

FYI: Early Childhood DEI Updates from Angela Gladstone

December 11, 2020

Dear Families,

Last week's home school support call was about talking with your children about diversity. We had a fruitful conversation, which I chose not to record so that participants were comfortable sharing their biographies and asking questions. I have put together a list of resources (for adults and children), for those who are inspired to do this work and wanting to learn more. These are some of the resources that I continue to reflect on, after reading or watching them some time ago. There is an amazing plethora of information out there, and each resource you find will continue to feed your own inner work and how you talk to your children. Empathy and equity is never ending work, but so fulfilling, and I am grateful to be a part of this community that is working to change the future from working with ourselves and our children.

The resources are below, and I have also attached it as a document, in case it is easier for you to store and reflect on it.

We will be continuing this conversation next month around Martin Luther King Jr. Day. Look for more details in the weeks to come!

Warmly,
Angela Gladstone

In early childhood we strive to make sure the children feel as though the world is a good and safe place to be, and we acknowledge our privilege in being able to do so. Having discussions around privilege and racism is something that many parents feel like they can more easily navigate with older children, but how to do so in early childhood causes many well-intentioned families to shy away from addressing the subjects until their children are older. However, these conversations can begin a lot sooner, the opportunity often arises by the children observing differences and then questioning those differences. We wanted to provide you with some resources that may be helpful for you and your family. The thing to keep in mind in all of this is that how and when we bring these topics to our children will be deeply held by them throughout their lives, and it can start in infancy. There are ways that we address these issues in class, but there is no script for how to do it, and definitely no script for the conversations that you have at home because they will be completely dependent on your biography, your child's personality, and your family's surroundings. This comes at a difficult time, as we are trying our best to follow social distancing guidelines to ensure the physical health of our families, when we know that one of the most important aspects of the social education that is needed is access to a multicultural environment. Below are some ideas and resources that we wanted to make sure everyone had access to as your family navigates how you approach this work to find equity for every human being and be a part of the change we are bringing about in this world. We are constantly grateful and inspired by all of the work that is being done and are grateful to be on this journey with you.

What we do in class: The value for every individual and the dignity of human life is at the heart of our education. We strive to create an atmosphere of inclusion. Our mixed age classes encourage acceptance through compassion and empathy for one another and our differences. We make sure to have books and puppet plays in which children can see a reflection of themselves, as well as a window into the world of another. We don't shy away from talking about skin tone, and instead celebrate it by talking about it in shades of color and for the beauty we see in each one and how it reminds us of a color in nature or a delicious food. We make sure that the toys we have and the images the children see offer a variety of skin tones. Throughout the year we celebrate various global festivals and traditions through food, stories, crafts and puppet plays.

We introduce leaders who have helped make a difference in our world, those who are making a change for injustices experienced by some of our fellow human beings. We do this through the books we have in our classrooms and with stories that are still filled with imagination and archetypes. Telling stories orally also allows each child to see a reflection of themselves, opposed to books that have fixed images (which are also helpful by allowing children to see windows into another's world).

Our classes encourage children to develop empathy, first by understanding and accepting their own emotions and then learning to do so in others. Using methods for conflict resolution that do not shame but allow the children to see each other, allows them to see others and value each individual. Conflict teaches so much!

During class, we deeply observe the children, their play, and interactions. Through these observations, we are always ready to step in to help support by acting as 'active observers', making statements about what we see and hear (or do not see or hear). We try to refrain from judgement or shame in our statements, but if words or actions are hurtful to another child, we do not shy away from acknowledging the expectations about how we treat one another and upholding the dignity of each human being.

As teachers we all continue to study this work ourselves, which provides inspiration for our teaching. As a group we study and discuss these topics, our program, and ourselves.

What you can do at home:

1. Reflect on your own experience and biography with the subject. One place to start is by thinking back to when you learned or experienced different things in your childhood, and how comfortable or not you are talking about these subjects.
1. Talk to your children! Books are a great place to start, or observations of something you have seen or experienced. Opening up the conversation allows the children to have a dialogue with you about something that they may be thinking or wondering about internally.
1. So much of parenthood is us working on ourselves- so the more you read and think about these topics, the more it seeps into your life. Book studies, articles and conversations with other adults help to process it all!
1. Developing empathy comes from knowing your own feelings and beginning to understand them in others. How you interact with one another, and respond to situations helps to shape this for your child. It may seem small and simple, but it is laying the foundation for how they treat, advocate for and think of others. Teaching Empathy Tips
2. <https://www.parentingscience.com/6-mistakes-white-parents-make-about-race.html>

Great resources for adults:

The Anti-racist Table is a 30-day challenge that was founded by a Waldorf Kindergarten teacher and her sister. It is filled with great information, activities and journaling that are extremely insightful. <https://theantiracisttable.com/>

How To Be an Anti-Racist by Ibram Kendi. Kendi is a professor and historian of race and discriminative policies. The way that he presents the book is extremely inviting and clear, giving the reader a great lens into this work.

[The Danger of a Single Story](#) Tedtalk - Bestselling author Chimamanda Adichie discusses the danger of hearing one story and the impact that has on our assumptions of groups of people.

