

## Notes from 2018 NAEYC Debra Lively

I attended the NAEYC Conference in Austin Texas, June 2018. The opening plenary session speaker, Dr. Sonia Nieto, delivered a message on Sunday, June 10, 2018 that provided multiple concepts and strategies to think about when working with young children who are learning English. Dr. Sonia Nieto is Professor Emerita of Language, Literacy and Culture at the School of Education, University of Massachusetts Amherst.

I thought sharing some of the concepts and ideas she shared on that day may inspire you to read her books or even connect with her professionally. Link to her books:

<https://www.google.com/search?client=safari&rls=en&q=sonia+nieto+books&stick=H4sIAAAAAAAAAAONgFuLSz9U3ME42TS4pUUJia0lJ1vpJ-XnZ-snlpZk5BdZgdjFCvI5OZUA-tRy2TYAAAA&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwi-gOimiOHbAhVCOKwKHefvC98QMqjPASgAMB8&biw=1440&bih=736>

### **Dr. Nieto's Session: Creating Inclusive affirming environments for emergent bilingual children**

She opened her presentation with the following terms that are often used in our field but unfortunately are considered deficit-based or inaccurate. Please understand that these are the notes that I took while attending the session so they are only representing the ideas or concepts I gathered from her presentation. Her presentation inspired me to re-think Bilingual Education and the labels we use to identify children learning English.

### **Deficit-based or Inaccurate terms**

"Non-English Speakers" tends to focus on limitations rather than supports.

"Limited English Proficient" (LEP)

"Bilingual" –This term is not accurate because children learning English are not yet bilingual.

"English Language Learners (ELL)" It is true they are learning English, but it is not the only thing they are learning.

"Culturally deprived" These are children with rich cultural and linguistic resources.

"At risk" -We are talking about children "PLACED" at risk and not "at risk children."

The caution here is to be sensitive to how children are labeled.

Possibly a better term: Emergent Bilingual Speakers (EBS)

All children need their culture affirmed!

Maybe a better term: Emergent Bilingual Speakers

"Students in the process of becoming bilingual."

### **We are and always will continue to be a multi-lingual nation.**

Over 350 languages are spoken in the US.

Over 20% speak another language as a primary language.

Spanish is by far the largest spoken language other than English in the US.

The US is the second largest nation who speaks Spanish.

What educators of EBS need to know...

1) About themselves and their histories...

2) About their students: who they are, where do they come from, their interests, hopes, dreams, talents, strengths, and resources

3) About their students' communities-don't just know cultural tidbits-this tends to stereotype people-one needs to dive deeper into the culture.

Dr. Nieto's book, *What Keeps Teachers going? (2003)*

Concepts reviewed in her book: Learning who you are and what you bring to the table is critical.

Teachers begin with a sincere yearning to do the best they can, but often get into situations that don't let them grow.

### **Educators need to embrace that children bring linguistic resources to their education!**

Many emergent bilingual children speak a language other than English at home.

Many have had some education in their home language.

Some are therefore literate.

Children bring "Funds of knowledge" (Gonzalez, Moll, & Amanti, 2005)

EVERY family has a "fund of knowledge."

Many come from large extended families. Although they may only be with nuclear family in the US, they have been raised with strong family values.

**Teaching emergent bilingual students is a stance and disposition**

It is not a pre-determined curriculum.  
It is not a specific set of practices.  
It is not a watered-down curriculum.  
It is not a “feel good approach.”  
It is a recognition of students’ “already culture” and assets.

**Examples of a stance and disposition**

Expecting the best from all students is essential. Children may come from a home that doesn’t have books, but parents can still have high expectations. Families can tell stories!  
Stories affirm identities and expand worlds.  
Honoring families is important.  
Valuing Diversity in words and deeds is critical.  
Educators need to be caring.

**Educators must cross borders and build bridges by becoming sociocultural mediators.**

Educators need to challenge conventional wisdom and taken for granted assumptions.

Our responsibility is to meet students where they are and take them someplace else.  
When teachers validate each child’s culture and experience, this allows him/her to become a part of US mainstream culture.

**The Challenge is thinking about these taken for granted assumptions.**

1. Emergent bilingual students are a blank slate.
2. Intelligence is what you are born with...intelligence is not fixed but changeable.
3. Skin color and language determine ability.
4. Immigrants don’t care about education.
5. Learning English is the only game in town.

We need to see parents as a gift...For example, see Esperanza as an adult who speaks Spanish rather than a Mexican who doesn’t speak English.

**Value Diversity in Word and Deed**

**What we can learn from Teachers of Emergent Bilingual Students?**

Love and support for students and families is critical.  
Life-Long learning- we need to learn about the students and their families.

There is no template; there are no “best practices.”  
Don’t rely on a list-it may not work for you and practices can change all the time.

**Basic Concrete Examples When Working with Children who are Learning English**

Learn to say students’ names correctly.  
Label room with languages spoken by the students.  
Have books and other materials that reflect the backgrounds of students in the room and of people in the world.  
Learn as much as you can about your students’ histories, cultures, and realities.  
Engage respectfully in authentic family outreach.  
Learn about and engage in the community of your students.  
Explore how your curriculum in all subject areas can support children from different cultures.  
Learn about the specific students you teach.  
Engage in inquiry/reading/study groups about questions concerning about your students.  
Learn another language.