In Chapter 1, you learned that American families are becoming increasingly diverse. What will that mean to you in your teaching? Think about what you’ve learned, thus far, about being responsive to different family types, as well as your own experiences with people from different races, cultures, religions, and socioeconomic and language groups. How prepared do you feel to work with culturally diverse families? Consider these questions:

- How will the changing demographics of American families influence your work with them?
- What exactly is “culture”?
- What are some similarities and differences between culturally diverse families?
- How can you work effectively in supporting linguistically diverse families?
- What should you consider when collaborating with families in terms of their religious beliefs or socioeconomic level?
- What is culturally responsive family involvement and how can you practice it as a new teacher?
- How can a classroom cultural audit help you welcome all families into your classroom?

Part of the excitement of working in the field of education is to get a glimpse of the future of communities and our nation right in our classrooms. The children of families that you
serve today will soon be high school graduates and one day, the adult citizens in your community. The children in your classroom are a reflection of the next generation and demonstrate the increasing diversity of America. One illustration of this diversity is seen in the many languages spoken by children in today’s American classrooms. Table 6.1 lists the top 25 languages spoken in schools currently, and Tables 6.2 and 6.3 demonstrate that while some states do have a higher population of English language learners, diversity is found in all areas of the country.

As you encounter the changing demographics of the nation at the local level in your own classroom, you will be working with children and families whose language and culture will be different from your own as well as that of other children. Those differences pose a particular set of challenges as you seek to be respectful of all children and families. The long list of differences can range from child-rearing practices, eating and dietary habits, gender roles, attitudes about school and learning, communication styles, to uneasy relationships with teachers and administrators.

In this chapter, we will examine how culture influences family involvement practices.
In the Classroom: The Silent Child

Clara Simpson didn’t know what to do. She had tried everything she could think of to help Elena be successful in her third-grade classroom, but as far as she could tell, she had made no progress with her. Elena and her family had moved to Poplar Grove from Mexico in early September, and they spoke no English. Since Elena’s first day in her classroom, she had not spoken one word in class. Clara had not been worried about that in the beginning, but here it was, late November of the school year, and Elena continued to be silent in the classroom. Clara knew that Elena was learning. She noticed how observant Elena was in watching the other children, and she knew that Elena comprehended some information. Just yesterday, the class had been working in groups on experimenting with simple machines. Elena had successfully done the task, needing little help from her group members. “How can she understand that a bottle opener is a lever, yet can’t answer questions about a story?” Clara wondered in frustration.

Clara had tried to build a relationship with Elena’s parents, but it was difficult since they spoke no English and had to rely on family members to serve as translators. At the parent-teacher conference a few weeks ago, they had nodded at everything Clara told them about Elena’s progress and seemed agreeable to helping her at home; yet Clara couldn’t tell if they were helping her or not. As a part of the school’s new Family Involvement Plan, she had invited the parents in to talk about their careers, and she had hoped Elena’s parents would come in and share their Mexican culture with the class. She knew they couldn’t speak English well, but thought that might motivate Elena to speak up in class, if she could translate for her parents. However, they had sent word through Elena’s fifth-grade cousin that they were not available. Clara knew that they worked long hours at the family’s Mexican restaurant to support themselves and guessed that they didn’t have time to come to school. Elena was probably going to grow up and work in the family’s restaurant business anyway, so maybe she shouldn’t worry about her academic progress.

Rosario rocked 3-year-old Gabriela and thought about how their lives had changed so dramatically in the last year. A year ago, the hurricane had destroyed much of their coastal fishing village of La Pesca in northeastern Mexico. Miguel’s fishing boat had been demolished, and their home damaged beyond repair. It was the final straw in their decision to leave Mexico for a better life for their family in the United States. Miguel’s brother, Hector, and his family had moved to the United States 10 years ago and owned a successful Mexican restaurant in town. He had been after them for a long time to come and join him in the business. “Our life in La Pesca wasn’t so bad,” she thought, as Miguel worked hard with his fishing business, and Rosario had been a teacher at the local school until Elena was born. Miguel and Rosario both believed that it was important for her to stay home with their children, and she had given up her teaching job to care for Elena, followed a few years later by Javier, and then Gabriela. Even without her income, they had managed to get by, until the hurricane. Now, in their new life, Miguel enjoyed the restaurant business, and she liked living close to her sisters-in-law. The Latino community in Poplar Grove was growing, and their local Catholic church offered a service in Spanish where her family could worship. Her English was slowly improving, and she hoped that one day that she would speak it well enough to volunteer at the children’s school. The school system was good, and she respected the teachers’ opinions. Elena’s teacher, Mrs. Simpson, had been concerned at their conference that Elena was not keeping up with the class, but Rosario knew from the things that Elena chattered about at home in Spanish that she was learning many new ideas. Elena didn’t seem to be picking up English as quickly as Javier was in his kindergarten class, and some of Rosario’s friends from church had told her that she shouldn’t allow the children to speak Spanish at home, but it was important to Rosario that the children not lose their Mexican heritage. She wished she could help Elena more with her homework and that Elena didn’t have to work 2 and 3 hours a night on it, but until her own English was better, she’d have to continue to rely on her nieces and nephews for help.
### TABLE 6.1  Language Backgrounds of Limited English Proficient (LEP) Students in the United States and Outlying Areas, 2000 to 2001 (Sorted by Estimated Rank, Top 25 Languages)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Language</th>
<th>LEP Students</th>
<th>Percentage of LEP Students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>3,598,451</td>
<td>79.045</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Vietnamese</td>
<td>88,906</td>
<td>1.953</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Hmong</td>
<td>70,768</td>
<td>1.555</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Chinese, Cantonese</td>
<td>46,466</td>
<td>1.021</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Korean (Yue)</td>
<td>43,969</td>
<td>0.966</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Haitian Creole</td>
<td>42,236</td>
<td>0.928</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Arabic</td>
<td>41,279</td>
<td>0.907</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Russian</td>
<td>37,157</td>
<td>0.816</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Tagalog (Filipino)</td>
<td>34,133</td>
<td>0.750</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Navajo (Dine)</td>
<td>27,029</td>
<td>0.594</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Khmer (Cambodian)</td>
<td>26,815</td>
<td>0.589</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Chinese, Mandarin</td>
<td>22,374</td>
<td>0.491</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Portuguese</td>
<td>20,787</td>
<td>0.457</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Urdu</td>
<td>18,649</td>
<td>0.410</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Serbo-Croatian</td>
<td>17,163</td>
<td>0.377</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Lao (Laotian)</td>
<td>15,549</td>
<td>0.342</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Japanese</td>
<td>15,453</td>
<td>0.339</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Chuukese (Truk)</td>
<td>15,194</td>
<td>0.334</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Chinese, unspecified</td>
<td>14,817</td>
<td>0.325</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Chamorro</td>
<td>14,354</td>
<td>0.315</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>Marshallese</td>
<td>13,808</td>
<td>0.303</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>Punjabi</td>
<td>13,200</td>
<td>0.290</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>Armenian</td>
<td>13,044</td>
<td>0.287</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>Polish</td>
<td>11,847</td>
<td>0.260</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>French</td>
<td>11,328</td>
<td>0.249</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


