into my classroom."

When teachers understand fully the complexities and difficulties English Language Learners and diverse children face on a daily basis, they are more responsive to making changes to ease the divide between home and school.

The teachers also believed that they were receiving high quality training from knowledgeable early childhood experts. All surveyed teachers reported that the style of their mentor was “excellent” and rated their mentor as a 5 on a 1-5 scale. The teachers found the information and strategies learned during the Summer Institute and mentoring to be extremely helpful, and 100 percent of the surveyed teachers have reported sharing the new information they learned with other teachers and/or administrators at their centers. The sharing of information concerning best practices for diverse students demonstrates a ripple effect in the transmission of knowledge between educators at the participating centers.
As the first infant/toddler classroom to participate in the New Jersey Cultural Competency and English Language Learners Summer Institute/Mentoring Program, the teaching team at the BPUM-Camden Center was highly motivated for success from the beginning. The lead teacher, Willie, described her interest in the program on her application by stating, “I hope to learn new techniques and ideas to address different cultures and to make sure all students feel included,” while the assistant classroom teacher, Evelyn, echoed, “I would welcome the chance to participate in this program ... that will further my skills as an assistant teacher and as a role model for our children’s future.”

The BPUM-Camden teaching team instructed a class of ten infant/toddlers between six and eighteen months old. This was the first infant/toddler classroom to participate in the program, and an early childhood mentor with special expertise in infant and toddler instruction was enlisted to help this teaching team achieve the linguistically and culturally responsive classroom.

Throughout the program, the assessments of the teaching team steadily progressed as they received training and ongoing mentoring support. For example, during the first pre-Institute observation the mentor noted that the teaching team was lacking a solid routine and transitions. However, by the final post-Institute observation, Willie and Evelyn were incorporating songs, dances, and bubbles to transition the children from different activities. The competency area of co-teaching and co-decision making also showed improvements as the teachers received additional mentoring. During the first assessment, the mentor noted that the lead teacher, Willie, was conducting the majority of the floor time activities without involving the assistant teacher. This competency gradually improved, and by the final post-Institute observation, the mentor recorded that both Willie and Evelyn worked well together and shared the task of leading activities with the children. The team even successfully incorporated an additional assistant into their established routines. The mentor added that the children appeared “happy and content” in their routine and established transitions.

The data from the assessments throughout the program further builds on the mentor observations to indicate that the teachers’ rhythm and temperament improved as the teaching team received training and additional mentoring. The mean score for culturally competent teaching rhythm and temperament increased by 3.6 points on the 5 point scale.
The teaching team at Mi Casita II worked extremely hard to create a culturally and linguistically responsive classroom for their eleven three-year-old students, all of whom were English Language Learners. The students were all from the East section of Camden, however, they all possessed unique ethnic heritages. Teachers Mimi and Luz reported that the students’ families were from many Latin American and Caribbean countries including Puerto Rico, Guatemala, Mexico, Dominican Republic, and Nicaragua. Working diligently to incorporate these multiple ethnicities, this teaching team possessed perfect or nearly perfect scores in all competencies across the curriculum by the conclusion of the program. By working together to create a culturally competent environment for their diverse learners, this teaching duo also learned how to work more effectively as a team to provide the greatest quality of instruction for their students.

Taking the advice of their mentor, Mimi learned how to better incorporate her assistant teacher, Luz, into the instructional routine. During the initial supportive visits, this highly capable assistant teacher would shy away from leading circle time activities that could be great opportunities throughout the course of the program, achieving a nearly perfect ‘excelling’ rating of 4.9 by the final post-Institute observation. The mean score for English Language Learners strategies increased by 3 points, while developmentally appropriate teaching rhythm and temperament practices increased by 1 point on the five point scale. [Refer to Figure 10 for complete results.]

**Figure 10.** BPUM – Camden Team’s Teaching Rhythm and Temperament Assessment Results

![BPUM - Camden Teaching Rhythm and Temperament](image)
for incorporating a balance of the English and Spanish languages together. By the fourth supportive visit, Luz was leading circle time by incorporating bilingual songs, counting in both English and Spanish, and discussing community helpers in the language that the student felt most comfortable speaking. This circle time activity also provided the perfect scaffolding for the development of the English language by providing community helper hats as props to further aid in understanding and comprehension of the lesson.

