Young Learners Diverse Children

Celebrating Diversity in Early Childhood

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Foreword by **Eugene E. García**

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Teaching Strategies

Chapter 3 presents four main clusters of pedagogical strategies that follow the ethnic-educator pedagogical model presented in Chapter 2, which are research-based and meet the educational needs of young, diverse children. Then, Chapter 3 translates the core theme of this book, the ethnic-educator approach with its philosophical principles, into an actual praxis or clusters of pedagogical strategies that build a curriculum. Examples of teachers using the ethnic-educator pedagogical strategies at the Bilingual Preschool Development Center (BPDC) are provided to portray the unique educational needs of young, diverse children.

STRATEGIES SUPPORTING THE ETHNIC-EDUCATOR APPROACH

In this section, four clusters of ethnic-educator pedagogical strategies are discussed in light of research-based instructional guidelines provided by the National Research Council (1999a, 1999b) and research-based instructional strategies recommended for improving the academic achievement of young, diverse children by a number of authors (e.g., Collier, 1994, 1995; Collier & Thomas, 2001, 2004; Gonzalez, 1999, 2007; Gonzalez, Brusca-Vega, & Yawkey, 1997; Gonzalez, Yawkey, & Minaya-Rowe, 2006; Ovando, Combs, & Collier, 2006; Tharp, 1997, 1999; Tharp, Estrada, Dalton, & Yamauchi, 2000; Tharp & Gallimore, 1998; Thomas & Collier, 2003; Waxman & Padrón, 2002). See Table 3.1 for a representation of the alignment of the philosophical and pedagogical principles endorsed by the ethnic-educator approach with the four clusters of pedagogical strategies discussed in this chapter.

The four clusters of pedagogical strategies endorsed by the ethnic-educator curriculum include the following:

1. Thematic and Holistic Curriculum

This describes an integrated and holistic developmental curriculum that aligns content and developmental areas with the cultural, linguistic, and idiosyncratic

needs of young, diverse children. The first cluster of pedagogical strategies discussed includes the alignment of the curriculum across content and developmental areas through using themes and topics and the individualization of the curriculum to themes and topics of interest to the children.

2. Stimulation of Critical-Thinking Skills

This describes a curriculum supported by theory and research following a socioconstructivistic perspective, which represents the interaction of internal and external factors on young, diverse children's developmental and learning processes. The second cluster of pedagogical strategies discussed includes a learner-centered approach, the stimulation of critical-thinking skills (cognitive, metacognitive, and metalinguistic strategies, instructional conversation, and inquiry-based learning), and the connection of concepts learned and content areas taught with young, diverse children's prior sociocultural knowledge and real-world experiences in particular sociocultural settings.

3. A Pluralistic Pedagogy Stimulating Connections to Prior Sociocultural Knowledge and Real-Life Experiences

This describes a curriculum that follows a pluralistic pedagogical approach, which values cultural and linguistic diversity as an asset enriching the developmental and learning potential of young, diverse children. The third cluster of pedagogical strategies discussed includes the use of additive language (i.e., first and second language [L1, L2]) as a method of instruction and a socialization tool for stimulating critical-thinking and socioemotional abilities and the use of classroom-based alternative assessments linked with instruction that represents cultural and linguistic diversity.

4. An Advocacy Position for Teachers

This describes an advocacy position that calls teachers to raise their cultural awareness and to develop personal connections between their family history and their students' sociohistorical backgrounds. The fourth cluster of pedagogical strategies discussed includes the need for teachers to develop commitment and rapport, and serve as cultural mediators or bridges between the school culture and diverse children and their families.

FIRST CLUSTER OF PEDAGOGICAL STRATEGIES
Thematic Curriculums

Thematic and topical presentations of instructional materials can be used to connect young, diverse children's cultural and social prior knowledge and real-life, daily experiences with content and developmental areas represented across the

Table 3.1 Alignment of Philosophical and Pedagogical Principles and Pedagogical Strategies Endorsed by the Ethnic-Educator Approach

Philosophical Principles	Pedagogical Principles	Pedagogical Strategies
Principle 1 *Developmental and Humanistic View of Learning* • A **holistic developmental perspective** for learning across cognitive, linguistic, and socioemotional developmental areas and academic areas (i.e., language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies)	*Socioemotional Nature of Teaching and Learning Processes* • **Developmental and humanistic** view of learning processes and academic achievement • View of teaching and learning processes as a social and affective experience	• Integrated and **holistic developmental curriculum** that aligns content and developmental areas and connects concepts learned through the school year across **themes and topics** • Connection of concepts learned and content areas taught to **children's interests in particular themes and topics** that are related to their idiosyncratic differences and sociocultural backgrounds and experiences • Need to develop a **personal rapport**, and familiarity and knowledge of the sociocultural background of young, diverse children and their families

Principle 2
Holistic View of Learning and the Curriculum
 	
• **Socioconstructivistic** Theoretical perspective with the interaction of internal and external factors in developmental and learning processes
	Internal and External Factors Affect Resilience and At-Risk Conditions
	
	• Learning and developmental processes are affected by the **interaction of internal factors** (i.e., maturational, psychological, and biological) and **external factors** (i.e, cultural, social, schooling, and family settings)
	  o **Internal and external factors** affecting low-socioeconomic-status (SES), young, diverse children can support or hinder their **academic achievement** (i.e., becoming resilient or at risk of underachievement)
		• **Individualizing the curriculum** to young, diverse children's learning and developmental needs resulting from the interaction of internal and external factors
		  o *Strengths and weaknesses (related to maturational and developmental processes, individual differences, and sociocultural experiences (degree of schooling and early stimulation, literacy and education levels at home)*
		  o *Assimilation and accommodation processes are affected by similarities and differences between cultural and linguistic factors in young, diverse children*

