

# Anti-Bias Curriculum for the Preschool Classroom



eliminating racism  
empowering women

**ywca**

Minneapolis

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# **Anti-Bias Curriculum for the Preschool Classroom**

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**by YWCA Minneapolis Early Childhood Education Department**



 **Redleaf Press®**  
www.redleafpress.org  
800-423-8309

Published by Redleaf Press  
10 Yorkton Court  
St. Paul, MN 55117  
[www.redleafpress.org](http://www.redleafpress.org)

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First edition 2021

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Cover design by Jim Handrigan

Interior design by Becky Daum

Typeset in Minion Pro

Printed in the United States of America

28 27 26 25 24 23 22 21      1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8

Cataloging-in-Publication Data is on file with the Library of Congress.

Printed on acid-free paper

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# Preface

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Two key international experiences have dramatically affected our YWCA Minneapolis community during the process of writing this book: the COVID-19 pandemic and the killing of George Floyd. The COVID-19 stay-at-home orders, layoffs, and deaths laid bare already existing health and financial disparities, and broad public awareness continues to grow. As the pandemic continued through the summer of 2020, conversations in early childhood education centered on business solvency for the field at large, driven by mounting worries about educating children as centers closed and families struggled to work while caring for their children, either as essential workers or from home, and many others lost their jobs entirely.

Then on Memorial Day 2020, police killed George Floyd in one of our communities in Minneapolis, Minnesota. The pain from this death is enormous. It has, among many things, brought forth highly essential and emotionally charged conversations and actions for many people on personal, workplace, educational, and governmental levels. All along, there have been myriad voices besides ours in our communities calling for massive changes in policies and practices in nearly every sector we can see. But now these calls are being heard in the context of these larger societal events, lending these issues greater urgency in the public eye. We want to take this time to state some of our present thoughts on the way this book might resonate during these times and in the times to come.

To us, to be anti-bias means looking for a multitude of ways to create equity for all diverse people. As you will see in our second chapter, the intersections of race and ethnicity, sex and gender, culture, religion, and economics, to name a just few, are infinite. We do not expect this book to be a complete history or conversation about how each of these areas of human diversity affects people. In fact, the ways in which human diversity affects people are individual, and to some extent individuals are done a disservice when we make generalizations regarding human diversity. Social change is a complex issue, and we are glad that now is a time when the importance of change is heightened. It is important to realize that anti-bias work is a constant, conscious decision. This book is not meant to be used as a standalone resource for understanding the complexities of social climates but rather as a resource and a reflection of some of our work at the YWCA Minneapolis.

We recognize that our mission to eliminate racism and support women is essential for the health of our future. We know that our skills and awareness move and change over time. Like a single observation of a child, this book is a small snapshot of what we have learned and built in our anti-bias early childhood education practice. We hope that our openness is an invitation to learn more and build stronger communities dedicated to justice for all the people we reach as a result of this publication. We believe in the power of self-reflection as a tool for anti-racism and anti-bias work for children and ourselves. We hope that this book spurs impactful ideas for your work in the early childhood field. Thank you for reading our book.

Warm regards,

The YWCA Minneapolis Early Childhood Education Department





## CHAPTER ONE

# Our Story

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### *How did we get here?*

YWCA USA is one of the oldest and largest multicultural organizations in the world. Our mission is to eliminate racism, empower women and girls, and promote peace, justice, freedom, and dignity for all. YWCA Minneapolis is a trusted social justice organization with a more than 125-year history of advocacy for women and children. We serve more than 30,000 people in our community every year through award-winning programs, classes, and workshops.

As part of the national YWCA USA and in coalition with thousands of community members, public and private businesses, and policymaking bodies, we strive every day to achieve the following:

- race, ethnicity, and gender equity
- economic independence for women
- respect for diverse cultures
- a place where children and youth thrive
- a vibrant and healthy community

YWCA Minneapolis carries out this work through five departments:

1. Health and Wellness
2. Girls and Youth
3. Racial Justice and Public Policy
4. Early Childhood Education
5. Organizational Advancement

From the beginning, YWCA Minneapolis has been at the forefront of the mission to advance diversity and inclusion. This book is part of a powerful legacy. We humbly offer this knowledge, earned through years of mission-based advocacy within our community. For more information about our history, please visit us online at [www.ywcamppls.org](http://www.ywcamppls.org).