While the teaching team improved on working together effectively, they also were successful in including family members within the classroom as volunteer assistants. For example, a classroom “grandmom” acted as an additional resource for the students during center activities and lowered the student teacher ratio to 1:5. This volunteer grandmom along with the assistant participated in long blocks of conversations in Spanish, supporting the children’s home language.

To include additional family members within the classroom and to successfully bridge the divide between home and school, this teaching team also hosted a fiesta during the instruction theme, “Our Families Are Special.” This fiesta not only included traditional dishes from each child’s culture, but it also provided an opportunity for each child’s cultural heritage to be affirmed and celebrated. The assistant teacher was even able to share her Puerto Rican heritage to connect with the families and students about their traditions and cuisine. Working to strengthen the connections between home and school, Mimi and Luz provided an exemplary culturally affirming classroom.

The data from the assessments demonstrates that this teaching team improved in all areas across the curriculum, but most notably, this teaching team worked hard to improve the rhythm and temperament of their instruction. The mean score for culturally competent teaching rhythm and temperament increased by 2.7 points on the five point scale throughout the course of the program, achieving a perfect ‘excelling’ rating of 5 by the final post-Institute observation. The mean score for English Language Learners strategies increased by 2.3 points, while developmentally appropriate teaching rhythm and temperament practices increased by 1.6 points on the five point scale. [Refer to Figure 11 for complete results.]

Figure 11. Mi Casita II Teaching Rhythm and Temperament Assessment Results
The teaching team at the Mercer County CYO Center demonstrated significant progress in improving their instructional strategies to create a more linguistically and culturally responsive environment for their diverse students. By listening to their mentor’s suggestions and incorporating new strategies learned during the Institute, Ramona, Tamilyn and Ivelisse steadily improved the quality of the instruction in their classroom. The lead teacher, Ramona, noted that the program mentor was effective by stating, “She was really good and provided clear expectations to help my students.”

These clear expectations and corresponding changes in classroom practices were observed throughout the curriculum. For example, during the second supportive visit, the program mentor recommended to the teaching team that they try to incorporate a literacy support such as a poem to reinforce the main theme of the lesson. Taking this recommendation seriously, during the final post-Institute observations, the teaching team made sure to utilize literacy activities such as a read-aloud poem. The teachers started slowly with what the children already knew, asking the students ‘What do you think busy means?’ and introduced the classic read aloud “The Very Busy Spider” by Eric Carle. During the lesson, the mentor noted that the teaching team “showed love and patience with the children” and that the “interactions with the children were positive.”

Ramona, Tamilyn, and Ivelisse described their motivation during their program interview stating that they have been working hard to incorporate more English and Spanish speaking activities into their lessons and to use the results of the evaluations to guide their future teaching. The data shows the results of this hard work and supports the idea that clear mentor expectations and recommendations can also lead to improvements. Noticeable gains were observed in all three competency areas, and particularly in the area of instructional strategies. The mean score for developmentally appropriate, instructional strategies increased by 1.4 points on the five point scale at the completion of the program. The mean score for English Language Learners instructional strategies increased by 1.8 points, and culturally competent instruction increased by an astounding 3.2 points on a five point scale. [Refer to Figure 12 for complete results.]
The program design of the New Jersey Cultural Competency and English Language Learners Summer Institute/Mentoring Program was successful in transforming teachers’ thinking and practices particularly in classroom design and instructional strategies in early childhood classrooms. During the program, the teaching teams were successful in improving their practices to create positive and welcoming classrooms that affirmed the culture and the home language of their students. The intensive mentoring that teaching teams received from expert early childhood educators encouraged the use of linguistically responsive and culturally competent practices to foster the language development of diverse students. In addition, the learning communities allowed the teachers to share knowledge that is drawn from the day-to-day experiences of teachers, which is best understood through critical reflection with others who share similar experiences.

