



CONNECTICUT
BIRTH TO THREE SYSTEM

PRESCHOOL SPECIAL
EDUCATION

WORKING TOGETHER FOR CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES

BIRTH through 5 NEWS

INFORMATION FOR FAMILIES AND PROFESSIONALS • VOLUME 4, NUMBER 2

Infusing Cultural Competence into Connecticut's Early Childhood Programs

By Cherie Takemoto, Director
Parent Education and Training Center (PEATC), Arlington, Virginia



Members of the Connecticut Cultural Competency team who attended four days of training at George Mason University were, left to right: Nanfi Nagenda Lubogo, Maria Vergara, Harryson Buster, Joan Parris, Tom Coakley, Yvette Johnson, Gweneth Myles, Lauren Gibson-Carter and Angel Avila.

This article is translated into Spanish on page 2. Ver la versión española de este artículo en la página 2.

Produced by the State
Department of Education and
the Connecticut Birth to Three
System in Collaboration with the



University of
Connecticut

COOPERATIVE EXTENSION SYSTEM
College of Agriculture and Natural Resources

What is culture? It is more than ethnicity, race or something folks check on the Census survey.

Culture is the lens through which we view our world. We all have it. Culture includes beliefs, values, rules, practices and actions for surviving in, or adapting to, a particular environment or situation.

SOME BASIC CHARACTERISTICS OF CULTURAL COMPETENCE INCLUDE:

Ability – to adapt activities, services and programs to respond to the cultural and ethnic diversity of a particular individual or community;

Awareness – of cultures represented in one's community and some general characteristics of those cultures;

Realization – that diversity between cultures will affect families' participation in programs.

For early childhood programs, we believe that two foundations of cultural competence in early childhood are already familiar to individuals in Connecticut: parent-provider partnerships and family-centered services. Our research and the training experiences in the Multicultural Early Childhood Team Training (MECTT) have shown that when providers and family members work together in a climate of mutual respect and trust, everyone benefits. Through these partnerships families, agencies, and professionals can work together to solve problems and promote change. This definition of partnership moves from simply cooperating and sharing information, to actively seeking new solutions, taking on new roles and sharing resources.

FOUNDATIONS OF CULTURAL COMPETENCE AND FAMILY-CENTERED SERVICES INCLUDE:

- An understanding of our own culture. This includes the values and beliefs we have about others that we see as different from ourselves;
- The belief that all families and individuals are unique – influenced, but not defined, by culture;
- The commitment that families and providers must work together to find common ground to design services that meet the needs of children and show respect for families;
- The ability to form partnerships between providers and parents which are vital to increasing cultural competencies;
- The expectation that providers have a responsibility for helping families to understand/interpret programs and services so that they can be better advocates for their children.

These foundations have led us to a new way of thinking of cultural competence. They take us beyond celebrating cultural differences and promoting an apprecia-

tion and understanding between cultures. Some people consider it a challenge to have to think about how to work with diverse cultures – some with histories of distrust, different languages, and different perspectives about disability and willingness to participate in early childhood programs. During our many years of working with programs and teams throughout the country, we have observed the synergistic effects of cultural competence and family/provider partnerships as programs and individuals built bridges with members of the community. This does not just happen. . . it takes commitment and effort!

This year is the beginning of an adventure as early childhood programs unite to develop cultural competence that responds to and embraces Connecticut's growing diversity. Immigrants from all over the world are calling Connecticut their new home. Their children are joining the children of families who have been in Connecticut for generations. They may feel unsure about early childhood programs. In June, an energetic, diverse, talented, and knowledgeable team of early childhood professionals and parents came to George Mason University to join teams from

Washington State and Colorado to become State Leadership Teams promoting and sustaining family-centered and culturally appropriate practices in local early childhood programs. They are now trained to teach the Multicultural Early Childhood Team Training – a 12-module curriculum that infuses cultural competence into early childhood programs. This curriculum was developed through parent/professional/community partnerships between PEATC (Virginia's Parent Training and Information Center), and the Helen A. Kellar Institute for Human Disabilities at George Mason University and early childhood experts and diverse community experts.

