

A Newsletter from your Technical Assistance Center, PCA-NJ

Promoting Acceptance of Diversity within Our Youngest Learners

Early childhood classrooms reflect the diverse cultures, races, abilities and family dynamics within our communities. Young children notice the inherent differences and learn about prevalent prejudices from their families, media and society. As a result, every teacher has probably witnessed situations that provide opportunities for teachable moments. The manner in which teachers respond can have a great impact on children and their perceptions of others. When faced with difficult scenarios, early childhood educators must be prepared to guide children in a positive and open manner. Simply saying, “that’s not nice!” or “we are all the same!” is not an effective response because this will not help children learn to appreciate differences. Sometimes teachers simply may not know what to say, so they don’t say anything, which in turn may allow the children to think that preconceived and uninformed perceptions of others are true.

“Why does he smell weird?”

“Why do her eyes look funny?”

“She can’t be a firefighter because she’s a girl.”

“She can’t play with us because she is in a wheelchair.”

“My grandpa said I can’t play with him because he has two dads.”



Children need concrete responses that they can relate to. Factual statements such as: “eyes come in many different shapes, sizes, and colors, and vary from person to person” and “food has different smells and the food we eat can sometimes make us smell differently,” can go a long way in fostering an anti-bias and multicultural classroom environment. In addition to the right language, teachers must also be thoughtful in choosing diverse materials for the classroom. It is important that pictures, books, music, and dramatic play material such as food, dress-up clothes and utensils are rich in diversity and represent different cultures, races, genders, abilities and home languages. At the same time, teachers should ensure that they do not promote stereotypes and are aware of the messages they portray. This means that all materials in the

classroom help children identify with and make realistic connections to the world that they are a part of. Some examples of such materials are: dolls of different races, books depicting different cultures, books depicting different family makeups, such as families with two moms or two dads; pictures of female firefighters and male dancers; sensory learning objects for different developmental needs; and displays of children in wheelchairs. When a program is intentional in promoting an environment that is rich in diversity and welcoming to all families, they will not only meet the indicators within ECERS-3 Item 26 and ITERS-R Item 24, *Promoting acceptance of diversity*, but they will also meet **GNJK standards, 2.2.3, 2.3.2, 3.3.2 and 3.5.2.**, but most importantly, they will be teaching children to embrace diversity and inclusion in their lives!

Resources:

- Anti Defamation League on creating environments that respect diversity:
<http://www.adl.org/assets/pdf/education-outreach/How-Can-You-Create-a-Learning-Environment-That-Respects-Diversity.pdf>
- NAEYC’s Quality Benchmark for Cultural Competence Tool:
https://www.naeyc.org/files/naeyc/file/policy/state/QBCC_Tool.pdf
- Visit the NAEYC Store to purchase **Anti-Bias Education for Young Children and Ourselves**:
<https://store.naeyc.org/store/anti-bias-education-young-children-and-ourselves>



A Conversation with Nikki Bryant, QIS for Middlesex and Somerset Counties

Q. *What does a multicultural classroom mean to you?*

A:

- A multicultural classroom represents different cultures in a way that will encourage children to be more accepting of others and will leave a lifelong impression.

Q. *What are some of the interesting and unique ways to make a classroom diverse?*

A:

- If you look at ECERS-3, one of the easiest ways to incorporate different cultures is through music. Having songs and music from different cultures and having children learn those songs or dances is a great way to expose them to diversity. Having families send in songs recorded in their own voice is also an example of family engagement.
- Using sign language within the classrooms is not only a great way to accommodate different abilities, but also a way to bridge the gap with the families. Teaching children to sign and communicate can help in interactions between children of varying abilities and languages.
- Many centers use a lot of different foods as a means to be inclusive, but what about utensils? How about having a “wok” in the dramatic play area for instance?
- Aside from displaying family pictures on walls and shelves, some creative ways to combine diversity and display at a child’s level (Item 5 on the ECERS-3 and the ITERS-R) can also include photos on the floor for crawling infants and toddlers, on pillows, and pasted onto empty cereal boxes that children can carry around.



*Nikki Bryant, QIS for Middlesex and Somerset Counties
Community Child Care Solutions*

Q. *What are your thoughts on engaging families in a culturally inclusive manner?*

A:

- I think the center should adopt a welcoming attitude from the very beginning and it starts with one-on-one communication at the outset. Having families come in and tell their own stories or stories from their culture and having them share a family book are some ways to make parents feel included. The center is also a hub of information for families. Centers that can create a calendar for all the different cultures, along with their special days and events represented within that community, will not only be celebrating diversity but will also be providing a great resource for new families that move into the neighborhood. This will also help towards meeting **Grow NJ Standards 3.2.2 and 3.5.2**.
- Another creative way would be having families that cannot come to the center, record a story that they would like to read and make it available as a book-on-tape either in the listening center or the library. This recording can be returned to the family as a keepsake at the end of the year!!