*Note:* These numbers mask regional variations. For example, in nine states, Spanish was not the dominant language among LEP’s. In Montana, Blackfoot was the top language other than spoken English, and in Maine, the top language diversity was French. In several states, Vietnamese was not the second most common language diversity. For example, Chinese ranked second in New York and Kentucky, and Serbo-Croatian was second in Missouri.
TABLE 6.2  English Language Learners Population by State

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>States with largest population of students with limited English proficiency (LEP) in public schools (2004 to 2005)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. California (1,591,525)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Texas (684,007)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Florida (299,346)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. New York (203,583)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Illinois (192,764)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Arizona (155,789)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. South Carolina (714.2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Kentucky (417.4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Indiana (407.8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. North Carolina (371.7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Tennessee (369.9%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Note: Twenty states have seen more than a 100% growth in the numbers of students with limited English proficiency since 1994.

TABLE 6.3  Top 10 U.S. School Districts Enrolling More Than 20,000 English Language Learner (ELL) Students (2004–2005)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>City Rank</th>
<th>ELL Students</th>
<th>Percentage Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Los Angeles, CA</td>
<td>328,684</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New York, NY</td>
<td>122,840</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chicago, IL</td>
<td>82,540</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miami-Dade, FL</td>
<td>62,767</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Houston, TX</td>
<td>61,319</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clark County, NV</td>
<td>53,517</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dallas, TX</td>
<td>51,328</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>San Diego, CA</td>
<td>38,629</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Santa Ana, CA</td>
<td>36,907</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Broward County, FL</td>
<td>29,909</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

WHAT IS CULTURE?

Culture is often described as the beliefs or practices of a certain group of people, but there are difficulties associated with the word "culture" in terms of its complexity. Frequently, people are labeled as “Latino,” “African American,” “Asian,” or “Native American,” and described in terms of characteristics attributed to their culture. Yet within each of these groups, there is much diversity. As Gonzalez-Mena (2008) stated,

Culture is extremely complex, and people of the same culture are quite different, depending on their individuality, their family, their gender, age, race, ethnicity, abilities, religion, economic level, social status, where they live and where they came from, sexual orientation, educational level, and even appearance, size, and shape! (p. 5)

Instead of viewing culture as a description of a group of people, perhaps a more useful approach for educators is to think of culture as the lens through which people view the world based on their own background and experiences. Cultural beliefs and practices, as transmitted through a student’s family and community experiences, help shape their personal and family histories. This is called belongingness, and it is important for educators to understand all the cultural influences on a family when trying to establish a relationship with them (Villegas & Lucas, 2002).

Culture cannot be limited to a fixed category or stereotypical list of traits. Instead, culture is fluid:

We all create cultures as we move through time. So, beyond race and ethnicity, culture has to include age, class, sexual orientation, disability, immigration, and any other axes of identification. We must not see these categories as separate. Rather, each intersects in various ways for different groups, and those intersections change over time. We cannot just talk about ethnicity or race separately. Rather, we must look at how race, class, gender, sexual orientation, and other axes come together for different communities in different locations during different times. (Warrier et al., 2002, p. 662)

In addition to race, ethnicity, language, age, socioeconomic status (SES), sexual orientation, disabilities, or country of origin, culture can also include religious or spiritual practices and geographical locations. For example, even though the white, Anglo-European descendant population may be similar in skin tone and language, there is a great diversity between rural and urban; male and female; upper-, middle-, and lower-socioeconomic classes; and younger and older Caucasians. Culture or diversity does not just refer to minorities but applies to the entire population.

If culture includes all these different factors, then all of us are multicultural. As Warrier et al. (2002) stated,

I might have grown up in a working class, but today I am a professional, so I may no longer identify as a working-class person. If I am multiracial, how do I identify
myself? We must move from having unitary ways of understanding people to looking at the complex ways all these issues come together for different people. (p. 662)

Before you can move toward cultural competence, you need to understand this critical concept of culture and how it changes and evolves with shared experiences and changing social and political landscapes (Warrier et al., 2002).

**Key Concepts in the Idea of Culture**

Phillips (as cited in Couchenour & Chrisman, 2000, pp. 25–26) described six key concepts of culture:

1. **Culture is learned**: Culture is not biological, meaning that a child of a certain ethnic or racial background may not necessarily understand the practices of that ethnic or racial group if not raised in it. For example, a child adopted from China and raised in a rural, middle-class white American home may not have any understanding of the Chinese “culture,” unless specifically taught about it.

2. **Culture is characteristic of groups and not an individual trait**: Individual personality characteristics, such as shyness or competitiveness, are not cultural practices. However, students may also have learned cultural behaviors. Children whose personality traits are in conflict with their family’s cultural behaviors may feel like they do not belong in their “culture.”

3. **Culture is a set of rules for behavior, but not necessarily the behavior itself**: Children are taught what is considered to be correct behavior and what is not, based on cultural beliefs. For example, if a family’s worldview is one of assertiveness and speaking up for individual rights, then children will be encouraged to be equal participants in conversations and question authority, while another cultural group’s belief may be to respect authority, with children taught to remain silent when adults are speaking.

4. **Cultures borrow and share rules**: Cultures change and influence one another, especially as people from different cultures interact, marry, and raise children. For example, if a couple, who are each of the Christian and Jewish faiths, marries, they may choose to raise their children with the religious beliefs of both of their faiths, including observing holidays from both religions. Cultures may change over time unless the group protects its boundaries by discouraging members from interacting with others outside the culture. For example, the Amish culture seeks to isolate itself from the American culture and protects its cultural practices and beliefs dating back to the late 17th century. Marriages outside the faith are not allowed (Robinson, 2006).

