Linguistic Diversity and Early Literacy: Serving Culturally Diverse Families in Early Head Start

Prepared by

Early Head Start National Resource Center @ ZERO TO THREE

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
Administration for Children and Families
Administration on Children, Youth and Families
Head Start Bureau
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This document was developed by the staff of the Early Head Start National Resource Center @ ZERO TO THREE in collaboration with the Head Start Bureau. The contents of the paper are not intended to be an interpretation of policy.

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The EHS NRC is funded by contract #105-98-2055
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
Administration for Children and Families
Administration on Children, Youth, and Families
Head Start Bureau

On the Cover
CESA #11, Early Head Start, Turtle Lake, WI

(c) 2001
ISBN #0-943657-53-9
Printed in the United States of America
First Printing, December 2001
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INTRODUCTION

Early literacy refers to the experiences and developmental skills from birth through early childhood that promote the later development of reading and writing. Early Head Start (EHS) programs serving children and families whose primary language is other than English have a unique challenge and responsibility to create an environment that is culturally responsive and rich in literacy experiences for all participating families.

EHS programs provide literacy experiences in a variety of settings. Some programs may have predominantly English-speaking families and may be struggling with how to meet the needs of the one or two families for whom English is a second language. Other programs are serving a large number of English-speaking families and non-English-speaking families simultaneously. At the same time, still other programs are providing services to large numbers of families who reflect many different cultures and who use a variety of languages. In all of these situations, programs are required to:

- provide child development experiences that promote the child's cognitive and language skills;
- create family literacy experiences that recognize a child's parents as his or her primary teachers and that promote child development, adult education, and self-sufficiency; and
- support cultural diversity by recognizing the importance of the child's home language and culture to his or her social, emotional, physical, and cognitive development.

Although literacy experiences play an important role in early childhood education, the acquisition of literacy skills is not the only criteria for school readiness and should not be the sole focus of early childhood programs. The characteristics that children develop in the early years—confidence, curiosity, self-control, and cooperativeness—provide the motivation to want to learn and the skills needed to function effectively later in school and in society (National Research Council Institute of Medicine, 2000; ZERO TO THREE, 1992). These characteristics are formed during the earliest months and years of life, are intimately tied to a child's sense of self, and are deeply rooted in family and culture.

This context of the child in relation to his or her caregivers is the context within which we consider how the foundation for literacy is developed in infancy and
toddlerhood. Before children can learn to read or write, they first learn to understand and speak a given language through interactions with their primary caregivers. Thus, this paper will largely focus on early language development in children from culturally and linguistically diverse families and the implications for later literacy development. The first section of the paper is an overview of how very young children learn language and the different contexts in which language acquisition occurs. We share some of the current research on language development in bilingual children and some of the particular risks faced by low-income, bilingual children in the area of literacy development. The second section of the paper focuses on family literacy and the process to create literacy-rich environments in culturally and linguistically diverse settings. The third section provides strategies for using program management systems to support family literacy as well as cultural and linguistic diversity. The paper concludes with profiles of two EHS programs that serve culturally diverse families and these programs’ approaches to literacy development.

**Child Development and Early Literacy**

Grantee and delegate agencies must provide for the development of each child’s cognitive and language skills by:

(iii) Promoting interaction and language use among children and between children and adults; and

(iv) Supporting emerging literacy and numeracy development through materials and activities according to the developmental level of each child.

*45 CFR 1304.21(a)(4)(iii)–(iv)*

Infants and toddlers learn language within the context of their natural environments. Formally teaching infants and toddlers how to understand or speak languages is not necessary. Children and caregivers naturally attempt to communicate with one another in a variety of ways through their daily interactions. Tone of voice, gestures, and facial expressions all communicate important messages to others. Infants and toddlers who are culturally and linguistically diverse need environments in which they can communicate with their caregivers regardless of the languages spoken by the children or their caregivers. In the case where the primary caregiver speaks only English, that caregiver should communicate naturally with infants and toddlers in a variety of ways by responding to their needs, establishing warm relationships, and providing them with a rich, interactive environment.
EHS Programs may be challenged with how to honor a child's home language and culture when their child development and family services are primarily in English. Program staff members should be aware of both how children learn languages and the context in which they learn languages to provide culturally and linguistically appropriate services to children. The context for how children learn languages includes the different kinds of environments to which the child is exposed. A few of the many possible contexts include the following:

- Only the non-English language is spoken in the home by all family members, and the family lives in a community that also uses that language.
- Only the non-English language is spoken in the home, but the family is situated in a predominantly English-speaking community.
- Particular family members speak only the non-English language, but other family members speak English.
- All family members speak both the non-English and English languages.

