



Roots & Wings





Roots & Wings

Affirming Culture in Early Childhood Programs

s t a c e y y o r k

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This book is dedicated to my family of origin:

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We become not a melting pot but a beautiful mosaic. Different people, different beliefs, different yearnings, different hopes, different dreams.

Jimmy Carter

Introduction

Welcome! This is a book about implementing culturally relevant and anti-bias education with young children. It provides a practical introduction to working with diverse children and families in early childhood settings. But first, let's clarify the basics: What does “culturally relevant” mean? What does “anti-bias” mean?

The phrase *culturally relevant* means the caregiving routines, teaching strategies, and curriculum match the child's home culture. The term “culturally relevant” is placed first in the title of this book because providing culturally relevant care and education is the foundation of high-quality child care and early education. *Anti-bias* refers to teaching children to respect, appreciate, and positively interact with people who are different from them. This also includes teaching children to avoid teasing and name-calling, and to stand up for themselves and others who are experiencing bias. Children learn to reject bias through our modeling, classroom materials, and classroom activities.

The best way to think about culturally relevant and anti-bias teaching is to understand the topics presented in this book: *culture, prejudice, racism, culturally responsive care, bilingual education, and multicultural education*. Whole books have been written about each of these complex topics. *Roots & Wings* attempts to present the prevailing theories and best practices in a clear and simple manner, with-



See glossary.



out losing the true meaning. We all need a place to enter the dialogue and rethink our understanding of diversity and early childhood education. Before we begin, let's explore common misconceptions, my working assumptions, and the benefits of affirming culture in early childhood programs.

Misconceptions

Many misconceptions exist about culturally relevant and anti-bias education. You may find yourself doubting the importance of multicultural education for young children. Perhaps you aren't sure if exploring such issues with your children is developmentally appropriate. Maybe you are afraid that you'll make matters worse. Here are some of the most common misconceptions teachers have about culturally relevant and anti-bias education:

Misconception: Children are too young to notice differences among people.

Fact: Children notice differences and form attitudes about human diversity in the early years.

Misconception: Pointing out or talking about human differences with children will only make cross-cultural relations worse.

Fact: Including human diversity in the curriculum and giving children simple, accurate information helps them see differences as normal. It prevents them from developing negative or fearful attitudes toward diversity.

Misconception: Multicultural education is only necessary if there are different cultures in the school.

Fact: Culturally relevant and anti-bias education is relevant for all children, in all grades. Children in all-white (racially segregated) classrooms are at risk for growing up without the social skills and knowledge base needed to live in a diverse country and work in a global marketplace.

Misconception: Multicultural education will create separatism and weaken national unity.

Fact: Culturally relevant and anti-bias curriculum reinforces patriotism, democracy skills, and citizenship skills—all of which promote a sense of national unity.

Misconception: Multicultural education is an attack on white people.

Fact: Culturally relevant and anti-bias education seeks to recognize and honor the ethnic identities and cultural traditions of all people. It does challenge the exclusive European American orientation of child development theories, caregiving and teaching practices, and curriculum, but it doesn't attack anyone.

Goals

This book was written for early childhood teachers, program directors, teacher trainers, and parents. The goals of this book are the following:

1. To introduce culturally relevant and anti-bias curriculum in a simple and organized way
2. To challenge prevailing misconceptions, stereotypes, and “isms” that affect child care and early childhood curriculum
3. To invite you to reflect on and clarify your own cultural identity and attitudes toward other races, cultures, and language groups
4. To empower you to develop cross-cultural competence, culturally responsive caregiving and teaching, and anti-bias curriculum
5. To present many practical ideas for implementing culturally relevant and anti-bias education in early childhood settings

Assumptions

This book does not include everything there is to know about culturally relevant and anti-bias education for young children. The information and topics covered in *Roots & Wings* reflect child development theory, established early childhood education practices, and current accreditation standards. The decisions to emphasize some information about culturally relevant and anti-bias education and to leave out other information is a product of my values and thinking, and the limitations of space and time.

