

**Parent Priorities in Selecting Early Care and Education Programs:
Implications for Minnesota’s Quality Rating and Improvement System**

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Introduction

In the United States non-familial early care and education have become normative experiences for children, birth to age five. Six million children under three and 66 percent of four-year olds are in non-family care or preschool (Hernandez, 2004; Planty et al., 2008). While preferences (e.g., center-based, family care) may vary many families, regardless of ethnicity, language or culture rely on some form of early care for their children. The demands of supporting a family and assuring, while they work, that their children are safe combine to make early childhood programs a necessity for parents. In addition, families may view education as a vehicle for the future success of their children and hence may seek out early education programs to help them gain a head start. But not all early childhood programs equally benefit children developmentally and educationally. Program quality varies low quality programs may place young children at-risk. High quality early care and education programs can help young children develop optimal cognitive, social, emotional, and physical capacities necessary for school success. The strongest effects of participation in high quality early childhood programs are reported for children in poverty, who are disproportionately from culturally, racially, and linguistically marginalized communities (Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000).

With these complex pressures—economics, child well-being, parental peace of mind, and educational attainment—families try to find the very best early childhood programs they can afford. But what factors do parents and families consider in selecting programs for their children? How do they assess a program’s ability to meet their childrearing and early education preferences? Do parents and families from particular cultural communities want programs that reflect their cultural beliefs, values and practices? Do they prefer programs that include adults who share their childrearing values and communicate in their home language? Do families want programs that help children learn English and assimilate to American culture? Would families benefit from tools, such as rating systems that clearly enumerate agreed upon criteria for evaluating program quality and rankings (e.g., grades, stars, or points) that allow consumers to compare programs? Should rating systems include criteria that reflect cultural responsiveness and competence? These rating systems, most commonly called quality rating and improvement systems (QRIS)¹ are being developed in many states, including Minnesota, and are justified, in part, as aides to families faced with early education and child care decisions. In addition, QRIS is intended to improve early childhood program quality through establishing criteria and supporting continuous program improvement.

Commissioned by the Minnesota Early Learning Foundation (MELF) and funded through generous support from the McKnight Foundation, this study explores family priorities around cultural and language criteria useful in selecting early care and learning programs, and the extent to which criteria vary for families from different cultural and language communities. It

¹ Oklahoma developed the first quality rating system (QRS) in 1998, and over time the term ‘improvement’ has been added by some states to indicate that an interaction is intended between ratings, early childhood program improvement, and optimal child outcomes.

addresses these issues by gathering information on culture and language preferences of parents of young children from six cultural communities in Minnesota. The results reflect the opinions, experiences, and concerns regarding quality early care and education of African American, American Indian, Hmong, Karen, Latino, and Somali parents and community members. The MELF's support for this study grew out of its sponsorship of the Parent Aware Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS) pilot. By design, Parent Aware is unique among QRIS in its primary focus on providing parents with the information they need to select quality programs for their young children, including information on the cultural responsiveness of those programs. But the absence of validated tools that measure cultural responsiveness in early childhood programs limits the ability of Parent Aware to provide this type of rating to parents. The focus of the present study is not to create measures of cultural responsiveness, but rather to identify the types of information regarding culture and language factors in early care and education programs that might help families make informed decisions.

The rationale for examining whether families from different cultural communities consider culture and language factors in seeking early care and education programs is related to a growing consensus among early childhood administrators, practitioners, researchers, and advocates. This consensus suggests that: 1) the normative nature of early childhood non-familial care has heightened the concerns of stakeholders, including parents, legislators, and researchers regarding program quality; 2) families want high quality programs for their young children and they need the information to distinguish among early childhood program options and the resources necessary to access those programs; 3) attention to growing cultural and language diversity in early childhood programs and inequalities in child outcomes associated with child poverty necessitate targeted systemic strategies for improving early childhood programs; 4) children have a right to both the cultural and language heritage of their families and the tools and skills necessary to succeed in a global economy; and 5) high quality early childhood programs, by definition, apply the principles of cultural competence and responsiveness throughout all program components.

Diversity, the Achievement Gap and High Quality Early Care and Education

The development of ways to help *all* families access high quality early childhood programs and to improve existing program quality are related to three factors: 1) demographic changes; 2) the persistence of the achievement gap; and 3) the scarcity of high quality early childhood programs that effectively educate culturally and linguistically diverse low-income children.

Demographic Changes

Children under age five are the vanguard of significant demographic changes. Currently, 45 percent of children in the U.S. are African American, Alaskan Native, American Indian, Asian American, Latino, and Pacific Islander (Hernandez, 2005); and by 2020 it is projected that this

number will grow to nearly 50 percent (U. S. Bureau of the Census, 1998). One-quarter of 3- to 9-year-old children have parents who were born outside the U. S. (U. S. Bureau of the Census, 1999). Nationally one-quarter of Head Start children speak a language other than English (Head Start Bureau, 2000). In Minnesota the proportion of young dual language learners varies by region, for example in North Minneapolis and Saint Paul about 52 percent of low-income families with young children speak a language other than English, while in Blue Earth and Nicollet counties in south central Minnesota only 8 percent of children are reared in homes in which English is not the first language (Chase & Moore, 2008). Since 1990 the Twin Cities have experienced growth in new immigrant communities, and currently have some of the largest populations of Hmong and Somali in the United States (Greater Twin Cities United Way, 2001).

Young children are the most economically disadvantaged population in the U. S. and are poorer than children were 25 years ago (Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000). Forty percent of American children live in working poor families, with 18 percent of those families below the poverty line. Poverty disproportionately affects children of color, including children in immigrant families, who have poverty rates twice that of Caucasian children (Children's Defense Fund, 2000, p. 5). In the Twin Cities, poverty rates among children in communities of color and new immigrants are higher relative to that of Caucasian children. For example, in the Saint Paul schools 32 percent of Caucasian school children are eligible for reduced price lunch programs in comparison to 72 percent of both Hispanic and Hmong children. In addition, the nature of American families is changing: a majority of mothers are in the workforce; single parents head a significant proportion of all families; and many families need two working parents to make ends meet (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 1999). In Minnesota, 74 percent of children six years of age and younger live in families in which both parents are in employed outside the home (Kids Count, 2009).

These demographic changes suggest that a growing sector of the U. S. population will increasingly consist of children and families of color and in poverty who historically have been more likely to live in economically marginalized environments and less likely to attain high levels of education. Attention to improving the quality of programs serving children at greater risk for school failure is an imperative for the early care and education field.

Educational Achievement

Young children from low-income communities of color, children of immigrants, children for whom 'standard school' English is a new language or a second dialect, and children with behavioral, psychological or medical challenges are at greater risk of school failure than middle class Caucasian children. Dissimilarities in children's educational attainment appear early (Bondy & Ross, 1998; Bowman, Donovan & Burns, 2001; Knapp & Associates, 1995). For example, in comparison to their 4-year old Caucasian middle class peers, children in chronically poor communities are more likely to have lower educational achievement in reading and math; and be disproportionately assigned to special education classrooms. Many factors have been used to explain the relative poorer educational outcomes of culturally and racially marginalized children and the poor—teacher

education (Sleeter, 2001); low teacher expectations (Gay, 2004); limited exposure to ‘school’ language and discourse patterns (Au, 1980; Brice Heath, 1983; Delpit, 1995); negative stereotypes internalized by children (Steele, 1999); parent/guardian/family involvement (Comer, 2002, 1986; Epstein, 1992; U. S. Department of Education, 2001); need for multicultural education (Banks, 1996; Gay, 2004); and school curriculum (Apple, 1990). The educational gap continues to grow through the school years with fewer African American, American Indian, Latino, and poor children graduating from high school or attending college.

