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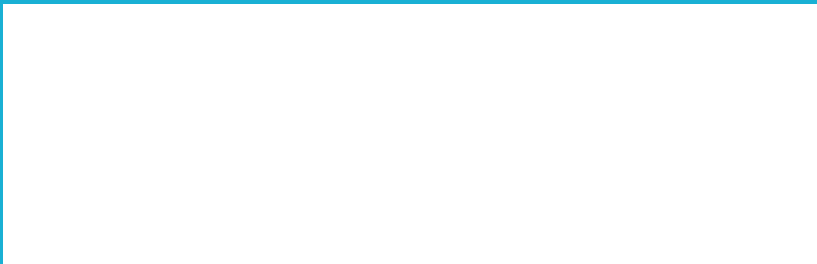
SECA's **75**th Anniversary

Equity and Inclusion in Early Learning Environments: Fostering Relationships, Representation, and Respect

Work Environments that Support the Early Childhood Workforce

Supporting the Social-Emotional Development of Our Youngest Learners: Infants Birth to Six Months Old

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Judy Whitesell
SECA President 2022 & 2023/Presidenta de SECA 2022 y 2023

I trust each of you had a joyous holiday season and are looking forward to the new year with excitement and joy! As my term as president draws to a close, I've been reflective of the accomplishments and work that has taken place over the last two years. Our committed SECA board has worked diligently to promote our organization, to serve our members, and better the lives of children and families in our region. I am proud to have worked with such a committed group of individuals. As we transition into the New Year with Dr. Crystal Campbell leading us as the incoming president, I am confident that you will see these efforts continue. I will continue with the board for another year to assist where needed and chair the nominating committee as we look toward the election for president-elect in the early fall of 2024.

In this issue of *Dimensions of Early Childhood*, you will notice our theme for our upcoming conference is "Diversity, Dedication and Development: Celebrating SECA's 75th Anniversary." Our organization's history (formerly Southern Association of Children under Six -SACUS) is rich, beginning in 1948 with a gathering of like-minded individuals in Nashville, Tennessee with the intention of ALL interested persons coming together to discuss the education of young children. An event like this was highly unusual in those days – to be intentional in including people from all races, religions, and philosophies. SECA continues, seven decades later, to value the contributions of everyone and appreciates the opportunities we have learning from each other. We hope to see you all in Atlanta at the SECA Conference, March 7-9, 2024.

Also in this issue of *Dimensions* you will find articles relating to equity and diversity, as well as a special focus on practices with infants and toddlers. Each of these submissions have been reviewed by our faithful Editorial Committee and a group of peer reviewers. We are fortunate to offer our members a professional refereed journal each quarter as a result of their actions. If you have an interest in writing and submitting your work to our Editorial Committee, please check our website for more information.

Finally, I would like to thank you, our members, for your support and confidence in those who are leaders in SECA. It has been an honor and privilege to work with you all.

Confío en que cada uno de ustedes haya tenido una feliz temporada festiva y recibido el nuevo año con emoción y alegría. A medida que mi mandato como presidenta llega a su fin, he reflexionado sobre los logros y el trabajo que se ha llevado a cabo en los últimos 2 años. Nuestra comprometida junta directiva de SECA ha trabajado diligentemente para promover nuestra organización, servir a nuestros miembros y mejorar las vidas de los niños y las familias de nuestra región. Estoy orgullosa de haber trabajado con un grupo de personas tan comprometidas. A medida que avanzamos hacia un nuevo año con la Dra. Crystal Campbell a la cabeza como presidenta entrante, confío en que verán como todos estos esfuerzos continuarán hacia adelante. Continuaré siendo parte de la junta de SECA durante un año más para ayudar donde sea necesario y presidir el comité de nominaciones para el próximo presidente electo a tener lugar a principios del otoño de 2024.

En este número de *Dimensions of Early Childhood*, verán que nuestro tema para la conferencia de anual del 2024 en Atlanta es Diversidad, Dedicación y Desarrollo: Celebrando el 75 Aniversario de SECA. La historia de nuestra organización (anteriormente SACUS por las siglas de su nombre, Southern Association of Children under Six) es muy rica, comenzando en 1948 con una reunión de personas de ideas afines en Nashville, Tennessee, con la intención de que TODAS las personas interesadas se reunieran para discutir la educación de los niños pequeños. Un evento como este era muy inusual en aquellos días, donde con toda intención se convocaba a personas de todas las razas, religiones y filosofías. Hoy, siete décadas después, SECA continúa valorando las contribuciones de todos y apreciando las oportunidades que tenemos para aprender unos de otros. Esperamos verlos a todos en Atlanta en la Conferencia SECA a tener lugar en marzo 7-9, 2024.

En este número de *Dimensions* también encontrarán artículos sobre la equidad y la diversidad, así como un enfoque especial sobre las prácticas con bebés y niños pequeños. Cada uno de estos artículos ha sido revisado por nuestro fiel Comité Editorial. Tenemos la suerte de ofrecer a nuestros miembros una revista profesional arbitrada por un grupo de profesionales . Si tiene interés en escribir y enviar su trabajo a nuestro Comité Editorial, consulte nuestro sitio web para obtener más información.

Finalmente, me gustaría agradecerles a ustedes, nuestros miembros, por su apoyo y confianza en aquellos que son líderes en SECA. Ha sido un honor y un privilegio trabajar con todos ustedes.

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A Time to Celebrate/Un momento para celebrar

**Wilma Robles-Melendez, Dina Costa Treff, Beverly Boals-Gilbert, Karen Walker,
Kenya Wolff, Susan Bales, and Zlata Stankovic**

With a year still young and promising many new opportunities to continue supporting children, this time SECA takes a moment to celebrate its 75th Anniversary. In over seven decades of advocacy for and dedication to the early childhood community, SECA continues to be a beacon of commitment and professionalism to children, families, and professionals in the southern states of the nation. With a firm determination to promote diversity and equity, it was this goal that guided the efforts of the courageous group of early childhood professionals in 1948 to create what is today the Southern Early Childhood Association (SECA). Today, SECA continues to be true to its guiding principles, advancing the call for equity and inclusive quality services for all children. Welcoming everyone committed to children, SECA continues as a voice for early childhood education, advocating for professionalism and equitable education for our children. Each of us at the SECA Editorial Committee salutes the work and efforts of those early childhood leaders who, 75 years ago, joined together for children. We also recognize the commitment and dedicated work of the SECA leadership members for continuing to bring forward the goals that built this association. We are proud to be part of this association and to have an opportunity to contribute to support early childhood by bringing to our readers practices, experiences, and ideas through each issue of Dimensions of Early Childhood. With a society continuing to face multiple challenges, the aspirations for equity and diversity that gave birth to this association remain today strongly defining our commitment and leading efforts in early childhood education. The commitment of the editorial committee continues to support early childhood educators to provide quality experiences for children.

As we celebrate our anniversary, we also take this time to welcome Dr. Crystal Campbell who will lead SECA's efforts as it continues to serve as a voice for early childhood educators, children, and families.

Con un año que comienza y prometiendo muchas nuevas oportunidades para seguir apoyando a los niños, esta vez SECA toma un momento para celebrar su 75 aniversario. En más de siete décadas de defensa y dedicación a la comunidad de la primera infancia, SECA continúa siendo un faro de compromiso y profesionalismo para los niños, las familias y los profesionales en la región del sur de la nación. Con la firme determinación de promover la diversidad y la equidad, fue este objetivo el que sirvió como guía de los esfuerzos del valiente grupo de profesionales de la primera infancia que se reunieron en 1948 para crear lo que entonces llamaran Southern Association for Children under Six (SACUS), y que hoy es la Asociación de la Primera Infancia del Sur. Hoy en día, SECA continúa siendo fiel a sus principios, promoviendo el llamado a la equidad y a la inclusividad para todos los niños. Hoy, SECA continúa siendo una voz para la educación de la primera infancia, abogando por el profesionalismo y la educación equitativa para nuestros niños. El Comite Editorial de SECA reconoce el trabajo y los esfuerzos de aquellos líderes de la primera infancia que, hace 75 años, se unieron por los niños. Queremos también reconocer la dedicación y esfuerzos de los lideres de SECA por continuar la misión que estableció a esta asociación. Nos sentimos honrados de ser parte de esta asociación y de la oportunidad de contribuir compartiendo prácticas, experiencias e ideas a través de cada número de Dimensions of Early Childhood. Con los continuos desafíos compartiendo la sociedad hoy en día, las aspiraciones de equidad y diversidad que dieron origen a esta asociación siguen hoy y liderando los esfuerzos y dedicación en la educación de la primera infancia. Como miembros del comité editorial, continuamos con nuestro compromiso de brindar un espacio para aprender, descubrir y compartir ideas que apoyen a los profesionales de la educación infantil en su labor con los niños y familias.

Al comenzar una nueva ruta hacia nuestros próximos años, saludamos y damos la bienvenida a la Dra. Crystal Campbell quien liderara los esfuerzos de SECA para continuar apoyando a los educadores de la educación temprana, a los niños y a sus familias

SECA 75

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Equity and Inclusion in Early Learning Environments:
Fostering Relationships, Representation, and Respect

William Harper-Hooper IV, Amy J. Samuels, and Gregory L. Samuels

on advancing the knowledge base related to equity and cultural competence. This includes equipping educators with culturally relevant approaches and informed practices that address the diverse needs of students and the communities they serve. Providing teachers with opportunities to enhance their understanding may accelerate their practices by building their capacity to more effectively support children and their learning needs.

In this article, we present a framework that considers how relationships, representation, and respect can be prioritized, presented, and nurtured in early learning environments to support and foster equity and inclusion. Ladson-Billings (2021) underscores the fact that culturally relevant pedagogy is not specific teaching strategies or techniques, but rather "a set of underlying beliefs that" drives how and what teachers teach" (p. 3). Borrowing from this idea, the framework in this article is designed to encourage an approach to teaching that purposefully considers how relationships, representation, and respect can be encouraged in isolation, and in unison, to promote equitable and inclusive educational spaces. As an encompassing approach, the components of the framework should be considered in both curricular and pedagogical decisions and practices, where teachers reflect upon (1) what they are teaching, (2) how students interpret and receive what is being taught, and (3) how the learning experience interacts with and enhances students' experiences and understanding.

When diversity, equity, and inclusion are prioritized in educational contexts, it simultaneously supports an enhanced sense of belonging and creates an environment where students feel valued and respected. However, given the current sociocultural climate where diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts and initiatives are under attack, educators are often placed in challenging circumstances. While most educators are committed to doing what is in the best interest of children, those interests can be contested by controversial policies and mandates. As such, we argue that educators must feel both equipped and empowered to apply their professional knowledge, skills, and dispositions to create and foster educational environments where students feel encouraged, included, and represented. An essential component in the process of supporting diversity is thoughtfully considering how individual, and diverse, identities and communities are presented in educational spaces, because increased exposure results in enhanced awareness. Strategic efforts to promote and encourage multicultural education is of particular importance because it can lead to a better understanding of self and others, which positively influences academic and social development and simultaneously increases appreciation and respectful engagement with diverse people and communities (National Association for Multicultural Education [NAME], n.d.)

Since educators can be reluctant to incorporate sociopolitical or critically conscious information or approaches in their classrooms (Ladson-Billings, 2021), there is a need for educator preparation programs and professional development departments to explicitly focus

The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC, 2019) provides professional standards and competencies for early childhood educators. Standard 4 specifically addresses developmentally, culturally, and linguistically appropriate teaching practices and emphasizes the importance of programs using effective pedagogical approaches that are developmentally, culturally, and linguistically appropriate and recognize children's complex and diverse learning needs, cultures, and experiences. While the terms equality and equity are often used interchangeably, we use definitions put forth by the National Association for Multicultural Education (NAME, n.d.) to differentiate between them. Equality is based on the premise that students have equal opportunities to learn, as

well as equal access to resources, and suggests all students learn the same way; thereby, advocating the appropriate nature of a one-size-fits-all approach, regarding curriculum and instruction. Equity, however, takes the diverse needs and experiences of students into account and underscores the importance of differentiating curriculum and instruction to respond to individual differences or sociocultural contexts, as well as developing programs that better support all students' identities, families, and communities. Although diversity is multi-faceted, for the purposes of this article we will focus on developmentally appropriate practices and resources that explore and support identities and engagement in relation to ability, gender, language, and race.

