Louise Derman-Sparks

Developments in Anti-Bias Education Work in the USA 2007

I am delighted to be back here after my visit several years ago. I will first share with you some of what we have learned in the USA and what some of our current context is for doing Anti-Bias education work. I have also been learning about the progress and lessons of your Anti-Bias education work –and will return to that at the end of my talk.

INTRODUCTION

I want to begin by reading you a few comments from teachers about why they practice Anti-Bias education:

From LUPE MARKS, 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 would not do the same to someone else. As a teacher, I wanted to break the cycle. Anti-Bias curriculum taught me to really respect <u>each</u> child, not just as an individual but also as a person who is part of society.*

From MERRIE NAJIMY, 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 children in my classroom do not have that same experience.*

From MARY PAT MARTIN, Community College ECE teacher, 'white", European American

> *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.*

VISION, CURRENT REALITIES & GOALS OF Anti-Bias EDUCATION

Vision: These explanations of why teachers practice Anti-Bias education reflect its vision: "All children will have the care and education that enables them to fully develop who they are and can be, and that affirms and respects their social identities and home cultures. All families will have the resources they need to nurture their children. "

In an ideal early childhood program, all children experience

- Acceptance, respect and equitable nurturance, feel safe and are active participants
- Their family's home culture as part of the educational environment and program
- Guidance for developing skills to effectively interact within both their home culture and within the dominant culture, including bilingual language development
- Guidance for their developing awareness, comfort, enjoyment and knowledge about all kinds of human diversity
- Fostering of their understanding and empathy for the common humanity that all people share
- Learning of skills for respectfully negotiating and adapting to differences, and for building strong connections with all kinds of people
- Help handling discriminatory behaviors directed at their own or another's identity, such as teasing, name-calling, and Biased comments.
- Culturally appropriate ways to raise issues of unfairness with adults.

Current Realities: For this vision to become reality, we need a society that is systemically and institutionally equitable and fair for all. In US, we are long way from realizing such a reality. Discrimination and prejudice connected to several kinds of social identity are still pervasive at both the institutional and individual levels. We are seeing the erosion or reversal of many of the institutional and legal gains of the 60's civil right movement. Income continues to be grossly disparate, depending on a person's racial, ethnic, and gender identities. The political struggle about ending bilingualism in education and preventing immigration rights is at the center of the Republican Party's program. So, too, are Anti-gay politics. Women's rights, particularly in regard to birth control and abortion, are going backwards. Loss of foundation support for diversity and equity education work is resulting in the closing of several non-profit organizations that provided research and technical services. All of this presents a serious challenge to Anti-Bias early childhood education.

Goals of Anti-Bias education:

However, Anti-Bias education remains as necessary as ever. The goals remain essentially the same as they were first conceptualized, but with some rephrasing, which puts the focus on expectations for children [see Appendix]

Goal One: ***Each child will demonstrate self-awareness, confidence, family pride, and positive group identities.***

Goal 2: ***Each child will express comfort and joy with human diversity, accurate language for human differences, and deep, caring human connections.***

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

Goal Four: ***Each child will demonstrate a sense of empowerment and the skills to act, with others or alone, against prejudice and/or discriminatory actions.***

The four goals apply to the many areas of social identity and social inequality. Anti-Bias education is like a kaleidoscope (A kaleidoscope is a toy that is a long tube, made up with pieces of colored glass at one end, a magnifying glass, and a way to turn the pieces of glass. Each turn creates a new pattern with the same pieces of glass). Different specific issues may in the spotlight at various periods—but underlying goals remain the same

WHERE WE ARE NOW—WHAT WE HAVE LEARNED

1. Identity and Anti-Bias education goals

People have many kinds of identities; family identities (mother, grandson, aunt), work identities (teacher, server, writer), talents and interests (jogger, dancer, artist); personal characteristics (talkative, nurturer, good student); physical identities (disabled, strong, attractive). All are part of who each child is. In Anti-Bias education, we highlight ***social identity***. These are group identities that affect all the people in a group, and which connect to systematic and institutional advantages or disadvantages Furthermore, teachers and family's social identity experiences affect which aspects and goals of Anti-Bias education they think are most important and relevant. The social identities of particular significance in Anti-Bias work include: ethnicity, culture, race, class, gender, sexual orientation and disability.

In the many interviews I held with Anti-Bias educators around the country, in preparation for wiring a revisions of the Anti-Bias Curriculum book, some interesting patterns emerged about how the racial, ethnic, and cultural identity of teachers and families influences their thinking about the Anti-Bias goals. This is an area for father study.