[Parenting in Support of Black Lives: How to Build a Just Future for Kids](#)- A video in which Allison [Briscoe Smith](#) (child psychologist specializing in race), Ibram X Kendi, and Julie [Lythcott-Haims](#) (author and former Dean at Stanford) talk specifically about parenting and speaking with children.

These are websites filled with great resources:

A great article today from the *NYT*: [Talking to Kids About Racism, Early and Often](#)

[Your Kids Aren't Too Young to Talk About Race: Resource Roundup](#)

[Talking to Children About Racial Bias](#)

[Social Justice Resources](#)

Here is a great **introduction to discussions at home**, adapted from **Julie Sizemore**, an Early Childhood teacher in Grand Rapids and Creator of RESPECT Care Teaching:

Infants as young as 4 months can begin to distinguish similarities and differences. This is a stage when they begin to recognize living and non-living. This is an age where they want to touch your face as their vision is being refined. Use mirrors, talk about their facial features, talk about similarities and differences. Skin tones, shapes, color of eyes, etc. We naturally start to describe the red fire truck or the green frog, so there is no reason to not do the same with people.

Young toddlers have a strong concept of familiar and unfamiliar. Children notice differences in skin tone, gender, facial hair, use of hats, and more. They often become curious again about the faces of people who look different from the people that they are used to seeing. Not acknowledging differences can lead them to answering a lot of their questions themselves and forming implicit biases.

If you are the person who is new to the child, saying something like, "I know I am new – you don't know me. My name is ____ and I am here to ____." This is all they need to begin the process of acceptance. As the parent, you can introduce someone new and supportive of that person such as describing your relationship to them or adding a note of something you like about the person such as "she makes the best cookies" or "he loves to be outside too, just like you!"

For older toddlers, begin helping them form a sense of identity. My favorite activity to begin talking about skin tone is a paint mixing activity. Get several colors of paint and give them appealing names like hazelnut, cream, peach, dark chocolate, avocado, etc. Mix them together on the back of a child's hand until you find the colors that match the child's skin. Talk about how one child has "hazelnut cream" skin while another child has "chocolate peach avocado" skin.

Children this age need exposure and celebration of individuality. Be sure to have books available with references to different cultures, have materials in dramatic play that bring in ethnic experiences. While these things seem simple, you have to remember that infants and toddlers need simple.

Children will learn from what we model. Acknowledge differences, label feelings, use objective language to describe the materials and experiences that the children are engaged with.

In order to change our world, we have to start with intentional, honest, conversations in our homes and in our classrooms. Children can reflect and grow in places that they feel safe. They feel safe with you. Use that safety net as your superpower to be the change you want to see.”

As children get older, you can have more explicit conversations using books you read together or possibly interactions that they have witnessed as a starting point. If you can, try to read the books first before reading them to your child so that you can think about the conversations that may come up, or tweak a word to make it easier or more appropriate for your child to understand. It is also important to have books that show BIPOC characters who are just doing normal life activities instead of only talking about disparities and differences.

Children's Books:

(note that the books link to a description on Amazon for ease of reading reviews and summaries)

There are wonderful resource lists online with wonderful books. Here are a few that we really like:

The Colors of Us- this is a great book to talk about skin tone as a platform to open future conversations.

Strictly no Elephants- this is a great book to talk about inclusion and differences.

Julien is a Mermaid- a gorgeously illustrated book about Julien who wishes that he was a mermaid.

Last Stop on Market Street- This book follows a little boy and his grandmother as they ride the bus to a soup kitchen to help serve food, meeting people along the way and noting disparities and differences.

Sulwe- Sulwe has the darkest skin in her family and tries to make it lighter. She finds out the meaning behind her name and embraces her skin in the end.

The Proudest Blue- A young girl looks up to her big sister as she reaches the age to start to wear a hijab to school.

Under My Hijab- A young girl looks to the women in her family, how they wear their hijab and the diverse things that they do.

The Rabbit Listened- Something sad happens to Taylor and all the animals try to help. This is a great book about empathy and listening to one another.

Fry Bread- A beautiful book about fry bread and what it means to the Native American family.

The First Strawberries- A Cherokee tale about the first man and woman quarreling and how they resolve it.

The Fort- Two children have different ideas for their fort. This book is filled with the inspirations of imaginative play as well as problem solving together.

Jalapeno Bagels- Trying to decide what to bring to school to represent his family history, Pablo looks at his Mexican mother and Jewish father in their bakery to find the perfect thing.

Elena's Serenade- In Monterrey, Elena wants to be like her father and the other glassblowers and is told she cannot because she is a girl. Filled with magic and determination, Elena sets out to create her dream. Alma - A

great book that looks at the history behind a little girl's name. It is a great conversation starter about your own history, and curiosity about other people's names.

Tango Makes Three- A true story of Roy and Silo, two penguins in Central Park that wanted to have a family and their journey for it to come true.

Families, Families, Families- A picture of many different family combinations.

A Big Mooncake for Little Star- Little Star and her mama make a moon cake, and every night she takes a tiny nibble. A beautiful tale filled with great images and imagination about what happens to the moon at night.

The Seven Chinese Sisters- The youngest sister is captured by a dragon and her six big sisters set out to help, each contributing their own talent. In the end there is also empathy for the dragon and kindness.