Q. *What can you suggest to centers that have a lot of different cultures represented and find it challenging to accommodate all these differences?*

A:

- You know one of the common misconceptions out there is “labeling everything.” Simply labeling everything in multiple languages is not meaningful in and of itself. It can be very confusing for children who are not even at the stage of reading. Also assuming that parents will appreciate having everything labeled in their language is not right. Like I said before, communication is the key. Asking the parents if they want things in the center to be labeled in the home language is important. Many parents may want their children to learn English and therefore do not want their home language to be used in school.
- The onus for multicultural responsiveness does not have to rest only on the centers. It can be a way to engage families. Having parents tell you how they would like their culture to be honored and having them help with creating necessary materials is an example of meaningful multicultural engagement.

Rethinking Our Approach to Acceptance

November is here and its that time of the year when many people begin to plan special celebrations, luncheons and other festivities within their centers. For some center staff, this is a very exciting time of the year, especially when families participate in large numbers and volunteer to make your events successful. For others, however, this time of year may feel more stressful, perhaps feeling like another family event is just one more thing added to the plate, especially when coupled with low parent involvement.

How can we break the monotony associated with having to meet the culturally competent check box, and instead, get back to hosting truly meaningful events with real significance to our families?



Before You...

Embark on the diversity journey...

Buy stereotypical cultural items off of the internet...

Incorporate dual language learning in the classroom...

Plan events around holidays and festivals...

Introduce different cultural foods to the children...

Modify lesson plans...

What if You...

Survey all the families at your center to learn about what's important to them.

Ask families to donate items important to them and their culture.

Seek the families' input on whether they want their home language spoken in the classroom.

Try to explore and collaborate with entities in your community.

Explore those cultures by appropriate use of technology, family input, etc.

Foster empathy for different learning abilities

One approach is to reframe celebrating diversity as a date on a calendar by instead making it a continuous, ongoing aspect of how we provide care and education. The Strengthening Families (**GNJK standards 3.2.1, 3.4.1 and 3.5.1**) philosophy advocates this approach, wherein families and children are valued daily, parenting philosophies and traditions are weaved into the learning environment and a strength-based reciprocal relationship with children and families drives the way care is provided. Centers that have parent/family groups can enlist the support of such groups when planning for classroom environments or activities that are culturally inclusive. Such an approach will not only give centers access to a vast resource of ideas but also help with family engagement (**GNJK standards 3.3.2 and 3.4.2**). Further, changing an approach does not have to mean a complete overhaul of the existing system. It can be a few tweaks and adjustments to what we are already doing in order to provide a comprehensive approach to building relationships within our communities and providing quality early childhood education.

Need to Know!

Save the date for these upcoming opportunities...

Webinars, *Open to all GNJK programs*

Date	Time	Topic	Presenter(s)	Description
11/16/16	1:30pm-2:30pm	Understanding Home Visitation in Early Childhood	Central Jersey Family Health Consortium	This webinar will help directors and teachers understand home visiting basics, using the Grow NJ Kids Standards, and develop plans and procedures to offer home visits to families. Registration Link: https://attendee.gotowebinar.com/register/7971714766006202625

GNJK Peer Learning Communities (PLCs), *County Specific*

Date	Time	Location	County
11/09/16	12pm-2pm	North Bergen Kennedy Branch Library	Hudson
11/16/16	12pm-2pm	Montgomery Presbyterian Church, Belleville	Essex
11/3/16	1pm-3pm	Child Care Resources of Monmouth County	Monmouth, Ocean
11/30/16	1:30pm-3:30pm	DCF Training Academy, New Brunswick	Middlesex, Somerset
12/6/16	1:00-3:00	Child Care Connection, Trenton	Mercer



Prevent Child Abuse New Jersey™

PCA-NJ operates a broad range of preventative services designed to support the improvement and quality of professional workforces and programming, resulting in significant positive impacts on family functioning and health in all 21 counties. **PCA-NJ programs include:**

- ◆ Grow NJ Kids TAC
- ◆ Middlesex County Council for Young Children
- ◆ Healthy Families
- ◆ Human Trafficking Prevention
- ◆ Parents as Teachers
- ◆ Essex Pregnancy & Parenting Connection
- ◆ Parent Linking Program
- ◆ Parent Education & Technical Assistance
- ◆ Enough Abuse
- ◆ The Period of Purple Crying

Needs Assessment Survey

Please help us cater to YOUR needs by completing our Needs Assessment survey. Follow this link and share your thoughts about PLCs.
<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/gnjknneedsassessment>



Training

Click on the link provided below to view all currently offered professional development opportunities specifically designed for GNJK centers.

[Trainings](#)

Central Region TA Center 103 Church Street, Suite 210 New Brunswick, NJ 08901 732.246.8060

Northeast Region TA Center 550 Broad Street, Suite 1105 Newark, NJ 07102 973.371.5301

www.preventchildabusenj.org/programs/growtac