

# Honoring Diversity in Early Childhood Education Materials

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- ✓ How can we be respectful and responsive to the qualities and needs of children, families, and their communities?
- ✓ How can we build relationships that regard diverse lifeways, viewpoints, and languages as an asset?
- ✓ How do we recognize the racism and inequities that continue to prevail in society and that contribute to unequal representation and access to health and education services?

Providing culturally and linguistically appropriate services is an important way to accomplish all these goals (see the Web site for Culturally and

Linguistically Appropriate Services, CLAS, <http://clas.uiuc.edu>; see also box page 34, “Where to Find Materials and Resources”).

To provide such services to young children and their families, we need to develop “the ability to relate and communicate effectively when individuals involved in the interaction do not share the same culture, ethnicity, language, or other salient variables” (Hains, Lynch, & Winton, 2000, p. 2). As professionals, we sometimes find it difficult to recognize the ways personal perspectives consciously and unconsciously shape and shade one’s relationships with chil-

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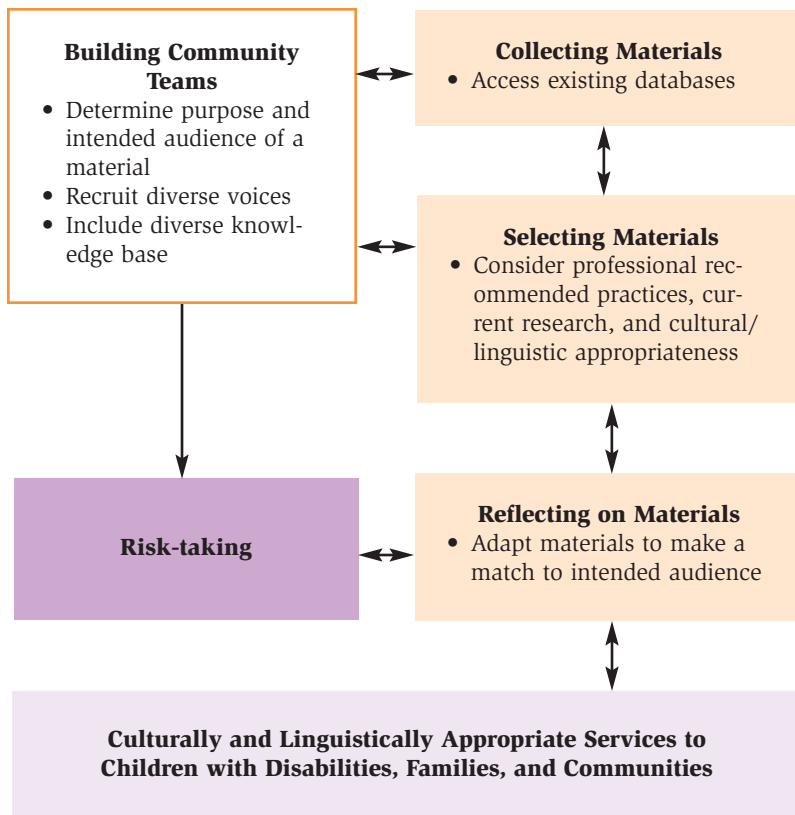
**Instead of simply using material “as is,” team members should reflect and consider how it can be made more suitable for the children and families receiving the material.**

dren and families (Craig, Hull, Haggart, & Perez-Selles, 2000; see also box on page 33, “What Does the Literature Say?”).

Many early childhood educators are faced with the challenge of finding quality materials to share with children, families, and their communities. The good news is that a world of materials is available, as well as resources to assist in selecting and adapting materials (Santos et al., 2000). This article summarizes guidelines developed by the CLAS Early Childhood Research Institute, based on their review of more than 500 early childhood materials. The article provides recommendations that community teams should consider in *collecting, selecting, and reflecting on* materials (see Figure 1). It also offers tips that may be of particular interest to early childhood service providers on

**Figure 1. Collecting, Selecting, and Reflecting on Early Childhood Materials**

**Culture, Language, Race, Power, and Ethnicity**



Note: Early childhood materials include those for early childhood education and early childhood special education.

adapting materials to make them more suitable for the children and families receiving the material.