	○ Two complementary learning processes take place: **assimilation** (i.e., positive transference of concepts) and **accommodation** (i.e., formation of new sociocultural concepts) ● Teachers need to help young, diverse children develop **conceptual frameworks** (or abstract learning principles and higher-level cognitive strategies) that can be transformed and become relevant to other knowledge and problem domains and that can be connected to real-world experiences ○ *Teachers need to use **thematic curriculums** that intersect developmental and content areas through common topics and core concepts*	○ *Use of **active learning strategies** such as cooperative learning* ○ *Development of **critical-thinking skills** in the form of metalearning (learning how to learn), metacognitive, and cognitive strategies (learning how to think and monitor thinking skills), and metalinguistic strategies (learning how to think about language and improve language skills)* ○ *All students need to develop conceptual competence (i.e., principles that can be transformed into critical-thinking skills and be able to apply it to factual knowledge gained in multiple academic content and real-world problem situations* ○ *All students need to develop concepts through **inquiry-based learning** (i.e., interactive dialogue and instructional conversations, cooperative learning, storytelling, reading stories, scripts)* ○ *Developing **critical-thinking skills** provides insight into self-regulation and independent thinking and learning processes* ● Connection of concepts learned and content areas taught to prior sociocultural knowledge and real-world experiences in particular sociocultural settings in learner-centered classrooms
Principle 3 *Pluralistic and Transcultural Perspectives* ● **Pluralistic pedagogical approach** because it celebrates cultural and linguistic diversity as an asset enriching the developmental and learning potential of young, diverse children into multicultural and multilingual minds and spirits	*Culture and Language Represented in Assessment and Instruction* ● Language is a conceptual tool for learning and representing sociocultural, affective, and emotional processes (i.e., cultural and bicultural identity) ● Indissoluble connection between **language and cognition**, both influenced by **sociocultural processes**	● **Additive stance toward language and culture** (value of maintaining and developing native language and culture in addition to English language and mainstream-American culture) ● **Teaching all content areas interconnected with the four integrated components of language development** (i.e., listening, speaking, reading, and writing)

(Continued)

Table 3.1 (Continued)

Philosophical Principles	Pedagogical Principles	Pedagogical Strategies
Principle 3 *Pluralistic and Transcultural Perspectives*	*Culture and Language Represented in Assessment and Instruction* • **Language as a conceptual tool** that provides developmental continuity of the *index, symbolic, and sign learning processes* for three- to five-year-old children • **Language learning is a cultural process** in which children need to acquire sociocultural competence and new cultural knowledge • **Language is used by schools to socialize children to be literate** and use reading and writing as major tools for learning • **Language is used by parents as a socialization tool in relation to sociocultural factors** (i.e., social class, ethnicity, topic, purpose, value and belief systems, cultural thinking, and interpersonal communication styles) • **Language learning is a process that takes developmental time and effort** (5–8 years during early childhood) • **Learning and academic achievement are influenced by external family, community, and school conditions** that may be at risk for disadvantaged, diverse children	• **Use language as a method of instruction,** in which verbal concepts are used as symbolic tools for developing critical-thinking skills (metacognitve, cognitive, and metalinguistic strategies) • Use of **cultural styles of learning and thinking** for representing diverse cultures and languages in the **curriculum** (e.g., storytelling, through instructional conversations, collaborative learning, and sheltered instruction) • Use of the **language experience approach for teaching reading and writing skills,** such as the use of dialogue journals, reading aloud, picture books, artwork, filmstrips for making a story, and in general writing stories for a real-life audience at school, at home, and in the community • **Stimulate learning potential** of economically disadvantaged, young, diverse children, providing them with developmental time to show learning progress and high-quality curriculums with grade-level expectations for success • Use **alternative assessments** that measure **potential for learning** instead of performance (i.e., amount of knowledge and degree of skills developed resulting from exposure to stimulation, bias indicators for disadvantaged, diverse children)

	• Teachers need to develop **alternative pedagogical approaches that link assessment to instruction**	• Use of **nonverbal and verbal classroom measures** to link assessment and instruction across content and developmental areas • Use of alternative assessment measures that **represent cultural and linguistic diversity**

Principle 4   Teachers as Advocates and Cultural Mediators

	• **Advocacy position** that calls on teachers to develop cultural awareness and *personal connections* between their family history and their students' sociohistorical backgrounds	• Teachers need to **develop nurturing learning communities** for young, diverse children to develop intrinsic motivation for learning, maintain collaborative relations, participate actively, and having a sense of belonging • Teachers need to act as **cultural bridges or mediators** between the mainstream school culture and the minority home and family cultural environments • Teachers need to act as **mentors for developing rapport** with young, diverse children and *partnerships* with their parents so that teachers can build mutual trust and respect for cultural and linguistic diversity and idiosyncratic differences	• Role of teachers as **sociocultural mediators or bridges, advocates, mentors, and role models** for young, diverse children and their families • Teachers need **to integrate diverse cultures and languages in the curriculum,** value and use as an enrichment the diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds of students, and model appropriate attitudes and behaviors to develop social adaptation to the mainstream school culture and American general society • Success in academic achievement needs to be considered by teachers as resulting from a **socioemotional process of cultural adaptation** in which diverse children need to learn how to behave, think, and talk to bridge their school, home, and community sociocultural settings

curriculum. Themes and topics need to represent the cultural and linguistic backgrounds of young, diverse children and serve as vehicles to introduce them to the mainstream school culture and the American general culture. In this way, the curriculum can help young, diverse children develop cultural adaptation and a bicultural identity, resulting in higher academic achievement.

Offering choices is one way of adapting the thematic curriculum to the idiosyncratic interest, developmental needs, and linguistic and cultural characteristics of young, diverse children. Offering choices in the classroom environment, such as "alternate activities, alternate channels of learning, and alternate assignments . . . presents real learning opportunities for decision-making, social participation, and successes" (Gonzalez et al., 1997, p. 160). By allowing students to make learning choices, teachers foster diverse children's motivation, self-esteem, and self-concept. In this manner, young, diverse children become independent thinkers who experience affective and cognitive involvement in their success in task completion. Teachers can also encourage young, diverse children to have personal initiative in making choices, follow through on a decision with persistence in task completion, and have better understanding of their potential as learners.