Our findings do not state that these teachers have arrived at becoming expert culturally responsive caregivers. The development of a truly culturally and linguistically competent educator is a continuous process that requires continual reinforcement as well as ongoing professional development and mentoring. However, the results from the program evaluation clearly demonstrate that improvements occurred in participants’ thinking and instructional practices. The assessment data from the program mentors illustrates improvements in linguistically responsive and culturally competent practices across the curriculum.

As the number of supportive and assessment visits grew, the improvements in instructional strategies increased as well. The data demonstrates that the longer a teaching team participated in the mentoring process, the more they improved their teaching practices. The data demonstrates that professional development, coupled with frequent and strategic mentoring, can have a significant impact on the use of effective instructional practices. When strategies are reinforced and encouraged through mentoring, real and lasting changes can occur within early childhood classrooms.

The hallmark of this innovation has been the intentional planning of cultural conversations that support child development and response to the needs of diverse communities. This innovation has excited students, teachers, parents, and administrators alike, while building meaningful home-school relationships that celebrate the cultures and languages families bring to the classroom. To continue these cultural conversations these tenets must be implemented across early childhood settings:

- Culture and language should be utilized as anchors for development.
- Teachers, administrators and schools need to be supported in their efforts to create culturally and linguistically responsive learning communities through professional development and on-going mentoring.
Classroom materials should be well-funded and reflective of the students and families enrolled in the early childhood programs.

Classroom teachers who are fluent in other languages or have knowledge of different cultural nuances should be placed in classrooms with diverse students who could best benefit from their support.

School districts should provide an increased number of professional development opportunities for their early childhood teachers to be trained in English Language Learners and culturally competent strategies.

It is only through on-going cultural conversations that students, teachers, and parents can pierce deeper into the cultural reality of diverse communities and understand those treasures that are intertwined into the fabric of culture and language.
References


Teaching Strategies DVD Series (2008), *Starting Points: Teaching English Language Learners in Early Childhood Classroom*.


Appendix
New Jersey Cultural Competency and English Language Learners Summer Institute/Mentoring Program for Early Childhood Educators 2009-2010 Application

I. PERSONAL DATA:

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<th>Name</th>
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Preferred First Name (if different from above)

Current Home Address

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Telephone Home: ____________________________ Cell #: ____________________________

Best Time to Call: ____________________________ A.M. Lunch Break ____________________________ P.M.

II. DEMOGRAPHIC DATA:

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Language(s) Spoken

Specific:

III. EMPLOYMENT DATA:

I prefer to have correspondences sent to: Business Address [ ] or Home Address [ ]

Company/Organization

Business Address

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Business Phone Business Fax Business E-mail Address

Current Title ____________________________ Years in position ____________________________
IV. PROGRAM DATA:

Type of Program & Age Groups

(Mark an X)  ____CBC Center     ____ Abbott Center    ___ Head Start

____ Other: __________________________ (explain)

(Mark an X)  ____Infant/Toddlers  ____3 years ____4 years ___5 years _____Mixed Ages

Candidate’s Level of Preparation

(Mark an X)  ____CDA Candidate  ____ CDA Credential    ___ Some college  ____Associate Degree

____Bachelor Degree  ____ Pursuing P-3  ____ P-3 Certified  ____Master Degree

Define the characteristics of the children in your classroom:

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<th>Number of Asian children</th>
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V: PARTICIPATION AGREEMENT:

I understand the purpose and expectations of the New Jersey Cultural Competency and English Language Learners Summer Institute/Mentoring Program. If accepted, I will devote the time required to complete the program, develop and implement a diverse action plan for my classroom, agree to receive three supportive visits and three observational visits in my classroom, and to attend peer group meetings as scheduled. (Yes) (No) Circle one response.

I further understand that throughout the program there will be data collected on the participants and program that will used in articles to demonstrate program impact. I agree to participate in the data collection process for this purpose as long as my personal information is kept confidential unless otherwise specified. My signature below acts as a release form for this purpose and as well a photo release form. (Yes) (No) Circle one response.

V. SIGNATURES:

______________________________  ______________________________
Candidate’s Signature          Employer’s Signature

______________________________  ______________________________
Date                                Date
APPLICATION INSTRUCTIONS AND AGREEMENTS (Please read this page carefully):

Please submit a cover letter, personal essay, resume, one professional letter of reference, and one personal letter of reference with your application (five items).

