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The case for anti-bias preschool and curriculum for teachers, children and families : thriving and learning in a diverse child-led environment

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The Case for Anti-Bias Preschool and Curriculum For Teachers, Children and Families: Thriving
and Learning in a Diverse, Child-led Environment.

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Abstract

This thesis attempts to make the case for the design of an anti-bias preschool. The paper looks at the specific age when young children begin to notice similarities and differences pertaining to physical characteristics, social-economic characteristics, cultural characteristics and developmental variations. It explores the impact formal anti-bias education can have in the preschool setting. This includes impacts on children, families and teachers. Recommendations are provided in the form of a teacher-training module that includes practical tips as well as an example of an anti-bias curriculum. Data was gathered from literature review as well as observations and interviews over the course of the study.

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The Case for Anti-Bias Preschool and Curriculum For Teachers, For Children and Families:
Thriving and Learning in a Diverse Child-led Environment.

“Why does she wear glasses?” “Why is her skin different than mine?” “Why is he talking funny?” “Why won’t he sit down?” In these first innocent moments when children begin to notice and express curiosity about similarities and differences a door is opened for teachers and families. Through the door is an opportunity for children to express curiosity safely, to learn to respect themselves and others and to be comfortable in place where everyone is valued. If the comments are not addressed, if they are brushed under the rug or lost in the busy day these valuable opportunities can be lost. Lifelong impacts are made in these moments and unfortunately hurt can be caused for certain children.

Personal Motivation

My personal connection to anti-bias preschool stemmed from my long-standing intention to open an inclusive school. Part of that intention was founded in a closely held value in my family. As a young child it was absolutely unacceptable in our family to make any sort of broad sweeping judgments about a group of people. How, if you make assumptions before meeting people, can one uncover the unique abilities and the beauty of the individuals? How could I introduce this concept within the walls of an inclusive preschool? For the purpose of this paper, I have used the following definition for Anti-Bias Education. “Anti-bias education means that adults intentionally teach accepting responses toward others whatever their unique human qualities” (Derman-Sparks & Olsen, 2010.)

On September 11, 2001, I was working on the 34th floor of the Second Tower of the World Trade Center. I witnessed first hand that day the absolute terror and devastation that can be caused by hopelessness, ignorance and fear. In the days, weeks and months that followed, I

struggled to understand the events and grew even more certain of my path. What could I do in my lifetime to prevent this from happening again? I don't know how I can make a broad impact on adults that live a world apart from me. However with my dream of opening a preschool and the underlying values from my family, I knew that I could create a special and unique environment. The values my family instilled in me helped me to understand the dangers in prejudging. I acquired the skill of recognizing opportunity to learn from everyone not just those that are similar; the wonder of learning about other cultures, and the importance of being kind. The values, a danger of prejudging and an openness to all, along with the experience of witnessing a horrid act of hatred and prejudice brought home the need for an open, loving and supportive place for children during the first magical moments when they begin to notice and become curious about similarities and differences. The need for a place where pre-prejudice and bias can be addressed safely and lifelong impacts can be made. Along with the right environment, I recognize a need for teachers that are prepared and able to reflect, observe and support anti-bias learning. In this environment, the intention is to give children the tools at an early age to recognize and combat biases in their own lives and the lives of others. It is also the intention to provide a true multi-cultural curriculum (not just a tourism curriculum) for the classroom where children can learn about and appreciate the gifts of other cultures, ethnicities and simply each other.

The problem as I see it is that in the hustle of the day, in the rush to jam content into the classroom or perhaps just a lack of understanding the significance of the moment, early childhood programs may not stop to recognize the thought processes that are beginning to solidify for children. Teachers enter the classroom with their own discomforts and biases along with parents, families and children. How are they treating each other in particular those that are

different? How are they speaking to each other? What do the classroom decorations, the books, the dolls say about who is important in our society? Have the teachers stopped to reflect upon their own attitudes towards others and how that is reflected in their classrooms? Children are eagerly observing our behaviors and interactions. They watch to see who is deemed important and worth our conversation and who is not? Who do we treat differently?

Philosophy

My beliefs about priorities in education are based on my passion for building a world in which children are supported in the pursuit their unique abilities and through those abilities education is provided. I selected schools and teachers to work with that had a similar philosophical viewpoint on the education of children. This progressive, child-led philosophy is based on the belief that each child is unique, they cannot all be expected to learn the same way or be excited by the same materials. That said, there are certain milestones in the domains of social development, physical development and cognitive development that can be met by most children. However, the way in which we encourage children's development in these areas can vary based upon the interests and unique abilities of the child. This philosophy dovetails neatly with a child-led, anti-bias environment in a preschool setting.

Knowledge is the understanding of principles and concepts attained, as Dewey suggests through experience and education. Babies attain knowledge through their senses: taste, touch, hearing, seeing and smell. They build on this knowledge and experiment. They come into school already "knowing" with interests, likes, and dislikes, ideas and experiences. Education should build upon this "knowing." Education is used to attain facts and to open the door to new opportunities. Education can be a means to understand history and its influences, to be able to understand at a much deeper level what we believe are important and to honor the many

perspectives of our society and our world. Education needs to arm us with the tools to seek information, to research and to question. Education should allow us give us the tools to do this in a fast-paced, ever-changing and exciting world in a way that allows the student to take advantage of or create opportunities. Students will experience different needs for data and knowledge with different motivations throughout their lifetime. I believe education should spark an interest to be a seeker of knowledge, to be open to others and to debate, hearing both sides, being well informed and then making the best decision at the moment. Education should provide an open worldview, one that truly communicates the value of all students regardless of their differences.

My personal philosophy of education is best described as ‘Meeting Places.’ Along the educational journey from birth to death we encounter critical meetings. Teachers meet students. Students meet the world. Teachers meet families and communities and so on. We all meet the need for acquiring new information and skills. As an educator, I believe these meeting points should inform our practice. Where is the child “at” in his learning? What experiences has he/she had? What are they interested in? How do they learn? Who is their family, their community? How can I use the information garnered in this “Meeting Place” to build a curriculum, to scaffold learning and to capture their attention? In order to create a classroom that is inclusive of all students teachers must religiously observe, reflect, learn and grow. Similar to the Developmental Interaction Approach, development occurs differently for different children and teachers should be meeting the children where they are. By understanding each child’s interaction with others and the broader world, the teacher gains valuable insight and keys to providing education.

Curriculum is designed to be a map and guide amongst the meeting places. It is to organize and structure content to be delivered in a way that can be understood and explained. It

is a way to build upon each topic in a logical manner. It can be a way to manage time and a way to ensure that important content is delivered. It can also be used as way to communicate the school's intentions and the general progress of the classroom. Curriculum should be flexible and not fixed. However it can be planned and well thought out.

In meeting the student the teacher needs to observe, reflect and create. To observe the students and try to have an understanding (somewhat like a parent/caregiver) of what the child already knows, feels, has experienced and what is possible next. Vygotsky refers to this observation and determination of next steps as the Zone of Proximal Development. The teacher must couple the observations with an understanding of their developmental stage and then reflect on the child's development, abilities and interests. Finally, to create experiences that are relevant, exciting and motivating, that provides exposure to new information, new challenges, problem solving skills and scaffolding to more. Teachers should have an understanding of the different modalities by which students learn. The student's role is to learn how to learn, how to communicate their understanding and how to thrive in a diverse society. Their participation in the classroom is crucial in order to be heard and understood, in order to add personal value and knowledge and in order for the teacher to understand how to deliver necessary content.

Method for Gathering Data

The purpose of my studies was to observe and describe everyday experiences of children in early childhood education settings as they notice similarities and differences and the teachers' pedagogy before, during and after these critical moments. The categories of classroom techniques will include setup, teacher language, activities and responses to children's questions.

Part One

The questions I sought to answer are as follows:

Main Question - How do you setup your classroom for successful interactions between children as they notice similarities and difference?

Sub Questions –

- In general terms, have you noticed an age, developmental stage or time of year when differences become a part of the children's conversations?
- Is there a specific curriculum you use or is this part of an ongoing conversation throughout the course of the year?
- How do you handle it, what language do you use when children make comments that are either inappropriate or framed in a judgmental manner?
- Do you feel that children leave at the end of the year with an understanding of people who are different from them and with the tools to identify and combat bias?

My third and final placement during my student teaching at Bank Street was an inclusive preschool on the Upper East Side of Manhattan. The classrooms were diverse both culturally and in terms of developmental variations. There were opportunities on a daily basis for children to interact with people that were different than them. In one particular classroom, the Friends Room, much of the year was spent exploring this very topic. For the purpose of this study, I returned to the school and spoke with the teachers about their experience during this time. I asked them my main and sub-questions about the setup of the classroom. I observed the classroom and saw how the children interacted with each other, with the materials and how they participated in the curriculum. I also interviewed a teacher at a private preschool in Manhattan. I hope for this study to be a tool and resource I can carry forward as I pursue my dream but also as a training tool for other teachers and schools that work with children of this age and stage.

Part 2

In order to specifically address work with children that have developmental variations, I researched pedagogical strategies relating to developmental variations, culminating in the creation of a PowerPoint training resource for teachers in inclusive preschool classroom that discusses pedagogy around the moments when children notice and comment about similarities and differences specifically pertaining to Developmental Variations. The findings are from current literature and interviews with the six therapists from multiple schools that work with children with Developmental Variations. The intention of the interviews was to understand how the classroom setting can be prepared for these moments, what types of linguistic choices teachers can use to respond to questions about differences and how therapists communicate to children about their variations to help them advocate for themselves in the classroom. The PowerPoint module is intended to raise questions, spark discussion and provide practical ideas for teachers to utilize in these precious moments.

