

Teacher Intentions Hold the Key

Your intentions as a teacher will play a very important role throughout your career; ultimately they will define you as a professional. As you shape your intentions, ask yourself, "What do I want everyone with whom I have worked as a professional to remember about me at the end of my career?" Once you really know who you want to be and how you want to be known, you are on your way to constructing a very strong and powerful identity as a teacher.

This book is written to encourage you to build your career with intentions that are strongly focused on child advocacy, ethics, social justice, and respect for human diversity. I believe that these interlinked intentions will help you to rise above discouragement, stay committed, support the growth of every child in your care, and lead others by example. Most important, they will help you to fully meet the high calling of teaching—the call to be a principled and compassionate social leader whose enduring impact on children will reverberate throughout your school or program, and ultimately your society. Let's get started by thinking about what the above intentions look like in the classroom.

JUSTICE AND ETHICS THROUGH THE EYES OF A CHILD

Imagine that this is your first day of kindergarten at a new school. It is the middle of the school year, and you don't know anyone. Almost all of the children and adults in the school are speaking English. You know some English words, but not many. Your family speaks a different language at home. Right now you are confused about what is happening in the room because children are moving into different play areas. Your teacher smiles, says your name the same way your mother says it, and guides you to a corner with a lot of blocks. You feel shy with the other children but start to enjoy building a little block house by yourself.

Suddenly two other children in the block area walk over to you, laugh at what you are doing, and call you a name that you do not understand. Their faces do not look very nice. Frightened, you look up and see your teacher walking over very fast. She puts her hand on your shoulder and

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speaks calmly but firmly to the other children. Even though you cannot understand the words she is saying, you can see that the other children listen to her and then say something that seems much nicer to you than continue to play with your blocks, feeling better about your day.

After everyone cleans up from play, the teacher reads a book with beautiful pictures about friends. You recognize the subject because you understand the word *friends* and also because there are many pictures of children helping one another. The book has some words in the language you speak; this seems wonderful to you. There is a game after that, and the teacher shows all the children how to play the game with a partner. You do not need to know all the words for the game because you can follow the teacher, your partner, and the other children. Your teacher keeps smiling at you and helping your partner to show you what to do next. She ever says good-bye to you in your own language! By the time you leave for home, you have started to be confident that school will be a place where you feel comfortable with the teacher and the other children.

JUSTICE AND ETHICS THROUGH THE INTENTIONS OF A TEACHER

The above narrative, written through the eyes of a young child, is a simple one. It might appear to be just a description of "good teaching." However, the well-developed teacher intentions that it reflects are highly complex. This teacher is not merely being "nice" or "encouraging." Rather, she understands the social oppressions that find their way into classroom life for young children and is determined to take a stand against them. Her intention is to interrupt discrimination and support fairness and equality in the structure of her planning and action in daily classroom life. Her intention is to implement what might be identified as *social justice teaching*—interventions about the common good and purposeful opposition to ramifications of social and political forces that can harm vulnerable young children (Kohl, 2000).

Her focus is not only on the children whom she considers to be different. Rather, she thinks it is very important that all the children in the room benefit from her insistence on fairness—she wants them all to be good citizens in a democratic and caring classroom environment (Dombro, Jablon, & Stetson, 2011). This book is strongly aligned with the concept of social justice teaching through the lens of advocacy, ethical social justice, and respect for diversity.

This early childhood teacher has a firm grasp on the intentions and actions necessary to work for social change in her own classroom. Through her approach to every child as a worthy person and capable learner,

demonstrates enacted regard for all her students (Williams, 1989). She finds support for her dynamic respect for human diversity not only in the ideal of justice within a democratic society, but in the fundamental ethical edict that "no child be harmed" in the process of education (National Association for the Education of Young Children, 2011).

Her students are so fortunate! They spend every day in a classroom with a teacher whose intentions support a fair and ethical learning community. As learners, as well as future citizens, they are benefitting from the daily intentions of their teacher. All children in America need teachers like this in their lives!

A VISION FOR YOUR OWN CLASSROOM

The teacher above, of-course, is or can be you! This book is written to support the daily activation of your intentions to be an educator known for strong commitments and dedication to the optimal development of all children. The following section will discuss situations and social conditions that you will need to keep in mind as you develop your determination to remain strong in your dedication to be a powerful force in your classroom, school, and society.