High Quality Early Childhood Programs, Diversity and Educational Achievement

Model high quality early childhood programs—the Carolina Abecedarian Project, Head Start/Follow Through, the Perry Preschool Project, the Chicago Child-Parent Program—have shown that early education programs can make a difference for children in poverty (Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000; Reynolds, Magnuson & Ou, 2006). These schools provide evidence that what happens inside early childhood classrooms can make a powerful contribution to academic achievement and can alter outcomes for students (Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000). The characteristics of high quality early education include well trained and well compensated staff, small adult-child ratios, consistency of adult caregivers, enriched age-appropriate curriculum, safe and stimulating environments, comprehensive family services, and staff who are culturally and linguistically competent (Ray, Aytch, & Ritchie, 2888; Reynolds, 2009; Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000). Especially significant are content knowledge, personal/psychological capacities (e.g., warmth), and skills working with culturally and linguistically diverse children of early childhood caregivers and educators (Bowman, Donovan, & Burns, 2001). But, “despite the knowledge of what constitutes quality teaching for young children, study after study demonstrates that there is a paucity of high-quality ECE teachers” (Kagen, et al. 2008, p. 6-7). Similarly, high quality early childhood programs represent a minority of the programs available to children and families. The majority of preschoolers (3-5 years of age) are in programs of only medium quality, the majority of children three and younger are in programs of only fair quality, and only nine percent of programs have been rated as excellent (Vandell & Pierce, 2003). Further, children in poverty are more likely to be in early care and education programs that are poorly resourced and staffed by adults who are less well prepared than teachers in programs serving middle class children (Ray, Aytch, & Ritchie, 2007).

Quality Rating and Improvement Systems and the Needs of Families for Early Care and Education Programs

From 1998 to the present 21 states and the District of Columbia have developed QRIS or QRS systems, and every other state is currently developing quality rating systems of some kind (Mitchell, 2009). In general, QRIS are state initiated mechanisms of accountability that are intended to improve early childhood program quality through establishing criteria of ‘quality’ and rating systems based on those criteria. The rating systems are available to both programs

and consumers, and are intended to leverage improvement in programs (Zellman & Perlman, 2008, p. 3). QRIS assume that if given information (e.g., quality criteria, ratings of programs), consumers will make informed choices, for example they will be more likely to select highly rated programs over those with lower ratings. In this way, consumer choice will act as a market force and will, in turn, impel lower rated programs to improve and higher rated programs to keep improving.

Because most QRIS use established standards, emphasizing alignment and accountability, their potential as mechanisms for systemic change in early childhood has been suggested (see Bruner, Ray, Wright, & Copeman, 2008; Mitchell, 2009). The potential of QRIS to consolidate, unify and reform the fragmentation in the early childhood system will require it to overcome its own systemic challenges. Currently QRIS are the products of the particular history, political culture, and early childhood/child services infrastructure in 21 states and the District of Columbia. A particular challenge for quality rating and improvement systems has been the matter of addressing child, family, and workforce diversity. If QRIS required all components (e.g., standards, accountability mechanisms, assessment tools) to demonstrate responsiveness and competence in relation to diversity (e.g., culture, language, ability, gender, social class and so forth) it would make a significant contribution to the larger early childhood field. However, at present it is clear that state QRIS efforts do not sufficiently address the complexity of diversity in early childhood settings. Bruner, Ray, Wright and Copeman (2008) analyzed 16 state quality rating and improvement systems for items that addressed culture, language, or race for which programs could receive a rating. They found that none of the 16 states have a specific subscale or component that assesses how well programs support the development and education of linguistically, culturally, racially and ethnically diverse children. While validated measures of cultural competence and cultural responsiveness do not currently exist, subscales of best practice in relation to these dimensions could be created by state QRIS based on criteria broadly accepted in the field (e.g., bilingual staff, intentional multicultural anti-bias curriculum, ongoing preparation of staff regarding cultural competence practice, written and transparent policies that support cultural competence). Presently these types of subscales of cultural competence have been proposed but not developed.

In addition, Bruner et al. (2008) report that QRIS tend to rely on measures of classroom quality, such as the Environmental Rating Scale (ERS) which to some extent refer to culture, race, and language differences in their assessment systems, but do not sufficiently address the needs of diverse learners throughout their standards. Further, these researchers found no evidence that QRIS award points for staff who: 1) are bilingual, bi-dialectic or able to speak in the family's home language; 2) have specialized training relevant to culture and language (e.g., bilingual or English as a Second Language certificates or coursework, specialized preparation in teaching culturally diverse children); or 3) have specialized training in anti-bias curriculum, addressing stereotypes and discrimination that children may exhibit.

Research (Ray, Bowman and Robbins, 2006a & 2006b; Wright & Copeman, 2007) has also identified other important challenges to developing a culturally responsive and competent early care and education system such as QRIS. Ray et al. (2006a) found that state and professional early childhood teacher standards insufficiently address the complex diversity present in early childhood classrooms; and early childhood teacher preparation programs inadequately address diversity (e.g., race, class, language, ability variations) in coursework and student practice requirements (2006b). Wright and Copeman (2007) found that state early learning standards only minimally address diversity. These studies are particularly relevant for the present discussion because of the reliance of many QRIS on teacher and learning standards and child learning standards developed by states and national professional organizations.

Standards and criteria of quality tend to be general and to be designed to apply to all programs—a one size fits all approach. Standards may increasingly reflect the aims of educational policymakers to reduce the achievement gap through improving instruction and assessing cognitive gains (Barbarian et al., p. 621) rather than the perspectives of a wider community of stakeholders, especially parents and families. Professional organizations, such as the NAEYC, have developed quality criteria and standards by drawing on indicators that have emerged in research, professional practice, and professional consensus documents. These types of standards have often been adopted by federal and state governments in their attempts to build systems to improve and regulate early childhood services for their constituents. Parent Aware, Minnesota's QRS program, relies on nationally accepted standards of early childhood program quality (e.g., NAEYC accreditation), local licensing, and national assessments (e.g., ECERS scores) as tools for assigning a rating to a program. The point here is not that this strategy is inappropriate, but that it may be insufficient in determining whether a program is culturally responsive and competent.

In comparison to early childhood professionals, parents occupy a unique vantage point in determining what children and families need (Lareau, 2003). Given their primary role as guardians of their children's welfare and development, parents, no doubt, use their own cultural models of child and adult competence and seek programs that will support their goals for their children. In addition, parents probably consider the environment in which their children are reared, including family, school, neighborhood, and nation, in determining what they want from preschool programs (Barbarian et al, 2006). Those who advocate for the development of QRIS have emphasized its potential to serve families and parents who seek early care and education programs. Despite this focus there is insufficient research on parents' views of program quality or how factors such as culture may influence their beliefs. Research (Barbarian et al, 2006; Cryer & Burchinal, 1997) suggests that in selecting early childhood programs, parents seek those that will enhance children's readiness for school, provide comprehensive services, are conveniently located, build strong parent-staff relationships, and support children's health and safety.