**Learning to Speak, Read, and Write**

Literacy skills begin from birth and unfold in the context of relationships between the infant and his or her caregivers. Newborns first learn about language as they hear the voices of their caregivers during the everyday routines of eating, dressing, and sleeping. Within a few short months, they are responding in turn with their own vocalizations and verbal play. Eventually, their random coos and vocalizations begin to approximate words and symbolize significant people or objects. Even young infants enjoy being read to and will look at simple picture books as well as babble in response to their caregivers’ storytelling. Children who see the significant people in their lives enjoying reading and writing feel an irresistible urge to imitate their behavior, pretending to “read” magazines and newspapers or scribble with crayons. These early literacy skills emerge in all children when they are exposed to these language experiences. However, also important is to recognize that some culturally and linguistically diverse families may have early language and literacy practices that differ from the American culture. For example, some cultures have a rich history of using storytelling rather than the written word for education and entertainment. EHS programs should be respectful of these differences and offer individualized services to meet the literacy needs of all families.

**The Cultural and Linguistic Context of Early Literacy Experiences**

Culturally and linguistically diverse families provide early literacy experiences to children in a variety of ways. In some circumstances, very young children may be exposed only to their non-English language and culture in their homes and communities. If this circumstance is the case, then children before the age of 3 years will develop their non-English language as their first language. These families may prefer to wait until their native language is firmly established and then introduce English to their child at some point after the age of 3 years. Other families may choose to simultaneously expose their children to their native language and culture and to the English language and American culture. Children
who are exposed to a second language after the age of 3 years will experience a different process and context for language learning than children who are exposed to a second language in infancy. Because of the differences in these cases, the early literacy experiences that EHS programs develop for these families also will differ.

Non-English speaking infants and toddlers are exposed to the English language and American culture in many ways. They may hear English and experience American culture in interactions with family members, in child-care settings, on community outings, through exposure to the media, and when receiving services through EHS programs. The degree of exposure to a second language and the use of the two languages will vary among children within and after the first 3 years of life. Some children may be consistently exposed to two languages but in very different contexts. For example, some children may be in an environment in which caregivers use both languages interchangeably, moving back and forth between English and another language within a single conversation or even within a single sentence. Other children might experience caregivers who use different languages in different environments. For example, the child may hear only the non-English language spoken in the home and English outside the home.

When children participate in early care and education settings outside of the home, providers should be aware of how the child’s home language and culture is reflected in the child-care setting. Infants and toddlers are just forming their sense of identity and self-esteem, and they

IN PRACTICE: Child Development Experiences That Promote the Child’s Cognitive and Language Skills

Recognize the link between early language development and later literacy skills. Learning language is the first step in learning how to read and write.

- **Read aloud to children frequently and early in infancy.** Even the youngest infants are stimulated by the sound of your voice and simple visual images.
- **Choose books, music, and other materials that reflect the range of cultures and languages of participating families so all children can see images and hear words and music with which they can identify.**
- **Talk directly to children, even in early infancy.** For example, you can describe what you are doing as you pick them up for diapering, a change of clothes, or a bath. Describe what the infant is experiencing so he or she can begin to connect words with actions.
- **Make books with children by assembling collections of photos or clips of magazine pictures that represent culturally diverse families and life experiences.**
- **Imitate infants’ vocalizations, creating a back-and-forth dialogue.** This reciprocal turn-taking sets the stage for later language learning.
- **Provide opportunities for young infants to use the fine-motor muscles of their hands and fingers in manipulative play with rattles and other safe objects.** Older toddlers enjoy manipulating crayons and other writing utensils. Allow children to scribble without their markings having to represent anything. First, they must enjoy the process of creating before they will be ready to intentionally write letters or draw pictures.
- **Encourage children to talk to their peers.** Help them to find the words to express their ideas and feelings to one another.
- **Sing songs with children.** Infants and toddlers love fingerplays such as the “itsy bitsy spider” or “pat-a-cake.”
- **Recognize that children learn language and literacy skills at different rates.** Train staff members to recognize the signs of language delay and the range of typical development. Use community resources for early identification and referral for language problems. Assist parents in obtaining access to culturally and linguistically appropriate developmental evaluations of their children.
depend on the sensitivity of their caretakers to respond to them in ways that affirm their developing sense of self. The Head Start Program Performance Standards recognize the importance of reflecting each child’s home language and culture in the EHS setting.