La infusión de la competencia cultural en los programas de Primera Infancia

Por Cherie Takemoto, Directora, Centro de Educación y Capacitación de Padres (PEATC), Arlington, Virginia.

¿Qué entendemos por cultura? Más que grupo étnico, raza u otro renglón de los censos de población, la cultura es el lente a través del cual vemos nuestro mundo. Todos tenemos una.

Comprende creencias, valores, normas, prácticas y acciones para sobrevivir o adaptarse a ambientes o situaciones.

Entre las características básicas de la competencia cultural, en el sentido de aptitud o idoneidad para trabajar con personas de diferentes culturas, están:

La habilidad – para hacer adaptaciones en actividades, servicios y programas, de modo que respondan a la diversidad cultural y étnica de un individuo o de una comunidad;

La conciencia – de las culturas representadas en la comunidad, y de algunas características generales de esas culturas;



La comprensión – de que la diversidad entre las culturas afecta la participación de las familias en los programas.

Dos de las bases de la competencia cultural son ya bien conocidas en los programas dedicados a la primera infancia en Connecticut: la asociación padre-proveedor y los servicios centrados en la familia. Nuestra investigación y las experiencias de los instructores en la Capacitación de equipos para programas dedicados a la primera infancia (MECTT) señalan que cuando proveedores y miembros de la familia trabajan juntos en un clima de respeto y confianza mutuos, todo el mundo gana. Mediante estas asociaciones familias, agencias y profesionales pueden trabajar juntos para solucionar problemas y provocar cambios. Esta definición de asociación comprende desde la simple cooperación y común acceso a infor-

mación hasta la búsqueda activa de nuevas soluciones, asunción de nuevas funciones y acceso común a otros recursos.

ENTRE LOS FUNDAMENTOS DE LA COMPETENCIA CULTURAL Y DE LOS SERVICIOS CENTRADOS EN LA FAMILIA SE CUENTAN:

La comprensión de nuestra propia cultura. Esto incluye nuestros valores y las ideas que nos hacemos de los que consideramos diferentes;

La creencia de que todas las familias y los individuos son únicos – influenciados, pero no definidos, por la cultura;

El compromiso de que familias y proveedores deben trabajar juntos para encontrar terreno común en el diseño de servicios que llenen las necesidades de los niños y muestren respeto por las familias;

La habilidad de formar asociaciones entre proveedores y padres que sean vitales al incremento de las competencias culturales;

La previsión de que los proveedores tienen la responsabilidad de ayudar a las familias a comprender/interpretar los programas y servicios de modo que puedan abogar mejor por sus hijos.

Estos fundamentos nos han llevado a una nueva forma de conceptualizar la

competencia cultural, más allá de la celebración de las diferencias culturales y promoción de la comprensión mutua. Para algunos es un desafío el pensar cómo trabajar con diversas culturas – algunas con historias de desconfianza, diferentes idiomas, y diferentes perspectivas de la incapacidad y del propósito de participar en programas de primera infancia. A lo largo de muchos años trabajando con programas y equipos a través del país, hemos observado los efectos sinérgicos de la competencia cultural y las asociaciones familia/proveedor, hemos comprobando cómo programas e individuos construyen puentes con miembros de la comunidad. Esto no pasa espontáneamente. . . ¡requiere compromiso y esfuerzo!

Este año es el comienzo de una aventura, al unirse los programas de servicios a la primera infancia con el propósito de fomentar la competencia cultural que responda a la creciente diversidad en la población de Connecticut. Inmigrantes de todo el mundo han hecho su nuevo hogar en Connecticut, y sus hijos se unen a los de familias que han estado aquí por generaciones. Pueden sentirse inseguros de los programas de primera infancia. En junio un grupo de padres y profesionales de la primera infancia, grupo informado, enérgico, diverso y talentoso, acudió a la Universidad George Mason para reunirse con grupos de los estados de Washington y Colorado y hacerse equipos estatales de liderazgo (State Leadership Teams) cuya misión es promover en los programas locales de primera infancia prácticas centradas en la familia y culturalmente apropiadas. Están ahora capacitados para enseñar el cursillo de 12 módulos Multicultural Early Childhood Team Training. Este cursillo, diseñado para infundir competencia cultural en programas de temprana infancia, se desarrolló mediante asociaciones padres/profesionales/comunidad entre la PEACT (Virginia's Parent Training and Information Center) y el Helen A. Kellar Institute for Human Disabilities de la Universidad George Mason y expertos en primera infancia y otros expertos de la comunidad.