The inclusion of the perspectives of families, especially culturally and linguistically diverse families, in the development of Minnesota's QRS effort may help it to more effectively serve Minnesota's families and may contribute to advancing efforts to improve early care and education nationally. It is with these possibilities in mind that this study was undertaken.

Study Goals and Focus

Concern about providing parents and families with information that may help them evaluate and select early care and education programs shaped the two questions examined in this study:

1. In selecting early care and education programs how important are culture and language factors to parents and families?
2. What are the implications of study findings for Minnesota's QRS system, specifically what type of information could be provided to families regarding early childhood programs' cultural responsiveness and competence?

To examine these questions a decision was made by MELF staff in consultation with Aisha Ray, the consultant and study author, to gather information from six cultural communities, native-born and new immigrant, served by early childhood programs in Minnesota. The six cultural communities are African American, American Indian, Hmong, Karen, Latino, and Somali. In seeking early child care and education programs it was assumed that families in each of these communities had experiences unique to their community, but also experiences in common with other communities. Our hope was to capture the complexity of these shared and unique experiences and to consider their implications for the development of high quality early care and education programs and quality rating systems. Because early childhood professionals work in the six cultural communities of interest, are members of those communities, and have relationships with families, it was decided that they, rather than the consultant, would conduct the interviews. It was thought that parents would be more comfortable sharing information about their culture, language, and preferences for care of their young children with individuals with whom they have a relationship rather than with a stranger.

MELF in consultation with the report's author agreed to collect information from families in the six target cultural communities using a three-step process. Step 1 involved MELF staff identifying early childhood professionals from the six cultures who were serving families in those communities. They were invited to apply to participate in culture-specific focus groups organized by MELF and conducted by Aisha Ray. The purpose of the focus groups was to "gather information on how the Quality Rating and Improvement System, in Minnesota and in other states, could provide parents with more information on the cultural responsiveness and relevance of rated programs" (Recruitment letter sent to potential participants July 20, 2009).

Thirty-four professionals were selected by MELF to interview parents in their community, and to participate in a focus group in which they would share the responses from parents (see Table 1). The early childhood professionals who participated in the focus groups worked in a variety of roles including program administrators, early childhood teachers, home-based child care providers, advocates and outreach educators working to help families access a range of services. All participants, with one exception, were members of the cultural communities in which they recruited families.

Table 1. Number of Early Childhood Professionals and Families from Six Cultural Communities Involved in Interviews or Focus Groups		
Six Cultural Groups	Step 1: Recruit Early Childhood Professionals	Step 2: Recruit Parents with Small Children
	Number	Number
African American	6	23
American Indian	5	22
Hmong	5	19
Karen	6	20
Latino	5	21
Somali	7	35
Total	34	140

In Step 2 of the process each of the 34 early childhood professionals was asked to recruit at least three to four parents with young children in their community. Parents were told that they would be interviewed by the early childhood professional regarding the extent to which culture and language factors might influence their decisions to select child care or early education programs. Specifically, the early childhood professional asked each parent to respond to the following five questions developed by the consultant:

1. In selecting an early care program how important is it to you that the caregivers and teachers understand the values and traditions of your cultural community, such as how to treat others, how to address elders, or knowing right from wrong? Please indicate how important this is to you, and tell me more about why that does/does not matter to you. Is it *very important*, *somewhat important*, or *not important*?
2. In selecting an early care program do you want a program that includes caregivers and teachers from your cultural community? Please indicate how important this is to you, and tell me more about why that does/does not matter to you. Is it *very important*, *somewhat important*, or *not important*?

3. In selecting an early care program do you want a program that includes children and families from your cultural community? Please indicate how important this is to you, and tell me more about why that does/does not matter to you. Is it *very important, somewhat important, or not important*?

4. In selecting an early care program is it important to you that caregivers and teachers talk to your child in your home language? Please indicate how important this is to you, and tell me more about why that does/does not matter to you. Is it *very important, somewhat important, or not important*?

5. In selecting an early care program do you look for a program that has caregivers or teachers who are sensitive to how you raise your child? Please indicate how important this is to you, and tell me more about why that does/does not matter to you. Is it *very important, somewhat important, or not important*?

Parents' responses were recorded on questionnaires by the early childhood professionals, each of whom received \$100.00 for attending the focus group, plus \$50.00 for each parent (up to a maximum of four) that they interviewed. They could interview as many parents as they wished, but could only receive a total \$300.00 for their effort. Recruiting of the professionals began in June, 2009.

Table 2. Step 3 - Six Culture-Specific Focus Groups				
Six Cultural Groups	EC Professionals	Length (Minutes)	Date, Time	Interpreter
African American	6	90	August 12, 9:00-10:30	No
American Indian	5	90	August 12, 3:00-4:30	No
Hmong	5	90	August 12, 1:00-2:30	Yes
Karen	6	90	August 14, 9:00-10:30	Yes
Latino	5	120	August 13, 3:00-5:00	Yes
Somali	7	90	August 13, 1:00-2:30	Yes

Finally, in Step 3 the 34 early childhood professionals attended a culture-specific focus group and discussed the results of their interviews, as well as their own perspective (based on both personal and professional experience) on each of the questions. Six African American, four American Indian and one non-American Indian, five Hmong, six Karen, five Latino, and seven Somali individuals reported results from their interviews with parents with young children (see Table 2). All of the parent responses to the questions were discussed in the six focus groups with one exception: of the five individuals who provided information gathered from American Indian families, three were reported in the focus group and two were conducted by this report's author over the telephone. Each of the two telephone interviews lasted one hour. On average the focus groups were 95 minutes long, with five lasting 90 minutes and one lasting 120 minutes. The six focus groups were conducted on August 12, 13 and 14, 2009 in a conference room at the Wilder Center in Saint Paul, Minnesota, with the exception of the Karen focus group which took place at the Resources for Child Caring office in Minneapolis. The focus groups were conducted by the consultant, Aisha Ray and recorded by staff from Wilder Research, who also prepared an English language transcript of each focus group. All focus groups were conducted in English and language interpreters were present in the Hmong, Karen, Latino, and Somali focus groups. All questionnaires were tallied and percentages calculated. In addition, all transcripts were coded for themes and issues that emerged relevant to this study.

Responses of 140 Parents to the Five Questions Regarding the Importance of Culture and Language in Selecting Early Care and Education Programs

The results reported here include a summary of the responses of 140 parents and include issues that emerged in their discussion with the early childhood professionals. Data are presented in the aggregate and for each specific cultural group. Parents were asked about the importance of five factors in selecting an early childhood program: 1) caregivers and teachers understand the values and traditions of the parent's cultural community; 2) caregivers and teachers are from the parent's cultural community; 3) children and families from the parent's cultural community are present in the program; 4) caregivers and teachers talk to the parent's child in their home language; and 5) caregivers or teachers are sensitive to how the parent raises her/his child. A majority of 140 parents, ranging from 64 to 90 percent, responded that all five cultural factors were 'very important' to them (see Table 3). A minority of parents, ranging from 9 to 28 percent, replied that that the five cultural factors were somewhat important and only 6 to 9 percent stated that the five factors were not important in their selection of an early care and education programs.