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## Our History: An Organization Shaped by Suffrage and Civil Rights

**1859**

The YWCA USA starts in Boston, Massachusetts, in 1859.



**1891**

The YWCA Minneapolis is founded as a member of YWCA USA, with Mrs. W. A. Miller as board president.



YWCA Minneapolis is one of the first and few women-owned and -operated buildings in Minnesota. It calls for equal pay for women, runs women factory worker retreats, and defies sexist social norms by opening an indoor, year-round pool for women.

**1927**

Seven years after the Nineteenth Amendment to the US Constitution is ratified in 1920 to include women's right to vote, the YWCA Minneapolis runs a fundraising campaign titled "What's a Girl Worth in Minneapolis?" It was the first capitol fund drive, and it raised more than a million dollars for the new YWCA building.



**1940**

In the 1940s, under board president Phebe Mae Givens, the YWCA Minneapolis helps find homes for Japanese Americans who had been imprisoned in internment camps.

**1945**

YWCA Minneapolis is the first Twin Cities organization to offer a racially integrated swimming pool.

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## 1963

In 1963, Dorothy Height, YWCA USA leader and president of the National Council of Negro Women, was instrumental in organizing the March on Washington. She is often called “the godmother of the civil rights movement.”

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## 1970

In the 1970s, the YWCA Minneapolis starts pregnancy prevention programming and provides early childhood care and education. We also begin offering seminars aimed at combating racism.

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## 2000

In 2000, YWCA Minneapolis opens the largest YWCA health and fitness center in the country. The Midtown YWCA houses our third YWCA Minneapolis early childhood education center.

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## 2007

In 2007, YWCA Minneapolis Channel Challenge swimmers cross the English Channel to raise awareness about racial disparities in drowning deaths in the Twin Cities. Swimmers raised money for youth swimming programs. Children in our centers continue to receive free swimming lessons today.

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## 2010

In 2010, the National Association for the Education of Young Children recognizes the YWCA Minneapolis Downtown Early Childhood Education Center as an Engaging Diverse Families exemplary program. Our center was one of only ten programs nationwide to receive this honor.

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## 2013

In 2013, our Early Childhood Education Department is one of the largest nationally accredited nonprofit childcare and education programs in Minnesota.

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## 2019

In 2019, the YWCA Minneapolis Racial Justice department leads its 17th annual It's Time to Talk: Forums on Race. This event brings more than 1,200 diverse leaders from business, education, arts, and community service agencies. They came together to move Minnesota forward through honest conversations about race and ethnicity.

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YWCA Minneapolis remains committed to empowering women and girls and eliminating racism. Our leaders, employees, members, and partners hold themselves to the highest standard by continuing to listen, learn, grow, and act. This work is lifelong and transformative. Success depends on communication, responsiveness, and a wholehearted dedication to uncovering and combating bias in society and in our own practice.

The YWCA Minneapolis Early Childhood Education (ECE) Department partners with families to build a vibrant and healthy community. As one of the largest nonprofit providers of nationally accredited childcare in Minnesota, we serve a wide range of community members, including families who are new to the country. Our efforts toward equity forged our anti-bias curriculum. Since 1976, when the first children's center opened in downtown Minneapolis, we have seen our system work. Consistently, more than 90 percent of children enrolled in the YWCA Early Childhood Education Program meet school readiness indicators, irrespective of their socioeconomic status, race, ethnicity, or national origin. We think our teachers are doing something very special. We believe these results come from strong dedication among our teachers.

In 2010, Minnesota called on early childhood education programs to use approved curricula tied to a common rating system. This system would allow parents seeking care for their children to compare the quality levels of participating programs. Ratings indicated the level of quality care and educational structure that parents might expect. The new system also had an impact on program finances. Centers that proved their quality could expect greater support. For more information on this rating system, please see Parent Aware at [www.parentaware.org](http://www.parentaware.org).

