***Nurturing that unprejudiced, youthful innocence may be the answer to better multicultural relations.***

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# School Safety

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**Ronald D. Stephens,** Executive Editor

**Stuart Greenbaum,** Editor/Art Director

**Brenda Turner,** Associate Editor

**Cynthia Randolph,** Photocompositor



Correspondence for *School Safety* and the National School Safety Center should be addressed to: National School Safety Center, 16830 Ventura Blvd., Suite 200, Encino, CA 91436, telephone 818/377-6200.

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**About the cover:**
Kids playing in sewer pipes may be a sad commentary on available recreation for inner-city (San Francisco) youths, but it also suggests a multicultural camaraderie all too uncharacteristic among older youths and adults. Photograph by Stuart Greenbaum, Copyright © 1978. Hand colored by Hope Harris.

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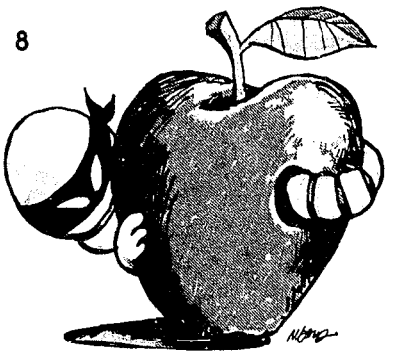


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BY LOUISE DERMAN-SPARKS

*Growing up with an understanding of cultural diversity will encourage future generations to recognize the need for racial equality and justice for all.*

# Challenging diversity with anti-bias curriculum

Racism and racial bias must be included in any list of factors that severly disrupt the learning environment.[1] As too many tragic events in recent years illustrate, our nation still suffers from these shameful conditions.

Incidents of racial tension and fighting have erupted in high schools throughout the nation. And now a group of young white supremacists known as skinheads has emerged, defacing property and committing physical assault in the name of white power. These realities sabotage the schools' efforts to create a safe and nurturing educational environment for all children.

If we are to rise to the challenge of diversity, we must recognize that although the United States is a multicultural society — a place where distinctly different racial and cultural groups exist — it is not yet a pluralistic society — a place where all racial and cultural groups share equal access to opportunities for quality lives and power over their own lives. To achieve pluralism, racism must be abolished. We must acknowledge, as Carol B. Phillips wrote in an article published in *Young Children:*

*Rather than difference itself, it is the response to difference that is the problem. Rather than culture itself, it is the attitudes about culture that are the problem. Rather than diversity itself, it is the ways in which major institutions of this country have responded to culturally, racially and ethnically diverse people that is the major source of our condition of...inequality.*[2]

Finally, we must learn new behaviors that challenge and transform racist thinking and actions. As Helen Epstein wrote in a *Los Angeles Times* column:

*We have to teach the value of personal interception. Whether it is in response to seeing a mugging, whether it is about reacting to a racist remark. This is the basic lesson children have to be taught.*[3]

Photographs by Stuart Greenbaum

**What is the impact of racisim on children's development?**

Building identity and attitudes toward others begins in earnest during the preschool years and continues through young adulthood. Racism has harmful, psychologically toxic effects on this process.[4] By four years of age, children become aware that race and ethnicity are connected with privilege and power. Some examples of this include the following typical incidents:

*A 2½-year-old Asian child refuses to hold the hand of a black classmate. "It's dirty," she insists. At home, after bathing, she tells her mother, "Now my hair is white because it is clean."*

*Two 5-year-old white boys are playing in the sandbox. A Vietnamese boy asks to join them. "Nah, nah, you can't play with us, you Chinese," they chorus, pulling their eyes into a slant.*[5]

Racism attacks the very sense of self for children of color and creates serious obstacles to obtaining the best education, health care and housing. It teaches white children a false identity of superi-

*Louise Derman-Sparks is a faculty member at Pacific Oaks College in Pasadena, California. She conducts research and also heads a special project on anti-bias curriculum.*

ority, distorts their perceptions of reality, and does not equip them to productively interact with more than half of the world's humanity.