Grantee and delegate agencies’ program of services for infants and toddlers must encourage:

(i) The development of secure relationships in out-of-home care settings for infants and toddlers by having a limited number of consistent teachers over an extended period of time. Teachers must demonstrate an understanding of the child’s family culture and, whenever possible, speak the child’s language.

45 CFR 1304.21(b)(1)(i)

Although continuity between home and other environments has clear advantages, finding qualified staff members who reflect diverse cultures and languages can be difficult. Staff development and training in the area of cultural diversity is critical for the success of any program. Staff members should have opportunities to explore their attitudes and beliefs about working with families who are from a different culture than themselves. Programs should identify the specific challenges that staff members struggle with when dealing with culturally and linguistically diverse families and should provide training about culturally and linguistically appropriate services to families as well as to infants and toddlers.

Language Development in Bilingual Children

As discussed above, children are exposed to both their non-English language and the English language in many different ways within their own families and in community settings outside of the home. Low-income families from minority cultures typically have fewer resources and options available to them with respect to their child’s education than more affluent families have. In addition, a particular danger lies in the messages, both subtle and overt, from the popular culture that convey the notion that the non-English culture is irrelevant and the non-English language is an impediment to success in school and later in life (Tabors & Snow, in press). EHS programs need to educate participating families to make informed decisions about their child’s early language and literacy goals and then to support families in those decisions.

Research in the area of bilingual language acquisition in very young children is scarce. The complexities of the environments in which children are exposed to more than one language are numerous. Bilingualism may best be conceptualized as a continuum (Tabors & Snow, in press). One end of the spectrum represents the children who are raised speaking the non-English language in a non-English community with minimal exposure to English. The other end of the spectrum represents the children who are primarily exposed to the English language and minimally proficient in the non-English language. In every case, language proficiency has an effect on literacy development. Researchers have identified particular risks that bilingual children face as they develop language in the early years.
Lack of continuity in language development: Very young children who experience the same language in both the home setting and out-of-home settings follow a typical course of language acquisition and preliteracy development in whichever language they speak. Children with a well-developed primary language are generally able to transfer those skills to proficiency in a second language (Wong Fillmore, 1991). A lack of continuity can disrupt the language development in both languages, leaving the child vulnerable to language delays and literacy problems later.

Smaller vocabulary size in each language: Vocabulary size is tied directly to reading skill. Researchers have noted that, although the number of words that a bilingual child knows across both languages is comparable to that of monolingual (one language), English-speaking children, the size of the vocabulary in each language is smaller. Certainly, the amount of time the child is exposed to each language influences how sophisticated his or her language skills are in receptive (ability to understand) domains and in expressive (ability to verbalize) domains.

Limited literacy experiences in both languages: Some families are eager for their children to learn the English language to help them succeed in school and in the American society. They may choose to limit the children’s exposure to the non-English language to foster the acquisition of English. At the same time, these parents may not be adequately proficient in the English language to support the higher-level preliteracy activities that the children need to become literate in English. If the children are not experiencing these literacy activities in either language, they are at an increased risk of failing to achieve literacy skills in both languages.

The implications for early childhood settings such as EHS are numerous. Program staff members can help parents identify their literacy goals, educate parents on the advantages and disadvantages of various early learning environments, and help parents become advocates for their children. Most importantly, EHS programs can provide an environment that recognizes that the quality of the interactions, not the language of the interaction, is what promotes very young children’s interest and ability to communicate in meaningful ways with the world around them.

Family Literacy

The term “family literacy services” means services that are of sufficient intensity in terms of hours, and of sufficient duration, to make sustainable changes in a family, and that integrate all of the activities:

(a) Interactive literacy activities between parents and their children.

(b) Training for parents regarding how to be the primary teacher for their children and full partners in the education of their children.

(c) Parent literacy training that leads to economic self-sufficiency.

(d) An age-appropriate education to prepare children for success in school and life experiences.

Head Start Act, Section 636.[42 U.S.C. 9832](3)(a–d)
Grantee and delegate agencies must provide, either directly or through referrals to other local agencies, opportunities for children and families to participate in family literacy services by:

(i) increasing family access to materials, services, and activities essential to development; and
(ii) assisting parents as adult learners to recognize and address their own literacy goals.