Another way to individualize instruction is by using *thematic interdisciplinary instruction* because by using themes that connect to children's prior cultural knowledge, teachers can create classroom environments that motivate young children to engage in the learning activity. Themes can develop intrinsic motivation for young children to become actively engaged in learning, thinking, and applying concepts to their social and cultural reality. Thematic instruction creates a meaningful context for exploring multiple content areas to stimulate cognitive, language, and socioemotional development and, ultimately, increase academic achievement. Moreover, themes can be used as media through which young children explore their senses, perception, memory, and stored conceptual knowledge. That is, themes can be used as conceptual tools to integrate content areas (such as literacy skills, math, social studies, and science) and as symbolic representational tools for learning and thinking.

Specific instructional strategies for using thematic curriculums to stimulate learning processes and academic achievement in young, diverse children include the following:

1. Use thematic curriculums to expose young children to *repetition of concepts* throughout the academic year, with the use of a variety of instructional activities and materials.

2. Allow *overlearning through extended periods of practice* for the assimilation of new content. The presence of a thematic curriculum will allow for *continuity* of topics and concepts stimulated across content areas. Use *mass experiences*, or continuous and different experiences, as a strategy for extending concepts across content areas and for learning situations and applications.

For instance, a BPDC teacher with experience serving young, diverse children, explained in a reflection:

> I like to create interdisciplinary theme units. This type of unit helps students develop a better understanding of a concept, its meaning, and its use in different content areas. Because I serve diverse children from age three to five in a mixed-age group, I am used to making accommodations to meet all my students' developmental needs and learning styles. I always try to include nonverbal cues like visual aids (big books, posters, hand puppets) and body language when explaining a concept or idea. I also like to include as many hands-on and cooperative-group activities as possible. Children learn from each other while interacting. I think it is good to include drama, partner reading, choral reading, dialogue journals, show-and-tell, and a variety of scaffolding nonverbal activities (e.g., create comic books, make collages about topics, select music for stories) as part of our curriculum. I also believe that teachers need to provide young, diverse children with many opportunities for social interactions with their mainstream peers. Diverse children not only need to learn to speak, listen, read and write in English, but they also need to learn cultural behavior in real-life social situations (e.g., taking turns in a conversation, following a script for going to a restaurant or grocery store), and mainstream peers are the best role models.

In sum, as the teacher's reflection points out, young, diverse children can benefit from a variety of verbal and nonverbal instructional activities that repeat across content areas in the curriculum. Teachers who provide extensive exposure to the same concepts and content areas through repetitive themes and topics in the curriculum facilitate developmental and learning processes in young, diverse children. Thematic curriculums also provide a holistic developmental approach that interfaces the stimulation of cognitive, language, and socioemotional learning and adaptation processes in young, diverse children.

FIRST CLUSTER OF PEDAGOGICAL STRATEGIES
Holistic Developmental Curriculums

Several instructional strategies that interface cognitive, language, and socioemotional developmental processes are recommended for increasing the development of social and academic language in young, diverse children. These strategies include storytelling, reading stories, interactive dialogue, and instructional conversations based on children's prior knowledge and real-life experiences in sociocultural settings. These strategies will be described in relation to examples in the BPDC.

Storytelling

This pedagogical strategy can help young, diverse children make a connection between prior knowledge and real-life experiences and new content learned.

Young children can, with the help of teachers, develop a *script* (i.e., story or verbal narrative) based on real-life experiences in their home, family, and community environments. The development of a script can start by helping children re-create real-life experiences in the classrooms through nonverbal and verbal behaviors. When teachers engage in talking about lived experiences at home and then assist children in re-creating their memories in the classroom through symbolic play, young children can develop their oral-language skills, conceptual development, and socioemotional processes. Then, young children can transform lived experiences and symbolic play into scripts or verbal narrations for developing their identity and socioemotional processes. Besides symbolic play, young, diverse children can also benefit from using real objects or props (i.e., nonverbal manipulative materials) to facilitate the verbal expression and recreation of lived experiences. For instance, puppets, a flannel board, and other props, such as costumes and concrete representations of objects and other referents (e.g., plastic food, doll, store, purse), can facilitate the creation of scripts or verbal narratives in young children.

Storytelling is a pedagogical strategy that is traditionally associated with content-based language learning. According to Diaz-Rico (2004),

> The use of stories is probably the most important means by which teachers can develop oral and written language in young children. Stories come naturally to children, and in the telling and retelling, they gain vocabulary enrichment, sensitivity to audience, and mastery over oral language. The same holds true for written stories as they learn to read. (p. 148)

As described by Diaz-Rico (2004), storytelling is a valued skill in many traditional cultures, and many young, diverse children will be familiar with the cultural use of stories for both teaching and entertaining. Using a broad definition of a story, one can say that storytelling encompasses much of everyday speech. A story may be a factual narrative about someone's daily routine, or it may be a fantastic imaginary tale that happens only in one's dreams. We use stories to explain who we are and where we are from, and we ask for stories when we inquire about others' experiences. Moreover, stories clearly provide a natural context for oral-language production that can take a written form. For writing, authenticity may translate as having a *real* reason and a *real* audience (Diaz-Rico, 2004, p. 167). This may take the form of requesting something, thanking someone for a gift, writing to a pen pal, writing directions for how to get to a park in the community, or myriad other purposes for writing that involve authentic communication.

Stories also offer an engaging context for grammar study, spelling practice, and reading fluency development, among many other literacy-related skills. In the form of written literature as language input, stories have the potential to teach young, diverse children new cultural and linguistic information as well as affirm their cultural diversity (Nieto, 2004). In a spoken or written form, stories have the potential to give young, diverse children *a voice and a space* in which they can safely explore their cultural identities as they acquire literacy (Igoa, 1995). Finally,

stories can also be used as pedagogical strategies to convey concepts across content and developmental areas. History comprises collections of stories, and the realms of literature and history very often overlap. Science experiments can be told in story format, and even the steps taken to complete a math problem can become stories (also called algorithms).