This book deals with such controversial issues as racism, prejudice, and oppression. The content is emotionally charged, and it is likely that you will have moments of discomfort as you read through this book. There is mass confusion

when it comes to multicultural education. Be prepared to rethink your own beliefs and assumptions. It is an incredibly complex issue. I have attempted to present a clear, simple approach that remains true to complexity without getting lost or immobilized by it.

Although the following assumptions are not discussed in this book, I want you to know that I believe in them and that they are important to me. These assumptions greatly influence my perspective on culturally relevant and anti-bias education.

1. In its fullest expression, culturally relevant and anti-bias education includes addressing the issues of discrimination against individuals in all areas, including religion, gender, economic class, age, ability, and sexual orientation. I have chosen to focus on culture and race because so few early childhood programs successfully deal with this issue. I believe that if a program can successfully incorporate multicultural values, it can incorporate the other equally important components of diversity and equity.
2. Life in the United States is not fair for everyone. All kinds of discrimination keep individuals from having equal access to society's services and opportunities. Education is not neutral. Schools and child care centers are institutions, and as such, they are part of the social structure that discriminates against individuals. As part of the social structure, early childhood programs inadvertently teach white supremacy and perpetuate European American, middle-class values. In the classroom, teachers pass on their values to children through their choice of bulletin board displays, toys, activities, celebrations, unit themes or projects, and through their interactions with the children and with other adults.
3. Everyone needs training in this area and one-time workshops aren't enough. We are all on a lifetime journey of learning about ourselves and others. There are no simple solutions or easy answers to these difficult issues. No quick fixes or "recipe book" solutions exist for designing and implementing culturally relevant and anti-bias education. Everyone means well. But many people are ignorant or misinformed. Don't get stuck in self-judgment. Let go of the past and embrace the present and the future.
4. The process is the product. If you come to this book focused solely on the outcome of having a culturally relevant and anti-bias curriculum, you won't be open to the possibility of discovery and personal growth. Put aside your preconceived notions of what culturally relevant and anti-bias education should be. Let go of your worries about implementing it in

your program. As you read this book, focus on the here and now. Open yourself up to your feelings. Take in the information bit by bit. Ask questions, stop for reflection, watch others around you, gather some materials and create some activities, and talk with children and parents. As you do these things, you will create a greater understanding of yourself, your culture, prejudice, and racism. And you will have begun the steps of implementing culturally relevant and anti-bias education in your classroom.

How This Book Is Organized

This book is divided into two main parts, one aimed at helping you understand the issues and the other designed to help you put these concepts into practice in your classroom or child care setting. Part one, “Understanding Multicultural and Anti-Bias Issues in the Classroom,” will give you information and insight that will help you understand the many issues involved. You will explore how multicultural and anti-bias issues affect today’s classrooms, what multicultural education is, and what culturally responsive care and education looks like on a day-to-day basis in the classroom. You will also have a chance to think through the ways that prejudice, racism, and bilingualism affect children. And finally, you will learn more about the interactions of community, culture, and family in relation to multicultural and anti-bias issues that affect the children you deal with every day.

Part two, “Implementing Multicultural and Anti-Bias Issues in the Classroom,” provides concrete ideas and activities you can use to start implementing culturally relevant and anti-bias education in your classroom. These activities will be of value for teachers who are relatively new to these ideas as well as for those of you who have already implemented them, but need new and fresh ways to provide culturally relevant and anti-bias care and education.

Each chapter is a building block that creates a solid foundation of understanding. Chapter 1, “The Changing Face of Our Classrooms,” provides an overview of issues in classrooms right now. What has changed in early childhood education that warrants a good, hard look at multicultural and anti-bias issues? Immigration, integration, and ethnic and racial diversity are just a few of the topics that contribute to new challenges and opportunities in today’s classrooms.

Chapter 2, “Children and Prejudice,” challenges the widely held belief that children are too young to understand bias. It’s easier to believe they don’t notice

differences than to consider that young children are aware of differences and form strong attitudes toward themselves and others. This chapter challenges you to look at your assumptions about children's awareness of and attitudes toward human differences, and to think about prejudice in new ways.

