

Culture as the Lens Through Which Children Learn Best: Implications for Policies to Improve Teaching

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BUILD & CELO: Learning Table on State Policy to Improve Teaching and Children's Learning

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No other intervention can make the difference that a knowledgeable skillful teacher can make in the learning process (Darling-Hammond, 1997)

Children from culturally diverse communities, poor children, and children from marginalized racial groups have better educational outcomes when teachers have knowledge and practice skills that support home culture and language (Au & Mason, 1981, 1983; Dee, 2004; Knapp & Associates, 1995; Pewewardy, 1994).

Problems 1 - PD Policies and Problem 4 - Ensuring Racially, Culturally and Linguistically Competent Teaching

- 1. Culture matters in teaching and learning
- 2. Culturally responsive teaching can contribute to optimal child outcomes
- 3. Culturally responsive teachers need to be nurtured through strengthening systems that support teaching and learning and intentional professional development –implications for building state systems

Children in the United States

- A very complex group that includes:
 - Children from cultural and racial/ethnic groups—African American, Asian American, Alaskan Native, Latino, Native American, Pacific Islanders, and children of immigrants
 - Children whose first languages and dialects
 - Children in poverty—children from all groups including children of color, immigrant children, and White children
 - Children with diverse abilities
 - Children from the world's cultures
- Children in these categories are more likely to have poorer early developmental and educational outcomes than middle-class children

Theory, research & consensus documents in the early childhood field

1. Development occurs in the context of culture
2. Children's cultural and language identity are essential to their optimal development
3. Children's home culture and language should be used as platforms for teaching and learning
4. Children have a right to the knowledge and skills of power (e.g., literacy, "school English") and a right to their cultural and linguistic traditions

The challenges in early care and education—equity

- Creating equitable, high quality early care and education **systems** that have sufficient policies, programs and capacities in place to support and sustain optimal developmental and educational outcomes for all children, including the most vulnerable.
- Creating a **workforce** at all levels that is able to provide equitable, high quality, culturally responsive, intellectually rigorous, and emotionally supportive care and education for children, including the most vulnerable.

Culturally responsive teachers

- It appears that insufficient numbers of teachers have the skills to be effective educators for all children.
- Research suggests that teachers may feel unprepared to teach children who they perceive to be different (class, race, language, ability, and so forth). (Sleeter; Ray and Bowman; Banks; Lee)
- *Ray and Fleming found that higher education faculty in 2- and 4- year early childhood teacher preparation programs report that less than 25% of their graduates were culturally competent.*
- State systems are not sufficiently funded, integrated and coordinated to provide the context and supports for the development of a culturally responsive workforce.

Culturally Responsive Education

- All children can learn (no exceptions)
- High standards: Excellence and rigor in teaching and learning
- All programs, tools and activities (e.g., teaching, curriculum) help children gain the skills and capacities needed for educational success at school and in life
- Authentic assessment tied to learning—multiple assessment strategies; assessment supports instruction
- Highly prepared culturally responsive staff at all levels
- Authentic, deep and rich involvement with families and children's communities