YWCA Minneapolis was excited to participate in this rating system because it showcases teacher and center quality and gives parents more power to choose a program to meet their needs. We explored the approved curricula. In an effort to find the right fit for our centers, we asked the following questions:

- Does this curriculum guide educators to celebrate the individual culture and learning style of each student?
- Can lessons be shaped and reshaped by the lives of our students and families?
- Does it provide tools to listen and respond to the social needs of the community?
- Does it reinforce our mission: to eliminate racism and empower women and girls?
- Would it inspire a growth mindset for teachers that allowed them to lead their own development?
- Is play-based learning a key principle in this curriculum's philosophy?
- Does this curriculum confront bias and encourage safe learning spaces for children from communities who often are failed by our educational system?

We found that while most of the current published curricula granted some flexibility for teachers to meet the needs of individual children and encouraged play, they were not proactively anti-bias. We think being explicitly anti-bias is a key driver of success. We

wanted anti-bias practice and play-based learning to be front and center in our defined work.

We also believed our teachers should be able to express themselves. They should continue to build on the excellent work that has taken us so far. The learning that happened in their classrooms made a difference. Our success rate proved it! Our ECE department had demonstrated that the proverbial “kindergarten readiness gap” will not persist when the privilege of high-quality early childhood experiences is accessible. For more than ten years, our teachers have been focused on equity, education, and play-based learning. We think this is no small victory. We decided to formalize and share this framework so that all children have the opportunity to learn in equitable environments.

It was not easy. Until we decided to formalize our process, the YWCA Minneapolis anti-bias curriculum was crafted through the lived work of teachers. We relied on a patchwork of trainings, the mission, and the voices of parents and students to guide our practice. The next step was to connect our work to science-based early learning standards.

We conducted field research. We observed our teachers in action to determine how they demonstrated excellence in each of the learning domains. We recorded anecdotes that illustrated anti-bias caregiving and play-based learning. We documented the skills teachers used to support kindergarten readiness for all children. The data we gathered laid the groundwork for this book. It gave us the opportunity to share our practice with you.

Parent Aware, the accrediting body of ECE programs in Minnesota, approved the YWCA Minneapolis anti-bias curriculum framework in 2014. That same year, our board of directors encouraged us to share our learning with the early childhood education community at large.

The YWCA Minneapolis anti-bias curriculum is guided by the following principles:

- Self-reflection is essential.
- Families are partners.
- The center environment must reflect home culture.
- Children learn through play.
- Teachers must take children’s and parents’ thoughts, ideas, and feelings seriously.
- Teaching is individualized: differences in ability and learning are celebrated and respected.
- Teacher advocacy can eliminate oppressive educational practices and create safe, vibrant learning space.

Our curriculum focuses on the caring ways relationships are formed between children and teachers. This book offers a guide to both the art and science of teaching in an early childhood setting. Even better, it allows you to approach your work from an anti-bias perspective. You will have the tools to embrace the diversity in your community. You will be better equipped to ensure that all of your students thrive. It will not be easy. You will not be perfect. We are not perfect. We never will be. True anti-bias work requires a willingness to learn and grow . . . and learn and grow . . . and learn and grow.

## Bringing It Together: A Flexible Framework

The structure of the YWCA Minneapolis preschool anti-bias curriculum is a flexible, living framework. It is aligned with state and national standards. Here are its objectives:

- We follow each child's lead and explore the learning domains through play.
- Our play uses materials from the child's world and home life.
- Teachers weave anti-bias practice into all aspects of learning.
- Teachers document what happens in play and shape their lesson plans based on these observations.
- Teachers change their practice based on continual observation and assessment of children's growth and development.

Flexibility requires sensitivity. Effective teachers adapt and change when necessary. For example, when children engage deeply with an activity, we allow extra time for sustained play. Flexibility does not mean we abandon all structure, ignore standards, and embrace chaos. We can view learning standards as a destination for the children and curriculum as the way teachers and children reach that destination. And, of course, the scenery is fascinating! Children learn best when all aspects of learning are connected to concepts they are interested in. The most engaging early childhood curriculum incorporates learning opportunities—the ones that include real-life activities and pretend play—into every part of the day.

