

From: “A Framework for Culturally Relevant, Multicultural, and Antibias Education in the Twenty-First Century”¹

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EDUCATIONAL APPROACHES TO DIVERSITY: PAST AND PRESENT

This section discusses the five basic educational approaches to diversity and social injustice that have emerged in our society in the twentieth century. For each approach, we describe the underlying assumptions about diversity and society, educational goals and methods, and current criticisms. The first three approaches focus on populations that have historically been excluded from the mainstream in the United States and ways of forcing their assimilation into the European American dominant culture. The last two approaches focus on all groups and reflect efforts to create more equitable social, cultural, economic, and political relationships among them.

Suppression of Cultural Diversity

The underlying assumption of the suppression of cultural diversity is that everyone needs to be assimilated into the European American culture to create a united nation. The justifications for this orientation rest on the racist assumptions that the European American culture is superior to others and that “it was here first.” It further implies that the rights and privileges of the United States are only for those who choose to assimilate and therefore sets up a fundamentally unequal power relationship between European Americans and other racial/ethnic groups.

Early childhood curriculum that reflects this orientation does not address diversity and discourages children and parents from bringing their own languages and cultural practices into the classroom. Schools that adhere to this view reflect only European

¹ **From:** In J. Roopnarine & J. Johnson (Eds.). (2007). Approaches to Early Childhood Education (4th ed.). New York: Merrill.

American images, beliefs, and behaviors in their curricula, physical environments, and materials. Teachers actively discourage children from retaining their own culture and language. For example, until the 1960s, schools run by the Bureau of Indian Affairs removed children from their home communities, and teachers and administrators sought to erase Native American children's culture and language and replace them with the language, values, and habits of middle-class white society. In many other schools, children were punished for speaking their native languages, and parents were urged to speak only English at home. A statement made many years ago by Theodore Roosevelt exemplifies this attitude: "We have room for but one language here and that is the English language, for we intend to see that the crucible turns our people out as Americans, of American nationality, and not as dwellers in a polyglot boarding house" (quoted in Marquez, 1991, p. 6).

In the 1960s a new form of cultural suppression emerged under the rubrics of "cultural deprivation theory" and "compensatory education." This approach argued that "the inability of culturally different families to benefit from the opportunities for social equality in this country, and thus the inability of their children to benefit from school experience is, in part (if not totally), due to their culture" (Phillips, 1988, p. 43). Therefore, the educational solution was to institute special programs for both children and parents that would teach them to assimilate into the dominant European American culture. Although appearing to be more compassionate than programs in which children were physically punished for speaking in their native tongues, these programs have shared the same ultimate goals of making all children fit a single cultural mold. Consequently, these programs embodied a deficit orientation toward the children they are designed to assist

This cultural deficit orientation violates what we recognize as good early childhood education practice. It is not based on current theories or empirical research about how children learn about themselves, about becoming competent individuals, and about diversity; and it hurts all children (Tatum, 1997). Schools with this approach cannot promote feelings of safety, security, and belonging for children. These conditions undermine children's social, emotional, and cognitive development and their relationships with their families. Although these settings may be less stressful for

European American children, this approach ill prepares them for their future, because increasingly, white children will grow up to live and work in diverse communities and work sites. Moreover, this perspective potentially condones or even encourages prejudice and discourages children from learning about groups other than the identified mainstream (Derman-Sparks, 1992; Derman-Sparks & Ramsey, 2006).

Melting Pot

In the early part of the twentieth century, the national vision was one of a melting pot, an expectation that diverse groups would be fused in the crucible of the United States and emerge as common Americans. By obliterating differences, all Americans would gain equal access to the opportunities of U.S. society. Schools were expected to teach everyone the same “melted” culture. Although this ideal embodied an expectation that all cultures would contribute to the common mix, in actuality, the “common culture” comprised the ethnic worldviews of Western/Northern Europe that were fused together to become the European American dominant culture. Even as the schools touted a “melting pot” approach, they were in fact pushing toward “Anglo conformity” (Ramsey & Williams, 2003; Vold, 1989). This one-way assimilation encourages immigrants to renounce their ancestry, values, and language and become as similar to the dominant Anglo-Saxon group as possible.