Chapter 3, "Racism," poses some key questions about racism: Are we as early childhood professionals able to recognize and understand how the environment shapes children's development? How do external environmental factors such as racism affect children's development? The fields of early education and child development have long ignored the issues of race in the development of children. There are few resources to help teachers minimize the impact racism has on their classrooms. This chapter examines race, racism, children's racial identity development, and how to create a nonracist classroom.

Differences between children and teachers or parents and teachers often cause problems. Chapter 4, "Culturally Responsive Care and Education," helps teachers realize that differences may be a result of culture. Culture influences how families raise children and how a child behaves, communicates, and learns. These behavior patterns and child-rearing practices reflect a specific culture's history, values, beliefs, and current situation. This chapter will help you work successfully with children from diverse cultures by identifying ways in which culture and family patterns mold the children you serve.

Chapter 5, "Bilingual Education," explores how children acquire a second language and provides classroom strategies you can use to support second language learners. Second language learners are one of the fastest-growing populations in early childhood classrooms. Today, a classroom will very likely have at least one child who does not speak English and a few children whose parents speak more than one language. Often, second language learners may attend early childhood programs in which no adults speak their home language. Moreover, the staff have little knowledge of how children learn a second language and no idea how to foster the development of a second language. The result is that most children who speak a language other than English do not receive developmentally appropriate language instruction and, as a result, are less likely to succeed in school.

Chapter 6, "Family, Culture, and Community," explores the idea that culturally relevant and anti-bias education requires us to understand the families, neighborhoods, and communities in which we work. This chapter provides an understanding of the context including the social, political, and historical environment. The community context is viewed in terms of geographic region, type

of community, and the community economy, diversity, history, events, and issues. The family context includes a look at the diversity of the families served. And the program context includes the program mission, particularly in relation to race, culture, home language, economic class, religion, and sexual orientation.

The remaining three chapters of the book form a guide to implementing multicultural and anti-bias care and education in the classroom or child care setting. Chapter 7, “Multicultural Education,” defines such important words as “multicultural” and “anti-bias.” These words mean many different things to people, including varying approaches and descriptive terms. This chapter sorts things out by examining the nature of multicultural education, listing its goals, and explaining the basic approaches. Chapter 8, “A Culturally Relevant, Anti-Bias Classroom,” explains that the quickest and easiest way to add or improve culturally relevant and anti-bias education is to improve the classroom by changing its environment as well as the people who teach in it. Chapter 9, “Culturally Relevant and Anti-Bias Activities,” provides over eighty culturally relevant and anti-bias activities for use in your classroom.

These are exciting times, full of new challenges and opportunities. Culturally relevant and anti-bias education can renew and rejuvenate your teaching and caregiving. I hope *Roots & Wings* introduces you to new ideas, and challenges and empowers you to put this new knowledge to work today in your classroom or in your work with children.





*E pluribus unum—
out of many, one.*
(United States motto)

The Changing Face of Our Classrooms

Today, teaching is more complex and more challenging than it was a few decades ago. When I reflect back on the classrooms of children I taught over twenty years ago, I smile as I think about the things that seemed so difficult. A child going through a divorce, a child with ADHD, or a child whose family had just arrived from Iran seemed like major disruptions in my quiet, settled classroom. Today, we expect to have children who experience crisis in their lives, children with special needs, and children from many different cultures and language groups.

As I grow older, it seems there are two things I can always count on in life: change and diversity. Change and diversity are the essence of life—be it plant life, animal life, or humanity. Living in the upper Midwest, I am so aware of changing seasons. In my garden and the woods beyond there is a rich diversity of plant and animal life in my little half acre. I have been teaching at the same school for seven years now and I am truly amazed at how our student population has changed. We were always one of the more diverse campuses in the state, but now there is a much wider range of cultural diversity among our students. Every school year brings students from new countries and new language groups. Just as I would miss the changing seasons or diversity of plants in my garden, I can't imagine teaching in a setting where everything stays the same or is expected to stay the

same. To deny change or to reject diversity is to deny life. If anything, we need classrooms, schools, and child care centers that are full of life.

Three points are critical to understanding the impact of diversity on early childhood classrooms: (1) the United States is a racially, ethnically, and linguistically diverse country, and that diversity is increasing, not diminishing; (2) most education in the United States does not take this diversity into account, and as a result it is ineffective for students of color; and (3) professional standards in the early childhood field increasingly require that early childhood teachers view diversity as a strength and provide culturally relevant programs.