Reading Stories

The pedagogical strategy of reading stories needs to be used by teachers as an opportunity for making connections and generalizing concepts across content in a thematic curriculum. Presenting new concepts to learners in meaningful contexts that make links with prior sociocultural knowledge is an effective instructional strategy for all students (August & Hakuta, 1997). Books can be a very good way to learn the *rhetoric* (i.e., script or verbal narrative) of talking about lived experiences at home and in the classroom. That is, reading stories can be used by teachers for making connections between prior sociocultural knowledge and the language necessary to express such knowledge in the form of text. Young, diverse children need to develop preliteracy skills, such as awareness of the connections between print and meaning and real-life experiences and verbal representations.

Moreover, young, diverse children need to understand the usefulness of books and literacy skills in general as tools for fulfilling many daily life needs, such as reading a recipe, reading a map for finding the location of an unknown place, and reading an invitation or ad. Young, diverse children also need to understand the power of literacy skills as a tool for learning concepts across content areas, as well as to socialize their minds to particular sociocultural ways of thinking, talking, and behaving. Ultimately, young, diverse children need to understand the usefulness of literacy skills to succeed in school and improve their academic achievement and to succeed in real-life contexts, such as work and real-life situations in the general society.

In sum, the classroom can become a real-life scenario for understanding the symbolic and social nature of talking, telling and reading stories, and developing prewriting skills. Together, the teacher and young, diverse children can follow a recipe by reading through the sequence of steps involved in the preparation of cupcakes and experiencing together the value of literacy. In the same manner, a map can be drawn by children to show understanding of the location of any real space (e.g., the playground, the supermarket, the mailbox down the street) in relation to their classroom. Any of these real-life experiences can generate concrete "anchors" for children to understand conceptually the symbolic functions of language and the use of telling and reading stories for conveying social and culturally valued meanings in school and in real-life scenarios.

Example of Using Scripts and Storytelling in Thematic Curriculums

Teachers can use *natural scripts*, acted out by young children in their symbolic play through nonverbal behaviors, for creating *verbal scripts* (or stories). For

instance, three Hispanic, preschool girls are engaging very eagerly in the home symbolic-play area in their BPDC classroom. They are very actively gathering some food to prepare for dinner. One is washing the vegetables in the sink while the other is cutting the vegetables, and the third girl is setting the table. Once they have finished preparing dinner, they sit together at the table and use their napkins and utensils to eat their food. Immediately after they are done eating, they again cooperate in doing the household duties. One little girl picks up the dishes from the table and gets busy washing dishes in the sink. The other little girl goes off to do the laundry and very carefully folds clothes. The third little girl hears the babies crying and runs to attend to their needs.

As an observer of this pretend household scenario, I am delighted to see cooperative play and vicarious imitation in full swing. It is obvious to me that the three little girls are reliving daily life experiences and that they come from pretty organized and harmonious family environments. Their play is very organized and unfolds in a natural collaboration that is *unspoken*, as they just engage in collaborative activities. Their unspoken script is enacting common daily life experiences that follow a natural sequence. The teacher can help these three little girls translate their symbolic play from actions (or nonverbal script) into a written story (or narrative). This script can be shared with peers, illustrated through drawings, and discussed in relation to peers' real-life experiences and prior sociocultural knowledge. Thus, the teacher can assist these three little girls in pushing their oral-language and literacy development by showing them how to re-create the action of lived experiences into oral scripts and written narratives.

In conclusion, the use of stories in the classroom offers endless possibilities for the implementation of sound language-learning pedagogy for young, diverse children. First, stories in the form of carefully selected published literature and student-produced work (both written and oral as storytelling) can affirm diverse children's real-life experiences and sociocultural background knowledge. Stories can also present young, diverse children with concepts across content areas needed to succeed in school. Moreover, activities involving telling, reading, writing, and sharing stories lend themselves to independent learning, individualized instruction and boost young, diverse children's intrinsic motivation and cultural identity. Finally, books provide opportunities to stimulate the four language skills (i.e., speaking, listening, reading, and writing) in a naturally integrated manner, as natural language is embedded in the rich, authentic, and meaningful context of stories.

SECOND CLUSTER OF PEDAGOGICAL STRATEGIES
Stimulating Critical–Thinking Skills

A main focus of the ethnic-educator curriculum is to stimulate young, diverse children to develop conceptual knowledge that can be transformed and applied to multiple instances of problem-solving situations across academic content areas (National Research Council, 1999a, 1999b). The emphasis is on young, diverse children gaining general principles of learning and thinking that can help them

abstract and generalize conceptual frameworks, such as metacognitive, cognitive, and metalinguistic strategies.

An illustration of cognitive and metacognitive strategies is the use of analogical reasoning, or syllogistic reasoning, and other more abstract forms of verbal logic and reasoning strategies. In turn, an illustration of the use of analogical reasoning is the ability to transpose knowledge across different content domains, such as a four-year-old at the BPDC making a comparison between his body sounds and musical instruments, by saying, "My stomach makes noises like a piano." Another illustration of the use of analogical reasoning is for children at the BPDC to interact with peers through collaborative problem-solving activities. Peers can help learners broaden self-centered perspectives to flexible-thinking processes. For instance, young, diverse children engaged in learning how water converts into ice can depart from their own real-life experiences with rain and snow, make hypotheses and predictions, engage in the actual experience of manipulating different elements, and discover what happened and why. Finally, they can learn the language expressions necessary to articulate their thoughts.

