



What Is Anti-Bias Education?

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We find these joys to be self-evident: That all children are created whole, endowed with innate intelligence, with dignity and wonder, worthy of respect. The embodiment of life, liberty, and happiness, children are original blessings, here to learn their own song. Every girl and boy is entitled to love, to dream, and belong to a loving “village.” And to pursue a life of purpose.

—Raffi, “A Covenant for Honouring Children”

Early childhood educators have deep faith in the principle that all people deserve the opportunities and resources to fulfill their complete humanity. Moreover, we have a unique role in making this principle real, in promoting all children’s chances to thrive and to succeed in school, in work, and in life. A basic principle in early childhood work is that when educators treat children as if they are strong, intelligent, and kind, children are far more likely to behave in strong, intelligent, kind ways. They are more likely to learn and thrive and succeed.

But what happens when children receive messages about themselves of disapproval, of disdain, of dislike? What happens when children do not see themselves or their families reflected and respected in their early childhood programs? When adults do not actively guide children’s thinking about diversity, how do children make sense of information—accurate or biased—about people who are different from themselves?

“I don’t want to sit next to her. She talks funny,” comments a 3-year-old, regarding a new teacher who speaks English with a strong accent.

“I don’t want to!” defiantly states a 4-year-old from a single-mom family when the teacher announces they are making cards for Father’s Day.

“You can’t be the princess! Princesses have blond hair!” announces a White 4-year-old to an African American friend.

“No girls allowed. No girls allowed. We’re big. We’re superheroes. No girls, no girls,” chant three 5-year-old boys from the top of the climbing structure.

“This is supposed to be a happy painting. Why are you using all that black paint?” observes a teacher to a young child at an easel.

“Martin’s daddy is going to drive on our field trip. He’s going to bring his new car! Isn’t that wonderful? It’s blue and shiny and brand new!” announces a teacher at circle time.

Each of these statements, whether made by teachers or children, sends a negative message about self-worth—evidence of harmful lessons learned about oneself or about others. In an anti-bias classroom, teachers intervene with immediate and follow-up activities to counter the cumulative, hurtful effects of these messages. In an anti-bias classroom, children learn to be proud of themselves and of their families, to respect human differences, to recognize bias, and to speak up for what is right.

“Don’t say ‘No way, José; it will hurt José’s feelings,’” explains a 4½-year-old to a 4-year-old in a preschool where teachers carefully teach not to use hurtful language about another’s identity.

In a preschool where the teacher engages children to examine stereotyping and omissions in their books, a 5-year-old writes in awkward printing, “This book is irregular. It doesn’t have any women in it.”

Why teachers do anti-bias education

Anti-bias work is essentially optimistic work about the future for our children. Anti-bias teachers are committed to the principle that every child deserves to develop to his or her fullest potential. Anti-bias work provides teachers a way to examine and transform their understanding of children’s lives and also do self-reflective work to more deeply understand their *own* lives.

Teachers’ accounts of what drew them to anti-bias education in their practice illustrate their determination to make life better for children and also the deep hopefulness of this work. Perhaps you will hear your own “voice” in theirs:

Lupe Marks, a Head Start teacher:

I remember that many adults put me down when I was a child, like saying, “Oh, she is just a little Mexican.” These comments really affected how I felt about myself, and I vowed I wouldn’t do the same to someone else. As a teacher, I wanted to break the cycle.

Lee Lesser, a preschool teacher and community college instructor:

Hearing children say disturbing things, to which I did not know how to respond, was one big reason anti-bias curriculum attracted me. One European American girl told an Asian American boy, “You’re stupid.” When I asked her why she said that, she said, “Because he doesn’t know how to talk.” Another time an African American parent asked me for advice. Her light-skinned daughter didn’t want to play with a Black Barbie doll and had told her that a Latino boy whose skin was about the same shade as hers wouldn’t want to marry her because she was too dark for him. These events had a big impact on me and made me realize I needed support in my anti-bias journey.

