

FPG  
Child  
Development  
Institute  
The University of North Carolina  
at Chapel Hill

# early developments



Spring 2004 | Volume 8, #1

**Diversity**

# news



**D**ick Clifford, FPG senior scientist and research associate professor in the UNC School of Education, received the Chancellor's Award from The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, which is given for meritorious or distinguished accomplishments. He was one of five university leaders recognized in the categories of devotion to duty, innovations, public service, safety/heroism, human relations or other achievements. The award recognized that "Clifford's accomplishments have dramatically changed services for young children in North Carolina."



## Coming Next

**F**ragile X syndrome (FXS) is the focus of the next issue of *Early Developments*. Upcoming stories include

- Early Identification and Newborn Screening
- Speech, Language and FXS
- The Behavioral Challenge
- National Fragile X Awareness Day
- Fragile X Information Center
- Video Analysis Reveals Key Behaviors

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**Editors**

Pam Winton, Virginia Buysse

**Writer**

John Manuel

**Designer**

Gina Harrison

**Photographer**

Don Trull

**Assistant Editor**

Satsuki Scoville

[www.fpg.unc.edu](http://www.fpg.unc.edu)

[www.ncedl.org](http://www.ncedl.org)

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**To subscribe or to change your address**

contact Jay Hargrove  
CB #8185, UNC-CH  
Chapel Hill, NC 27599-8185  
(919) 966-0888  
hargrove@mail.fpg.unc.edu

**To order additional copies**

contact FPG Publications Office  
(919) 966-4221  
FPGPublications@unc.edu

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# Director's Notes by Don Bailey



**B**Y NOW IT SHOULD NOT BE NEWS TO ANYONE that America is becoming increasingly diverse in its population. Signs that we live in a multicultural, global society abound in the world today. In fact the word “minority” is taking on a new meaning in states such as California, where fewer than 50% of the children are Caucasian and there are more Hispanic than African-American children. These trends will likely characterize the US as a whole in the not-so-distant future, and early childhood programs need to be ready.

What is it about cultural diversity that challenges early childhood programs? One factor is that children enter early childhood and early intervention programs from families with a wide range of values and cultural experiences. Sometimes those values and experiences differ from those of the teachers and caregivers in those programs. Another factor is that unfortunately in America today, “minority” status is statistically more likely to be associated with poverty and poor educational outcomes. This means that special efforts are needed to support some children to maximize school success, but also that we need to be careful and not unfairly characterize an entire group of individuals. Poverty is probably the single factor that most significantly influences success in school and society, irrespective of one’s ethnic or cultural background. But racism, discrimination, and perceived minority status also work in subtle yet powerful ways.

This issue of *Early Developments* highlights some of the work at FPG designed to meet this need. One key concern is the extent to which individuals working in early childhood programs understand children and families from different cultures and behave in ways that are respectful of cultural differences. One FPG project is designed to assess

beliefs, practices and barriers perceived by early childhood professionals who work with Latino children. Building on this information, FPG is testing the efficacy of a three-day workshop designed to raise the knowledge, attitudes, and skills of child care providers in working with culturally and linguistically diverse families. Consistent with models used by other projects at FPG, the training includes a self-assessment tool that is used to help raise participants’ awareness of their own attitudes and behaviors, and to develop a training and technical assistance plan.

In addition to “front-line” service providers, a second need is for more diversity among our nation’s early childhood leaders. An FPG project called Walking the Walk strives to increase the number of culturally and linguistically diverse people entering the early childhood profession through campus-community partnerships across North Carolina. And researchers at FPG are taking advantage of a special program funded by the National Institutes of Health to promote research careers of individuals from diverse cultures.

Finally, we are engaged in direct work with children. In contrast to much research that has focused on school



failure in low-income and minority children, projects at FPG focus on factors that contribute to school success. One project is finding out about children's constructions and negotiations of social identities in culturally diverse schools. And another project uses science activities as the context in which to identify and nurture talent in young children from diverse cultures.

Dr. Martin Luther King's "I Have a Dream" speech is one of the most well known of all American speeches. Much progress has been made since his time, but the dream has yet to be fully realized. Each April our country celebrates the Week of the Young Child in recognition that the early childhood years are where it all begins. In addition to assuring that children have the early experiences necessary for school success, so that no child is left behind, we also need to assure that all children finish the early childhood period with an appreciation for and understanding of individual differences. Attitudes about individual differences are formed during the early childhood years, in part by living and interacting with a wide or narrow range of people, and in part by the attitudes and experiences provided by adults. What should teachers and parents do

to facilitate understanding and acceptance of individual differences? How overt and planned should these strategies be? How can this be done without reinforcing generalizations about groups that do not reflect individual variation within groups? Can strategies be identified that assure a lifetime of appreciation and respect for human diversity? Much discussion about these topics has occurred in the early childhood literature. This has resulted in various "multicultural" curriculum models and guidelines. However, research on this topic at the early childhood level is scant and teachers have very little guidance as to the best strategies to use. Much work is needed to identify meaningful and appropriate practices that really make a difference in attitudes, beliefs, and behavior. The research being conducted at FPG outlined in this issue is making an important contribution to achieving this end. |ed|

# Nuestros

# Our Children | Niños

## Survey Highlights Issues in Serving Latino Children

**T**HE CHILDREN ENROLLED in Kara Thompson's pre-kindergarten classroom are working in various interest centers. Several children are looking at a book together in the book corner. Others are tracing letter forms in the writing center, playing with blocks, and putting puzzles together. Kara notices that Benita is quietly observing the other children in the dramatic play area, but she does not enter into play with them. Benita only recently enrolled in the program and Kara is still trying to figure out how much English Benita understands while helping her to get adjusted to the classroom.

Increasingly, early childhood teachers are serving children who are from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. In order to determine how well early childhood programs are addressing the needs of Latino children and families, FPG has conducted a national survey of state administrators of early childhood programs.

Released in 2004, the survey examined administrators' challenges, strategies, and beliefs around serving Latino children and families. Four types of early childhood programs were represented: child care and Head Start, as well as Part B-Section 619 preschool programs and Part C infant-toddler programs for children with disabilities or at-risk conditions.



According to the survey, the enrollment of Latino children in these early childhood programs is increasing. Of the four programs represented, Head Start administrators estimated the highest percentage (28%) of Latino children enrolled.