Specific critical-thinking, pedagogical strategies that can be used in early childhood classroom settings include the following:

1. Use instructional activities for stimulating abstract-conceptual knowledge, topic knowledge, and problem-solving abilities. Teachers can help children develop *adaptive expertise* in learning strategies for how to think (metacognition), how to think with language (metalinguistic awareness), and how to learn (metalearning) when facing daily life and problem-solving situations. For instance, children can learn applications and transformations of conceptual knowledge in in-school and out-of-school contexts through problem-solving activities and can learn to apply these strategies in a creative and flexible manner.

2. Emphasize the formation of new concepts through *discovery and exploration* and the stimulation of assimilation and accommodation learning processes. *Inquiry-based learning* strategies using student-centered, active learning, discovery of concepts, and critical-thinking skills (i.e., cognitive, metacognitive, and metalinguistic strategies) need to be modeled by teachers. *Interactive dialogue and instructional conversation strategies* can be modeled in relation to specific content areas because thinking and learning strategies are not generic (e.g., articulating observations and making deductions and elaborations in relation to specific concepts and topics).

3. Build concrete "anchors" or authentic sociocultural experiences for stimulating higher levels of learning (from index, to symbolic, to sign levels) across content areas.

4. Develop awareness in young, diverse children of their characteristics as learners (i.e., learning styles, interests, strengths, and weaknesses) so that they use appropriate metacognitive, cognitive, and metalinguistic strategies to enhance the learning process.

Application of all four critical-thinking, pedagogical strategies in an integrated manner is used in the BPDC preschool classroom. The critical-thinking, pedagogical strategies endorsed by the ethnic-educator approach provide young, diverse children the opportunity to learn from their teachers high-level critical-thinking skills, including how to think (metacognitive strategies), how to think with language (metalinguistic awareness), and how to learn (metalearning strategies). Together, teachers and young, diverse children can engage in inquiry-based activities, such as brainstorming, elaboration, the use of trial and error for problem solving, and the use of language as a vehicle for thinking aloud and asking explanatory questions (of the what, how, when, and why nature). In this way, teachers can serve as role models for young, diverse children learning how to use language as an internal mental tool for thinking by modeling critical-thinking strategies, such as analysis, synthesis, elaboration, comparison, imagery, transformation, abstraction, generalization, and deduction.

Teachers acting as models for inquiry-based learning promote an active and learner-centered classroom environment. The inquiry-based learning approach promotes intrinsic motivation for learning in young, diverse children, stimulates creative and flexible thinking, and develops conceptual understanding; and in general, it creates the ideal environment for stimulating independent problem solvers. The use of a conceptual approach also helps young, diverse children focus on similar topics across content areas and use language as a symbolic tool for learning, resulting in the stimulation of language competence at a faster rate.

The result is an emphasis on the process of learning (rather than on the product) and on conceptual learning and the development of critical-thinking skills (rather than on memorization of information). The development of critical-thinking skills will provide young, diverse children with the mental abilities for learning topic and content knowledge at a faster rate because they have developed the mental tools necessary for transforming topic knowledge into general conceptual principles and networks. For instance, numbers are no longer isolated pieces of information that need to be memorized in a string of words through a song. Instead, numbers become concepts attached to prior experiences and conceptual knowledge that provide the ability to engage in one-to-one correspondence when using counting for solving a real-life problem. That is, helping the teacher and classmates follow a recipe by reading first how many eggs are needed for making cupcakes and then by breaking the exact number of eggs that the recipe calls for: Six! No less and no more.

In sum, teachers act as facilitators, mentors, role models, and social mediators for engaging in cooperative discovery with young children and modeling critical-thinking, pedagogical strategies. As recommended by Ovando, Combs, and Collier (2006), children share with teachers the responsibility for learning and integrating real-life experiences, prior and cultural knowledge, and new content learned in school. We will explore how the curriculum can be connected to young, diverse children's prior sociocultural knowledge and real-life experiences in the next section.

SECOND AND THIRD CLUSTERS OF PEDAGOGICAL STRATEGIES
A Pluralistic Pedagogy Stimulating Connections to Prior Sociocultural Knowledge and Real-Life Experiences

The ethnic-educator curriculum celebrates cultural and linguistic diversity as an asset and enrichment for multilingual and multicultural children. This pluralistic curriculum centers on the development of the potential for learning of young, diverse children, by using their strengths and cultural and linguistic thinking style for enriching the curriculum and classroom experiences. The active, inquiry-based classrooms encourage young, diverse children to use their prior sociocultural knowledge to create meaningful learning (National Research Council, 1999a, 1999b). When diverse children do not share the same cultural knowledge as the school culture, teachers need to create learning opportunities in the classroom to build life experiences that anchor the formation of new cultural knowledge.

Young, diverse children usually find themselves struggling not only with the task of comprehending a new language but also with sociocultural background knowledge they have not been exposed to. This new knowledge includes all the belief systems, practices, and shared experiences that members of that culture often take for granted but that may in fact be quite foreign to young, diverse children. Success in school too often depends on students' familiarity with mainstream sociocultural knowledge (Gonzalez et al., 2006; Nieto, 2004). Thus, it becomes the task of the teacher to explicitly teach background knowledge that is culturally relevant to a mainstream school context. However, teachers must be careful not to adopt a deficit stance regarding diverse children's prior experience and background knowledge. Diverse children bring with them extensive experiences and knowledge grounded in their native language and culture, and teachers must find ways to first familiarize themselves with students' experiences and background knowledge and then to creatively capitalize on students' prior knowledge to introduce new mainstream cultural knowledge (Heath, 1983; Igoa, 1995; Nieto, 2004).

The ethnic-educator curriculum stimulates language development through using meaningful sociocultural experiences and authentic texts that represent the actual reality of young, diverse children at home and at school. For instance, diverse preschool children in the BPDC, who are growing up in the Midwest while listening to a story about what happens in the fall, need to develop new cultural experiences with the English language and the American concepts of pumpkins, scarecrows, leaves changing colors and falling from trees, and squirrels piling up nuts and acorns. When teachers just read this kind of *culturally loaded* book, young, diverse children just listen to strings of words with *empty* sociocultural meanings. But when teachers bring out leaves of multiple colors and sizes and ask preschoolers to count the leaves, sort them by color and size, and then demonstrate the spatial concept of "up and down" by dropping the

leaves, young, diverse children engage in the activity and build meaningful life experiences that can anchor their newly formed cultural concepts.