The field of early childhood has long been guided by a vision of advocacy, justice, and ethics in the context of respect for diversity (Wollons, 1993). But what does that vision *mean* for real teachers in real classrooms? Some readers of this book may recall their first days in teacher preparation classes, when every idealistic word about teachers changing the world seemed to ring true. Why would we ever doubt our ability to be fair and ethical and to embrace the principles of social justice and respect for diversity? Shouldn't such intentions just come naturally to all teachers who dedicate their lives to children? Yes, one might argue, they should! But often in teaching what first appears to come naturally, ultimately may require a lot of reflection, determination, and hard work.

Once we complete our preparation as teachers and find ourselves employed with real children in actual classrooms, difficulty in retaining our ideals can surface quickly. Challenges with administrators, colleagues, and parents can begin to emerge. We may become aware of problems that exist in our schools and in the communities they serve. Children may seem at times to resist our efforts to support their learning and development. We can be discouraged by the reality of the impact of problems like adult addiction, family turmoil, or poverty on the daily lives of our students. Fairly soon, for many of us, there can be quite a long list of

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potential barriers to our retention and implementation of the ideals we once formed so easily.

Added to possible frustrations might be the ways in which our is perceived by others. Family members or friends might wonder why someone with our talents would have selected a "low-status" teaching young children. We might turn on the nightly news for a relaxing minutes in front of the TV and find ourselves listening to a isolator who is blaming the very complex economic, social, and political problems of our nation on *teachers*. Possibly, we find that even our living expenses seem to exceed our salaries, especially if we have a few to support. In fact, although we work very hard to care for other children, at the same time we might be having considerable trouble ing adequate and affordable child care for our own!

For the above reasons and many others, we face pressing questions about our power as early-childhood educators—can we really hold our ideals and continue to believe that the important work we do is essential to the lives of many children and families? Moreover, can we ally stand up for our beliefs about advocacy, diversity, ethics, and justice in ways that make a true difference in school and society? This book is written to say yes, we can do these things—not easily, but with insight, termination, persistence, and ideals that refuse to waver from their place on the well-being of children in our classrooms and our nation.

THE PERSISTENT CHALLENGE OF CHILDHOOD IN THE UNITED STATES

Early childhood teachers confront some of the most complex and pressing social dilemmas of our nation every day. Young children coming to their schools and programs reflecting the ramifications of problems as family stress, poverty and unemployment, lack of access to medical and dental care, inadequate nutrition, child abuse, community violence and commercialized media exposing them to games and toys that undermine healthy social and emotional development (Children's Defense Fund, 2011).

Today in America, we appear to be facing an escalating child crisis. Linda Darling-Hammond (2012) recently indicated:

We live in a nation that is on the verge of forgetting its children. United States now has a far higher poverty rate for children than any industrialized nation in the world . . . a more tattered safety net . . . greater disparities in wealth than any other leading country. (p. vii)

It is going to take a lot of commitment and resilience for early childhood educators to retain vision in these difficult times. We need to continue to find ways to care about and act on behalf of children, especially when it seems that many in power do not.

FOCUSING ADVOCACY ON ALL CHILDREN IN THE UNITED STATES

Traditionally, child advocacy has focused on children in our society whose needs are not being met. It has been very important to focus on the children who are suffering the most from such adversities as poverty, institutional racism, and gross educational inequalities. However, in this book, I am going to suggest that advocates extend their articulated commitment to every child living in the United States today. Why? First of all, I would argue that every child is affected in a negative way by life in a society that allows some children to suffer so deeply and to lose their opportunities for optimal development. Why would children believe in the ideals of democracy when they are well aware of significant inequities experienced by some children—frequently including children who are obviously marginalized in their own schools? Also, the myopic social selfishness that allows shameful neglect of many children can interfere with the development of empathy, compassion, and commitment to community in any child. Including all children in our advocacy and concern may strengthen policy and advocacy initiatives. From a historical policy perspective, many years of advocacy, research, publications, conferences, summits, and national commissions have not been able to change the hearts and minds of the many in America who dismiss any sense of responsibility for the problems of “other people’s children.” Including all children may help to ameliorate this problem!