“Head Start administrators also reported that more than one-third of the parents of these children primarily speak Spanish and this presents a big challenge with respect to outreach and parental involvement,” says Virginia Buysse, FPG senior scientist and principal investigator of the study.

Across all of these programs, administrators reported that the most urgent challenges in serving the Latino population were the lack of Latino or bilingual staff and the lack of sufficient preparation and training of early childhood professionals. Other challenges given high ratings included communication difficulties with Latino families and a lack of information in Spanish about early childhood programs.

“These findings suggest that communication difficulties continue to serve as a significant barrier for Latino families in terms of their full access and utilization of early childhood services,” Buysse says. “Outreach activities to promote early childhood services must take into account a family’s home language and use many different strategies to make this information widely accessible and acceptable to Latino communities.”

Administrators who reported using more strategies also reported lower ratings on challenges. “This suggests that programs that use a wide variety of strategies to serve Latino families may have found ways to overcome the challenges they initially encountered in working with this population,” says Dina Castro, FPG researcher and co-principal investigator of this study. Among the most frequently used strategies were translating written materials into Spanish, hiring professional interpreters, and referring families to other community agencies. The least frequently used strategies included conducting an assessment of needs and resources specific to the Latino community and preparing parents for leadership roles. Ideally, programs could plan the use of these different strategies systematically to allow a gradual move away from solving immediate problems to working toward goals that have a more lasting impact on the well-being of Latino children and families.

All four groups of administrators gave uniformly high ratings to two different curricular approaches for promoting cultural diversity. These include the *additive* approach (also known as “heroes and holidays”) in which ethnic content, concepts, or themes are added to a standard curriculum, and the *transformational* approach, which involves

embedding materials (e.g., books, artifacts) and activities throughout the curriculum and learning environment to enhance children's appreciation of other racial, ethnic, and cultural experiences. "There is growing consensus that early childhood programs must shift from relying solely on additive strategies toward a transformational approach, the goal of which is to create a classroom environment that not only promotes acceptance of diverse cultural beliefs and practices, but also validates the experiences of children from diverse groups by making these activities an integral part of the classroom's daily routines," Buysse says. Administrators also generally endorsed a third approach for promoting diversity that involves providing additional educational opportunities to increase school readiness for at-risk children from diverse cultural groups. One example of this approach is North Carolina's *More at Four* pre-kindergarten program, which currently serves over 10,000 children in the 2003–2004 school year.

Administrators were asked to rank their use of three parental involvement strategies: providing opportunities for Latino parents to participate in making decisions about program policies, involving Latino parents in their children's education, and encouraging participation of Latino parents in parent education and parent support activities. As a group, Head Start administrators reported the highest mean ratings, and Part C administrators the second highest ratings on all three parental involvement strategies presented.

Experts in the field view the preservation of a child's home language as a critical aspect of language development for English language learners. Administrators responding to this survey generally agreed on the importance of this approach. Further, administrators generally agreed with the notion that learning two languages at the same time does not cause confusion or language delays in young children, and that teaching both languages actually facilitates English language learning—findings consistent with recommendations in the literature.





The study found less agreement among groups of administrators on issues related to child assessment. Administrators generally agreed that standardized tests, if used at all, should be translated into Spanish rather than administered through interpreters. (Some experts propose that a more effective approach would involve increasing the availability of culturally and linguistically competent assessors.) Administrators were divided about whether it was advisable to assess young Latino children in their home language or use both their home language and English (some experts endorse the second approach).

“In many ways, the findings of this survey confirm what we already thought,” says Castro. “We knew the enrollment of Latinos in early childhood programs was increasing. We knew the language barrier was a major challenge. The survey also provided new information about what early childhood programs are doing to meet the needs of Latino children. For instance, it was encouraging to learn how many programs are making an effort to reach out to Latino parents, despite difficulties in communicating with these families.”

The national survey is one component of a larger FPG project called *Nuestros Niños*. As part of this project, FPG researchers are assessing program practices to promote diversity and conducting ethnographic observations in classrooms that enroll Latino children in Florida, North Carolina, and Washington. They also are interviewing parents, teachers, and other professionals participating in their study to examine the same issues addressed in the national survey. |ed|

### To Learn More

#### **Nuestros Niños Project**

[www.fpg.unc.edu/~nuestros/](http://www.fpg.unc.edu/~nuestros/)

*Addressing the Needs of Latino Children: A National Survey of State Administrators of Early Childhood Programs*

[www.fpg.unc.edu/~nuestros/pdfs/NExecSummary.pdf](http://www.fpg.unc.edu/~nuestros/pdfs/NExecSummary.pdf)

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# Taking Up the Challenge

New Voices



**NUEVAS VOCES**

ONE OF THE KEY FINDINGS OF FPG's national survey of early childhood programs is the need for a more qualified workforce to serve the nation's growing Latino community. FPG has responded to that challenge through the creation of New Voices/Nuevas Voces, a project that seeks to enhance the capabilities of a diverse array of professionals working with Latinos in the state of North Carolina.

New Voices gives early childhood professionals and others the training and technical assistance to raise their knowledge, attitudes, and skills in working with culturally and linguistically diverse families. Offered at different locations across North Carolina, the training takes place over a three-day period and covers modules on the foundations of cultural diversity, cross-cultural communication, understanding diverse families and their roles, supporting language development in young English learners, and working with culturally and linguistically diverse children.

"The focus of the training is on Latino families, but the modules' content includes general information about working with families from diverse culture and language backgrounds," says Dina Castro, principal investigator of New Voices.

Lynn Young, a pre-kindergarten teacher in Wake County schools and one of the participants of the New Voices program, used the information to change some of her classroom practices. One example is a storybook activity in which she read the book *Too Many Tamales* with children in her classroom and later sent home an English or Spanish version of the same book (depending on the child's home language) for children to read with their parents. Once the children were familiar with the story, Lynn invited one of the Latina mothers to make tamales at school and share them with the children. On the day of the visit, with help from an interpreter, this mother explained to the children what ingredients are used and how tamales are made.



and works only with other professionals, but from past experience, she knows how valuable cultural sensitivity is in working with families with young children. Haas provides her therapists with materials written in Spanish, which New Voices helped provide. Haas is also trying to weave the content of the training

into workshops on other topics, such as assistive technologies and writing therapy goals.