Birth to Three System

By Linda Goodman

We're very excited that cultural competency is the topic of this newsletter. For at least two years we've recognized that this was an area that needed some attention. For that reason we paid for many of the team members to attend the training, described by Cherie Takemoto in her article, at George Mason University last summer. Also, we joined with the



Preschool Special Education program to request help in cultural competency from the National Early Childhood Technical Assistance Center in Chapel Hill, North Carolina. They funded the training for a few more members of the team and sent staff to Connecticut twice to help us conduct meetings on this topic. We are very happy that this spring we will be able to take advantage of the team's newly developed expertise by having the team play a significant role in our annual Together We Will Conference scheduled for April 11 and 12 (see the announcement on page 7.) Since staff of the Birth to Three programs usually see children and families in their own homes and since the pri-

mary goal of early intervention services is to be family-centered, it is critical that staff be able to understand each family's culture and values. It is equally important that families from various cultures know how to advocate for their children. Only then can the relationship between the family and the interventionist be productive.

As I wrote in the last newsletter, the IDEA reauthorization process in Washington, D.C. continues. The basis of the Birth to Three System is rooted in Part C of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. Every five

years important Federal legislation comes up for reauthorization. During this process changes can be made to any part of the law. IDEA was last reauthorized in 1997 with a number of changes made to the special education portion, but only a few to Part C. As I write this, it seems unlikely that any bills will be introduced before Congress takes its October recess and it is equally unlikely that bills will be introduced during

the "lame duck" session that follows the recess. When the new 108th Congress convenes in January everything starts over again. Because all representatives and many senators are up for election in November the composition of Congress will have a major effect on what the 108th Congress chooses to do during reauthorization. If you wish to follow the legislative process of IDEA reauthorization, you can visit the websites of the U.S. House (www.house.gov), Senate (www.senate.gov) and U.S. Department of Education (www.ed.gov). We will also attempt to post current information on the Birth to Three website: www.birthe23.org.

Preschool Special Education

By Maria Synodi

The *Birth Through Five Newsletter* has always worked to tie various aspects of child development, families, and communities into the context of the topics covered from issue to issue. The topic of this newsletter, cultural competence, speaks to the continuing need of professionals to respond to the diverse ethnic and cultural populations of the children and families served in early intervention and preschool special education.

As professionals we need to be aware that as a whole, our society is growing and becoming more diverse. America's racial profile is changing. The rate of increase in the population for racial and ethnic minorities is much greater than for white Americans. Taken as a group, children from minority cultures comprise a larger percent of public school students than ever before. Throughout our country, large city school populations are largely comprised of minority students. The population of children that arrives at the school door with limited proficiency in English is the fastest

growing in our nation.

And not only are there more children from diverse backgrounds in our schools, there are also more children from certain races and ethnicities than expected in special education when compared to the percentage of students from those races and ethnicities in the general school population. Studies have documented discrepancies in referrals to special education eligibility and placement decisions for students from diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds. Greater effort is needed to prevent issues associated with misdiagnosing and mislabeling children and placing them in special education programs unnecessarily. Professional organizations remind us that individual and cultural variations among children are the norm and not the exception. Programs and professionals need to consider children's individual needs and the family's cultural con-

text in the decision-making process. Given the increasing diversity of families in our society, professionals need to understand how to appropriately identify individual and cultural differences, ensure high quality developmentally appropriate programs and foster family involvement in the education of their children.

Linda and I hope that this newsletter provides a window to schools' continuing efforts to respond to the diversity of the children and families that we serve in our programs. As Linda said in her *Birth to Three Update*, this year our annual statewide early childhood conference is focused on this topic. The conference, *Together We Will: Support Cultural Competence*, will be on April 11 and 12. See you there.