I want to clarify that I am *not* suggesting that we silence our voices of outrage focused on poverty, homelessness, persistent racism, early incarceration, and other incredibly serious dilemmas! But I do think it is time to speak out with concern about how the greed and inequality that exist in our society are affecting all children. My hope is that this might strengthen a sense of common cause—an urgent need for all people to create a new nation in which the safe and healthy development of all children is an irreducible priority.

Child Problems Are Pervasive

Many serious problems such as child suicide, depression, and addiction occur on all levels of society (Children’s Defense Fund, 2011). In fact, recent research suggests that affluent suburban children experience

substance abuse and depression at a higher rate than children who in the inner city (Luthar & Barkin, 2012). Among other serious dilemmas that touch the lives of many American children across class lines are family violence, sudden parental unemployment, mental illness, and divorce (Fennimore, 2011). Clearly, there are many ways in which problems challenge the lives of all our children.

Including broadly based child problems in our advocacy can raise larger questions to the surface. How much support are we really giving to our child population in the United States? Are we protecting our population from harmful influences? These and many other questions can lead to much-needed reflection on our national commitment to children and our need to prioritize them as a significant concern—even if they do not appear to be imminently in harm’s way.

Social “Nastiness” and Consumerism: A Good Place to Start

I would suggest that a pervasive level of social nastiness and constant manipulation of children for the economic gain of adults will be a good place to start an examination of America’s child- and fan-related values.

The problem of “nastiness.” All children today are affected by what James Garbarino (1995) has termed the social toxicity and increasing “nastiness” that are commonplace in American life. Children may be experiencing this toxicity in schools through cruel actions and words of their peers in forms of bullying. However, they also may be observing and experiencing nastiness of the part of *adults* on a daily basis. This can include hostile words and actions while driving cars, speaking angrily on cell phones in places, pushing or cutting lines in stores, or just generally treating others without personal regard or respect. Civility—constant awareness of others and intention to treat others in kind and ethical ways—appears to be lacking in many aspects of our adult society (Forni, 2002). Children follow the example of adults; therefore, it is time to talk about the effect of nastiness and a lack of adult civility on the development of all our children.

Consumerism and greed. Added to social toxicity and lack of civility in our society are the selfishness and greed reflected in a pervasive emphasis on consumerism. There is no escape from consumerism in our media-saturated society; children are affected by them early in life. Linked to a focus on consumerism is vacuous adult behavior that prioritizes personal acquisition above moral values and respect for rights and needs of others. A look at headlines on any given day tells

that adults, including some of the most successful and affluent, are losing their grip on ethics. Marian Wright Edelman, executive director of the Children's Defense Fund, makes an important point:

What's wrong with our children?—Adults telling children to be honest while lying and cheating. Adults telling children not to be violent while marketing and glorifying violence. . . . I believe that adult hypocrisy is the biggest problem children face in America. (Shetterly, 2005, p. 3)

I would argue that the problems of greed and hypocrisy are contributing directly not only to a callous disregard for child and family poverty, but to the moral and emotional vacuum felt by many children whose economic needs are well met.

Children and consumerism. All American children are affected by the consumption-saturated world in which they live. Corporate investment in advertising to children has risen from \$100,000 in 1983 to a current \$17 billion annual expense (Levin, 2011). Children who are poor are constantly manipulated to desire toys and games that are completely out of their family's economic reach. Those who advertise are blind to the children's frustration and disappointment. However, even the children whose families can afford to continually meet their requests for purchases are negatively affected by consumerist advertising. Often they develop the perception that material possessions are the most important thing to seek in life and the best indicator of the quality of a person. This leads to a form of "affluenza" that prioritizes consumption over positive human qualities such as understanding, kindness, and fairness. The American Academy of Pediatrics considers "affluenza" ultimately to be a cause of adolescent depression and suicide (De Graaf, 2005).

All adults should take action. Our society as a whole must take a careful inward look at our standards of civility and our child- and family-related values. Moving as a nation from consumerism to humanism and compassion would wake us up to not only the unjust misery that so many children experience, but the damage that empty, selfish values and behaviors do to all children. We early childhood educators are in a good position to embrace the common cause of childhood and encourage others to do so as well.

Ethics and Justice for Every Child

It is because all children are affected in significant ways by negative social forces in the United States that I believe every early childhood

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educator should be a vigilant advocate. We cannot deny that circumstances vary widely, but we would do well to recognize that all children need teachers with a commitment to justice and ethics. All children can better thrive in a classroom community in which positive human values and behaviors are modeled and reinforced. Hopefully, the children today, if they are fortunate enough to experience such classroom communities, will be the compassionate and civic-minded adults of tomorrow.