**Building Community Teams**

An important starting point is to approach the collection, selection, and reflection on materials as a team process that incorporates diverse voices and perspectives in each phase. The composition of these community teams should reflect an understanding and awareness of the values, beliefs, and languages of the material's intended users (in this case, young children and their families).

In many instances, community teams may be selecting materials to support service providers. In either case,

the process remains the same. We should actively try to recruit family members, an interdisciplinary team of professionals, and others who may serve as cultural guides (e.g., community leaders or clergy) for the community team. To ensure that people share diverse perspectives, it is important to provide a safe environment that facilitates candid and supportive dialogue.

Before the teams can examine the implicit and explicit assumptions of a material, members of the teams must first engage in the challenging activity of making their own values and beliefs known. Team members must share some of their core beliefs around issues of child-rearing, health and wellness, and disabilities. In addition, teams

should explore ways to support a family's primary language; and teams must address issues of power differential and institutional racism.

**COLLECT: Finding Materials**

Intervention teams or programs often find their first challenge is simply finding up-to-date materials and information on specific topics. Many different resources now exist, however, to help teams collect many different types of materials (see box, "Where to Find Materials and Resources"). Several professional organizations have completed much of the work to create substantial collections of materials. These collections allow community teams to make an informed choice about which materials are most appropriate for them.

An example of one of these collections is the CLAS Institute Web site (<http://clas.uiuc.edu>), which provides a database of nearly 2,000 early childhood/early intervention materials on topics like these:

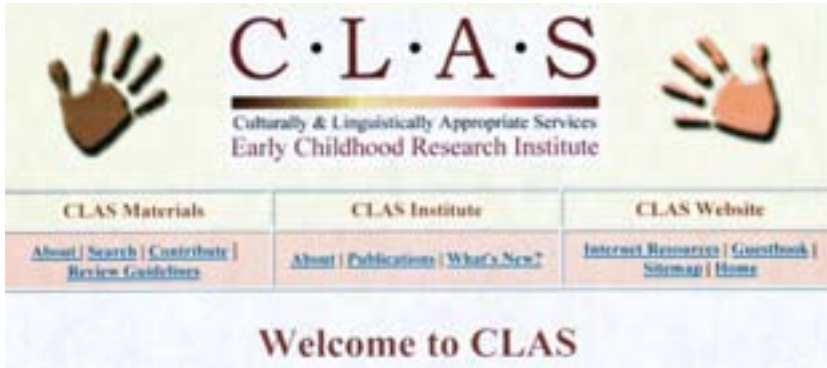
- Child assessment.
- Emergent literacy.
- Child find.
- Personnel preparation.
- Transition.
- Individualized education program and individualized family support program (IEP/IFSP) development.

Figure 2 provides examples of resources on the CLAS Web site, including how to search the database. From the CLAS home page, under "CLAS Materials" click on "Search." You will be linked to the "Search CLAS

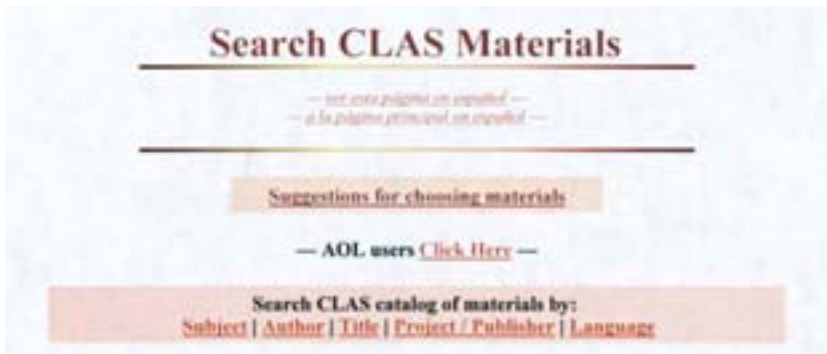
**Professional organizations have completed much of the work to create substantial collections of materials for linguistically and culturally diverse children and families.**

