

## This Issue and Why it Matters

*Who am I? Where do I fit?*

These are universal questions central to the experience of being human. One need only look at favorite movies, television shows, and books to see common threads of identity and belonging and the angst of an identity crisis or fear of not belonging. With something so deeply human, it's not surprising that its roots can be found in early childhood. The formation of a positive, healthy sense of self and belonging is an aspect of social-emotional development that is foundational for a child's current and future well-being, learning, and successful functioning in society.

The articles in this issue of the Journal explore several facets of children's developing sense of self and belonging, and the intersecting contexts of family, culture, and classroom community. The following questions are addressed:

- How does the understanding of oneself as a separate, unique person take shape over the first 3 years of life?
- What role does language play in forming a child's understanding and experience of social connectedness, identity, and community? What are the implications for the formation of cultural biases?
- What do infant-toddler educators need to understand about young children and their families in order to fully and effectively support each child's developing sense of self and belonging? What are some specific strategies and practices that have been tested in a program serving families that differ in many ways, including linguistically, culturally, and economically?
- How can inclusion be practiced in early childhood classrooms so that all children, with and without disabilities, and their families receive the clear message that they belong?
- How can early childhood programs welcome, support, and represent children and families with diverse family structures and identities? What can professionals learn from the experiences of LGBTQ parents, adoptive families, and multiracial families about creating a culture of belonging in early childhood education programs that serve them?

Raising self-awareness and intentionality about serving diverse families with respect and sensitivity has never been more critical for infant-toddler educators and the larger community of early childhood professionals. Each family's social identity is complex and influential to parenting. Professionals who work with families have their own social identities that may differ from those of the families they serve. Awareness of these influences and dynamics is the first step toward serving families with the intention, responsiveness, and respect that justice and equity demand. To that end, this issue of the Journal concludes with an article describing the "Diversity-Informed Tenets for Work With Infants, Children, and Families" (i.e., "the Tenets"), the history of their development and recent revision, and responses to commonly asked questions about their usefulness and implementation for the infant and early childhood professional community.

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