Table 3. 140 Parents' Responses to the Five Questions

Five Questions	Very Important	Somewhat Important	Not Important	Don't Know/ Missing Data
	Number (%)	Number (%)	Number (%)	Number (%)
1. In selecting an early care program how important is it to you that the caregivers and teachers understand the values and traditions of your cultural community? How important is that to you?	126 (90 %)	12 (9 %)	0	2 (1 %)
2. In selecting an early care program do you want a program that includes caregivers and teachers from your cultural community? How important is that to you?	103 (74 %)	24 (17 %)	13 (9 %)	0
3. In selecting an early care program do you want a program that includes children and families from your cultural community? How important is that to you?	89 (64 %)	39 (28 %)	12 (8 %)	0
4. In selecting an early care program is it important to you that caregivers and teachers talk to your child in their home language? How important is that to you?	98 (70 %)	27 (19 %)	9 (6 %)	2 (1 %)*
5. In selecting an early care program do you look for a program that has caregivers or teachers who are sensitive to how you raise your child? How important it that to you?	113 (81 %)	13 (9 %)	12 (8 %)	2 (1 %)

* Indicates missing data due to questions that were not answered by parents during the interviews.

An additional method for examining parents' preferences is to arrange them by the highest to lowest percentages of 'very important' responses to the five factors related to the selection of early care and education programs

Factor 1: Caregivers and teachers understand the values and traditions of the parent's cultural community. Among the 140 respondents the greatest agreement was on selecting an early care and education program in which caregivers and teachers understand the values and traditions of the parent's cultural community. Ninety percent or 126 respondents stated that this was very important to them, and an additional 9 percent felt it was somewhat important. There were no parents who felt this factor was not important in selecting a child care program.

Factor 2: Caregivers or teachers are sensitive to how the parent raises her/his child. Eighty-one percent or 113 parents felt that this factor was very important, 9 percent that it was somewhat important, and 8 percent that it was not important. Together, those two responses, very important and somewhat important, account for 90 percent of the responses for this factor.

Factor 3: A program includes caregivers and teachers from the parent's cultural community. Seventy-four percent or 103 parents responded that caregivers and teachers from their cultural community were very important to them in selecting a child care program, and an additional 17 percent (24 parents) reported that this factor was somewhat important to them. Together those two responses, very important and somewhat important, account for 91 percent of the responses for this factor. Only 9 percent of parents did not consider this an important issue in selecting child care.

Factor 4: Teachers talk to the child in their home language. Seventy percent or 98 parents reported that teachers who speak the child's home language are very important and additional 19 percent (27 parents) stated that this factor was somewhat important. Together those two responses, very important and somewhat important, account for 89 percent of the responses for this factor. Only 6 percent of parents considered this factor unimportant in seeking an early education program for their child.

Factor 5: Children and families from the parent's cultural community attend the program. Sixty-four percent or 89 parents considered this factor to be very important, and an additional 28 percent (39 parents) felt it was somewhat important. Together those two responses, very important and somewhat important, account for 92 percent of the responses for this factor. Only 8 percent of parents felt this was not important in their child care decisions.

Parents' opinions regarding the cultural and language factors they consider in selecting early childhood programs can be further examined by comparing the responses within cultural groups (e.g., what factors did African American consider most important relative to other factors) and between groups (e.g., what factors did Hmong versus other groups consider as most important). Table 4 allows us to compare the responses of particular groups of parents.

Table 4. Responses of Parents from Six Cultural Communities Regarding the Significance of Cultural Factors in Selecting Child Care
(Frequency and Percentages*)

Six cultural communities	Degree of Importance	In selecting an early care program how important is it to you...									
		1. That caregivers and teachers understand the values and traditions of your cultural community?*		2. That programs include caregivers and teachers from your cultural community?		3. That a program includes children and families from your cultural community?		4. That caregivers and teachers talk to your child in their home language? **		5. That a program has caregivers or teachers who are sensitive to how you raise your child?	
		number	%	number	%	number	%	number	%	number	%
1. African American** (n=23)	Very important	20	87	12	52	12	52	16	70	20	87
	Somewhat Important	2	9	7	30	8	35	4	17	2	7
	Not Important	0		4	17	3	13	1	4	1	4
2. American Indian*** (n=22)	Very important	17	77	13	59	12	55	12	54	19	86
	Somewhat Important	5	22	5	23	8	36	6	27	2	9
	Not Important	0		4	18	2	9	0		1	4
3. Hmong**** (n=19)	Very important	15	79	10	53	6	31	8	42	13	68
	Somewhat Important	3	16	6	31	6	31	6	32	2	10
	Not Important	0		3	16	7	37	5	26	4	21
4. Karen (n=20)	Very important	20	100	20	100	18	90	16	80	20	100
	Somewhat Important	0		0		2	10	3	15	0	
	Not Important	0		0		0		1	5	0	
5. Latino (n=21)	Very important	19	90	14	67	11	52	15	71	14	67
	Somewhat Important	2	10	6	28	10	48	5	24	6	28
	Not Important	0		1	5	0		1	5	1	5
6. Somali***** (n=35)	Very important	35	100	34	97	30	86	31	89	27	77
	Somewhat Important	0		0		5	14	3	8	5	14
	Not Important	0		1	3	0		1	3	1	3

* Percentages rounded up

**Questions 1 missing 1 response and Question 4 missing 2 responses

*** Question 4 missing 4 responses

**** Question 1 missing 1 response

***** Question 5 missing 2 responses

African American Parents. In responding to all five early childhood factors a majority (52 to 87 percent) of the 23 African American parents felt they were all ‘very important’. But, of the five factors two, *caregivers and teachers who understand the values and traditions of the parent’s community* and *are sensitive to how the parent raises her/his child* were each selected by 87 percent of parents. Fifty-two percent of African American parents felt that in selecting early childhood programs *the presence of teachers from their cultural community and families and children from their community* were very important. If the percentages of responses to very important and somewhat important are combined for the five factors they range from 82 to 96 percent. Four or fewer parents considered the five early childhood selection factors not important.

American Indian Parents. A majority of the 22 American Indian parents (54 to 86 percent) felt that all five factors were ‘very important’ (see Table 4). In selecting child care programs the largest percentage (86 percent) of parents in this group considered *caregivers who are sensitive to how the parent raises her/his child* to be very important; and 77 percent considered *caregivers and teachers who understand the values and traditions of the parent’s community* as very important, also. Smaller percentages of parents, but still over 50 percent, felt that three other factors matter in selecting early childhood programs: 1) *caregivers and teachers from your cultural community* (59 percent); 2) *families and children from your community* (55 percent); and 3) *caregivers and teachers who speak the home language of the parent* (54 percent). Eighty-one to 99 percent of parents selected very important and somewhat important in responding to the five early childhood selection factors; and only four or fewer parents considered the five factors not important.

Hmong Parents. Three of the five factors, 1) *caregivers and teachers who understand the values and traditions of the parent’s community* (79 percent), 2) *caregivers who are sensitive to how the parent raises her/his child* (68 percent), and 3) *caregivers and teachers from the parent’s cultural community* (53 percent) were considered to be very important by Hmong parents (see Table 4). In selecting child care programs nearly one-third of Hmong parents consider *caregivers and teachers who speak the parent’s home language to the child*, *caregivers and teachers from their cultural community*, and *children and families from the parent’s cultural community* are somewhat important. Thirty-seven percent of Hmong parents responded that *caregivers and teachers from the parent’s cultural community* was not important in selecting early childhood programs; similarly, 26 percent reported that *teachers who speak to the child in the parent’s home language* is not important; 21 percent that *caregivers and teachers who are sensitive to how the parent raises her/his child* is not important; and 16 percent that *children and families from the parent’s culture attend the program* was not important.