I initially sought to understand how the classroom should be set-up at the beginning of the year and the language that should be used at the start of school to create a welcoming and supportive environment for all children. In reading about children's development I realized I needed to expand the time frame to include the full school year for children in the three to five age range. I also needed to narrow my focus to specifically seek practical tools for teachers to use whenever children in their classroom comment or question differences related to Developmental Variations. I learned through interviews that these questions could arise anytime during the studied range and certainly anytime during the course of the school year. As I read and spoke with therapists, I realized the volumes of information available on laws, rights, tools

and materials, specific variations and anecdotes and well as recommendations and language to use with children. There is so much to learn and understand.

Organization of Project

As I worked towards a Master's Degree, towards this Thesis and eventually towards opening a preschool, I conducted interviews, observations and researched curriculum to make the case for an intentional and explicit, anti-bias environment within the preschool classroom. This thesis serves as a culmination of that work and will explore existing preschools with and without anti-bias education, anti-bias as it relates to children with developmental variations, along with a training guide for teachers. For practical purposes, the design of an anti-bias curriculum is included to demonstrate how these principles can be worked into everyday lessons. In order to understand the context of work, the philosophy that guides the overall design of the preschool is a progressive, child-led theory that will be explored first.

Literature Review

In order to fully understand the scope of anti-bias education and the impact it has on the classroom for both typically developing children and children with developmental variations, I reviewed current research and peer-reviewed journals. A number of themes emerged in the literature.

Specific Ages for Learning about Self and Others.

Research within the field of early childhood indicates that from birth to age five, children begin to notice critical similarities and differences. In addition they are actively constructing a sense of self and others with influences from the world around them. Very often people assume that bias and prejudice are an "adult issue." Wolpert (2003) points out that young children do notice differences. They see differences based on race, gender, wealth, ethnicity and other

characteristics. Not only are they aware of these differences, they “learn from the environment to attach values to those differences...” (Wolpert, 2003.) In order to understand children’s experience in the everyday moments in classrooms as they begin to notice similarities and differences, it is helpful to begin with an understanding of typical development of a child’s sense of self and of others. According to Derman-Sparks & Edwards (2010) children are making observations and using these to construct “self-identity and concept of others.” A typical progression is as follows:

- Around six months – infants may notice differences in skin color (Katz & Koflin, 1997.)
- Toddlers – notice and comment on both racial and gender differences. By two years old children may be able to use appropriate labels for gender such as boy and girl. They apply their knowledge of color names to define skin color. (Ramsey, 2004.)
- By three years old – questions may be asked about “their own attributes, including racial identity, language, gender and physical disabilities.” (Derman-Sparks & Edwards, 2010.)
- By four – children in the classroom may be aware of economic class and familial structure (Tatum, 2003.)
- By five – “children are well underway with the formation of social identity, the sum total of perceptions of oneself (self-concept) and feelings about oneself (self-esteem) relative to others who are similar to and different from themselves” (Derman-Sparks & Edwards, 2010.)

During this critical time, children, with limited experience may develop a sense of self worth and a sense of others from the adults and peers in their school and community. They also may develop “pre-prejudice, absorb negative attitudes, misinformation and stereotypes about various aspects of human diversity.” (Derman-Sparks & Edwards, 2010.) These pre-prejudices can have

lifelong and cumulative impacts; they can influence and perhaps hinder future relationships in a diverse society.

Bias Exists in Multiple Forms.

Despite attempts to quell overt bias in the classroom, bias exists in multiple forms. Intentional or unintentional these statements or behaviors can send negative messages about self worth. Bias, almost like an onion, comes in many forms and has multiple layers. In order for children to feel welcome, represented, competent and powerful in the classroom these layers must be examined, peeled away and addressed.

The first layer of bias is “built into the system” according to Louise Derman-Spark and Julie Olsen Edwards (2010.) The society within which the school operates has built advantages into the system for certain kinds of people and cultures and disadvantages for those who do not fall into these groups (Derman-Sparks & Edwards, 2010.) This could be the availability of funds or resources, quality of schools, points awarded for college admittance and so on. Despite teacher’s best intentions these biases are present in the classroom and in the community around the school.

These societal inequities are represented not just in opportunity or lack thereof but in materials as well, which is the second layer we will discuss. Many children’s books depict “white, suburban, able-bodies, English-speaking, mother-and-father (nuclear) family and only a handful of toys, pictures, songs, posters depicts the full range of family possibilities and cultures that exist in the classroom.” (Derman-Sparks & Edwards, 2010.) There are certainly texts and toys that do represent these groups. However, not being represented in the classroom can “undermine some of children’s positive sense of self, while teaching other children they are

specially deserving” (Derman-Sparks & Edwards, 2010.) Rather than feeling as though they are included as a valued part of the classroom, children can feel insecure or different.

The third layer of bias exists with the adults of the school and community. Teachers, administrator and even parents need to take the time to reflect on their own feelings and to educate themselves about the cultures of children within the classroom. This will be addressed further in the following theme.

The fourth layer of bias we will discuss exists within children. They are already beginning to pick up on cues from society, community, home, teacher, classroom and peers about who is visible or important and who is not. A child may not want to sit next to another child because “his skin is dirty.” A child may frown at food that smells differently or tease when another child doesn’t celebrate the same holiday. Children derive these messages about who is important and who is not from multiple sources some of which have been mentioned such as society, parents and teachers. In early childhood these messages are “recorded as emotional memories..can become pre-prejudice – the beginning of a tendency to show discrimination” (Gartell, 2012.) Other sources are more indirect such as homogenous environments where children are not exposed to diversity. “Contradictory messages such as “skin color doesn’t matter” when the message from media and other social entities may be that skin color does matter” can also be confusing if not uncovered and discussed (Gartell, 2012.)

Self-Reflection and a Concrete Curriculum are Necessary.

Research indicated that a supported, formalized process of self-reflection is necessary as well as a concrete curriculum on anti-bias for young children. Many teachers feel unprepared to set up an anti-bias curriculum or set up activities within the classroom. Teacher candidates tend to be “English speaking, middle class females of European descent...their future students are likely

to be culturally diverse” (Lin, Lake and Rice, 2008.) It is critical to engage in conversation, pre-service role-play and fieldwork, to develop a critical cultural consciousness or understanding (Lin et al, 2008.) “No one escapes learning stereotypes...these lessons begin when we are very young, taught initially and most powerfully by our family and then by the larger world around us. And all of us still carry inaccurate and negative messages – even if we no longer believe they are true – that can keep us from seeing each person as a unique, whole person fully deserving of our respect.” (Derman-Sparks & Edwards, 2010) The authors recommend identifying support people to share ideas with and discuss thoughts and feelings, think about our own social identifies and taking the time to uncover our own stereotypes, what makes us uncomfortable, what bias we may have before entering the classroom. Teachers and teacher educators need to develop self-awareness and reflect on their own bias, as they will have a great impact on the students that enter their classrooms. This requires learning to run a reflective practice (Wolpert, 2003.) This reflective thought process will help teachers as they make decisions within the classroom “moment-to-moment” (Jacobson, 2003.) Decades ago, even Dewey addressed the importance of reflection by stating “active, persistent and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds that support it and the further conclusions to which it tends” (Dewey, 1933.) It is necessary to look within ourselves and continuously question our practices.

Teachers need to address not only their own feelings but also how they are adapting their classroom and lessons to be inclusive of its students (Wolpert, 2003.) Children learn from their environment and absorb these messages, “unless those biases and behaviors are challenged. Children need help in recognizing and challenging bias rather than internalizing it.” (Wolpert, 2003.) Anti-bias education on its own cannot eradicate bias or prejudice in a society. As

discussed there are so many layers of bias that exist both inside and outside of the classroom.

However, when provided with this early, formal and intentional education Wolpert (2003) lays out potential positive outcomes:

Children:

- Take pride in who they are;
- Show respect for others and the ability to interact with many different perspectives and to solve problems cooperatively and creatively;
- Demonstrate critical thinking skills and the ability to recognize bias and injustice;
- Demonstrate the commitment and ability to act against bias and injustice individually and in cooperation with others.

In *Curriculum as Window & Mirror*, Emily Style summarizes the importance of this intentional education by expressing the need for curriculum to “reflect and reveal most accurately both a multicultural world and the student herself or himself... to look through window frames in order to see the realities of others and into mirrors in order to see her/his own reality reflected.” (Styles, 1988.) This knowledge helps the student to understand him/her self better as well as the interrelatedness with the world. The idea behind anti-bias education and curriculum in the classroom is that teachers ‘intentionally’ teach children accepting responses towards others “whatever their unique human qualities” (Gartell, 2012.) This includes modeling responses to “children and families who are vulnerable for stigma (negative social separation from the group) and not remaining silent in the face of “oppressive interactions out of fear of not saying the right thing” (Gartell, 2012.) This once again brings up the importance of pre-service work, support groups, discussion and role-play.

Despite many of the positive outcomes, many teachers feel unprepared or uncomfortable, even inadequate when faced with teaching a multi-cultural or anti-bias curriculum. “Most teachers admit they have had little or no training at all to work with culturally diverse children and lack the necessary pedagogical strategies to enable them to obtain good results with these students.” (Aguado, Ballesteros & Malik, 2003.) Without training and without strategies it is not only difficult to obtain good results it is difficult to even recognize the moments that require additional attention.