Teachers who are oriented to the melting pot position often claim to be color blind. They may deny noticing whether their children are white, black, purple, or green and adhere to the position that “we are all Americans and share a common culture” and that “everyone is the same.” With these pronouncements, teachers minimize differences, thereby ignoring the lifestyles and contributions of other groups as well as the effects of differential power and affluence on children’s development.

This approach almost always results in teaching practices, environments, and materials that reflect European American culture and deny the realities of diversity and the absorption of societal biases. Moreover, it confuses the concept of diversity with that of Anglo conformity and thus contradicts children’s daily experiences and thwarts their efforts to understand their social worlds.

“Add-On” Multiculturalism

Criticisms of cultural suppression educational approaches began to emerge as a result of the civil rights movement in the 1960s. Critics argued that recognizing cultural differences as strengths, rather than as problems, was necessary to create a more equitable society. A multicultural approach to education began to take shape in the 1960s with the underlying assumption that we are a society of many peoples and that we all need to learn to honor ourselves and one another. From this perspective, schools have a responsibility to support the cultures of all children, to teach children to respect themselves and others, and to get along with a wide range of people. The hope was that this approach would also reduce prejudice and discrimination.

Although advocates of multicultural education argue that the approach must be infused into all aspects of the education program, an insufficient version, critically termed add-on multiculturalism, has become the most frequently practiced approach. In this version of multicultural education, the existing classroom environment and curriculum continue to be based on the dominant European American culture, while other cultures (i.e., ethnic minority groups) are introduced into the curriculum from time to time through special activities. Thus, a classroom may have a special multicultural bulletin board, or may organize learning about diversity around special days or holidays, or may introduce week-long units about particular ethnic groups, and then go back to the regular curriculum.

Because add-on multiculturalism is organized around concrete and nonthreatening activities, many teachers find it easier to make these superficial gestures, or window-dressing changes, rather than to truly transform their curriculum. Many teacher education classes and inservice workshops continue to be influenced by the add-on approach. This response is abetted by the availability of (and heavily promoted) commercial curriculum materials and published curriculum guides that reflect an add-on version of multicultural education.

This form of multiculturalism has been strongly criticized as a “tourist” approach that stereotypes, trivializes, and misrepresents cultures different from the mainstream European American culture. It further perpetuates inequitable racial power relationships by keeping European American culture the center or norm and other cultures as satellites

or occasional places to visit. An add-on or tourist approach to diversity does not adequately address diversity and cannot effectively support children's healthy development of identity or respectful attitudes toward others (Derman-Sparks, et al., 1989).

Bilingualism/Biculturalism

The underlying assumption of the bilingual/bicultural approach is that children can and should learn to be effective members of both their own cultural group and of the wider, mainstream society. The prefix *bi* means *two*: two languages; two cultural ways of being. Biculturalism is based on the premise that the creation of a truly democratic society in which all groups have fair and equal access to opportunities requires that members of diverse ethnic, racial, and religious groups maintain an autonomous participation in their traditions, cultures, and special interests, while also becoming part of a shared nation (Appleton, 1983; Banks, 1988). For example, in the United States, this means people speak both English and their home, or "heritage," language (Krashen, Tse, & McQuillan, 1998). Early childhood programs that reflect this orientation foster children's ability to speak and learn in their home language and culture while learning the language and cultural rules of behavior of the dominant culture.

Bilingualism/biculturalism is not a new idea in American education. Heritage language programs have a long history in North America (Krashen et al., 1998). German-English schools were established in Ohio in the midnineteenth century (Grosjean, 1982), and many other communities formed their own language schools in Dutch, German, Swedish, Yiddish, and Italian (Dropkin, Tobier, & City University of New York, 1976; Fishman, 1966). However, powerful attempts to destroy the language of Native Americans, the enslaved Africans, and the conquered Mexican people also have a long tradition in U.S. history. In 1923 a total of 34 states had English-only educational policies affecting European immigrant languages as well as those of Mexican and the many Native American nations (Marquez, 1991).

In the 1960s self-determination and social-political rights movements fueled a renewed demand for education to support all people's cultural rights and to reverse the tragic undermining of children's cultures, identities, and native languages that contributed

to the disproportionately high school dropout rates of non-European American children. The *Lau v. Nichols* decision in 1974 led many schools to start bilingual education programs.

