

## Considering Culture in Early Childhood

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Through my experience, as an early childhood educator, as well as through my work on the CREATE Culturally Responsive Early Childhood project, I have come to fully realize how personal perspectives, cultural background and worldview fundamentally affects the interactions and relationships we have with the young children and families we serve. For early childhood education and care teachers and providers to have a positive impact on developmental outcomes and future educational success of young children it is crucial to be aware and acknowledge the role culture plays. Co-worker and friend Don Rosin, Tribal Ambassador of CREATE Wisconsin, speaks passionately of the importance of addressing communication barriers and issues of trust with Native parents beginning in early childhood programs so that trust relationships and positive attitudes are established and maintained as their children move into the public school system.

The question: "Why should early childhood professionals consider the role of culture?" (Trumbull et al. 4), is asked and answered in the article *Bridging Cultures in Early Childhood*. which was excerpted from *Bridging Cultures in Early Care and Education: A Training Module* WestEd's *R&D Alert*, Vol. 7, No. 3, 2005:

Increasingly, home and center based staff and providers work with children and families who come from cultural backgrounds different from their own. Early care and education programs are generally the first settings where children may be away from their families for extended periods of time...

Most families with children have more contact with early childhood professionals than they do with educators once their children enter elementary school and start moving up the grades. This first contact is especially important because it helps form families' attitudes toward school, educators, and other child-serving professionals. Thus, the early childhood years provide caregivers and early educators an opportunity to make a positive impact not only on children's adjustment to outside care and education but also on long-term relationships between families and professionals...

Early childhood is a critical time to begin establishing common ground between teachers (including infant-toddler caregivers and other professionals) and the children and families they serve. (Trumbull et al. 4)

The CREATE Culturally Responsive Early Childhood project remains committed to culturally responsive education and care practices and services for young American Indian

children and their families in Wisconsin. During the 2011-12 school year, the Culturally Responsive Early Childhood Project in partnership with WI Early Childhood Association will host statewide professional development opportunities and workshops for ECEC professionals in building “cultural bridges” and establishing “common ground”. The purpose of the workshops and other follow-up activities is intended to support participants in (a) understanding and appreciating their own cultural backgrounds, (b) reflecting on how their cultural background affects how they interact with others from a different background than their own, and (c) understanding the cultural backgrounds of children and families they serve (specifically) from Tribal communities so that they can respond appropriately. Watch the CREATE calendar for more information to be posted on these upcoming workshops.

I would also like to take this opportunity to announce a highly recommended new resource called *Dual Language Learners: Facts and Tips Series*, developed by Ruth Reinl (Early Dual Language Learning Consultant) and funded by Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction. The *Facts and Tips Series* documents can be accessed and downloaded from the WI Early Childhood Collaborating Partners website at [www.collaboratingpartners.com/dual-language-learners\\_about.php](http://www.collaboratingpartners.com/dual-language-learners_about.php). The intent of the valuable resource “is to create a “common language and common understanding base” among programs and practitioners in Wisconsin so that services can be delivered to young dual language learners and their families in a linguistically and culturally responsive manner.” (Reinl, 2011)

In addition, *The Facts and Tips Series* provides early childhood programs, practitioners, and professional development trainers with quick and easy access to research-based information, resources, and practical strategies for meeting the needs of young dual language learners and their families. The series covers a wide range of topics including culture and families, language development, assessment, service delivery, effective instruction, language use, and interpreters. Learning/training modules are being developed to provide more in-depth knowledge and application strategies for these deeply complex topic areas.

Reinl, R. (2011). *Dual Language Learner: Facts & Tips*. Retrieved September 7, 2011, from WI Early Childhood Collaborating Partners: <http://www.collaboratingpartners.com/documents/OverviewFTwithrefsFINAL.pdf>

Trumbull, E., Rothstein-Fisch, C., Zepeda, M., and Gonzalez-Mena, J. (2005) *Bridging Cultures in Early Childhood*. Retrieved August 30, 2011, from WestEd: <http://www.wested.org/cs/we/view/feat/178>