45 CFR 1304.40(e)(4)(i)-(ii)

Family literacy is central to the goals of the Head Start program. The Head Start Act, as amended in 1998, provides a definition of family literacy that specifies the four types of experiences that EHS programs must provide to enrolled families: (1) interactive literacy experiences between parents and children; (2) parent training to help parents become their child's primary teacher and to become full partners in education; (3) parent literacy training that leads to economic self-sufficiency; and (4) age-appropriate education for children to prepare them to succeed in school and later in life.

EHS programs should work in partnership with families to establish specific language goals for children as well as their parents and to help parents establish strong communicative relationships with their children. The language in which service providers offer early literacy experiences to children and families is a critical factor in attaining the specific language outcomes the family has identified for themselves and their children. One family may want to encourage the rapid acquisition of English and may request that books and literacy experiences be delivered only in English. Another family may want to ensure that they preserve their native culture by immersing their child in their native language and delaying English language experiences until after their native language has been well established. EHS programs should respect the family's approach to early literacy and should educate parents about early language development in the context of cultural diversity so they can make informed decisions about their family's literacy goals.

Communication between parent and child forms the foundation for the quality of their relationship. Parents must be able to read and interpret their child's signals and emerging attempts at language for the child to feel understood and valued. If the language goals that parents have for their children are different than the goals that service providers who are working with the family have, then great potential exists for confusing the child and disrupting the parent-child relationship. Service providers who can support parents in establishing secure communicative relationships with their children, help to foster a strong parent-child bond and to promote literacy skills across cultures and languages.

IN PRACTICE: CREATING A LITERACY-RICH ENVIRONMENT IN CULTURALLY DIVERSE SETTINGS

● Help parents to identify literacy goals for themselves and their children.
● Involve parents and families in sharing their language and culture through a range of activities.
● Communicate with the families in a variety of ways using different language approaches and resources. For example, provide information both verbally and in written form.
● Use the Family Partnership Agreement process to address family literacy needs, assets, and goals.
● Collaborate with community partners as well as state and local programs such as public libraries, museums, Even Start, and other family literacy programs.
● Actively involve all parents in curriculum development. Ensure that the curriculum is individualized to support the literacy goals that parents have identified for their children.
● Encourage parents to share music and songs for children that are from other cultures.
● Use visual images (books, posters, photos), furnishings, toys, and foods that reflect the cultural diversity of the families.
● Respect and support the cultural values of families. Create an environment that is open and that accepts differences. This acceptance is reflected in all aspects of how the program is carried out, including how staff members recruit and engage families, how the environment is designed, what toys and other materials are available to families, when and where program services are offered, what community partnerships are provided that support culturally diverse families, and what kinds of daily interactions occur among children, staff, and parents.
**IN PRACTICE: USING MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS TO SUPPORT FAMILY LITERACY AS WELL AS CULTURAL AND LINGUISTIC DIVERSITY**

**PROGRAM PLANNING**

Your Community Assessment will help you identify the cultural and linguistic diversity in the community. The specific needs of the families you enroll will further define your curriculum as well as the short- and long-term objectives of your program. EHS programs and families should work in partnership to achieve the following:

- Identify the languages used in the community and by all the family members in each participating family.
- Identify the language goals for the child and family. (Is the goal to learn the native language first, to learn the native language and English simultaneously, or to learn English first?)
- Consider different program choices with respect to language options. For example, you may be able to offer families a choice of a non-English, home-based program option or a center-based, bilingual option.
- Individualize the curriculum according to the child’s needs. The kinds of literacy experiences offered to families should reflect the individual goals of the families.
- Conduct developmental and language assessments in both languages to obtain accurate information about language development.

**COMMUNICATIONS**

Effective communication systems are important on all levels of interaction, including between staff members and parents, among staff members, between the staff and governing bodies, and between parents within a family unit. Programs who serve culturally and linguistically diverse families but who lack bilingual-bicultural staff members experience particular challenges in ensuring that information is shared in a timely manner, is shared with all appropriate parties, and is shared in culturally sensitive ways.

- Develop a communication system that ensures that all parents will receive ongoing programmatic information. Provide written materials in the language best understood by the parents. Internet-based translation services may be of benefit; however, do ensure that the information has been accurately translated in a way that can be understood by families. These translation services may offer a rough translation that might not precisely convey the information that you intended.
- Provide parents with opportunities to interact formally and informally with staff.
- Provide staff and families with opportunities to learn another language.
- Train staff and families in language and cultural issues.
- Encourage parent participation in EHS activities by creating a welcoming environment that encourages, supports, respects, and values cultural diversity as well as the use and learning of the non-English language.

