



Responsiveness to Family, Culture, Values and Education

For optimal development and learning of all children, DEC believes that individuals who work with children must respect and support the culture, values and languages of each home and promote the active participation of all families. Legislation and recommended practices call for individualized approaches to serving infants, toddlers and young children with special needs and their families (Harbin & Salisbury, 2000; Sandall, McLean, & Smith, 2000). Individualized services begin with acceptance of both similarities and differences in race, ethnicity, culture, language, ability, religion, education, income, family configuration, geographic location and other characteristics that contribute to human uniqueness. For example, Turnbull and Stowe (2001) suggest that individuals with disabilities have different perspectives compared to parents of individuals with disabilities, and individuals from various disciplines (e.g., law, policy, medicine). According to Turnbull and Stowe, differing perspectives are reflected in how one views and reacts to core concepts, including disability, which in turn impacts disability policies.

Responsiveness grows from interpersonal relationships that reflect a mutual respect and appreciation for diversity among individuals within and across groups. DEC defines diversity “as a highly inclusive construct, embracing all aspects of individuals and groups that make them different [from each other], which includes, but is not limited to, language, race, ethnicity, gender, ability, geographic location, class, and lifestyle” (Division for Early Childhood, 2004). Barrera, Corso and Macpherson (2003) suggest that diversity is a construct that is both dynamic and relative in any given context. “No single person can be said to be diverse, culturally or otherwise, except in reference to other persons or environments. Diversity . . . cannot exist independently of its

context. Recognizing this point is essential to responding respectfully to cultural diversity and honoring those who are diverse from us” (pp. 6–7). Responsive early childhood professionals and programs honor the beliefs and practices of the families being served as well as the people providing the services.

We believe that there are many sources of diversity. We also recognize that cultural diversity in the United States is distinct from cross-cultural international diversity. This concept paper addresses diversity in the U.S. stemming from cultural and linguistic variables. This paper includes a description of the beliefs held by DEC regarding family cultures, values and languages and how each may impact the activities and policies of organizations and service programs that cater to children with disabilities, their families, and professionals who work with them.

The six beliefs of a responsive organization listed in DEC’s position statement on family cultures, values and languages (2002) and discussed in this paper are:

1. Respecting the values and practices of all members.
2. Encouraging multiple viewpoints to enrich the whole organization.
3. Seeking ways to extend the competence of the leadership (e.g., families, governance and practitioners), with regard to understanding similarities and differences in family cultures, values and languages.
4. Developing, implementing and reviewing of policies and procedures in recruitment and leadership at all levels of service to ensure meaningful local, state,

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national and international representation and participation of people from different cultures, values and languages.

5. Encouraging and supporting the development and dissemination of products that address family cultures, values and languages.
6. Incorporating in training and dissemination activities (e.g., meetings, events, conferences and publications) the impact of family cultures, values and languages.

In an effort to provide the field with a common understanding of concepts, including culture, cultural and linguistic diversity, inclusiveness, multiculturalism, and values, a glossary of selected terms follows the discussion. Readers may wish to review the definitions to familiarize themselves with this terminology prior to reading this paper.

DEC strongly believes in respecting the values and practices of all members. Respecting diverse values and practices is an ongoing commitment of DEC. This commitment is made explicit in DEC's code of ethics: "Demonstrate our respect and concern for children and families, colleagues and others with whom we work, honoring their beliefs, values, customs and culture" (Sandall, McLean, & Smith, 2000, p. 163). Respect, however, can be difficult to communicate across diverse cultural parameters. What is considered respectful within one culture may not be perceived as such within other cultures (Barrera 2000; Lynch & Hanson, 1998). Often, underlying differences in cultural beliefs and practices contribute to ineffective or disrespectful interactions between individuals (Harry, Kalyanpur, & Day, 1999).

Barrera, Corso and Macpherson identify two qualities essential to effectively communicating respect: reciprocity and responsiveness. These two qualities give insight into how to increase the probability that actions are perceived as respectful, even across diverse cultural parameters (Kalyanpur & Harry, 1999; Villegas & Lucas, 2000).

Reciprocity involves making space for equal voice or "power" in all interactions (Barrera, Corso, &

Macpherson, 2003; Harry, Kalyanpur & Day, 1999). This can be accomplished by highlighting the range of values and practices existing within one's organization or program, and the positive contributions of these diverse values and practices. For example, DEC should use both active (e.g., keynote addresses; procedures used to develop policy) and passive (e.g., in DEC literature and posters; demographic membership "pie charts"; or translated materials that are representative of the multiple languages of DEC members) methods for showcasing our high regard for diverse values and practices within the organization. The diversity of values and practices of organizations and service programs and the children and families they serve need to be consistently mirrored in all contexts (e.g., conferences, publications, policies and practices) and in ways that clearly acknowledge and show appreciation for its diverse membership. Such acknowledgment and appreciation will then lead to true responsiveness.