Relationships

Early childhood education is an ideal context for students to examine and explore ideas related to diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging because, for many students, this is their first significant opportunity to learn with and about people outside of their families and communities. Students learn from their social experiences and their behavior is influenced by what they observe in their immediate environments, as well as how they interact with the world around them (Hammer, 2011). Early childhood teachers should take advantage of these opportunities for learning to support the development of students' abilities to build relationships by expanding their cultural knowledge and supporting their capacity to connect across differences. Not only should teachers work to develop, advance, and model cultural respect and responsiveness in their practices with students and other adults in the learning community, but they should also implement curriculum and developmentally appropriate practices that provide students the opportunity to strategically learn about diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging. Students should not only see themselves represented and reflected in the educational space, but they should also have ongoing opportunities to see and learn about people who are different from themselves to establish connections and positive perceptions and relationships with the overall learning experience.

Meeting the Diverse Needs of All Children

A critical component in working effectively with diverse populations is fostering a learning environment that is responsive to all children's diverse learning needs and backgrounds. To do this, teachers must commit to developing and maintaining positive relationships with students and their families. In addition, it is important for teachers to facilitate evidence-based teaching approaches that intentionally encourage collaboration, work, and play between students and their peers, especially those who may differ from one another. A fundamental responsibility of early childhood teachers is to model positive, warm, caring, and supportive interactions because students will learn from what they observe

and experience. If we want students to effectively communicate and cooperate with their peers, we must model such communication and cooperation. If we want students to demonstrate compassion and empathy with their peers and other adults in the learning community, we must model such compassion and empathy. If we want students to be kind and affirm one another's cultural identities, we must model such kindness and affirmation. Teachers can use teachable moments as they arise throughout the day, and they can also positively reinforce and model interactions across multiple environments and activities such as circle time, literacy strategies during story reading, role-playing, and music and movement activities.

To build rapport and establish a culture of care, students and families need to feel welcomed, valued, and supported by teachers and educational programs. We want students and families to feel a true sense of belonging to the community and see themselves as active contributors to the overall learning experience. Therefore, getting to know our students and their families, as well as their interests and what is important to them, is essential, as it will help nurture authentic connections, develop positive relationships, and encourage increased family involvement. Additionally, it will support continuity between students' in-school and out-of-school experiences. Since students use their prior knowledge and experiences to process and make meaning of what they learn and experience in school (Hattan & Alexander, 2020), it is necessary for educational experiences to serve as a bridge that connects students' lives and sociocultural contexts to the learning environment and educational community. To truly engage students and respond effectively to their diverse needs, early childhood teachers should consider how they can best communicate and collaborate with families and communities to establish and sustain a shared vision of student success that advances diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging. When reflecting on the role and impact of relationships, it is beneficial to recognize that relationship building is not only part of the formal curriculum, in relation to the content and pedagogical practices, but relationships are also a highly influential component of the hidden curriculum. Therefore, it is imperative that teachers are deliberate and intentional in their efforts to

1940's by Kenneth Clark and Mamie Clark (Clark & Phipps Clark, 1947). In the study, the Clarks explored students' perceptions of race using just one single, but common object, a doll. Originally, Kenneth and Mamie Clark designed and conducted a series of experiments titled, "the doll tests" to examine psychological effects of segregation and explore how young Black children perceived their racial identities (Clark & Phipps Clark, 1947). As part of the study, children were presented with four dolls that were presumably identical in all areas except for skin tone. Children, between the ages of three to seven, were asked to identify the race of the dolls and explain which color doll they favored. The majority of children in the study, all of whom were Black,

build and foster positive and collaborative relationships with students and families. This may involve inviting families to visit the classroom and co-facilitate or participate in activities with their children, regular meetings that encourage parent-led goal setting, or home visits that center around informal discussions and dialogue.

Representation

Play is a form of research, development, and learning for children. Consequently, a learning environment that does not include play or embrace stories, characters, resources, and experiences that provide a diverse representation of all children and families, specifically diverse cultural and ethnic representation and varied abilities, can negatively impact self-identity and limit the development of empowerment, creativity, and collective joy in early childhood.

Early childhood educators, scholars, and activists have argued that by three years of age children can identify differences in racial and physical features. Early childhood professionals assert that the lack of diverse and inclusive representation in play materials advantages children of dominant backgrounds to self-identify, establish a preference for their race and abilities, and view their race, culture, families, and abilities more positively. Therefore, when culturally, physically, and racially minoritized children lack positive representation within their learning environments and experiences, their play, development, and learning experiences are negatively impacted (Escayg, 2019).

Through continued research, early childhood professionals have been able to revisit previous studies, even those conducted prior to the civil rights era, and found early childhood is a critical time in developing children's understanding of culture, community, equity, and self-identity. Therefore, it is critical that diverse identities, backgrounds, and experiences are supported within the classroom and greater educational community. Every decade early childhood researchers and psychologists continue to return to the seminal study originally conducted in the

expressed preferences for the white doll and assigned consistently positive characteristics to the white dolls. Based on their findings, the Clarks concluded that racial biases were persistent, emphasized that "prejudice, discrimination, and segregation" created and maintained feelings of inferiority among Black children, and discussed negative implications for self-esteem (NAACP, 2023). As educators and psychologists continue to recreate similar studies each decade on the anniversary of the Clarks' original study, findings continue to show related results sparking new discussions.

For teachers, equity and representation are concepts that often fall under the larger umbrella of diversity. However, both concepts deserve further consideration and intentional reflection to improve the early experiences of children and their families. Representation within itself provides children the opportunity to explore concepts and experiences related to diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging in ways that strengthen cognitive development and encourage children to explore topics of race, gender, ability, and language in more abstract and complex ways.

While the development of positive self-identity should always be prioritized, cultural and diverse positivity and empowerment are of particular importance due to the growing shift in the diversity represented within classrooms and communities, as well as challenges faced by many families. For teachers, there has to be an intentional effort made to reflect on the role that equity plays in the development, learning, and experiences of young children and their families. Creating a classroom that employs an equity lens requires early childhood teachers to consider how children within their classrooms view themselves and each other (Escayg, 2019). Since children can identify differences in racial and physical features by three years of age, it is critical early childhood teachers make an intentional effort to cultivate classroom communities and relationships that incorporate diversified play and inquiry-based experiences for children through shared

reading, classroom materials, and curricula that embrace positive representation of diverse people and groups (Beneke & Cheatham, 2019; Escayg, 2019)

Through shared reading experiences with diverse representation, teachers are able to scaffold children's understanding of and ability to make real-world connections with topics of diversity and equity, which can result in increased understanding. Exposure to such materials encourages children to discover other cultures and experiences, which promotes the development of empathy, respect for cultural and physical differences, and a positive sense of self (Beneke & Cheatham, 2019). The same is true for selecting classroom materials and resources. When choosing books, posters, dolls, or other materials, it is important to highlight the diversity that is represented within the classroom and community, but it is also important to highlight identities and groups that are not represented. It is also important to note that simply selecting diverse and inclusive materials is not enough to truly encourage authentic representation, but rather materials and resources need to be discussed, revisited, included in planned educational experiences, and highlighted throughout the school year. It is in these strategic moments of scaffolding, play, and exploration that children diversify their thinking, make positive personal and peer connections, and develop their own understanding and interpretation of diversity and inclusion. As such, diverse and representative materials and experiences serve as empowering resources for the development of self-identity, while simultaneously countering stigmas and biases, to cultivate a classroom community that prioritizes diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging.

Respect

As we consider this framework that encourages early childhood teachers' responsiveness to children's needs, it is important to emphasize that relationships, representation, and respect are not dependent variables, but rather connected factors that should work together in concert to advance equity and inclusion in early learning environments. While it is possible to develop relationships and cultivate respectful interactions with students, families, and communities without a goal of advancing equity and inclusion, we argue that given the growing shift in diversity within our classrooms and communities, as well as diversity-related challenges faced by many families (and society overall), application of an equity lens in relationships and respect must be a priority. Not only do students need to have access to equitable and inclusive learning experiences, but they need to develop a clear understanding of equity and learn how to foster it authentically in their own spaces and personal contexts.

Reflecting on fundamental ideas, respect can be considered a sense of admiration or the ability to exhibit positive feelings, attitudes, or dispositions toward someone, or something, and recognize they are valuable or should be held in high regard. It acknowledges and appreciates their abilities, qualities, and achievements. When an equity lens is applied to this concept, it is then represented as conveying positive feelings, attitudes, or dispositions for the qualities and achievements of diverse people and communities, especially in relation to abilities, genders, languages, and races that have been marginalized historically. As such, in an attempt to advance equity and inclusion, early childhood teachers should consider (1) how they can best convey or portray such feelings, attitudes, and dispositions with students, fam-

ilies, colleagues, and communities and (2) how they can strategically teach children to develop, communicate, and express such feelings, attitudes, and dispositions.

Respect can be exemplified in both communication and interactions. Thus, it is important to consider communication and interactions between early childhood teachers, students, and families, as well as communication and interactions between the students themselves. Not only does respect contribute to the learning environment, it also constructively supports the overall learning process, since learning is both positively influenced and encouraged through respectful interactions. For that reason, care, courtesy, consideration, and kindness should be central to the early learning classroom context. Students and families should feel that their identities, both academic and social, are valued. They should not only feel seen and heard, but also deem themselves as valuable contributors to the learning community. Advancing and Advocating for Social Justice and Equity (NAME, n.d.) offers information and resources, as well as teacher case studies and reflective activities, for teachers to consider what they can do to further impact outcomes related to positive academic identities and positive social identities, as well as emphasizing respectful engagement with diverse people, social justice consciousness, and social justice action.

Early childhood teachers should also recognize and respond to students' identities, specifically their lives beyond the classroom, so they can be attentive and responsive to students' learning needs, cultures, and backgrounds. They should be intentional in encouraging parental involvement and listening to the stories and experiences of students and families, as well as inviting their feedback, so they can learn more about individual students and the communities they serve. Such deliberate and purposeful listening not only aids in framing parents and students as experts in their own lives, it increases knowledge of students and families for early childhood professionals. Then, this increased awareness can assist teachers in tailoring instruction and creating developmentally appropriate practices reflective of students' interests, talents, and familiarities. This involves leveraging students' strengths by incorporating activities that activate students' prior knowledge and draw on their life experiences, cultural perspectives, and practices in planning and facilitating instruction. It increases the relevance of learning because the prior knowledge, experiences, tools, and assets students bring to the classroom are used to shape and guide instruction, including student-led discussions. In addition, flexibility is accentuated, as early childhood teachers must adapt, adjust, and change their practices based on the needs, identities, and experiences of students currently represented in their classrooms.

Committed to developing and nurturing spaces filled with encouragement, kindness, and empathy, early childhood teachers who employ an equity lens to teaching and learning not only incorporate this approach in their practices with students and families but also prioritize teaching students to respect one another and connect across differences. Consequently, similar to the role and impact of relationships, it is helpful to frame respect as not only a deliberate and purposeful approach in communication and interactions, but also a critical component of the formal curriculum in which students learn how to understand and value multiple perspectives and appreciate the abilities, qualities, and achievements of others, especially those who may be underrepresented in society or differ from themselves. It is in this work

Table 1 Classroom Resources

	Teacher Resources	Activities, Strategies, and Materials
Relationships	*Anti-Bias Education for Young Children and Ourselves* (Derman-Sparks, L., & Edwards, J.O. with Goins, C.M. 2020) Equity Literacy Institute: *Equity Resources* (n.d.) KidCitizen (2023) [website]	Advance the use of bilingual communication in ways that allow for a simple, non-complex use of language accessible by all level learners. Engage in home visits in ways that align with a community-oriented pedagogy of the learner and their families. Advocate for parent-led goal setting that includes relevant and authentic use and gradual increase of vocabulary related to diversity, equity, and inclusion. Integrate role-playing that allows for students to recognize and identify relationship dynamics within and outside of schools and the community.
Representation	Zero to Three: Racial Equity, Diversity, Inclusion (2022) *Multicultural Principles for Early Childhood Leaders* (Head Start, 2023) Building Belonging: A Toolkit for Early Childhood Educators on Cultural Diversity and Responding to Prejudice (Australian Human Rights Commission, 2023)	Incorporate books and puppet play to highlight diverse characters and their stories. Provide opportunities for dramatic play experiences that include diverse materials (costumes, play food, etc.) Incorporate representation through posters and images with real characters that are supported with continued discussions. Provide materials that highlight the diversity within your classroom community (dolls, puzzles, art materials, etc.)
Respect	Colorín Colorado: A Bilingual Site for Educators and Families of English Language Learners: *Culturally Responsive Instruction: Resource List* (n.d.) *Learning for Justice: Social Justice Standards: A Framework for Anti-Bias Education* (The Southern Poverty Law Center, Inc. 2022) National Association for Multicultural Education (NAME)*: Advancing Multicultural Learning* (n.d.)	Encourage parent involvement. Facilitate student-led discussions where students co-construct knowledge with peers and adults. Invite community partners and guest speakers to make curricular connections to diverse people and experiences outside the classroom. Implement activities that activate students' prior knowledge and build on cultural perspectives and experiences. Affirm and accurately portray diverse and multiple perspectives in instructional resources and activities.

that teachers strive to create and facilitate activities that affirm and accurately portray diverse and multiple perspectives. Learning for Justice offers Social Justice Standards (The Southern Poverty Law Center, Inc. 2022) which provide a framework for anti-bias education that uses age-appropriate learning outcomes and an organizational structure to support curriculum development and encourage goals related to equity and justice. Specifically, one of the four anchor standards is centered around diversity. Teachers can access information related to grade-level outcomes and anti-bias scenarios to support their planning and instructional practice to further diversity practices.