**Figure 2. Search Features of the CLAS Web Site**

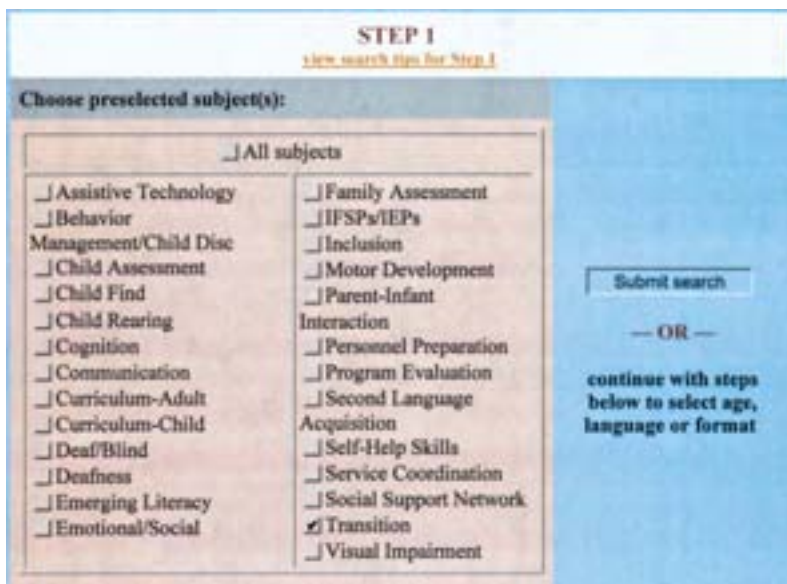
**“CLAS Homepage” (<http://clas.uiuc.edu>)**



**“Search CLAS Materials” Page**



**“Search the CLAS Collection by Subject” Page**



Note: CLAS = Culturally and Linguistically Appropriate Services.

Materials” page, which allows you to search by subject, author, title, project/publisher, or language. If you wish, for example, to search by subject, you will be linked to the “Search the CLAS Collection” page. From there, simply click on the desired topic and submit search. If you chose a subject like transition, the titles will be shown of over 100 materials on this topic, which educators from different locations have developed in various languages. In addition to the titles, you receive the following information:

- A summary of the material.
- Whom the material is intended for.
- Language(s) in which the material is available.
- Format of the material (e.g., video, print, audiotape, poster).
- How to order the material.
- The cost (if any) for the material. In many instances, the material is immediately downloadable at no cost.

The combination of the Internet and the collection of a variety of materials by several different national projects has considerably eased the process of identifying useful materials. The issue often becomes which one of the several different existing materials on this topic should we select.

**SELECT: Determining a Match**

When selecting materials, teams should become knowledgeable about the child, family, and community group with whom they will share the material. Teams must realize that individuals and families are members of multiple cultures (Kalyanpur & Harry, 1999). Even though “children are raised within a cultural framework that imposes rewards and sanctions for efficient learning of the group’s norms and expectations” (Kalyanpur & Harry, p. 3), intragroup differences are often as large as intergroup differences. Therefore, selecting materials and practices cannot be a simple “recipe” approach where teams assume that a family from “culture X” should receive “material Y.”

Teams must consider the overall strengths and limitations of any material, as follows:

### What Does the Literature Say About Culturally Diverse Materials?

To communicate effectively with families whose backgrounds are different from our own, we must first gain an understanding of our own culture so as to acknowledge the cultural framework or lens through which we view the world (Barrera, 1998; Gonzalez-Mena, 1997; Hains et al., 2000; Kalyanpur & Harry, 1999; Lynch & Hanson, 1998). We can then move toward becoming more aware of the effect of our actions and interactions with children, families, and communities.

To work effectively with children and families of diverse backgrounds, we must also find or adapt materials to ensure that the content respects, reflects, and includes the values, beliefs, and customs of the children and families who are receiving them (Santos, Fowler, Corso, & Bruns, 2000). Although authors and publishers of educational materials may increasingly acknowledge issues of cultural and linguistic diversity, the responsibility of selecting materials still rests with professionals. No one material can be totally responsive to families from the full range of values and beliefs that exist across cultures. Therefore, the most challenging aspect of finding and effectively using materials involves reflecting on the content of the material and, subsequently, considering ways to adapt existing materials to increase their cultural and linguistic appropriateness for the people with whom the materials will be used.