5. **Members of a cultural group may be proficient in cultural behavior but are unable to describe the rule**: For example, a rural southern tradition is to serve black-eyed peas and hog jowl on New Year’s Eve due to the belief that if a person eats like a “poor man” on the first day of the year, the New Year will bring prosperity. Children may grow up participating in this tradition and continue it into adulthood without ever understanding why this is a traditional holiday meal.
6. Individuals are embedded to different degrees within a culture. Acculturation describes the degree to which people from a certain cultural group display the beliefs and practices of that group. Families adopt cultural practices in varying levels based on factors such as education level, SES, the amount of time spent in the culture or removed from it, including the age of immigration from the native country, the amount of contact with people from other cultures, and urban or rural origin (Randall-David, 1989). Therefore, it is important for teachers not to expect a family to act a certain way because of their race, ethnicity, or language. It is important to understand individual differences, as well as cultural beliefs.
SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES AMONG CULTURALLY DIVERSE FAMILIES

There are fundamental similarities among culturally diverse families that teachers can count on. Parents from all races, social classes, and ethnicities want the very best for their children. One Latino mother summed it up: “I believe every parent wants their child to be something” (Griego Jones, 2003, p. 89). To help achieve this, a significant amount of learning goes on in the home. Families may discuss the events of the school day with their children, help with homework and projects, as well as teach about the world indirectly through everyday activities in the neighborhood and community (De Gaetano, 2007). This goes counter to the notion of the deficit model held by some educators. The deficit model is a negative view about families that presumes that some families are lacking in resources or talents to support their children in their education. As discussed in Chapter 2, Moll's research relating to families' funds of knowledge clearly illustrates that teaching goes on in every home, and teachers should recognize and appreciate the resources of the home.

While there are similarities among culturally diverse families, there are also differences, especially relating to the amount and type of school involvement the families will choose. Edwards (2004) described differentiated parenting as the recognition that families differ from one another in their ideas, viewpoints, and abilities to work with educators. Some families may willingly choose an active role and partnership with the school, while other families may remain fearful and intimidated by the prospect of school involvement based on language differences, racial politics, social stigma, educational or economic level, and age. One mother related her discomfort when attending a meeting scheduled by the teacher:

The pre-judgment before you even get there . . . your stomach starts churning, and I mean, I think that’s how most parents feel. It’s like, oh, I gotta go in and talk to the teacher at the teacher conference and they are going to look at me like I don’t know anything. (Griego Jones, 2003, p. 91)

It is important for you to have a variety of family involvement strategies that will allow families to choose to be involved in ways that are best suited to their lifestyle and beliefs about education.

TEACHERS’ BELIEFS ABOUT DIVERSE FAMILIES

While collaborating with individual parents, caregivers, and extended families, you need to reconsider your habitudes, or unexamined attitudes or preconceptions of cultural traits, because these preconceived notions may be inaccurate for the actual families you’ll be working with (Flores, Tefft-Cousins, & Diaz, 1991). Teachers may mistakenly use the term culture as an explanation for student and family behaviors that appears contradictory to their expectations. Ladson-Billings (2006) described an incident where teachers had labeled certain cultures as being a “problem” when it came to family involvement:
Teachers from a suburban school invite me to talk to them about a problem they are experiencing. They cannot get African American and Hmong parents to come to school. I arrive at the meeting and begin with the question: “Suppose you arrive at school tomorrow morning and every African American and Hmong parent in this school is here. What would you have them do?” The teachers sit in stunned silence. I have not given them some handy tips or a pat explanation about the culture of the students and their parents. (p. 108)

Establishing respectful relationships with families of diverse cultures first involves understanding your own personal beliefs about culture and the complex nature of family involvement.

It is also important to note that the dominant white, middle-class American perspective generally prevails when considering family involvement practices, and teachers often (unconsciously and consciously) feel more at ease with family involvement practices that reflect that worldview (Villegas & Lucas, 2002). This conventional approach to family involvement may feel strange to families who hold different viewpoints about their role in their child’s education. For example, some families may not understand how fundraising through a bake sale or school car wash may directly contribute to the academic success of their child. They would rather help their children with homework and leave school activities to the teacher, who was trained for that (Clayton, 2003). American teachers view favorably families who act as interventionists in their child’s education, with active involvement in school activities. However, some cultures view the family’s role in their child’s education to be noninterventionist in nature, or that they should not intervene in the education process or question the teacher’s practices (Protheroe, 2006). For example, one study found that parents from the Netherlands, Sweden, Japan, and Belgium believed that education-related activities belong exclusively to the educators, whereas child rearing belonged solely to the family (Mullins as cited in Copeland, 2007). Another study of immigrant families with highly successful children described one family of five children with two parents who lacked a high school education. Interviews showed that the parents expected their children to work hard in school and value education and that this work ethic was constantly communicated to the children. From a teacher’s viewpoint, the parents may have seemed largely uninterested in their children’s education since they were not involved in traditional ways, such as volunteering at school or attending conferences (Protheroe, 2006). These varied perspectives can cause teachers who value traditional family involvement activities to feel frustrated, as in the case of one teacher who lamented the lack of volunteers in her classroom, stating, “I give up my time after school for their child. They should give up a little of theirs to come to school and meet with me.” This teacher never realized that her own cultural perspective limited families to ways they could be involved, causing her to fail to appreciate the ways they were actually supporting their child’s learning.

The majority of American teachers come from the dominant culture: 86% of elementary and secondary teachers are white, European Americans (Gay, 2002), and they may have fixed notions of the “right” way to parent, leading to resistance to other worldviews. For example, teachers regularly recommend that families read books with their children
and view negatively any families where books weren’t read in the home. However, as one Latino mother shared, having books in the home and reading to children was not a routine in many Latino homes, but instead, they tended to tell stories. For example, many mothers would hold babies and toddlers and tell them stories, which was also a bonding time. This mother was surprised when her children entered school that families were encouraged to purchase books for the home and that reading to or listening to children read was so much stressed by the teachers (J. Goddard, personal communication, March 30, 2007). As this illustrates, it is important for teachers to not only understand their own personal beliefs but also strive to understand families’ viewpoints and practices that are different from their own.

**LINGUISTIC DIVERSITY IN FAMILIES**

With the variety of languages spoken by American students and their families, it is important for you to develop skills to work successfully with those who may not speak English. This starts with an understanding of the process of second language acquisition and how families influence that process. The process of learning a second language is similar to the process of learning the first language. However, becoming fluent in a language can be highly influenced by environmental factors, including the ability to practice the language with other competent speakers and the support in the school setting. Schools may offer a variety of instructional programs for English language learners (ELLs):

1. **English immersion:** Often called ESL (English as a Second Language). This approach does not develop or have the child practice their first language. The goal is to have students learn everything in English.

2. **Bilingual education:** Sometimes called dual-language programs. Instruction in this program is divided into English and the child’s first language. The goal is to maintain and support the child’s first language while transitioning into English.