Racial Diversity in the United States

Census 2000 data confirmed what demographers have been telling us: America is racially diverse. European Americans make up 77 percent of the total population. The South and Midwest have the highest population of white people. The Midwest also has the highest proportion of white people to other racial groups.

African Americans number 36.4 million people in this country and make up 12.9 percent of the total population. Almost 55 percent of all African Americans live in the South. States with the largest African American populations include New York, California, Florida, Georgia, Illinois, North Carolina, Maryland, Michigan, and Louisiana.

Latinos make up 13 percent of the total U.S. population, numbering 35.3 million. The largest number of Latinos are Mexican followed by Puerto Rican, Cuban, Central American, and South American. Three-fourths of Latino people in the United States live in the West or the southern regions of the United States, and one-half live in California or Texas.

Asian Americans number 11.9 million, representing 4.2 percent of the total population. Chinese is the largest ethnic group followed by people from India, Korea, the Philippines, and Vietnam. Cities with the largest Asian American populations include Los Angeles, New York, San Francisco, San Jose (California), and Honolulu.

American Indians and Alaskan natives make up 1.5 percent of the total population. There are 4.1 million people who identified themselves as American Indian or Alaskan Native, or American Indian in combination with another race. The

state of California has the highest American Indian population followed by Oklahoma, Alaska, New Mexico, and South Dakota.

Census 2000 offered the first chance for people to report biracial identity, and 6.8 million people took advantage of that opportunity. Ninety-three percent of them identified themselves as coming from two racial or ethnic groups. The most common combinations were white and American Indian or Alaska Native, white and Asian, and white and African American.

There are 28.4 million people living in the United States who were born in a foreign country. One-fifth of the total population are foreign-born or have a parent who was foreign-born. Children under the age of eighteen who live in a household with a foreign-born parent number 72.1 million. Of that 72.1 million, 35 percent are under the age of six.

Many of our classrooms reflect both the cultural and linguistic diversity present in the United States today. In 1993, California Tomorrow, a California organization that does research and policy advocacy on the topic of diversity, randomly surveyed 435 child care centers in five California counties. They found that 96 percent of the centers cared for children from more than one racial group, and 80 percent cared for children from more than one language group.

Minorities Are Becoming the Majority

Look at what's happening in California, Florida, New York, and Texas. Among California's population, there is no clear racial majority. Today the majority of school children in California are members of a minority group. In 1980, 70 percent of America's school-age children were European American—today that number is 64 percent. In the next eighteen years, European American children will make up 56 percent of the school-age population. And thirty years from now, children of color will make up the majority of school-age children in the United States. The number of Latino children is increasing the most rapidly of any racial group. By 2025, nearly one in four schoolagers will be Latino. America's children are more diverse than the general U.S. population. By 2050, half of all Americans will be people of color, which means that, according to the National Association for the Education of Young Children (2001), "U.S. babies born today will reach adulthood in a country in which no one ethnic group predominates."

Immigration

Immigration has always been a major force shaping America's history, economy, and social life. Currently, we are experiencing one of the largest waves of immigration. About one million people immigrate to the United States each year. In the past, immigrants came from Europe. Today they come mostly from Asia, and Central and South America. Today's immigrants are younger: about 22 percent of all immigrants are under twenty-five. One in five immigrants come from Mexico.

Do immigrants have distinct educational needs? Many of them do. Less than one-third of Mexican immigrants have a high school diploma. Children of refugee families may have missed out on schooling due to political turmoil and war in their home country. They may be coming to school without knowing English and without being literate in their home language. One of the challenges facing teachers today is how to improve the educational outcomes for children of immigrants and refugees.