Karen Parents. As can be seen in Table 4 the 20 Karen parents had very consistent responses, ranging from 80 to 100 percent on all five early childhood program selection criteria. One hundred percent of Karen parents agreed that three of the five factors were very important, 1) *caregivers and teachers who understand the values and traditions of the parent's community*; 2) *caregivers who are sensitive to how the parent raises her/his child*; and 3) *caregivers and teachers from the parent's cultural community*. Ninety percent of parents consider the presence of *children and families from the parent's cultural community* to be very important and 80 percent feel similarly that *caregivers and teachers speak to the child in the parent's home language*. If the very important and somewhat important responses are combined 95 to 100 percent of Karen parents consider the five factors in choosing early care programs. Only one parent responded that any of the five factors was unimportant, in this case the factor was *caregivers and teachers talk to the child in the parent's home language*.

Latino Parents. Ninety percent of 21 Latino parents consider two factors to be very important—*caregivers and teachers who understand the values and traditions of the parent's community* and 71 percent that *caregivers and teachers speak to the child in the parent's home language* (see Table 4). If the very important and somewhat important responses are combined for these two factors the parent's responses rise to 100 percent and 95 respectively. Sixty-seven percent of Latino families rank both *caregivers and teachers from the parent's cultural community* and *caregivers who are sensitive to how the parent raises her/his child* as very important. In responding to the importance of *children and families from the parent's cultural community* 52 percent of Latino families rated this factor as very important and 48 percent as somewhat important. Only one parent responded that three of the factors were not important—*caregivers and teachers from the parent's cultural community*, *caregivers who are sensitive to how the parent raises her/his child*, and *caregivers and teachers speak to the child in the parent's home language*.

Somali Parents. Like Karen parents the 35 Somali parents had considerable agreement across the five factors that may influence their decisions regarding early childhood programs. One-hundred percent of Somali parents consider *caregivers and teachers who understand the values and traditions of the parent's community* as very important (see Table 4). In addition, very important was selected by 97 percent in responding to the factor, *caregivers and teachers from the parent's cultural community*; 89 percent to the factor *caregivers and teachers speak to the child in the parent's home language*; 86 percent to the factor *children and families from the parent's cultural community*; and 77 percent regarding *caregivers who are sensitive to how the parent raises her/his child*. Only one parent responded that three of the factors were not important—*caregivers and teachers from the parent's cultural community*, *caregivers who are sensitive to how the parent raises her/his child*, and *caregivers and teachers speak to the child in the parent's home language*.

Common Themes in the Interviews

Key themes that emerged in parent-early childhood professional interviews were identified. These responses reflect the most common themes and are presented in no order of importance.

Question 1-Caregivers and teachers understand the values and traditions of the parent’s cultural community, and Question 5-Caregivers and teachers are sensitive to how the parent raises her/his child. The largest percentages of parents (ranging from 79 to 100 percent) in five of six groups, African Americans, Hmong, Karen, Latino, and Somali, considered *caregivers and teacher understand the values and traditions of the parent’s cultural community* as very important. The largest percentage of American Indian parents consider *caregivers and teachers are sensitive to how the parent raises her/his child* as most important, and the second largest percentage choose *caregivers and teachers understand the values and traditions of the parent’s cultural community*.

Common Themes for Questions 1 and 5:

- Parents and families need early care and education programs that they trust. Many parents reported it is difficult to find programs that appear to understand the complexity of their cultures, and hence prefer family home care, both licensed and unlicensed, that is provided by members of their cultural and language communities.
- Many parents felt that it is very important that early care and education staff understand their cultural model of child competence. The reasons parents offered for the importance of both the culturally grounded childrearing practices of particular cultural communities and sensitivity to how parents raise their child included the need for the teacher to understand parental, family and community expectations of a well-raised child, and for improved communication with staff and families. They gave examples of values, beliefs, practices, behavioral norms, and ways of knowing the world that early childhood staff need to understand, but generally do not. For example:
 - All groups referred to behavioral norms children are taught for respectfully greeting and interacting with adults and older children. In many Karen families children are taught to refer to adults who teach in schools not by her/his first or last name, which would be disrespectful, but as “Teacher” a title of honor. Many African American parents expect children to refer to an adult with a title, such as Mister or Misses before their last name. A Hmong parent said, “When you communicate in our culture you respect the elders and you speak to them with a different tone and in a different manner.” African American parents stressed the need for children to respect their elders, their parents and themselves. In addition,

parents were concerned about the development of trusting respectful relationships with early childhood teachers (African America Focus Group, August 12; Hmong Focus Group, August 12; and Karen Focus Group, August 14, 2009).

- Latino parents described childrearing practices that involve demonstrating physical closeness, holding, and affection to children (Latino Focus Group, August 13, 2009).
- Karen, Hmong and Somali parents commented on food taboos, concerns about the typical American diet, and the importance of good nutrition for their children, for example Muslim Somali children cannot eat pork (Hmong Focus Group, August 12, Somali Focus Group, August 13, and Karen Focus Group, August 14, 2009).
- Many parents referred to the need for early care and education staff to understand the religious/spiritual/philosophical practices of families and communities. American Indian parents mentioned the importance of understanding how feasts, ceremonies, and holidays are a part of the lives of children. Hmong parents commented on the seamless relationship between religious/worldview and everyday life; and on variations among Hmong families who have become “Christian and capitalists” and those who hold traditional beliefs. (Hmong Focus Group, August 12, 2009).
- Somali parents and families tend to use childrearing practices in helping their children calm down or regain focus that are different from those employed in many childcare programs. The strategy of “time out” used in early care and education programs is unfamiliar to many Somali parents and some view it as inappropriate for young children (Somali Focus Group, August 13, 2009).
- Karen parents stated, “Culturally, the Karen people are very peaceful. Our great grandparents taught us from generation to generation to be peaceful and to be helpful to each other. The caregivers need to know that is our expectation. ...we also would like the care provider to know that we have our own traditions, our food, our literacy, our flag, and we have our own clothing.” (Karen Focus Group, August 14, 2009).
- Karen parents remarked that they wanted care givers to know that the Karen do not have family names in the way that many Americans do, and that when addressing an individual they must use the full name.

- A Hmong participant stated, “You were talking about how you train children at a young age. It has to do with roles versus mannerisms. So the [Hmong] children are supposed to submit to the older people or to the elders and show them respect. There tends to be support for roles versus the individual child. American culture teaches a lot for the individual child, so they give them time-out so they can think about what they’ve done. The Hmong culture teaches more about community and their roles in community, versus how it’s going to affect yourself when you grow up. I think that’s a big difference.” (Hmong Focus Group, August 12, 2009)
- Parents observed that early childhood staff members rarely approach them and ask them to share information about their culture or childrearing practices. When cultural or other differences are addressed, they generally are raised in the context of a perceived problem the program is having with the child or family. These encounters generally are not conducted in an atmosphere of genuine curiosity or mutuality, rather the tone is often judgmental and critical. Some parents commented that they did not like to have to explain their culture to others, especially if they feel they are being implicitly or explicitly criticized. Other parents are willing to share themselves and their culture with early childhood caregivers and teachers if it is done in atmosphere of respect.
- Parents may prefer Family, Friends and Neighbors care because they feel that the childrearing perspectives and behaviors they value will be reinforced and supported in that type of care. As one parent reported, “We want our kids to feel love, not just be told you’re loved...those are the kind of values that we like to see, which is why we go to Family, Friends and Neighbors.” (Latino Focus Group, August 13, 2009).
- Early care and education programs may through curriculum, policies and other practices may reinforce cultural, racial and ethnic stereotypes of the communities from which the children in the program come. These practices are both hurtful and unacceptable to parents and families. For example, American Indian parents cited activities in early childhood programs that depict ceremonial objects (e.g., war bonnets) inappropriately or American Indian life in stereotypical ways, such as people living in teepees which tend to reinforce outmoded and reactionary views of children, families and communities. African American parents commented that teachers expectations of young African American boys may be low, teachers may have negative attitudes towards boys, and the curriculum of early childhood programs may not sufficiently take into account the developmental and educational needs of their boys (Native American Interview, August 21, 2009; African American Focus Group, August 12, 2009)
- Early care and education program curricula, policies and practices may implicitly or explicitly disrespect the cultural practices of families. For example, Somali parents

reported incidents with early care and education staff who removed the headscarves young girls wore to school, fed their children foods that are taboo in their culture, and appear insensitive to the religious practices of the families.