**RECORD KEEPING AND REPORTING**

A challenge that surfaces in programs serving linguistically diverse families concerns written documents for non-English speaking families. Consider how the forms your program uses in connection with the family (enrollment forms, consent forms, children’s assessments) can be offered in both English and other languages. At times, providing bilingual forms is very difficult for programs to do because they lack qualified bilingual staff members. Nonetheless, EHS programs need to provide alternative ways to record and report important information concerning culturally and linguistically diverse families.

- Consider who needs the information in the written records, and make sure that it is accessible to and understood by all appropriate parties.
- Hire bilingual staff members, use a translator, have written forms available in more than one language, or provide some combination of these services to aid effective record keeping for programs serving non-English speaking families.
- Consider contacting EHS programs that serve large numbers of culturally and linguistically diverse families. These programs may have forms and other resources in different languages that your program could adapt.
- Recruit bilingual volunteers from your families, the community, or other institutions to provide oral and written translation services.

**SELF-ASSESSMENT AND MONITORING**

The annual program self-assessment should include mechanisms for understanding how your program is meeting the needs of culturally and linguistically diverse families. Ask families whether they are comfortable with how their culture and language are represented in program services. Seek feedback from the families you are serving with respect to your success in meeting the families’ literacy goals. Get their perspective and suggestions on how to best represent their culture and language. Integrate appropriate cultural and linguistic materials by taking the following actions:

- Incorporate parents’ suggestions and ideas in all areas when developing a curriculum that includes their language and culture.
- Provide parents opportunities and resources to assess written and visual materials in their non-English language that are appropriate for them and their children.
- Invite an individual who speaks the parent’s native language to talk with the family about how their needs are being met. (Families are often more comfortable sharing this kind of information with someone who is from their own culture and who speaks their native language.)
- Identify and partner with community agencies that can assist your program in providing appropriate cultural and linguistic services.
**Program Management Systems to Support Cultural Diversity and Early Literacy**

In order to help children gain the social competence, skills and confidence necessary to be prepared to succeed in their present environment and with later responsibilities in school and life, grantee and delegate agencies’ approach to child development and education must:

(i) Be developmentally and linguistically appropriate, recognizing that children have individual rates of development as well as individual interests, temperaments, languages, cultural backgrounds, and learning styles: and

(ii) Provide an environment of acceptance that supports and respects gender, culture, language, ethnicity and family composition.

45 CFR 1304.21(a)(1)(i)–(ii)

Grantee and delegate agencies must support the social and emotional development of infants and toddlers by promoting an environment that:

(ii) Supports the emerging communication skills of infants and toddlers by providing daily opportunities for each child to interact with others and to express himself or herself freely.

1304.21(b)(2)(ii)

EHS programs should work in partnership with culturally and linguistically diverse families to determine how best to support their culture and language as well as to design early literacy practices to meet those needs. Service providers should have management systems in place to carry out the necessary services to meet the identified needs.

**Transition Issues: Moving from EHS to Preschool Settings**

The transition from EHS to other early childhood programs provides an opportunity to further assist parents with identifying and advocating for the family’s literacy goals. As children move from EHS into preschool settings and, later, into other educational institutions, parents typically experience increased tension between preserving the home language and culture and controlling the growing influence of the English language and American culture. Parents are better able to manage this tension and give their children the best opportunities for success when families feel supported, respected, and empowered.

EHS programs should be familiar with the various language approaches used by community programs serving preschool children and should help parents understand them also. The language goals and literacy experiences of available preschool programs vary and may be different from what families have experienced in EHS. Keep in mind that parents may have different goals...
for their preschool age children than they had for their infants or toddlers and, thus, may seek a different type of setting.