Diversity Is Spreading beyond the Inner City

While much of the diversity is concentrated in a few states, the search for jobs and quality of life results in diversity throughout our country. Many small and rural communities as well as Midwestern and southern communities are experiencing an increase in diversity like never before. Historically, inner-city neighborhoods were often home to immigrant communities. Today's immigrants are settling in suburban and rural areas. Food processing plants and manufacturing plants located in small towns and rural areas provide a source of employment to recent immigrants. As a result, rural school districts in Alabama, Kansas, Nebraska, North Carolina, and Minnesota reported a 400 percent or greater increase in the number of English as a Second Language (ESL) students. In many cases, change in the ethnic makeup of these communities occurred rapidly and was not predicted. It caught community leaders, administrators, and teachers by surprise. They must now rethink their practices and change the way they provide services.

Teacher - Student Mismatch

While researchers foresee a slight demand for elementary school teachers in the next ten years, demand is great for bilingual teachers and teachers of color. The American Association of Colleges of Teacher Education reported that, in schools

today, 87 percent of teachers are European American and a mere 7 percent of teachers are African American. Teachers clearly don't reflect the students they are teaching. T. Snyder (1988) reported in the *Digest of Education Statistics*, "Of the 51 million elementary and secondary students enrolled in American schools in 1997, approximately 35 percent were minorities." In a study conducted by the U.S. Department of Education, only 20 percent of public school teachers felt prepared to teach children from diverse cultures or children who are English language learners.

Unequal Outcomes

Life in the United States continues to be sharply divided along racial, cultural, social class, and gender lines. This is true in education as well. Data continues to show a different set of outcomes for children of color as compared to white children. Children of color score lower on standardized tests and have higher dropout rates. They are more likely than white children to be identified as having special needs, more often placed in noncollege tracks, less likely to be recommended for gifted and talented programs, and more likely to receive more and harsher discipline in school. If you doubt these statements, do a little research in your own school district or state. Investigate the graduation, dropout, and suspension rates of students by race. Find out how those rates have changed in the past ten or twenty years. The answers may surprise you.

Reasons for such unequal treatment and outcomes include the following:

- You can't teach someone whose identity you are trying to ignore or aren't willing to acknowledge.
- The classroom, the teaching-learning process, and the curriculum are oriented to European American or white students.
- Teachers assume children of color or children who are English language learners are inferior and, as a result, set lower expectations for these children.
- Children of color experience a lack of success in the early grades, which discourages them or alienates them from school.

Redefining Good Teaching

In response to the changing demographics in early childhood classrooms, we need a new definition of good teaching. The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), the largest professional organization, has come to recognize the importance of addressing diversity in the preparation of teachers, as the following statements demonstrate:

The face of America is rapidly changing. In three states including California, European Americans are no longer the majority group. U.S. babies born today will reach adulthood in a country in which no one ethnic group predominates. By the year 2005, children and adolescents of color will represent 40 percent of all U.S. school children. The largest proportion of individuals with disabilities is found in the preschool population. Thus, tomorrow's early childhood teachers must be prepared to serve and to value a far more diverse group of young children and families than at any time in the past. In addition, the profession needs to recruit many more early childhood professionals who share children's cultures and home languages (NAEYC 2001, 5).

Candidates demonstrate the essential dispositions and skills to develop positive, respectful relationships with children whose cultures and languages may differ from their own, as well as with children who may have developmental delays, disabilities, or other learning challenges. In making the transition from family to a group context, very young children rely on continuity between the caregiving practices of family members and those used by professionals in the early childhood setting. Their feelings of safety and confidence depend on this continuity. Candidates know the cultural practices and contexts of the young children they teach and they adapt practices to be culturally sensitive. With older children, candidates continue to emphasize cultural sensitivity while also developing culturally relevant knowledge and skills in important academic domains (NAEYC 2001, 18).

Before they come to school, all children learn and develop in their own unique and highly diverse linguistic, social, and cultural context. When previous learning and development are nurtured in early education programs, the overall benefits of early education are enhanced. Recognizing and using the child's and family's primary language ensures that early childhood education adds to and does not subtract from previous experiences at home and in the community.

In implementing effective approaches to teaching and learning, candidates demonstrate that they use linguistic and cultural diversity as resources, rather than seeing diversity as a deficit or problem (NAEYC 2001, 19).