Taking into consideration students' passions and interests, as well as their sense of identity and community, contributes to a learning environment that underscores the importance of authentic engagement and values high expectations for all students. It promotes and advances knowledge, skills, and dispositions that establish a foundation for increasing students' self-esteem, achievement, empowerment, and growth. It is our hope that with increased relationships, representation, and respect, children will perceive the identities of themselves and their peers, including those who represent groups who have been marginalized historically, with a sense of appreciation and admiration.

Although the framework provided in the article is designed to encourage an overarching approach to teaching that considers how relationships, representation, and respect can be encouraged to promote equitable and inclusive educational spaces, **Table 1** highlights activities and strategies, as well as resources and materials educators might reference or utilize as they explore components of the framework.

Conclusion

Early childhood classrooms are an ideal space for teaching information, both explicitly and implicitly, that is critical for children's sociocultural development, which includes understanding diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging. The framework presented in this article can serve as a guide for teachers to foster and sustain a classroom environment that not only addresses students' individual needs but prepares them to develop an increased understanding of their peers and community members, particularly those who may differ from them. Through developmentally appropriate instructional practices and resources, as well as engaging parents in students' learning, teachers have the opportunity to maximize students' educational experiences and engage them in meaningful and relevant ways.

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Amy Samuels is an associate professor of Instructional Leadership at the University of Montevallo and teaches courses on curriculum, educational research, equity, mentoring, professional development, and social justice. Her research interests include social and cultural foundations, examining how culture and identity shape educational contexts, and culturally responsive practices that foster DEI and social justice. Amy has authored peer-reviewed articles and book chapters, as well as presented sessions at national and international conferences about critical multiculturalism, culturally responsive pedagogy, racial (in)equity, and whiteness. She also partners with organizations to design and facilitate staff development to support equitable and inclusive practices.

Gregory L. Samuels is an associate professor of Secondary Education at the University of Montevallo. Gregory teaches courses on instructional strategies at the secondary level directly related to classroom management, diversity in schools, inclusive practices in the classroom, and lesson plan development. His research interests include critical pedagogy, social studies education, and inclusive and equity-based approaches of classroom management. Gregory has authored several peer-reviewed articles and chapters on topics including critical multiculturalism, racial literacy, and racist educational policies impacting school systems.

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Work Environments that Support the Early Childhood Workforce

Erin Hamel

Early childhood (EC) environments that are safe and engaging can positively influence developmental outcomes in children. Indeed, the benefits of a high-quality environment for young children are numerous (Kostelnik et al., 2019). The EC classroom is also the primary workplace of EC teachers and much like the children they serve, they can also benefit from high-quality environments that support their well-being and growth as professionals. This article explores the importance of the EC teachers' work environment and provides suggestions for program and center directors for evaluating and improving environmental work supports for teachers.

Teacher Well-Being

Researchers have examined teachers' well-being in relation to the working conditions they experience to better understand how the work environment impacts teachers. The Whole Teacher Well-Being Conceptual Model (Kwon et al., 2022) was proposed as a holistic way to consider the context of the program in which teachers work. The model includes work climate, pay and benefits, breaks, job demands, and the physical environment as specific aspects of the work environment. Teachers' environments can provide them support and resources such as access to substitute teachers, sick days, and reliable breaks, that positively impact their well-being. Conversely, the environment may lack supportive features or contain elements that negatively impact teachers such as unreliable technology or an inflexible schedule. The model suggests that the work environment and

workplace supports can impact teachers' physical, psychological, and professional well-being.

Workplace Features

Early childhood teachers report their primary reason for entering the field is because of their strong desire to work with young children and their families (Hamel et al., 2023). Teachers recognize their pay will be low in the EC field and still choose to enter the profession. Teachers perceive their work with children and families as a value to society that transcends the time they have with children by making a long-term impact on children's futures (Hamel et al., 2023). It may be that teachers' dedication to children and families serves as a motivation to enter the field; however, without proper environmental supports and strong relationships with co-workers, teachers are more likely to leave their current workplace (Zinsser et al., 2016). A study of Head Start teachers revealed that teachers who had a negative view of their working conditions had higher intentions of quitting (Wells, 2015). Additionally, work supports such as access to health and disability insurance are associated with higher retention (Holochwost et al., 2009; Totenhagen et al., 2016). Teachers' professional well-being is also associated with burnout and the quality of care they provide (Kusma et al., 2012; Wells, 2015). Thus, it is important to evaluate and improve the environment and working conditions for EC teachers.

Evaluating the EC Environment & Working Conditions with Teachers in Mind

Research on child-care quality initially focused on global assessments of the overall program, which have since been separated into two distinct categories: structure and process quality (Phillips & Howes, 1987). Structure and process quality have been used to examine different aspects of quality in the EC environment. Process quality is defined as requiring human interactions among individuals (Cassidy et al., 2005). On the other hand, structural quality is defined as part of the environment that is separate from human interactions and includes concrete aspects of the environment like schedules, furnishings, rules, and procedures (Cassidy et al., 2005). When evaluating

EC teachers' work environments, it is important to assess both process and structure quality because of the known impact of relationships and physical working conditions on teacher retention (Kwon et al., 2020; Zinsser et al., 2013).

Program and center directors, administrators, and stakeholders should consider evaluating the working conditions and environment using the checklist presented in **Figure 1**. The checklist could be completed by one individual or a group of individuals, including teachers, whose perceptions of working conditions are most important.

Improving Working Conditions

After assessing teachers' working conditions, program and center directors can determine what to target first for change. Wages will likely be an issue as many EC teachers themselves experience economic challenges due to low pay (McLean et al., 2021). Despite wages increasing between 2017 and 2019, pay is still at an insufficient rate and child care workers and EC teachers continue to be one of the lowest paid occupations in our nation (McLean et al., 2021). Programs are limited in the number of improvements they can immediately make to address working conditions for EC teachers. Resources are finite and directors must make difficult decisions about allotment. Limitations to addressing working conditions and environment include physical space, time, and financial constraints. To be clear, the field should continue the important work of advocating for and ensuring increased teachers' pay and benefits. However, there are other tangible ways to improve working conditions at the programmatic level and directors may still be able to make small improvements that can make a difference in the lives of teachers (Hamel et al., 2023). First, consider asking teachers for input on what is most important to them and what they view as most valuable to their well-being before making plans. If your program is unable to implement multiple

Figure 1. Evaluating Program Working Conditions

Do teachers have access to:	Yes	No
Substitute teachers?		
Reliable and consistent breaks?		
Breaks upon request?		
Adult space away from children?		
Adult-sized furnishings, such as tables and chairs?		
On-site laundry to maintain bedding and care for children?		
Reliable technology such as a computer, copier, and printer?		
A quiet place to relax during breaks?		
Do teachers have opportunities to provide input with leadership?		
Do teachers have opportunities to advance their careers?		
Do teachers have input in the type of professional development they pursue?		
Do teachers have opportunities to collaborate with their colleagues?		
Do teachers have opportunities to engage with and form relationships with colleagues outside of work?		
Do teachers have protected time away from the classroom to plan and prepare for their lessons?		
Are teachers treated as professionals by administrators and families?		
Do administrators and families show appreciation for teachers?		
Do teachers receive encouragement and support from administration?		
Do teachers have predictable schedules?		
Do teachers have flexible work hours?		
Do teachers receive:		
Pay increases?		
Health benefits?		
Sick leave?		
Overtime?		
Are professional resources available to teachers, such as:		
Teaching resource books?		
Guides and books on child development?		
Resources for behavior management?		
Publications from respected professional organizations?		

take a break. EC teachers also need work support to help them complete their work tasks, ensure teachers have scheduled planning time that is free from interruption from children and other adults to work on preparing lessons and gathering necessary materials. If teachers are unable to take their planning time one day, work with staff to find a way to reschedule the time.

Build Relationships. Create opportunities for relationship building outside of work. Programs can host an event for teachers to get to know one another outside of work. Teachers value their relationships with their co-workers but often do not have time to establish nor maintain those relationships. Directors can further aid in the development of relationships by providing space and time for an annual picnic or gathering in which teachers and their families can attend and celebrate their efforts and achievements. Programs can also ensure opportunities for collaboration by overlapping planning times for EC teachers as a way to increase teamwork.

Invest in Teachers. Demonstrate program commitment to EC teachers by providing them with opportunities to attend conferences and trainings that they are interested in and not merely to meet required professional development minimums. Directors should meet with individual teachers to learn their interests related to early childhood and help create a professional development plan to nurture their development. Directors may also consider paying for membership in a professional organization for each of the lead teachers in the program. Benefits include belonging to a professional community, professional development opportunities, and resources for teachers. Like other professionals, EC teachers may want to pursue opportunities to improve themselves and their position (Hamel et al., 2023).

Summary

EC teachers show dedication to young children and their families by persisting through challenging working conditions and unlivable wages. Efforts to improve the working environment and conditions, no matter how small, can be a sign to EC teachers that their work is recognized and appreciated. Advocating for teachers of young children can happen at the programmatic level and should continue with policies that have teachers' holistic well-being in mind.

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changes at once, prioritize and make a list of future improvement goals. Consider involving families in the improvements as well. Following are ideas that researchers and teachers have identified that can be beneficial in your program.

Show Appreciation. EC teachers report being motivated by displays of gratitude and appreciation for their work (Hamel et al., 2023). This can take the form of occasionally providing lunch or snacks in the break room to show thanks for teachers' efforts. Other programs implement wellness activities once a week by providing time and space for meditation, brief massages for teachers, time to walk outdoors, or inviting a yoga instructor in to provide lessons. Resources for such activities could be solicited from community partners or families who wish to donate their time or talents.

Substitute Teachers. Teachers rarely have access to sick leave despite interacting daily with young children who are still developing their hygiene skills (McLean et al., 2021). In some cases, programs require EC teachers to contact and secure their own substitute when they need to be absent (Hamel et al., 2023). It is especially important that EC teachers have the opportunity to take days off when needed. This extra effort can benefit EC teachers personally and the program. Research indicates that teachers who had positive and supportive relationships in their personal lives have lower intentions to leave their jobs (Zhou et al., 2020).

Protected Space and Time. An effective and necessary work support is reliable, consistent breaks away from children. EC teachers need breaks to use the restroom, take care of medical conditions, and reduce stress. Teachers who have effective supports to reduce their stress and psychological load are more likely to respond to children sensitively (Buettner et al., 2016). Consider asking community stakeholders, partners, and families to assist in creating a lounge area in your program where teachers can go to relax. Protect this space procedurally by implementing a program policy to avoid interrupting teachers who are using the space to

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Supporting the Social-Emotional Development of Our Youngest Learners:
Infants Birth to Six Months Old

Seungyoun Lee

context of mother-infant interaction. Quality emotional and social exchanges are essential for the infant to develop emotional self-regulation (Myruski et al, 2018). A distracted caregiver provides decreased opportunities for "in-the-moment" emotional feedback that is essential to promote optimal development. When the infant signals distress with crying, the caregiver's prompt, consistent, and appropriate attention to her/his physiological needs and social-emotional state helps to reduce the distress (Davis et al., 2021). Over time, the support the infant receives from the caregiver supports her/his learning how to self-regulate.

Understanding Infants' Social-Emotional Development

The capacity for growth and development is an integral part of being human. Infant social-emotional development is critically important to overall development and begins in the first months of life. These processes encompass how we relate to ourselves and others in our everyday lives (Malti & Cheah, 2021). Social-emotional development includes how we understand our own and others' emotions, how we express our internal feelings, needs, and desires, and how we handle social and emotional upheaval. Understanding how infants develop socially and emotionally is important to supporting their development in effective ways (Lang et al., 2020). Parents/guardians and caregivers play an important role in facilitating development in this area. Social-emotional competence in the beginning months of life shapes the infant's long-term trajectory in all areas of development (Blower et al., 2021; Bozicevic et al., 2021; Davis et al., 2021; Israelashvili et al., 2020; Lang, et al., 2020).