Fortunately, children also can begin the journey toward anti-bias identity and attitudes at an early age if their feelings about fairness and caring are nurtured and extended to include an awareness of diversity. Listen to some of their voices:

*Casey (age 5), and another white friend, Tommy, are playing. Casey calls two other boys to join them. "You can't play with them, they're black," Tommy says to him. Casey replies, "That's not right. Black and white kids should play together. My dad tells me civil rights stories."*

*After hearing the story of Rosa Parks and the Montgomery bus boycott, Tiffany (age 5½), whose skin is light brown, ponders whether she would have had to sit in the back of the bus. Finally, she firmly asserts, "I'm black, and anyway all this is stupid. I would just get off the bus and tell them to keep their old bus."*[6]

These children are learning to think critically about racial bias and discrimination and to speak up when they believe something is unfair. If preschoolers can do this, so can older children, although the task becomes more challenging. As children get older, they have greater cognitive capacity for dealing with complex issues of race, culture and racism. However, their emotional commitment to negative beliefs about others are more deeply ingrained.

Ideally, anti-bias education should start in preschool and continue throughout a child's education. Nonetheless, we can effectively introduce anti-bias curriculum at any point in a child's (or adult's) development. It is never too late to activate our human feelings of fairness, empathy and nurturance.

**What is anti-bias curriculum about?**

Anti-bias curriculum is an active/activist approach to challenging prejudice, stereotyping, bias and racism. It is based on the premise that in a society where racism continues to prevail, it is insufficient, and highly unlikely, to be "non-biased." Nor is it sufficient to be an observer. Rather, it is necessary for each individual to actively intervene and counter the personal and institutional behaviors that perpetuate oppression.

The goals remain the same across childhood, but the topics and activities become more complex. These include:

- to construct a knowledgeable, confident self-identity;
- to develop comfortable, empathetic and just interaction with diversity;
- to develop critical thinking about bias; and
- to learn the skills for standing up for oneself and others in the face of injustice.

Anti-bias curriculum embraces an educational philosophy, as well as specific techniques and content, that permeate all aspects of daily classroom life. It is a value-based approach: differences are great; oppressive behaviors are not. A dynamic tension is created between respecting diversity and challenging injustice. Students and teachers are asked to confront troublesome issues rather than covering them up.

Anti-bias curriculum includes learning about one's own culture and the cultures of others in the context of people's daily lives, work and history, as well as their struggles to achieve freedom, justice and the pursuit of happiness. However, it also goes beyond the study of culture to directly address the dynamics that interfere with comfortable, intergroup interaction and to ways of solving the problem by creating intergroup understanding and equality.

**What are the activities of anti-bias curriculum?**

Following are several examples of activities that can be used to help achieve the goals of anti-bias curriculum. Additional activities could be tailored to your setting.

*Goal 1: To construct a knowledgeable, confident racial and ethnic identity.*

Race and ethnicity refer to different aspects of identity in our society. Race refers to one's skin color and other specific physical characteristics, while ethnicity refers to the geographic place of origin of one's family and the cultural way of life associated with the group to which one's family belongs.

Although race is not a scientifically valid way to categorize people, bigotry, prejudice and discrimination based on the concept of race still remain a powerful part of our nation's psyche and practice. For example, a recent national survey of high school biology teachers by two University of Texas at Arlington researchers revealed that one in four of the respondents (majority white and male) agreed with the statement, "Some races of people are more intelligent than others."[7] Clearly, work remains to be done!

Activities for fostering a positive racial identity among preschool and kindergarten-age children include filling their environment with pictures, books, dolls and other materials showing a range of skin colors, eye shapes and hair textures. Another possibility would

be to mix paints to reflect each child's skin color and to paint life-size paper cutouts of each child. Children in the first to third grades could read simple books that explain the differences in physical characteristics associated with racial identity and discuss the important functions skin, hair and eyes have for everyone. In the fourth to sixth grades, have students explore the children's stereotypes about the physical capabilities of different groups. Also, have children find stories and pictures of people whose life challenges specific racial stereotypes.

In junior high biology classes, do a unit on the "research" about racial differences, as well as the critiques of the methods and results of these "studies."[8] Senior high school students might study the concept of race and its misuse to first justify slavery, and then bigotry. For example, they could do a study about IQ testing and why such tests have been criticized for having inherent racial bias.[9]

*Goal 2: To develop knowledgeable, comfortable, empathetic understanding of cultural diversity.*

Culture, in its broadest sense, is a set of rules for behavior by which humans organize and give meaning to the world. It is an essential source of individual and group identity and strength. A major challenge facing schools is how to allow groups to retain their cultural integrity while they gain the skills to function in the larger society.