What we value as individuals has a strong likelihood of affecting how we select materials, the kind of materials we select, and how we use the materials. As we learn to acknowledge and understand our own cultural lens, we can begin to see beyond our particular framework. Thus, on our journey to intercultural competence, we can engage in the deeper process of selecting and adapting materials that are respectful of the diverse cultural values and beliefs of the children, families, and communities with whom we work.

- Consider whether the material is responsive to the cultural and linguistic background of those with whom they intend to use the material. Consider if the values, beliefs, and practices highlighted in the material support or conflict with the values and beliefs of the children and families receiving the material.
- Determine if the presentation and format of the material is appropriate for the needs outlined by the community team. For instance, the team may prefer a video format instead of printed material or may prefer material written specifically for families whose primary language is Spanish.
- Determine if the material reflects current recommended practices or if it omits important practices.
- Determine if the practices espoused in the material support local, state, and federal policies governing the provision of services to children and families.
- If the material is translated, consider the accuracy and quality of the translation. The CLAS Institute has developed a series of Review Guidelines to assist community teams through this process, which are also available to download from the Web site.

#### **REFLECT: Adapting to Make a Match**

After weighing the strengths and limitations of a series of materials, community teams will likely find material that approximates their needs. Instead of simply using material “as is,” team members should reflect and consider how it can be made more suitable for the children and families receiving the material. That is, how can community teams create a match between a material and the values, beliefs, and practices of children and families?

If teams decide to adapt material, they need to consider copyright issues. If the material is copyrighted, it may not

***The Internet has considerably eased the process of collecting, selecting, and adapting useful materials.***

be altered without permission from the copyright holder—typically the author or publisher. This does not prohibit teams from using parts of the material or using it in conjunction with other materials. If the material is in the public domain (e.g., a government publication), teams have more freedom to adapt it as needed. It is always a good practice to give credit to the producers of the material by citing the original source.

Teams need to ask certain questions to help them determine what adaptations, if any, are necessary (see box on page 35, “Questions to Ask”). Community teams may rely on the benefits of the multiple voices among their members to spark ideas and provide direction for making adaptations to materials they have selected. Team members can then use these ideas to improve material’s quality and usefulness. Adaptations will vary, depending on the material itself, the intended audience of the material, and the situation in which the material is used.

In adapting materials, teams must consider the values, assumptions, and beliefs represented in the material, as well as those of the participants and families with whom the material will be used (see box on page 35, “Suggestions on Ways to Adapt Materials”). Establishing cultural dialogue and

***The CLAS Institute has developed a series of Review Guidelines to assist community teams through the selection process.***

### Where to Find Materials and Resources

The following are some World Wide Web sites that offer information and resources on a variety of materials that educators can use when working with children, families, community groups, and early childhood special education providers:

- **The Early Childhood Research Institute on Culturally and Linguistically Appropriate Services (CLAS)** is a project funded by the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs. The CLAS Early Childhood Research Institute collects and describes early childhood/early intervention resources that have been developed across the United States for children with disabilities and their families and the service providers who work with them. The materials and resources available on the CLAS Web site reflect the intersection of culture and language, disabilities, and child development. Through this site, the CLAS Institute intends to inform consumers (e.g., practitioners, families, and researchers) about materials and practices that are available and the contexts in which they might select a given material or practice. Parts of the CLAS Web site can also be read in Spanish (<http://clas.uiuc.edu/>).
- **The Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC)** is a national information system designed to provide users with ready access to an extensive body of education-related literature. The ERIC Clearinghouses collect, abstract, and index education materials for the ERIC database; respond to requests for information in their subject-specific areas; and produce special publications on current research, programs, and practices. ERIC Clearinghouses identify and select documents and journal articles, and then prepare entries describing the documents and articles to be incorporated in the ERIC database, the world's most frequently used collection of information on education. Clearinghouses also publish digests, monographs, and other publications; answer questions; disseminate information on the Internet; and represent ERIC at conferences and workshops (<http://www.accesseric.org/>).
- **The ERIC Clearinghouse on Disabilities and Gifted Education (ERIC EC)** gathers and disseminates the professional literature, information, and resources on the education and development of individuals of all ages who have disabilities and/or who are gifted (<http://ericec.org/>).
- **The ERIC Clearinghouse on Elementary and Early Childhood Education (ERIC/EECE)** contributes to the database in the areas of child development, the education and care of children from birth through early adolescence, the teaching of young children, and parenting and family life (<http://ericece.org/>).
- **The National Association for the Education of Young Children's (NAEYC) *Resources for developmentally appropriate practice: Recommendations from the profession*** edited by Gail Perry and Mary Duru (1999). This sourcebook is a compilation of more than 1,200 annotated resources. These resources offer many different routes to best practices in early childhood educational settings that meet the challenges facing teachers. This is a welcome addition to the reference shelves of teachers, teacher educators, center directors, administrators, and policymakers. Topics include the roots of and current debates about developmentally appropriate practice, social competence, diversity, and issues surrounding curriculum standards. Selected Spanish-language materials and video resources are listed (<http://www.naeyc.org/resources/catalog/>).
- **Parent Advocacy Coalition for Educational Rights (PACER) Technical Assistance Alliance for Parent Centers** offers a database, which is meant to serve as a reference for parent centers, professionals, and parents who work with or have children with disabilities. The database contains information on resources from parent centers and elsewhere on a wide variety of topics such as disabilities, education, organizational management, fundraising, and multicultural materials. Roughly 300 materials are available in these areas (<http://www.taalliance.org/database/index.html>).
- **The Systems Change in Personnel Preparation Projects' *Resource Guide: Selected Early Childhood/Early Intervention Training Materials*** (9th ed.) edited by Camille Catlett and Pam Winton (2000). This resource guide includes almost 400 resources that might assist in designing teaching, training, staff development, or statewide personnel preparation planning. Resources, including curricula, videotapes, programmed texts, and discussion guides, are grouped by content (e.g., assessment, family-professional collaboration) and process (e.g., family involvement). This new edition features many additions in the areas of cultural and linguistic diversity and early care and development. In addition to the 60+ new entries, the editors have added information on costs, Web sites, and e-mail addresses to make ordering easier (<http://www.fpg.unc.edu/~SCPP/pdfs/rg9.pdf>).

frameworks will enhance a team's ability to make meaningful connections with families, children, and communities.

Adapting the material's presentation will often enhance the material's clarity, comprehension level, format, and

graphics. Making adaptations in the presentation may also increase the material's usefulness and efficacy. Added photos, illustrations, or graphics can make the material more inclusive and representative of diverse audiences

(e.g., intergenerational families, ethnically/racially diverse families).

Teams must ensure that a material is up to date with regard to current recommended practices, like those of the Council for Exceptional Children

### Questions to Ask When Considering Adapting Material

- Does the content match the participants' learning needs? Is the content sensitive to diverse learning styles, values, and practices?
- Are there better ways to present the material to your clients (e.g., in print or other media, in face-to-face interactions, or electronically)?
- Can you address your concerns and identify appropriate ways of using the material through supplemental activities, discussion, or other materials?
- Can you use some but not all of the material and still produce desired outcomes?
- Can you use the materials as a model to develop a new document, given your current resources?
- Can technology assist you in making adaptations (e.g., Web-based threaded discussions and Internet resources)?

Division for Early Childhood (Sandall, McLean, & Smith, 2000) and of the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC; Bredekamp & Copple, 1998). Teams must also check to see if the material reflects the most current legislation. For example, material produced before 1997 may not reflect the most current amendments to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). A community team can update this material by revising it to reflect the current legislation (if it is public domain) or by creating an insert that will bring the material up to date (if it is copyrighted).

As the process of selecting and using materials unfolds, community teams may continually refer to the question: How can we adapt this material to best reflect the unique strengths and needs of children and families in our community? Teams will also want to think about adding information to the select-

ed material about working with families and children for whom English is a second language. They should consider presenting the material in another language through the use of professionals who are bilingual and bicultural.