Another instructional strategy for connecting learning to prior knowledge is to use the children's L1 and L2 as methods of instruction, resulting in a *spiral curriculum* that can represent languages by teacher, by content area, or by time scheduled. By using both languages as symbolic tools for learning content and concepts, young, diverse children can transfer their prior verbal and non-verbal, sociocultural knowledge (acquired through their L1 and native culture) to learning new content in their L2 (i.e., English). In the BPDC, the use of both languages for instruction results in faster language learning and higher levels of academic achievement for young, diverse children learning English as a second language.

Yet another instructional strategy for connecting prior sociocultural knowledge and real-life experiences to the content learned in the curriculum is to teach the four language skills in an integrated manner. That is, listening, speaking, reading, and writing language skills should reflect their natural use—integrated with one another and situated in authentic and meaningful contexts. Traditionally, language has been taught in a segmented manner in which listening, speaking, reading, and writing have been artificially isolated from one another (Diaz-Rico, 2004; Ovando et al., 2006). Such an approach robs children of the excellent learning opportunities available in the natural sociocultural context, overlapping-language environment that occurs in real life. One can observe how children seem to learn their L1 so effortlessly. They do not sit down at a desk for a predetermined amount of time each day to practice talking or listening. Rather, they learn as they go about their normal routines of playing with siblings and friends and participating in family activities. Similarly, diverse children learning ESL do better when both languages are situated in real and meaningful social and instructional interactions—as in the BPDC. Piper (2003) warned against a tendency to believe that children need a rehearsal period initially before moving on to real communication. Instead, young, diverse children should be encouraged and guided to engage in authentic interaction from the very first day of school.

High-quality, early childhood curriculums, such as the ethnic-educator approach, encourage connections to real-world experiences by emphasizing *active learning.* Student-centered learning at the BPDC allows children to actively develop conceptual knowledge through discovery and dynamic interaction with meaningful instructional materials representing different content areas and objectives. Children engage in inquiry-based learning by constructing new meanings and concepts, creating original uses of language and information, and engaging in authentic communication and dialogue with peers and teachers.

A student-centered approach is highly motivating and validates students' ownership of the learning process. According to Piper (2003), although there are some factors that teachers can control, such as materials and methodology, the idea that teachers can determine students' learning is actually an illusion. Therefore, we need to let students guide their own learning. The descriptions of Igoa's classroom in her book *The Inner World of the Immigrant Child* (1995) offer

a powerful argument for placing the responsibility for learning in the hands of students. In a child-centered classroom, students learn to establish their own goals for learning, and they choose the specific daily tasks that will best help them achieve those goals. At the BPDC, children assist one another, work at their own pace, and are highly motivated as they are given the freedom and the supportive environment that they need to become independent learners.

Other specific instructional strategies used at the BPDC for stimulating young, diverse children to make connections between prior sociocultural knowledge, real-life experiences, and new concepts across content areas include the following:

1. Select developmentally appropriate and linguistically and culturally authentic instructional materials. In addition, provide classroom opportunities to develop lived experiences so that the curriculum represents young, diverse children's sociocultural prior knowledge and links it to opportunities to construct new mainstream sociocultural knowledge. In this manner, teachers value the home language and cultural experiences (e.g., dialect and cultural values) for affirming young, diverse children's cultural identity and motivate them to build conceptual links to new mainstream sociocultural knowledge. *Interactive dialogue* or *instructional conversations* can be used as individual and group strategies for children to talk about lived experiences (e.g., real-life, daily events like eating lunch at the school cafeteria and recalling the menu) and to provide verbal descriptions and explanations of the sequence of events. Community and sociocultural contexts are ideal authentic experiences for providing authentic learning opportunities for oral-language and literacy development in young, diverse children.

2. Use *sheltered instruction* (i.e., the integration of language and content instruction), in which teachers use pedagogical strategies that adapt to the needs of ESL learners (e.g., using nonverbal materials such as manipulative materials and pictures, speaking slowly and clearly, using repeated patterns of language, building on prior sociocultural knowledge and real-life experiences). The sheltered instruction strategy also works for diverse, mainstream, or monolingual-English children who come from low-income households and show delays in language development (in comparison to middle- or upper-class mainstream peers).

3. Use *learner-centered, high-quality teaching* to help children increase their intrinsic motivation for learning, such as instructional activities that are varied, engaging, and socially relevant to real life (authentic and project oriented) and develop experiential knowledge, build linguistic and cultural competence, and involve cooperative and collaborative learning. High-quality teaching can also stimulate the formation of high self-expectation and high self-esteem while learning, through instructional activities representing children's interests and by teachers' modeling a positive attitude diverse cultures and languages. A learner-centered classroom stimulates active

and inquiry-based learning that motivates learners to become independent and successful.

4. Use *individualized instruction* to represent the multiple learning needs of young, diverse children, including their idiosyncratic interests, learning pace, strengths and weaknesses (across cognitive, linguistic, and socioemotional developmental areas), and learning styles (e.g., visual, auditory, kinesthetic). Teachers can individualize instruction by offering choices in the classroom, such as alternative activities, various teaching and learning strategies, and a variety of assignments. By individualizing instruction, teachers can set developmental prerequisites needed for maximizing success and minimizing failure in the educational process of young, diverse children.