Responsiveness occurs when individuals "decenter" and create sufficient space to integrate the riches and power of diverse voices (Barrera, Corso, & Macpherson, 2003). The most challenging aspect of responsiveness is that one must become comfortable with limits and uncertainty.

Responsiveness requires moving away from preset or "this is the way it is" agendas and staying open to what might emerge as diverse voices converge on an equal level. Developing a variety of ways for members' voices to be heard may lead all to being truly responsive to what is heard. Some opportunities for responsiveness may already exist within organizations and service programs while others still need to be developed. By strengthening opportunities for reciprocity and responsiveness, one's commitment to respecting diverse values and practices will encourage the organization and its constituency to speak strongly and clearly.

DEC strongly encourages multiple viewpoints to enrich the whole organization. Many professional organizations seek to "move beyond merely valuing diversity to building an inclusive, high-performing organization. In the process, diversity ceases to be merely a human-resource initiative and becomes a fundamental competency: Diversity and inclusiveness

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become the responsibility of everyone in the organization” (Norris & Lofton, 1995, p. 2). Organizations and service programs should seek not to merely focus on differences but to build inclusiveness around a shared set of values articulated in the organization’s mission statement, position statements, strategic plan and other documents. For example, the DEC Executive Board recently adopted a five-year strategic plan that includes goals and objectives that relate to planning, developing and implementing activities, products and outreach efforts that recognize and promote diversity (Division for Early Childhood, 2004).

Organizations are under increasing pressure to become more service- and customer-oriented in order to establish a competitive advantage in the marketplace (Bryant, 1991). Understanding the marketplace argument for diversity impacts all levels of the organization, in contrast to being delegated as a “special initiative” or assigned to a specific task force or committee (Norris & Lofton, 1995). In some cases, the membership takes the initiative before the leadership in making a full commitment to diversity-building efforts. Norris and Lofton note that in their case studies, a strong commitment from leaders was critical to the success of organization’s initiatives related to diversity. In every organization’s strategic plan, activities should emerge from its stakeholders and be incorporated across the goals set for given periods of time. Commitment across all levels facilitates the incorporation of diversity goals into every strategy, initiative and program.

DEC strongly believes in seeking ways to extend the competence of its leadership (e.g., families, governance and practitioners), as well as acknowledge different leadership styles with regard to understanding similarities and differences in family cultures, values and languages. DEC believes that leadership development is a key to creating quality EI/ECSE programs and that its members (e.g., service providers, family members, students, faculty and trainers, Subdivision members, etc.) do not have to be in formally appointed supervisory, administrative or organizational roles to be “leaders.” DEC believes its membership can and should exercise leadership and become involved at the local, state and national levels.

As a professional organization, DEC provides vital leadership to its members as well as in the larger

national political context. Given the diverse nature of global, national and local professional environments, it is critical to ensure that leadership in organizations and service programs is both culturally responsive and culturally informed. Three aspects emerge as critical in developing culturally responsive and culturally informed leadership at any level, whether as teachers in classrooms or as members in professional organizations. The first is exploring diverse paradigms; the second is supporting opportunities for diverse voices to be heard; and the third is finding avenues for integrating the diverse contributions those voices can make (Norris & Lofton, 1995; Wheatley & Kellner-Rogers, 1996).

Diverse paradigms. One of the characteristics of cultural diversity is the fact that there are multiple perspectives and multiple values around those perspectives. Culturally responsive and informed leadership respects this fact and explores individuals’ diverse understanding of the concept of leadership. Exploration is a first step in building the competence we seek. Once diverse leadership paradigms are identified, it is important to develop a means of integrating them into policy and governance. As these differing perspectives become more visible, the diverse voices of individuals within organizations and service programs will emerge. For example, the literature on women’s leadership styles is growing, and the focus on women’s leadership from the center of the organization, rather than the top, is a paradigm shift in the traditional corporate world (Helgesen, 1990 and 1995). Organizational charts depict circular structures rather than a “top-down” approach typically found in the hierarchical model.

