PRINCIPLE 10:

Culturally relevant and diverse programming and practices are incorporated in all systems and services and are beneficial to all adults and children.

Highlights from the *Original Multicultural Principles* (1991)

- To achieve Head Start goals and maximize child and family development, these principles must not be limited to the education component but must be applied to all aspects of the program.

Although Head Start no longer uses the term components to indicate program services, the need to disseminate information and to obtain buy-in from program staff, parents, and community partners on these Principles is essential.

Information on cultural relevance and dual-language development is complex, and implications for practice vary based on specific program conditions (e.g., staff are monolingual English speakers, staff are bilingual). However, the complexity of the content information requires that Head Start programs further examine their processes and practices within self-assessment, community assessment, child assessment, family partnerships, individualized curriculum, effective learning environments, health services, governance, and other elements of their program. A main task for programs is to connect the information on culture and dual-language development with Head Start systems and services.

Clearly, administrative leadership is essential to developing systems and services that address cultural relevance and dual-language development. Examples of specific aspects of leadership include: initiating the project; information gathering—current assessment of the organization; planning; communication; developing training opportunities and training and technical assistance (T/TA) plans; development of written policies—including policies for hiring; and budgeting.

In *Neurons to Neighborhoods*, the National Research Council and Institute of Medicine (2000) presented key elements of a culturally competent service system:

1. Monitor assessment procedures and instruments to ensure appropriateness and validity.

2. Identify groups that are underserved and eliminate cultural barriers that interfere with service delivery.

3. Organize planning, staff training, and community participation in order to deliver culturally competent services.

4. Define the location, size, characteristics, resources, and needs of culturally diverse populations within the service area.

5. Build cross-cultural communication skills.

6. Help diverse communities to organize themselves to improve the availability and use of needed services.

In addition, the authors recommend that the family—as defined by the cultural perspective of the target population—be the focus of service delivery.

In the original *Multicultural Principles*, it was recommended that Head Start directors schedule time to "review and discuss these principles with all component coordinators as a group" (Administration for Children, Youth, and Families 1991, 3). In this version, we suggest that Head Start directors and their management teams—including parents and community partners—develop both short- and long-term plans and processes to consider the ways in which:

1. culture(s) and languages (both English and the home languages of families) influence the lives of program staff;

2. culture(s) and languages (both English and the home language) influence the lives of the children and families;

3. attitudes, values, and beliefs are culture bound and shape our behaviors/teaching practices;

4. cultures and different home languages can be overtly respected and supported;

5. reflections on cultural issues can be integrated into daily classroom practices; and

6. reflections on cultural issues can be integrated into family partnership agreements and family services practices.

VOICES FROM THE HEAD START COMMUNITY

A program in New York provided four vignettes describing its work across service areas and systems.

To support the diverse families we serve in our program, we knew we had to reach out to our community. Our program planned a Community Resource Fair. We held a brainstorming session with many staff prior to our event to really focus on our goals and outreach efforts. We connected with local universities, community colleges, and local health and medical agencies. Through our Resource Fair, we began partnerships with a community college. We had medical students come and help with initial health screenings. Many of our new partners spoke the languages of our families.

Our program needed to boost the family literacy activities at our center. I went to the library in the community to find out what outreach services the library offers. During this visit, I set up a used book donation for our program, planned a schedule for storytelling, and gave families monthly library schedules for library activities. We found out we could host a parent meeting at the library, and, in turn, families got to tour the library and find out about services. Each family received a library card; some were amazed by how many books one could check out. The library did not have books in all the home languages our families needed, but by attending meetings and inquiring about the needs of our community, the library staff eventually ordered books in many of our home languages.

For all families to feel welcome, our program created a team dedicated to assessing what could be done to be more inclusive of the diverse families in our school. The team consisted of staff, parents, and community volunteers. The team looked at the building, classrooms, menus, and more. Some of the changes included adding a welcome mat with different languages to the front of our building; making sure the documents at our front desk were in many languages; and providing mint tea, ginger tea, and different pastries at our parent meetings. We also worked with our local public schools for translation services.

Over the years, our program went from a program with maybe 2 or 3 home languages to a program with more than 20! We wanted to ensure that our staff could incorporate all the different cultural differences, so we began with cultural sensitivity training. Looking at our own cultural biases and discussing any concerns or areas that made us uncomfortable was the way we began to understand the true needs of our program. We were also able to tie this to professional development for all staff.

Reflective Questions/Activities

To further support the work of addressing culture and home languages in Head Start program operations, the following list of Guiding Questions for program management teams has been created:

1. **Do you assess the current state of affairs in your program with regard to cultural responsiveness and dual-language acquisition?**

   - *Guiding Questions*: What knowledge of cultural groups does program staff have? What is the awareness level of staff at different levels within the organization? Does your program have written policies that address cultural relevance and home language and/or are they in need of revision? How do the systems, services, and practices visibly demonstrate your knowledge and awareness?

2. **Have you created plans for the next program year that extend or expand upon current practices, policies, and/or systems?**

   - *Guiding Questions*: How does your program address issues of cultural relevance and home language during your self-assessment process? Where are your program strengths in these areas? What have you done to address stereotypes and bias? What are some "next steps"?

3. **Does the administrative leadership represent the population you serve? Do you build in administrative leadership by providing professional development on issues of culture and home languages?**

   - *Guiding Questions*: How is your program's approach to issues of cultural relevance and home language organized? Do you have formal committees or working groups? Or do these efforts tend to be the work of one person? What administrative supports are attached to ongoing work on these issues?

4. **Are you (and your staff) clear on long-term goals?**

   • *Guiding Questions*: Does your program have written goals for work on issues of cultural relevance and home language in written form that are widely disseminated in your agency? Do these goals address the range of issues identified in the preceding text? How often are these goals reviewed and/or revised? Do your T/TA plans reflect these goals? Does your program find ways to recognize and celebrate progress made in working on these issues?

5. **Have you identified tangible short-term objectives?**

   • *Guiding Questions*: Does your program have specific short-term objectives for work on issues of cultural relevance and home language in written form that are widely disseminated in your agency? How is work on these objectives monitored and evaluated? Does your program find ways to recognize and celebrate progress made in working on these issues?