According to Gonzalez, Brusca-Vega, and Yawkey (1997), *active learning* requires that ESL "students must interact or come in contact with their environments in some fashion . . . [and] must be provided [with opportunities for] . . . emphasis on process and concrete object manipulation" (p. 158). Thus, for young, diverse children, the availability of multiple objects that they can touch, smell, see, and manipulate to sort, seriate, order, and use for symbolic play and problem-solving activities generates opportunities for developing conceptual mental abilities. For example, for young, diverse children at the BPDC to discover why autumn is also called fall, they need to manipulate actual leaves of different colors, shapes, and sizes and understand what happens when they drop them into a table or pail of water. Young children can discover, by *doing*, that the season *fall* is named after the many leaves that *fall* from trees, by engaging in collaborative learning with peers through instructional conversation activities that require critical-thinking and problem-solving processes, such as probing, trial and error, deduction, prediction, elaboration, and the use of prior knowledge.

Another example of BPDC curricular activities that stimulate language development through exposing young, diverse children to authentic sociocultural experiences is providing concrete anchors for developing concepts. Almost every primary-level class starts with a group time for describing the weather and identifying the date and month. When young children are asked to repeat strings of words, even in the context of a song, language becomes empty of meaning. Most young children disengage from learning weather concepts because they are presented without concrete, experiential anchors. Instead, when BPDC preschoolers are provided with manipulative materials to develop connections to real-life experiences, such as creating lived experiences in the classroom, they can attach language to these experiences and motivation for learning increases dramatically among young, diverse children. A good source of manipulative anchors may be representations of clouds in the form of cotton balls falling from the sky that preschoolers need to catch in a basket in the context of small groups. Then, with the help of a BPDC teacher as a mediator, children can engage in counting, adding, and subtracting quantities in relation to how many clouds their group and other groups of children were able to gather. The actual prior real-life experience of catching clouds provides young children the opportunity to build connections between prior and new knowledge across content areas and develop

conceptual understanding of the abstract concept of "cloudiness," having had the opportunity to develop meaning for a previous empty label. Then, coming back to the singing activity about how the weather is today, young children can experience that words in the song are meaningful because they had an opportunity to develop prior conceptual knowledge through exposure to real-life social and cultural experiences. Young children now become engaged, happy singers, who are actively learning the meaning of language. You can tell by their happy faces and their body language!

Another instructional strategy used at the BPDC to emphasize the connection of school with real-world experiences is to use *cooperative learning*. It is one of the best instructional strategies for helping young, diverse children acquire conceptual knowledge and increase their academic achievement and their language skills. In the context of an ethic-educator curriculum, peers can use cooperative learning to model learning and thinking strategies and to act as mentors and mediators or social resources for one another. Young peers can act as resources for one another because they have different strengths and weaknesses across content and developmental areas. Then, through the use of cooperative learning strategies, teachers can use the help of peer groups to increase conceptual learning, to integrate prior knowledge to subject and topic learning, and ultimately, to increase academic achievement. The participation in teams also helps young children improve emotional and social developmental skills, such as self-esteem self-concept, identity, trust, mutual respect and support, and a sense of synergy. Roles of group members should be rotated so that every student becomes responsible for different tasks and actively engages in all aspects of the learning tasks. For instance, some roles suggested by Ovando, Combs, and Collier (2006) for group members are captains, timekeepers, cheerleaders, presenters, recorders, and bilingual facilitators.

The diversity in young children's ethnic and cultural backgrounds, language-proficiency levels, achievement levels, learning styles, personalities, and developmental strengths and weaknesses can increase team group productivity and can enhance the utility of cooperative learning as a successful teaching strategy. Groups should be formed based on heterogeneous characteristics of students and should be rotated to maximize exposure to a diverse array of peer characteristics. Always, team or group work should avoid tracking of students by level of academic achievement or language proficiency background. In fact, it is beneficial for young, diverse children to be exposed to peers achieving at higher levels, in both academic and language proficiency. By experiencing exposure to the diverse backgrounds of peers, students can improve their attitudes toward mainstream and diverse groups and improve their communicative and cultural competence.

FOURTH CLUSTER OF PEDAGOGICAL STRATEGIES
An Advocacy Position for Teachers

Teachers need to develop classroom environments in which they act as mentors, advocates, role models, and cultural mediators for fostering caring, collaborative, nurturing, and motivated learning communities. Teachers of young, diverse

children need to become cultural mediators or bridges between their students' home culture and language and the mainstream school culture. This means that teachers need to adapt instructional strategies and the curriculum to the unique cultural and linguistic educational needs of diverse children. What works for mainstream students will not necessarily match the learning and developmental needs of young, diverse children. Thus, teachers need to become role models of instructional strategies that meet the cultural and linguistic diversity of their students.

Traditional mainstream education in U.S. public schools reflects the values and attitudes held by mainstream-American families, and it does not make allowances for diverse backgrounds. Thus, many diverse children and their families find themselves alienated from and confused by the norms and expectations of schools. The burden rests almost completely on the diverse children and their families to adapt to the way things are traditionally done at school. This can be exceptionally challenging for young, diverse children because while they are busy trying to deal with the cultural and linguistic dissonance they experience, they are missing valuable opportunities for learning academic subject matter, often with detrimental effects on their academic achievement. Children bring their cultural and linguistic background with them to school, as part of their personality. When a child's culture and language become part of their curriculum, the entire schooling process become more meaningful. Support in both school and home settings is beneficial and essential for the academic success of young, diverse children.

Therefore, to better serve diverse children, teachers need to become advocates and value their unique cultural and linguistic backgrounds as assets for their learning and developmental processes. For instance, BPDC teachers help young, diverse children make connections between what they already know (i.e., concepts in their L1, such as numbers and colors) and concepts and subject matter they are learning at school. Another example is that BPDC teachers use a variety of instructional strategies to try to match the different cultural learning and thinking styles, as well as the individual learning styles and topics of interest of their diverse students. Peer collaborative interactions in the BPDC classroom provide opportunities for young, diverse children to make connections with real-world experiences and prior sociocultural knowledge and use peers as role models for engaging in critical-thinking processes. When interacting with peers, language can be used as a tool for conveying concepts and new meanings (i.e., instructional conversations and interactive dialogue).