(a) People of Color:

all the different national or ethnic groups that are targets of racism in the U.S. includes Asian-Pacific Americans, Black Americans, Latino and Puerto Rican Americans, Native Americans. More recently, Arab-Americans while 'technically white' have also become targets of institutional as well as interpersonal racism. Within each group, ethnic origin, cultural and class differences create intra-group diversity.

People of color tend to focus on goal one, the "identity" goal, in particular the children's racial, ethnic and cultural identities. They treat goals 3 & 4 – developing the skills for critical thinking and resistance and acting in the face of unfairness and injustice – as integrally related to nurturing a strong identity. Learning about others, goal two is also important, but often secondary to the identity work. Teachers and families of color also believe that Anti-Bias education is an element of promoting their children's school success.

(b) White people:

a politically, and legally created category, based on skin color and ancestry. It includes most the different ethnic groups of European origin. Whites as a group are disproportionately represented in the control of and advantages of the economic, political, and cultural institutions in the United States. However, the degree of this 'white advantage or privilege" is affected by the other key forms of social identity, such as class, gender, ethnicity and religion.

Whites, as a group, tend to focus on goal two, believing that learning about diversity enriches C's lives. In addition, they connect AntiBias education to becoming a good person—learning to be respectful of all people. The more radical white teachers also emphasize developing skills of critical thinking and taking action –goals three and four. Many white teachers also tend to include gender, disabilties and class as part of Anti-Bias content. However, they do not pay much attention to how young white children construct their 'whiteness' identity. (I return to this topic later.)

2. Making Anti-Bias education practice culturally relevant

However, since all four goals part of the package, need to think more about what each means in terms of different realities and perceived needs. This means making Anti-Bias education practice culturally relevant to the children and families whom we serve. As Anne Stewart, an outstanding Anti-Bias educator explains,

Although the four Anti-Bias education goals remain the same for all children, the paths to achieving them should not look the same in every program. What you do is start asking 'What is already in the culture that we can tie ABE goals to?". I best understand how to do this in my own culture—but we can learn from others. For example, African American families understand that kids have to have pride to do well in school and in the world. We

know that developing strong self and group identity, and being rooted in their home culture, enables children to resist messages that undermine their confidence to succeed in school and afterward. There is also a long tradition of residence and working for equality. However, many people do not know their own history—so do not believe it is possible to make changes. Therefore, you also need to learn about how the people in your own community have together made changes that improved their lives.

Being culturally competent and responsive does run into some dilemmas. You cannot eliminate having some cultural conflicts. You have to run into the hard stuff and learn some wisdom from dealing with them. I have observed that teachers are a whole lot more likely to see what an actual child or actual family needs in a real, face-to face situation, rather than trying to figure out what to do on theoretical discussions.

3. Issues re white children or children from dominant racial/cultural groups

"What if all the kids are white?" has been one of the most frequently asked questions in our workshops and discussions with early childhood teachers over the past two decades. Usually posed by white teachers, it echoes the persistent confusion about the role of whites in Anti-Bias education and Anti-racism work.

The question usually reflects one of two perspectives. One is teachers who assume that Anti-Bias education is not relevant to white children, and the question has an undertone of "Why should we bother?" More recently, however, many teachers of white children have become aware of how discrimination affects everyone. They understand that a false sense of racial superiority is isolating and damaging and ill prepares children to function in a diverse society. Such teachers also recognize that working for social justice will benefit all people, but cannot be achieved unless people in all groups, including whites, join the long-term struggle. As a result, the intent of the question has shifted from "why?" to "what" and "how".

In addition, Anti-racist activists and theorists have become increasingly interested in identifying the specific dynamics of "whiteness" and the role of whites in challenging racism. They argue that racism must be understood as a systemic, institutionalized force that advantages people defined as "white" and disadvantages people defined as "not white." Understanding that racism is not just a matter of individual prejudice and discrimination opens up new avenues for defining the roles and responsibilities of whites. It is not enough for white people to "accept" and "respect" people of color or to "tweak" the current system. Rather, whites need to undergo a profound shift from viewing the world through a lens of dominance, however unrecognized, to making a commitment to equitably sharing power and resources.

Thus, the question of "what" and "how" to do Anti-Bias work with white children, or, more broadly, children from the dominant racial/cultural group in a society, has two dimensions. One, the more obvious dimension, is how to promote awareness, empathy, comfort and respect for racial, ethnic and cultural; diversity among white children.

However, the second dimension, the "other side of the coin", is how to foster a new identity among white children. Thirty years ago, Robert Terry (1970) proposed the following image of a "new white consciousness:"

> The new in the label points to fresh possibilities. We are not totally limited by our past. *White* is a constant reminder that we are not racially neutral, and a reminder that we still participate in racist institutions and culture. *Consciousness* continually reminds us that we need to reconstruct totally our understanding of who we are and what we ought to do (p.20).