EHS staff members can help parents make the decision about what kind of a literacy environment they want for their child and how to advocate for what they want as they prepare for preschool. Giving parents some ideas about how the new setting could affect their child’s development is helpful. For example, a child may leave EHS understanding and speaking one language more readily than another, understanding both languages equally well, or understanding only his or her non-English language. Parents who are preparing their non-English speaking child to enter to a preschool where only English is spoken should be aware that the complex process of learning a second language typically involves the following developmental stages (Tabors, 1997):

- Children may first use the non-English language in the English classroom even though they may not be understood by the teacher. It may take some time for these children to understand that a different language is being spoken in the new setting.
- Children may then stop using their non-English language in the new setting during what is called a “non-verbal” period. They do not, however, stop communicating. They will use nonverbal gestures such as crying, whimpering, pointing, and so forth to make their needs known. They are developing a receptive understanding of the new language during this time in preparation for using the new language.
- In the third stage, children tend to use the English language in the form of telegraphic or formulaic speech and may repeat routine words or phrases such as “uh-oh,” “mine,” “okay,” “bye-bye.” These simple phrases help children begin to be involved in the social activities of the group.
- Finally, children begin using language productively. They are able to form new sentences and gain a more complex understanding of the English language.

Naturally, children will proceed through this developmental sequence at different rates depending on factors such as the child’s motivation, personality, and age. Yet this type of developmental information can help prepare parents for what to expect in the new setting, can help them identify and establish ongoing literacy goals, and can enable them to advocate for what they most want for their children.

**In Summary**

EHS is uniquely suited to provide children and families from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds a strong foundation in early literacy development by creating an environment of acceptance that embraces cultural diversity and empowers families to identify their own literacy goals. EHS programs can play a pivotal role in supporting parents’ efforts to make educational decisions that best meet their literacy goals during the child’s formative first 3 years and later in life.
Program Profiles
Two EHS programs are profiled below. The first program is located in a large metropolitan area, and approximately 40% of the families are Spanish speaking or Spanish and English speakers. The second program is a Native American Indian program located in rural Wisconsin, which strives to pass on the native Objibwe language and customs to future generations.

Family Star Early Head Start
Family Star Early Head Start is an urban, center-based, full-day, year-round, infant-parent education center serving children from 2 months through 3 years of age. The Infant Parent program is a special program component dedicated to expectant parents. The center's design is based on a dual language (Spanish and English) Montessori approach. It serves many two-parent families from a predominantly Latino population. Ten percent of the population are teens, and 12–14% are children with identified disabilities. Approximately 10% of the families are monolingual Spanish speaking, roughly 30% are bilingual (Spanish and English), and the rest are English speakers.

Family Star demonstrates its strong belief in strengthening the communities in which its programs are located by hiring neighborhood women to assist in the classrooms. The eight classrooms at the northwest center have a minimum of three qualified, full-time staff members for eight children to maintain a high-quality environment and to provide both English and Spanish speakers to interact with the children. All children hear both languages, have the opportunity to learn both languages, and learn to differentiate who speaks Spanish and who speaks English.

Currently, the program's two centers have 26 bilingual speakers, 9 additional staff members who speak primarily Spanish, and 23 English speakers. We hold weekly forums for all levels of the staff for staff development activities, including addressing cultural and diversity issues. Two weeks of in-service training annually provide opportunities for addressing topics such as cultural diversity, child development, working with families, and how to work effectively with two languages and two cultures. This past February, the program was fortunate to have a Montessori trainer from Mexico City facilitate a 2-day workshop with the classroom staff, focusing on language development. She conducted these workshops in both English and Spanish.
Family Star respects the diversity of its families and staff by having every memo, flyer, newsletter, and conference as well as all written materials available in both English and Spanish. Spanish interpreters are available for all parent nights, seminars, Policy Council meetings, and home visits. The staff members who are in key roles that involve family contact such as the health coordinators, family service coordinators, and male involvement coordinators are Latino and bilingual.

The centers offer diverse cultural experiences to children so they may develop a sensitivity and understanding of the many cultures in our world. The staff, children, and parents explore many different cultures through books, activities, materials, songs, fingerplays, poems, and chants. Both parents and staff are wonderful resources who provide children (and adults) with bilingual, multicultural learning experiences and who use any opportunity to learn from one another. Trainings for staff members allow them to explore the rich cultural experiences they had as children and to bring that self-awareness into their work. Family Star has a strong partnership with a local library for culturally diverse books in Spanish and English.

The program has a strong focus on early literacy through its Great Start Early Literacy Program, which has been in operation for several years. This program consists of intensive staff training, daily preliteracy experiences in the classroom, and parent education workshops designed to give parents the tools to support their child’s preliteracy skill development at home. Some of the literacy activities and resources are included in the following descriptions. The effort to involve parents in the literacy program has motivated them to spend more time in the classroom, reading, observing, and getting involved in the literacy activities.