Lower Fairfield LICC Reaches Out to Families Who Speak Spanish

By Lolli Ross, LICC Chair and Maria Engborg, LICC Member

Local Interagency Coordinating Councils (LICCs) around Connecticut reach out to families of diverse backgrounds to improve their experiences with early intervention and preschool special education supports and services. The delivery of these services to non-English speaking families has been a focus for the Lower Fairfield LICC for a couple of years.

First a subcommittee of Spanish-speaking and English-speaking community and LICC members was formed to discuss the issues and explore strategies to enhance the delivery of early intervention services to this part of the community. As a result the LICC sponsored several forums for Spanish-speaking parents and professionals to discuss their concerns. Families told us they needed more culturally sensitive services, more bilingual early intervention associates and professionals, and more materials and resources written in Spanish. Parents reported discomfort with their transition to preschool special education services and a need to learn more about special education law and their rights. While these are important topics for all families, they are critical areas of need for non-

English speaking families as they struggle with language and cultural barriers.

LICC activities to address these concerns have included:

- The translation into Spanish of a thirty-five-page guide to special education services. The guide is available upon request.
- "Leaving Birth to Three," workshops on transition to preschool special education services were given in Spanish. These workshops will be offered by the LICC on an ongoing basis.
- Several networking forums in English and Spanish allowed parents and professionals to discuss the issues and

explore creative solutions to them. English and Spanish speaking LICC members facilitated these forums.

- Collaboration with a community agency to provide ESL classes for several Spanish speaking Birth to Three families.
- A training workshop on cultural awareness and competence was held for area Birth to Three providers. Future workshops are being planned with Spanish speaking parents as co-trainers.
- Funding for the translation of some Birth to Three materials into Spanish.
- Workshops were given in Spanish on special education law and services.

Families who participated in these activities report that they feel much more confident in planning for their children's services and supports. They feel they can speak up and make a difference for their children and others, and have expressed their satisfaction with being included in planning and improvement activities. Providers also



report more confidence in their ability to support the needs of non-English-speaking families and make services more relevant to their lives. Reaching out to families that speak Spanish has proven to be so successful that these and other activities are now a permanent part of the Lower Fairfield LICC event schedule each year.

For more information about the Lower Fairfield LICC, please contact **Maria Engborg** at (203) 629-1880 x 314. To learn if there is a LICC in your area, call **Eileen McMurrer** at (860) 418-6134.

ICC Update

By *Ann Gionet*

At the October 7, 2002 ICC meeting Mary Eberle, the State Representative from the 15th district, was honored for her long-term support of the Birth to Three System. We appreciate her dedication and com-

mitment to Connecticut's infants and young children. Representative Eberle has been a longtime advocate and friend and has been instrumental in keeping Connecticut legislators informed about outcomes of programs for children in Connecticut.

The Family Involvement Committee of the State ICC participated in the Family Voices Region One, Regional Leadership Conference held at the Hole in the Wall Gang Camp in Ashford, Connecticut from October 15-17, 2002. Building Leaders for Healthy Families 2010 was the theme of the conference which addressed the following topics:

- The Medical Home
- Early Identification and Screening
- Insurance Coverage
- Community Integrated Systems
- Family Professional Partnerships
- Transition to Adulthood

Several members of the Connecticut ICC participated with approximately 120 family advocates including consumers of health care products, state agency representatives, members of the American Academy of Pediatrics and other key stakeholders. The conference was sponsored by Family Voices, which is a national grassroots network of families and friends of children with special health care needs.

"SNIPPETS"

The Parent Perspective

Families as Teachers of Cultural Competence

By *Yvette Johnson, Parent Member of CT Multicultural Training Team, CT Council on Developmental Disabilities*

Culture is more than ethnicity. How many times do we as parents interact with professionals who suggest goals for our child that conflict with our personal and cultural approach to meeting the needs of our family? How many times do we say, "yes" when talking to professionals who speak a language other than our own, and leave that discussion not understanding what they have said? How many times do we as parents sacrifice our family and cultural values in decision making in order to access services? These are examples of cultural barriers that many families encounter when interacting with professionals. (Adapted from *REPORT*, family and centered practice – fall/winter 95/96.)