## How to Use This Book

Each chapter of the YWCA Minneapolis anti-bias curriculum explores and explains our guiding principles. Each chapter builds upon the one before it, but you can read them in any order that suits your needs.

In chapter 2: Anti-Bias Teaching, we discuss our current understanding of key questions we keep in mind when we deliver high-quality early childhood educational experiences. The first question, “What is bias?” includes defining discrimination, prejudice, and microaggressions. Next we discuss modes of unfair bias, such as racism, homophobia, sexism, classism, and religious and political bias as opportunities to construct equity and fairness. We next share our perspective on the specific needs children might have in terms of physical, emotional, and cognitive development and ways teachers can support differences in their settings. Last, we share our goals for anti-bias work and how they can each be supported in simple interactions with children.

In chapter 3, we focus on self-reflection. Our willingness to learn about ourselves helps us recognize the perspectives of others. We share our investigation of this process, and what we have found are some of the ways self-knowledge can invigorate and elevate our practice.

In chapter 4, we focus on families. Since each child views the world from the vantage point of home culture, we believe that the best curriculum is the one that connects with



not just the whole child but also the whole family—and often the whole community as well.

In chapter 5, we connect anti-bias work with high-quality learning standards. We describe how anti-bias teachers can set goals in the following learning domains:

- Social and Emotional Development
- Approaches to Learning
- Language and Literacy
- Creativity and the Arts
- Mathematical Development
- Scientific Thinking
- Physical and Motor Development

In chapter 6, we offer tools for teachers to measure and support children's success through observation and assessment. We share how our process encourages active play-based teacher-child interactions as the best place to collect observation and assessment data. We believe children are partners in this process, and when they are included, it can actually lighten the load teachers carry.

In chapter 7, we provide an overview of lesson planning. This guide will help teachers integrate our key pillars of quality—anti-bias and play as the vehicle toward learning goals—into the daily classroom environment.

Some curriculum books lay out specific activities and units, but you will soon see that we refrain from this approach. Instead we contextualize ways to support children's play and developmental goals within an anti-bias practice and build readers' understanding of how to do this in their own classrooms. Children reach the teachers' developmental goals through play. We focus on giving children time to engage and play with concepts and materials. Through play we are teaching for understanding, rather than teaching for knowledge or skill alone. We think that to do this requires the following:

- Teachers cultivate an intentional anti-bias teaching practice.
- Teachers understand child development.
- Teachers set learning goals and plan accordingly.
- Teachers use conversations and coaching during play activities to help children understand and transfer concepts.

This book provides strategies and stories to show you what implementation looks like in our programs. We also offer questions to help you analyze your classroom interactions, relationships, and outcomes. Our goal is to promote teaching that is grounded in anti-bias principles. Consequently, we must continuously evaluate our own life experiences and teaching practices.

Because anti-bias work asks us to confront both internal and external prejudices, answering these questions may make some readers uncomfortable. Some of the scenarios our teachers shared were uncomfortable experiences. Some of the topics we discuss and scenarios included may be triggering for some people who have experienced discrimination in their own lives. We honor where everyone is in their own journey, and encourage

everyone to recognize the moments that they feel discomfort throughout this process. It is not easy to confront bias, racism, sexism, homophobia, and ableism. Admitting our own bias is not easy either. Are you a person who has experienced injustice? Are you a person who has unwittingly added to a biased interaction? How is your experience different from someone else's? Everyone's experience will be different, each are equally valid, and everyone has anti-bias work that can be done.

We are grateful that our teachers allowed us to publish their stories about self-study, communication, and empathetic understanding. We changed the names and markedly defining details of teachers, children, and families' stories. We did this to both protect privacy and to show how common many of their experiences are.

In this curriculum, we think of you, the reader, as a lifelong learner. Effective leaders in early childhood education share a passion for professional development. In her book *Leadership in Early Childhood* (2012), Jillian Rodd describes three main characteristics of early childhood leaders. They are

- curiosity in learning;
- courage to take risks, make mistakes, and learn from them; and
- compassion for one another, to develop trust and create high expectations among colleagues.