Understanding Self-Regulation

Emotional regulation includes enhancing positive effect or reducing negative states. It begins early in life and is learned primarily in the

From the first days of life, infants focus on faces, particularly that of the primary caregiver (Bozicevic et al., 2021; Musholt, 2018). Mothers and caregivers respond to infant smiles and vocalizations with mirroring, duplicating the infant's actions with exaggerated repeating back to them. Not only do these interactions support infant social communication during the exchange, but they also support later social-emotional interactions. In the first days of life, the caregiver regulates the infant's emotions, but very quickly the caregiver and infant become co-regulators (Bozicevic et al., 2021).

Caregiver attachment is a primary factor in the development of infants' social-emotional capacities (Nijssens et al., 2020). When the caregiver or parent/guardian responds sensitively and appropriately to the infant's physical and emotional needs, the two become more attached. Within this secure relationship, the infant is able to learn about self and others, fostering her/his social-emotional development (Nijssens et al., 2020).

Understanding Self

One of the earliest indicators of the understanding of self is when an infant develops an awareness of her/his physical self (Reschke, 2019).

In the first weeks of life, the infants appear fascinated by playing with their hands and feet. They touch, move, and look at them. Their physical actions and seeing their own image contribute to developing a sense of self. During the first six months of life, the infant begins to vocalize and create various different sounds (Reschke, 2019). They seem to experiment with the kinds of vocalizations they can make and the volume at which they can make them.

Understanding the self also grows out of the attachment relationship the infant has with her/his parent or caregiver. When it develops within a secure relationship within which the infant receives appropriate attention, an increased sense of self-efficacy occurs (Nijssens et al., 2020). Face-to-face play helps infants learn about themselves through imitative interactions between the infant and caregiver (Klerk, 2020). In this 'social mirror,' infants see their own actions reflected by someone else.

Young infants seem to naturally and preferentially orient towards faces and seem especially motivated to pay attention to faces that interact with them (Klerk, 2020). These early encounters provide the foundation for understanding oneself and include imitation games, vocal exchanges, and rhymes and songs. Often, the caregiver manipulates the infant's body, as in 'peekaboo' and 'this little piggy,' during this face-to-face play. Not only is the play enjoyable, but it plays an important role in social development.

One of the first abstract labels the infant begins to understand is his/her name (Reschke, 2019). The infant begins to identify that the label refers to him/her. His/her name becomes attached to his/her understanding of who he/she is. In addition to his/her name, Reschke (2019) indicates that the young infant will begin to build a foundation of who he/she is by the comments and descriptive words the adult uses about him/her. These labels become a part of his/her self-image.

Face-to-face play between infants and caregivers provides the support needed to enhance the attachment relationship between the pair (Klerk, 2020). These interactions contribute to the infant's development of a sense of self. Through the interactions, the infant develops the ability to copy the facial expressions of others. Klerk (2020) and Sauciuc et al. (2020) suggest that social mirroring helps infants see themselves through others' eyes. Imitation games may also lead to infants' learning about their own emotions. When the infant expresses anger or sadness, the sensitive caregiver copies their facial expressions in an exaggerated and empathetic way. This helps infants understand the link between their internal emotional state and their facial expression. This imitation of the infant's actions and vocalizations provides scaffolding for several social competences such as self-awareness, self-other discrimination, and others' intentions (Sauciuc et al., 2020).

Understanding Self in Relation to Others

Social interactions are shaped by the early interactions between the infant and caregiver. Positive shaping was found to occur with two types of caregiver-infant interactions (Bozicevic et al., 2021). Mirroring with an exact match of the infant's behavior and positive marking and when the caregiver singles out and marks an infant behavior with a smile or other positive cues have been found to increase infants' positive social expressions.

During face-to-face interactions, infants form expectations about others' social responsiveness (Klerk, 2020). Maylott et al. (2021) found that looking at faces, eye contact, and imitation, often displayed by very young infants, lay the groundwork for later social and emotional development. By two months old, infants' social interactions become much more complex. Social smiles emerge and they show increased attention to the eye region of faces.

Unfortunately, not all social opportunities for infants prove to be positive. Mobile devices used by the parent or caregiver can impact infants' developing understanding of connectedness to caring adults (Myruski et al., 2018). The parent or caregiver may be physically present but most likely will be distracted and unresponsive towards the infant.

Traditionally in research, infants demonstrated the most distress when the mother or caregiver was disengaged. Myruski et al. (2018) found that infants increased their social bids to gain attention when the parent/guardian/caregiver was not providing emotional feedback to gain. In addition, infants who were reported as having a negative temperament engaged less with their caregiver and displayed room exploration less during interaction (Myruski et al, 2018). In fact,

and appropriately to the infants' needs. When the infant demonstrates distress by crying, fretting, or showing distress in any way, the mindful caregiver responds right away. They approach the infant and express soothing noises. The caregiver attempts to determine the infants' needs. Are they too warm or cool? Do they need a diaper change? Do they need to eat? Soothe infants by saying you see that they are upset and you will help them. Comfort infants by discovering their needs and attending to them.

Consistent Routine. In addition to responding quickly and consistently to infants' needs, the caregiver supports self-regulation by establishing consistent routines. Infants are more likely to feel safe and secure when they begin to anticipate what to expect on a daily basis.

Leon and Olhaberry (2020) report that between 11% and 37% of infants experience social-emotional difficulties by 6 months old. It is unquestionably important that caregivers engage with infants in ways that provide a strong, positive foundation in social-emotional development.

Positive social-emotional learning cannot be left to chance. Infants need a parent/guardian and caregiver response to foster their social-emotional learning in their homes, their childcare facilities, and in their communities (Israelashvili et al., 2020). Developing a sense of self and a sense of self in relation to others is rooted in the infant's interactions with others (Musholt, 2018). It develops through appropriate and consistent interactions with others in which "the others" must take the primary role with the young infant.

Strategies for Positive Growth in Social-Emotional Development

Knowing the importance of supporting young infants' social-emotional development, it is imperative that caregivers employ strategies that help build positive growth in this area. The following sections provide information about ways caregivers can help infants.

Self-Regulation

Newborn infants need a caregiver to help them begin to self-regulate their emotions so that they can soon begin to employ their own strategies to self-regulate. Ways to support infants' growth include responding to infants' needs, establishing consistent routines, and interacting with infants to help both stimulate and soothe them.

Respond to Infants' Needs. In order to help infants self-regulate their emotions, caregivers should respond quickly, consistently,

Feed, bathe, dress, change diapers, and cuddle on a somewhat dependable schedule, without being inflexible based on the infants' needs.

Regularly Interact. Caregivers play an important role in both soothing and stimulating infants. In order to learn self-regulation, infants need to interact with a close caregiver several times each day. One of the best ways to help infants learn to soothe themselves is to hold and cuddle them. This is the best tool caregivers possess to help infants begin to develop an attachment to them. While cuddling, infants make eye contact and talk softly to them. Modeling this soothing interaction helps infants learn to self-soothe.

Likewise, infants need to learn to experience a range of emotion, so providing stimulation as well as soothing supports infants in handling varying emotions. Play with infants and make time with them to be fun, silly, and active. As you read a book, use differing voices, make funny sounds, and laugh with them. Responding quickly, consistently, and appropriately, establishing consistent routines, and interacting regularly with infants help them develop self-regulation.

Understanding Self

In addition of self-regulation, infants also need caregiver support to begin to understand themselves as separate and important beings. Infants begin to recognize their own bodies during opportunities to experiment and learn what the various parts can do and what they look like. Understanding themselves as a person can be achieved by playing games that focus on them, helping them feel different parts of their bodies, hearing their names, and seeing themselves.

Games that Focus on Them. Infants begin to recognize various parts

of themselves when caregivers play games that focus on their body parts. Some of the games that can be used include "This Little Piggy." Use both toes and fingers when playing. Another fingerplay to use is "Pat a Cake." Hold the infants' hands and gently clap them together while you recite the verse.

Getting the Feels. Touching is important for infants for getting a feel for themselves. Giving lots of cuddles helps infants begin to feel and understand touch on different areas of their bodies. Hold them firmly but gently. Use baby massage techniques to both soothe and help infants become aware of their bodies. Use a gentle, sparing amount oil such as avocado oil or baby oil for the massage. Tell infants about the body part you are massaging.

Names and Labels. As infants hear their names associated with themselves enough, they begin to recognize that the name is who they are. The name becomes an important part of their identity. Before infants are six months old, they will recognize their names and look toward someone who says their name.

Likewise, infants begin to apply labels they hear spoken both to and about them. These labels become important building blocks of their self-esteem. When caregivers speak strength, importance, and caring to infants, they begin to apply these labels to who they are and build positive self-esteem. Caregivers should use infants' names and talk positively to them while cuddling, feeding, changing diapers, and anytime during the day when interacting with them.

Seeing Themselves. Infants begin to build a foundation of sense of self by seeing themselves in a mirror. Place a non-breakable mirror on the crib or propped beside where

infants are engaged in tummy time. Caregivers can also hold the infant in front of a wall mirror. It is important to pair looking in the mirror with conversation about the infant's reflection.

Resources to Support Infants' Social-Emotional Development

To continue the study of social and emotional development in our youngest learners, the following includes some resources that you may find helpful:

Videos
CNN. (n.d.). *Importance of reading to babies* [Video]. Youtube.
https://www.youtube.com/watch5A
This video discusses the value of reading to babies.

Lucy's Angels (2015, May 16). *Baby Massage Short Video Routine for Calming, Soothing and Sleep.* How to Massage your Baby [Video]. Youtube.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=an42r8O_XwE
How to. The video provides ideas and directions for using baby massage to calm and soothe babies.

Sproutable. (n.d.). *Finger plays and songs for infants part 1.* Youtube.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JZxTN_Kvuh4
Words to songs and fingerplays and ways to engage infants with them are provided in this video

Telethon Kids Institute. (n.d.) *Baby's social development milestones.* Youtube.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m4M4QMWhZMk
An overview of infant social development is provided in this video.

Actively Family. (n.d.). Baby games for your 4 to 6 month old [Video]. Youtube.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BE5gRCMU
This video suggests games that can be played with babies.

Websites
Zero To Three. (2016, January 1). Books about feelings for babies and toddlers. Zero To Three.
https://www.zerotothree.org/resource/books-about-feel
Website recommends books to support social and emotional growth for babies and toddlers.

Nemours Kids Health (2023, August). *Reading books to babies*. Nemours Children's Health.
https://kidshealth.org/en/parents/reading-babies.html
This website describes why reading to babies is important and gives ideas for how to read to help babies' growth and development.

Help Me Grow. (n.d.). *Practicing social skills: Activity ideas for babies.* Help Me Connect.
https://helpmegrowmn.org/HMG/HelpfulRes/Articles/socialskillsbabies/index.htm
Website provides activities to do with infants to promote the development of social skills.

Articles
O'Neill, K. (n.d.). The best social-emotional activities for infants. Parenting Expert To Mom.
https://www.parentingexperttomom.com/the-best-social-emotional-activities-for-infants/
Article that gives information about how to support positive infant social-emotional development.

MI Kids Matter. (n.d.). *Social & emotional development for infants* (Birth – 12 months). Michigan Department of Education.
https://www.michigan.gov/mikidsmatter/parents/infant/social
This article provides both an overview of what to expect from infants socially and emotionally and ways to support their development.

in relation to others, these conversations need to be in the context of talking "with" infants rather than "to" them. Talk and wait for the infant to vocalize to you in return. Most infants will coo and make other sounds by the time they are two months old. Ask the infant a question and wait for her/him to answer. This builds the understanding of the exchange that is required for social interaction.

Other conversation built around interesting people and things are also interesting for caregiver-infant conversations. Collect some photographs or snapshots of the infant's family members. Point out and name them for the infant. Talk about mothers, fathers, siblings, cousins, and grandparents. Show them photos of other babies, especially those who are similar ages to the infant.

Understanding Self in Relation to Others

Infants are a part of a social structure – a family, a childcare facility, a faith community, and a neighborhood. From their earliest days, it is important to make them a part of the social structure. As they interact with others within each structure of which they are a part, they begin to experience the foundation that will support the building of their social development. Ways that caregivers can use to support this acquisition of foundational experience is through playing games and singing, moving together, and having conversations.

Play Games and Sing. As with other facets of social and emotional development, playing games and singing supports infants in building an understanding of themselves in relation to others. This is a form of shared interaction that brings comfort and builds positive relationships with others. The rhyme, rhythm, and repetition found in fingerplays and songs provide the language for developmentally appropriate interaction that makes these activities successful in building relationships and forming strong attachments.

Move Together. Enjoying many activities in which the caregiver and infant move together also help to provide foundational experience during which infants begin to understand themselves in relation to others. Lay babies on your lap and lift your legs up and down to rock the infant, sit the infant in your lap supporting her/his back against your upper body and sway back and forth. Support the infant to sit on your lap and make eye contact while talking with him/her. Hold the infant securely against you and slowly dance to music.