Linking Advocacy, Ethics, Justice, and Diversity

The conceptual framework on which this book is structured, discussed in the introduction, is an imagined "tent" of child advocacy up by the conceptual "stakes" of commitment to social justice, adherence to the ethics of teaching, and respect for diversity. Throughout this I will consider advocacy, ethics, justice, and respect for diversity—deeply interrelated—each depending on the understanding of an adherence to the others.

ADVOCACY: A TENT OF PROTECTION FOR CHILDREN

Advocacy for children has held an important place in early child education for many years (Goffin & Lombardi, 1988; Robinson & S 2005). The central concept of advocacy rests on the idea that child educators, who encounter the barriers that can stand between children and optimal development, should speak out and contribute to solutions to political and social problems. In my first book, *Child Advocacy for Childhood Educators* (1989), I defined child advocacy in this way:

Child advocacy [is] a personal commitment to active involvement in the lives of children beyond remunerated professional responsibilities with the goal of enhancing the opportunities of those children for optimal growth and development. For early childhood professionals, advocacy is the way they take their dedication to the service of young children a step further (many steps) further to the point of becoming activists for young children. (p. 4)

Today, while my fundamental concept of child advocacy continues to resonate with the above definition, I would make one significant change. I think my original definition was affected by what was then current thought that advocacy took place in settings *beyond the borders of schools and classrooms*. I continue to believe that child advocacy in political, social, and private-sector (business) settings is essential, closely related

to the act of teaching, and central to the improvement of child welfare in America (Goffin & Lombardi, 1988; Robinson & Stark, 2005). However, when I used the words “beyond remunerated responsibilities” I was overlooking the fundamental relationship of child advocacy to the practice of early childhood educators—the ways in which they approach their daily professional work with children. Today I would add this to my definition: Advocacy also can be integrated into classroom teaching and school-related interactions when teachers act upon their commitment to ethics, social justice, and respect for diversity in their daily practice.

Is Advocacy Too Controversial for Teachers?

Many teachers have asked me this question. They agree with the need for outspoken advocacy but do not feel that it is possible in their sites of practice. Some express discomfort with the idea of challenging district policies or raising controversial issues within the school. They say they are expected to be neutral in school or program politics; some express knowledge or fear of administrative retaliation when teachers involve themselves in contested areas that arise in the program, school, or district.

I think it is very important to be aware and respectful of the real risks that some teachers might take when they become stronger advocates in their schools. However, in this book, I hope to raise avenues for teacher advocacy that are *possible*, although never easy. Every early childhood educator has the power to decide where and when to stand up and be an advocate for children.

Advocacy: Traditional, Critical, and Participatory

This chapter is focused on *teacher intentions* that shape professional careers. The intention to be an advocate is never linear; we can never be sure of exactly what events will arise or of what the best ways will be to address problems that concern us. I pose three different kinds of advocacy that are interrelated—in many cases, teachers can select some parts of each to support an advocacy initiative in their schools.

Traditional child advocacy. Child advocacy has long been conceptualized as a way to call attention to the unmet needs of children and to work with others to make necessary social changes on their behalf (Fennimore, 1989; Robinson & Stark, 2005). For example, advocates might write letters to legislators, sign petitions circulated by professional groups and associations, or work with others to improve services for children.

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Possibly, a group of advocates might volunteer to clean up an (dilapidated playground and petition the local government for fun updated and safer equipment for child play.

Examples of traditional advocacy for teachers in schools might work with the Parent Association to set up a clothing donation collection room for children who are in need of warm winter attire, or to avenues through which local businesses might donate needed supplies such as book bags, folders for home-school communications, paper crayons. Quite often, traditional advocacy can make a real difference for children without political controversy.

Critical child advocacy. Critical child advocacy often is focused on forms of inequality that exist because an imbalance of power privileges some and marginalizes others (Ryan & Grieshaber, 2004). Critical advocacy is more likely to be controversial because it challenges an inequity status quo. Those who feel criticized, or who feel that the inequity benefits them or their children are justified, are likely to openly resist changes suggested by critical advocates. This situation often arises in public conflicts over school resources that privilege some children over others in terms of status, funding, and resources (Fennimore, 2005).