Merrie Najimy, a primary school teacher:

I think everyone who does anti-bias education has a turning point in their life that makes them pick up the work. As a Lebanese Arab American child, I was invisible in school curriculum and materials. Now I see my responsibility as a teacher to make sure that students of color in my classroom do not have that same experience. At the same time, I have to figure out how to get White kids to expand their thinking to understand that they are not the only people in the classroom, the school, the town, the country, the world.

Mary Pat Martin, a community college instructor:

The anti-bias education approach put into words everything in my life that I always thought was right about equality and justice. It gave me the tools to put into practice what I always knew was the right way for me to do early childhood education.

Brian Silveira, a preschool teacher:

Anti-bias curriculum changed the way I looked at child development and the world. I probably wouldn’t be such an activist today without it. We *are* creating a better world.

The vision of anti-bias education

The heart of anti-bias work is a vision of a world in which *all* children are able to blossom, and each child’s particular abilities and gifts are able to flourish. In this world:

- All children and families have a sense of belonging and experience affirmation of their identities and cultural ways of being.
- All children have access to and participate in the education they need to become successful, contributing members of society.
- The educational process engages all members of the program or school in joyful learning.
- Children and adults know how to respectfully and easily live, learn, and work together in diverse and inclusive environments.
- All families have the resources they need to fully nurture their children.
- All children and families live in safe, peaceful, healthy, comfortable housing and neighborhoods.

This vision of anti-bias education also reflects the basic human rights described in the United Nations (1989) Declaration of the Rights of the Child:

- The right to *survival*.
- The right to *develop to the fullest*.
- The right to *protection* from harmful influences, abuse, and/or exploitation.
- The right to *participate fully* in family, cultural, and social life.

In order for children to receive all these rights, their society, their families, and those responsible for their care and education must work to provide everything that each child needs to flourish. A worldwide community of educators shares the vision toward which anti-bias education strives. They adapt its goals and principles to the needs of children and families in their specific contexts.

Stop & Think: Imagine

Because of societal inequities, too many children still do not have access to the “basic human rights” due them. Imagine a world of justice and equal opportunity for *all*.

- What would that world look like for each of the children you work with?
 - What would that world look like for the program you work in?
 - What would *you* add to the “vision of anti-bias education” list?
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Bias is built into the system

Early childhood teachers want children to feel powerful and competent. They strive to welcome children and to show respect to their families as best they know how. However, beyond individual teachers’ hopes, beliefs, and actions is a society that has built advantage and disadvantage into its institutions and systems. These dynamics of advantage and disadvantage are deeply rooted in history. They continue to shape the degree of access children have to education, health care, security—in a word, access to the services necessary for children’s healthy development. These dynamics also greatly affect the early childhood education system, despite whatever values individual teachers may have.

Inequity of resources, and the biases that justify that inequity, have an enormous impact on children’s lives. *It is important to remember that it is not human differences that undermine children’s development but rather unfair, hurtful treatment based upon those differences.*

One major dynamic of advantage and disadvantage that especially affects early childhood practice is that of the “visibility” or “invisibility” of certain kinds of people and cultures in a program. Too many early childhood materials focus on children and families who resemble the stereotypes of American culture as it is most commonly depicted—middle-class, White, suburban, able-bodied, English-speaking, mother-and-father (nuclear) family—as if these were the only types of children and families we work with. Books that accurately and positively depict children from low-income or rural families are few in number. While there are increasing numbers of authentic and respectful books about children of color, they do not yet cover all of America’s many ethnic groups and cultures. Only a handful of toys, pictures, songs, posters, and the like, depict the full range of family structures, such as shared-custody families; single-parent

families; foster families; gay/lesbian-headed families; families with a parent or other family member with a disability or who is homeless, unemployed, or incarcerated; newly arrived immigrant families; families separated by military duty; and on and on. This invisibility or visibility in the classroom’s physical environment undermines some young children’s positive sense of self, while teaching other children that they are specially deserving.

Given the continuing societal inequities into which children are born, anti-bias education raises these questions for early childhood educators:

- How does living in a highly diverse and inequitable (unjust) society affect children’s development?
- What do children need in a diverse but inequitable society to grow up healthy and strong?
- What do early childhood educators (and families) need in order to respond to this challenge?