We hope this curriculum will give you the opportunity to be curious, take risks, and cultivate compassion. We hope to inspire you to be anti-bias advocates. Then you can inspire your colleagues, your colleagues can inspire theirs, and so on. We think this is an attainable and essential goal to have for our communities, our children, and ourselves. We think this commitment is one essential component needed for building a strong foundation in anti-bias preschool education. A program without a commitment to anti-bias work can be harmful to children and its stakeholders. We are all in this together, and together we hope to continue to build communities committed to equity through anti-bias work.

## CHAPTER TWO

# Anti-Bias Teaching

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### *What is anti-bias teaching?*

People often wonder “What is anti-bias teaching?” or, “How can you be anti-bias?” This chapter outlines some concepts and terms that help us explain our understanding of anti-bias teaching. It also introduces some of the professional development tools YWCA Minneapolis (YWCA) teachers use to shape their anti-bias teaching practices.

Generally speaking, bias is harmful when unfair consideration is given to one group over another. Yet personal bias is present in every aspect of an individual’s awareness. The American Psychological Association (2006) reminds us that bias very often precedes prejudice. When we speak about bias, often the first words that come to mind for someone are racism and sexism. These are often the easiest concepts to access, but they are not the only ways in which bias can lead to prejudice. In this book, we have focused on racism and sexism as the two primary forms of bias used in examples because of the moment in time that we are in. The #BlackLivesMatter movement cresting in a new crescendo, and the continuing work of the YWCA to combat sexism, has meant that those areas are the ones in which we have the most experience and the most examples. In a little over 200 pages, we regrettably do not have time to fully address all of the possible areas of bias and where they might intersect, but hope to touch on many throughout this book. As a backdrop to everything we are discussing here, we encourage you to reflect upon the compounding impact of injustices due to intersectionality.

We also want to recognize that for people who have more than one historically represented and persecuted identity, the intersectionality of those identities only compounds the biased experiences they may have; it also may impact the bias an individual may feel. The APA strongly warns us all to take notice because bias can hurt us all now and has hurt many of us in the past. We take this to mean that unchecked bias can lead to negative prejudice and unfair discrimination. We have found *Anti-Bias Education for Young Children and Ourselves* by Louise Derman-Sparks and Julie Olsen Edwards (2010) to be an excellent resource to help understand and stop unfair bias. You can also see the American Psychological Association (APA), the Anti-Defamation League, and the glossary in this book for useful definitions and steps to take to help address bias. Our practice is confirmed in what the APA and others have also researched and reported. Bias against groups of people can be based on many factors, including race, ethnicity, gender, familial status, education, physical appearance, ability, economic status, sexual orientation, culture, or religion. Jacob Priest and colleagues (2020) recently contributed to our collective understanding of how bias hurts people. Their study finds that discrimination is a socially sustained and inescapable stressor for African Americans that impacts health. It is not possible to accurately consider health and wellness of African Americans and



other historically marginalized people without deep consideration of the ways racism and other forms of prejudice are woven into every aspect of life. Unfair bias can affect the way expressions, thoughts, and even objects are viewed. Nina Asher (2003) reminds us that it is critically important to remember that the concepts of diversity and unraveling bias are extremely complex. Like Asher, we know we are all connected. And like so many researchers in the field, we believe it is vital that we confront and eliminate unfair bias in our perceptions and in our educational system if we want to build healthy and vibrant communities.

It is important, required, and possible to teach and learn about prejudice, discrimination, and unfairness with young children (Beneke, Park, and Taitingfong 2019). They also explained that early childhood educators are often untrained in ways to teach about fairness, which may cause them to avoid discussing sensitive topics like race. We think that it is our responsibility to teach and build equity through an anti-bias approach. Sometimes people think their child is too young to benefit from an anti-bias curriculum, because they may not yet be aware of any differences among their peers. But children notice differences at an early age, especially in social contexts like a preschool classroom (Park 2011).

We have seen that too, and we teach them to! Younger students learn to name colors and shapes.

Older students learn to group and categorize similar objects.

Children notice differences in people's physical appearances and in how they do things whether we consciously address them or not. In our classrooms, we often hear phrases like:

"Her hair looks different than mine."