Early childhood education has a particularly salient and sensitive role in bilingual and bicultural education because the preschool years are key to all children's language and identity development. Knowing when to begin instruction in English for children whose home language is not English and the methods that best support continued growth in the child's home language while the child is also learning English are central to creating good programs. The National Association for the Education of Young Children recognized this in its 1997 position statement *Cultural and Linguistic Diversity*, which states that:

As our nation becomes more linguistically and culturally diverse and as the issue of bilingual education becomes more politically charged, early childhood educators have a responsibility to understand how best to ... provide effective early childhood education for *all* children. .. Educators should encourage the use of home language learning while fostering the acquisition of English in order to strengthen ties between programs and families.(p.1)

While some educators argue that maintaining the home language interferes with the acquisition of English (e.g., Porter, 1990), most studies demonstrate that young children can learn to be bilingual (Garcia, 1980; Krashen et al., 1998; Sandoval-Martinez, 1982) and in the process benefit in other ways as well. Maintenance of home languages fosters earlier development of academic skills and eventually more proficient English (e.g., Crawford, 1991) and supports children's overall cognitive and emotional development and their ability to communicate with their families (Cummins, 1981, 1986; Wong Fillmore, 1991). Collier and Thomas (1997) collected data on over 700,000 language minority students from 1982 to 1996 in schools that were using different kinds of well-implemented bilingual programs. They found that students in programs with the longest

use of their home languages combined with strong content-based English as a second-language instruction showed most academic success. Students who received only English instruction without any home-language instruction in the early years of schooling fared the worst academically. Several researchers have also found a positive relationship between children's development of positive self-identity and the maintenance of their home language, because of the continuing connection with their cultural group. In addition, positive self and group concepts also foster the development of positive attitudes toward other ethnic and cultural groups (Tse, 1998). Nevertheless, bilingual education is "the focus of a continuing debate over language choice in the society. The arguments against bilingual education carry ... with them underlying political and social perspectives related to people's views of American society" (Wong Fillmore, 1991, p. 2). Recently several states have virtually banned it from public schools (although, in some places, families can still request that their children continue to receive bilingual education). This ban does not legally extend to preschool programs unless they are part of a public school system. Typically, opponents fear that bilingualism will lead to divisiveness and political unrest (Krashen et al., 1998). However, no evidence demonstrates that bilingualism or multilingualism causes political or economic problems in nations where people speak more than one language.

Continued research is needed to determine the most effective methods to implement a bilingual/bicultural approach in varying contexts and at different developmental periods. We need to consider how bilingual education might be implemented in programs where many different languages are spoken or where only one or two children speak a language other than English. We also need to more deeply understand when and how to begin second-language English instruction and how to support early childhood teachers' progress toward becoming fluent in a language other than English.

However, based on the research to date, we agree with the United Nation's *Convention on the Rights of the Child* (1989) that becoming bilingual and bicultural is a basic right of the child. As Eugene Garcia, a leading expert in early childhood

bilingual development stated, “Every strong tree has strong roots. If you transplant a young plant before its roots are strong enough, the plant does not thrive- it often withers and dies” (Keynote, NAME conference, Oct 06) Indeed, we believe that it is to the benefit of all children to become bilingual and bicultural—a necessity for effective work in our global society.

Antibias Multicultural Education

The goals of this approach are to ensure equitable individual participation in all aspects of society and to enable people to maintain their own culture while participating together to live in a common society. This approach embodies a profound acknowledgment and critique of the fundamental contradictions of our nation and a commitment to transform the inequitable power relationships in our schools and society, while also including the initial goal of multicultural education of respect for oneself and others. The antibias multicultural approach has a pragmatic as well as an idealistic intent. The realities of changing demographics mean that, as a society, we cannot afford to waste the human talent of an increasingly growing segment of the population and that “majority” (soon to be the demographic “minority”) children need to learn how to live effectively and be activists in a changing and diverse society. From this perspective, schools have a responsibility not only to teach children to respect themselves and create equitable relationships with a wide range of people but also to teach children how to work toward eliminating prejudice and discrimination.