3. **Primary or native language programs:** Instruction is only in the child’s native language with little or no exposure to English. (Espinosa, 2005)

Research indicates that helping children maintain and build their skills in their first language, while building strong language skills in English, should be a long-term goal for educators. When children lose the ability to speak their native language, they may suffer cultural alienation, family difficulties, and possible school failure (Espinosa, 2005; Garcia, 2003; Wong Fillmore, 2000). There is strong value in children maintaining their home language, as the home can function as a language refuge, a place where cultural bonds and linguistic ties to the extended family are nurtured. The home can also reinforce a positive attitude toward learning English, although the decision about whether to speak English at home should be a collaborative family decision and not forced due to school expectations (Clayton 2003).
Suggestions for Working With Linguistically Diverse Families

When working with families who do not speak English as their first language, you should encourage them to speak with their child in the home language and support families in the following ways:

- Loan native language books, stories, and materials to families to use during interactive reading activities.
- Include families and extended relatives in the classroom as language models to read to the class in their first language or tell stories, provide translation, and teach the class new words.
- Keep families informed about their child’s language development in the acquisition of English. Compared with learning only one language, bilingualism may result in a slower growth in vocabulary. Also, one language may become dominant for the speaker, which is normal (Espinosa, 2005). This can be confusing and upsetting for families who notice the child depending on his or her native language less.
- Allow students to maintain their native culture and language. Research shows that students who maintain their cultural identity and native language have more academic success (Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory [NWREL], 1998).
- Recruit volunteers to serve as guides for the families’ first year in a new school setting. Ideally, these mentors should speak both English and the families’ native language. If that is not feasible, then offer the services of translators when possible.
- Work with your district to offer districtwide meetings for families with limited English proficiency, complete with translators to ensure information is disseminated and questions are answered (Clayton, 2003).

While you may try to reach out to families who do not speak English and encourage them to be involved in the school setting, it is important to realize that often, families with limited English proficiency may be reluctant to become involved for several reasons. Their lack of fluency in English, plus their lack of knowledge of the cultural expectations of schools, may prevent involvement. In addition, many cultures regard attending a child’s school as the delivery of bad news and possible loss of face. They are afraid they will be given suggestions by the teacher they cannot implement because of language misunderstandings. Finally, many families do not have the luxury to leave work and physically get to school during inconvenient hours for them, from 8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. If public transportation does not run near the school, they may lack the means to get there.

More information about working with linguistically diverse families, relating to communicating effectively with them, will be shared in Chapter 11.

WORKING WITH NEWLY IMMIGRATED FAMILIES

Estimates provided from the Federation for American Immigration Reform (FAIR, 2007) show that, as of 2005, 12.1% of the U.S. population comprises foreign-born people. While
a debate has raged for several years about the positive or negative influence that immigration has had on our society, the impact of immigration has been profoundly felt in schools (Friedlander, 1991). Immigrant children are regularly found in today’s classrooms, and there are a variety of reasons as to why these students’ families chose to migrate to the United States. Some came for religious freedom or to unite with family members, others to escape various war-torn countries or oppressive governments and dictators, while others may have chosen to live in the United States to seek the economic possibilities the country has to offer. You may have a similar family history as many of the new immigrant groups. History tells us that families have been immigrating to the United States for similar reasons from the beginning of its founding.

Some families who reach the United States come with advanced preparation, job security, language and educational skills, family and community support, making for an easier adjustment in adapting to their new life. Other families, who leave their country under a variety of difficult circumstances such as war, political chaos, or economic stagnation, may face greater adaptation problems due to uncertainty, separation, lack of support, low education and language skills, and general isolation. The experience of many immigrant families includes a combination of both these positive and negative experiences in their adjustment and adaptation (Igoa, 1995; Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 2001).

Until the last part of the 20th century, the majority of the immigrants to the United States came from European countries, as specified in federal policy. A change in that policy made entry into the United States more representative of the world at large, and today’s immigrants come from every corner of the planet. These contemporary immigrants face several issues and challenges. These may include learning a new language and dealing with different religious traditions, values, and principles from their native country, which may be in conflict with their beliefs about the role of men and women in society and child-rearing practices (Buriel & De Ment, 1997). Employers often seek immigrant workers for lower-paying, less-desirable jobs (National Immigration Forum, 2005), and immigrants may find resistance from the community for their presence. This uneasiness that a community may feel about a new group is often based on the perception that the cultural identity of their community, and even the nation, is under siege (Huntington, 2004).

Suggestions for Working With Newly Immigrated Families

Immigrant families and their children are now part of communities in every state of the nation. As a teaching professional, your task is to focus on the well-being, adjustment, and accommodation of the family and child in the school community. By building a relationship that strengthens the adaptation journey for the family, you foster individual success in school and community life. Here are some suggestions to consider:

- Focus on helping the child become successful in school. School success is embraced and encouraged by families, most specially immigrant families.
• Provide families with resources for their own life-long learning goals by sharing resources for English classes, job training, GED classes, and job opportunities.

• As a key person in the adaptation process for an immigrant family, you may be the “ambassador” of American culture. Provide explanation and reasoning for our way of life, from special celebrations and holidays to the foods served in the school cafeteria.

• Depending on the stage of adaptation, you may be using “translators” and interpreters with recently arrived immigrant families; as the teacher, you must always be clear that you are the person responsible for a child’s school progress, the relationship is between you and the parent; translators are to be the “background” voice during meetings and conferences. Ideally, professional translators should be used, but realistically, finding these translators is not always feasible. You may need to get creative and find local resources within the community, such as military personnel who have lived abroad, or electronic translation sources, such as free or commercial Internet sites and computer programs. Remember, there may be some parents who are not literate, and you should not rely only on print communication.

• Be aware of intercultural communication, which includes more than just language, but also the relationships between people who are different in values, role expectations, and rules in social relationships (NWREL, 1998).

• Encourage family involvement. Many families come from cultures where teachers are not questioned and family involvement in schooling would be considered rude and disrespectful (NWREL, 1998). Thus, involvement in the educational process may be a new concept for many immigrant families. Therefore, continuously reach out to your students’ families with suggestions of ways they can be involved with their child’s education.

• Seek to understand the causes of immigration and particular concerns of your students’ families. As stated earlier, immigrants come to the United States for various reasons, and no two immigrants’ experiences are the same. Understanding why your students’ family immigrated will assist you in developing a positive relationship with your immigrant families.

As with past generations of immigrants to America, education will provide the foundation for a new life in the United States for new immigrant families. Your work with these families and their children today will have a lasting, positive impact on those families as well as your community.