Culturally Responsive Education

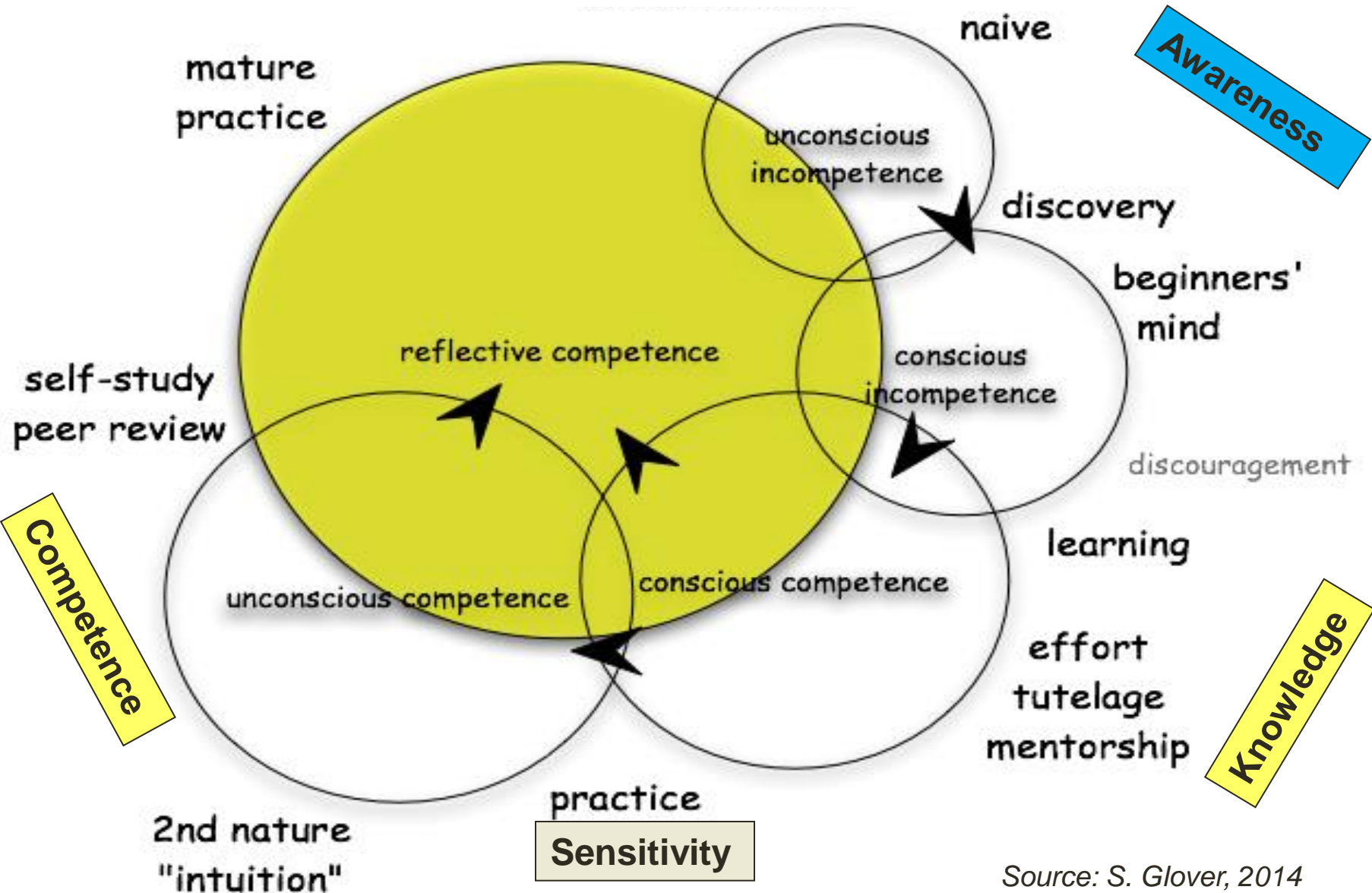
- Rich curriculum that reflects cultures—Grounded and taught *through* children’s cultures, capacities, and prior experiences
- Values/accepts home languages and dialects; intentionally prepares children as linguistic code switchers
- All children are involved in knowledge construction

Culturally Responsive Teaching is Skilled Teaching

Culturally responsive teaching means we are teaching to and through the strengths of a child's culture. We are validating and affirming the child by using the child's "cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles" so that the learning experiences are effective and relevant (Gay, 2000).

Effective teachers get to know the culture and background of their students not to use it as an excuse for failure, but to understand the culture, to use positive aspects of that, to propel student achievement (Green, 2009).