Teams should include evaluation measures when they adapt materials. For example, many materials now include feedback forms where users can respond to what they liked about the material, as well as suggestions for improving the material, that can be sent to the developer or the agency distributing the material. If this is not a part of the material, a feedback form can easily be inserted into the material. Evaluation is both an opportunity for community members to give input about their exper-

ience with materials and a tool that community teams can employ to decide whether to continue using a material. In this reciprocal process, teams need to engage the voices of as many diverse stakeholders as possible. This shared responsibility for selecting and adapting materials will increase the community team's awareness and sensitivity, thus increasing the potential to use material more appropriately with diverse populations.

### Risk-Taking

Although collecting diverse materials to use with children and families is becoming increasingly easier through the use of the Internet, selecting the most appropriate material and reflecting on

### Suggestions on Ways to Adapt Materials

#### Adapting a Material for Cultural Diversity:

- Use with additional materials that are intended to build cultural awareness/competence.
- Add a brief list of guiding questions for users so they can find out information about the backgrounds of the children and families they are serving.
- Identify a cultural guide who could train staff on the use of this material within the context of your local community.
- Use a team that can make local adaptations in the training strategies of this curriculum to better match the cultural and linguistic background of the participants.

#### Adapting the Material's Presentation:

- Add graphics, illustrations, and/or photos to the material.
- Use only suggested parts of the material.
- Reorganize the order of the material.
- Add an insert that explains jargon, terms, and acronyms.
- Add summaries to the more complex parts of the material.
- Supplement the material with case studies or examples.
- Use different formats (text, audio, video) in presenting the material.

#### Adapting the Recommended Practices in the Material:

- Add current references to update the material.
- Include a list of current recommended practices.
- Revise the material to reflect the current legislation (e.g., IDEA, 1997).

#### Adapting the Material for Linguistic Diversity/Translation:

- Add information about working with families/children whose primary language is other than English.
- Present the material in another language through the use of interpreters and translators.

#### Adapting the Material to Include Evaluation:

- Use parents/family members and other community members from diverse backgrounds to evaluate the material.
- Add evaluation feedback forms along with the material to assess satisfaction with the material.

**Community teams must learn how to discuss differences without asking individual team members to sacrifice any of their core beliefs or values.**

possible adaptations remain challenging tasks. Creating community teams with diverse voices and perspectives is an important first step. The more critical step, however, comes when members of these teams create a safe environment where risk-taking can occur. In this type of environment, people can make cultural “mistakes” and discuss them in a manner that supports the lifelong learning of the individual team members and the children and families with whom they work.

A safe environment does not necessarily mean one without tension. Team members may have to agree to live with tension and not try to resolve all differences. According to Robert Fritz (1991), tension is absolutely necessary for creativity. If you stay with the tension, creativity will follow. Community teams must learn how to discuss differences without asking individual team members to sacrifice any of their core beliefs or values. An appropriate analogy can be made with an orchestra. The goal of an orchestra is not to reduce the differences in instruments. Instead, the goal

**How can we adapt this material to best reflect the unique strengths and needs of children and families in our community?**

is to bring out the “voice” of each of the instruments in a harmonic balance.

Barrera (1998) stated:

There is a tendency to believe that if optimum services cannot be provided, then there is little that can be done until such services can be secured. Practitioners tend to overlook all that can be done even while continuing to search for stronger alternatives. (p. 9)

When practitioners adapt or modify existing services or materials, they become major contributors in changing the status quo. People on community teams must take the “risk” of exploring and sharing their own values and beliefs, so they may better understand the values and beliefs of others. It is only through this type of exploration that teams can come together to find and create materials that support the values and beliefs of the children and families with whom they work.

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### Books Now

\*To order the book marked by an asterisk (\*), please call 24 hrs/365 days: 1-800-BOOKS-NOW (266-5766) or (732) 728-1040; or visit them on the Web at <http://www.clicksmart.com/teaching/>. Use VISA, M/C, AMEX, or Discover or send check or money order + \$4.95 S&H (\$2.50 each add'l item) to: Clicksmart, 400 Morris Avenue, Long Branch, NJ 07740; (732) 728-1040 or FAX (732) 728-7080.

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