Observations - Results and Discussion

When analyzing the data based on research about the everyday moments in preschool classrooms when children begin to notice similarities and differences three main themes emerged very similar to my findings in the literature review. As I touched on above, around, ages 3 to 5 children are actively noticing and commenting on similarities and differences within the preschool classroom. Second, for varied reasons teachers have not introduced formal anti-bias curriculum into the classrooms and instead address these incidents as they occur if they are caught. Third, it is crucial to prepare for these everyday occurrences when children notice, when they ask questions and comment about differences.

Young Children Comment on Differences.

Around age three to five young children are actively noticing and commenting on similarities and differences within the preschool classroom. These comments whether intentional or unintentional can reflect and communicate bias. By the time children are three they have already begun to notice and comment on racial and gender differences, they begin to ask questions about their personal attributes (race, language, gender and physical disabilities) (Derman-Sparks & Edwards, 2010.) By four, they may also become aware of economic class

and familial structure and by five they are well into the process of constructing ideas about themselves and others. (Derman-Sparks & Edwards, 2010.) This academic research was supported by comments from teachers of Preschool age students as they discussed children noticing many different types of similarities and differences.

Tara, a founder and teacher at a private preschool in Manhattan, noticed that the four to five year old children are actively identifying what is different. In her interview she spoke about children in the classroom beginning to notice differences, usually led by one child and then rubbing off on each other. A child in the class decides that pink paper is for girls and then all the girls begin to use pink. “All differences get brought up, it’s not just race, it’s gender, it could be food, and it could be anything.”

Tara provided an example of a child in her classroom noticing and commenting on another child’s food. “You eat apples, ick I hate apples, they are disgusting.” When noticing gender a child in her school said, “pink paper is for girls and blue paper is for boys.” A boy said, “For Halloween, I am Spiderman” and assumed “You are Abby Cadabby” to a female student. When considering the apple incident and the gender related incident it is important to highlight some noticing of differences are related to a larger societal pattern of discrimination whereas others (like a dislike of apples) do not.

Becky, a teacher at a private inclusive preschool in Manhattan, stated that in her classroom of three and four year olds, children notice even slight differences by early in the school year. They point out physical differences such as size and height but also other differences such as speech articulation and behavior. She believes the curiosity of similar and different “comes naturally at this age.”

Becky provided an example of children in her classroom commenting on height differences after a measuring activity. Each child's height was measured and charted "Look how tall he is!" "Look how short he is!" She gave examples of children commenting on speech articulation differences "why does so-an-so talk like a baby?" She provided examples of children noticing physical differences "why does she wear glasses?" They pick up on child that behaves differently and ask questions about why.

In observing a four-year-old child at her home, I observed Lucy¹ playing with a toddler, Ben². She watched him eat and then asked, "Why doesn't he eat with a fork like me? Look, he dropped his pancake?" Later during play, she noticed differences in size "I am a big girl, look, I am so big. He is not big." She asked questions to make comparisons between herself and Ben. "Does he sleep in a bed? I do. Tonight I am having a sleepover with my Mommy." "My sister slept in her crib too!" While helping with a diaper change she exclaimed, "He has a peanut! I have a vagina! Yes, I am a girl. I have a vagina. Do you have a vagina?" Holding a large package she said "this is too heavy for Ben but I am big it is not heavy." She applied her understanding of big and small to the relationship between the package and the children. She was constructing ideas about herself and others, what it means to be different.

In observing a classroom of three and four year olds, specifically and boy and girl beginning dramatic play with dolls on the rug, gender roles were played out without the supervision of a teacher. The female student selected a small female doll "Here's my daughter!" The male child collected male figurines dressed in uniform "Police and one fireman!" "ROAR" as he stomps his dolls across the roof of the house. He would not engage in the 'family' story line the female student's play had suggested. Later conflicts arose as another female child joined

¹ Pseudonym used.

² Pseudonym used.

the play. There were arguments over the use of toys, space and play themes. Much of this conflict went unnoticed as teachers were occupied in other areas of the classroom.

The data suggests that there are moments, whether observed by adults or not that children of this age range are noticing, commenting, questioning and even enacting differences. The comments may be hurtful to other students.

Preparation is Key

In the first years that children notice similarities and differences, for varied reasons teachers have not introduced formal anti-bias curriculum into the classroom and instead address these incidents as they occur (if they are caught.) It is crucial to prepare for these everyday occurrences when children notice, question and comment about differences. Rather than building explicit anti-bias teaching into the curriculum, Tara chose to work it into everything they do. The philosophy of the school is that children should be able to achieve independence and an understanding that they are a part of a larger world. She mentioned they are “child-centered” which plays into the way teachers respond to children as they comment on differences. They introduce concepts at the beginning of the year, which are reiterated and referenced over and over as a set of guidelines on how to treat “friends.” These guidelines include respect of others, listening to each other, tolerance, respect of differences and being open. She works to “concretize” these abstract concepts by modeling behavior, asking open-ended questions and setting the initial guidelines to be referenced.

As children make comments about similarities and differences, Tara notes that they ask questions of the teachers and of other students. While religion is not directly addressed at school sometimes children bring it up or have questions. “A child came into our class and for show-and-tell he shared a toy he got from Santa. A little girl asked, “Who is Santa?” He said, “You

know, the Christmas guy that gives you toys.” Tara decided they had to address that. In following with their child-centered philosophy they asked the girl “When do you get presents?” The child responded “My Birthday!” “And when else?” the teacher asked. “Hanukkah!” “Oh, who brings the toys? You get toys at Hanukah and Kieran³ gets toys at Christmas” Tara explained they are meeting the child where he or she is and using that to scaffold to their larger objectives which includes delivering curriculum and providing and enriching environment. This includes the teaching of acceptance of differences.

When children make potentially hurtful comments the teachers at Tara’s school tend to use language such as “We don’t say that” and “How do you think that makes her feel?” She believes at this age they are starting to understand empathy. Becky had a similar response when asked about inappropriate comments from children. When asked, “why is he speaking like a baby?” she responds, “Everyone speaks differently and we don’t want to make our friends feel badly.” For questions about children misbehaving she explains, “He is still learning how to be a part of the class and every once in a while you may have to remind him of the right thing to do.”

During the first weeks of class, Becky establishes classroom rules. They spend a lot of time going over the rules and reminding children in the everyday moments that they interact with each other. They have a bead jar to reward kind behavior but she admits “they definitely test the rules at this age.” Kind behavior to others is encouraged, excluding or discriminating against peers not rewarded.

When Lucy, the four-year-old female asked about Ben’s “peanut” (penis) the response from the caregiver was “Yes, Ben is a boy and he has a penis. Do you have a penis? You are a girl you have a vagina.” It was a simple and factual response that seemed to satisfy the

³ Pseudonym used.

momentary curiosity. Becky also believes that “it doesn’t have to be as complicated as adults make it.” Simple, factual language can be used to respond to questions. She also redirects children to ask each other “Why don’t you ask her why she wears glasses?”

The entire year in Becky’s classroom is called “About Me.” Children study themselves and naturally comparisons with others arise. She does not specifically introduce anti-bias education. Instead she provides language and a framework for understanding difference as a matter of fact rather than of shame as they learn and make comparisons. During a study of skin color they mix paints to match their skin. Becky tells the children “We all have different skin color but we all have hands!” In Becky’s classroom, it is ok to be different. There are activities specifically designed to evoke the comments about other children. They trace bodies, look at their peers and notice features to draw on the tracings. Teachers are there to ask open-ended questions and guide the activity. It gives children practice with descriptive rather than judgmental language about different features and characteristics they might notice.

When asked how the classroom is set up to promote successful interactions when the teacher is not available, Tara mentioned many actions they take. As referenced above, they use concrete language and open-ended questions with students. They ask how other people might feel and point out the ways everyone does things differently. She diversifies the classroom materials and provides representation of different skin colors, hair, glasses and “all sorts of diversity.” The baby dolls are diverse and Tara believes it is helpful for children to see themselves represented in the classroom. “It’s very powerful and validates for the children and others in the classroom community” (sic)

Data gathered during the observation of the classroom did not completely align with Becky’s description. A student teacher, interrupting a conflict over dolls redirected the play and

made closed-ended statements and questions rather than working with the children to make the play inclusive of others. The research also suggests that the children's behavior in school can be influenced by their home life (ex. enacting scenes from home.) For this reason, it is important to share the rules or philosophy of the school in particular how teachers will be responding to moments when children begin to notice differences. Support from families and a consistent is a benefit to the overall goal.

Families Play an Important Role.

Families play an important role in a child's understanding of self and others. The influence and participation of families were considered in the classrooms. Within Tara's school, children came into show-n-tell with stories and presents from Santa. In Becky's classroom, a child with glasses utilized language modeled by her mother to answer a question about difference. "I need glasses to help me see better."

Tara discussed the link between home and school. In particular she mentions a time when a particular holiday was taught by one of the parents. She retained approval from the other parents and offered opportunities for them to come in and share details of their own celebrations. In addition to listening to family's stories and perspectives in order to understand the community Tara also works with them to share the school's philosophy. She states "If a child says something we have a real issue with we will bring the family in on the conversation and try to work with them to understand bias is not ok or forcing a preference, being mean is not ok." She has one child that needed to "be kinder." She learned that at home the child yelled at her mother "I WANT OJ!" Tara believed this tied into her actions within the classroom and asked the mother to redirect at home.

The family influence was observed in the classroom with three and four-year olds as they played with the dollhouse. A female child chose a small doll as her daughter. A female student, Belle⁴ enacts a scene in which she lays the doll down in the bed, provides her with a blanket and pillow and tucks her into bed. She demonstrated the path from home to school and the influence familiar behavior can have on play and interaction with others.

The data gathered reflects an influence from outside of the classroom. For young children family plays a powerful role in the child's understanding of his/her world. These influences may include familial biases that can arise within the classroom community.