Competence



Source: S. Glover, 2014

NAEYC's *Quality Benchmarks for Cultural Competence* —8 key concepts

1. Children are nested in families
2. Identify shared goals among families and staff
3. Authentically incorporate cultural traditions and history in the classroom
4. Acknowledge child development as a culturally-driven, ongoing process that should be supported across contexts in a child's life [e.g., school and home]
5. Individuals and institutions are embedded in culture
6. Ensure decisions and policies embrace languages and dialects
7. Ensure policies and practices embrace and respect families' cultural values, attitudes, and beliefs toward learning
8. Equalize balances of power; counter stereotyping and bias through intentional teaching

‘High quality’ culturally responsive caregivers & teachers

- 1. Early childhood teacher training (classroom staff need to include a mixture of teachers with BA/EC certification & AA EC degrees)**
- 2. Demonstrated content knowledge and the ability to teach using appropriate proven strategies that are culturally responsive**
- 3. Specialized training in 2nd language/dialect acquisition and implications for teaching and learning**

'High quality' culturally responsive caregivers & teachers

4. Specialized knowledge re. culture and child development; and the role of culture in teaching and learning (*Lily Wong Fillmore and Catherine Snow's paper on What teachers of DLLs need to know and do*)
5. Well integrated knowledge regarding developmental and educational needs of children with a variety of characteristics including culture, race, language, ethnicity, gender, immigration history, and diverse abilities (multiple diversities)

'High quality' culturally responsive caregivers & teachers

6. Ability to partner with and communicate effectively with all children and families for whom English is a new language or 2nd dialect

- *EC teachers who can communicate effectively in children's home language are more likely to develop close secure relationships with children;*
- *Teacher-child closeness has been shown to be related to the development of social skills and better behavior in class.*

‘High quality’ culturally responsive caregivers & teachers

- 7. Able to use assessment information and data to improve instruction and child outcomes**
- 8. Able to engage in critical self-reflection, accept supervision, and work with colleagues to improve instruction and child outcomes**

Culturally Competent Systems

“The integration and transformation of knowledge, information, and data about children, families and groups of people into compatible and specific standards, skills, service approaches, techniques, and programs that match child and family’s culture and increase the quality and appropriateness of care and outcomes.”

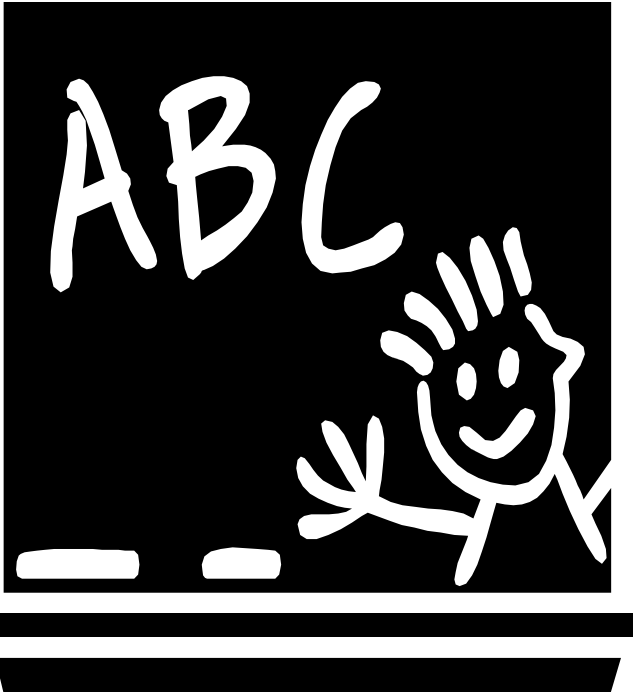
(King Davis, 2000)

Issues in Developing an Early Learning System Reflecting Complex Diversity

Workforce

- Defining goals—long and short term for developing a culturally responsive EC workforce
- Structuring, planning and governance
- Changing the infrastructure (e.g., teacher standards)
- Develop the capacity of leaders—trainers, coaches, higher education faculty
- Assessment and accountability
- Professional development—role of higher education

The ABCs of Strengthening Higher Education's Ability to Prepare Teachers for Diversity



- Registries—keeping track of PD providers
- Statewide efforts (e.g., conferences) to support and *re-educate faculty* in areas of need (conducted over several years)
- *Pilot models that are shared across institutions and state lines*
- Small grants from state boards of education to support inter-institutional efforts
- *Create, recruit and invest in the development of a more diverse faculty and faculty with specialized knowledge*
- Develop legislation and policies that require all early childhood staff receive relevant cultural competency education (e.g., Minnesota's efforts)



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