**Breakfast with Books:** This event occurs quarterly and is scheduled during arrival time. Parents are served breakfast and invited to browse through an assortment of books to expand their home libraries. The books are available for 25 cents a piece.

**Alphabet Soup:** Offered twice a month, this activity is an opportunity for parents to socialize with one another and engage in conversation with respect to parental issues that they share. At the end of each session, parents are able to check out books and materials that are used in the classroom.

**Resource Library:** Family Star’s on-site resource library includes books, videos, journals, and articles on various topics such as health, parenting, child development, and fiction for children and adults. The library is open during regular center hours.

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**Early Head Start, Sumter, SC**
**Music Literacy Playgroup:** Many parents participate in this bimonthly parent-and-child interactional group that was designed to promote social interaction, language, and preliteracy skills through music, storytelling, and multisensory activities. Another primary purpose of the group is to help working parents bond and reconnect with their children in a positive and playful environment after the work day. Families leave the group with many ideas and home activities to enhance their child’s language, motor, and emotional development.

The staff person coordinating Family Star's literacy efforts attended a 5-day intensive training at the National Center for Family Literacy. The training focused on the philosophical, theoretical, and practical foundations of the family literacy movement. Four component areas were emphasized: adult education, child education, parent literacy training, and parent-child interaction. This staff member has also joined the Colorado Department of Education's statewide literacy consortium as the EHS representative. Family Star is now collaborating with the Department of Education and the National Center for Family Literacy to sponsor a 2-day intensive training on literacy for EHS programs in the metro area. The focus will be on the four components described above and will help EHS programs understand not only how to implement family literacy within their own programs but also the importance of starting early to support families by helping them to achieve their literacy goals.

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**Red Cliff Band of the Objibwe Indians**

Members of the Red Cliff Band of Objibwe Indians are descendants of The Great Buffalo, one of the Lake Superior Chippewa. The Red Cliff Reservation spans approximately 14,541 acres along the southern shore of Lake Superior, about 90 miles east of Superior, Wisconsin. The ancestral lands of the Objibwe once extended along both shores of Lake Superior and west to the Turtle Mountains of North Dakota. In 1854, under Chief Buffalo, the Red Cliff Band of Objibwe signed the LaPointe Treaty, which established its reservation. The Objibwe Indians are one of the largest grouping of tribes in North America. In Wisconsin, six Objibwe reservations are located throughout the northern part of the state; these reservations form a portion of the Lake Superior Tribe of Chippewa Indians.

Over the years, many of the Wisconsin Objibwe have moved away from their reservations to seek employment, education, and other opportunities in the region’s urban areas. Even so, the tribe has made a number of advances in recent decades. Tribal councils established under the 1934 Indian Reorganization Act promoted widespread improvements in health, social services, and housing. The tribe is organized under the 1934 Indian Reorganization Act. The reservation is governed by an elected nine-member Tribal Council. Officers include a chairperson, vice chairperson, secretary, and treasurer. Each council member serves a 2-year term. The government oversees the business of 25 different departments ranging from education to social services to health care. Additionally, tribal courts expanded their jurisdictions to include child welfare, small claims, and development of air and water standards.

Traditionally, high unemployment rates among the Objibwe have been greatly mitigated by the establishment of bingo and other gaming operations during the past decade. Other sources of tribal income include commercial fishing, forestry, production and sales of arts and crafts, and the region’s tourist and service economy.
Interest in traditional culture has seen a resurgence in recent years with renewed interest in the Big Drum Society as well as in powwows and other ceremonies. The Red Cliff Reservation maintains a respected tribal museum.

Low educational achievement continues to be apparent within the population. For the adult population 18 years and older, 43% did not have a high school diploma or general equivalency certificate in 1990. The population of Red Cliff has been growing faster than the population of the surrounding communities. Births to American Indian teen mothers at Red Cliff accounted for 26% of the total births. Of all family households of American Indians at Red Cliff, 15.6% are females who head a household with children under 18 years and 4.9% are males who head a household with children under 18. Overall, 20.5% of all American Indian households at Red Cliff are single family units.