- An African American parent mentioned the need for staff to “culturally bond” with the child because it helps children develop socially and emotionally, to get along well with others, and to develop cognitively. This term appeared to involve knowledge of the child’s cultural community, positive regard of the child’s cultural background, affective capacities (e.g., warmth, ability to develop positive relationships), and communication skills (African American Focus Group, August 12, 2009).
- Teachers’ and caregivers’ cultural, ethnic or racial background was less important to parents than the ability to deeply know and understand the culture of parents.
- Parents gave numerous examples from their experiences with early childhood staff in which they felt that there were significant cultural misunderstandings. Examples included lack of knowledge, intrusive behavior, and judgmental attitudes towards discipline practices, observance of religious traditions, forms of greeting and address, appropriate food and food taboos, childrearing practices, dress of children, and so forth.

Question 2-The program includes caregivers and teachers from the parent’s cultural community. Apparently, for Karen and Somali parents this was a very important factor in selecting early childhood programs, while for all other groups fewer than 70 percent of parents felt similarly.

Common Themes for Question 2:

- Parents discussed the need to increase the number of teachers and caregivers who are from their particular communities because they would reinforce parent’s childrearing goals, and communicate effectively with families and children. Further, teachers and caregivers from the parents’ culture would be in a position to advocate for families and parents and to communicate effectively with other early childhood professionals.
- Parents acknowledged that simply being from a culture does not necessarily translate into cultural competence in a teacher or caregiver.
- A Karen parent stated, “We 100 percent need the Karen staff in the program.” Another Karen parent remarked, “I assume that would be the best way to do it, to have the Karen staff in this program so that he or she can accommodate with the culture issue and the language issue.” (Karen Focus Group, August 14, 2009)

Question 3-The program includes children and families from the parent’s cultural community. The percentage of parents who felt this factor was very important varied across the groups from 90 to 31 percent. Fifty-two percent of Latino and African Americans parents, and 55 percent of American Indian (55 percent) endorsed the importance of this factor.

Common Themes for Question 3:

- Teachers and caregivers need to help children from different cultural and language traditions learn to get along well with others because they are growing up in a multicultural global world.
- Every group expressed concern that children might lose their culture through exposure to other cultural influences.
- A Karen parent stated, “We just want the Karen kids and families to have their friends at school. At other times they can speak English with their friends, but if there is a Karen section period they should speak the language and they should have friends to speak with (Karen Focus Group, August 14, 2009).

Question 4-Caregivers and teachers talk to the child in the parent’s home language. A majority of all groups (Range from 54 to 86 percent) said *caregivers and teachers who speak to the child in the parent’s home language* were very important.

Common Themes for Question 4:

- Many parents discussed the importance of language to their child’s development and their hope that early childhood programs include teachers and caregivers who can speak to the child and the parent in their home language. It did not matter whether the teacher was from the community or not. But whether monolingual English speakers or dual language speakers, parents did acknowledge that they wanted their children to have excellent language role models in early childhood programs. Specifically,
 - A Latina expressed a common sentiment, “The most important thing for me is that my child speak the ‘right’ language—right English and the right Spanish.” (Latino Focus Group, August 13, 2009).
 - Hmong parents discussed the need for early childhood staff to understand that two Hmong dialects exist. A parent stated, “If you are talking about a school setting or in a caregiving setting, the Hmong language in itself, there are two dialects.

There is the Green dialect and the White dialect....So when you are talking about programming that offers a Hmong cultural focus, that has the [cultural] practice and the language, the question always becomes, 'Do we teach the Green dialect or the White dialect?' And it gets pretty political. The written language is written in White Hmong dialect. And that's where you get the tension because if it's a parent that is very aware of what is happening in the school or in the caregiving place, then they start to question, 'Why isn't my dialect used?'" (Hmong Focus Group, August 12, 2009).

- A Karen parent stated, "And the Karen kids that were born here, one day I think they will be the President, like President Obama. We hope that we teach the kids that when they become the President they need to speak their language too, not just American, not just English (Karen Focus Group, August 14, 2009).
- Language and culture are inseparable, a child cannot know their culture if they do not know their parent's language.
- Parents want children to become truly bilingual, that is fluent and literate in their home language and in English. They want early childhood programs to help them achieve this goal.
- Parents feared that their children will lose their home language and because of this fear may not enroll them in early childhood programs. They referred to their observations of older children who they feel do not speak their parent's language well or at all, and are better speakers of English than are some of their parents.
- Many American Indian parents want their children to speak their heritage language, but insufficient numbers of elders still speak languages, such as Ojibwa. In discussing this factor parents talked about the bitter legacy of their grandparents' experience in U. S. government-sponsored boarding schools that forced their grandparents, as children and youth, to lose their heritage language and threatened their identity. The present-day implication of language loss in previous generations is that many American Indian parents feel they will not be able to find early childhood programs in which staff members speak their heritage languages.

Building a Culturally Responsive and Relevant QRIS in Minnesota: The Implications of Family Early Childhood Preferences

Parents in all groups appear to want early childhood programs and caregivers/teachers who are culturally responsive and competent. There were variations in their preferences across the six parent groups but the trend in the data is clear. Culturally and linguistically diverse parents and families face a dilemma not generally shared with monolingual middle class parents. They worry that their children will lose their language and culture. They want their children to succeed in American schools and society, but they fear that the cost may be very high. Parents want teachers and caregivers (and probably directors, master teachers, and family workers, too) to appreciate their culture and to turn to the family/parents for insights into their culture, its values, practices, and ways of knowing that may help the teacher understand the child more deeply—and hence educate the child more effectively. Parents view culturally responsive early childhood programs as potential allies, in part because within them their culture and language is valued, members of their communities are on the staff, children from their community attend and are well cared for, and the program helps their children learn the skills and knowledge necessary for school success. It is difficult to distill into simple descriptors all the knowledge (e.g., the role of culture in child development), dispositions (e.g., openness, warmth) and skills (e.g., effective communicator, ability to be critically reflective) necessary to meet parents' expectations. Most early childhood caregivers and teachers have had little to no formal training on the role of culture in child development, teaching and learning, or in working with adults across cultural, ethnic or language borders. Ray and Bowman (2005) found that most early childhood teachers, whether experienced or novice, did not feel prepared to educate culturally and linguistically diverse children or to work with their families. The shortage of highly competent early childhood teachers who can meet the expectations of parents and families in this study is a significant barrier to helping them find programs that they so earnestly want and feel their children deserve.