Culture is a combination of thoughts,

feelings, attitudes, beliefs, values and behaviors shared by groups of people through symbols, communication and social patterns. Each culture satisfies basic human needs from a shared perspective of the group. We are all the same in our basic human needs, yet different in the ways that we meet those needs. Culture is a complex system of learned responses to our needs, and so culture is a great resource for understanding our shared strengths and needs.

All families have a responsibility to help professionals become more aware of the cultural needs in our communities. This includes what we have to know or believe in order to operate in our cultural group and the varied views, beliefs, rules, practices, and actions



The Provider Perspective

Developing Cultural Competence

By Angel Avila, ARC Greenwich, Birth to Three Program and MECTT Training Team Member
(Original article written in Spanish)

The face of America has changed, and so have our ways and means of living and working. Services to pre-school children are no exception. At the national level as well as in the state of Connecticut, Hispanics continue to be the fastest growing segment of the population with a pattern similar to that of other groups of immigrants. The cultural diversification and expansion has raised significant issues for service providers. Given the shortage of professionals in the area, especially bilingual and bicultural professionals, offering quality service to these communities has become a real challenge.

In response to this scenario much has been heard about the development of cultural competence. Cultural competence translates as knowledge and attitudes that include appreciating and accepting other cultures, recognizing ours, understanding the difference between both, learning from them and being able to adapt (Project Adept, Brown University). However, to many, something particularly important in the development of cultural competence is the affective or human factor. Cultural competence is not something that can be understood from books or definitions. What one may want to know about other cultures can be found in school texts, but really understanding the diversity and essence of each culture requires a commitment beyond books.

Continued on page 8.

needed when adapting to a particular environment. It is important as parents that we share with professionals how we view the world with our family. Our values, traditions and beliefs assist us in raising our children.

HERE ARE QUESTIONS FAMILIES MIGHT WANT TO ASK THEMSELVES WHEN TALKING WITH PROFESSIONALS:

- Do I tell professionals about my child's and family's needs?
- Do I share information about my culture that is important to my family?
- Do I check to see if the professional(s) understand my family's culture the way I want them to?
- Do I have enough information about the provider's culture to work together as partners in supporting my child?

Add your own unique questions to this list. Open the door to communicating with the professionals in your family's life as partners who support your child's development in ways that respect your cultural approach. Professionals have questions to ask themselves as well.

HERE ARE SOME QUESTIONS THAT PROVIDERS MIGHT WANT

TO ASK THEMSELVES WHEN TALKING WITH FAMILIES:

- Am I actively listening to the family to find out what is important to them?
- Do I ask families how they prefer to be involved with the program?
- Do I avoid jargon and check to see whether a family understands what I am saying?
- Have I asked how decisions are made in this family?
- Am I aware of my own cultural influences and how they may differ from the family's?

Cultural competence implies that all activities, services, and programs are sensitive to and show respect for cultural, ethnic, and economic diversity. Cultural sensitivity does not imply that we know everything there is to know about every culture. It is being aware of varied cultures represented in communities, asking questions, sharing and learning about similarities and differences and realizing that cultural influences will affect the family's participation. Families who openly share their culture in important ways will teach providers how to do their job better within each family's unique culture.



Training Calendar



Training Opportunities for Families and Providers

• Orientation to the Birth to Three System

January 14 or April 7, New Haven, no fee

• Resources for Families of Young Children

March 12, Hartford, no fee

• Assessment of children under the age of three

March 27, New Haven, no fee

• Involving Families in the IFSP

May 8, Farmington, no fee

For more information or to request a registration form for any of the above see the Birth to Three website: www.birth23.org or call Kathy Granata at the Birth to Three System (860) 418-6146.