FPG's New Voices project is now conducting interviews of Latino families to incorporate family perspectives into its training curriculum. Investigators are also working on a book to show service providers how Latino families perceive the services they are getting, and help increase providers' understanding of Latino families strengths and needs. "Rather than a textbook, this represents first-hand experiences of Latino families," Castro says. "It will help service providers understand the perspective of Latino parents."

The New Voices training and technical assistance model is currently being field tested in North Carolina, and will be available to a national audience by the end of the project. This project is funded by the US Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs. |ed|

#### To Learn More

**New Voices/Nuevas Voces Project**

[www.fpg.unc.edu/~nv](http://www.fpg.unc.edu/~nv)

The technical assistance component of the project is supervised by Betsy Ayankoya, co-principal investigator. "We offer six months of technical support to all participants, which includes conference calls to discuss specific areas of interest, on-site consultation, a listserv to allow participants to share news and questions, and access to resources through the project's web page," says Ayankoya.

Participants have included preschool teachers, speech language pathologists, early interventionists, and occupational and physical therapists, among others. One of those is Karen Haas, now a physical therapy consultant in Greenville, North Carolina. Haas received the training as a member of a

regional Early Intervention Training and Technical Assistance System (EITTAS) team.

"I wanted the training so I could be a better consultant to the people I work with, who are other physical therapists," Haas says. "After my training at FPG, I sponsored my own workshop for professionals in northeastern North Carolina on how to more effectively serve the Latino community.

After my training at FPG, I sponsored my own workshop for professionals in northeastern North Carolina on how to more effectively serve the Latino community.

"The FPG [New Voices] staff was extremely responsive," Haas says. "They were willing to work with participants to help them with their particular areas of concern. Based on our feedback, they made revisions to the content for the second training."

Haas does not speak Spanish



# Higher Ed Brings Diversity to Early Childhood Workforce

**E**ARLY EDUCATION AND INTERVENTION PROFESSIONALS increasingly are encountering children and families from a variety of cultures, yet early childhood programs are largely unprepared to address these diverse educational and linguistic needs. One of the key challenges in meeting the needs of our rapidly diversifying population is to increase the diversity of teachers and other early childhood specialists and administrators. While children and adolescents of color will make up as much as 40% of the US youth population by 2005, the majority of our early childhood educators are white and female. Colleges and universities train our educators, yet they have not succeeded in recruiting, retaining and supporting large numbers of racial and ethnic minorities into their early childhood personnel preparation programs. FPG's Walking the Walk program seeks to break this impasse by forging campus-community partnerships across North Carolina dedicated to increasing the number of culturally and linguistically diverse people entering the early childhood profession and supporting faculty who prepare those individuals.

Over the past three years, Walking the Walk has provided training and technical assistance to six teams of university and community college faculty, community providers, parents and state agency leaders. Five of the teams are community based and one is statewide. Several of the former have gone on to develop their own impressive programs.

In Raleigh, team members Patsy Pierce, professor of Child Development at predominantly white Meredith College, and Ida Bailey, former professor at predominantly black Shaw University, developed a collaborative effort known as the Early Intervention Seedlings program. Enacted in 2002, the program brought together Meredith and Shaw students pursuing early childhood teaching degrees to learn how to work with ethnically diverse young children with special needs and their families. The program included classroom instruction by Pierce and Bailey, observation of children with special needs at a Raleigh child care center, and home visits with the children's families. Former students, most of whom are now working as early childhood professionals, give the program uniformly high praise.

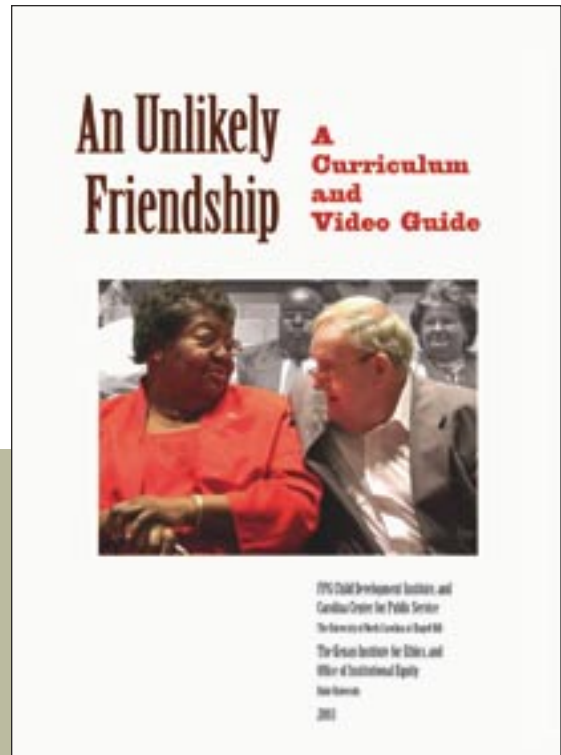
"It was one of my best experiences in college," says Amanda Austin, a former Meredith student and now a preschool teacher at Hillburn Drive Elementary School in Raleigh. "We did a lot of activities both in and out of classrooms. I especially enjoyed the home visits. We worked with a diverse group of families, including an

Hispanic family whose child is now in my class.”

Meredith alumna Tulia Pascht, who now works for Project Enlightenment at the Wake County Public Schools System, also praised the hands-on nature of the experience. “I enjoyed the mixture of classes at Meredith and visits to the Jordan Family Center,” she says. “We were able to work with little children and immediately apply the things we learned in class.”

Gladys Carter is a former Shaw student who now teaches at Carver Elementary School. She valued the  
*(continued on page 14)*

## Video and Curriculum Boosts Race Relations



During the racially divisive decade of the 1970s, an embittered Ku Klux Klansman and an outspoken black woman activist managed to overcome their hatred for one another and form a lifelong mutual friendship. That story, and the film on which it was based, are the subject of a training curriculum developed by FPG and three other Triangle institutions for use in middle school, secondary school, and college audiences.