- The professional letter should speak to your teaching experience and desire to learn more about effectively teaching diverse populations. The personal letter should speak to your character.
- The personal essay should address the following questions and should not exceed 1 ½ pages in length:
  1) Why do you want to be selected for this Summer Institute?
  2) What do you hope to learn that will change your classroom practices?
  3) What are the challenges you are experiencing in terms of cultural competency and working with children who are acquiring English as a second language?

QUESTIONS: Please call Ana I. Berdecia, M.Ed., Senior Fellow/Director of the Center for the Positive Development of Urban Children, at 609-777-4351 x4290 or e-mail: aberdecia@tesc.edu Mail the completed application along with your cover letter, personal essay, resume, and recommendation letters to:

Attention: Ana I. Berdecia, M.Ed.
The Cultural Competency and English Language Learners Summer Institute
The John S. Watson Institute for Public Policy of Thomas Edison State College
101 West State Street Trenton, NJ 08608-1176

EXPECTATIONS OF THE CULTURAL COMPETENCY AND ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS SUMMER INSTITUTE:

A. Teachers will be required to attend/participate in the three-day Summer Institute (8:30 a.m.-3:30 p.m.), commit to three supportive visits/three observation visits and complete assignments/evaluations at various intervals throughout the program. All training materials will be provided.

B. Teachers will be required to sign an information/data collection release form that will allow the program administrator to capture the impact of the program. Articles on the impact of the program will be shared across New Jersey; however, personal data will be kept confidential.

C. Teachers will be required to implement their classroom’s action plan in the next academic year. Three classroom observations will be made during the academic year to assess the strategies that are being implemented.

D. Teachers will be required to participate in two or three peer group meetings to share lessons learned and application of concepts learned as a result of the Summer Institute.

E. Center directors must agree to participate in a one-day informative meeting about the implementation of the program and how they can support their teachers.

III. FUNDING: Family Strength Associates, Inc, in conjunction with the New Jersey Department of Human Service-Division of Family Development, the Schumann Fund for New Jersey, the TD Banknorth Charitable Foundation, Bank of America, and John S. Watson Institute for Public Policy, Thomas Edison State College.
# Appendix B: Assessment Tool

New Jersey Cultural Competency & English Language Learners Summer Institute/Mentoring Program

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## Scale

5 = Excels 4 = Evident 3 = Somewhat Evident 2 = Needs Improvement 1 = Not Evident

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Action Items for Supportive Mentoring/Coaching Visit:

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Priorities for the Supportive Visits:

