

Promoting Diversity in Early Childhood Programs

BY SUSAN MARIE SCHULHOF

“We envision innovative and responsive early childhood systems with extraordinary leaders who inspire the best start for every child.”

One of the many ways the work that we do at the McCormick Center for Early Childhood Leadership supports diversity, equity, and inclusion is in our early childhood education program assessments. As Assessor and Training Specialists, we observe the early childhood teachers in their interactions with the children, as well as examine the books, materials, and displays to assess the diversity found in the classroom. Although there are various ways to exhibit diversity, the five main ways they demonstrate this for children in their environment are with race, culture, age, abilities, and non-conforming gender roles. Teachers also have those age-appropriate conversations about stereotypes and prejudice, and they discuss ways that people are different and similar.

“Acceptance of diversity means that instead of viewing differences as a negative, they are seen as strengths, adding more flavor to life and allowing all to contribute in unique ways” (Cryer, Riley, & Link, 2019. p. 336). While it is vital that the schools we observe provide an inclusive, equitable, and diverse environment for the children to learn in, it is also our responsibility as assessors to provide a fair, accurate, and equitable assessment of their program. We strive to be objective in our assessments of programs with systems to ensure validity and reliability in our observations. We are aware of how implicit bias may impact our work; therefore, we are provided with ongoing training to ensure that all assessors view programs through an unbiased lens.

The evaluation tools we use in early childhood programs have been tested carefully across cultures and internationally to ensure they offer a fair and unbiased lens for continuous quality improvement. We must work diligently to be aware of our biases, take the necessary steps to reduce them and minimize the effect on our assessment of an early childhood education center. We can do this by exploring patterns of thought, feelings, and behaviors, and much self-reflection. It is essential that we ask ourselves probing questions and have an openness to being addressed if we speak or act in a way that is not open and inclusive. For all educators, implicit bias can influence perceptions and decisions unless carefully examined. We understand how important it is to be aware of our thoughts and actions every day by frequently reflecting on questions like, “What are my first thoughts? Are they true? Are they fair? Where could bias show up here? Am I making any assumptions?”

Diversity awareness, inclusion, and equity practices are so important that we must keep these questions at the forefront to create a more equitable world for future generations. As stated in this article, [Bias Starts as Early as Preschool, but Can Be Unlearned](#), biases form at a young age. Understanding the influence of implicit bias can be explored further by reading the [Statement from NAEYC on Implicit Bias Research](#) as well as these articles on [Strategies for Addressing Implicit Bias in Early Childhood](#) and [Understanding Implicit Bias and Its Effects on Early Childhood Settings](#). The McCormick Center for Early Childhood Leadership is committed to supporting programs and the profession in the goal of ensuring diversity, equity, and inclusion as a foundation for all of their practices.

References

Cryer, D., Riley, C., & Link, T. (2019). *All About ECERS-3* (1st ed.) Lewisville, NC: Gryphon House Publishers.

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