Terry ended his book with a hopeful and motivating call to whites: "**The new white** committed to justice and working to rid this nation of its racism **can be a major force for social justice**. The time is right. **It is up to us to seize that time to turn our legacy of old white privilege into new white possibility**." [Bold authors] (p.97).

This paradigm shift calls on educators and families to nurture white children's early identity and social-emotional development in new ways. It is not enough to teach them to embrace racial and cultural diversity; children must also develop individual and group identities that will recognize and resist the false notions of racial superiority and racial entitlement. To participate in this work, those of us who are white must also develop our own new white consciousness. We also must always keep in mind that work with white children, or children from the dominant group, is one aspect of Anti-Bias education work, much as a map insert magnifies one piece of the overall terrain. Examining this issue in no way implies that we do not continue to increase our understanding and skill for working with children of the groups not part of the dominant group. Rather, we need to better know how to work with white, or domain group children to increase the possibilities that white children will grow up to join them in the ongoing struggles for social justice.

To this end, Dr. Patricia Ramsey and I wrote a book titled *"What If All the Kids Are White?" Anti-Bias /Multicultural Education for Young Children and Families*, published by Teachers College Press in 2006. We intend it for all teachers, caregivers, and families who work with or raise white children. The conceptual framework and learning themes are relevant for white children and families in either homogeneous or in racially/ethnically diverse settings, although specific approaches and activities vary across programs. We propose seven core-learning themes for working with white children, based on the four Anti-Bias education goals. Four of these learning themes particularly reflect the specific issues of Anti-Bias work with white children, reflecting our understanding of the construction of the social identity of "whiteness". These core-learning themes are to:

Develop authentic identities based on personal abilities and interests, family history, and culture, rather than on white superiority. (ABC goal 1) Learning theme seven adds another identity issue, "building identities that include Anti-Bias ideals and possibilities". This requires learning about white people who engage in Anti-racism and other social justice actions.

Know, respect, and value the range of the diversity of physical and social attributes among white people. (ABC goal 1). Understanding the differences within one's own social identity group helps children see the individuality of people from other groups.

Build the capacity for caring, cooperative, and equitable relationships with others. (ABC goal 2) The dominant culture tends to teach competition, putting oneself first, and the need to rank others as less than oneself.

Commit to the ideal that all people have the right to a secure, healthy, comfortable and sustainable life and that everyone must equitably share the resources of the earth and collaboratively care for them. (ABC goal 3 & 4)

4. Progress & Challenges

Progress:

a) We have influenced the "canon" of early childhood education. It now includes two key concepts. One is that young children need culturally appropriate care and education environments. The second is that prejudice influences and hurts young children's developing sense of themselves and others. In another words, there has been a paradigm shift from the 'difference denial" or "color blind" approach to young children. This is an important change, even though it does not automatically turn into actual practice in early childhood programs.

b) Lots of innovative practice in working with children and adults on Anti-Bias issues.

c) Comparatively, there are many more new publications on the subject, written by experienced Anti-Bias educators.

d) Many more available and good learning materials: (although also a lot that isn't good, but marketing to the acceptance of diversity learning needs

Challenges:

Unfortunately, the challenges are a longer list than the successes. The George Bush years have been a very difficult time for any form of diversity and equity education work.

a) Too many people only know the "ant-Bias education" term, but not what it means in practice. Many others think they are doing Anti-Bias education, but it is superficial and piecemeal applications—a start, but not sufficient. Worse, are the schools that make "false promises": e.g., as a mother of a bi-racial child, in an ECE program calling itself an Anti-Bias school, said to them "*Do not advertise a promise to support those children so often hurt by this society and then fail to follow through on your commitment to them. If you do, imagine what it felt like for me to see some of my*

son's sparkle diminish that day, what might have been different had his teachers, and his school followed through on their promise."

b) Standardized assessment and curriculum: Both at the federal and state governmental levels, pressure or early childhood programs to use standardized assessment has become a political issue. Ironically, this has come as early childhood education assumes a more respectable place in the society (partly because of research about brain development that supports what we have long known—the importance of the early years for children's cognitive development). Unfortunately, legislating standardized assessment also means dollars for corporations, who push for assessment tests that are not only not useful, but also often harmful as a way to improve instruction. In addition, Anti-Bias education and bilingual education have no place in these standardized assessments.

c) Teachers' resistance:

- In the past, the main form of resistance came from the argument that "children don't notice differences and teaching about differences will make them prejudiced". However, the current professional understanding offers a counter to that argument, i.e., ignoring children's curiosity and misconceptions about differences can reinforce the prejudice they are learning from our society.
- Now, resistance to doing Anti-Bias education also comes more from arguments such as: (1) I do not need to do it—there is no more racism, sexism; (2) "I've been there/done that: Now I am on to something else (e.g., literacy)", (3) demands for standardized assessment and curriculum do not allow time

d) Political challenges to and laws ending bilingual education in several states: While this applies more directly to primary education, many programs take it as a directive or permission to ignore diversity and Anti-Bias education.