DIVERSITY IN FAMILY RELIGIOUS PRACTICES

Beginning teachers are often confused about diverse family religious practices: what to include in the classroom curriculum in the area of world religions and how to respect family
requests concerning their religious beliefs. For example, is it all right for children to talk about their family’s religious practices in class discussions, or is that a violation of the separation of church and state? Can teachers share books that show families participating in religious ceremonies and rituals without being accused of teaching about religion? The First Amendment makes it clear: “Public schools may not inculcate nor inhibit religion. They must be places where religion and religious conviction are treated with fairness and respect.” This point is important enough to repeat, “public schools uphold the First Amendment when they protect the religious liberty rights of students of all faiths or none” (Family Education, 2007, p. 1). Therefore, culturally supportive family involvement practices include respecting all families’ religious beliefs and allowing children to share those freely in the classroom.

The issue of religious beliefs often surfaces around holidays. In the United States, the school calendar is built around the holidays celebrated in the Christian religion. For example, public schools are not in session on Sunday, the Christian Sabbath day, and schools rarely plan activities to be held on a Sunday or other special religious days, such as Christmas and Easter. Teachers tend to plan their curriculum around the dominant culture themes, and the classroom read-aloud often features holiday stories from an Anglo-Saxon perspective. This ethnocentric, monocultural emphasis can lead to cultural discontinuity for students from different religious backgrounds, where they feel disconnected from the overall classroom cultural environment because of a lack of connectedness with what is being taught.

Schools demonstrate equity when they ensure that the curriculum includes study about all world religions. Diverse religious holidays offer rich opportunities to teach about religion in elementary schools. Teaching about religious holidays is permissible, which is different from celebrating religious holidays, which is not. Studying different religious holidays or festivals may not only add to students’ academic knowledge about the world but also be a way to explore family and community diversity (Family Education, 2007). Table 6.4 lists a variety of ethnic and religious holidays, many of which may not be familiar to you.

One issue that sometimes turns into a “battleground” between teachers and families relating to religion is a family’s request for their child to be excused from classroom discussions or activities for religious reasons. School officials must accommodate these requests, and if students miss school days due to religious reasons, they must be allowed to make up the work. This may be difficult for you, as a teacher, to accept, but it is important to remember that religion shapes culture, and cultural practices often reflect religious beliefs. For example, as one Muslim mother stated, “Our religion is our culture, and our culture is our religion. I can not separate the two.” For this parent, observing her faith’s religious practices was more important than her child attending school that day. This illustrates the importance of teachers suspending their judgment concerning families’ religious beliefs, as they will spill over into the classroom setting.
## TABLE 6.4  Ethnic and Religious Holidays/Celebrations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnicity/Religion</th>
<th>Holiday/Celebration</th>
<th>Month*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>Emancipation day&lt;br&gt;Black history month&lt;br&gt;Rosa Park’s anniversary&lt;br&gt;Malcolm X’s birthday&lt;br&gt;Juneteenth&lt;br&gt;Kwanzaa</td>
<td>January&lt;br&gt;February&lt;br&gt;February&lt;br&gt;May&lt;br&gt;June&lt;br&gt;December to January</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buddhist</td>
<td>Lohri&lt;br&gt;Vesak—Buddha’s Birth&lt;br&gt;Diwali&lt;br&gt;Bodhi—Buddha’s Enlightenment</td>
<td>January&lt;br&gt;April&lt;br&gt;October&lt;br&gt;December</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinese, Korean, Taiwan</td>
<td>Chinese lunar New Year&lt;br&gt;Lantern Festival&lt;br&gt;Dragon Boat Festival&lt;br&gt;Mid-Autumn Festival&lt;br&gt;Double Ninth Day (Elder’s Day)</td>
<td>January/February&lt;br&gt;February/March&lt;br&gt;May/June&lt;br&gt;September/October&lt;br&gt;October/November</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christian</td>
<td>Epiphany&lt;br&gt;St. Patrick’s Day&lt;br&gt;Lent&lt;br&gt;Holy Week: Ash Wednesday, Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, Easter&lt;br&gt;All Saints Day&lt;br&gt;Advent&lt;br&gt;Christmas</td>
<td>January&lt;br&gt;March&lt;br&gt;40 days prior to Easter&lt;br&gt;March/April&lt;br&gt;November&lt;br&gt;4 weeks prior to Christmas&lt;br&gt;December</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hindu</td>
<td>Lohri&lt;br&gt;Holi&lt;br&gt;Mahashivaratri (Shiva Ratri)&lt;br&gt;Rama Navami&lt;br&gt;Krishna Jayanti&lt;br&gt;Ganesha-Chaturthi (Ganesha Utsava)&lt;br&gt;Diwali</td>
<td>January&lt;br&gt;February/March&lt;br&gt;February/March&lt;br&gt;April&lt;br&gt;July/August&lt;br&gt;August/September&lt;br&gt;October</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Islamic, Muslimb</td>
<td>Al Hijra—Muslim New Year&lt;br&gt;Mawlid al-Nabi (Muhammad’s birthday)&lt;br&gt;Ramadan</td>
<td>January/February/March&lt;br&gt;March/April/May&lt;br&gt;August/September/October/November</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnicity/Religion</td>
<td>Holiday/Celebration</td>
<td>Month*</td>
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<tr>
<td>--------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>Japanese</td>
<td>EidpAl_Fitr (conclusion of Ramadan) Eid al-adha (conclusion of Hajj)</td>
<td>September/October/ November/December November/December/January/ February</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Japanese</td>
<td>Japanese New Year National Foundation Day The Doll Festival Bon Festival/Feast of Lanterns Autumnal Equinox</td>
<td>January February March August September/October</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jewish</td>
<td>Tu B'Shvat or Tu B'Shevat Purim Pesach/Passover Yom Hashoah/Holocaust Memorial Day Shavuot Tisha B’av Rosh Hashanah Yom Kippur/Day of Atonement Sukkot Shemini Atzeret/Simchat Torah Hanukkah</td>
<td>January/February February/March March/April April/May May/June July/August September/October September/October September/October September/October September/October December</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mexico</td>
<td>Constitution Day Flag Day Cinco de Mayo Mexican Independence Day Día de los Muertos/Day of the Dead Las Posadas</td>
<td>February February May September November December</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Puerto Rican</td>
<td>Three Kings Day Emancipation Day Commonwealth of Puerto Rico Discovery of Puerto Rico Day</td>
<td>January March July November</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vietnam</td>
<td>Tet Nguyen Dan (Vietnamese New Year) Tet Trung Thu (Mid-Autumn Festival)</td>
<td>January/February September/October</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source:* Kentucky University Medical Center (2008).

*Notes:*

a. For specific dates for a calendar year, see, www3.kumc.edu/diversity/ethnic_relig/ethnic.html.

b. The Islamic calendar is based on lunar observation, and dates apply to North America.
Consider the following short vignettes involving classroom situations. How would you respond to the students involved and their families?