An imbalance of power, resulting in privilege or oppression, often exists between the best interests of children and those of adults. Thus, educators who are critical child advocates frequently find themselves in conflict with opposing adults whose power is more influential than any possible by the children and their families (Sensory & DiAngelo, 2011). Consider, for example, a district in which a school board votes to eliminate play from the kindergarten day so the children can spend more time on structured academic lessons. This initiative could possibly be backed by school administrators who stand to benefit from bonus pay if district test scores rise. A group of early childhood teachers in the district, uncomfortable with any mention of the above conflict of interest, decide to find a way to speak up for the children's developmental need for play. They are aware of barriers they face as well as the risks in speaking out. What might the

Many teachers, in my experience, express hesitancy to be involved in critical advocacy for children in their site of practice because of perceived risks. However, when a situation is considered thoughtfully, there are most always *something* that teachers can do so their voices will be heard. The teacher advocates in the above situation, for example, decide to call for a meeting with their principal and early childhood curriculum supervisor. In that meeting they bring forth information on developmental appropriate practices from the National Association for the Education of Young Children (2009).

Young Children (NAEYC) and pose several alternatives to the complete removal of play from the curriculum.

Ultimately, their early childhood supervisor is able to convince the school board and superintendent to reinstate play time in kindergarten 3 days a week. While this was not the complete solution sought by the teachers, they have helped the children as much as possible while retaining their professionalism and good relationship with their principal and curriculum supervisor.

Participatory advocacy in the workplace. All teachers have some opportunity to participate in meaningful ways in the democratic processes of their workplace. These may include scheduled faculty meetings, participation on committees, and formal or informal meetings with supervisors, administrators, and other teachers. Some districts and programs provide time during the school day for teachers to meet together to plan and discuss problems. Individual teachers can play a very important role in making sure that this is time well spent and focused on the children. Whatever the participatory opportunities might be, teachers who are participatory advocates take them seriously. They engage actively with others to express opinions, make contributions, and otherwise work for the betterment of the children.

While this kind of participation might seem obvious, in my experience many teachers are hesitant to speak up and express opinions during group meetings or activities. Discretion and common sense are always essential. However, the first step to participatory advocacy is to accept one's responsibility to fully engage with others to form a strong democratic community.

All advocacy is important. In conclusion, the intention to be an advocate during one's career opens up countless opportunities to be engaged and empowered. Teachers can find opportunities to be advocates every day: traditional, critical, and participatory advocacy are often interlinked as we respond to the demands of our daily lives as teachers. Under the "tent" of child advocacy, we can discover our best selves as teachers as we help all of our students to move forward in life.

SOCIAL JUSTICE: ESSENTIAL AND CONTROVERSIAL

This section will define social justice, examine recent controversy over the inclusion of social justice in teacher education, and relate social justice to ethics and respect for diversity in the classroom.

Defining Social Justice

Many theorists have sought to define social justice. John Rawls's theory of justice (1971, 2001), conceptualized social justice as holding of the common good by responsible citizens working in of fairness and cooperation within their social communities and national institutions. His ideas continue to resonate with most conceptions of social justice as the existence of a society that is committed to fair and equal treatment of every individual. Such a society understands and values human rights and recognizes the dignity of every person (Juda, Majhanovich, & Rust, 2006). Once a just society has established resources to which each citizen should have equal access, it need not be concerned when some citizens are able to gain little or nothing to the needed resources (Rawls, 1971).

Social justice is defined not only as an idea but as an active habit, is "social" in two senses: It requires the skills necessary to insist on work with others in a civil society, and it has a focus on the good community. As Novak (2000) indicates: "We must rule out any 'social justice' that does not attach itself to the habits (that is, virtues) of individuals. Social justice is a virtue, an attribute of individuals, not a fraud" (p. 11). Those who seek integrity must accept the responsibility of challenging the contradictions between social justice rhetoric and realities of divisiveness and injustice within a society (Thrupp & Ton 2005). Further, they need to question the claims of others that they all people equally and fairly when they are in fact clearly acting otherwise (Bender-Slack & Raupach, 2008).

Why the Social Justice Controversy?