The five questions parents were asked to respond to included five factors associated in research and practice literatures with culturally responsive and culturally competent (CRCC) approaches to the education of *all* children², especially culturally and linguistically diverse children. The following sections first discuss the developmental theories and research on children (preschool to early elementary school) that support a culturally responsive early childhood approach; and secondly, discuss specific cultural and language information that could be offered immediately to Minnesota parents and families to help them distinguish between early childhood programs.

² The term 'all children' refers to children typically described as 'diverse' or 'minorities' including but not limited to children of color, immigrant children and children of immigrants, dual language and dialect speakers, low-income children, gay/lesbian/bisexual/transgender children, ability diverse children, and children from all cultural and ethnic traditions. In addition, this term includes, but does not privilege, the developmental and educational needs of European American middle class, monolingual children without disabilities. This term implies equity, inclusion, social justice, and investment in all children's developmental and educational needs in early childhood settings and at all levels of professional development and training (Ray, Bowman & Robbins, 2006a, p. 1).

Culturally Responsive and Culturally Competent Early Care and Education

A significant body of research and practice literatures argue that effective early childhood education for culturally, racially and economically marginalized children must be grounded in and responsive to children's cultural and language backgrounds (Irvine, 2003; Ladson-Billings 1994; Murrell, 2002; Ray, Bowman & Robbins, 2006a). In addition, early childhood programs that are culturally responsive and culturally competent may be appealing to culturally and linguistically diverse families. CRCC programs intentionally support parents' and families' desires to help their children build positive cultural identities and language abilities, *and* gain the academic tools for success in the larger society. High quality CRCC programs support and embrace these parenting goals and work to insure that young children can succeed in both school and community. All aspects of these programs (e.g., curriculum and pedagogy, hiring, policies, staff training, administration, family partnerships) reflect these values and goals.

The rationale for the role of culture in children's development and early education is related to cognitive theory (e.g., Piaget, 1969; Vygotsky, 1978) that posits new knowledge is built on prior knowledge and experience. Before formal schooling, all children have gained an enormous amount of understanding of the world through observation, participation, and explicit instruction from adults and older children. When children are introduced to new information, they use their repertoires of established knowledge, language, and cultural practices to make sense of the new (Cole, 1996; Rogoff, 2003). In order to support optimal learning in young children, CRCC early caregivers and educators have a deep understanding of and respect for the knowledge children bring to school and care settings. They also recognize that children are shaped by a cultural model of care and competence held by their family and community. This model involves values, beliefs, expectations, practices, roles, and behaviors that contribute to the desired developmental outcomes held by the adults. CRCC early caregivers and educators realize that their development is also a product of a cultural model. Culturally competent early caregivers and educators believe that 'expertise' about the child is co-constructed with the parent/family.

Research that shows all child development occurs in the context of culture (Kağıtçıbaşı, 1996; Nsamenang, 1992; Rogoff, 2003), and research on culturally responsive programs (see for example, Delpit, 1995; Irvine, 2003; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Native Hawaiian Education Council, 2002; Pewewardy, 1994; Sheets, 2005) has important implications for creating high quality early care and education programs in which all children achieve and develop as whole individuals and productive citizens. CRCC high quality early education is not a silver bullet for everything that ails this society and its children, but can contribute to better educational outcomes for culturally diverse children and those economically disadvantaged (Heckman, 2007; Reynolds, Magnuson & Ou, 2006).

CRCC Early Caregivers and Educators

Caregiving practices, teaching practices, and curricula responsive to racially, culturally and economically marginalized young children have been recommended for bridging the gap between the knowledge children bring with them to school and what schools want them to learn. This literature identifies the following characteristics, practices and assumptions of culturally responsive care and education:

- All young children are embedded in families in which cultural models of care and competence shape their development;
- All young children (infants to 5 years of age) are involved in the construction of knowledge;
- Young children's prior knowledge, interests and personal and cultural strengths form the foundation for learning;
- Young children examine the activities (e.g., curriculum, materials, routines) in early care and education settings from a variety of perspectives;
- Early childhood caregivers and teachers are aware of their own cultural and professional models of development, care giving, teaching and learning;
- Early childhood caregivers and teachers use multiple assessment practices; and
- Classroom and family home care culture is inclusive of all children (adapted by Ray from Villegas & Lucas, 2002, pp. 91-123).

According to research (Casper, Cooper, Finn & Stott, 2003; Foster & Peele, 1999; Irvine, 2003; Villegas & Lucas, 2002) culturally responsive teachers and caregivers:

- Understand that child development occurs in cultural context and that children are embedded in complex family and social relationships that matter to them and their families;
- Develop rich relationships with children and families based on respect;
- Recognize that social-ecological factors such as race, social class and culture locate people within a social order which may influence how they understand the world;
- Advocate for children and engage in systemic reform within early care and education programs and settings;
- Are anti-racist, anti-bias, and social justice advocates;
- Are responsive to the context (e.g., program, families, neighborhood/communities) in which they teach and individual and group needs;

- Possess an array of strategies and techniques for engaging young children (birth to age 5) effectively, and create instruction that integrates the knowledge and experience children have with the knowledge children are learning in early care and education programs; and
- Develop knowledge and understanding of the necessity to learn about the children in their program and have strategies to do so; and design instruction and activities to draw on children's strengths and address their needs (adapted by Ray from Villegas & Lucas, 2002, p. 121).

*Early Care and Education Teaching Practices that Connect
Children's Experience to the Classroom*

Research on teaching practices distinguishes between *transformative* approaches that dismantle institutionalized Euro-centric pedagogy (see for example McCarty, 2002; Murrell, 2002; Native Hawaiian Education Council, 2002); and *additive* approaches in which culturally responsive practice is infused in classroom curriculum, but may not alter a fundamentally Euro-centric pedagogy. The former, which Murrell (2002) refers to as culturally explicit pedagogy, requires transformation of early childhood programs at all levels—classroom practice, policies, philosophy and so forth. It is usually created by a partnership of early educators, community leaders, and families. The development of culturally explicit pedagogy for Native Hawaiian (Native Hawaiian Education Council, 2002), Navajo (McCarty, 2002), and Alaskan Native children (Alaskan Native Knowledge Network, 1998) indicates that these programs have contributed to greater educational success for children, family and community engagement, and teacher efficacy. These efforts differentiate between teaching and learning *about* the child's culture, and teaching and learning *through* the child's culture (Native Hawaiian Education Council, 2002, p. 12).

Scheurich's (1998) research on highly successful early elementary schools serving economically disadvantaged racial minority students (largely Latino) is instructive. Children in these schools perform at or above their more economically advantaged peers on standard achievement measures. These schools are generally not developed by university experts in partnership with school personnel, but appear to have evolved from dedicated parents/guardians/families, teachers, and principals who craft over time a shared vision for the education of children in a particular school. Scheurich's data suggests that all partners share four beliefs, specifically: 1) all children can succeed at high academic levels; 2) relationships with children must be based on love, appreciation, and respect; 3) the child's culture and first language are highly valued; and 4) the school exists for and serves families and the community.