"I don't eat that at home."

"I don't understand what he's saying."

"Why is she wearing that?"

"Why is he being pushed in a chair?"

These types of questions and comments can lead to meaningful learning experiences, because anti-bias teachers are always on the lookout for opportunities to explore and honor differences. One of our teachers, Ms. Chantal, affirms her group's perceptive





observations by proclaiming, “Everybody’s different!” Whenever she says this, her class echoes it back.

Another teacher, Ms. Dana, shared that one of her students always asks, “Is that Spanish?” when he hears another language. Ms. Dana sees this as an opportunity to talk with her students about the many languages of the world.

Caryn Park (2011) suggests that preschool children are noticing racial and ethnic differences and making meaning about what they see with the information they have in social contexts.

Her analysis suggested that children will help each other make sense of things, like race and ethnicity, that are beyond their current comprehension, especially when there is no older or more experienced person available to help. Children leading children in understanding racial and ethnic differences can lead to incorrect ideas, she said, and it is the role of the teacher to critically and carefully guide children’s understanding about human differences. We agree that people are not born with prejudices, but as they grow, children quickly learn about stereotypes from the adults and media around them. As teachers of young children, the language we use and the comments we make can dramatically influence children’s perceptions of human differences. It is important to use an anti-bias framework to speak accurately, calmly, and with respect when talking about differences.

YWCA teacher Mr. Jaxson used this approach with one of his students, Tyler.

One day after school, Tyler walked up to a mother picking up her child. “Why are you fat?” he asked.

Mr. Jaxson stepped in. “Tyler, every person’s body is different and special,” he said. “When we talk to others, we use facts. I think you might mean her body looks different from your mother’s body. Is that right?”

Tyler nodded.

“Okay,” Mr. Jaxson said. “Let’s try saying, ‘I think your body is different from my mother’s.’”

Tyler repeated Mr. Jaxson’s words. His eye flicked between the mother and his teacher. Mr. Jaxson smiled, made eye contact with them both and nodded his head.

Mr. Jaxson’s short but important conversation with Tyler helped show him the significance of choosing his words carefully. His actions showed the others that this was a supported learning moment. Mr. Jaxson gave Tyler a high five for “using fact words.”

Often it is the adults in the room who are uncomfortable talking about differences, but professional development can help us approach these discussions with confidence. Beneke, Park, and Taitingfong (2019) understand how Mr. Jaxson might be feeling. They said teachers sometimes freeze when a sensitive topic is broached by children. And, when they do address it, they must somehow rise above possible feelings of sadness, guilt,



shame, or a host of others to present a calm, educative, and supportive demeanor. That is hard work! Knowing that we are learning alongside children and families to address and unravel unfair bias can be protective for teachers as well as children and families. Acknowledging that we are all learners in stopping unfair bias can help teachers feel less overwhelmed or unduly burdened in their endeavors. It is an unending process, after all.

In addition to acknowledging the teacher as a learner in stopping the spread of unfair bias, teachers also have a unique call to understand the developmental stages of children. Understanding children's developmental capabilities will enable them to teach through an anti-bias approach. A skilled teacher can guide conversations in ways that are meaningful and appropriate. It is important that we do not shy away from these situations, because research shows that anti-bias learning does not happen on its own.

Here is an example from our own work that supports Park's (2011) findings that without an adult to guide them, a child may easily come to untrue or unfair conclusions. When one YWCA teacher heard a child being described as a baby by her peers, she quickly stepped in and explained that they were preschoolers. When the students asked why the other child could not use the bathroom and do other self-help tasks by himself, the teacher told them that everyone learns different things at different speeds. The children agreed that everyone needs extra help once in a while, and the teacher led them in a conversation about the things they still needed help doing. They wrapped it up by celebrating the things everyone, including their classmate, could do well. Because of this teacher's quick thinking, the children's conversation was steered in a much more positive direction.

When we model and encourage open dialogue, we help children become more comfortable with each other and more confident about exploring new ideas, customs, and ways of being. Respecting diversity is an essential component of anti-bias teaching. When teachers take the time to address with mindfulness and care any issues that arise, we can help create the educational and professional climate we want.