In the past few years, the centrality of social justice in teacher education has been challenged. Specifically, questions have been asked about the appropriateness of an emphasis on social justice in teacher education. The focus of much of this debate was on the document: National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCAATE) because of a reference to social justice as a possible consideration in evaluating a prospective candidate's disposition for teaching (NCAATE, 2005). The controversy was based in large part on the idea that social justice is embedded in partisan politics—that it is "liberal" or "Democratic" rather than "conservative" or "Republican." Some feared that student teacher education would be forced to adopt liberal political beliefs; thus would be experiencing a form of political coercion that violated the first amendment rights and academic freedom (Wasley, 2006).

In response to the challenge, the leadership of NCATE first denied categorically that the organization had a mandatory standard for social justice (Applebaum, 2009). Then, as the controversy continued, the NCATE board voted to completely eliminate social justice language from its documents. It is left up to individual universities to decide whether social justice will be a focus of the teacher education program (Wilson, 2006).

THE RELEVANCE AND IMPORTANCE OF SOCIAL JUSTICE COMMITMENTS

I have been very concerned, since the above sequence of events, about the number of early childhood teachers and teacher educators I have encountered who believe that social justice is no longer an acceptable component of credentialled early childhood programs. I have been equally concerned about early childhood educators who seem to believe that the term *social justice* should be avoided because it generates too much controversy.

I believe there are two important steps that must be taken to re-establish the central relevance of social justice in teaching and teacher education. The first is to challenge the point of view that social justice in the United States is a political choice. I believe that commitment to social justice in this nation is a *political responsibility* for all citizens. While citizens retain the right to partisan loyalties, they also share the responsibility to uphold constitutional principles and related legal obligations. Where human rights and laws are violated, social justice concerns are essential regardless of personal and political affiliations. Teachers do not leave their American citizenship at the door of the school. They carry public trust for the well-being of vulnerable children and must be particularly mindful of laws, rights, and accompanying protections (Swadener, 2003).

The second step is to make it clear that academic freedom and the first amendment rights of students are a priority in teacher education. Students preparing for careers in education are encouraged to engage in critical thinking, to develop individual perspectives on social problems, and to articulate their positions freely in class discussions. The responsibility of teacher educators and professional developers, while avoiding coercion or abridgment of free speech, is to focus on the ways in which the ethics of our profession ultimately must guide all teachers to commitment to fairness, justice, and compassion for others.

PROFESSIONAL ETHICS: ESSENTIAL TO TEACHING PRACTICE

The discipline of ethics supports the intentions of educators who seek what is right and to recognize and alleviate what may be wrong in classrooms and schools. Ethics help us to judge and evaluate actions from a perspective of professional values and moral principles (Hopkins, 1997). As Bakhtin, as discussed in Pollard (2011), emphasizes that every moral action involves a choice of response for which we are responsible. As we are human beings, it is never right for us to abdicate our responsibility for participatory thinking and to act on what we believe is right.

Ethics is the field of philosophy that asks questions about how reality should be *applied*. To be ethical is to be attentive to our guiding principles and to justify our actions in light of what we believe to be right (Taggart, 2011). We early childhood educators are so fortunate to have a well-developed and widely accepted professional code of ethics. The code, established by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC, 2011), provides guidance on a wide variety of actions related to early childhood classroom practice. Its overarching mission is to uphold the human dignity of every child with whom we come into contact as educators; in every interaction, we must avoid doing harm and seek to do good (Feeney & Freeman, 2005).

Ethical codes are critical guides to right action on the part of those who are entrusted with the care of others (Hopkins, 1997). To be effective, however, they must be enacted by individuals and groups who understand them and see them as dynamic essentials to daily practice. Implementation of *intentional* ethics requires early childhood teachers to be very familiar with their written code and to consult it regularly when questions arise.

INTENTIONAL RESPECT FOR DIVERSITY IN EARLY CHILDHOOD CLASSROOMS

In this book, I am using the words *respect for diversity* to mirror those in the NAEYC Code of Ethical Conduct and Statement of Commitment (2011) (also referred to in this book as the Code of Ethics). In the past, the idea of "respecting" diversity may have been used by some to encourage attention to human differences as something that should be enjoyed and celebrated (Castagno, 2009). At times, such broad (though valuable) goals have sidestepped controversy, thus silencing the problems of prejudice, discrimination, and institutional racism. This, in some cases, led to tri-

approaches to multicultural education that neither acknowledged nor interrupted the pervasive forms of oppression that some children clearly were experiencing in their schools.

