ENGAGING MULTILINGUAL FAMILIES

Bryndle L. Bottoms, Ph.D., Editor
University of South Carolina

For several years, researchers and social scientists have been focused on identifying, serving, and educating vulnerable populations of children, particularly those populations of children who have continually been penalized or restricted from resources due to the color of their skin or the language they speak. Across the country, different states are designing policies and creating infrastructure to support the needs of these children. At the same time, the political conversation regarding immigration and the conflicts arising among different religious groups demands that research, policy, and practice work towards the common goal of supporting those most vulnerable. This issue will focus on the unique ways two teams of researchers have investigated multilingual families and strategies to support their unique needs.

This topic of serving and supporting multilingual families is relevant because of the current landscape of families across the United States. In 2019, it was reported that 75% of center-based early childhood educators served one or more Hispanic children, and 1 in 5 worked in settings with an enrollment of 25% or more Hispanic children (Crosby, Mendez, & Stephens, 2023). More recently, the Migrant Policy Institute reports one third of all US children under the age of five are dual language learners and are an even larger proportion of the population in states like California, New Mexico, and Texas. While Spanish is the dominant second language in this country for most states, it cannot be ignored that dozens of other languages are also spoken across our nation. In our state of North Carolina, this includes Arabic, French, and Telugu (2023).

The first research article is by Maria José A. Dias, Julia T. Atiles, and Jamie Dice Moore of East Tennessee State and Athens, Georgia. Their research team crafted a professional development workshop series for Head Start educators to directly support multilingual families. The workshop introduced a pedagogy of a translanguaging approach, which aligns with developmentally appropriate practices by intertwining the individual experiences of both students and teachers and how they both engage with *all* languages. Students are encouraged to use their entire language repertoire to make meaning of the classroom and world around them. The four workshops surveyed participants before and after to understand major impacts. The authors report five major findings, one of which is building empathy towards multilingual families. These findings are explored in more detail in the corresponding research to practice summary.

While the first group of authors focused on educator practice, the next research impacts family engagement and family partnerships. Tricia C. Clarke and seven other scholars of Fordham University in New York explored the perceptions of Head Start programming held by 42

multilingual families. Their sample included both families with and without children, which brings a holistic view of how Head Start may be perceived. Within early childhood partnerships, it is essential that families and communities feel that the environment is supporting their individual child's development through social interactions with peers and structured learning activities. This research also demonstrates the need for children to be encouraged to use *all* known languages and develop a cultural identity as being multilingual. Their corresponding research to practice summary explores the findings to impact teachers and practitioners.

Fundamentally, their research centered on the importance of empathy and inclusion of all languages within classroom and family interactions. This message has led the Editorial Team to issue a call for a special issue, in the hopes that this issue can change early childhood practices across the country. We welcome submission of research articles, research to practice narratives, and applied policy work that impacts bilingual children and families. This special issue is titled, *Supporting Multilingual Families in Early Childhood Spaces*. The call can be found on our website under Announcements and has a due date of April 26, 2024.

As we wrap up the year, the Editorial Team hopes you find time to be reflective of all the impactful work that you and your colleagues have been able to accomplish. We also wish you and your families a wonderful holiday season of rest and restoration, that sparks new energies and ideas to carry you into the year 2024!

REFERENCES

Crosby, D., Mendez, J., & Stephens, C. (2023). *Characteristics of the early childhood workforce serving Latino children*. National Research Center on Hispanic Children & Families. https://doi.org/10.59377/564i2785e

Nhi Giang, I. T., & Park, M. (2023, March 14). *Dual language learners: Key characteristics and considerations for early childhood programs*. migrationpolicy.org. https://www.migrationpolicy.org/research/dual-language-learner-characteristics

Monsen, L., & Gregory, M. (2023, Feb 16). The United States is rich in languages. Shareamerica.org. https://share.america.gov/united-states-rich-in-languages/