After observing the classrooms, I looked back at current research to synthesize my findings. My findings from current literature indicate that there is a definitive age-range when children notice and comment on differences. During this time it is possible for children to develop pre-prejudice. In my own research, I sought out classrooms that specifically taught children in this range (birth to five years old.) I did not witness any overt acts of prejudice. However, I did observe several situations in which children were thinking about social categories of similarity and difference. Research from the literature also indicates that bias exists in many forms. It is built into the system, in the materials in our classrooms, in our community and children at this age are actively absorbing these messages. Within the classroom, children comments on what gender-roles "should be." For example girls "should use pink paper." Children that are different (ex. a girl using blue paper) may receive messages about her self-worth that are negative. In order to address these biases, research indicates that teachers need personal reflection and an explicit, concrete curriculum is necessary. While the teachers that I talked to did demonstrate awareness of the importance of guiding children toward accepting

⁴ Pseudonym used.

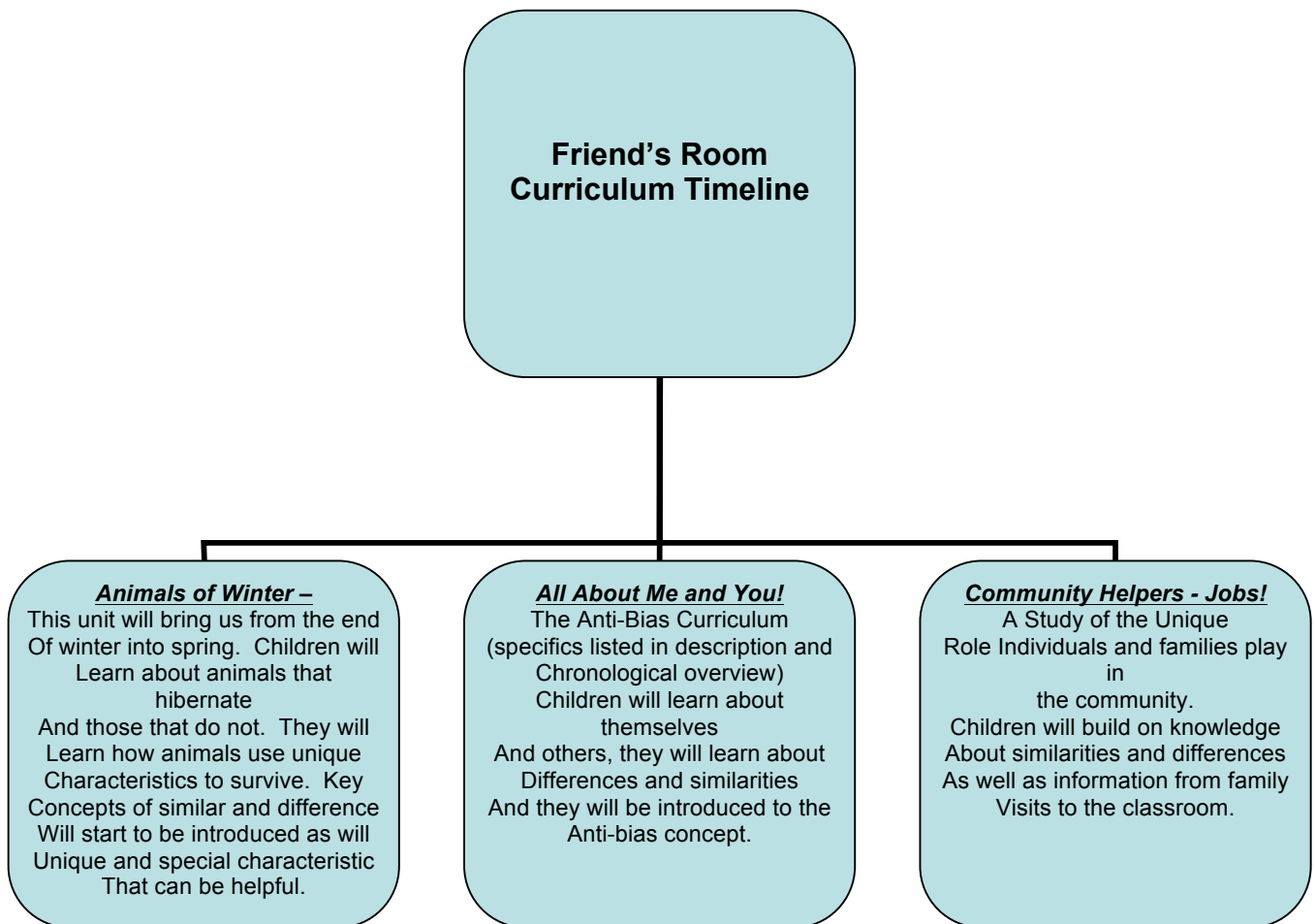
others, their classrooms did not have an explicit, anti-bias curriculum. General rules of behavior were established at the beginning of the year and incidents of statements were addressed as they arose, if they are caught. Unfortunately, unless the statements are caught and addressed children absorb the messages. In my observations, I also noticed situations in which behavior, which relied on stereotypical understandings of gender roles, was evident. This may be an indication that more explicit curriculum teaching anti-bias principles are necessary. Even when the statements that are framed as judgmental are addressed, without explicit, anti-bias education children are not taught implicitly taught how to recognize and challenge bias on their own. As children become more independent within the classroom, these biases may go unheard by adults. All children should feel welcomed within the walls of the classroom and valuable in their ability to succeed and contribute.

Recommendations

After concluding that explicit anti-bias education is critical within the classroom, teachers are faced with the task of creating and implementing a new curriculum. In order to address this task, the following is a six-week, anti-bias preschool curriculum.

Curriculum

Timeline.



Description of Unit

Anti-bias is an extremely delicate subject to broach with children as teachers enter the classroom with their own hesitations and each family may have their own feelings on the topic. However, even infants and toddlers have been shown to have an awareness of skin color (Derman-Sparks & Edwards, 2010.). Children are naturally curious and begin to inquire about similarities and differences. As discussed, in these early stages, there is a space to create a loving respectful classroom environment and to arm children with tools needed as they head out into the world.

Specifically in the unit, children will work on learning all about themselves. They will measure themselves, trace themselves on paper and create big life-size pictures of themselves. They will use realistic colors to draw hair, eyes, skin, and so on. I assume a follow up to these lessons would be the comparison between each other's skin, hair color and so on. We will first compare things we notice physically (like hair color.) We will then shift the discussion to how we are the same and different at home. We will welcome each student's family into the class with a special food and culturally related story. In these lessons we will work with students to identify things that are similar and different in their families, cultures, gender and so on. Activities such as photographs from home, experiences with language, introduction to foods, music and important people in the community will be included. Students will travel into the neighborhood to look for evidence of the foods and stories we have been exposed to through children's sharing. In this respect, we can make the learning relevant and connected to the children's lives. We can look at the restaurants they dine at with their families, as well as other community locations that are important to individual children. Then we will return to the classroom to explore and re-create our experiences. Through readings, we will explore the

impact of bias against differences and through dramatic play we will address feelings that surface and tools to combat bias. We will explore the unique and special gifts we all have. Through these gifts children learn how we can work together to make the world a better place and how we can appreciate each other's differences or gifts. Finally, we will share all of our work with our families and friends before moving onto a study of community helpers.

Chronological Overview

I. Week One – Paper Doll ‘Me’

Launch –

Upon the launch of this new unit, children will be directed back into the classroom and to take a seat on the rug. They will be greeted by two life size paper cutouts of their teachers, sitting at the head of the circle. The children will be excited. Some will want to touch the paper dolls or play with them. Once settled, the teacher and assistant teacher will ask questions about what the children notice. Together they will figure out these are drawings of their teachers. They will talk about what they notice. In this first conversation, teachers will have a chance to observe and assess what children already know about bodies, body parts and if they are picking up on similarities and differences. The teachers will finish the discussion by announcing that the children will start making paper dolls of them. The circle concludes with an “About Me” story and children are subsequently excused to other activities.

Key Concepts – The key concepts of this unit are similarities and differences. Similarities refer to aspects of all of us that are the same. For children it can be as simple as hair color or eye color. On a broader theme, even though we look different we can have the same wishes, desires or feelings. Differences refer to the variation of people in our world.

Goals - “Children will have accurate information about and feel comfortable with their physical characteristics linked to racial identity” (Derman-Sparks & Edwards, 2010.)

Main Activity –

This week the children will be split into smaller groups and will work on their paper ‘me’ dolls. First they will lie down on paper they select (skin tone) and the teacher will trace their body. Teachers will cut out the tracings. Children will use a mirror to talk about what they notice about themselves. They will use this knowledge to collage their features onto the cutout. Yarn, fabric, paints, markers, crayons, google eyes and more will be available. This will take place over the course of the week as children first work on the head and hair, then the body and clothes.

Other Activities –There will be books available on the shelf in the quiet reading area such as Black is Brown is Tan by Leo Leoni and Hair by Pelitos (a resource list is included.) As the class gets to know their bodies, we will sing songs like the Hokey Pokey to solidify our knowledge. To strengthen their knowledge of self, children will be dismissed during transitions by hair color, eye color or other aspects we discussed.

II. Week Two – ‘Paper Doll ‘Me’ and Paper Doll ‘You’

Key Concepts – This is a continuation of similarities and differences as mentioned in week one. In a diverse classroom setting children are exposed to both similar looking and different looking peers.

Goals - “Children will have accurate information about, and respect for, each other’s individual physical characteristics; and they will appreciate their shared human physical characteristics”

(Derman-Sparks & Edwards, 2010.)

