13.4: Section Summary

The content within this section is intended to share information about the diverse populations within our communities and children that may be in early childhood education programs. It would be impossible to represent every aspect of all forms of diversity. And ultimately each family is an expert of their background and family history. As early childhood educators it behooves us to create a learning environment of inclusivity while honoring individuality. This should be done by creating a relationships with families that allows you to learn about who they are.

Understanding a family’s cultures and dynamics takes curiosity, patience, commitment, and a willingness to feel uncomfortable at times. It also takes courage and humility to reflect on our own experiences and understand how they affect our attitudes toward families. And it requires a readiness to recognize when we have misunderstood or made a mistake. Our interactions are always a result of cultural influences—ours and those of the families in our programs. Program expectations, routines, and policies also influence our interactions with families. It is our responsibility to be open to understand and appreciate the meaning of a family’s choices, even if they do not align with our own preferences or the policies of our program. The process of understanding the cultural beliefs, values, and perspectives of others – as well as those of our own – is essential to effective family engagement. [201]