Research on additive approaches indicates that particular practices do improve outcomes for children of color and children in poverty. Specifically, early elementary children (6-8 year olds, 1st-3rd grade) who have teachers who help them build connections between school and home

culture show significant improvement in literacy and mathematics achievement. Knapp and Associates (1995) studied 140 high-poverty early elementary school classrooms in 15 schools and identified two dimensions of teachers' instructional responses to the diversity of children in their classrooms. The first dimension involves *constructive* and *nonconstructive* teacher responses. Essentially, constructive teachers believe that regardless of home culture characteristics (e.g., parent's marital status, poverty) children can learn, while nonconstructive teachers assume that students' backgrounds determine educational outcomes. The second dimension involves the degree of *responsiveness* (*active* versus *passive*) that teachers exhibit in dealing with student differences. Active teachers believe that they understand the cultural backgrounds of the children they teach and use teaching strategies and curricula that support their beliefs. Passive teachers do not respond to differences either because they do not perceive differences or do not recognize them as significant in the child's educational performance. The researchers caution that active responses should not be perceived as automatically positive. Active teachers can incorrectly assume that they understand children's home culture, and as a result, may develop teaching strategies based on erroneous assumptions.

CCCR educators do improve children's learning of school content. Despite the prevalence of deficit perspectives regarding the language skills of children in poverty a considerable research literature argues to the contrary. These researchers assert that schools and teachers stigmatize the languages and literacies children bring to school and hence cannot and do not use them as a basis for engaging young learners (Compton-Lilly, 2003; Dyson, 2003; Zentrella, 1997). Dyson's (2003) rich ethnography documents a CCRC early childhood teacher who knows how to use children's home language as a platform for successful teaching and learning. She is, in Knapp's terms, both responsive and active. African American, Latino/a, and Asian American low-income children bring into the classroom an extensive popular literacy (e.g., hip hop songs, church sermons and music, radio deejays, movies, jump rope rhymes, television, sports). The children and their teacher use these literacies in art projects, problem solving, relationship building, and in early writing and early literacy activities. Further, the teacher uses children's home language and knowledge to build bridges to school content both she and parents want children to master. Together children's literacy and writing capacities were strengthened throughout the school year. This use of the cultural knowledge children bring to school is a fine example of how teachers of young children can develop rich discourse, early writing and early literacy skills and connect home and school. It requires that teachers recognize children's communicative abilities, embrace their linguistic traditions, build on their strengths, and understand parental goals regarding maintaining home culture and the development of school competence.

In conclusion, CRCC early care and education may make a significant contribution to evolving ideas about what constitutes a highly effective caregiver or teacher of culturally and linguistically diverse children in Minnesota, as well as constructs of quality early education. It

appears to meet the preferences parents in the present study hope to find in selecting child care and early education experiences for their children.

Suggestions for Immediately Addressing Identified Parent Preferences for Culturally Responsive and Culturally Competent Care

The following section lists suggestions for immediately addressing the preferences for culturally responsive and culturally competent care identified by the six parent groups. The descriptors are organized somewhat loosely under information about culture and information about language.

Information about Culture and Early Care and Education Programs

1. Parents appear to want early child care and education programs that are responsive to and reflective of their cultural values and practices.
2. Parents want early care and education staff who understand their culture, including values, beliefs, practices and ways of knowing the world.
3. Parents want early care and education staff from their communities.
4. Parents value early care and education programs and perceive them as places where their children can develop important social, emotional, cognitive and physical capacities necessary for later school success, and where parents can learn important information about parenting.

Possible programs descriptors are:

- Information about the program's curriculum. Parents discussed the value of learning about other cultures and children learning from one another in multicultural programs. Parents may benefit from knowing if a program has a multicultural anti-bias curriculum. Does the program provide families with information about its goals regarding the value of multicultural programming? Does it state its values, for example to treating all cultures and individuals with respect? A 'culturally neutral' approach may not assure parents that *their* children's culture is welcome and will be respected within the program.
- Information about the role of families in bringing culture and language into the program and the classroom. Does the program have strategies or programs that encourage family involvement in the classroom curriculum as cultural teachers or cultural experts? For

example, involving parents and other family members as story tellers, folk dance instructors, as teachers, and so forth.

- Information about the program’s emphasis on social-emotional and social learning. Parents discussed wanting their children to learn to get along with others because they and their culture valued positive relationships with people from other groups. Also, parents mentioned that they valued programs that helped their children develop positive social skills.
- Information about the program’s approach to engaging families. Parents discussed wanting to partner with early care and education staff. Does the program welcome ‘families’ or only ‘parents’? In some cultures members are embedded within large extended families, clans, and other meaningful social units, and children may be reared by multiple caregivers, not merely their parents. Parents mentioned individuals beyond themselves who are critical in the rearing of their children. These individuals included grandparents, aunts, uncles, godparents, and individuals with responsibility for moral instruction of the child or healing the child. Families may be helped to distinguish between early childhood programs if information about their approach to families is described.
- Provide information on the program’s commitment to children’s cognitive development and readiness for learning. Parents and families value early childhood programs because they perceive them as places where children learn content related to present and later school success. Provide information that helps parents and families understand the program’s philosophy toward their child’s learning (e.g., “all children can learn, no exceptions”).
- Provide information that indicates staff members have demonstrated skills and training in working with families from different cultures and communities.
- Describe how program policies and procedures support a multicultural-anti-bias approach to families and children.
- Describe how the program serves other family needs. Does the program provide other support services to families it serves? Are those services offered in the parent’s first language?

Information about Language and Early Care and Education Programs

1. Parents want early care and education staff who are highly competent home language models for their children, for example to have at least a college degree and speak "standard" Spanish, Hmong, or Somali--not just any form of their home language. This factor would influence their selection of an early childhood program.

2. All parents, especially Somali, Hmong, Karen, and Latino, recognize that finding early childhood programs that have staff who are culturally knowledgeable and competent and/or excellent home language models is very difficult and contributes to their preference for friend, family and neighbor care.

3. Parents recognize that in many cases they will not find early childhood programs that have culturally competent and responsive staff who speak their language. Because they are aware of the limitations of current early care and education programs in these two critical areas they often look for center-based programs using other criteria, e.g., staff training, student-teacher ratios, attention to safety, age appropriate curriculum.

- Describe the early care and education programs language policy—English only, multilingual, dual language, transitional, or bidialectic; indicate that the language policy is written and available to every parent and prospective parent. A written language policy will help families understand the program’s approach to their home language and to learning English. It should be translated into the languages of parents/families served in the program.
- Information about the program’s early language or dual language curriculum or approach. Describe the programs use of a multilingual, bilingual or monolingual curriculum or approach to early literacy and to teaching and learning. Given the complexity of language issues in early childhood, especially for dual language learners, it is important that the program try to address what emerged as an issue in the parent interviews, namely the competence of adult speakers of the child’s home language.
- Provide information about how the child’s first language is dealt with within the classroom
- Information about the capacity of the staff to speak to the family in its preferred language (e.g., “Our program makes every effort to communicate with families in their home language.”)

- Indicate whether the program provides translators at meetings and all/most interactions with families for whom English is not their preferred language
- Describe the varied formats used to convey information to families (e.g., text messages, newsletters [electronic and paper], voicemail) and the policy regarding communication with families employed by the program (e.g., “all information sent home or mailed to families is translated into Spanish and Hmong.”)
- Describe how the program supports families getting to know one another and how it promotes cross cultural dialogue and engagement
- Provide information regarding caregivers and teachers competence in children’s first language.
- Indicate if caregivers and teachers have specialized training in English as a Second Language (ESL) or bilingual early education.
- Describe how the program policies and procedures support a multicultural-anti-bias approach to families and children.

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