Diverse voices. Supporting opportunities for diverse voices to be heard requires a deep appreciation of the relevance of stakeholders and the gifts of pluralism. Individuals acquire “voice” as their views and opinions are acknowledged by colleagues and peers. Culturally responsive and informed leadership makes time to listen to and highlight the diverse voices of its constituents. Having the courage to initiate conversations with constituents is key. Wheatley (2002) notes that large-scale efforts often start small, with passion and not power.

“One of the most important results of creating opportunities for diverse voices to be heard is that

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individuals begin to define themselves as citizens of the organizations in which they participate” (Block, 2002, p. 81). Block goes on to elaborate that when individuals see themselves as citizens of an organization they choose to “vote with [their] feet, [their] hearts, [their] energy, [to express their] care or indifference toward how [their] institution fares in the world” (p. 84). In adapting Block’s approach, it is critical that organizations and service programs provide opportunities for its diverse constituents and membership to do just that, to vote with their feet, their hearts, their energy, and to act with care toward how their organizations or programs fare in the world. As this happens, every individual has opportunities to participate in the organization’s leadership — every member can offer his or her diverse contributions toward the whole. For example, Helgesen (1990 and 1995) refers to the “web of inclusion” in her discussion of women’s leadership styles. This approach emphasizes accessibility and equality by ensuring that communication lines are “multiple, open and diffuse” (Helgesen, 1990, p. 266).

Diverse contributions. The distinct talents we each possess become visible as our voices are valued and acknowledged. Culturally responsive and informed leadership invites individuals to add their distinct talents to those of others so that the total community may benefit. Rather than ask for volunteers to participate in preassigned tasks and activities, we should collectively find avenues for each other’s contributions, weaving a seamless tapestry for the whole. Culturally responsive and informed leadership recognizes that following is as critical as leading; that listening in silence is as valuable as speaking out; and that staying in the background is as important as standing out. Each contribution adds something to the whole. Through attending to diverse paradigms, diverse voices and diverse contributions, leadership competence will grow and become stronger in regard to similarities and differences in cultures, values and languages.

DEC strongly believes in the development, implementation and review of policies and procedures in recruitment and leadership at all levels of service to ensure meaningful local, state, national and international representation and participation of people from different cultures, values and languages. The meaningful participation of diverse

individuals is critical if we are to effect change in services for all children and families (National Research Council, 2002). Thus, it is important that policies and procedures related to recruitment and leadership at all levels of service reflect a degree of commitment to achieve participation of diverse individuals. This includes local schools and programs, state and federal agencies, institutions of higher education, and national organizations such as DEC. This commitment could in turn, help to increase interest and membership of diverse individuals in the early intervention (EI) and early childhood special education (ECSE) profession.

There is a critical need in our field for leaders from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds who can serve as mentors to young professionals (Elliott et al. 1999a; Fenichel, 1992; Hood & Boyce, 1997). Issues of fragmented health, education and social service systems; low wages; lack of career paths; and limited access to formal training, higher education and professional development contribute to the lack of diverse personnel advancing into leadership positions (Elliott et al. 1999a; Kagan & Bowman, 1997). In a publication about creating a viable career development system for practitioners, Elliott and colleagues noted that to be able to better address the needs of children and families, professionals need to reflect and represent the communities they serve (Elliott et al. 1999b, p. 2).

The shortage of qualified personnel to work in EI, ECSE and special education continues (23rd Annual Report to Congress, 2001). This shortage is accentuated by the need for qualified personnel of different cultures, values and languages. Hanson (1998) found that even with the increasing number of nonwhite, non-Anglo-European children and their families being served in EI, there is still a disproportionately low representation of workers of non-Anglo-European cultures being trained to work with these children and families. Similarly, few higher education preparation programs are responsive to ethnic and language diversity (Gay, 2002; Isenberg, 2000; Kushner & Ortiz, 2000) or have diverse faculty (American Psychological Association, 1996a and 1996b; Isenberg, 2000).

Leadership development is essential to ensuring quality services and programs for all children and families (Elliott et al. 1996a). Through its policies and procedures,

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organizations and service programs can facilitate diversity in its leadership within EI and ECSE. A clearly defined mission statement and action plan convey a strong message to the field that creates opportunities that are available, appropriate and accessible for all. We as individuals and as an organization need to “[commit] resources, [exert] coordinated efforts to influence institutional policies and [make] internal policy and structural changes” (Hood & Boyce, 1997, pp. 152–153). For example, one way to examine policies and procedures is to adopt the premise that “work settings are language communities” and “all leaders are leading language communities” (Kegan & Lahey, 2001, p. 8). Kegan and Lahey recommend three languages to transform customary organizational arrangement, and one of them is moving “from the language of rules and policies to the language of public agreement” (p. 9).