Have Conversations. Talking with infants is one of the most important activities a caregiver can provide to infants to support their social development. To address infants' understanding of themselves

Infant caregivers play an important role in nurturing the understandings and experiences that become positive social and emotional development for infants. Even though they lack language, or even understand language, when they are born, they are already learners who are developing quickly. It is important that we do not neglect the experiences they need to self-regulate, understand themselves, and understand themselves in relation to others.

Reflecting on Cultural Diversity for Infants' Social-Emotional Development

"There are considerable individual differences in children's early dispositional characteristics, such as how they react to challenging situations and their ability to regulate behavioral and emotional reactions" (Chen, 2023, p.1). Since "diversity in our country is fast becoming the norm" (Wright, Chang, & Rocha, 2000, p. 1), it is a timely issue to give thought to how diversity is in effect in infants' social-emotional development.

Creating welcoming environments for infants and their families and encouraging family engagement in terms of how to better understand and support infants are important for them to feel connected to their caregivers and community. This is crucial if caregivers are to help infants from diverse backgrounds learn more securely and meet their needs more equally in the learning setting by providing a safe, challenging, and nurturing environment (NAEYC, 2020). Furthermore, caregivers' professional knowledge and skills are required in meeting diverse families' needs (Zeanah & Zeanah, 2009).

Considering a more variation in family patterns and diversity traits than any other times in history, including single-parent, blended fam-

ilies, infants living with relatives, infants living in poverty, and families who are speakers of languages other than English, it is critical for caregivers to learn more about the infants they teach, their family and community, and their unique culture. Parents/guardians can be helpful in providing information about infants' personal experiences and backgrounds such as developmental level, race and ethnicity, physical and emotional states, prior experiences, interests, family and home life, learning preferences, and a myriad of other variables influencing the teaching and learning processes.

"Diversity-informed practice is a dynamic system of beliefs and values that strives for the highest levels of diversity, inclusion, and equity" (Thomas et al., 2019, p. 49). Caregivers need to examine the embedded beliefs and values of the infant's family and the local community knowledge, backgrounds, and culture and broaden their learning awareness of diversity to improve their awareness, sensitivity, knowledge, and skills related to diversity issues in teaching and learning. They should be knowledgeable of the norms, values, beliefs, traditions, behaviors, cultural preferences, and learning styles of infants from diverse cultures, and should have strategies to teach diverse learners from different sociocultural contexts more effectively. This will help them not to offend infants' family beliefs through their teaching and learning experiences.

Caregivers' planning and teaching approaches affect how infants construct different knowledge about diverse cultures. Using infants' literature books will be one method for facilitating their exposure to learning about diversity naturally integrating lessons with diversity. For that caregivers' teaching approaches can go a long way towards boosting infants' interest in diversity, it is valued for them to be aware of their own assumptions and beliefs about diversity and generalize their own feelings, opinions, and personal theory about it in teaching and learning by reflecting their professional and personal experiences.

Pointing out the importance of no one size fits all mindset, it is significant to treat all infants equally with flexible teaching approaches which consider infants' specific situations. What is fair for an infant is what the infant needs. Important considerations should be taken in fostering a positive environment and learning attitude by offering socioculturally appropriate responses to and learning opportunities for individual infants.

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Apoyando El Desarrollo Socioemocional De Nuestros Alumnos Más Pequeños:
Los Bebés Desde El Nacimiento Hasta Los Seis Meses De Edad

Seungyoun Lee

Comprendiendo el desarrollo socioemocional de los bebés

La capacidad de crecimiento y desarrollo es una parte integral del ser humano. El desarrollo socioemocional infantil es de vital importancia para el desarrollo general y comienza en los primeros meses de vida. Estos procesos abarcan la forma en que nos relacionamos con nosotros mismos y con los demás en nuestra vida cotidiana (Malti y Cheah, 2021). El desarrollo socioemocional incluye cómo entendemos nuestras propias emociones y las de los demás, cómo expresamos nuestros sentimientos, necesidades y deseos internos, y cómo manejamos las contrariedades social y emocionalmente. Comprender cómo se desarrollan social y emocionalmente los bebés es importante para apoyar su desarrollo de manera efectiva (Lang et al., 2020). Los padres y cuidadores desempeñan un papel importante en el desarrollo en esta área. La competencia socioemocional en los primeros meses de vida da forma a la trayectoria a largo plazo del bebé en todas las áreas del desarrollo (Blower et al., 2021; Bozicevic et al., 2021; Davis et al., 2021; Israelashvili et al., 2020; Lang, et al., 2020).

Entendiendo la autorregulación

La regulación emocional incluye la mejora de la respuesta positiva o la reducción de los estados negativos. Comienza temprano en la vida y se aprende principalmente en el contexto de la interacción madre-hijo. Los intercambios emocionales y sociales de calidad son esenciales para que el bebé desarrolle la autorregulación emocional (Myruski et al, 2018). Un cuidador distraído proporciona menos oportunidades para la retroalimentación emocional "en el momento" que es esencial para promover un desarrollo óptimo. Cuando el bebé demuestra angustia con su llanto, la atención rápida, constante y apropiada del cuidador a sus necesidades fisiológicas y estado socioemocional ayuda a reducir la angustia (Davis et al., 2021). Con el tiempo, el apoyo que el bebé recibe del cuidador lo apoya en su aprendizaje de autorregulación.

Desde los primeros días de vida, los bebés se centran en los rostros, en particular en el del cuidador principal (Bozicevic et al., 2021; Musholt, 2018). Las madres y los cuidadores responden a las sonrisas y vocalizaciones de los bebés con un reflejo, duplicando las acciones del bebé con repeticiones exageradas. Estas interacciones no solo apoyan la comunicación social infantil durante las interacciones, sino que también apoyan las interacciones socioemocionales posteriores. En los primeros días de vida, el cuidador regula las emociones del bebé, pero muy rápidamente el cuidador y el bebé se convierten en co-reguladores (Bozicevic et al., 2021).

El sentido de apego del cuidador es un factor primordial en el desarrollo de las capacidades socioemocionales de los bebés (Nijssens et al., 2020). Cuando el cuidador o los padres responden de manera sensible y apropiada a las necesidades físicas y emocionales del bebé, los dos se vuelven más apegados. Dentro de esta relación segura, el

infante es capaz de aprender so-
bre sí mismo y sobre los demás,
fomentando su desarrollo so-
cioemocional de forma positiva
(Nijssens et al., 2020).

Comprenderse a sí mismo

Uno de los primeros indicadores
de la comprensión de sí mismo
es cuando un bebé desarrolla
una conciencia de su yo físico
(Reschke, 2019). En las prime-
ras semanas de vida, los bebés
parecen fascinados jugando con
las manos y los pies. Los tocan,
se mueven y los miran. Sus ac-
ciones físicas y ver su propia
imagen contribuyen a desarr-
ollar un sentido de sí mismos.
Durante los primeros seis meses
de vida, el bebé comienza a vo-
calizar y a crear varios sonidos diferentes (Reschke, 2019). Parecen
experimentar con los tipos de vocalizaciones que pueden hacer y el
volumen al que pueden hacerlas.

La comprensión del yo también surge de la relación de apego que el
bebé tiene con sus padres o cuidadores. Cuando se desarrolla dentro
de una relación segura dentro de la cual el bebé recibe la atención
adecuada, se produce un mayor sentido de autoeficacia (Nijssens et
al., 2020). El juego cara a cara ayuda a los bebés a aprender so-
bre sí mismos a través de interacciones imitativas entre el bebé y el
cuidador (Klerk, 2020). En este "espejo social", los bebés ven sus
propias acciones reflejadas por otra persona.

Los bebés pequeños parecen orientarse de forma natural y prefer-
ente hacia los rostros y parecen especialmente motivados para pre-
star atención a los rostros que interactúan con ellos (Klerk, 2020).
Estos encuentros tempranos proporcionan la base para entenderse
a uno mismo e incluyen juegos de imitación, intercambios vocales
y rimas y canciones. A menudo, el cuidador manipula el cuerpo del
bebé, como en 'cucú' y 'este cerdito', durante este juego cara a cara.
La obra no solo es agradable, sino que juega un papel importante en
el desarrollo social.

Una de las primeras fórmulas abstractas que el bebé comienza a en-
tender es su nombre (Reschke, 2019). El bebé comienza a identificar
que la etiqueta se refiere a él/ella. Su nombre se vincula a su comp-
rensión de quién es. Además de su nombre, Reschke (2019) indica
que el bebé pequeño comenzará a construir una base de quién es
por los comentarios y palabras descriptivas que el adulto usa sobre él.
Estas etiquetas se convierten en parte de su autoimagen.

El juego cara a cara entre los bebés y los cuidadores proporciona el
apoyo necesario para mejorar la relación de apego entre la pareja
(Klerk, 2020). Estas interacciones contribuyen al desarrollo de un sen-
tido de sí mismo en el bebé. A través de las interacciones, el bebé de-
sarrolla la capacidad de copiar las expresiones faciales de los demás.
Klerk (2020) y Sauciuc et al. (2020) sugieren que el reflejo social ayu-
da a los bebés a verse a sí mismos a través de los ojos de los demás.
Los juegos de imitación también pueden hacer que los bebés apren-
dan sobre sus propias emociones. Cuando el bebé expresa enojo o
tristeza, el cuidador sensible copia sus expresiones faciales de una
manera exagerada y empática. Esto ayuda a los bebés a comprender
el vínculo entre su estado emocional interno y su expresión facial.
Esta imitación de las acciones y vocalizaciones del infante proporcio-
na un andamiaje para varias competencias sociales como la autocon-
ciencia, la discriminación entre sí mismo y los demás y las intenciones
de los demás (Sauciuc et al., 2020).

Comprenderse a sí mismo en relación con los demás

Las interacciones sociales son moldeadas por las primeras interac-
ciones entre el bebé y su cuidador. Positive shaping was found to
occur with two types of caregiver-infant interactions (Bozicevic et al.,
2021). Se ha encontrado que reflejar con una coincidencia exacta
del comportamiento del bebé y la calificación positiva y cuando el
cuidador señala y marca un comportamiento infantil con una sonrisa
u otra señal positiva aumenta las expresiones sociales positivas de los
bebés.

Durante las interacciones cara a cara, los bebés forman expectativas
sobre la capacidad de respuesta social de los demás (Klerk, 2020).
Maylott et al. (2021) descubrieron que mirar caras, el contacto visual
y la imitación, que a menudo muestran los bebés muy pequeños,
sientan las bases para el desarrollo social y emocional posterior. A los
dos meses de edad, las interacciones sociales de los bebés se vuelven
mucho más complejas. Las sonrisas sociales emergen y muestran una
mayor atención a los ojos.

Desafortunadamente, no todas las oportunidades sociales para
los bebés resultan ser positivas. Los dispositivos móviles utilizados
por los padres o cuidadores pueden afectar el desarrollo de su
comprensión sobre su conexión con los adultos que los cuidan
(Myruski et al., 2018). El padre o cuidador puede estar físicamente
presente, pero lo más probable es que esté distraído y no respon-
da hacia el bebé.

Tradicionalmente, en la investigación, los bebés demostraban una mayor angustia cuando la madre o el cuidador estaban desconectados. Myruski et al. (2018) encontraron que los bebés aumentaron sus intentos sociales de llamar la atención cuando el padre/tutor/cuidador no estaba proporcionando su respuesta emocional. Igualmente, se encontró que los bebés que tenían un temperamento negativo se involucraron menos con su cuidador y mostraron menos exploración del espacio durante la interacción (Myruski et al, 2018). De hecho, Leon y Olhaberry (2020) reportan que entre el 11% y el 37% de los bebés experimentan dificultades socioemocionales a los 6 meses de edad. Es indudablemente importante que los cuidadores se involucren con los bebés de manera que proporcionen una base sólida y positiva para su desarrollo socioemocional.

El aprendizaje socioemocional positivo no puede dejarse al azar. Los bebés necesitan la respuesta de un padre y cuidador para fomentar su aprendizaje socioemocional en sus hogares, en sus centros de cuidado infantil y en sus comunidades (Israelashvili et al., 2020). El desarrollo de un sentido de sí mismo y un sentido de sí mismo en relación con los demás tiene sus raíces en las interacciones del bebé con los demás (Musholt, 2018). Se desarrolla a través de interacciones apropiadas y consistentes con los demás en las que "los otros" deben asumir el papel principal con el pequeño.

Estrategias para el crecimiento positivo en el desarrollo socioemocional

Conociendo la importancia de apoyar el desarrollo socioemocional de los bebés pequeños, hace que sea necesaria la implementación de estrategias que ayuden a desarrollar un crecimiento positivo en esta área. Las siguientes secciones proporcionan información sobre las formas en que los cuidadores pueden ayudar a los bebés a lograr un desarrollo positivo.