The 2001 video documentary *An Unlikely Friendship* tells the story of how white supremacist C.P. Ellis and black activist Ann Atwater developed a close friendship despite deeply-held racial prejudices. Producer Diane Bloom says the film is not just about black-white relations in the US, but about all forms of group hatred. “It is a hopeful and optimistic film, because if two people as different as Ann and C.P. could transcend stereotypes and form such a strong and loving bond, so can the rest of us,” Bloom says.

FPG researchers, along with members of the Kenan Institute for Ethics and the Office of Institutional Equity at Duke University, saw the potential for using this film as an educational tool to promote race relations.

“The film was first shown several years ago and audience response was extremely positive, especially in regard to its capacity for educating the general public and students about civil rights and race relations,” says Pam Winton, a senior scientist at FPG. “Based on that, we decided to produce a curriculum and video guide to support its use in the classroom.” Faculty grants from the Carolina Center for Public Service at UNC funded the development of the video and the curriculum. Area teachers and students were involved with the development of the material.

The project was co-directed by Pam Winton and Camille Catlett. The 20-page curriculum and video guide includes objectives, activities, role-plays, and discussion questions for various age levels. The curriculum is free online at [www.fpg.unc.edu/~walkingthewalk/pdfs/unlikely\\_friendship.pdf](http://www.fpg.unc.edu/~walkingthewalk/pdfs/unlikely_friendship.pdf). *An Unlikely Friendship* kit, which includes the video and printed curriculum, is \$69.95 and can be ordered by mailing Character Development Group, PO Box 9211, Chapel Hill, NC 27515-9211, or emailing [respect96@aol.com](mailto:respect96@aol.com), or calling 919.967.2110.

assessment tools as well as the practical experience provided through the training. “We learned about assessment tools to check children for developmental delays and then how to help the parent help the child,” Carter says. “We’d visit the child’s home and track their progress from prior visits. The parents were so receptive. When they saw that their child had developmental delays, they wanted help.”

As much as they valued the work with diverse children and their families, the students marveled at how well they bonded with each other.

“I’m a relatively older person and most of the other students were in their twenties,” Carter says. “I didn’t know how well I would be received. But the first day, we did an exercise called ‘Bump’ where we all shared some difficulty about our lives. When you heard these experiences, you couldn’t help but embrace the other people in the group. All of a sudden, age, race, and economic background didn’t matter.”

“I really enjoyed the richness of the group,” Pascht says. “There were Latinos, African Americans, northerners, southerners, Asian Americans...I learned a lot about how all these different groups are treated and how hard they had to work to overcome this.”

“The sharing of experiences was incredible,” Austin says. “It has helped me relate to my own students. I have an Hispanic child who has some severe learning disabilities. I’ve done three home visits with the family and we’ve learned some ways to help him deal with these problems. The grandmother said to me in Spanish, ‘You’re an angel to our family. Nobody has believed in him before. Now, he loves school.’”

Another Walking the Walk team is located in Winston-Salem, North Carolina. Team member Ellen Wenner has followed up on her FPG training by applying for and receiving funds to translate materials into Spanish for her Early Childhood Credentials class at Forsyth Tech Community College. This past summer, Wenner contracted with Nelly Blanco, a *More at Four* teacher’s assistant, to instruct the classes in Spanish. “We had ten students who were Limited English Proficient, and this prepared them to either work in a child care program or assist the lead teachers,” Wenner says.

This year, Wenner has contracted with Rafael Perez, Director of Customized Spanish Programs at Forsyth Tech, to instruct the Early Childhood Credential classes in Spanish. “The program has been very successful,” Perez says. “I had sixteen Hispanic students in October who wanted to get their license. Some are now working at child

care centers; others will have programs in their own homes. There is a tremendous need for Spanish-speaking child care professionals in this area. The Hispanic community is huge and growing constantly.”

Forsyth Tech has received an additional grant of \$10,000 to translate their Early Childhood Certificate program into Spanish. The school is also looking for college instructors who can teach the courses.

Asked how Walking the Walk has helped her promote diversity in the early childhood workforce, Wenner says, “Quite simply, it was the [FPG] institute that brought a new focus to the issue of diversity for me and my staff. It was the spark to help me rethink what we do in our community and how I, through my position, help others become more aware of the needs of the Latino community and diversity issues in general.”

The state Walking the Walk team identified the challenge that there were multiple diversity initiatives or training opportunities within different state and local agencies, but efforts were fragmented and information about these opportunities was not widely available. The team set the goal of conducting a statewide survey to identify agencies and programs currently providing diversity training. After conducting the survey, the team made the results available online, so others can find out about diversity training resources, programs and agencies, organized by North Carolina county.

Walking the Walk is an outreach project funded by the US Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs and co-directed by Pam Winton and Camille Catlett. | **ed** |

## **To Learn More**

### **Walking the Walk**

[www.fpg.unc.edu/~walkingthewalk](http://www.fpg.unc.edu/~walkingthewalk)

### **Diversity Resource Guide**

[www.fpg.unc.edu/whatsnew/pub\\_summary.cfm?apubid=321](http://www.fpg.unc.edu/whatsnew/pub_summary.cfm?apubid=321)

### **Moving Towards Cross-Cultural Competence in Lifelong Personnel Development - A Review of the Literature**

#### **Technical Report #3**

October 2000

by Ann H. Hains, Eleanor W. Lynch, & Pamela J. Winton

[www.clas.uiuc.edu/techreport/tech3.html](http://www.clas.uiuc.edu/techreport/tech3.html)

### **Database of diversity training opportunities in North Carolina**

[www.fpg.unc.edu/~walkingthewalk/diversity\\_survey/trainings\\_avail.cfm](http://www.fpg.unc.edu/~walkingthewalk/diversity_survey/trainings_avail.cfm)

# NIH Aids Scientists at FPG

As part of its efforts to increase diversity among early childhood professionals, FPG seeks grants to support research being conducted by its own staff through a special program offered by the National Institutes of Health (NIH). Launched in 1989, NIH's Research Supplements for Underrepresented Minorities program was established to address the shortage of minority scientists participating in biomedical research and the health related sciences. The program offers grants in the form of administrative supplements to support research activities and career development from high school to the faculty level. The funds are available only to principal investigators already holding NIH grants.