The antibias multicultural education movement has several precursors and roots. One is the intergroup education movement of the late 1940s and early 1950s (Taba, Brady, & Robinson, 1952). During this period, some of the classic studies of young children’s racial awareness and attitudes toward self and others were conducted (e.g., Clark, 1955; Trager & Radke-Yarrow, 1952). Unfortunately, information about the work of the intergroup movement as well as of the pioneering research on children’s development of attitudes was subsequently ignored in mainstream child development and nursery school texts. However, it has reemerged in more recent work on early attitude development, and antibias multicultural education embodies many of the goals of the intergroup education

movement. Another precursor is the ethnic studies movement of the 1970s, which argued for education that provided children of different groups with accurate information about their own cultures and histories. A third is the commitment to eliminate prejudice and discrimination that fueled the civil rights movement of the 1960s and ultimately led to the realization that white children and families must confront and unlearn their racism.

Multicultural education that began to develop during the late 1960s and 1970s initially focused on fostering respect within and across different racial and cultural groups. The antibias approach, which first appeared in written form in 1989, argued that other aspects of identity such as gender, social class, religion, sexual orientation, and disabilities were also germane to the development of the children's positive identities and respect for others. By the 1990s, advocates of multiculturalism as well as of antibias education agreed that all educational programs should address the wider issue of underrepresentation and should incorporate all groups that have been excluded from the traditional curriculum (e.g., Derman-Sparks & ABC Task Force, 1989; Nieto, 1996; Ramsey, 1998). We choose to use the term *antibias multicultural education* to describe this perspective, although people in the field may only use one or the other of the terms.

During the 1990s, antibias multicultural education more explicitly incorporated a social reconstructionist orientation that assumes that the creation of a just society requires a fundamental change in institutional structures, policies, and behaviors that inhibit the equitable participation of all racial and ethnic groups (Sleeter & Grant, 1987). As Enid Lee explains,

It is a point of view that cuts across all subject areas, and addresses the histories and experiences of people who have been left out of the curriculum. Its purpose is to help us deal equitably with all the cultural and racial differences in the human family. It's also a perspective that allows us to get at explanations for why things are the way they are in terms of power relationships and equality issues. (1991, p. 6)

Derman-Sparks and the ABC Task Force (1989) defined antibias education as

An active/activist approach to challenging prejudices, stereotyping bias, and the "isms." In a society in which institutional structures create and

maintain sexism, racism, handicapism, it is not sufficient to be nonbiased, nor is it sufficient to be an observer. It is necessary for each individual to actively intervene, to challenge and counter the personal and institutional behaviors that perpetuate oppression. (p. 3)

In the 21st century, as the populations in our country and in many countries around the world become more racially, culturally, and linguistically diverse, educational movements advocating for multicultural, anti-bias, and bilingual/bicultural curriculum in early childhood care and education are active not only in the United States but also in countries such as Australia, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Germany, The Netherlands, Sweden, South Africa, The United Kingdom, and New Zealand (e.g., Brown, 1998, 2001; Creaser & Dau, 1996; Van Keulen, A., 2004). In the USA, several new books written after *Anti-Bias Curriculum: Tools for Young Children* (Derman-Sparks et al, 1989) provide further resources to teachers wishing to use anti-bias multicultural approaches (Alvarado, Derman-Sparks, & Ramsey, 1999, Bisson, 1997; Kendall, 1996; Pelo & Davidson, 2000; Deman-Sparks, 2008, Derman-Sparks & Ramsey, 2006; Hoffman, 2005; Ramsey, 2004; Ramsey & Williams, 2003; Tatum, 1997; Whitney, 1999; Wolpert, 1999; York, 1998).

More recently, some antibias multicultural writers have been pointing out connections between the marginalization and subjugation of particular groups of people and the exploitation of our natural resources and the competitive consumerism in our society (Cowhey, 2006; Ramsey, 2004). These latter themes relate to cultural and social class differences because how one views the natural world and consumption is influenced by one's culture and level of affluence. They also embody social justice issues because environmental degradation is concentrated in poor communities and countries (Fruchter, 1999), and global warming is already disproportionately affecting people, who live in more vulnerable such as low-lying coastal areas and regions that are being taken over by deserts. Moreover, commercial interests often target disadvantaged groups for their most aggressive marketing (e.g., vigorous marketing of high-priced sneakers and other expensive clothing in poor urban communities [Nightingale, 1993]).