This book looks at these three questions and provides a set of strategies for teachers who want to see themselves as champions for *all* children and their families. Anti-bias education is needed because children live in a world that is not yet a place where all of them have equal opportunity to become all they could be. We know children need to feel safe and secure in all their many identities, feel pride in their families, and feel at home in their early childhood programs. We also know that children need tools to navigate the complex issues of identity, diversity, prejudice, and power in their daily lives so that they may learn, thrive, and succeed.

Rita Tenorio, an experienced early childhood educator, puts it this way:

Racism and other biases are part of our society and part of what children have to learn to deal with, to become savvy about. They have to be ready to take what is their right to have: respect, decent jobs, a decent education. What we are about in education is preparing children for the future—giving them what they need to be successful. We need to give children a critical perspective and appropriate tools. Those they will need no matter what they become in life.

The four goals of anti-bias education

Anti-bias education has four core goals, each of which applies to children of all backgrounds and influences every arena of our programs. As illustrated in the box “Gears,” each goal interacts and builds on the other three. Together, they provide a safe, supportive learning community for all children. Effective anti-bias education happens when all four goals are part of your program.

Goal 1

Each child will demonstrate self-awareness, confidence, family pride, and positive social identities.

This is the starting place for all children, in all settings. A basic goal of quality early childhood education work is to nurture each child's individual, personal identity. Anti-bias education adds to that goal the important idea of nurturing social (or group) identities. Goal 1 strengthens social, emotional, and cognitive development. As children develop a strong sense of both individual and group identity, they also develop more tools for success in school and in life.

Guidelines for teaching Goal 1

- Build on self-concept activities you already do by also exploring the children's various social identities (e.g., racial, cultural, gender, economic class). Each of chapters 5 through 11 offers many ideas for how to do this in each arena. You may also want to read *What If All the Kids Are White?* (Derman-Sparks & Ramsey 2006) for further ideas about social identity issues and activities.
- Remember that respectfully making visible and supporting *all* of the children's families is an essential element in nurturing a positive sense of self for each child. (See chapter 9 for more information on families.)
- Support children fully in the social identity aspects of Goal 1 before you move on to any of the other goals. This is essential. As Bill Martin (1970) says in his poem "I Am Freedom's Child": "As I learn to like the differences in me, I learn to like the differences in you."

Goal 2

Each child will express comfort and joy with human diversity; accurate language for human differences; and deep, caring human connections.

In an anti-bias approach, encouraging children to learn about how they are different from other children and learn about how they are similar go hand in hand. These are never either/or realities because people are simultaneously the same and different from one another. This is at the heart of learning how to treat all people caringly and fairly.

From infancy on, children notice and are curious about all kinds of differences among people. They also develop their own (often surprising) explanations for the differences that they observe and experience. By preschool, children have already developed ideas about many aspects of human diversity—including ideas that may seem quite strange to adults. Moreover, many children already have begun to develop discomfort about or even fear of specific kinds of differences.

Some teachers and parents are not sure they should encourage children to "notice" and learn about differences among people. They think it is best to teach only about how people are the same, worrying that learning about differences causes prejudice. While well intentioned, this concern arises from a mistaken notion about the sources of bias. Differences, in and of themselves, do not create the problem. *Children learn prejudice from prejudice*—not from learning about human diversity. It is how people respond to differences that teaches bias and fear.

Gears

At a conference in Berlin, Germany, on early childhood anti-bias education, teachers from 31 child care centers, participants in a national initiative organized by Projekt Kinderwelten (a nonprofit, nongovernment organization), displayed storyboards documenting their work. One center had a wonderful way to show the relationship among the four anti-bias education goals. They made four wooden, interlocking gears—each representing one goal. When you moved any one of the gears, the rest also moved.



Goal 1 . . . moves Goal 2 . . . moves Goal 3 . . . moves Goal 4

Moreover, a difference-denial approach, which ignores children's identities and family cultures, runs the risk of making invisible the many children who do not have the social identity of the dominant group.