• Applied Behavior Analysis for Young Children with Autism

January 10, New Britain, \$30

• Supervising and Supporting Paraprofessionals in their Work with Young Children

January 17, Middletown, \$60

• Partnering with Families of Young Children on Challenging Issues

January 23, New Britain, \$15

• Discrete Trial Instruction for Young Children with Autism – Beginner Level

January 28 and February 25, Hartford, \$60

• Assistive Technology to Develop Play And Social Interaction For Young Children Birth To Five

January 30, Middletown, \$40

• The 10th Annual Conference Together We Will: Support Cultural Competence

Danbury Sheraton Hotel
Friday, April 11, 2003
Keynote Speaker: Louise Derman-Sparks
Pacific Oaks College, California

• Together We Will With Families

Danbury Sheraton Hotel
Saturday, April 12, 2003
Keynote Speaker: Cherie Takemoto
Parent Educational Advocacy
Training Center, Arlington, VA

• Families and Literacy Conference: Building Bridges from Preschool to Kindergarten

January 30, Meriden, \$25

• Sleep Disorders and Their Treatment for Young Children with Special Needs

February 1, Middletown, \$50

• The Application of Simple Switches and Battery-Powered Toys for Young Children with Disabilities

February 26 and 27, Hartford, \$60

• Nutrition and Feeding Issues with Young Children

March 5, Meriden, \$15

• Parent-Child Interaction Therapy

March 12, Meriden, \$15

• Discrete Trial Instruction – Advanced

March 18 and 19, Hartford, \$60

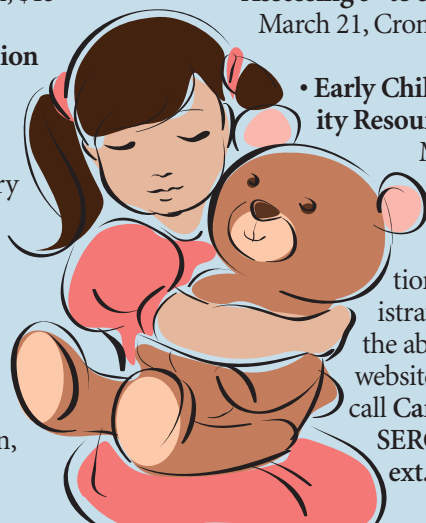
• Assessing 3- to 5-year-olds

March 21, Cromwell, \$30

• Early Childhood Community Resources Forums

May 21, West Hartford, no fee

For more information or to request a registration form for any of the above see the SERC website: www.ctserc.org or call Carissa D'Amico at SERC (860) 632-1485 ext. 269.



BIRTH through 5 NEWS

Information for Families and Professionals

is published quarterly by the University of Connecticut Cooperative Extension System in collaboration with the Connecticut Birth to Three System, the Connecticut State Department of Education and the Newsletter Advisory Board. We welcome readers' comments and contributions related to the special needs of infants, toddlers, preschoolers and their families. Please mail correspondence to the editor at 67 Stony Hill Road, Bethel, CT 06801.

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Developing Cultural... from page 6.

The development of cultural competence is a continuing process of search and human growth. It is not necessary to travel the world seeking knowledge about cultures. One of the most beautiful things the field of education offers is precisely the opportunity to appreciate these cultures in our own backyard. What we can do is utilize strategies to create bonds with the families that let us understand their culture and develop the sensibility required to provide special education services.

**SOME PRACTICAL STRATEGIES
THAT PROFESSIONALS
CAN UTILIZE ARE:**

Listen to the families; pay attention to their stories.

When you utilize interpreters, make sure you always address the family and not the interpreter.

In Latin cultures it is important to express gratitude with a gift, so do not be surprised if you are offered something to drink or eat. Your acceptance of the gift promotes the bonding so useful for the cooperation that in great measure conditions the success of our services.

For years I have devoted efforts to learn how to serve diverse cultures,



to become competent in my work and provide the best possible quality of service. I have had plenty of different experiences that have taught me that the needs of families are similar regardless of race or culture. But perhaps the most important lesson has been that time is our best ally.

A group of parents and professionals, recognizing the importance of learning more on the subject, traveled to Virginia recently to attend a Cultural Competence seminar. The "Multicultural Early Childhood Training Team" sponsored by the Virginia Parent Educational and Training Center and George Mason University qualifies the attendants to train others, thus meeting a need. It helps us keep on offering the best possible quality services.

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