**Family Religious Beliefs**

- You overhear a conversation between two students in your fifth-grade class concerning snakes and poison. One of the students describes his church, The Church of God With Signs Following, where they wave live rattlesnakes during services and drink poison (strychnine) too. If they die, their faith is probably weak. The student said that he has witnessed men fall on the floor and be carried out.

- A parent calls for a conference with you, the teacher, and the principal. She adamantly and emotionally states that she does not want her child to hear anything about the topic of religion either in the classroom or in the school environment. When information on religion comes up, she asks that her child be allowed to leave the room. She indicates that she is willing to sue the district and the teacher personally if she hears religion being discussed.

- A new student moves into your classroom. On her first morning, her mother brings her to class and informs you that their family members are Jehovah’s Witnesses and that her daughter does not celebrate holidays and/or salute the flag. That morning, during the Pledge of Allegiance, the student remains seated. Later, the other students ask why she did not participate in saying the Pledge.

**Sexual Mores**

- A Muslim father requests that his fifth-grade daughter never be seated next to a boy (Weinstein, Tomlinson-Clarke, & Curran, 2004). However, you often have students’ desks in groups of four facing each other to promote cooperative learning. In addition, there are fewer girls than boys in your classroom this school year. So the option of placing the girl only next to other girls appears limited. You are also unsure how you will control her seating when she is in other classes, such as art or music.

- Some of the fundamentalist Christian families in your classroom believe that a gay lifestyle is against the natural order and do not want their children exposed to this lifestyle. However, your roster for the upcoming year’s class includes a family with same-sex parents. You have planned a beginning of the year picnic at a local park, and all families are invited.

**Religious Practices or Traditions**

- It is taboo to describe the religious ceremonies of the Zuni to outsiders—secrecy is fundamental to the Zuni religion. Teaching Zuni ceremonial prayers to youths is the role of the head kachina priest (Morrell, 2007). A Zuni student in your class has missed several classes for reasons that are unclear to you. When you contacted the parents, they indicated that their child had been undergoing training to be involved in a ceremony.

- You created a math classification activity for your kindergarten class where children were given small bags of colored candies and asked to sort them according to color, size, and shape. After the children sorted their candies by different attributes, they were allowed to eat them. One child began crying and said that she couldn’t have any “sweets” because of her religion. Her mother sent you a note the next day that expressed her unhappiness about the incident. She wrote that their Catholic family was abstaining from all sweets during the Lent season and that she did not want any more candy served in class until the end of Lent.
All these scenarios present difficult dilemmas that teachers find themselves facing, relating to religious diversity. What can teachers do to be better prepared for family religious diversity in their classrooms?

**Suggestions for Working With Religiously Diverse Families**

- Research the major religions or belief systems practiced within your school community. Take notes on any restrictions within the religion that may influence your classroom instruction and your students. Investigate festivals or celebrations that could add richness to your curriculum of study.

- Be aware of school district policies relating to how religious information is shared, and also make sure families are aware of the district policies and legal rights concerning religion. Have a chat with your principal about her or his approach to working with families who bring up faith-based concerns. You may be reluctant to approach the issue of religion with families. However, to be respectful of all families, you must be aware of any religious limitations for particular students.

- Remember, students also have the right to express their religious views during a class discussion or as a part of a written assignment or activity. Young students’ opinions are often based on their families’ values and may be controversial, but warrant a discussion. Be prepared that certain units of study, such as evolution or religious holidays, may lead to questions and discussions relating to faith or religious beliefs.

- Recruit another teacher as a mentor to help you with community religious issues. If you are concerned that a conversation with a family member about religious concerns may become confrontational or accusatory, ask your administrator, mentor teacher, or Family Involvement Coordinator to be a part of the meeting.

Your own faith background (or lack thereof) helps define who you are as a member of your own culture, yet as a public school teacher, it is important that you suspend judgment concerning families’ religious beliefs and be respectful of those beliefs different from your own.

**SOCIOECONOMIC DIVERSITY AND FAMILY INVOLVEMENT**

If you were raised in a middle- or upper-class setting, terms such as situational poverty (resulting from lack of resources due to events such as a death, chronic illness, divorce) or generational poverty (being in poverty for at least two generations), WIC (Women, Infants, Children; a federal program that provides nutritious foods to supplement diets, information about healthy eating, and referrals to health care for low-income women, infants, and children up to the age of 5), TANF (Temporary Assistance for Needy Families), or “receiving a living wage,” may be remote to you. However, there is no question that “if you are impacted by poverty, it does not look the same as if you are not” (Grant, 2000, p. 118). Children from low-income families have less educational advantages. Families receiving
public assistance have fewer books in the home and read and tell stories less often to their children (National Center for Education Statistics, 2000). Fewer books and less verbal interaction leads to children coming to school with a limited vocabulary (Hart & Risley, 1995). In contrast, students from a higher SES typically own about three times as many books as low-SES students, visit public libraries more often, and have families that read to them (Lee & Burkam, 2002). However, this does not mean that all culturally diverse families are low-income families. Families from different races, ethnic groups, religions, and so on can run the economic spectrum from extremely low SES to high SES.

As a beginning teacher, it will be important for you to learn about your individual students’ socioeconomic levels and also not make snap judgments about families who struggle financially. As a white grandfather with Cheyenne grandchildren wisely observed:

It is so darned easy to get caught up in your daily planning, your discipline and your responsibilities that you don’t take a moment to take another look every day at this [particular] kid . . . which of these kids has a computer, what about the economics [of the family] . . . the bumps, blemishes, the gifts, you know . . . and I don’t think we can teach that [to new teachers], but we can teach awareness of it. (Grant, 2000, p. 112)

As noted earlier, if you view low-income families from the deficit model of thinking, your negative attitude about these families automatically dooms otherwise productive school and family partnerships to failure. The prevailing attitude in America is that families living in poverty, especially those who come from past generations of poverty, are lazy, make bad choices, and are not motivated or intelligent (Beegle, 2003). This stereotypical, biased view will not be helpful in working with low-income families and students.

Depending on the community in which you teach, you will probably encounter families dealing with socioeconomic hardships. Poverty may be “generational,” as this author described her own experiences:

I was born into a family where no one was educated beyond the eighth grade. For generations, my family subsisted on menial-wage employment and migrant work. Although we worked hard, we were constantly evicted, hungry, and struggling with poverty. Early on, I learned that education meant stress: the stress of trying to arrive on time; having the right clothing, shoes, and lunch; and completing homework projects. (Beegle, 2003, p. 11)

Poverty may also be due to situations such as a parent who has lost regular employment, had an accident, or developed a chronic illness. For families living from paycheck to paycheck with no insurance benefits, something as minor as a car breakdown or broken bone can be devastating to the family. Many parents work two or three minimum-wage jobs just to pay the rent. The luxury of affording school supplies, money for school field trips, or sending in a snack for the class is beyond their budget. Basic survival items, such as food, housing, transportation, and clothing remain priorities.