e) More general challenges facing EC programs: too low salaries and no or insufficient benefits, which results in a high teacher turn over; lack of adequate training (6-12 semester credit hours to be a teacher); insufficient time for teachers to plan, reflect and build relationships with families

f) Insufficient preparation and training of teachers in diversity and Anti-Bias work. Some progress has been made - we do know how to do this effectively, and there are many faculty in 2-years colleges (where most ECE teachers get their training) doing good work. However, in general, the situation remains a challenge. For example, a recent large-scale study of teacher preparation programs (Ray et al.) showed that they rarely prepare educators for working with a wide range of children. Ironically, most institutions, "recognize the developmental and educational needs of children of color, children with special needs, low-income children, immigrants, and second language/dialect speakers as relevant [for]…early childhood teachers. …[But] few hours of coursework and

little practice [are] devoted to teaching early childhood teachers how to be effective educators of [diverse children] and [how to] work with their families and communities" (Ray et al., 2005, p. vii-viii).

5. Connection of Anti-Bias education work to social justice work in the society

Small percentage of very dedicated teachers, maybe 20%, who understand Anti-Bias education? They are in all aspects of early childhood education - working with children, with families, directors, preparing teachers. I think about Margaret Mead's comment that "A small group of dedicated people can change the world". I am not sure they can really do it all themselves, but they sure can get and keep the changes started and motivate and educate more people. Many dedicated Anti-Bias teachers also work in various social justice movements.

As BRIAN SILVERIA, a pre-school teacher in San Francisco explained,

Anti-Bias curriculum changed the way I looked at child development and the world. I probably would not be such an activist today without it. We <u>are</u> creating a better world.

ENDING

Freedom's Plow (excerpts)*

Langston Hughes

When a man [and woman] start out to build a world…

First in the heart is the dream.

Then the mind starts seeking a way…

The eyes see there materials for building,

See the difficulties, too, and the obstacles.

The hand seeks tools to cut the wood,

To till the soil, and harness the power of the waters.

Then the hand seeks other hands to help,

A community of hands to help__

Thus the dream becomes not one man's dream alone,

But a community dream.

Not my world alone,

But *your world and my world*,

Belonging to all the hands who build…

(*In: Rampersad, Arnold (Ed). The Collected Poems of Langston Hughes. (1995). NY: Vintage Books, p.263)

From an American Folk Song

"Inch by inch, row by row, *gonna* (going *to*) make my garden grow"

Going to dig it deep and low, *gonna (going to)* make it fertile ground" (American folk song)

Appendix

GOALS OF Anti-Bias EDUCATION

Goal One: Each child will demonstrate self-awareness, confidence, family pride, and positive group identities.

Teachers have the responsibility to:

- Accept, respect, and equitably but uniquely, nurture all children
- Enable all children to like who they are without feeling superior to others
- Respect and include each family (traditions, way of life, and culture) in all aspects of the educational program
- Foster all children's skills to effectively interact within both their home culture and within the dominant culture
- Promote bilingual language development

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

Teachers have the responsibility to:

- Nurture children's developing awareness and knowledge about all kinds of human difference
- Guide children's learning about diversity within their various identity groups

- Foster children's comfort, enjoyment and appreciation of diversity
- Demonstrate accurate knowledge of human differences
- Foster all children's skills for respectfully negotiating and adapting to differences
- Promote all children's cognitive and emotional understanding of the common humanity that all people share and how each person is both the same and different from others
- Cultivate all children's empathy toward others and skills for building strong connections with all kinds of people
- Create a classroom community in which all children feel safe and are active participants

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

Teachers have the responsibility to:

- Guide children's skill development for identifying unfair and untrue images and messages about themselves or others
- Foster children's awareness of discriminatory behaviors directed at their own or another's identity, such as teasing, name-calling, Biased comments.
- Cultivate in all children, empathy for the pain that unfair images, messages and behaviors cause (be they about gender, race, ethnicity, disability, class, age, weight, family structure, language, etc.)

Goal Four: Each child will demonstrate a sense of empowerment and the skills to act, with others or alone, against prejudice and/or discriminatory actions.

Teachers have the responsibility to:

- Cultivate children's desires for fairness and their empathy toward others
- Guide children in moving from critical thinking about unfairness to taking action
- Promote the development of a tool-box of skills for acting with others and or alone when a child behaves in a Biased manner towards another child
- Teach children culturally appropriate ways to raise issues of unfairness with adults.