Head Start, the largest federally funded early childhood program in the United States, has long served racially and culturally diverse populations. These programs revolve around the Head Start Performance Standards. The standards include principles for multicultural programming and addressing diversity in the classroom. The standards include teacher behaviors such as demonstrating respect for children's cultures, offering a classroom environment that naturally reflects the cultures of the children, promoting children's primary language while helping them acquire English, and avoiding stereotypic materials and activities.

In the past ten years, many states have begun efforts to increase the quality of child care through establishing standards for professional development. Core knowledge is often the foundation of these new professional development initiatives. Diversity is now an established element of the core knowledge in early childhood care and education.

Here is an example of indicators from the Core Competencies for Early Care and Educational Professionals (2001) used in Kansas and Missouri:

- Accepts cultural differences and the effects those differences may have on behavior and development.
- Creates environments and experiences that affirm and respect cultural/linguistic diversity.
- Uses materials that demonstrate acceptance of all children's gender, family, race, language, culture, and special needs.
- Offers learning opportunities reflecting the cultures represented in the community of the program.
- Designs learning opportunities reflective of cultures represented in the community of the program.
- Supports children's developing awareness of the individual as a member of a family and of an ethnic or social group and is sensitive to different cultural values and expectations.
- Accepts cultural differences that may affect children's ways of expressing themselves creatively.
- Works effectively with families from a variety of cultural, linguistic, and socioeconomic backgrounds.

Questions to Ponder

What are your dreams for society?

What impact do you want to have on children, families, and society?

What will happen if we continue to ignore racial and cultural diversity in our classrooms?

What will happen if we fail to restructure and update the curriculum?

What will happen if we don't revise the way we prepare teachers?

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Children and Prejudice

Is it hard for you to believe that preschoolers are prejudiced? If so, you aren't alone. Most teachers want to deny the slightest possibility of bias in young children. We think to ourselves, "These children are too young to even notice race much less understand racism." Or we say things such as, "Children don't notice differences, and besides, they like everyone they meet." There are many indications that young children are aware of differences and form strong attitudes toward themselves and others. This chapter challenges you to look at your assumptions about children's awareness of and attitudes toward human differences, and to think about prejudice in new ways.

*You've got to be taught to hate and fear
You've got to be taught from year to year
It's got to be drummed in your dear little ear
You've got to be carefully taught
You've got to be taught to be afraid
of people whose eyes are oddly made
and people whose skin is a different shade
You've got to be carefully taught
From the musical South Pacific.
Lyric by Oscar Hammerstein, II. 1949.*

Differences Children Notice

I wondered if the children in the child care center where I was working noticed differences among themselves or in the adults. The teachers weren't able to identify many comments from the children to suggest that they were aware of or interested in differences among people. In 1986, I conducted an informal poll of the parents in the center where I was working. Of the parents who completed the

questionnaire, 83 percent confirmed that their children were aware of differences, and they described the specific physical attributes their children noticed. Louise Derman-Sparks, author of *Anti-Bias Curriculum*, reported similar results. Children ages two through five commented on and asked questions about the following:

People with disabilities. Wheelchairs, glasses, physical impairments, and use of special facilities

Gender differences. Male and female anatomy, and perceptions of what boys and girls can do (Some girls said things such as, “I can’t be a doctor”; “I can’t drive a tractor”; and, “I wish I could be a boy because boys can do things girls can’t do.”)

Physical differences. Skin color; facial features; and differences in hair color, texture, and style

Cultural differences. Different languages, foreign accents, diets, and celebrations

Family lifestyles. Who lives with and takes care of the child, what families do together, where they live, what pets they have, what rules and discipline they follow (Derman-Sparks, Higa, and Sparks 1980)

Once the results were in, staff had a better idea of what to listen for. As teacher awareness increased, we were able to identify more and more instances where children noticed physical differences and used stereotypes and social labels.

In another informal poll, teachers involved in the Culturally Relevant Anti-Bias (CRAB) Leadership Project listed the comments and questions they had heard that indicate young children are struggling with race (skin color and physical features), ethnicity, culture, class, physical ability, age, and sexual orientation. (The CRAB Project was a three-year project that took place from 1991 to 1994 in Seattle, New Orleans, and Minneapolis. You can find a complete account of the CRAB Project in *Future Vision, Present Work* published by Redleaf Press.) That information is summarized on the next page.