Guidelines for teaching Goal 2

- Strike a balance between exploring people's similarities and differences. We share similar biological attributes and needs (e.g., the need for food, shelter, and love; the commonalities of language, families, and feelings) *and* we live these in many different ways.
- Developmentally, it is best to teach children by beginning with what they already know and have experienced. Therefore, it is important to explore the many kinds of diversity present among the children in the group, even when they come from similar racial, cultural, economic class, and family backgrounds. This will set the stage for learning about diversity in their larger communities beyond the classroom.
- Further broaden children's knowledge of diversity by acquainting children with groups of people who live and work in their larger neighborhood and city. Preschoolers learn best about people as individuals, not as representatives of groups or countries.
- Avoid a "tourist curriculum" approach to diversity, as described later in this chapter.

Goal 3

Each child will increasingly recognize unfairness, have language to describe unfairness, and understand that unfairness hurts.

Children cannot construct a strong self-concept or develop respect for others if they do not know how to identify and resist hurtful, stereotypical, and inaccurate messages or actions directed toward them or others. Developing the ability to think critically strengthens children's sense of self, as well as their capacity to form caring relationships with others. Furthermore, being able to think critically about the world is a skill important for later school success.

Guidelines for teaching Goal 3

- Assess children's misconceptions and stereotypes. First, find out their thinking and feelings about a particular kind of diversity (e.g., a person who is deaf, a person who is White or American Indian, a person who is homeless). Note comments children make in informal conversations or play (see the box "Dealing with Misinformation"). Hold planned conversations to draw out their ideas; use a picture, a question, or a book to spark their insights.

- Plan activities that help children learn how to contrast inaccurate, untrue images or ideas with accurate ones.

- In the same activities, build children's budding capacities for empathy and fairness.

- Support critical-thinking activities, which pave the way for their learning to take action to make unfair things fair.

Taking into account the social background of children as we make plans for teaching them helps to make education equitable and fair. For example:

In an inclusive kindergarten classroom in a public school, the teacher does a unit with the children about "handicapped" parking spaces. They look at photos of these spaces and at the signs that people put in their cars so they can park there. When they find out that some teachers are inappropriately parking in their school's handicapped parking spaces, the children make "tickets" to put on those cars, and the inappropriate parking soon stops—thus moving naturally into Goal 4.

Goal 4

Each child will demonstrate empowerment and the skills to act, with others or alone, against prejudice and/or discriminatory actions.

This fourth building block of anti-bias education is about helping every child learn and practice a variety of ways to act when:

- another child behaves in a biased manner toward her or him
- a child behaves in a biased manner toward another child
- unfair situations occur in the center/classroom
- unfair situations occur in the children's immediate community

Children's growth on Goal 4 strengthens their growth on the other three goals. If a child is the target of prejudice or discrimination, she needs tools to resist and to know that she has worth (Goal 1). When a child speaks up for another child, it reinforces his understanding of other people's unique feelings (Goal 2). When children are helped to take action, it broadens their understanding of "unfairness" and "fairness" (Goal 3).

Biased behaviors among children such as teasing, rejection, and exclusion based on some aspect of a child's identity are a form of aggressive behavior and are just as serious as physical aggression. The old saying "Sticks and stones may break my bones, but

Dealing with Misinformation

Overhearing a child telling classmates that adopted children were “thrown away” by their “real parents,” I knew I needed to deal with this misinformation immediately. I told the children that two doll “classmates” had told Rachel (one of our persona dolls) that “she had been thrown away by her real parents because she was a bad baby.” I invited the children to explore Rachel’s feelings of hurt, sorrow, and anger. One of the kids said Rachel might feel afraid that she would be “thrown away” again if she did something bad.

I then asked the children what they knew about adoption. “What do you think? Were those [doll] kids right about adopted kids being thrown away?” Only one child, herself adopted, knew something true about adoption. I acknowledged her information and reassured her: “Barbara knows some real information about adoption. That’s right, Barbara.”

The next step was asking about where to get correct information: “Rachel needs to find out the

truth about adoption right away. How do you think she can get real information? Whom could she ask?” The children had several ideas: “Her mom.” . . . “Her Bubbe [grandmother].” . . . “Maybe her teacher knows.” . . . “A book about being adopted.” I supported their ideas.