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## Key Indicators & Terms

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<th>Classroom Design</th>
<th>Teacher Rhythm &amp; Temperament</th>
<th>Instructional Strategies</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Pictures/Photos:</strong> Multiple walls contain pictures and photos that reflect diverse cultures and families. It is welcoming and visually appearing.</td>
<td><strong>Discipline Strategies:</strong> Teachers display an understanding of how children respond to adult correction from a cultural perspective (such as tone of voice, guidance vs. punishment, and model positive reinforcement).</td>
<td><strong>Start Slowly with what Children Know:</strong> Teacher knows and uses a few important words in the children’s home language. He/she gives the children time to adjust to the program. Using the child’s name as often as possible to build rapport.</td>
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<td><strong>Use of Print:</strong> Poems, stories, and phrases in the home language(s) are utilized throughout the classroom. Materials are labeled both in home language and in English.</td>
<td><strong>Routine/Transition:</strong> Teachers have an established predictable routine that cues the children on what comes next including a variety of cues/activities to indicate activity change using rhymes, songs, bells, etc.</td>
<td><strong>Talking while Doing:</strong> Teachers “double the message” with gestures, action, or directed gaze. They say the name of objects as the children use them and talk through activities that have multiple steps. “Talking while doing” also known as “running commentary.” The teachers explain the child’s action and the action of others as the activity unfolds.</td>
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<td><strong>Posters/Art:</strong> Posters and artwork are purposefully selected and used to create home-like environment.</td>
<td><strong>Providing Choices to the Children:</strong> Children can make choices about how and where to play and explore. There is a balance between child-directed and adult-direct activities.</td>
<td><strong>Talking About Here and Now:</strong> Talks about what is right there (real time-real objects), giving ELL a chance to narrow down the field of what the conversation is about and focus in on a more restricted number of options for response.</td>
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<td><strong>Learning Centers:</strong> Each learning center has three to five items that are linked to the children’s home life and family. Cultural items have a purpose and are connected to the curriculum in a meaningful way.</td>
<td><strong>Models/Facilitates Exploration:</strong> Teachers facilitate and guide learning by following the children’s lead and help them explore props and objects in a meaningful way.</td>
<td><strong>Utilize One-to-one and Small Group Instruction:</strong> ELL can feel more at ease interacting due to their social proximity. Teachers know the children’s interest, abilities, and limitations. Children scaffold from isolated to more coordinated play activities.</td>
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<td><strong>Materials/Supplies:</strong> Props and manipulative toys are culturally diverse and connected to children’s home life and family in an authentic way.</td>
<td><strong>Children’s Language Proficiency Level:</strong> Teachers consider each child’s language proficiency level and make adjustments in the activities and curriculum.</td>
<td><strong>Repetition:</strong> Say the same thing more than once. It gives a child more opportunities to catch on to what is being said. Teachers use repetition to introduce a new word and build vocabulary.</td>
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<td><strong>Interactions with Children:</strong> Teachers approach students in a caring and loving manner that reflects their appreciation and value of the children’s culture and language.</td>
<td><strong>Extend/Expand:</strong> Start with what a child already knows and work from there to scaffold them from simple words to more complex phrases e.g., “cookie” to “chocolate chip cookie.”</td>
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<td>Co-teaching/co-decision making: Teachers work together to use their strengths to facilitate second language acquisition and the management of the class. Both teachers plan, teach, observe, and make adjustments to the curriculum and activities as needed.</td>
<td>Utilize Literacy Activities: Teachers utilize read-aloud, songs, poems, and other pre-writing activities to support home language and acquire English skills. Other strategies are: 1) Keep it short; 2) Consider small group book reading; 3) Choose books carefully (rehearse book beforehand and use props); 4) Talk the story rather than read it; 5) Read books more than once.</td>
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<td>INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES CONTINUES:</td>
<td>Build vocabulary in English and Home Language: Teachers attempt to create a balance in the use of words from both languages. Intentionally asking “How do you say this in the home language? What is that word in English?”</td>
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<td>For more explanation on ELL Strategies refer to Chapter 6 &amp; 7 in the textbook, “One Child, Two Languages,” by Patton O. Tabor.</td>
<td>Use second language in both content and directions: Teachers use home language during circle time and project time. Avoid using home language for just directional commands.</td>
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<td>Extended conversations in both languages: Teachers who are native speakers of the language that are represented in their classroom are free to carry on-going conversations in the child’s home language/English for extend periods to facilitate proficiency in both languages.</td>
<td>Involve parents in a meaningful way: Teachers invite parents to share their culture, volunteer in classrooms and participate in taping home language stories for the library.</td>
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<td>Provide school information in the parents’ preferred language: All school information is available in the child’s home language when possible and all interactions with parents are in the language the parent prefers.</td>
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1. African Play Food
2. Latino Play Food
3. Asian Play Food
4. Two Learn to Dress Dolls (African & Latino boy & girl)
5. Multi-Cultural Families Puzzle (Set of Five)
6. Multi-cultural Music Kit (16 instruments from around the world)
7. CD by Ella Jenkins-Multi-Cultural Children’s Songs
8. Bilingual (Spanish & English) Color Paint Cups
9. Infant/Toddler Tambourines (Set of Four)
10. Story Telling Glove with Little Red Riding Hood Finger Puppets
11. Shades of Black Board (Book)
12. All the Colors We Are (Book)
13. Erandi’s Braids (Book)
14. Hairs/Pelitos (Book)
15. Four Spanish Board Book Set
16. Friends from Around the World-Folktale Book Set (10 books)
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Project Staff at Thomas Edison State College
- Joseph Youngblood II, J.D. Ph.D., Vice Provost and Dean of the John S. Watson School of Public Service and Continuing Studies
- Barbara George Johnson, M.PH., J.D., Executive Director of the John S. Watson Institute for Public Policy
- Ana I. Berdecía, M.Ed., Senior Fellow/Director of the Center for the Positive Development of Urban Children
- Caitlin Kosec, M.P.P., Independent Evaluator for the Project
- Ashley Stewart, Administrative Assistant