Autorregulación

Los bebés recién nacidos necesitan un cuidador que los ayude a comenzar a autorregular sus emociones para que pronto puedan iniciar y emplear sus propias estrategias para autorregularse. Las formas de apoyar el crecimiento de los bebés incluyen responder a las necesidades de los bebés, establecer rutinas consistentes e interactuar con los bebés para ayudar a estimularlos y calmarlos.

Responder a las necesidades de los bebés. Para ayudar a los bebés a autorregular sus emociones, los cuidadores deben responder de manera rápida, consistente y apropiada a las necesidades de los bebés. Cuando el bebé demuestra angustia llorando, inquietándose o mostrando angustia de alguna manera, el cuidador atento responde de inmediato. Se acercan al bebé y se expresan con vocalizaciones relajantes. El cuidador intenta determinar las necesidades de los bebés. ¿Sienten demasiado calor o frío? ¿Necesitan un cambio de pañal? ¿Necesitan comer? Tranquilice a los bebés diciéndoles que ve que están molestos y que los ayudará. Consuele a los bebés descubriendo sus necesidades y atendiéndolas.

Rutina constante. Además de responder rápida y consistentemente a las necesidades de los bebés, el cuidador apoya la autorregulación mediante el establecimiento de rutinas consistentes. Es más probable que los bebés se sientan seguros y protegidos cuando comienzan a anticipar qué van a esperar a diario. Es importante alimentar, bañar,

vestir, cambiar pañales y acurrucarlos en un horario más o menos confiable, sin ser inflexible en función de las necesidades de los bebés. Interactuar de forma regular. Los cuidadores desempeñan un papel importante tanto en calmar como en la estimulación de los bebés. Para aprender a autorregularse, los bebés necesitan interactuar con un cuidador varias veces al día. Una de las mejores maneras de ayudar a los bebés a aprender a calmarse es sostenerlos y abrazarlos. Esta es la mejor herramienta que poseen los cuidadores para ayudar a los bebés a comenzar a desarrollar un apego a ellos. Mientras se acurrucan, los bebés hacen contacto visual y se les habla en voz baja. Modelar esta interacción relajante ayuda a los bebés a aprender a calmarse a sí mismos.

Del mismo modo, los bebés necesitan aprender a experimentar una variedad de emociones, por lo que proporcionar estimulación y calma ayuda a los bebés a manejar diferentes tipos de emociones. Juegue con los bebés y dedique tiempo con ellos para que sean divertidos, expresivos y activos. Mientras lees un libro, use diferentes voces, haga sonidos divertidos y ríase con ellos. Responder de manera rápida, consistente y apropiada, establecer rutinas consistentes e interactuar regularmente con los bebés los ayuda a desarrollar la autorregulación.

Comprenderse a sí mismo

Además de la autorregulación, los bebés también necesitan el apoyo del cuidador para comenzar a entenderse a sí mismos como seres individuales e importantes. Los bebés comienzan a reconocer sus propios cuerpos durante las oportunidades de experimentar y aprender lo que las diversas partes pueden hacer y cómo se ven. Entenderse a sí mismos como personas se puede lograr jugando juegos que se centren en ellos, ayudándolos a sentir diferentes partes de sus cuerpos, escuchando sus nombres y viéndose a sí mismos.

Juegos que se centran en los bebés. Los bebés comienzan a reconocer varias partes de sí mismos cuando los cuidadores juegan juegos que se enfocan en las partes de su cuerpo. Algunos de los juegos que se pueden usar incluyen This Little Piggy. Use los dedos de los pies y de las manos cuando toque. Otro juego de dedos para usar es Tortillitas. Sostenga las manos de los bebés y aplauda suavemente mientras recita los versos.

Adquirir las sensaciones. El tacto es importante para que los bebés sientan por sí mismos. Dar muchos abrazos ayuda a los bebés a comenzar a sentir y comprender el tacto en diferentes áreas de sus cuerpos. Sujételos con firmeza, pero con suavidad. Use técnicas de masaje para bebés para calmar y ayudar a los bebes a tener conciencia de sus cuerpos. Use una cantidad suave de aceite de bebé para un masaje. Cuénteles a los bebés sobre la parte del cuerpo que está masajeando.

Nombres y etiquetas. A medida que los bebés escuchan frecuentemente sus nombres asociados con ellos, comienzan a reconocer que el nombre se refiere a ellos. El nombre se convierte en una parte importante de su identidad. Antes de que los bebés tengan seis meses de edad, reconocerán sus nombres y mirarán hacia alguien que diga su nombre.

Del mismo modo, los bebés comienzan a aplicar las etiquetas o ex-

presiones que oyen al hablar tanto sobre ellos como de ellos. Estas etiquetas se convierten en importantes componentes básicos de su autoestima. Cuando los cuidadores hablan de la fortaleza, importancia y cuidado a los bebés, comienzan a aplicar estas mismas designaciones a ellos, ayudando a desarrollar una autoestima positiva. Los cuidadores deben usar los nombres de los bebés y hablarles positivamente mientras los abrazan, los alimentan, les cambian los pañales y en cualquier momento del día cuando interactúan con ellos.

Viéndose a sí mismos. Los bebés comienzan a construir un sentido de sí mismos al verse a sí mismos en un espejo. Coloque un espejo irrompible en la cuna o al lado de donde los bebés pasan el tiempo. Los cuidadores también pueden sostener al bebé frente a un espejo de pared. Es importante combinar la mirada en el espejo con la conversación sobre el reflejo del bebé.

Comprenderse a sí mismo en relación con los demás

Los bebés son parte de una estructura social: una familia, un centro de cuidado infantil, una comunidad y un vecindario. Desde sus primeros días, es importante hacerlos parte de la estructura social. A medida que interactúan con otros dentro de cada estructura de la que forman parte, comienzan a formar los cimientos que apoyarán la construcción de su desarrollo social. Las formas que los cuidadores pueden utilizar para apoyar esta adquisición de estas experiencias fundamentales son a través de juegos y cantos, moviéndose juntos y sosteniendo conversaciones con los pequeños.

Jueguen y canten. Al igual que con otras facetas del desarrollo

Recursos para apoyar el desarrollo socioemocional de los bebés

Para continuar con el estudio del desarrollo social y emocional en nuestros alumnos más pequeños, a continuación, se incluyen algunos recursos que pueden serles útiles:

Importance of Reading to Babies https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NUyVdW5ow9A.. Este video analiza el valor de leerle a los bebés.

Videos

Lucy's Angels (2015). Baby Massage Short Video Routine for Calming, Soothing and Sleep. How to Massage your Baby [Video]. Youtube.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=an42r8O_XwE
Ofrece ideas para calmar a los bebes a través del masaje.
Finger plays and songs for infants Part 1 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JZxTN_Kvuh4

Telethon Kids Institute. (n.d.) Baby's social development milestones [[Hitos del desarrollo social del bebé]. Youtube.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m4M4QMWhZMk
Ofrece una visión sobre el desarrollo social de los infantes.

Actively Family. (n.d.). Baby games for your 4 to 6 month old [Video]. Youtube.
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La importancia de leer con los bebes. Explica por qué debemos leer con los bebes.

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[Juegos con los dedos y canciones para infantes. Parte I]. ofrece ideas sobre juegos con palabras y juegos digitales y canciones para los bebés.

Sitios web

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https://www.zerotothree.org/resource/books-about-feel
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mente aquellos que sean de su misma edad.

Los cuidadores de bebés desempeñan un papel importante en el fomento de la comprensión y las experiencias que se convierten en un desarrollo social y emocional positivo para los bebés. A pesar de que carecen de lenguaje, o incluso entienden el lenguaje, cuando nacen, ya son aprendices que están desarrollándose rápidamente. Es importante que no olvidemos las experiencias que necesitan para autorregularse, comprenderse a sí mismos y comprenderse a sí mismos en relación con los demás.

social y emocional, jugar y cantar ayuda a los bebés a entender mejor a sí mismos en relación con los demás. Esta es una forma de interacción compartida que construye relaciones positivas con los demás. La rima, el ritmo y la repetición que hay en los juegos con los dedos y las canciones proporcionan el lenguaje para la interacción apropiada según el nivel de desarrollo que permite que estas actividades tengan éxito en la construcción de relaciones y la formación de vínculos fuertes.

Moviéndose juntos. Disfrutar de muchas actividades en las que el cuidador y el bebé se mueven juntos también ayuda a proporcionar una experiencia fundamental durante la cual los bebés comienzan a comprenderse a sí mismos en relación con los demás. Coloque a los bebés en su regazo y cuidosamente balancee las piernas hacia arriba y hacia abajo para mecer al bebé, siéntelo en su regazo apoyando su espalda contra la parte superior de su cuerpo y balancee hacia adelante y hacia atrás. Apoye al bebé para que sentado en su regazo haga contacto visual mientras habla con él/ella. Sostenga al bebé firmemente contra usted y baile lentamente al ritmo de la música.

Tener conversaciones. Hablar con los bebés es una de las actividades más importantes que un cuidador puede proporcionar a los bebés para apoyar su desarrollo social. Para abordar la comprensión que los bebés tienen de sí mismos en relación con los demás, estas conversaciones deben ser en el contexto de hablar "con" los bebés en lugar de "con" ellos. Hable y espere a que el bebé le vocalice a usted. La mayoría de los bebés arrullarán y emitirán otros sonidos cuando tengan dos meses de edad. Hágale una pregunta al bebé y espere a que responda. Esto construye la comprensión del intercambio que se requiere para la interacción social.

Otras conversaciones sobre personas y cosas interesantes también son interesantes para los diálogos entre el cuidador y el bebé. Reúna algunas de los miembros de la familia del bebé. Señálelos y nómbrelos para el bebé. Hable sobre los familiares: madres, padres, hermanos, primos, abuelos. Muéstreles fotos de otros bebés especial-

Reflexionar sobre la diversidad cultural para el desarrollo socioemocional de los bebés

"Existen diferencias individuales considerables en las características de disposición temprana de los niños, como la forma en que reaccionan a situaciones desafiantes y su capacidad para regular las reacciones conductuales y emocionales" (Chen, 2023, p.1). Dado que "la diversidad en nuestro país se está convirtiendo rápidamente en la norma" (Wright et al., 2000, p. 1), es oportuno reflexionar sobre cómo la diversidad está en efecto en el desarrollo socioemocional de los bebés.

Crear entornos acogedores para los bebés y sus familias y fomentar la participación de la familia en términos de cómo comprender y apoyar mejor a los bebés es importante para que se sientan conectados con sus cuidadores y la comunidad. Esto es crucial para que los cuidadores ayuden a los bebés de diversos orígenes a aprender de manera más segura y a satisfacer sus necesidades de manera más equitativa en el entorno de aprendizaje al proporcionar un entorno seguro, desafiante y enriquecedor (NAEYC, 2020). Además, se requieren conocimientos y habilidades profesionales de los cuidadores para satisfacer las necesidades de las familias diversas (Zeanah y Zeanah, 2009).

Teniendo en cuenta que hay más variación en los patrones familiares y los rasgos de diversidad que en cualquier otro momento de la historia, incluidas las familias monoparentales, las familias mixtas, los bebés que viven con parientes, los bebés que viven en la pobreza y las familias que hablan idiomas distintos del inglés, es fundamental que los cuidadores aprendan más sobre los bebés a los que enseñan, su familia y comunidad, y su cultura única. Los padres/tutores pueden ser útiles para proporcionar información sobre las experiencias personales y los antecedentes de los bebés, como el nivel de desarrollo, la raza y el origen étnico, los estados físicos y emocionales, las experiencias previas, los intereses, la vida familiar y hogareña, las preferencias de aprendizaje y una miríada de otras variables que influyen en los procesos de enseñanza y aprendizaje.

"La práctica informada sobre la diversidad es un sistema dinámico de creencias y valores que se esfuerza por alcanzar los niveles más altos de diversidad, inclusión y equidad" (Thomas et al., 2019, pág. 49). Los cuidadores deben examinar las creencias y los valores arraigados en el conocimiento, los antecedentes y la cultura de la familia del bebé y de la comunidad local, y ampliar su conciencia de aprendizaje sobre la diversidad para mejorar su conciencia, sensibilidad, conocimiento y habilidades relacionadas con los problemas de diversidad en la enseñanza y el aprendizaje. Deben conocer las normas, valores, creencias, tradiciones, comportamientos, preferencias culturales y estilos de aprendizaje de los bebés de diversas culturas, y deben tener estrategias para enseñar a diversos estudiantes de diferentes contextos socioculturales de manera más efectiva. Esto les ayudará a no ofender las creencias familiares de los bebés a través de sus experiencias de enseñanza y aprendizaje.