Main Activity –

The children will enter the classroom this week to find their dolls have been hung, holding hands with each other all the way around the classroom. In small groups children will take a paper doll ‘safari’ with their teacher. They will have a camera and the teacher will have a notebook to capture comments. Students will talk about what they notice about all the different dolls. Through teacher prompting and on their own, children will begin to discuss how others are similar or different than their own doll. When the safari is complete, children will have the chance to draw or paint. Prompts will be given in discussion about capturing thoughts or ideas they had on the safari.

Other Activities –

Children will graph eye color and hair color. This may spark discussions about same and different. It will also provide an opportunity to count and learn to graph. Children will work with teachers to measure their height. The pictures taken on safari will be posted on a large bulletin board. Children will be able to play an “I Spy” game, matching cut out body parts (arms, legs, heads) to pictures of their friend’s dolls. We will read ‘The Mixed-up Chameleon’ and ‘The Churkendoose’ to discourage the practice of trying to be like others rather than ourselves.

As children become more aware, they may notice inequities in classroom materials. In the best-case scenario, teachers should provide materials that represent many different families and cultures. Teachers should be prepared to acknowledge children’s comments (ex “why are all the dolls white?”) and work with the school or families to come up with a plan of action. As children compare, teachers need to be aware of hurtful comments or comparisons and reiterate all skin colors are good or beautiful, that we like you just the way you are as does your adults (ex

mommy, daddy.) Teacher's needed to prepare for exploration of comments from children. A child could voice dislike for their skin color or want to paint an inaccurate color.

III. Week Three – Our Paper Doll Gifts

Key Concepts – There are three key concepts for this lesson: tradition, values and interdependence. Tradition refers to groups (in our case children and their families) and the way they deal with issues, their values and their attitudes. Values refer to items or characteristics that are deemed important. Children will share both family traditions and values. From this we will work to demonstrate interdependence. That we all need each other and can all have an impact on each other. This will be further demonstrated in lesson plan three.

Goals - “Children will feel positive, but not superior, about their racial identity” (Derman-Sparks & Edwards, 2010.)

Main Activity –

This week, upon entering the classroom, the teacher's paper dolls will have a wrapped gift glued to their paper hands. During circle time, the teacher will share something that makes her/him special. An example would be playing piano, speaking another language or something unique about culture or heritage. She will write a word representing the concept (ex. piano, Spanish) and slip the paper into her respective gift box. A few children each day will be asked to ‘show and tell’ something special. Families will be made aware of this on the preceding Friday so they have time to prepare. Families will be welcomed into the classroom, siblings, cultural food, music, dance, clothing are all part of this discussion. One-by-one as children share the teacher will capture the special gift and then write it on a paper. The child will be able to place it

in his/her gift box on the paper doll. Pictures will be taken of the child and their show and tell item.

Other Activities –

Teachers will collect all the pictures of the children and their show and tell items (or persons) and create a classroom book called “Our Gifts – What Makes Us Special!” The children’s comments about their show and tell items will be documented under their pictures. Artifacts from the family visits will be permanently placed into their respective areas in the classroom. Culturally specific clothing and cookware will go into the dramatic play area. Foods and snacks will be tasted and brought into the rotation (if feasible.) Children will be able to play with and play out new things they learn. Culture runs much deeper than just foods and clothing, with family’s visits hopefully more will be revealed such as language, values, religion, gender roles and so on.

IV. Week Four – Anti-Bias Week

Key Concepts – For this week, key concepts are multiculturalism and conflict resolution.

Children have learned and acknowledged differences representative of a multicultural classroom. They look at physical differences as well as differences in values and traditions. They will learn about conflict resolution specifically tools to use when they are mistreated, see others mistreated, or recognize bias.

Goals - “Children will demonstrate appropriate skills for identifying and challenging misinformation and stereotypical ideas about “race” (Derman-Sparks & Edwards, 2010.)

Main Activities –

The teachers will read a book called ‘No Dogs Allowed.’ The book (only pictures no words) is about a restaurant that disallows dogs, then cats, and then rabbits and so on. Teachers

can discuss with the children imaginary reasons why the owner decided not to let the dogs in. Perhaps he thought the dog would jump on the table or chew on the leg of the chair. Children will be able to discuss that “it’s silly” and how the owner might miss out on some friendly dogs by thinking they all jump or chew. In the story, the pet owners and pets gather elsewhere and have a great time. Eventually, they are all allowed into the restaurant. Teacher’s can ask questions to the children to highlight the importance of standing up for oneself when faced with practices that are unfair. “What if your were the dog? What would you do?” “How could the dog have let the restaurant owner know he was being unfair?”

During the week, puppets representing the characters will be placed in the dramatic play area with the book. Children will be able to play out the characters as they are turned away. Teachers will ask children about how the dog might feel if he was not allowed in. They will ask how do you think this might feel if it happened to you. (A heavy question for such a young child) Teachers will help children come up with a plan of action with the puppets. Solutions could be to talk to the restaurant owner, to eat somewhere else, or to ask a friend to help. This is an extremely delicate and touchy subject; teachers should be aware of their own feelings and be hyper-vigilant to student’s feelings, comments and conversations. Children tend to notices a large variety of things from readings and questions. They might be concerned for the feelings of the dog, they might come up with solutions or they might discuss a puppy they saw on the way to school!

Other Activities –

We will read other books ‘Being Wendy’ and ‘The Sneetches’ to reiterate the trouble and hurt feelings associated with bias. Teachers will take pictures of children making faces to represent how they might feel if they were not allow into the restaurant and how they would feel

after a resolution had occurred. Simple paper charts displaying these feelings will be displayed around the room.

V. Week Five – Field Trip – Addressing an Unjust Situation

Key Concepts – Can use our differences and unique gifts to work together to make the world a better place.

Main Activities –

This week coincides with Earth Day. Now that children have learned to respect and value differences and similarities we will figure out how we can each use our gifts and our bodies to work together to help the earth. We will take a field trip to a small park near the school for “clean up.” Children will be broken into small groups by task: clean up crew, cooking crew, set up crew, photographers and so on. When we return, we will discuss the trip. We will talk about all the things that would not happen if there weren’t all sorts of different people in the world (this is a prelude to the coming unit on jobs.) We will talk about each of the teams and how they helped.

Other Activities –

The teachers will create a slideshow to view on the smart board in the classroom. Children will be able to see each of the special teams doing their tasks. They will see before and after pictures of the park, the table with food and more. We will read books and sing songs relevant to earth day. Children will take another safari around the classroom and the school looking for ways to save water, recycle or help the earth.

VI. Week Six – Culmination

Key Concepts and Goals –

“Children will develop non-biased responses to racial differences and will demonstrate beginning skills for interrupting biased behaviors and for creating a fair classroom environment.”

Main Activity –

This week we will work on preparing our classroom for a family visit. Families will come share in the wrap up of this unit and the launch into our jobs unit. Families will be asked to bring in foods representative of their cultures. Children’s pictures and paper dolls with presents will all be on display. Children will be able to share with their parents all about the work. There will be graphs showing similarities and differences will be posted and a bulletin board complete with photos of our work in class and in the park will be displayed.

Other Activities –

After learned about how it may feel to be treated differently and after learning about how each of us has a gift and we can all work together, children will work to create classroom rules for ‘Me’ and for ‘You.’

Integrated Subjects Graphic



Lesson Plan One

1.) Name of Lesson/Activity – All About Me!

2.) Goal and Objective of Lesson –

Key Concept – The key concepts of this unit are similarities and differences. Similarities refer to aspects of all of us that are the same. For children it can be as simple as hair color or eye color. On a broader theme, even though we look different we can have the same wishes, desires or feelings. Differences refer to the variation of people in our world.

Objectives and Goals - Children will learn how to notice unique aspects of themselves by noticing personal characteristics. Children will learn how to contrast/compare their personal qualities with the idea of appreciation of the diversity of their peers in the classroom.

“Children will have accurate information about and feel comfortable with their physical characteristics linked to racial identity” (Derman-Sparks & Edwards, 2010.)

3.) Materials Needed for Lesson –

- Large rolls of paper in various shades (i.e. skin tones.)
- Black permanent marker to trace children’s body
- Multi-cultural paints and crayons
- Fabrics and yarn
- A Mirror
- Paper for graphs

4.) Procedure – We will start by reading a story about a child’s features. After the story, children will split into small groups. They will look in the mirror and discuss what they notice about their physical characteristics with teacher prompts and questions (below.)

Children will then select paper (multi-cultural paper) and lay down on the paper.

Teachers will trace the child’s body and cut out the shape. Children will revisit the mirror to study features such as skin tone, eye color, hair etc. They will select materials

and collage/draw themselves on the paper. Teachers will graph hair color and begin to discuss with children similarities and differences.

Teacher Questions and Prompts During Activity:

- Let's work together to select a paper to use. Would you like to look in the mirror and then select a paper that looks like you?
- What else do you notice about yourself in the mirror? What color are your eyes? What color is your hair? Is it long or short? Tell me what else you notice about yourself.
- Where shall we put your name of this graph about hair color? How many children have the same color hair as you? Let's count. How many children have different color hair? Let's count together.
- You noticed you had ___ eyes and ___ hair. Which materials would you like to use to make yourself?

Possible Children's Questions During Activity:

- How do I know what paper to choose?
- Why is her hair different than mine?
- Why don't you have brown eyes?
- How many people are like me?
- Why is he different than me?