Then I added to the story, telling how the doll got reliable information, and I related an accurate explanation about adoption. (Remember that if you need to do some research to be sure you have the correct information in a similar situation, tell the children you need to collect the true information and will talk with them about it the next day.) We ended by my asking, “Are there other things you would like to know about adoption? Who has a question?” I answered a few more questions and ended the discussion.

Source: Adapted from T. Whitney, *Kids Like Us: Using Persona Dolls in the Classroom* (St. Paul, MN: Redleaf, 1999), pp. 107–10. Used with permission.

names will never hurt me” does not apply. Children’s developing sense of self is hurt by name-calling, teasing, and exclusion based on identity. And children who engage in such hurtful behaviors are learning to be bullies. An anti-bias approach calls on teachers to gently but firmly intervene, support the child who has been hurt by the biased behavior, and help children learn other ways of interacting. Anti-bias education is a necessary partner of conflict-resolution education.

Guidelines for teaching Goal 4

- Be alert for unfair practices that directly affect children’s lives. You may be the first to identify the problem, or the children may bring a problem to your attention.
- Engage the children in dialogue about their feelings and ideas regarding the specific situation. Provide information about the situation, as appropriate.
- Consider the interests and dynamics of your group of children. Do they care about the problem? What kind of actions would help them appropriately address the issue?
- Consider the children’s families. Learn how each family teaches their child to handle being the target of discriminatory behaviors. Explain why you believe it is important for children to learn several ways to respond. Incorporate diverse strategies based on what families do.
- Plan and carry out an action to address the problem (see the example below and the box “Children Figure

Out What Actions to Take”). If one action works, great! If it does not, try again with a different activity.

A teacher in a Midwest college child development center helps children address the problem of racial bias in a calendar sent to them in which all the children in the pictures are White. After carefully looking at the pictures and discussing their observations, the children decide the calendar is not fair because it does not show many kinds of children. They dictate a letter to the company, but do not receive a response. Their teacher then helps them create a petition using the words from their dictated letter. The children collect a hundred signatures from the college students on their campus. The company replies to the petition, promising the next calendar will show many kinds of children.

Chapters 3 and 4 will help you to understand how to go about putting these four goals into practice. Chapters 5 through 11 will help you focus on the various specific aspects of identity for which children need support.

Educational principles for putting anti-bias goals into action

Now that you have a grasp on what anti-bias education hopes to accomplish, here are some principles for using the four anti-bias education goals.

● The four anti-bias education goals are for everyone, and everyone benefits.

Social inequities and biases undermine healthy development in *all* children, in one way or another; and *all* children benefit from being made visible and

equitably included in daily classroom activities. Some people wonder how White children fit into an anti-bias approach, thinking that diversity issues only really affect children of color. However, the continued realities and messages of inequity in our society and world also negatively affect White children's sense of self and attitudes toward others. Nurturing White children's healthy identity and their positive attitudes toward others is an essential part of anti-bias education.

Conversely, some people wonder whether anti-bias education is primarily for White children. Carol Brunson Day offers her insights about this question:

People of color often have the feeling that anti-bias education is work that Whites need to do, because the sources of racism come from White history and culture. They question its relevancy for children of color, for whom they believe empowerment is the key issue.

White children definitely need anti-bias education. So, too, do children of color, although the specific work differs from that with White children. Education to prevent internalized oppression by fostering strong personal and social identities and to counter prejudices about *other* groups of color are two essential tasks that are part of the larger anti-bias work. We also need to create alliances to achieve our shared ultimate goal of a more equitable society.

● Anti-bias education activities pay attention to the realities of children's lives.

The four anti-bias education goals create a framework for teaching all children, but a one-size-fits-all curriculum is not effective in anti-bias work any more

than it is effective for any other aspect of early childhood education that is developmentally (culturally) appropriate. There are different kinds of inequity and power issues connected to each area of diversity, and each one affects children's development in a somewhat different way.