Summer Institute Faculty/Program Mentors
- Ana I. Berdecía, M.Ed., Faculty/Mentor
- Deitra Bailey, Mentor
- Ramata Choma, M.A., Mentor, Family Strength Associates, Inc.
- Jody Eberly, Ed.D., Faculty, The College of New Jersey
- Alexandra Figueras, M.A., Faculty/ Early Childhood Doctoral Student at Rutgers University
- Liliana Gomez, Mentor
- Arti Joshi, Ph.D. Faculty, The College of New Jersey
- Pamela Sims Jones, Faculty, Thomas Edison State College
- Constance Oswald South, Faculty, Thomas Edison State College

Participating Centers
- Better Beginnings Child Development Center, Hightstown, New Jersey
- BPUM Child Development Inc., Blackwood, New Jersey
- BPUM Child Development Inc., Camden, New Jersey
- CYO of Mercer Child Care Center, Trenton, New Jersey
- Princeton YWCA Child Care Center, Princeton, New Jersey
- La Vida Child Care Center, Patterson, New Jersey
- Mi Casita I & Mi Casita II, Camden, New Jersey
- The Leaguers Child Care Center, Elizabeth, New Jersey
About the Authors

Ana I. Berdecía M.Ed., is the Senior Fellow/Director of the Center for the Positive Development of Urban Children at the John S. Watson Institute for Public Policy of Thomas Edison State College. Ana helps bridge the voices of teachers, practitioners, and parent/guardians to promote policy initiatives in New Jersey that impact the health, well-being, and educational outcomes of children and families. Prior to joining the college, Ana served as the executive director of the Puerto Rican Community Day Care Center, Inc., in Trenton, New Jersey. Ana has extensive experience working with diverse families and children as an administrator, program developer, trainer, and consultant. She is an adjunct faculty member at Mercer County Community College where she teaches the Introduction to Early Childhood Education and Infant/Toddler Development. She serves on numerous boards and committees in the field of early childhood and human services and has written and co-authored various publications on culture and language in early childhood education. Ana has a BA in Sociology with a minor in Women Studies and a Master’s degree in Education with a specialization in Early Childhood, both from The College of New Jersey. Ana also holds a New Jersey Standard Teaching Certificate in Preschool through 3rd Grade, and a post-graduate certificate in Infant Mental Health from the YCS Infant and Preschool Mental Health Institute and Seton Hall University. Recently, Ana was accepted into Ph.D. Program focused on Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health and Development Disorders with the Graduate School of the Interdisciplinary Council on Developmental and Learning Disorders.

Caitlin Kosec, M.P.P., is an independent policy analyst and program evaluator with the Center for the Positive Development of Urban Children at the John S. Watson Institute for Public Policy of Thomas Edison State College. While serving the college as a consultant, Caitlin co-authored and completed data analysis for the 2008 publication, Threads of Culture: The New Jersey Cultural Competency and English Language Learners Summer Institute and Mentoring Program. Caitlin is also a Development Associate at Advancement Project, an innovative civil rights and policy "action tank" based in Los Angeles, California. Advancement Project looks for new ways to secure equity and expand opportunity for low income people of color. Prior to joining the Advancement Project, Caitlin served as the Scholarship Director for the Carson Scholars Fund, where she implemented a national scholarship for academically talented and socially conscious students across the country. She oversaw the scholarship process for over 4,300 scholars in 42 states. She also edited numerous published works for the Institute of Policy Studies at Johns Hopkins University and has previously worked for the CEO's Office of the Baltimore City Public School System. Caitlin has a BA in History and a minor in Elementary Education from the University of Mary Washington, and a Master's degree in Public Policy with a concentration in Education Policy from Johns Hopkins University. Caitlin is originally from Hillsboro, New Jersey.