The Red Cliff Early Head Start program predominately serves adolescent and single mothers. Although the primary language spoken in the community is English, the Ojibwe language is being reintroduced into the tribal community by the EHS program and the Touchpoints Fatherhood Initiative. The Ojibwe culture is integrated in the Red Cliff program through language, art, music activities, and tribal ceremonies. A partial-language immersion program is in operation where teachers for infants and toddlers read, sing, and speak to the children in Ojibwe and English. Many of the children’s favorite books are translated into Ojibwe by the teachers. Members of the EHS staff are enrolled in an Ojibwe language class taught on the Red Cliff reservation through the Lac Courte Oreille Tribal College by a Red Cliff native who is one of the community’s most fluent native language speakers. EHS staff members are also studying Ojibwe philosophy and history. In addition, community members instruct the staff and children in the art of Ojibwe basketry, rice harvesting, and flute music. Grandma Jenny, an 80-year-old tribal elder who is the cook at the Red Cliff Early Childhood Center, teaches moccasin making to children and staff. Powwows are held every Thursday at the EHS center and are open to all of the members of the Red Cliff community. The children learn the traditional grass dances, and EHS fathers and other men from the community bring the ceremonial drums to the early childhood center to drum and sing for the dances.

The indoor and outdoor learning environments are filled with culturally specific items. A beautiful ribbon dress that was made by an EHS child’s auntie is displayed on an infant classroom wall. Wigwams are a treasured space in each infant-toddler learning environment. The wigwam is a replica of the traditional Ojibwe house constructed of birch bark. It symbolizes the four Ojibwe core values of respect, honesty, kindness and sharing. Bear rugs, gathered from hunting trips in the north woods of the reservation, adorn the floor of the wigwams.
The EHS teachers keep an Objibwe dictionary in the toddler classroom. Children often have questions how to translate English to their native language and meaning making is referenced in Objibwe. Many of the toddlers have a vocabulary of 30 to 40 Objibwe words. The EHS staff members also translate the activities and questions the children ask from English to Objibwe in a multi-leveled effort designed for language education and preservation. EHS parents are learning the Objibwe language from their children, and the center's newsletter informs parents of native language activities as well as the children’s progress in acquiring Objibwe.

Reverence for nature is an essential element of Objibwe culture and is integrated into the EHS curriculum. For example, in the winter, the children are curious about the animal tracks they observe in the snow near their homes and early childhood center. The children spend time learning Objibwe songs and stories about animals as well as hibernation and migration patterns. This educational element is a natural part of Red Cliff child’s world. The EHS center is situated deep within the alpine and birch north woods and is surrounded by an 8-foot fence to keep the bears out of the children’s playground. Often when the toddlers go for a walk, they see deer, rabbits, fox, and other small animals as well as many different kinds of birds. The outdoor learning environment is filled with the sounds of hawks, crows, and songbirds.

The EHS staff and children join the Head Start community in participating in the sacred pipe ceremony. The purpose of this ceremony is to invite the ancestors to watch over and guide the adults in all of their endeavors for the benefit of the children. In the ceremony, thanks is given to the Four Winds and the Four Directions.

The EHS staff comprises equally Objibwe and non-native staff members. The non-native staff has received extensive training in cultural sensitivity.

A team of early childhood professionals trained with Dr. T. Berry Brazelton and the Touchpoints faculty to acquire skills in promoting father and male involvement in the EHS program. The Red Cliff Touchpoints project incorporates Objibwe culture into a Touchpoints Model that will focus on father involvement. The purpose of the Touchpoints Community Project is threefold. The Touchpoints project is designed to enhance the relationships among the EHS educators, parents, as well as community health and social service caregivers through the development of an early childhood development curriculum that is universal and cohesive as well as culturally sensitive. An outcome of this model is reflected in the common language of developmental terms that is generated by using the Touchpoints Model for children from ages birth to 5 years. The second purpose of the project is to enhance the parenting skills and knowledge of early development with a special focus on fatherhood that is achieved by expanding opportunities for the fathers (or significant male role models) of young children to participate in the care and education of their children in a culturally significant manner. The third purpose is to use the Touchpoints Model to train education and health professionals around key points in a young child’s development. The training emphasizes prevention through anticipatory guidance and development of relationships between parents and providers.

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Resources

REFERENCES


PUBLICATIONS


NATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS
ERIC Clearinghouse on Languages and Linguistics
4646 40th Street, NW
Washington, DC 20016
800-276-9834
http://www.cal.org/ericcll

Languages and Linguistics, Center for Applied Linguistics
1118 22nd Street, NW
Washington, DC 20037
800-276-9834

National Association for Bilingual Education
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NABE@nabe.org
http://www.nabe.org

National Center for Family Literacy
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