Some children need support to resist social messages of racial or cultural inferiority, which undercut their positive identity; others need guidance to develop a positive self-concept without absorbing social messages of superiority. Children of wealthy families need help resisting the message that material accumulation defines their worth; children of poor families need teachers who make them visible and respect their lives. Some girls will need extra support to develop their math and science abilities; some boys will require help to develop skills for having nurturing, cooperative interactions with their peers.

Anti-bias educators also design their work based on the specific cultural backgrounds of the individual children and families they serve. Here is some useful advice from African American anti-bias educator Anne Stewart:

As teachers, we know that developing strong self- and group identity, being rooted in home culture, and having skills to resist messages that undermine confidence enable children to succeed in school and afterward. Ask yourself, "What is already in the culture to which we can tie ABE goals?" For example, African American families understand that kids must have pride in themselves to do well in school and in the world. Families, however,

Children Figure Out What Actions to Take

At circle time, the teacher explains that a group of the doll boys were playing Fort with the outdoor climbing equipment. Jamie, a girl persona doll, wanted to join in, but the boys declared, "Only boys can play in this fort. You do not know how to play."

Teacher: How do you think Jamie felt? Has this ever happened to you? Can girls play that game too? What could Jamie do?

Children: She could tell him he hurt her feelings. . . . I would climb into that fort anyway. . . . I'd go find someone else.

Teacher: You have many good ideas. Jamie has many choices of what she can do. It depends on how she feels. She could try to work it out, or tell the boys to let her in, or she could go find someone else to play with. What could she say if she wanted to try to work it out with them?

Children: "Girls can too!" . . . "How would he like it?"

Teacher: Those are all great ideas. What if she wanted some help? Where could she find help?

Children: Her friends; she could go get 'em. . . . Maybe the teacher? . . . Make her own fort.

Teacher: What if she's feeling bad? What could you do or say to help her feel better?

Children: I'd give her a hug. . . . "Don't listen to him. He's wrong!" . . . "I'll play with you. I like you."

Teacher: We could also make a sign that reminds everyone that everyone can play where she or he wants. What should we write?

Children: "Girls can play where they want to. So can boys." . . . "Don't hurt kids' feelings." . . . "Friends can help you."

The teacher makes up the sign and posts it where the children can read it. Later, when incidents occur among them to which their "rules" apply, she reminds the children of what the sign says.

Source: Adapted from T. Whitney, *Kids Like Us: Using Persona Dolls in the Classroom* (St. Paul, MN: Redleaf, 1999), pp. 142–44. Used with permission.

may not make the connection between school success and children learning to change the world in which they live—even though the connection is real and there is a long history of African Americans acting on it.

● **Anti-bias education is developmentally appropriate.**

As in all other areas of early childhood curriculum, teachers tailor and scaffold anti-bias education materials and activities to each child’s cognitive, social, and emotional developmental capacities. They plan and choose learning experiences that stimulate children to explore the next step of new ideas and skills and allow each child to apply new understandings and behaviors in his or her daily life.

Principle 8 of NAEYC’s position statement on developmentally appropriate practice—“Development and learning occur in and are influenced by multiple social and cultural contexts”—makes explicit that anti-bias education is developmentally appropriate. So, too, does the principle of “Creating a caring community of learners.” As the position statement explains,

Because early childhood settings tend to be children’s first communities outside the home, the character of these communities is very influential in development. How children expect to be treated and how they treat others is significantly shaped in the early childhood setting. In developmentally appropriate practice, practitioners create and foster a “community of learners” that supports all children to develop and learn. (NAEYC 2009, 16)

● **Anti-bias planning uses both child- and teacher-initiated activities.**

Children’s questions, comments, and behaviors are a vital source of anti-bias curriculum. They spark teachable moments as well as longer-term projects. However, it is not sufficient to do anti-bias activities only when a child brings up a relevant issue.

Teacher-initiated activities are also necessary—be they intentionally putting materials in the environment to broaden children’s awareness or planning specific learning experiences around issues or areas that matter to families and the community. Teacher-initiated activities open up opportunities to uncover and help children explore ideas. We do not wait for children to open up the topic of reading or numbers before making literacy and numeracy part of our daily early childhood curriculum. Because we have decided that these understandings and skills are essential for children, we provide literacy and numeracy discussions and activities in our classrooms. The same is true for anti-bias.