Still Fighting for Children's Rights

Multicultural education has had a pervasive and powerful impact on education in the United States. Yet, today, I see some truth in the statement that in many educational contexts the focus on multicultural education can be more a matter of rhetoric than reality (Boutte, 2008). It appears at times that the idea of multicultural education "has become both a popular catchphrase and an obsolete descriptor within educational settings" (Castagno, 2009, p. 43). Added to this problem is the fact that some educators are dismissing multicultural and anti-bias education as no longer necessary (De Gaetano, 2011).

I believe that the struggle to make schools places where all children are welcomed and respected, like the struggle for equal educational opportunity, is far from over. In fact, as Castagno (2009) has written, "given that the expected outcomes of multicultural education . . . have seen little improvement over the past few decades, we have to wonder whether multicultural education is actually occurring in schools" (p. 3). My intention is not to denigrate what has been accomplished by many great scholars, teachers, and leaders in multicultural education. Rather, I want to acknowledge the powerful challenges that continue to exist for everyone who is fighting for equality for all children in school and society.

Resistance and Progress

The evolution of multicultural education has greatly furthered the principle that all children must be protected from the harm of bias and discrimination, honored for the culture in which they live, and provided with the opportunity to be prepared in schools for meaningful lives as individuals and as culturally competent citizens. However, over more than half a century since the *Brown* decision, that principle still exists in contested grounds.

It continues to be up to us as teachers not only to acknowledge the differences that exist in every classroom but to address the ways in which those differences attract privilege or oppression. Our respect for diversity must be our fundamental respect for humanity and our refusal to participate in practices that harm the children in our care. We need to stand up to the resistance in school and society that continues to marginalize some

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children and to block their access to the fundamental opportunities lead to positive life trajectories. Finally, our respect for diversity: be our ongoing willingness to acknowledge our own bias and to allow it to interfere with movement toward a society that considers treatment to be the irreducible right of every child.

The concepts of advocacy, justice, ethics, and respect for diversity are complex. The most important first step is to get excited about the which standing up for something every day can illuminate and your daily life with children. Your enthusiasm, your vision, and your ingenuity to embrace powerful commitments will fill your classroom with hope and promise for all your students.

MEET OUR FOUR HYPOTHETICAL TEACHER-GUIDES

There are four hypothetical early childhood teacher-guides joined throughout this book. These teacher-guides are a composite of wonderful early childhood teachers with whom I have worked in capacities and a wide variety of geographical and program or school over the years. The guides will provide examples of the thought complex ways in which they apply, in their early childhood sites, the ideas in each of the following chapters. The reader will notice, I have not identified a specific ethnic or racial identity for the guide reason for this is that I want to invite all readers to see themselves of the guides and to decide how they might act or think in a different way based on their own experience and identity. I also hope all readers, regardless of where they teach, will consider how the of the teacher-guides might be enacted in their own particular classrooms and schools (including those serving wealthy or privileged children). guides are constructed to demonstrate the deep complexities that involved in the decisions and actions of any teacher who is determined to be ethical, just, and an advocate for all children.

Aanetra

Aanetra is certified in special and early childhood education, a pre-K teacher for the past 2 years in an inclusive state-funded pre-K program. She is determined to focus on a number of tensions: parents, children, and other teachers that have arisen around the education of children with special needs and children from a wide variety of economic backgrounds in her classroom as she works to promote equity for diversity and equality.

Emilio

Emilio is a bilingual 3rd-grade teacher in a high-poverty urban community. He feels pressured by his school district to improve the standardized test scores of his students at the expense of other subjects and culturally relevant activities. As a member of a family with mixed-immigration status in the United States, he feels committed to respecting his students with an authentic and relevant learning environment as he supports their academic success. He also wants to interrupt any resentment of their presence or of the support of their primary language in the school. Emilio thinks, "*Yo quiero mucho a mis estudiantes y quiero que sean exitosos en la escuela. Entiendo y respeto sus culturas y quiero que otros en la escuela también los respeten.*" ["I love my students and I want them to be successful. I also want them to grow up respecting their culture, and I want others to respect it as well."]