Los enfoques de planificación y enseñanza de los cuidadores afectan la forma en que los bebés construyen diferentes conocimientos sobre diversas culturas. El uso de libros de literatura infantil será un método para facilitar su exposición al aprendizaje sobre la diversidad, integrando naturalmente las lecciones con la diversidad. Dado que los enfoques de enseñanza de los cuidadores pueden contribuir en gran medida a aumentar el interés de los bebés por la diversidad, se valora que sean conscientes de sus propias suposiciones y creencias sobre la diversidad y generalicen sus propios sentimientos, opiniones y teorías personales al respecto en la enseñanza y el aprendizaje reflejando sus experiencias profesionales y personales.

Haciendo hincapié en la importancia de recordar que no existe una forma única para acomodar a todos, si es importante recordar que debemos tratar a todos los bebés por igual con enfoques de enseñanza flexibles que tengan en cuenta las situaciones específicas de cada uno de los bebés. Lo que es justo para un bebé es lo que el bebé necesita. Debemos tomar en cuenta las consideraciones que son importantes para fomentar un entorno positivo y de aprendizaje ofreciendo respuestas socioculturalmente apropiadas y oportunidades de aprendizaje que individualmente respondan para cada bebé.

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Role of Early Childhood Educators in Addressing Diversity

Jasmin A. King, Ksenia S. Zhbanova and Jeffrey L. Leffler

Why Should Diversity be a Focus of Early Childhood Education?

Early childhood is a time of rapid learning and development of cognition, language as well as social and emotional spheres (Harvard University Center on the Developing Child, 2023; Robertson & Diaz, 2017). It is also the time of the development of identity as well as skills in various areas such as physical, psychosocial, and cognitive development, which are all greatly affected by both the home and classroom environments (Johnson et al., 2020). Additionally, early childhood education is famous for being ingrained in developmentally and culturally appropriate practices, and one major developmentally appropriate practice is play (Robles de Melendez & Beck, 2018). During the first eight years of life, children gain their sense of self while the major development of their brains also takes place. Play supports their cognitive development and social development: children learn about their roles at school and the roles of others, learn to build relationships, etc. (Frost & Goldberg, 2020; Johnson et al., 2020). This makes it the optimal time to develop the attitude of acceptance and embrace diversity in children.

Our society is consistently becoming more and more interconnected and the general population of students at all levels of education has become more and more diverse (Servaes et al., 2022). Therefore, the multicultural practices that were adopted by early childhood educators in the mid-1990s (Rhedding-Jones, 2010), are an even more important core component of quality early education programs today (Kaiser & Sklar Raminsky, 2020). Early childhood educators have a tremendous opportunity to foster inclusivity, respect, and a sense of belonging in young children and their families (Abacioglu et al., 2020). They can impact children's early experiences by creating caring and inclusive learning environments in schools and homes (Vidal-Hall et al., 2020). Educators foster inclusivity, respect, and a sense of belonging in children by using varied texts, materials, and resources to reflect their children's diverse origins. (Abacioglu et al., 2020).

Facilitating diverse classroom experiences requires cultural knowledge and competence on the part of early childhood educators. Cultural competence requires educators to understand other cultures, traditions, and beliefs. It also involves recognizing and correcting one's biases and assumptions and actively seeking different perspectives and. Professional development and reflective practices focused on diversity and cultural awareness can help educators build cultural competency.

Diversity and its Theoretical Context in Early Childhood Education

The goal of addressing cultural diversity is shared by many civic and professional organizations: National Association for the Education of Young Children, Association for Supervision and curriculum development, Southern Early Childhood Association, and National Council for the Social Studies (Robles de Melendez & Beck, 2018). Even at a very young age, student populations are very diverse, which affects everything from individual attitudes, values, perceptions, and actions to group dynamics and school environment. Lev Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory of Cognitive Development postulates that children develop and learn through social interactions with others (McLeod, 2023). Therefore, interactions that children have with other students, teachers, and other significant people in their life affect their development and learning.

Bronfenbrenner's Social Ecological Model further states that at any time in a child's life they are strongly influenced by different systems (Carter, 2019). These systems include such components as family, school, and peers (microsystem); alignment between different components of microsystem e.g., values taught by the family vs values taught by the preschool (mesosystem); neighbors, social services, mass media (exosystem), culture, ideologies, and attitudes of the society (macrosystem), and sociohistorical conditions of the time (chronosystem). Children are subjects affected by the multitude of facets of diversity and at the same time a part of these faucets that influence others. This creates a very complex system that necessitates diversity to be one of the main factors that early childhood (and other) educators need to consider when designing curriculum and instruction as well as when teaching. Further, teaching children about diversity and teaching them to accept and appreciate it is vital for creating healthy school, and subsequently work environments. Cryer et al. (2019) explain that we need to develop acceptance of diversity in ourselves and our young children, which means viewing it as a unique strength that can contribute to the lives of everyone.

Cultural Competence

The condition of being different has a profound impact on our lives. For example, cultural diversity determines our values, our actions in certain situations, child-rearing, relationships, and so much more (Kaiser & Sklar Raminsky, 2020). Children come to school with different views and expectations, skills, and talents that are shaped by their cultures, socioeconomic backgrounds, language, and other facets of diversity. The ways children are treated by significant people in their lives, such as parents and teachers, affect their self-concepts (Kaiser & Sklar Raminsky, 2020). A good place to start for a teacher of young children to better comprehend the varied students and families they teach is learning about and reflecting on the development of their own cultural competence, which requires them to gain skills to converse with people from varied cultures. This includes understanding nonverbal communication, comprehending language and communication patterns in different cultures, and building trust and rapport with diverse people (Tatham-Fashanu, 2021). Cultural competence also includes adapting teaching methods to the needs of varied learners. Early educators must accommodate various learning styles, offer personalized education, and adopt culturally responsive teaching practices encompassing multiple perspectives and experiences. Teachers must self-reflect and evaluate to ensure diversity in the classroom. This requires routinely assessing cultural competence by intentionally seeking out input from colleagues, students, and families, as well as making necessary teaching adjustments based on this feedback (Lauricella et al., 2020). Early educators pursuing cultural competence must also engage in continuous learning, participate in professional development opportunities, and seek out resources to enhance their cultural knowledge. Through that, they can comprehensively understand cultural competence, embrace it, and serve as role models for children, fostering a sense of curiosity and respect for diversity.

Cross-Cultural Awareness

Once the early educator develops their own cultural competence, they can begin passing that on to the children and families they serve. In today's globalized society, children need to develop cross-cultural awareness. The first step in passing on cultural competence is the creation of inclusive and equitable learning environments for all students. Creating a classroom atmosphere that celebrates and respects diversity, promotes healthy interactions among various students, and addresses all types of bias and discrimination is necessary to achieve this. Early childhood educators can leverage classroom activities to introduce young learners to other perspectives, cultures, and customs to promote cross-cultural understanding. Multicultural events, dialogues, and celebrations can teach young children empathy and respect for others. Adding diverse literature, music, and art to the classroom materials can help educators promote cross-cultural understanding. Educators may help youngsters appreciate many cultures and traditions by sharing the stories and music of those cultures, particularly those represented by children and families in the class. Educators can also use dress, food, and art to teach children about diverse cultures and their contributions. Encouraging children to discuss their ethnic backgrounds and experiences promotes cross-cultural understanding. Educators can foster pride in ethnic identity and acceptance of other opinions by encouraging children to share their tales and rituals. Role-playing in both group activities and in the dramatic play center can also teach children about various cultures and facilitate the development of empathy. By role-playing cultural dif-

acceptance of differences. This additionally assists children in beginning to understand the world and its varied inhabitants. Interactive read-alouds of high-quality children's books representing various cultures and differences positively can help children begin to engage in critical thinking regarding differences. Critical thinking decreases bias because exploring biases and beliefs with young children is often easily comprehended as they tend to readily understand prejudice and injustice and desire to see people treated fairly (You et al., 2019). Family and community discussions on bias are also important to foster acceptance. Discussing prejudice and discrimination with families and community members helps educators gain powerful partners in teaching children about the importance of respecting diversity. Discussions such as this can help families and communities understand inclusiveness and empathy, enabling a more harmonious and equitable classroom, community, and world. (Baiduri et al., 2019). Engaging family members to create cultural events, field trips, and speakers helps children experience diversity and challenge biases. Early educators must continually assess these bias-reduction efforts with families and community members. This feedback can help them improve their anti-bias efforts.

ferences, educators can help children begin to comprehend the obstacles experienced by people from different origins (Vidal-Hall et al., 2020). These activities teach children about cultural differences and how they affect people's thoughts, feelings, and actions. Creating a caring classroom atmosphere that celebrates and respects diversity, promotes healthy interactions among various students, and addresses all types of bias and discrimination can achieve this. Educators can also involve families and communities in cross-cultural understanding. Early educators can share this teaching about diversity and its impact by integrating families and community members in multicultural activities and celebrations. Throughout the process of providing classroom opportunities for multicultural understanding, early educators must regularly evaluate their cross-cultural understanding initiatives. Students, families, colleagues, and community members can provide valuable feedback to help them assess and improve their practices.

Challenging Existing Biases

Unfortunately, many learning environments have deep-seated biases and stereotypes, especially when the classroom lacks exposure to students and families from different races, ethnicities, and cultures. Fortunately, early educators have a unique opportunity to help promote diversity early on by challenging existing biases and stereotypes within a secure classroom environment (Abacioglu et al., 2020). Teachers can address stereotypes and biases to help young children understand and confront discriminatory views with simple things like including materials that represent diversity positively and asking good questions when biased points of view come up. Critical thinking, cultural competence, and empathy can and must be fostered in the early childhood classroom (You et al., 2019). One effective way of addressing bias is through open discussions. Educators may help children learn how stereotypes and biases affect others by providing a safe space for them to discuss prejudice and discrimination they may have experienced. Open dialogues can help children question their preconceptions and build empathy for people from various backgrounds.

Teachers can also use diverse-perspective literature. By selecting books and other resources that represent the diversity in and outside of the classroom, teachers can set the stage to foster awareness and

A Secure Space

In early childhood, children learn through experiencing the world around them and largely from what they see and hear (MacNevin & Berman, 2017; Robertson & Diaz, 2017). Therefore, learning environments for children need to be diverse and inclusive. Early educators can better understand diverse groups' issues and develop ways to combat bias and discrimination by providing a secure space for families and community members to share their experiences and viewpoints (Vidal-Hall et al., 2020). Families and communities discussing diversity can help facilitate a community that recognizes its value. Children can be taught about diversity and ultimately develop acceptance and empathy by involving families and community members in these dialogues. Educators can also work with families and communities to provide resources to develop young children's executive function which is key to building a secure space for interacting positively with others. Educators must regularly evaluate their family and community engagement efforts. Family and community feedback can help educators assess and improve their approach (Larson et al., 2020). This collaboration helps bridge the gap between home and school, promoting a sense of shared responsibility in nurturing children's understanding and appreciation of diversity. By fostering curiosity and understanding, educators help children develop empathy and respect for others, enabling them ultimately to better navigate a diverse world with open-mindedness and cultural competence.

Families and Communities

Early childhood educators must work with families and communities

to promote diversity and establish a comprehensive approach. Educators can use parents, guardians, and community members' experiences and viewpoints in classroom activities and discussions. This method can help teachers understand their students' cultural origins and build techniques that meet their requirements. Parent-teacher conferences help families and communities collaborate. These conferences allow educators to learn about their students' families and cultures and share educational success. Educators can foster engagement and collaboration with families to improve student outcomes (Larson et al., 2020). Diverse classroom activities can also involve families and communities. Cultural festivals, celebrations, and other events can promote students' cultural diversity. Educators can foster community and awareness of diverse cultures by including families and communities in these activities. Early educators can also work with community leaders to promote diversity. Working with local cultural organizations, houses of worship, and community centers to support students and families, educators may foster a more inclusive environment. Families and communities can also help educators choose diversity-promoting classroom materials (Love & Beneke, 2021). Educators may ensure that classroom materials and tools are culturally sensitive and represent students' experiences and opinions by seeking family and community feedback. Families and communities can also tackle bias and discrimination with educators.