According to Elliott and colleagues, many who advance into early childhood leadership positions lack the necessary support and training to allow them to address the needs of the communities they serve. Often, disparities between the backgrounds of early childhood leaders and members of the communities they serve lead to policies and practices that are inconsistent and inappropriate with the values and needs of those communities. In addition, the diversity of professional preparation and professional roles is much greater in early childhood fields than in other areas of education (National Institute on Early Childhood Development and Education, 2000). Thus, the concept of “career lattice” seen in early childhood does not match the corporate models of “lock-step” promotions (Bredenkamp & Willer, 1992; Jalongo & Isenberg, 2000; National Association for the Education of Young Children, 1994).

The American Council on Education identified four key issues for advancing leadership in higher education: (1) leadership development, (2) career advancement, (3) workplace and campus climate, and (4) mentoring (Brown, Ummersen, and Hill, 2002). In essence, these areas apply to all members of the EI/ECSE field (from various backgrounds, race/ethnicity, income levels, disciplines, skill levels, etc.). Organizations and service programs have the opportunity to establish a blueprint or guide for promoting the untapped potential for new and emerging leaders as well as supporting existing

leaders and their advancement. Diversity among leadership throughout EI/ECSE is essential to ensuring educational equity for all children and families (Moore, 1997).

DEC strongly encourages and supports the development and dissemination of products that address family cultures, values and languages. To meet the needs of an increasingly diverse number of children, families and professionals in the early childhood field, it is important that materials and products reflect and address different family cultures, values and languages (Santos, et al. 2000). The dynamic nature of our field warrants the development of materials and products that reflect current and state-of-the-art evidence- and value-based practices. The impact of differing values, beliefs and practices must be addressed and infused across all relevant topics in DEC products. A separate section on “diversity” is often insufficient in addressing the full impact on practices. For example, a booklet for families on transition should address how individual family values, beliefs and practices may influence their participation in the transition process, choices of programs, expectations of children’s readiness and overall development, and families’ relationships with professionals. Finally, it is critical that material developers consider and address cultural and linguistic factors that impact accessibility, appropriateness, and adaptability, not only in terms of the format of materials but also in the information and practices promoted in the products.

Organizations and programs must also give equal importance to creating and implementing an effective dissemination plan. Multiple venues to disseminate information and products must be considered to ensure that needed information reaches all possible audiences.

Accessibility is key to the success of any dissemination activity. Thus, developers of materials must consider the accessibility of their products not only in terms of disability access (e.g., Braille) but also in terms of languages (e.g., Spanish, American Sign Language and other languages), formats (e.g., video, audio, Web-based), readability and comprehensibility.

Likewise, at the organizational level, dissemination in multiple formats is also desirable to reach diverse audiences. For example, information gathering for

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strategic planning might include specific target groups (e.g., family members, direct service providers, higher education faculty, etc.), and formats for input and discussion might vary (e.g., focus groups, online surveys, conference meetings, Web-based discussion groups, etc.).

As consumers, we need to encourage product developers to bring together a wide range of diverse voices to conceptualize, develop, implement, evaluate and disseminate products. This is an important first step to ensure that materials address different family cultures, values and languages (Corso, Santos, & Roof, 2002). A flexible yet systematic plan must be in place to ensure that multiple perspectives are considered and addressed in all phases of product development, implementation and dissemination. This plan should include concrete steps to recruit and retain individuals from a variety of backgrounds who will participate in all aspects of the development and dissemination of products. For example, a work panel composed of diverse stakeholders could provide continuous feedback to developers on the content and format of the product. Members of the panel could be recruited through agencies that serve diverse children and families who would benefit from the product being developed. The plan also should include a clearly conceptualized formative and summative evaluation plan that promotes and supports meaningful consumer participation. Developers should consider evaluation questions that examine the extent to which their products address the needs of families and children from a variety of backgrounds.

DEC strongly believes in training and dissemination activities (e.g., meetings, events, conferences and publications) that incorporate the impact of family cultures, values and languages. Professional organizations such as DEC play a key role in promoting the transformation of the educational pipeline (from high school through postdoctoral and continuing education) so that the student population reflects the changing demographics of the population at large. Also, higher education and continuing education programs must embed multicultural competence in training, research and practice issues. Within higher education, scholars acknowledge that professionals will not become culturally competent and inclusive until programs are reflective of those values (American Psychological Association, 1997; Morey &

Kitano, 1997; Phillips, 1993; Ponterotto, 1996). DEC professional development and personnel preparation activities seek to incorporate family cultures, values and languages. For example, explicit review criteria for conference proposals and publications are steps to ensure that multiple voices contribute to these activities, and the translation of materials is a positive step towards addressing the needs of a linguistically diverse population.