For 2003, NIH awarded administrative supplements to two grants under the direction of FPG director Don Bailey. These supplements will be used to enhance the work of two African American staff members—Lynette Aytch and Blair Edwards. Aytch holds a doctorate in school psychology and has completed a post-doctorate fellowship in early intervention at FPG. She is lead author of the *Early Intervention Services Assessment Scale (EISAS)* and is principal investigator for the Quality Care for Children initiative (QCCI) grant funded by the District of Columbia's Office of Early Childhood Development. As PI of the QCCI project, Aytch trains a corps of early childhood professionals to provide consultation and technical assistance to child care providers to improve the quality of infant-toddler care.



**Aytch**

The NIH supplement will support her participation in the Fragile X Center research team. Her research will focus on parent adaptation and well-being in caring for a child with Fragile X syndrome (FXS), the most common genetic disorder of mental retardation syndrome.

“At FPG, my work has principally focused on instrument development and outreach projects,” Aytch says. “At this point

**Edwards**



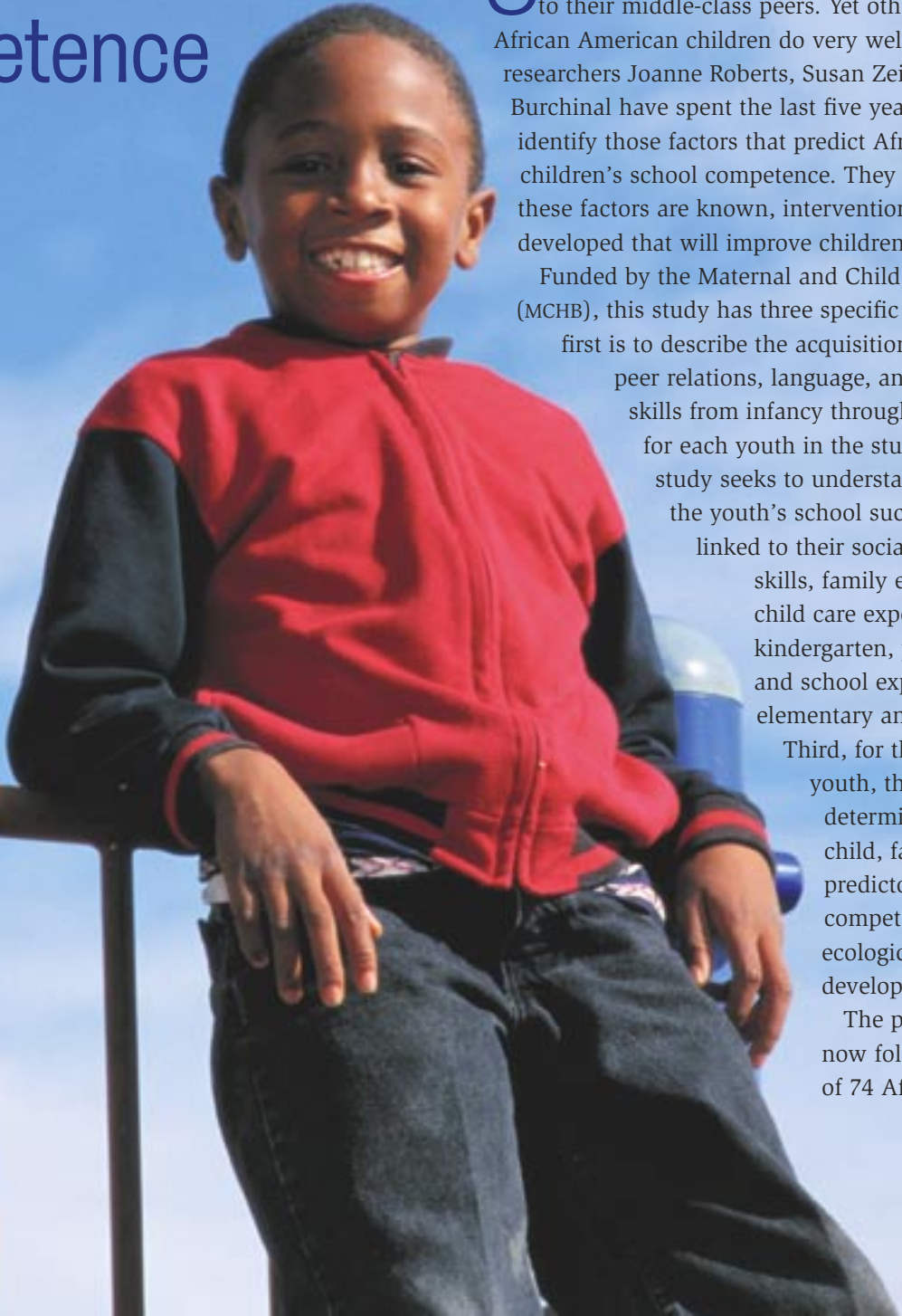
in my career, my goal is to further enhance my research skills through collaboration with a multidisciplinary research team. I am particularly interested in understanding cultural-ethnic influences on adaptation and well-being in families of color with a child with FXS. This supplement offers a wonderful opportunity to develop as a research scientist and be part of a cutting-edge project.”

Edwards holds a Bachelor of Science degree with a focus in psychology from UNC-Chapel Hill. She began work with FPG in an administrative support position, and with the help of the NIH supplement, has advanced to a research assistant position working on two longitudinal cognitive studies. She is currently receiving training in the use of assessment tools for FXS and collecting data related to academic achievement, attention, memory, and executive function abilities in children with this condition.

“I am interested in all aspects of child development, but especially in working with special populations in longitudinal research design,” Edwards says. “My particular interest in school psychology will be especially helpful to the project, since many aspects of the protocol concern cognitive development and neuropsychological performance. This project will be very beneficial to my future goals, such as graduate school. Furthermore, this supplement provides greater insight into the field of research.” ■

# Secrets to Success

## African American Children's School Competence

A young African American boy is sitting on a playground structure, smiling broadly. He is wearing a red and black zip-up jacket and blue jeans. The background is a clear blue sky with some light clouds. The playground structure has a wooden railing and blue and white posts.

SOME AFRICAN AMERICAN CHILDREN from low-income families do not succeed as well in school compared to their middle-class peers. Yet other low-income African American children do very well in school. FPG researchers Joanne Roberts, Susan Zeisel, and Peg Burchinal have spent the last five years seeking to identify those factors that predict African American children's school competence. They hope that once these factors are known, intervention efforts can be developed that will improve children's school success.