A balance between child-initiated and teacher-initiated activities is as vital in anti-bias education as in any other part of the early childhood curriculum.

● **Anti-bias learning does not happen in one lesson or one day.**

Anti-bias education is not just a set of activities for occasional use (although that is often how new anti-bias educators begin). It is a focus that permeates everything that happens in our program. All learning proceeds unevenly and requires many lessons on the same topic. Children need multiple ways to think about and experience the ideas and skills of anti-bias work, too.

As children first begin to talk about identity and fairness issues, they may make more, rather than fewer, biased comments than before. But such comments are a natural part of the anti-bias process—it takes many attempts before they learn a new way of thinking about difference, so children need to be free to ask questions and share their ideas.

● **Anti-bias education calls on teachers to know themselves.**

As you saw in the quotes from teachers early in this chapter, teachers themselves are on a journey as they work with children, families, and colleagues on the four anti-bias education goals. Broadening our understanding of ourselves is both a challenge and a reward of being anti-bias educators. (See chapter 3 for further discussion of this topic and suggestions for getting-to-know-yourself activities.)

Anti-bias education work is a journey with many paths and rhythms; each person chooses her or his own (see the box “What Do the ABE Goals Mean to Me?”). Some teachers focus on their own growth and the changes they make in their own work. Others move on to conversations with other adults—colleagues, families, friends. Many anti-bias educators also decide to engage in change work beyond their classroom.

● **Anti-bias education avoids the pitfall of tourist curriculum.**

One of the most common mistakes teachers new to anti-bias work make when incorporating diversity activities into their program is to do “tourist curriculum.” Tourist curriculum, a superficial educational approach, does not make diversity a routine part of the ongoing, daily learning environment and experiences. Instead it is curriculum that “drops in” on strange, exotic people to see their holidays and taste their foods, and then returns to the “real” world of “regular” life. That “regular” daily learning environment is shaped by the cultural norms, rules of behavior, images, and teaching and learning styles of the dominant U.S. groups (middle-class, White, suburban, able-bodied).

Several teaching behaviors signal a tourist curriculum, including *tokenism*, *trivializing*, *misrepresenting*, and *stereotyping*. (See the section “Tourist Curriculum Is Hazardous to Growing Children” in chapter 4 for an explanation of these practices.) The most frequently seen example is when a teacher does activities about “other” cultural groups as part of a holiday/special unit, and then the group disappears from the curriculum until the same time the following year.

This kind of teaching about diversity communicates messages (even if unintentionally) that undermine respect for different ways of living. One message is that the dominant way of life must be the “normal” or “right” way, as it is the daily experience of school. Another message is that because “other” cultural groups are only occasionally part of the curriculum, they must be less important than the dominant groups. Through these messages, tourist curriculum in essence undermines the core goals and values of anti-bias education.

● **Anti-bias education rests on strong relationships among staff and between staff and families.**

Many teachers find that raising issues of diversity and inequity with other adults is more challenging for them than working with children is. This is not surprising. A kind of “emperor’s new clothes” syndrome in our society (i.e., thinking it’s better to pretend not to see what is in front of our eyes) keeps many of us silent about anti-bias issues. However, collaboration has the benefit of providing more effective anti-bias education for the children and a richer, more complex, and more effective experience for the adults.

What we do matters

Anti-bias education work in early childhood is shaped by a deep-seated belief in the importance of justice, the dream of each child being able to achieve all he or she is capable of, the knowledge that together human beings can make a difference. Listen to the voices of children who have experienced anti-bias education at school or at home. They give us hope and direction.

Several 3-year-olds (Asian, White, and Latino) are at the art table playing with small mirrors while they paint on paper ovals. As they look at their eyes, Jesse starts crooning to himself: “Oh, pretty eyes, pretty eyes. Lots of different eyes, pretty eyes, pretty eyes. Brown and blue, pointy, round. Pretty eyes, pretty eyes.”