Preschool and kindergarten students can be taught to appreciate their own and others' ethnic identity by regularly reading stories about children from different ethnic groups and including common issues faced by young children, such as the birth of a sibling. Children in the first through third grades could do oral histories about each child's family and begin to explore each one's different place of origin. In the fourth to sixth grades, students could expand these oral history activities to include the concept of immigration and the history of different groups in your city by interviewing members of the children's various ethnic communities.

In junior high, help students identify the important cultural rules, values and beliefs in their own ethnic group and how they are reflected in their family's lifestyles. Contrast the cultural beliefs of students in the class, and discuss how different ideas about behavior may cause misunderstandings and interpersonal conflicts. Role-play ways to resolve such conflicts. High school students might study the culture of major ethnic groups, how these cultures have influenced American life, and how aspects of different cultures may conflict with the dominant culture.

*Goal 3: To learn to think critically about racial bias.*

Racial bias manifests itself in various forms, but stereotyping, misinformation and prejudice are the most common. No one escapes learning racial biases against other groups, and, to some extent, also believing erroneous ideas about one's own group. These biases become filters through which the developing child views reality and assimilates new experiences and information. A major thrust of an anti-bias curriculum is to help children become aware of and rid themselves of the biases that limit their vision and cause misunderstanding, hurt and conflict.

In preschool and kindergarten, by contrasting true, fair pictures with stereotypic pictures, help children learn that some of the pictures in books, posters and greeting cards are untrue, unfair and hurt people's feelings. Have first through third grade children make a chart called "What We Think — What We Learned" about a frequently stereotyped topic. For example, ask children their ideas about Native-Americans. Next, select a few groups and do a unit about the past and current life of Native-Americans. Finally, go back to the chart and evaluate the accuracy of the first list. Discuss how stereotypes interfere with knowing reality.

Students in grades four to six may develop their research skills by systematically studying stereotypes they see on television, in magazines, etc. Junior high and senior high students might do a unit on the Ku Klux Klan. Include learning about current Klan and other white supremacist groups and how people are combating these groups.

*Goal 4: To gain skills for challenging discriminatory behavior directed against oneself and others.*

This goal builds upon and vitalizes the preceding three goals. Here is where students learn to practice the "value of personal interception" and the responsibilities of citizenship in a democracy. Challenging discriminatory behavior begins with developing assertiveness and non-violent conflict-resolution skills in one-on-one interactions. But it does not stop there. Even young children can start learning about role models in the community who stand up for justice and engage themselves in simple group actions about issues relevant to their lives in their school and neighborhood.

At all grade levels, the behavior of the adults provide the first lesson. In other words, adults must practice what they preach if they want their students to follow suit. Nowhere is this more

true than in how school staff addresses incidents of racism.

In preschool and kindergarten, regardless of what you think may be the underlying reasons, do not ever permit a child to reject another child because of race or ethnicity, or to use derogatory terms about a child's identity. Such behavior is equivalent to physical aggression. Stop the behavior first, comfort the child who has been the target, and then find out from both what was going on and take action accordingly.

With children in first to third grade, create and post classroom rules about discriminatory behavior. Have children write down the rules and take the list home to their parents. Students in grades four to six could interview people in your community and write to important national figures who contribute to the work for racial justice. Junior high school students might form a schoolwide council of students, with teacher supervision, similar to a student governance council, whose responsibility is to discuss and make suggestions when incidents of racial prejudice and discrimination occur. Encourage high school youths to become involved in a community service that improves the quality of life for people.

**What do teachers need to know to implement anti-bias curriculum?**

Teachers, administrators and other school staff must first work on cleaning up the filters through which they perceive and interpret the behaviors of various racial and ethnic groups. Through individual and small group study, learn about the dynamics of institutional racism and how they manifest themselves in our schools. This is not a question of assigning individual guilt, but of understanding how these dynamics can act even without conscious intent on the part of school staff.

The existence of institutional racism is apparent by its consequences. For example, in a multiracial/multiethnic high school, if most of the students in the advanced placement or gifted classes are white, or if there is insufficient support for non-English-speaking students, then institutional racism is operating. An anti-bias commitment means analyzing why these situations exist and implementing strategies to improve them.