5.) Adaptions –

This adaption is specifically for a child in class that has a limited vocabulary and limited attention span. The teachers will trace L. and then allow him to select another activity while they cut out his body. Materials for eyes and hair will be pre-cut and prepared for application. When asking about hair color and eye color L. will be given choices (ex. are your eyes brown or purple? with visuals. Is your hair long (with gestures) or short?) Rather than finding children with similar and different hair colors L. will be asked if the teacher has brown hair. The teacher will stress “the same!” or “different.” L. will then be asked about another teacher and if the color is same or different.

6.) Assessment/Evaluation –

By the completion of this lesson, students will be able to describe characteristics of self and compare these characteristics with those in the classroom community. Students will be able

to create a visual representation of self. Children will be able to discuss similarities and differences of characters in the books read to compliment the lesson.

Children's learning will be assessed as an ongoing part of this lesson. During the initial exercise of looking the mirror children will be asked to verbally express what they notice about themselves. In order to assess their understanding of similarities and differences, teachers will graph hair color and discuss with children how many are the same and how they differ. Students will be asked to identify one child with the same color hair and one child with different color hair.

7.) Extensions:

Height Wall: We can measure and mark children and teacher's height on the wall. We can include some very tall adults and perhaps some very small classroom pets (ex. turtle.)

Charts: In addition to the hair color chart, we can graph eye color and height.

Drawings: Children can make drawings or collages of themselves and friends, taking time to include characteristics we discussed.

8.) Standards Addressed – Since the school will eventually be based in New Jersey I have referenced the New Jersey Department of Educations Standards as referenced in 'Preschool Teaching & Learning Expectation: Standards of Quality.' This lesson addresses "Expectation 1: Children identify unique characteristics of themselves and others."

Lesson Plan Two

1.) Name of Lesson/Activity –Our Paper Doll Gifts

2.) Goal and Objective of Lesson –.

Key Concept – There are three key concepts for this lesson: tradition, values and interdependence. Tradition refers to groups (in our case children and their families) and the way they deal with issues, their values and their attitudes. Values refer to items or characteristics that are deemed important. Children will share both family traditions and values. From this we will work to demonstrate interdependence. We all need each other and can all have an impact on each other. This will be further demonstrated in lesson plan three.

Goals and Objectives: “Children will feel positive, but not superior, about their racial identity” (Derman-Sparks & Edwards, 2010.)

3.) Materials Needed for Lesson –

- Wrapped gift boxes with slit in the top
- Tape or staples to secure boxes to dolls
- Paper and pen to capture “gift comments”
- Family consent to share or visit
- Family artifacts for the classroom
- Camera
- Bulletin board

4.) Procedure –

This week, upon entering the classroom, the teacher’s paper dolls will have a wrapped gift glued to their paper hands. In order to model the “gift sharing” the teacher will share something that makes her/him special at the class circle time. My share for the class will be that I learned how to make chicken soup that helps when people are not feeling well. I will share that the recipe has been passed from great-grandma, to grandma, to mom to me. At snack, we will taste the soup. I will write S-O-U-P on a paper and show the children that I have placed the word in the gift box. This is my special gift. The co-teacher will also share.

His/her share will be different in order to represent other ideas and perhaps spark different thinking in the children. A few children each day will be asked to 'show and tell' something special. As each child shares, a wrapped gift box will be placed (glued) in the hands of each paper child. Families will be made aware of this on the preceding Friday so they have time to prepare. Families will be welcome into the classroom and siblings, cultural food, music, dances, clothing are all part of this discussion. One-by-one as children share the teacher will capture the special gift, write it on a paper and the child will be able to place it in his/her gift box on the paper doll. Pictures will be taken of the child and their show and tell item.

Teacher Questions and Prompts During Activity:

- Let's work together to think of special things to share from home.
- Tell us about some of the things your family does at mealtime, at bedtime, in the morning, on the weekend? Try to be careful not to give specific prompts so as to leave the activity open-ended for children.
- What did you notice about _____ gift? How can we use this in the classroom?
- Let's draw a picture about _____ gift and how we can use it.

Possible Children's Questions During Activity:

- What if I don't have a gift?
- What if I am not special?
- Why does his food smell different?
- Why does his family look/eat/sing/read/speak different than mine?
- How can I use his/her gift?

5.) Adaptions –

This adaption is for a female child in the class that is an English Language Learner with significant delays in many of the developmental domains. Her receptive language is broader than her expressive skill however she needs assistance in both areas. She struggles to maintain focus for long periods of time. During the 'show and tell' of other children, teachers will have graphic representations or pictures available if material items are not. As much as possible, all children (in particular this child) will be encourage to use all their senses to experience the gifts (smelling, tasting, feeling, listening and so on.) Teachers will provide

prompts in the dramatic play area and model use of new family artifacts. Teachers will provide language for engaging in play with other children using these artifacts.

The teachers can work with this student's mother (who is very involved with her daughter's education) to come in for the show and tell. Mom can do the telling and the student can "show." She can walk around class and allow each child to touch or taste her gift. Mom and teachers can also provide yes or no questions and questions for which she is capable of responding.

6.) Assessment/Evaluation –

Through naturalistic observation teachers will observe children's responses to new concepts, food, toys and clothing. Children's drawings and comments on their artwork will be used as a way to evaluate their grasp of these concepts. Children's time in the dramatic play area will also be observed in order to assess the language around their own culture and the cultures of others.

7.) Extensions –

There will be a classroom book documenting the exciting visits and show and tell objects from the week. Children will be able to draw about their show and tell and dictate or (using invented spelling") write. Teachers will collect all the pictures of the children and their show and tell items (or persons) and create a classroom book called "Our Gifts – What Makes Us Special!" Artifacts from the family visits will be permanently placed into their respective areas in the classroom. Culturally specific clothing and cookware will go into the dramatic play area. Foods and snacks will be tasted and brought into the rotation (if feasible.)

Children will be able to play with and play out new things they learn.

8.) Standards Addressed – Since the school will eventually be based in New Jersey I have referenced the New Jersey Department of Educations Standards as referenced in

‘Preschool Teaching & Learning Expectation: Standards of Quality.’ This lesson addresses “Expectation 2: Children communicate about their family, family roles and family traditions” and “Expectation 3: Children become contributing members of the classroom community.”

Lesson Plan Three

1.) Name of Lesson/Activity – Using ALL of our gifts together to make the world a better place!

2.) Goal and Objective of Lesson –.

Key Concepts – The goal for this lesson is also interdependency and interconnectedness.

Children will understand how the acts of others can impact our world (littering in the park.)

Children will learn how to use their gifts to positively impact the world and others.

Goals and Objectives - Materials Needed for Lesson –

- Drawing utensils and paper
- Individualized ‘trip sheets’ made on poster board with graphic representations of tasks
- Clipboards
- Camera
- Food and serving ware
- Trash bags and latex or non latex gloves
- Chaperones

3.) Procedure –

For the field trip, students will be able to “use their gifts” to help the world. We will learn that garbage can pollute our park and make it dirty and dangerous to play. We will discuss our gifts and think about how we can use them to help the park. Teachers will gather student ideas and create work groups. Students will break into one of three groups: cleanup crew, photographers or the food and beverage servers. Other groups are possible depending on the ideas presented by the children. Children will travel with teachers and chaperones to our

local park for a Park Clean Up. They will work on their tasks (picking up trash, preparing a snack, documenting the work through photographs.)

Teacher Questions and Prompts During Activity:

- Why is there garbage in our park?
- Can we play if there is garbage in our way?
- What will the animals do if there is garbage in their homes?
- Now that we have learned all about our gifts. Let's think of ways we can use them together to help save our park.
- What did you notice while we were working in the park?
- What did you notice about the work the _____ (photographers, the servers, and the cleanup crew) did?
- What if it was just you working? How would everything else get done?
- There is a need for ALL of us and ALL of our gifts!

Possible Children's Questions During Activity:

- What if I cannot think of a way to help?
- Why can't I be in a group with my best friend?
- Why do we have to pick up other people's garbage?
- Why isn't she helping?
- Why isn't she talking/sharing?

4.) Adaptions –

This adaption is for a child in the classroom (who does not have an IEP) that frequently falls and bumps into or sits on other students. She tends to collide full force with other students during gross motor play and seems unaware of her strength when playing rough. Travel outside the classroom, crossing busy streets and playing near unfamiliar playground equipment could prove dangerous. So as not to single this child out, teachers and chaperones will all be assigned to one or two students. They will hold hands crossing the street and stay vigilant during our time at the park. This child will be assigned to a work group that allows her freedom to move about without being in close quarters with other. She will still be able to work as a team. During the pre-trip we will talk about being careful around friends that have camera (which might break) and asking adults for help around new playground equipment.

5.) Assessment/Evaluation –

During this activity teachers will be able to assess many of the developmental domains.

Students will need to sit, focus and listen to brief instructions. They will utilize both gross motor skills (during the actual trip) and fine motor skills (during drawing and painting.)

Teachers will use naturalistic observation to observe.

Teachers will also assess and evaluate student's understanding of the concepts presented in the previous weeks through open-ended questions about our gifts, what makes us special and how we can work together. During the discussion of "what if you have to work in the park on your own" teachers will assess student's understanding of self, others and community.

6.) Extensions –

Upon returning to the classroom, students will discuss what they did and how they have helped the earth. They will talk about what would have happened if they were working alone versus working together as a group. Students will be able to take a safari around the classroom and school to look for other ways to help save water, recycle and help the earth. There will be a slideshow of the day and opportunities to draw and play out the field trip.

7.) Standards Addressed – Since the school will eventually be based in New Jersey I have referenced the New Jersey Department of Education's Standards as referenced in 'Preschool Teaching & Learning Expectation: Standards of Quality.' This lesson addresses "Expectation 4: Children demonstrate knowledge of neighborhood and community" and "Expectation 5: Children participate in activities that reflect the cultures within their classroom and their community."