Teachers can unconsciously send messages to children and families from a low-income background that they are substandard. Interviews with adults who grew up in generational poverty found that most thought that their teachers “didn’t care” about them, didn’t believe in them, had never reached out to support them, and that they were “pushed aside.”
They reacted by either acting out in class or withdrawing and becoming silent. As one said, “My clothes and my shoes drew enough focus on me. I didn’t want to ever raise my hand and draw more” (Beegle, 2003, p. 15).

School districts serving affluent families also have their own particular challenges. While families from a high SES have access to more resources, such as educational materials and activities and better health care, and their children may come to school better prepared to be successful than children from a lower-income background, these families may be demanding of the school in terms of expecting high test scores and special services not typically provided by a school. They may not want their child to be taught by an inexperienced teacher and may be overly critical of new teachers. Children may be “over” involved in after-school activities, such as sports, music lessons, and even tutoring (whether it is needed or not). As with any of the other diverse family types, it is important that teachers establish relationships with these families, and since they may have a stay-at-home parent, seek their help as classroom volunteers. These families can be a great resource for a teacher and may also be able to send in extra supplies for the classroom or for children who cannot afford them. For example, one mother from a higher SES regularly sent in extra money with her child’s book order for the teacher to use to order books for children who could not afford them. She asked to remain anonymous and requested the teacher to make sure every child got to order a book sometime during the year. This arrangement would not have happened if the teacher had not worked to establish a trusting relationship with this parent.

**Suggestions for Working With Families From Different Socioeconomic Levels**

How can teachers effectively work with families from different socioeconomic levels? While Chapter 8 will further address the issue of working with families in poverty, here are some specific suggestions for teachers in working with families from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds:

- Quietly designate a “save pennies” pot, recycle cans for classroom cash, access a school slush fund, or community resources, such as a local church or civic organization, to provide help for families and children under severe economic stress. While families may not share that information due to their own pride, some “red flag” warnings include a student not attending a field trip (because of the expense); shabby or oversized clothing; a lack of lunch money (successive days or weeks, wanting to charge their lunch); health problems that go untreated; or excessive absences (to babysit younger children while a parent works).

- Organize a clothing and food drive, toy donations, and other ongoing charitable projects in your school. Cultivate a caring community in your classroom and school where children from all socioeconomic levels want to help others who are less fortunate. Ask your Parent Teachers Association or Organization to help with the project.

- Be aware that transportation costs may keep families from being involved or attending school functions, such as a parent-teacher conference. Seek out a source of funds from your school social worker, parent coordinator, or administration. Title I, a federally funded program that targets the highest poverty schools, has funds to cover parental transportation.
to parent-teacher meetings, family involvement workshops, on-site child care, or even conferences to plan a student’s IEP (individualized education program) meetings. If your district sets goals for a Family Involvement Plan, ask that transportation funds for families to attend school functions be included.

- Spend time learning about the SES of your school and community. These data are often easily obtained from State Department of Education’s Web sites, Census Bureau data, Kids Count data, or local community information. Go beyond learning the statistical data, though. A deeper awareness of the economics of your community can be developed by visiting a local food bank, interviewing a welfare caseworker, stopping in at a local business where parents are employed, or driving through areas where your students’ families live. If you are teaching in a rural area, spend time driving in the country and noting the distance families might have to travel to come to school as well as the types of housing children are living in. Another way to accomplish this is by riding the different bus routes of the students. This can be an eye-opening experience and help you better understand family housing issues.

- Include families in discussions about classroom trips and other events that require money. Consider surveying your families about the amount of money that is appropriate to request for supplies, school trips, or current events newspaper subscriptions. Ask families if they would consider helping other families experiencing severe financial distress so children are not excluded from activities. Encourage families to let you know about any changes that affect their economic situation, such as a job loss. Listen sensitively and hold back from forming opinions. Have a list of helpful community agencies at your fingertips.

While this chapter has just addressed a few of the diversities that teachers will face in their classroom, we hope that we have made it obvious that a teacher who is committed to all children being successful and all families being respected must be “culturally responsive.” The next section will discuss what it means to have culturally responsive family involvement.

**CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE FAMILY INVOLVEMENT**

Recent researchers have described the importance of a culturally responsive curriculum that meets the needs of all learners, including those who are diverse in race, ethnicity, language, ability, gender, language, religion, and SES (Gay, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Villegas & Lucas, 2002). In Chapter 1, you were introduced to the similar concept of culturally responsive family involvement where teachers go beyond the traditional activities associated with schools and families and seek to have a strong awareness of cultural differences, while also affirming the views of all families (Villegas & Lucas, 2002, p. 27). This culturally responsive family involvement requires multiple communication opportunities with families, such as the Beginning of School Year survey in Table 6.5 or by conducting home visits (which will be further discussed in Chapter 13).

Culturally responsive family involvement must go beyond your classroom practices though and also include your school’s policies and practices. The state of Alaska has developed “Standards for Culturally Responsive Schools” to provide “a way for schools and communities to examine the extent to which they are attending to the educational and cultural well being of the students in their care” (Alaska Native Knowledge Network, 1998, p. 2). The Standards are listed in Table 6.6.
Note that the recommendation that culturally responsive educators actively participate in the community and connect with community members in meaningful ways. This can be a powerful tool to strengthen partnerships with families (Villegas & Lucas, 2002). If the community that your students come from is having a celebration, by all means attend. It is painfully clear when parents realize that some teachers avoid involvement in their cultural events, whether at school or in their community setting. For example, Latino parents noticed with surprise and sadness that both new and veteran teachers sometimes appeared to be afraid to venture into their communities and wanted to leave quickly (Griego Jones, 2003).

**Developing a Classroom Cultural Audit**

Another important aspect of culturally responsive family involvement involves your classroom environment. You can send a subtle message of acceptance or rejection each time a student or family member walks into your classroom. During your first year of teaching, seek to create a classroom community that values the cultural contributions of all families and is a risk-free environment where students respect different cultures. Your attitude, tone of voice, and behavior as you interact with students and families will serve as a model for your students and is the essence of **culturally sensitive caring**, where teachers are placed in an ethical, emotional, and academic partnership with ethically diverse students who are anchored in honor, integrity, resource sharing, and deep belief in the possibility of growth (Gay, 2002). When children feel accepted (or rejected) at school, they will communicate this to their families.