We also need to learn about the cultural patterns of the various ethnic groups with whom we work and how these influence learning styles. This step, usually the first and often the *only* step in staff development, comes *after* work on individual and institutional racism. Otherwise, new information about cultural patterns is negatively distorted by the unexamined filters of racial bias.

We need to investigate the impact different classroom structures have on promoting or sabotaging multicultural relationships. For example, "cooperative learning" techniques improve the learning of many "minority" children and also enhance intergroup interactions.[10]

We need to make the internal organization of schools more democratic by introducing participatory decision making, where teachers, students and parents join administrators in decisions regarding the school's management.[11]

It is time we realize the dream so powerfully stated by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.: "I have a dream today...to transform the jangling discords of our nation into a beautiful symphony of brotherhood. . . ." [12] How we teach our children *will* make a difference. □

*For more information and examples of anti-bias curriculum activities, Louise Derman-Sparks can be contacted at Pacific Oaks College, 5 Westmoreland Place, Pasadena, California 91103, 818/397-1300.*

**Endnotes**

1. Racism is any attitude, action or institutional practice that subordinates people because of their color. This includes the imposition of one ethnic group's culture in such a way as to withhold respect for, to demean or to destroy the cultures of other races. In the United States, targets of racism include Afro-Americans, Asian-Pacific Americans, Jewish-Americans, Latin-Americans and Native-Americans. Racial bias is any attitude, belief or feeling that results in, and helps to justify, unfair treatment of an individual because of his or her identity.
2. Carol B. Phillips, "Nurturing Diversity for Today's Children and Tomorrow's Leaders," *Young Children*, January 1988, p. 44.
3. Comment by Helen Epstein, in "Halocaust: Children Confront the Lessons," *Los Angeles Times*, November 9, 1988, p. 2.
4. For further information, read: J. Phinney and M. Rotherman (eds.), *Children's Ethnic Socialization: Pluralism and Development* (Newbury Park, California: Sage Press, 1987); L. Derman-Sparks, et al., "Children, Race and Racism: How Race Awareness Develops," *Interracial Books for Children Bulletin*, 11 (November 1980), pp. 3-9; and E. Barnes, "The Black Community as the Source of Positive Self-Concept for Black Children," in Jones, *Black Psychology* (New York: Harper and Row, 1980), pp. 106-130.
5. Collected by members of the Anti-Bias Curriculum Project at Pacific Oaks College, Pasadena, California. Results of this project appear in *Anti-Bias Curriculum: Tools for Empowering Young Children* by L. Derman-Sparks, et al. (Washington, D.C.: NAEYC, 1989).
6. Collected by members of the Anti-Bias Curriculum Project.
7. *The Seattle Times*, September 11, 1988, p. A12.
8. For information, read: Ashley Montagu, *Statement On Race* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972); and Robert V. Guthrie, *Even the Rat Was White* (New York: Harper and Row, 1976).
9. For detailed information, read: Stephen Jay Gould, *The Mismeasurement of Man* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1981).
10. Catherine Emilovich, "Social Interaction in Two Integrated Kindergartens," *Integrated Education*, 1981, pp. 72-78.
11. Francis Nakano, "Settling for Nothing Else," *School Safety*, Fall 1988, p. 19.
12. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., "I Have a Dream," Washington, D.C., August 28, 1963.

**Resources**

*Early Childhood*: Louise Derman-Sparks and the ABC Task Force, *Anti-Bias Curriculum: Tools for Empowering Young Children* (Washington, D.C.: NAEYC, 1989).

*Elementary School*: Nancy Schniedewind and Ellen Davidson, *Open Minds to Equality* (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1983); and B. Banfield, et al., *Winning Justice for All* (New York: Council on Interracial Books for Children, 1980).

*Junior and Senior High*: *Violence, The Ku Klux Klan and the Struggle for Equality*, prepared and published by the Connecticut Education Association, the Council on Interracial Books for Children, and the National Education Association, 1981.

*Adults*: Judy Katz, *White Awareness: A Handbook for Anti-Racism Training* (Norman, Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 1979) — book; "From Racism to Pluralism" and "Understanding Institutional Racism" (New York: Council on Interracial Books for Children) — filmstrips; and "Frontline: A Class Divided" (Washington, D.C.: PBS) — video.