Funded by the Maternal and Child Health Bureau (MCHB), this study has three specific objectives. The first is to describe the acquisition of social skills, peer relations, language, and academic skills from infancy through adolescence for each youth in the study. Second, the study seeks to understand the extent the youth's school success can be linked to their social skills, language skills, family environment, child care experiences prior to kindergarten, peer relations, and school experiences in elementary and middle schools.

Third, for the same group of youth, the study seeks to determine the multiple child, family, and school predictors of school competence within an ecological model of child development.

The project leaders are now following a group of 74 African American



children primarily from low-income families, whose development, family, and school environments they have prospectively documented since infancy.

“What’s really unique about this project is the length of time we’ve been able to follow these children,” Roberts says. “There are few studies that have followed a large group of African American children from infancy through elementary school.”

In terms of child measures, researchers have assessed the children’s language, cognitive development, Afro-cultural beliefs and practices, social behavior, peer adjustment, and school competence. Family measures have included such factors as maternal education, parental involvement, and monitoring. For school measures, researchers have assessed such factors as classroom quality, teachers’ perceptions of relationships with students, and classroom demographics.

Data collection has been completed for the first two phases of the project through fifth grade and is now being analyzed. The findings reaffirm the importance of the early childhood environment. Research has found that the responsiveness and support of the home environment predicted children’s language development and academic achievement from infancy through the first three years of elementary school. Additionally, findings revealed the importance of quality child care on children’s language development.

“This stresses the importance of the home environment in a child’s language development, which has important implications for families,” Burchinal says. “It also stresses the importance of a high quality child care environment. These factors are going to impact children’s chances for success for years to come.”

Roberts, Zeisel, and Burchinal are now into the third phase of the project, which will follow the youth from sixth through eighth grade. This phase of the project will look

more closely at peer relations by adding to the sample a best friend for each of the study youth.

“Essentially, we want to know who the youth in our project socialize with and how that impacts their school competence,” Zeisel says.

This year, researchers will be submitting a grant to study the youths’ use of African American vernacular English and how that impacts their school success. |ed|

### To Learn More

Preschool to School Project

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Parents’ report of vocabulary and grammatical development of African American preschoolers: Child and environmental associations. Roberts, J. E., Burchinal, M., & Durham, M. (1999). *Child Development*, 70(1), 92-106.

# Children's Social Identities in Culturally Diverse Schools



**P**UBLIC SCHOOLS NATIONWIDE must strive to accommodate the varied academic and social needs of culturally diverse student bodies, foster tolerance among students, and ensure students' safety. To meet these challenges, school administrators and teachers require an understanding of the ways in which social differences such as race, ethnicity, gender, class, and ability impact how children view themselves, their peers, and the world around them. FPG scientist Debra Skinner's ethnographic study, *Children's Constructions and Negotiations of Social Identities in Culturally Diverse Schools* (funded by the W. T. Grant Foundation), seeks to improve our understanding of how elementary school students, specifically fourth and fifth grade students, understand and negotiate human differences and similarities in and beyond their classrooms. The research team, which also includes FPG senior scientist Virginia Buysse and project ethnographers Rebecca Schaffer and Tammy Morgan, is conducting several hundred hours of classroom observations and interviews with approximately 150 students and 8 teachers at 2 diverse public schools in North Carolina over a 2-year period. The goal of this research is to produce a detailed account of the ways in which pre-adolescent students perceive themselves and others, how these students interact

with their peers, and how schools' policies and practices influence the students beliefs and practices about diversity.

Skinner's study is designed to capture the language that students use to classify various "social types" within their schools. These terms are often based on physical appearance, social class differences, race/ethnicity, academic ability, and other characteristics deemed important by students in particular contexts. For example, preliminary analyses suggest that terms such as "nerd" and "retard" are commonly used by fourth and fifth graders to classify students based on perceived academic ability, to indicate or explain a student's lack of popularity, or

to tease, taunt, or put down another student. "Another common term that the children use to describe, and often to tease and taunt each other, is 'gay.' They sometimes use it to describe students who behave in a manner that is stereotypically identified with the opposite gender, such as when a girl plays a 'boy's game' during recess or when a boy hugs someone. They also use it as a more general taunt to express their dislike for another student," Morgan says. Students who chronically violate classroom norms for appearance or behavior are often singled out by their peers and labeled as "crazy" or "different."

Linguistic terms or labels for certain social types encapsulate bodies of cultural knowledge that students draw upon not only to describe other students but also to demonstrate their own relationship to a particular cultural group. For example, students who express an interest in hip-hop culture

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One significant preliminary finding is that teachers who employ critical multicultural lessons that explore histories of inequality and oppression, incorporate students' knowledge of their own cultural backgrounds, encourage students to connect what they are learning to their own lives, and provide safe spaces in which students can openly explore their ideas and feelings about sensitive topics are best able to promote true tolerance and understanding.

and/or rap music may use the term “shortie” to refer to all female students or the term “bling” or “bling bling” to refer to jewelry. In doing so, these students attempt to prove that they are conversant in this vocabulary and, therefore, affiliated with this culture. Schaffer notes that students' use of such terms often provides insight into cultural boundaries that they deem important. For example, when a white student with few or no African American friends uses a term such as “bling bling,” that student may be accused of “acting black” by African American peers. However, a white student who has a number of African American friends may use the same term without causing any concern among African American peers, although that student may be accused of “acting black” by other white students. Arguments about whether or not a student is “acting black” provide important windows into the ways in which students understand and help construct boundaries between social groups in the classroom and beyond. They are also strong examples of symbolic encounters, which arouse the emotions of those involved and require participants to reconsider their own identities and their relationships to others. These encounters often reveal some

of the sources of information about group differences on which children draw when making social distinctions. These sources may include school curricula, the mass media, parents, religious institutions, and other domains that provide information about social categories.