Culturally Sensitive Curriculum

Curriculum for early childhood classrooms needs to include the diversity component because a fraction of children around the age of three already demonstrate awareness of their identity and some demonstrate exclusionary attitudes (Bouillet & Miškeljin, 2017). Children at a young age begin developing stereotypical gender attitudes and financial status attitudes (Bouillet & Miškeljin, 2017), as well as preference for faces from their own ethnic group (Pektas et al., 2022). Even at this early age some students experience the challenges related to diversity and are capable of learning to understand different identities and negative attitudes to them (Bouillet & Miškeljin, 2017). This makes this age appropriate to develop positive and appreciative attitude to diversity in children. Early childhood educators must offer an inclusive curriculum and methodology to foster diversity. Creating a learning environment that values and respects students' experiences and backgrounds requires going beyond traditional teaching methods. Collaborative projects that promote varied ideas can promote inclusive curricula and pedagogy. Educators can assist students in developing interpersonal skills like communication, teamwork, and problem-solving by having them work on projects with varied perspectives. These abilities are necessary for positive social interactions and student belonging. An inclusive curriculum and pedagogy can assist educators in addressing cultural bias, discrimination, and injustice and promote social justice and equity (Baiduri et al., 2019).

Culturally Responsive Teaching

Inclusive pedagogy can also involve adapting teaching methods to all students (Cabero-Almenara et al., 2021). Preschool teachers constitute a vital part of not only developmentally appropriate instruction, but multiculturally appropriate education (Peköz & Gürşimşek, 2020). According to The Education Hub (2019) culturally responsive teaching (CRT) is an approach to teaching and learning that draws on students' cultures, languages, life experiences, etc. Gunn et al.

(2021) list the five main frameworks of CRT: (1) Culturally responsive Classroom community; (2) Family engagement; (3) Critical Literacy within a Social Justice Framework; (4) Multicultural literature; (5) Culturally responsive print rich environments.

Cultural content of books that students are offered during reading is important because it is one of the way teachers can make reading more relevant to diverse students and provides role models to children, as well as helps them feel important during the identity negotiation process (Gunn et al., 2021). Quality early childhood classroom environments include resources and activities representing students' cultural heritage, language, and experiences. Including play materials and books representing diverse perspectives assists educators in making children feel seen, heard, and valued. Teachers can also help students tell their stories using the play props and other resources provided in the classroom space. Storytelling, writing, and art allow students to express their unique backgrounds and experiences (Larson et al., 2020). Educators foster empathy and acceptance when they have children tell their stories. This can help students understand their ethnic identity and accept diversity. Through large and small group discussions, teachers can develop critical thinking and challenge students' prejudices and assumptions.

Technology, individualized instruction, and personalized learning can ensure that all students have the necessary resources and assistance. Inclusive pedagogy lets teachers meet all students' needs (Slicker & Hustedt, 2019). Educators must also foster a diverse classroom. Promoting positive student interactions, modeling inclusive conduct, and addressing all types of bias and discrimination help achieve this. Creating a diverse classroom culture can help children feel included and develop inclusive attitudes and actions. Early educators must regularly evaluate their inclusive curriculum and pedagogy initiative and

input from students and families is essential to help educators assess and improve their practices.

Practical Ideas for Addressing Diversity

Culturally responsive teaching in early childhood education is essential for creating an inclusive and supportive learning environment. Here are some practical ideas with examples that early childhood practitioners can incorporate into their teaching (Derman-Sparks & Olsen Edwards, 2019; Lauren-Price & Steed, 2016; Lynch, 2014):

1. **Foster Cultural Awareness:**
   Idea: Provide learning materials that represent a variety of cultures, races, abilities, and family structures.

   Examples: Include books, toys, visual aids, and learning materials that showcase diverse characters and perspectives as well as reflect the cultural backgrounds of the children in the classroom. For instance, have books with character from various cultural backgrounds. This helps children see positive representations of people from different backgrounds.

2. **Anti-Bias Education:**
   Idea: Integrate anti-bias education into the curriculum

   Examples: Incorporate activities and discussions that address stereotypes, prejudice, and discrimination. For instance, explore books or stories that challenge stereotypes and encourage critical thinking. Ask open-ended questions that promote reflection and critical thinking, such as "Why do you think people might have different opinions?" This helps children develop a deeper understanding and value for diversity. Regularly evaluate curriculum materials, classroom displays, and teaching approaches to ensure they are free from bias. Encourage feedback from students, parents, and colleagues for ongoing improvement.

3. **Create Secure and Inclusive Learning Spaces:**
   Idea: Design the classroom to be a secure space inclusive of various cultures and needs.

   Examples: Display artwork, symbols, and images representing different cultures. Create spaces for various types of interactions including small and large group spaces as well as spaces for independent activities. Use storytelling to highlight themes of kindness, understanding, and friendship across cultures. Discuss the importance of treating everyone with respect and valuing differences.

4. **Build Relationships with Families:**
   Idea: Establish strong connections with parents and caregivers to better understand each child's cultural context and incorporate the languages spoken by children and their families.

   Examples: Organize family engagement events where parents can share aspects of their culture, traditions, or languages. Learn a few basic phrases in the languages spoken by the children, display labels in multiple languages, and encourage children to share key words or phrases from their home language with the class.

5. **Integrate Culturally Relevant Content in the Curriculum:**
   Idea: Include content that reflects the diversity of the world in the curriculum.

   Examples: Learn a few basic phrases in the languages spoken by the children or others they may encounter in the community, when teaching about animals, explore creatures from different parts of the world. Discuss the habitats, climates, and customs associated with those regions to broaden children's understanding of the world around them.

6. **Responsive Teaching Practices:**
   Idea: Teach children about respect, empathy, and appreciation of differences and adjust teaching methods to meet the needs of diverse learners.

   Examples: Use storytelling to highlight themes of kindness, understanding, and friendship across cultures. Discuss the importance of treating everyone with respect and valuing differences. Recognize and respect different communication styles; some children may express themselves more comfortably through art or movement, while others prefer verbal communication.

By incorporating these suggested ideas and examples, early childhood practitioners can celebrate diversity, provide culturally responsive teaching, and contribute to the positive development of all children in their care.

Conclusion

Early childhood educators are crucial to encouraging diversity and developing inclusive learning spaces that promote cross-cultural understanding, acceptance, and inclusion. Teachers may support all children by developing cultural competence and working with families and communities. Early childhood educators must value and respect their students' diverse backgrounds and experiences. They may teach children empathy and understanding by actively supporting variety. They can also directly address prejudices and biases and encourage critical thinking. Open discussions, age-appropriate resources, and critical-thinking activities can help young children learn how prejudice and discrimination affect people and society. Early educators may promote diversity and inclusion to create culturally aware, inclusive citizens. Early education shapes children's attitudes and behaviors, and teachers can foster positive social relationships and a sense of belonging in all children. Educators must also maintain cultural competence and examine their own biases. Educators may meet the needs of all children by being mindful of their biases and assumptions. Early educators shape the brains and hearts of future generations and can build a secure, caring environment that recognizes and respects all students' unique traits and experiences by encouraging diversity, inclusiveness, and cultural competence. They are crucial to developing empathic and culturally aware people in a diverse and constantly changing environment.

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Emotionally Safe Places for Our Youngest Children

Wilma Melendez

How we feel when we enter a classroom space is an experience characterized by many emotional messages. For a young child, it is an experience that may also convey a variety of feelings. The welcoming faces and expressions of care child experiences are common traits of places where children's emotional development is supported. These are also factors defining a space where a child's wellbeing is nurtured. Awareness about the need for spaces that contribute to a child's healthy and positive development is primordial across the early childhood years and beyond. This is especially relevant during the first three years of life when children begin to learn about self while building relationships with others in environments where they feel safe (LoBuen & Ogren, 2022; Melendez & Beck, 2024). Findings from research about neurological development have shown us that children's development blossoms when they live and interact in environments where they feel welcome and safe (American Association of Pediatrics, 2021; Ho & Funk, 2018). Today, when young children are growing up in a time where multiple challenges seem to arise every day, there is a greater need for emotionally safe classrooms. An emotionally safe classroom place is one where adults are knowledgeable about the social and emotional needs of the child and recognize their needs in responsive and nurturing ways. A safe environment is one where young children feel they belong and are cared for by responsive adults.

Creating an emotionally safe place for our youngest children calls for intentional and determined decisions. Decisions and actions are aimed at supporting the wellbeing of the child. Here are some suggestions to help you make your classroom become an emotionally healthy and safe space for our youngest children (Melendez & Capo, 2020):

- *It begins with the teacher!* A safe environment for toddlers begins with a caring and dedicated teacher who understands the developmental needs of the child. You are the key to an environment where children feel cared for and welcomed.

- *Responsive adults recognize children's emotions.* Knowledge about the variety of emotional responses younger children may exhibit allows teachers to recognize needs and respond in caring and developmentally appropriate ways.

- *Consistent routines.* Consistency is a factor aiding to make a child feel emotionally safe. Regularly scheduled activities continue to be a factor helping children to feel they are in an environment where they have a sense of control.

- *Age-appropriate activities and materials.* The classroom environment provides a variety of age-appropriate objects that invite and engage children in play and creative experiences.

- *Diversity inclusive environments.* Emotionally safe environments are places where children find their diversity is welcome and integrated into the environment. Objects, materials, languages, and accommodations make the space into a familiar one for children.

- *Inviting and soothing environment.* Overall, an emotionally safe environment is also something that is felt as you step in the classroom and experience the interactions and activities. Taking time to reflect on how the classroom space makes you feel is important to maintain an environment where children feel safe and welcome.

Wilma Melendez, PhD is professor of Early Childhood Education at Nova Southeastern University (FL), where she teaches early childhood education and leadership courses. With over two decades of experience in early childhood, she presents at state, national and international conferences.

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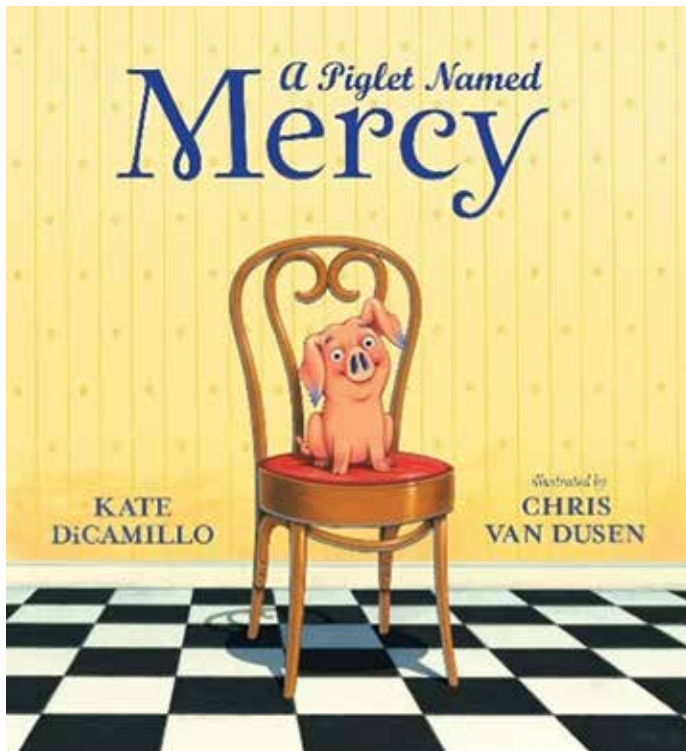Tuesday, Nov 19th – 5:30/6:30 pm EST

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Children's Book Review

By Dina Costa Treff

A Piglet Named Mercy

El señor y la señora Watson eran personas típicas, predecibles y comunes que vivían en el pueblo hasta que un pequeño cerdito apareció en su casa en Deckawoo Drive. Los Watson la acogieron, la cuidaron y la alimentaron. Muy pronto descubrieron que a la cerdita le encantaban las tostadas y la mantequilla. Los señores Watson la llamaron Mercy y rápidamente se volvieron impredecibles y, después de todo, no tan comunes habitantes de su pueblo. *Una cerdito llamado Mercy* es un cuento ilustrado que introduce al lector a la historia de Mercy Watson, una maravilla porcina, y la estrella y precuela de la serie de libros de capítulos escritos por Kate DiCamillo para los lectores emergentes

El cuento *A Piglet Named Mercy* está escrito por Kate DiCamillo e ilustrado por Chris Van Dusen. Este libro es ideal para niños de 3 a 7 años, en los grados de preescolar a 2° grado.

Mr. and Mrs. Watson were typical, predictable, ordinary people until a small piglet showed up at their home on Deckawoo Drive. The Watsons took her in, cared for her and fed her. They soon discovered that the piglet loved toast and butter. Mr. and Mrs. Watson named her Mercy and quickly became unpredictable and not so ordinary after all. *A Piglet Named Mercy* is the picture book introduction to Mercy Watson, the porcine wonder, the star and prequel to Kate DiCamillo's series of chapter books for early readers.

A Piglet Named Mercy is written by Kate DiCamillo and illustrated by Chris Van Dusen. This book is great for children ages 3-7 years old, grades Preschool-2nd Grade.

Dina Costa Treff is the Lead Teacher of the Preschool Program of the Child Development Lab at the McPhaul Center College of Family and Consumer Science, University of Georgia.

International Children's Book Day is April 2. What stories will you share with children?

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