In addition to your behavior in the classroom, the environment should also clearly represent the children’s lives through home, school, and community connections (McIntyre, Rosebery, & Gonzalez, 2001). Gay (2002) described the hidden or **symbolic curriculum** that is communicated through classroom materials and displays. By portraying a wide variety of age, gender, ability, race, ethnic, religious, and social class diversity through the classroom environment, the message is given that all people are valued. Rotating classroom displays, portfolio collections, photo albums or scrapbooks, bulletin board exhibits, student projects, tape recordings, or videos that represent family diversity can draw attention to the

### TABLE 6.5  Beginning of the Year Survey for Families

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. What does your child like to do at home? What do you like to do together?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Does your child like to read or be read to? What does your child like to read?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. What kind of activities does your child do at home that requires work with numbers or math?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. How do you help your child learn different things that are important to your family, such as your family’s values and beliefs?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. How does your child contribute to your daily family routines? What special jobs within the family does your child do?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. What hobbies or sports does your child enjoy? Do other family members participate in these hobbies or sports? If so, who?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. What goals do you have for your child this year?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. What else would you like me to know about your child or your family?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Cultural Standards for Educators

Culturally responsive educators work closely with parents to achieve a high level of complementary educational expectations between home and school. Educators who meet this cultural standard:

1. Promote extensive community and parental interaction and involvement in their children’s education
2. Involve elders, parents, and local leaders in all aspects of instructional planning and implementation
3. Seek to continually learn about and build on the cultural knowledge that students bring with them from their homes and community
4. Seek to learn the local heritage language and promote its use in their teaching
5. Exercise professional responsibilities in the context of local cultural traditions and expectations
6. Maintain a close working relationship with and make appropriate use of the cultural and professional expertise of their coworkers from the local community

Culturally responsive educators participate in community events and activities in an appropriate and supportive way. Educators who meet this cultural standard:

1. Become active members of the community in which they teach and make positive and culturally appropriate contributions to the well-being of that community
2. Exercise professional responsibilities in the context of local cultural traditions and expectations
3. Maintain a close working relationship with and make appropriate use of the cultural and professional expertise of their coworkers from the local community


accomplishments of all families and help them feel that they are partners with the teacher in educating their children. It also gives the children a sense of belonging and continuity between school and home.

One way to ensure that you do this is to conduct a Family-Friendly Classroom Audit. By looking at your classroom displays and exhibitions of family cultural artifacts, classroom projects, and the ways in which you have authentic contact with families, you can determine your level of cultural responsiveness. Table 6.7 presents a checklist of ideas for ways in which you can further develop culturally responsive family involvement through your classroom environment.

SUMMARY

Respecting and honoring the different families represented in your classroom through your teaching practices and classroom environment is not an easy task. In fact, it will be a lot of work! However, as a professional in the field of education, you will be supporting the basic principle of family involvement as a part of healthy child development and learning for children from diverse families. Your work will also benefit your entire classroom, as all your students learn to accept and appreciate each other’s similarities and differences.
How does your classroom rate? Check if your classroom has the following elements:

**Classroom displays**
Recruit families as collaborators in designing a family-friendly classroom:

- Display a world map on the wall indicating where everyone is from, linking children’s pictures with yarn. Encourage families to add their pictures next to their child’s in the collection.
- Generate a list of personality words children have suggested to describe other students in the classroom (McIntyre et al., 2001). Highlight students throughout the school year.
- Tape record children’s songs based on community themes (McIntyre et al., 2001). Have a tape recorder available to families to listen to their children’s songs.
- Video tape children’s dance demonstrations, whether they are ethnic, regional, or community based. Have a television available for families to view when they stop by.
- Label items throughout the classroom in multiple languages and use these to build vocabulary. Consider rotating terms rather than leaving them all year. When possible, integrate into the curriculum.
- Set up a family-based classroom museum with families contributing artifacts on a rotating basis. A family member might be willing to take on the role of curator (on a rotating basis).
- Create a bulletin board exhibit of photos of ceremonial dress or clothing worn in native country. A volunteer might be willing to be in charge of changing the exhibit periodically.
- As a project for the year end, put together a portfolio (using a pictorial overview) of the cultural artifacts families have contributed.

**Projects tied to family/community interests**
Enlist families as partners with their children in project development:

- Embed home language into projects through the year (McIntyre et al., 2001). Make sure to alert families about contributing to projects in which they may have particular expertise.
- Integrate cultural knowledge through the act of storytelling in the classroom (Delgado Gaitan, 2004). Video tape the event for other families to view at a later date.
- Compare current projects in your classroom with those completed by families (e.g., raising chicks) (McIntyre et al., 2001). Encourage families to tell their children about their school projects similar to the ones they are currently engaged in.
- Ask students about special food dishes, breads, or candies from their communities of origin (Cortina, 2006). Provide ingredients for families to make recipes if they are willing.

**Cultural and community demonstrations**
Cultural and community-learning opportunities engage students:

- Have families act as guides in local area mapping activities during a classroom geography lesson.
- Integrate “funds of knowledge” held by family member relating to a specific classroom lesson.

**Opportunities for authentic contact with families**
Deepen your understanding of family dynamics:

- Exchange journals between families and teacher (Finnegan, 1997).
- Look for opportunities for interactions with family members during pick-up or drop-off times. Try to allow for discussions about hobbies, sports interests, and academics.

Display multicultural books and use them for interactive reading and make them available for children and families to read at home through a classroom loan program.
REFLECTION QUESTIONS

Reread the “In the Classroom” case study presented at the beginning of the chapter, and reflect on these questions:

1. What attitudes or preconceived notions does Clara Simpson have about Elena and her family? How does that affect her teaching effectiveness with Elena?
2. What family involvement strategies has the teacher tried? Have they been effective? Why or why not?
3. Using a model of culturally responsive family support, what other family involvement strategies should the teacher try so as to help Elena be successful in class?

WEB SITES

Bridging Cultures Between Home and School Institute, maintained by WestEd, www.wested.org/cs/we/view/serv/94.
WestEd, a regional educational laboratory, offers a one-day institute for school districts to help design and implement programs to meet the needs of underserved cultural, linguistic, and racial groups with the goal to improve educational outcomes for these groups.

This site includes information on family income research and policies affecting families, including food insecurity, poverty statistics for states and cities, and minimum wage increases.

Colorín Colorado is a free Web-based bilingual service that provides information, activities, and advice for educators and Spanish-speaking families of English language learners. Reading Rockets sponsors the site.

A site developed initially to combat religious intolerance by featuring information on all world religions. Parents could use this site to discuss diversity of religious belief with their children.

WEB-BASED STUDENT STUDY SITE

The Companion Web site for Home, School, and Community Collaboration can be found at www.sagepub.com/kgrantstudy. Visit the Web-based student study site to enhance your understanding of the chapter content. The study materials include practice tests, flash cards, suggested readings and movie lists, and more.