In the broader context, organizations and service programs should engage in interactions with other systems such as human services organizations and higher education institutions. Stakeholders take key values with them as they move within and across systems and organizations. The process of inclusion permeates the organization or service program's product development (e.g., journals, publications, Web site, brochures, etc.), conference planning, meetings, and communication styles at local, state and national levels. For example, human services systems (Focal Point, 1994; Hernandez & Isaacs, 1998), child welfare systems (Child Welfare League of America, 1993), schools (Kalyanpur & Harry, 1999; Lipman, 1998; Nieto, 1999) and communities (Pang, Gay, & Stanley, 1995) recognize a growing need on the part of agencies and institutions to examine their systems with respect to serving increasingly diverse populations. Thus, it is critical that organizations and service programs commit themselves to continuous improvement with regard to family cultures, values and languages. Furthermore, organizations and service programs must engage in a process of ongoing monitoring and recalibration to assure adjustments that reflect our ever-growing appreciation of how to be responsive. Therefore, organizations and service programs should continuously examine and take steps to make necessary changes to ensure that what is projected to the larger community, such as policies, position statements and products, reflect the value placed on the multiple viewpoints that its diverse membership brings.

Definitions of Selected Terms

Many fields have long-established definitions and an understanding of concepts around culture and language. Because EI and ECSE as a field are young, there is as yet no general consensus of understanding. In fact many

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concepts related to culture and language may be unfamiliar to readers. This section provides definitions of selected terms, which we have borrowed from various disciplines such as anthropology, sociology, psychology and counseling. It is important to note that there are local, regional and state differences on which terms are used and how they are used. Each term carries various nuances depending on the user and listener. While this list is not exhaustive, it is our intention to establish some common understanding among EI and ECSE researchers and practitioners around these concepts.

Culture refers to “shared and learned ideas and products of a society. It is the shared way of life of a people, including their beliefs, their technology, their values and norms, all of which are transmitted down through the generations by learning and observation” (Small, 1998, p. 72). It also refers to the “ideations, symbols, behaviors — values, and beliefs that are shared by a human group” (Banks & Banks, 2001, p. 428). “Culture is not a static phenomenon. It is sustained, challenged, or modified over time. Culture is also not a neutral construct. It draws much of its influence from the conviction that its values and practices are inherently right and preferable to those of others” (Shonkoff and Phillips, 2000, p. 69). “Central to greater understanding [of culture] is the need to identify the diverse and frequently overlapping elements of ethnicity, which include national origin, race, minority status, language, and religion. Ethnicity can be an amalgam of any or all of these . . .” (Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000, p. 63).

Cultural linguistic diversity refers to “behavioral, value, linguistic, and other differences ascribed to people’s cultural backgrounds. Cultural diversity almost invariably includes some level of diversity in how language is understood and used . . . [the terms] cultural diversity and cultural linguistic diversity [are often used] synonymously” (Barrera, Corso, & Macpherson, 2003).

Inclusiveness “is the act of encouraging belonging. Leaders of an inclusive organization do more than value diversity — they understand and aggressively eliminate barriers to performance that fall unevenly on different groups. In addition to creating a pluralistic culture, they establish standards of behavior that affirm inclusiveness. These leaders expect all . . . to meet the standards.

Inclusive organizations motivate employees and generate intensive commitment, while at the same time leading world-class performance standards. They use diverse teams to solve complex problems that involve highly diverse customer populations” (Norris & Lofton, 1995, pp. 5–6).

Multiculturalism “refers to a condition in which the organization represents, values, understands, and respects several distinct cultures. The classic multicultural situation exists in many international settings, where distinctive ethnic or cultural groups must understand and respect one another if they are to do business together and succeed” (Norris & Lofton, 1995, p. 5).

Values refer to aspects of one’s culture (e.g., behaviors, beliefs, language) that are given high positive weight, esteem and/or significance. For example, common values in cultures with Northern European roots include competition, autonomy and individualism. Cultures with roots in South American and non-European countries value intimacy, dignity and deference to elders (Robinson & Howard-Hamilton, 2000).

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