

# Space Speaks! Early Childhood Spaces and Cultural Diversity

By Migdalia Young

For many years I worked as a director of a NAEYC accredited and Reggio-inspired early childhood program located in the Pilsen area, a predominantly Mexican community in Chicago. The Chicago Commons Guadalupano Family Center where I worked strongly valued cultural differences. Making children and their families feel at home was important to our program, and providing our children with diverse, multicultural experiences was a key component. We strived to create an environment that was welcoming and represented the culture of the families we served.

The following are some examples of ways we demonstrated our commitment to valuing the diversity of our children. These are ideas you too can do to help children and parents feel welcome in your program. You'll see some photos of how we worked in these values into our space:

1. Add books, pictures, music, furniture, and other materials such as pots and pans, dishes, and pottery that represent families' culture or are relevant to their culture to the dramatic play area.
2. Serve a variety of foods that are common in the families' cultures.
3. Add furniture from their culture to common areas such as parents waiting areas.
4. Hire staff that speak the parents' and child's home language, live in their community, and/or understand their culture.
5. Translate materials, such as projects and artwork displays throughout the program, into families' home language(s).
6. Create a mural or other display where families can tell stories about where they came from or stories from/about their communities.
7. Create displays where families can express their hopes and dreams for their children.

Parents and children feel valued when there are visual representations of their culture/community throughout the program and when program staff speak their home language. In addition to making families feel valued, this will also help children develop a sense of belonging.

Interested in exploring this topic more? I invite you to check out the following resources:

[Cultural Competency: What it is and why it matters](#) by Laurie Olsen, Jhumpa Bhattacharya and Amy Scharf  
[Diversity in Early Childhood Programs](#) by Francis Wardle

*Migdalia Young is an Assessor and Training Specialist at the McCormick Center for Early Childhood Leadership. Prior to joining the McCormick Center, Migdalia worked for many years as a director of a NAEYC Accredited and Reggio-inspired early childhood program.*

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