Discussion about the nature of antibias multicultural work with white children and adults is another recent development. “What if all the kids are white?” has been one of the most frequently asked questions by white early childhood teachers over the past three decades. It echoes the misconception that antibias multicultural education is only about people who are “different than” whites. In the early days of multicultural education, teachers in predominately white programs often assumed that education about diversity was not relevant to their children, and the question had an undertone of “Why should we bother?” After all, *their* children were not confronted by negative identity-damaging stereotypes, alienated from the images and practices in their classrooms, or subjected to racial or ethnic discrimination by school and community personnel. More recently, however, many teachers of white children have become aware of how racism affects everyone. They understand that a false sense of racial superiority is isolating and damaging and ill prepares white children to function in a diverse society. Such teachers also recognize that working for social justice is indeed also a “white thing.” A society without racism will benefit *all* people, including whites, and cannot be achieved unless all groups, especially those in power, join the struggle. Thus, many teachers today believe that antibias/multicultural education IS relevant to white children. However, when such teachers serve all-white groups of children and do not perceive obvious diversity, they do not know how to engage children in learning about differences and social justice. For these teachers, the intent of the question has shifted from “why?” to “how?” The authors of this chapter recently published a book, *What If All the Kids are White?* (2006) that explores the many issues and possible strategies to address the question of “What if all the kids are white?”

Critics who disagree with an antibias multicultural approach have raised several objections. One is the belief that learning about differences among people will make children become prejudiced. This assumption is based on a misconception, not on our knowledge about the early development of attitudes. Young children *do* absorb stereotypes about people’s identities but *not* because they are learning authentic information and having an opportunity to ask their questions about differences. Rather, children’s misperceptions and biases reflect those that are expressed by parents, peers, television, movies, books and become entrenched when they are left unchallenged. A

second objection is that teachers are already overburdened and cannot add anything else to the curriculum. This assumption reflects a misunderstanding about the processes of antibias multicultural education. Teaching about diversity and justice is woven *into*, not added *onto*, the existing curriculum, so it is a change in perspective rather than an elaborate new curriculum.

Another criticism of antibias multicultural education rests on the belief that learning about diversity and discrimination diverts time from more important purposes of schooling. We argue that these critics are taking a myopic view of the purpose of education and not asking themselves the crucial question, “What world are we educating our children *for*?” Research and statistics about the changing demographics and the school failure and dropout rates of particular groups provide a powerful argument that multicultural education is essential to the health and success of our society.

Another objection is that teaching the values of antibias multicultural education may conflict with the values of some of their children’s families who either subscribe to biased thinking or may prefer to assimilate quietly into the society rather than challenge the system. These criticisms underscore the importance of involving families and community people in the process of designing and implementing curricula that reflect this approach. Finally, some critics have denounced multicultural antibias education for being too “political” because it presents a particular point of view. We argue that *all* education is political. Decisions about what to insert or omit in a story book or textbook, selections of topics and activities for a classroom, and strategies for working with children and parents—all reflect our priorities and values. Thus, continuing to use material that focuses only on European Americans and supports assimilation and the status quo is as political as incorporating a multicultural perspective.

It is time to act on the premise that quality education for *all* children, from the earliest years onward, requires the implementation of bilingual/bicultural and antibias multicultural education in all of their dimensions. We need to move more energetically and systematically from good intentions to good practice. As our knowledge and practices continue to develop and improve, we will all learn more about the most effective ways to meet children’s developmental needs. We need to take advantage of the

new models of action research in which teachers are involved directly in defining questions and conducting studies to learn in more depth about the impact of this work on both children and adults.

As early childhood and other educators work with one another and with parents and community people to create programs that meet the developmental and educational needs of *all* young children, we may no longer need to use explicit terms such as bilingual/bicultural and antibias multicultural education. Perhaps in the twenty-first century we will come to understand that the terms *care* and *education* automatically mean fostering development in linguistically and culturally consistent ways and teaching all children about diversity and how to confront and challenge stereotyping, bias, and institutional “isms.” Early childhood educators will then be taking seriously Alice Walker’s call to “Keep in mind always the present you are constructing. It should be the future you want” (Walker, 1989, p. 238).

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