Two preschool girls are playing Indians by whooping and pretending to have tomahawks. Miriam (age 4) stops them by saying, “Stop! That isn’t like real Indians. Mrs. Cowell is Cherokee, and you will hurt her feelings!”

A kindergarten teacher shows the children a magazine picture titled “Brides of America.” All of the women pictured are White. She asks, “What do you think of this picture?” Sophia, whose family is Nicaraguan, responds, “That’s a silly picture. My mom was a bride, and she doesn’t look like that.”

A mother relates the following anecdote: “When I picked Jonah up from kindergarten the other day, he said, ‘Mom, Kevin had tears in his eyes and his face looked sad and he told me that a bigger kid pushed him off the bars at recess. So Zena and I went to go find the boy and ask him why he did it. We couldn’t find him, but then we found him on the field. We’re not allowed to go on the field, but we had to because we had to save Kevin.’ After he told his story, I reflected, ‘Wow. You are a really good friend, Jonah.’ He said, ‘Yeah, when I see something unfair, Mom, I change it.’”

Why do we do anti-bias education work? We do it because we live in a world that is not yet a place where all children have equal opportunity to become all they are. A worldwide community of educators shares the vision toward which anti-bias education strives, adapting its goals and principles to the specific needs of the children and families they work with.

We invite you to be a part of this community, and we hope this book will provide some beginning maps for your journey.

“What Do the ABE Goals Mean to Me?”

Consider the four core anti-bias education goals as they apply to your own daily life and work. How do you assess yourself on each? (You can do this exercise by yourself or with your learning partners.)

1. (ABE Goal 1) To what degree, or in what ways, do I nurture construction of a knowledgeable, confident self-identity and group identity in myself?
2. (ABE Goal 2) How do I promote my own comfortable, empathetic interactions with people from diverse backgrounds?
3. (ABE Goal 3) In what ways do I foster my critical thinking about bias?
4. (ABE Goal 4) Under what circumstances do I cultivate my ability to stand up for myself and for others in the face of bias?
5. What are the challenges to achieving these goals in my life?
6. What might be ways for me to develop each of these goals in my work? in my personal life?

Source: Adapted from C. Lamm, “Anti-Bias Perspective Seminar,” unpublished manuscript (ECE Department, Fullerton College, CA, Spring 2007). Used with permission.

The Vital Connection between Anti-Bias Education and Peace Education

by Diane Levin

For children to become truly responsible and caring members of a global community in which diverse people cooperate and resolve conflicts without violence and war, the foundation needs to be laid early. Doing this well requires taking into account how understanding similarities and differences affects children's development and learning. From birth onward, children's attention is often drawn to what they don't know—to the novel and different rather than to the familiar. Children naturally use similarities and differences among people, objects, and events to help them define and understand their world—a parent or familiar caretaker from a stranger, a bottle from a breast, or a rattle from a pacifier.

As children try to relate what is different to what they already know, they learn new lessons about the world. These lessons can contribute to their reacting to differences with trust and tolerance or with fear and violence. The lessons set the tone for how children will deal with differences among people throughout life—differences in how they look, act, and think. The lessons also influence how children deal with differing points of view during conflicts. For instance,

if two children want to play with the same ball, a conflict can result from their differing ideas about who should have the ball. Children who have learned to deal with conflicting ideas by working differences out justly and peacefully are more likely to find a way to share the ball than are children who view differences with suspicion and threat.

We play a vital role in how children learn to think about and deal with similarities and differences. It is by helping children begin to develop positive attitudes, values, and skills about diversity when they are young that they will learn what it means to respect and stand up for themselves and others in the face of injustice, and come to a just and comfortable relationship with diversity among people as they grow up. Our efforts will help children develop the strategies they need to break the cycle of violence in their own lives and in the wider society.

Source: Adapted from D. Levin, *Teaching Young Children in Violent Times: Building a Peaceable Classroom*, 2d ed. (Cambridge, MA: Educators for Social Responsibility; Washington, DC: NAEYC, 2003), Chapter 6: Anti-Bias Education.