## Celebrating the “Whole Child”

The word is out—all human beings are unique. And when children walk into a classroom, it is as if they bring their parents and families too—and their ways of knowing and understanding life.

Urie Bronfenbrenner and Stephen Ceci (1994) explain this through a model of human ecology. The human ecology model views children's development as affected by all the different systems they are a part of—such as family, school, or learning environments, places of worship, and neighborhoods—and examines



how those systems interact with one another. Within the human ecology model, there is also the individual response; that is, two children from the exact same circumstances will still express themselves in their own ways.

Anti-bias practitioners are driven to take a closer look at their students in order to truly see, celebrate, and serve the whole child. When we do, we cannot help but become advocates. When we care about the total individuality of our students, we are motivated to combat racism, sexism, and other forms of oppression. We are also motivated to give our students the skills they need to advocate for themselves.

We believe that best practice is achieved only through teaching from an anti-bias perspective. We know the conversation about anti-bias started in early childhood programs long ago and continues today. We think many experts would agree: there is no effective conversation about best teaching practices—in any field—that does not emphasize the need to confront bias.

## What Is Bias?

Bias happens when we value one group—their ideas, opinions, expressions, and lives—above another. Bias is reinforced by stereotypes, and both stereotypes and bias lead to prejudice and discrimination. Microaggressions often occur in environments that fail to confront and combat bias. We broadly define these terms so we can organize our understanding of the negative consequences of bias.

Bias is not inherently negative. Although bias is not limited to gender, sexuality, religion, race, ethnicity, ability, or economic position, we look at these general categories to develop an awareness of how we can support and celebrate, rather than ignore or devalue, the differences around us. From a culturally responsive perspective, Susan Bennett and colleagues (2018) draw on a rich body of research to explain that ECE centers are formative of culture—and even as they shape culture, they are shaped by it. To us this means that the ways in which culture is present or not present in children's daily classroom lives affects both self-image and learning.

Ibram X. Kendi (2019) in his book *How to Be an Antiracist* covers many important aspects about his path to understanding racism and bias. One point he made is that to undo unfairness we have to favor a marginalized group over a privileged one. This might be startling to some. Today, for example, it is more common to see representations of women astronauts or doctors. Once, that was pushing social boundaries. Now, you might find centers with photos of gay or adoptive families. A person who feels threatened by such images may say something like “I feel marginalized when there are not photos of [heterosexual couples, Christian-themed holiday décor, and so forth] in the environment.” To that, we say it can be painful to feel some loss of ground, but remember that our culture privileges white, heterosexual Christians already, so there is no need to overshadow others with dominant imagery. In our settings it is okay to bring unexpected messages to the preschool classroom.

Things we ask ourselves are these: How are marginalized groups represented in the classroom? How are women and people of color physically represented? For example,



# A time-tested, anti-bias, and play-based curriculum framework

Since 1973, YWCA Minneapolis Early Childhood Education Department has been delivering a powerful blend of high-quality, full-time early childhood education, direct service, and advocacy for children. Now, the YWCA's unique, anti-bias approach to high-quality early childhood education can be incorporated into your preschool program.

In *Anti-Bias Curriculum for the Preschool Classroom*, YWCA Minneapolis Early Childhood Education department synthesizes the history of their transformative model for the education of young children that yields significant results. Consistently, at least 85% of

- preschoolers were proficient in school readiness standards,
- infants through preschoolers were on track with age-appropriate development, and
- families reported their children demonstrated grounding in their own culture and were comfortable with people of diverse backgrounds.

## **YWCA Minneapolis Early Childhood Education Department**

YWCA Minneapolis' Downtown Children's Center, the oldest and flagship location, was licensed in 1978 and has been NAEYC accredited since 1987. Today, YWCA Minneapolis operates five Children's Centers in Minneapolis and St. Paul. All are Four Star Parent Aware Rated and NAEYC accredited.

**Paula Landis**, project writer and curriculum director for the YWCA Minneapolis Early Childhood Education department, holds a master's degree in early childhood education from Concordia University-St. Paul.