The study also examines peer relationships and friendships within culturally diverse classrooms to identify the extent to which social differences and school practices affect student relationships. Researchers will examine factors that influence friendship patterns such as ability tracking, social class, religious affiliations, and nationality. The study is also concerned with the ways in which features of the school and classroom environment influence children's understandings and experiences of cultural diversity. Multicultural curricula and ability tracking (pull-out programs for academically gifted and/or special needs students) are two of the features that appear to be significant factors in students' understandings of difference and interactions with their peers. One significant preliminary finding is that teachers who employ critical multicultural lessons that explore histories of inequality and oppression, incorporate students' knowledge of their own cultural backgrounds, encourage students to connect what they are learning to their own lives, and provide safe spaces in which students can openly explore their ideas and feelings about sensitive topics are best able to promote true tolerance and understanding. When children are encouraged to ask questions and explore their own complicated relationships to cultural identities and social issues, they are better able to understand their own social positions and empathize with other students. Another significant preliminary finding is that assigning bilingual students who are fluent in English to assist students who are not yet proficient in English can produce a range of social outcomes for both students. For example, while some bilingual students expressed pride in being able to help their peers and saw these requests as opportunities to make new friends, others were concerned that being paired with a student who lacked English proficiency would reduce the amount of time they would be able to spend with other friends.

In addition to presenting these and other findings to researchers and practitioners, Skinner and her colleagues are working closely with school teachers and the Global Fund for Children to develop recommendations for improving multicultural curricula to help children value diversity and become productive, caring members of a global society. |ed|

# Trying on Different Hats

Matt, a 10-year-old Caucasian fourth grader with a wiry build, a very light complexion, a pale blonde brush cut, and bright blue eyes, provides an excellent example of the ways in which children draw on a wide variety of cultural symbols and public discussions in creating their own identities and understandings of the world.

One morning, Matt entered the classroom, chanting lines from a popular rap song and bobbing his head up and down. Later that day, during a social studies lesson on slavery, Matt told the class that he "hates slavery because most of my friends are African American." He later repeated this information to a visiting researcher and then explained that slavery "isn't right because no one should treat people that way." Matt was outspoken about his feelings on this topic. At the same time, Matt was wearing a confederate soldier cap, which he bought on a field trip to a local history museum. He was also wearing a baseball hat (backwards and underneath the confederate soldier cap), a bandage on his right cheekbone (similar to the bandage worn by the rapper, Nelly, who wears it in honor of his incarcerated brother), and an oversized basketball jersey. He said he "was for the South" in the Civil War, because he loves the South *and* because he hates slavery. His "best buddy," who is African American, nods his head as Matt explains his position and then informs Matt that they had better hurry to get a good seat in the cafeteria. They run off, laughing about some lyrics that Matt has been working on.

# Finding the Stars in a Multi-Colored Sky

**W**HEN TEACHERS WITNESS A YOUNG CHILD BENDING A PAPER CLIP INTO ODD SHAPES, refusing to take no for an answer, or pushing classmates into engaging in some questionable activity, they may well see signs of trouble that need to be suppressed. These are often the children who do not succeed in school. FPG senior scientist Mary Ruth Coleman wants teachers to consider another possibility—that this child is a natural scientist whose talents need to be encouraged.

Acting on the recommendations of FPG's survey on African American Children's School Success, Coleman has developed a program called U-STARS (which stands for Using Science Talents and Abilities to Recognize Students) designed to both identify and nurture the talents of children at a young age, especially those considered at-risk for school failure.

"Teachers tend to look at these kids with an at-risk mind set and ask, 'how can we discipline them?' " Coleman says. "But instead of discouraging this behavior, we want teachers to look at enrichment activities that take *advantage* of this curiosity, this tenacity and consider these kids 'at-potential.' The field that values these traits is science."

U-STARS has three components: an observation scale used to identify students with potential in science, a family intervention component designed to engender understanding and support from the students' families, and science and literature materials designed for use in elementary school classes. Coleman has designed these components so that any one component can be used independently from the others. "Replication of the entire project takes a high level of commitment by the entire school," she says. "Therefore, we've designed it so individual teachers can use just parts of it even if their school does not choose to adopt the model."

For the observation component, teachers are given 180 hours of preparation in how to recognize gifted behavior in children. U-STARS has developed an observation form through which teachers can note behaviors, such as "asks unusual, provocative questions" or "is able to lose self in something of interest" that indicate curiosity and creativity or strong interests.

The science and literature materials have been developed by U-STARS in a way that allows science to be incorporated into everyday literacy activities. Sherri Wells, a second grade teacher at Spring Hope Elementary School in Spring Hope, North Carolina, offers an example. "We just finished an animal module in

which we read a story about animals in winter and what habitats they need to survive,” Wells says. “I had the children cut out a picture of an animal from a magazine and come up with their own habitat—shelter, food.

“Children thrive on it,” Wells adds. “Those who may struggle with reading or paying attention enjoy the scientific thought process much more than having you sit there and read to them.”

Alice Freeman teaches first grade at Johnson Elementary School in Rocky Mount. She says U-STARS training gave her a new focus and excitement about science. “U-STARS was a great experience,” Freeman says. “I realized we didn’t reach all of our children by teaching just reading and math. When we did science, you’d see real excitement, particularly in some of the lower performing children.”

All U-STARS materials are tied to the standard course of study for grades K-3, as well as to national science standards and national literature standards. “Other approaches to identifying bright children who have been underrepresented have required teachers to add in pieces from outside the curriculum,” Coleman says. “That pulled students and teachers away from the core classes and took away precious teaching time.”

U-STARS evolved out of a project run in the mid-1990s with schools in two eastern North Carolina counties—Johnston and Northampton. The goal of this project was early identification of children with potential. Researchers developed the observation form and taught teachers how to do screening of young children.

Having laid the seed for the program, FPG then sought a grant to develop the science and literature model for teachers and a family support component. The project was to be run in three northeastern North Carolina counties (Nash-Rocky Mount, Edgecombe, and Northampton) that have high percentages of minorities. The first year of the project, Hurricane Floyd hit eastern North Carolina and destroyed or closed many of the schools. Despite this setback, 40 teachers received 180 hours of training, virtually all of whom have stayed with the project.

With a grant from the Jacob Javits Foundation, U-STARS is now being expanded nationwide. More than 35 school districts in North Carolina are officially signed onto the project. The State of Louisiana has committed to U-STARS, as have school districts in Colorado, and the cities of



Albuquerque and Baltimore. The grant provides for a random comparison of schools employing U-STARS with non-participating schools. The latter will be folded into the project after two years. These schools have committed release

time for their teachers and in-kind support for training.