Annotated Bibliography

- 1.) *Amazing Grace* by Mary Hoffman and Caroline Birch (Dial Books for Young Readers, 1991): This is a story about Grace. She wants to be Peter Pan in the class play. The children say she cannot because she is female and Black. In the end, after seeing a Black ballerina, she does play Peter Pan and does an amazing job.
- 2.) *The Sneetches*, Dr. Seuss (Random House, 1961.) This is a story about “sneetches” some with star bellies and some without. They get tricked into trying to get stars or get rid of stars. In the end they learn their lesson to love themselves and others for who they are not what they look like.
- 3.) *No Dogs Allowed*, Linda Ashman, (Sterling Children’s Books, 2011.) In this book a waiter disallows first dogs (and their owners) and then all sorts of other creatures. He ends up with no clients and everyone ends up hungry and thirsty. He eventually opens the restaurant to everyone and they are all happy. There are no words in the book so it allows for made-up dialogue from teachers and children. This is a great way to teach about the impact of bias and possible solutions.
- 4.) *The Mixed Up Chameleon*, Eric Carle (Harper Collins, NY, NY 1975.) This is a book about a chameleon that wants to look like everyone else. He ends up getting mixed up and not being able to do what he needs to survive. He returns to his own form and is much happier that way.
- 5.) *Being Wendy*, Fran Drescher (Grosset & Dunlap, 2011.) Wendy lives in a town in which everyone wears a box with a label on it. The labels are their jobs. Wendy does not want to choose a label. She wants to be free to do as she pleases and change her mind. Wendy does not wear her box and people are upset. Eventually, Wendy and her family move to a new town where no one wears boxes.

6.) *All the Colors of the Earth*, Sheila Hamanaka (Morrow Junior Books, 1994.) This is a poem and a story about how all skin colors are the color of love.

7.) *Black is Brown is Tan*, Arnold Adoff (Harper & Row, NY 2004.) This is a story about a family with different skin colors. The mother is African-American, the father is white and their children are “tan.”

8.) *K is for Kiss Goodnight*, Jill Sardegna (Doubleday, New York, NY 1994.) This is a terrific bedtime or (in-school) naptime story. It is an alphabet book depicting a diverse group of families putting their children to bed.

9.) *What is Beautiful?* Mary Jean Watson Avery (Tricycle Press, Berkeley, CA, 1995.) This book has a mirror at the end to show children their very own beauty!

10.) *Hairs – Pelitos*, Sandra Cisneros (Alfred A. Knopf, NY, 1994.) This story is told by the child. The child describes all the different kinds of hair that people in the family have.

Conclusion

In creating this thesis, I attempted to understand the everyday occurrences of children in the early childhood education setting as they notice similarities and differences, as well as the teachers’ pedagogy around these moments.

The questions asked at the beginning of this project focused on how teachers set-up their classroom for successful interactions between children in the everyday moments when they notice similarities and differences. How do teachers handle comments in these moments? The study aimed to identify an age range in which similarities and differences become a part of children’s conversations. Finally, what is teacher pedagogy around these moments? Is there a specific curriculum, classroom setup, materials or language used? Do teachers feel children leave at the end of the year understanding similarities and differences, bias and tools to interrupt

bias? During interviews and from a review of literature the general consensus was from age 3-5 children begin to notice and comment on similarities and differences. From interviews, teachers addressed comments as they occurred however they did not have formal anti-bias curriculums in the classroom. The teachers set up classroom rules or guidelines which they expected children to follow throughout the year, they concretized abstract concepts like kindness, modeled what they felt was appropriate language and included families when they felt it was needed. With these practices in hand the teachers interviewed did not feel it was necessary to introduce a formal anti-bias curriculum. Both teachers felt as if children had a curiosity and a growing understanding about differences however there was no mention of tools to identify or combat bias.

The intentions described by the teachers I interviewed were to create a classroom with clear guidelines, a secure setting in which all children felt welcome and a classroom in which children understood respect, tolerance and open-mindedness. However, the information gathered from the literature review suggested in order to realize these goals formal anti-bias education must be introduced, as well as teacher support groups, reflection, and time for observation. The discrepancy between the need for formal anti-bias education and actual teacher pedagogy became apparent during the research study. There was not an explicit curriculum related to anti-bias in many of the classrooms I visited.

Without further research, I am unsure why teachers did not directly teach bias in the classroom. Regardless of the reason, the action or inaction has an impact on the classroom and on the students. During interviews teachers did not mention any sort of racial comments or questions the children might have, they paused and seemed to select words carefully when discussing religion. The example given about bias in the classroom centered on food, slight

physical variations like glasses and gender differences. Perhaps these classrooms have not had any moments that needed to be addressed. However, the literature suggests children encounter layers of bias outside of the classroom during these critical years when they formulate self-concept and construct concept of others. The literature also suggests that adults can be hesitant to address certain topics, particularly race. The literature offers many researched solutions and practical ideas to weave anti-bias lessons into the classroom. It is clear, we live in a diverse society and our children will leave the classroom and enter the world. They will witness or fall victim to bias. At these crucial moments as they formulate their understanding that we exist in a world with others, it is key to introduce the concepts of kindness, open-mindedness, empathy. However, such concepts may not be enough. Research suggests the importance of also teaching children that bias exists, that bias can be hurtful and there are tools we can use to interrupt bias. The literature review revealed developmentally appropriate steps, lesson plans, materials and self-reflection questions for teachers. As citizens of a powerful society, we have all been impacted by bias. For this reason, teachers need to spend the time reflecting on their own biases, to discover what words or questions are uncomfortable, and ask why. Role-play and support groups are needed to prepare for common questions that might arise in the classroom and to discuss strategy and teacher pedagogy around new incidents that occur.

The implications to teachers are the same as they have always been. They have a choice to address bias or ignore it. If they pro-actively address bias, teachers are opening the possibility of creating a welcoming, democratic classroom in which children's natural curiosity is a starting point to scaffold more abstract and complex concepts of bias. If they do not address bias, there is a possibility it will exist in the classroom and perhaps fester. The lessons children learn during

these crucial years as they construct their understanding of others will have a lifelong impact.

The implications for the field are broad and require actions are taken outside of the classroom.

Reflection

On September 11, I witnessed the terror and devastation that can be caused by hopelessness, ignorance and fear. As mentioned earlier, I struggled to understand the events and longed to find a way that I could make a difference. I struggled to understand how to reach adults that live a world apart from me. I realized with new vigor that the combination of founding principles and the idea to build an inclusive preschool, I could create a safe and welcoming environment for children to explore and ask questions about differences. These events in my life brought home the urgency of opening the school and making it an open, loving and supportive home during these first magical moments. In working on this paper, I reaffirmed my belief that at this very early age, in the moments when children are developing a sense of self and a sense of others, a safe, supportive environment that provides explicit, anti-bias education can help to make positive life-long impressions. I believe that this is the key to preventing hatred and prejudice.

My intentions were to explore the moments when young children begin to notice similarities and differences and the teacher pedagogy around these moments. I observed children, interviewed teachers and read as much as I could on the subject. I realized along the way, as a career changer, I had gaps in my own knowledge, lack of experience and fears to address and overcome. This was as much a personal journey as it was a means to create a platform to teach and train others. My hope in researching this topic was also to create a resource that teachers could use to guide them through these delicate moments. I realized in doing the research that I really needed this information personally to map the way between my intentions and the bricks

and mortar realization of my dream to open an inclusive Preschool. It takes personal reflection, role-playing, the support of professionals and practice to gain comfort in these moments. The alternative, ignoring any bias that might arise, I have learned carries a high cost.

In doing the research, I sought to understand both academically and practically the development of children, specifically their development of sense of self, concept of others and the values they place on both. In finding out this developmental range, it opened up the possibility to explore how children express curiosity, how teachers handle remarks and what research has suggested.

I was seeking an answer. What is the best way to respond? How do we answer, “Why does he have a wheelchair?” Not just answer but create a space where asking such questions is ok and children are empowered, confident and armed with the tools to answer. What materials should the classroom have? When exactly should it be presented to children? Anti-bias education provides many of the practical ideas for the classroom, research on benefits and even work for teachers to become more competent. However, in meeting teachers and students, I also learned that there would never be just one answer to my questions. Children develop on a continuum when they learn to read and the same is true for developing sense of self and others. As a teacher, I will always need to observe and reflect on my classroom and ask myself “how is this classroom inclusive of *all* students?” The answer will be different, year-by-year, student-by-student, and family-by-family. In following with my own teaching philosophy, my understanding of anti-bias will manifest itself in the classroom in a way that its born from the children’s own curiosities. I will meet them at those moments and be available to scaffold accepting responses towards others despite similarities or differences. My hopes are to interrupt the cycle of developing “pre-prejudice, absorbing negative attitudes, misinformation and

stereotypes about various aspects of human diversity.” (Derman-Sparks & Edwards, 2010.)

Instead, I wish to provide children with an open worldview and the idea that we are all valuable, loved, important and capable.

My research of course led to time in the presence of children. I am always challenged by the questions that arise. I was stumped as a pregnant student teacher when ten five years olds surrounded me and asked, “How does your baby come out?” What was surprising to me was just how simplistic and factual the answer can be and how satisfied and child can be with “the doctor will help me when it is time.” In my reading and research on bias and anti-bias education there is so much that can be done to prepare the setting, the materials and the classroom for work with children in a diverse setting. It seemed daunting and overwhelming at first. I came across a page that listed the benefits of anti-bias education and it reminded me of the very reasons I am so passionate about this subject:

- Children take pride in who they are
- Show respect for others and the ability to interact with many different perspectives and to solve problems cooperatively and creatively
- Demonstrate critical thinking skills and the ability to recognize bias and injustice
- Demonstrate the commitment and ability to act against bias and injustice individually and in cooperation with others.