Teachers of young, diverse children also need to act as mentors and involve parents in the educational process. For instance, BPDC teachers help engage diverse parents in collaborative activities and open house events at school and in workshops and orientation sessions about the school culture. An important benefit of teacher-family collaboration is that it can also serve to empower parents through validation of their cultural and language heritage (i.e., child-rearing and socialization practices, communication styles, and cultural values toward education). This is very important for diverse families, who may often feel isolated from mainstream institutions like schools. Through these partnerships, parents'

expertise and cultural backgrounds can be utilized by making them feel valued and respected as players in their child's education. Thus, care must be taken by teachers to develop collaborative partnerships with immigrant minority parents, which need to be based on empathy and trust (Pease-Alvarez, García, & Espinosa, 1991).

Teachers can also facilitate diverse parent involvement by doing home visits and making phone calls to better understand their students' educational needs. By learning about the home and community environments of their diverse students, teachers become educated about their students' cultural and linguistic backgrounds and can make the educational context more equitable and meaningful. Then, the advocacy position of the ethnic-educator curriculum is that teachers need to be educated not only about the learning and instructional process but also about their diverse students' cultural backgrounds. Although clearly a time-consuming process, taking the time to learn about students' cultural backgrounds and home cultures is an essential aspect of providing more equitable educational opportunities for young, diverse children.

A major challenge for educators seeking to develop conceptual links for diverse children has been the practical task of identifying their prior sociocultural knowledge. It is becoming increasingly clear that diverse parents can play a crucial role in this identification process. A parent possesses invaluable insight into a child's prior knowledge because of the intimate and long-term nature of the relationship they hold with each other. A parent's thorough understanding of a child's household, community, and cultural environments also contributes to this expertise. Unfortunately, many barriers can exist between educators and diverse parents that inhibit sharing this understanding and applying it to the classroom. One of the barriers is that educators hold misperceptions of diverse parents. For instance, one common misconception is that immigrant parents hold low educational aspirations for their children or are uninterested in participating in their education.

An important step for teachers in coming to understand the cultural backgrounds of diverse children and their families is assessing their attitudes, beliefs, and related misconceptions and misperceptions of diverse children and their families. Teachers must realize that their personalities are the most important tool for instruction; they need to acknowledge their own beliefs and prejudices as well as determine how their particular cultural and linguistic backgrounds affect the way they conduct instruction. A BPDC teacher summed up very well how the experience of using an ethnic-educator curriculum had affirmed her commitment to better serve diverse children.

> My teaching experience has affirmed my belief that educators must take the initiative to inform others about the many wonderful differences in our world. The curriculum should be multicultural, giving students the opportunity to learn about all people and respect differences in our world. This will give students the chance to understand and respect all people, regardless of their social or economic status, race, gender, age, or religion, and make lifelong contributions for a better world.

In sum, as the reflection of the BPDC teacher illustrates, serving young, diverse children is a demanding and challenging task that requires advocacy and commitment. Teachers need to act as role models of respect and value for multi-culturalism and as mentors and cultural bridges for facilitating the cultural adaptation of young, diverse children and their families.

SUGGESTIONS FOR APPLYING THE STRATEGIES

These recommended pedagogical strategies can be used to interface content with developmental areas across the curriculum. Then, while the teacher stimulates young, diverse children to develop their language (with emphasis on additive L1 and L2 development), critical-thinking, and socioemotional skills, children can acquire verbal and nonverbal concepts in math, science, and social studies.

1. Teachers may use the language-experience approach (LEA), in which children tell their teacher or a more capable peer a story in their own words. Then, the teacher transcribes the story and reads it back to the students. With guidance, children eventually begin to read the text on their own. This can help connect children's words, personal stories, and experiences with print, and it supports the development of phonemic awareness (Diaz-Rico, 2004; Hadaway, Vardell, & Young, 2002).

2. Dialogue journals can be excellent and flexible follow-ups to reading a text. Typically, there is no established topic, and the teacher responds but does not evaluate or correct children's early attempts to write (Diaz-Rico, 2004). This strategy can be adapted for beginning writers by creating *frame sentences*, which are based on the initial text and present fill-in-the-gap key words for children to complete.

3. Reading aloud (listening to the teacher read or audiotapes of stories) is an excellent practice that provides students with "big words and literary sentences" (Hadaway et al., 2002, p. 168).

4. With the help of the teacher, children can work in small groups to respond to wordless picture books. Children can be stimulated to engage in discussions with peers of what they think will happen in the story, telling the story as they see it in the illustrations, or writing the events depicted in the pictures (Hadaway et al., 2002).

5. Children can be stimulated by teachers to respond to stories by drawing and then labeling key points of the illustrations with words and phrases (Hadaway et al., 2002; Igoa 1995). Together, children can compose the text for a big book. Each child is assigned a page of the book to illustrate, and then each of the pages is bound together to create the big book (Diaz-Rico, 2004).

6. Igoa (1995) described children's *filmstrip-story making*, in which they transform their own stories into a simple filmstrip. Children write their stories, and then they divide the text of the story into sections to accompany each film slide and record themselves reading the text. This becomes the narration for the film. Next, the child creates the graphics by creating a series of illustrations on a long strip of paper, which will be fitted to a reel for viewing. Finally, classmates are gathered around to listen to the story, offer constructive feedback, and decide together on sound effects. After they practice the sound effects, the film is viewed again with the audience providing the sound effects.

7. Teachers need to observe children carefully to discover their interests. Then, teachers locate texts that support the children's interests with the goal of motivating them to read and showing them that reading is related to their lives (Diaz-Rico, 2004).

Therefore, by using the pedagogical strategies endorsed by the ethnic-educator curriculum, teachers of young, diverse children can facilitate their academic achievement across content areas by stimulating their language, cognitive, and socioemotional development. By using language and literacy skills as tools for thinking, teachers empower young, diverse children to communicate verbal and nonverbal meanings across content areas in a socially appropriate manner.