“It’s a big commitment,” says Coleman. “The schools will help us with data collection across the district vis-à-vis opportunities and access to advanced learning for K-12 students.”

U-STARS PLUS, the latest version of the program, is developing a leadership cadre in participating school districts to help sustain the model. Teachers who are trained under the program can act (be hired) as consultants.

Coleman and colleagues have done some preliminary data collection validating the observation form. “Our observation of and teachers’ identification of talented kids was a one-to-one match,” Coleman says. “What teachers really like about the project is that it helps them relate to the students differently. The observation tool becomes a new set of lenses. The teachers might only do individual observations for three-to-six kids per class, but once they start, it changes the way they view all of their kids.”

And the program is spiking teacher interest as well. “I’ve been teaching for ten years and was getting tired of teaching the same-old same-old,” Wells says. “U-STARS was an opportunity for me to learn something new. I enjoy science and now, for the first time, I feel comfortable teaching it.”

“So many youngsters and teachers have lost their passion for learning,” says Susan Lamar, U-STARS board member and former director of Gifted Education programs at the Nash-Rocky Mount Schools. “Science is the hook for bringing the excitement back. Even children that might be discipline problems turn around and learn. These lessons enable their talents to shine.” |ed|

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**Project U-STARS**  
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# From Different Worlds

## The challenge to understand the diverse social environments of children

**E**THNICITY, RACE, AND CULTURE continue to be among the most difficult and pressing issues we face as a society. This is true for several reasons. North Carolina, like many other states in the nation, is undergoing dramatic transformation as waves of immigrants are absorbed into communities which must accommodate the language, mores and behavioral patterns of the new arrivals. For native North Carolinians the difficulty of this challenge applies as much to the hordes of Yankees pouring in from the north as it does to Mexican immigrants from the south. These dramatic population shifts are coming just at a time when the black/white achievement gap and the stubbornly high poverty rates among African- and Native American children remind us how far we still must go to realize the promise of racial equality in education and employment.

The research projects described in this issue of *Early Developments* broaden our understanding of the problems we must confront to address the needs of diverse populations. This work is a testament to the importance of the ethnicity and culture to early child care and education.

FPG is making an important contribution in its positive focus on competence and finding solutions. A preponderance of national research involving ethnicity and culture gravitates toward the negative pole of risk and failure. Researchers at FPG have responded to the call to understand the conditions that contribute to the success, competence, and resilience of children of color and their families. Even more work is needed. In pursuing this line of research, we will likely realize that factors that contribute to competence in one group may not do the same for another group. Why? Because their life conditions and social histories differ. For example, the advantages high socio-economic status (SES) offers to whites for academic achievement do not accrue in equal measure to African Americans.

Pervasive economic inequities and continuing racial inequalities have influenced who attends college and in this way created an imbalance in the pool of teachers and scholars who are ethnic minorities. Two projects focus on increasing the number of African American and Latino teachers and scholars in the early childhood field and enhancing their skills in working with diverse populations. Another project demonstrates that cross ethnic prejudice and suspicion can be modified through person to person contact. Together they represent efforts to create school environments more responsive to ethnically diverse children by developing scholars and teachers who reflect the diversity of



**Oscar A. Barbarin** is the L. Richardson and Emily Preyer Bicentennial Distinguished Professor for Strengthening Families, School of Social Work, and Senior Investigator, FPG Child Development Institute. He directs the Familial and Social Environments Study, which is part of the National Center for Early Development & Learning (NCEDL) at FPG Child Development Institute.

...we must not only understand more fully how economic, ethnic and cultural diversity gives rise to culturally diverse behaviors, beliefs, priorities and problem-solving preferences but also how to transform that knowledge into practices which reach across the economic and social divide.

the children and by creating a corps of educators who engage respectfully with those who are different.

Because families exercise extraordinary influence over development, the success of education and other social interventions may ultimately depend on how well such programs are articulated with and reinforced by socialization practices that occur in the family and neighborhood, as well as in schools or child care programs. *The Familial and Social Environments Study* which I lead explores the social context of a diverse group of children enrolled in public sponsored pre-kindergarten programs. This project points to several findings. Children of different ethnic and cultural groups are growing up in somewhat different worlds, developing somewhat distinct world views, aspirations and sense of their place in the world outside of their ethnic or racial communities. This is not only reflected in language, customs and mores. It permeates the very nature of family life and shapes day-to-day experiences which differ considerably across socio-economic, ethnic, racial, and cultural lines. Some children grow up in households with two biological parents and children; others in extended multi-generational households. Some children grow up in families with parents who have stable and satisfying employment which offers predictable wages, personal autonomy and flexible work schedules. Others live in homes where jobs are regimented, lack meaning and offer little security. Even these simple differences in household composition and work life have tremendous implications on how parents socialize, monitor and respond in children's lives. Some children have all of their needs met and many of their wants indulged. Others go to bed hungry, make do with second-hand clothing or toys and endure illness and injuries without appropriate medical care. Level of English proficiency, cultural beliefs, values, and problem-solving styles also influence the diversity of

children's experiences. This breach between those who are materially advantaged and those who suffer hardship, and between ethnic groups who have been marginalized and treated as dispensable and those who have occupied positions of

privilege in American society was first recognized by the Kerner Commission on Civil Disorder. These differences come to a head in school, where great effort and good will must be invoked to connect children who arrive from such different places and environments.

This work is important because of the challenge we face in reducing disparities that now exist in educational outcomes for children of color. Our ability to make the dream of educational equity a reality will rest in part on our ability to understand the child's social and familial environment and to apply that knowledge in building a bridge between school and to the child's world outside of the school. To be successful, we must not only understand more fully how economic, ethnic and cultural diversity gives rise to culturally diverse behaviors, beliefs, priorities and problem-solving preferences but also how to transform that knowledge into practices which reach across the economic and social divide.

The challenge we face is to understand the implications of these differences for the developmental needs of children and the educational goals we wish them to achieve. Ultimately, our challenge is not only to understand but also to respect, to value, and to work with this diversity. And if that was not difficult enough, there is one final test. Can we understand and embrace diversity without invoking ethnocentrism, inciting racism, and undermining our sense of unity as a nation? The answer is simple. We must! |ed|

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