Ratvitch (2010) discusses the trouble with accountability “the problem with using tests to make important decisions about people’s lives is the standardized tests are not precise instruments.” The broader issue is that many decisions about the classroom are being made way outside of the classroom. Unfortunately, these determinations can impact curriculum, funding and even the time in the day. Thankfully, in many early childhood settings there is still some

flexibility left and anti-bias principles and practices can show up in dramatic play, art and story time. It can exist with an activity about cooking or family or math. It is the responsibility of an anti-bias teacher to make the classroom a safe and inclusive space, which may entail some creativity!

Despite witnessing acts of prejudice and hatred in my life, I tend to have a positive and perhaps naïve outlook when it comes to the existence of bias. I have learned over the semesters and in my own research the layers and layers of bias that we are exposed to. Bias exists even in the most sensitive and “politically correct” environments. There are inequalities outside of school such as “economics, basics of life (food, health, housing, racial prejudice) as well as schooling inequalities such as “segregated schools, unequal spending, unequal opportunities to learn, unequal resources and gaps in achievement.” (Oakes & Lipton, 2007.) This is all before the teacher and students enter the classroom for the first day. I realized teachers were uncomfortable and spoke in hushed tones or avoided topics altogether. Their personal experiences impacted their feelings and actions in the classroom. In a graduate school classroom, students may have the chance to learn, discuss and role-play. The same is needed in the professional setting in order to fully introduce anti-bias education.

Although, I understand there is not one answer, I also feel empowered that in my own world and in the lives of my future students I have the possibility of making a difference. We live in an “extraordinarily diverse – racially, ethnically, culturally and linguistically” society and “group of young people who attend U.S. schools.” (Oakes & Lipton, 2007.) I truly believe all of us can benefit from an anti-bias understanding.

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Appendix A – Resources for Teachers: Books for the Classroom

To specifically address developmental variations within an anti-bias classroom, I looked to a few additional resources that I have annotated below.

Derman-Sparks, L., & Olsen Edwards, J. (2010). *Anti-bias education for young children and ourselves*. Washington, DC: National Association for the Education of Young Children.

This book was published by the National Association for the Education of Young Children which is a resource I have turned to frequently for current articles and peer-reviewed journals pertaining to the education of children and current issues. I am particularly interested in Chapter 10, *Learning About Different Abilities and Fairness*. It discusses children's early experiences and understandings of ability and disability as well as how to foster an "anti-bias inclusive community." There are practical classroom strategies offered.

Derman-Sparks, L., & Olsen Edwards, J. (2012). *Education for a civil society: how guidance teaches young children democratic life skills*. Washington, DC: National Association for the Education of Young Children.

This book is another publication from the National Association for Young Children. For the project I will make reference to Chapter 15. This chapter explores the fourth Democratic Life Skill: Accepting Unique Human Qualities in Others. I will use this chapter to identify current research on when and how children begin to interpret human differences. There are also a few practical examples of making an inclusive classroom work.

Giangureco Ph.D, M. (1996). *The stairs don't go anywhere: A disabled person's reflections*

on specialized services and their impact on people with disabilities. Journal of the Council for Exceptional Children Division for Physical and Health Disabilities, Retrieved from <http://www.normemma.com/articles/arstairs.htm>

This peer-reviewed journal article contains an interview with Norman Kunc. Mr. Kunc is a speaker on educational, disability and social justice. He discusses his experience as a child working with special service providers. He also labels two types of providers and the message they sent to him as a child. It will be valuable to understand how this landed on him and the impact it had on his life.

Harris, K., Pretti-Frontczak, K., & Brown, T. (2009). Peer-mediated intervention: An effective, inclusive strategy for all young children. Young Children.

This peer-reviewed journal article offers an in-depth look at a practical strategy for teachers in the inclusive settings for young children, specifically peer-mediated intervention. As my project seeks to understand teacher pedagogy around the moments children notice similarities and differences around developmental variations this article will offer practical examples.

Ray, J., Pewitt, J., & George, S. (2009). Partnering with families of children with special needs. Young Children.

This article from Young Children focuses on the families of children with Developmental Variations. It is important to understand how the family views the child, how they work with their children and what information they can share with educators.

Appendix B – Resource for Teachers: Teacher Training Module for Inclusive Classrooms

In order to specifically address inclusive classrooms and the questions that may arise from students, the data gathered from therapists was used to create the following teacher-training module to be used in inclusive classrooms.



Addressing Variations In the Classroom

Practical ideas for teachers optimize the inclusive preschool classroom in the moments when children begin to notice same and different specifically pertaining to developmental variations.

Addressing Variations

It's your first day of class as a teacher in an inclusive classroom. Upon observing the students you begin to notice the unique characteristics of each child.

1. Stu has hit several students in class and they are upset with him.
2. Jessie is having trouble following instructions and doesn't seem to hear the teacher or peers.
3. Sue is having trouble with social interactions and doesn't seem to know how to join in the play of others.

Have you ever had students express feelings or curiosity about differences in others such as these?

Addressing Variations

What you choose to do...

- o will impact these students experience in school the entire year as well as their peers.
- o will impact ALL the students understanding of differences, lifelong impressions can be made.
- o will create the space for children to understand and advocate for their variations and variations of others OR IT WON'T!

How do we get it right?!

Addressing Variations

In the classroom

What does the current literature tell us?

What do the professionals tell us?

Now, What would you do?

What does current literature tell us?

Children can learn to accept unique qualities in others.

Time is of the Essence

- “By age three, children begin asking questions about their own and others’ attributes, including racial identify, language, gender and physical disabilities” (Derman-Sparks & Edwards, 2010.)
 - “By five they are well on their way to constructing self-concept and understanding of others” (Gartell, 2012)
- Anti-bias education “adults can intentionally teach accepting responses towards other whatever their unique human qualities” (Derman-Sparks & Edwards, 2010.)

What does current literature tell us?

Really think about the impact of words.

- o “No one comes up and says “Look, in order to live a good life you have to be normal,” but it’s a powerful, implied message” (Giangreco, 1996.)

Include ALL Families

- o Frequent, on-going two way communications with families.
- o Understand parents go through stages in understanding variations.
- o Get to know how the family feels and understands the variation.
- o (Ray, Pewitt & George, 2009.)

What do the therapist suggest?

Recommendations for Teachers in Inclusive Classrooms

- Maintain “culture in the classroom in such a manner that emphasizes that children respect other children and everyone has different needs” (Weber, 2012)

The Language to Use with Students -

- “There are many different ways to learn, everyone is different in their own way and those differences are what make our classroom a unique and special community” (Banner, 2012.)

Language NOT to Use with Students -

- “Try not to call attention to a child that is different by yelling out. Try to incorporate all students to the best extent possible” (Banner, 2012.)

What do the therapist suggest?

Recommendations To Help a Child Advocate for Themselves –

- Model simple and factual statements - “I wear glasses to help me see” (Dryfuss, 2012.)
- Help students understand there is not one way to do something everyone learns differently. Explain it’s ok and they can be proud especially if they help create or develop strategy (ex. A visual checklist) (Weber, 2012.)
- Once the therapist has found a strategy that works, encouraging student to explain to the teacher why the strategy helps and that it would be beneficial to use in the classroom. With articulation trouble therapist can be present (Banner, 2012.)
- Allow children in the classroom to try out tools like squeeze ball or cushion (Christoforou, 2012.)

What do the therapist suggest?

Recommendations for 'bias' incidents

- o Speak with students expressing bias and try to find out why they are excluding or harming others. (Banner, 2012.)
- o Pair students with a student who is different for an assignment, scaffold to help them understand how to work together. (Weber, 2012.)
- o Consultation with a school guidance counselor. (Banner, 2012.)
- o Ensure students are not “in the corner with an aide doing work completely different that the rest of the class” with no attempt to include. (Weber, 2012.)

Now, what would
you do?

During snack time, Sue yells
across the room to you “why does
Jack get to use a straw and I
don’t? That’s NOT FAIR!”





Now, what would you do?

A new student is joining the class next week. The student has significant developmental variations. What, if anything, would you do to prepare the classroom and the students?



Addressing Variations - TAKEAWAYS

1. Consider the impact of how we behave and speak as teachers as well as our classroom settings?
2. Consider how can you prepare yourself to work with students that are typically developing and with developmental variations to understand same/different, bias and provide tools to advocate for self and others.
3. Consider “efforts made to include children with variations in setting that include typically developing peers...has led to teachers who may not have seen students like these before to gain a greater understanding and appreciation for the different ways students learn and process information.”

Addressing Variations

- o Please take a handout with tips to bring back to your classroom.
- o This can be used as a reminder and it can be shared with co-teachers and assistants.

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Appendix C - Permissions

March 1, 2013

Nicole Robbins

Dear Nicole,

Your proposal for working with human participants for your Independent Study have been approved. You may commence your work with human participants. If you make any significant changes to your work with human participants, you need to inform the IMP Committee in writing of your plans. Please place a copy of this letter along with unsigned copies of any consent letters and forms in a Permissions section at the end of your appendix. Keep the original signed forms in a safe place for five years.

The best of luck with your study. We look forward to having the completed copy in the Bank Street College Library.

Sincerely,

Nina Jensen

Nina Jensen, Chair
Integrative Master's Project Committee