Kira

Kira is certified in early childhood and elementary education, and is a new teacher in a "transitional" kindergarten–1st-grade classroom in a moderately sized city. (Her students were in kindergarten last year and deemed "not ready" for 1st grade this year.) A philosophy major who graduated with certification and a master's degree in education from an alternative teacher preparation program, she is determined to ethically address what she feels is the deficit approach to the ways her students are conceptualized, talked about, and treated in her school.

Jordan

Jordan has been the head teacher for the mixed-age, 3- to 5-year-old room in his small rural child-care center for the past 5 years. His differentiated curriculum is designed to provide early kindergarten experiences for the older children, who subsequently spend a full year of kindergarten at the consolidated school district an hour away by school bus. The district has found it best to delay the long day and school entry until the children are closer to 6 years of age. Jordan has become skilled at making his curriculum accessible to children at a variety of ages. Jordan is a natural leader who speaks openly with his colleagues and director about his beliefs and commitments to ethics and social justice.

All four teachers will provide us with opportunities for thought and reflection as we consider the actions they take in their classrooms and schools to stand up for their students.

Teacher Intentions Hold the Key

SOME PRACTICAL IDEAS FOR GETTING STARTED

Some of you may already have begun to put your commitments and intentions in the areas of diversity, ethics, and justice to work in your professional settings. Others may very much want to do this, but feel unsure of where to start. Here are some suggestions.

Begin systematic observation in your classroom and school. What emerges from the interactions and conversations of your students? Are they known to one another? What sorts of exclusions or conflicts do you see as they play or work together? What beliefs about diversity and differences emerge in group discussions? Take brief daily notes to get a stronger picture of the relationships and attitudes of the children.

Open conversation with colleagues. What emerges in the interactions and conversations of your colleagues? Do you hear voices of advocacy? Are you aware of labeling or negative assumptions that relate to critical advocacy? As you observe and think about this, start to generate ideas about how you might talk more about your commitments to social justice, ethics, and respect for diversity in your classroom. You may want to let all of your colleagues know that you have placed the NAEYC Code of Ethics in an accessible place in your classroom for reference. Possibly you could suggest a 10-minute weekly discussion of an ethical issue before or after your work with the children.

Start a journal. This is a good time to keep a journal in which you jot down incidents, expressions, or other events in your classroom that relate to diversity, ethics, and social justice. Share your experiences and interests with like-minded colleagues—and use your journal to inform your daily practice.

Strengthen your voice. Think about meetings, committees, and informal discussions as an opportunity to build your identity as a teacher committed to advocacy, ethics, social justice, and respect for diversity. Start to explore ways of sharing your opinions and ideas with others.

Questions for Discussion

1. Think ahead to the day that you retire from your career in the service of young children. What do you most want people to remember about your intentions as an educator?

2. How frequently do you have time to think about justice and ethics in your daily practice? How might you make these concepts more "present" every day?
3. How have you been thinking about the concept of diversity up to this point in your career? What do you think of the idea of diversity as the norm?
4. Are there any ethical issues in your educational past or present that you strongly feel should be addressed by your profession?
5. Is "social justice" a term with which you are politically comfortable as an educator? Why or why not?

TWO

Teacher Talk Is Teacher Action!

All teachers have a powerful and readily available tool to support daily intentions to enact ethics and justice in their classrooms. That is their "teacher talk"—the language that they use in daily life to discuss and describe the children they teach. Your words are with you every day—in and out of the classroom. This chapter will focus on the ways in which you characterize and talk about your children in your professional setting.

How does the way you talk about your students outside the classroom affect the way you teach? All of your words count. They enact and enact the ways in which you choose to see your students, and ways in which you want others to see them. All of the good intentions you have to be an ethical advocate who respects diversity must be reflected in the words you use to describe your students. This chapter connects teacher talk and teacher action. As we explore the importance of educational language, our hypothetical teacher-guides will be with us to demonstrate the efforts they make to counteract deficit-based talk about children in their schools.

THE IMPORTANCE OF TEACHER TALK

As a teacher educator, I have spent a great deal of time supervising student teachers in urban, rural, and suburban schools. Over the years, I listened to the talk of educators in schools, I became increasingly aware of the routine use of deficit terminology and denigrating descriptions of children in many school settings:

- "Low-income students"
- "Parents who don't care"
- "Homes that don't value education"
- "Kids who start school way behind"
- "The kids who are poor have limited vocabularies"
- "This school is filled with at-risk kids"