COACHING FOR
Diversity,
Equity, Inclusion,
Accessibility,
and Belonging
IN EARLY CHILDHOOD

A Step-by-Step Guide
for PROGRAMS
and SCHOOLS

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Coaching for Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, Accessibility, and Belonging in Early Childhood

A Step-by-Step Guide for Programs and Schools

by

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The individuals described in this book are composites or real people whose situations are masked
and are based on the authors' experiences. In all instances, names and identifying details have been
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About the Authors

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Dr. Reinking is an educator, author, researcher, mother, wife, aunt, daughter, stepmother, social justice advocate, and current elected official (school board member). She has been in the field of education for more than 16 years. As a classroom teacher, she taught in Mombasa, Kenya, the Southside of Chicago, Northwest Indiana, and Central Illinois. Upon leaving the PK–5 classroom learning environment, she worked in the social service field, as a college professor, and as a professional development provider. Furthermore, Dr. Reinking owns Reinking Education Consulting, LLC (www.akreinking.com). In this work, she focuses on facilitating the growth of organizations and schools to increase equity and diversity and to transform them to be places of inclusion.

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Mrs. Thigpen is an education consultant, poet, and researcher. She focuses her work on developing racially inclusive environments for early childhood students, families, and educators and combating biases and stereotypes in early childhood classrooms. Mrs. Thigpen has years of experience teaching in child care and Head Start; directing a summer program; and being a supervisor, instructor, and coach for both preservice and in-service teachers. Mrs. Thigpen continues to challenge and motivate educators to establish environments where all people are valued and uses her poetry for reflection in diversity, equity, inclusion, access, and belonging (DEIAB) training. She currently lives in Central Florida with her husband and four children.

Preface

Because you have opened this book, you may be starting your own growth journey, identify as a social justice educator, or fall somewhere in between. Wherever you are in your equity-focused learning journey, we welcome you to this brave space of learning, reading, and reflecting.

We are the authors of this book: Dr. Anni K. Reinking and Laycee Thigpen, MS.Ed. We are self-identified social justice advocates and have been in the education research field focused on diversity since the early 2000s.

We met in 2017 at Southern Illinois University Edwardsville. Dr. Reinking was Mrs. Thigpen's professor in the early childhood program. Since 2019, when Mrs. Thigpen graduated, we have worked continuously to coach, guide, facilitate, and advocate for diversity, equity, inclusion, access, and belonging (DEIAB) at the early childhood level, which lead to transformative, justice-focused learning environments. Through our work, we have continued to push each other to learn, grow, and view the world through different lenses.

We were asked to write this book as a way to share our knowledge regarding the work we do that focuses on educating programs to build equitable environments for all students, families, and educators. As the preschool population becomes more diverse, educational organizations must address the embedded, historically inequitable practices and policies to meet the needs of the inevitable diversity in every community in the United States. There is diversity of thought, diversity of race/ethnicity, diversity of socioeconomics, diversity of sexuality and gender, diversity of religion, diversity of ability, diversity of age, and diversity of experiences. Each of these diverse identities has been, and continues to be, part of early learning environments. Therefore, it is imperative to do this work and to start or continue the conversations regarding transforming early childhood environments to be inclusive for all.

Overall, the information in this book will provide a how-to model filled with reflection questions, activities, and resources, with the overarching theme of DEIAB. Regardless of how "inclusive" your organization believes

it is, desires to be, or actually is, this book will serve as a guide. This guide was designed to give early childhood administrators, directors, curriculum coaches, and school leaders a step-by-step process for launching or improving DEIAB work in a program or school. This book connects the knowledge that is often presented in DEIAB trainings with concrete action steps that lead to a transformative environment.

This guide is most effective when used to reflect and acknowledge internal pushback and possibly external pushback from colleagues, families, or administrators, as well as acknowledge the hard work of those on their own equity journey. On this journey, it is important that we recognize the "truth" we were taught and possibly start to relearn the truth and historical contexts of our country—all of which can be challenging. Our hope is that you, as the leader, keep reading and reflecting to eventually question unfair policies and help build a school community that supports all students, families, and educators.

Whether you are novice, advanced, or somewhere in between within the DEIAB field, our challenge to you is to consider the practices, ideas, and identities presented in this book from a beginner's mindset. Everyone has more to learn; however, learning only happens when a person is open to learning. We have continued to learn throughout this process and acknowledge we have more learning to do. So, prepare to start or continue your journey of learning, as we continue ours.

We hope that by reading this book, you, as a leader or coach in the early childhood field, will be able to grow and become better equipped to assist others as they grow and learn within the equity field. Together, with your guidance and this book (and lots of reflection), your organization or the organizations you work with will begin (or continue) to transform into places that acknowledge and value the diversity of families, students, and educators and take the leap from tiptoeing around diversity to inviting it in.

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

We suggest using this book in one of two ways. First, while reading and reflecting, contextualize the information within theories. There are theories and approaches associated with DEIAB within the education and psychology field that are excellent to ground this work. Second, there is a case study provided throughout the book as a way to see how the practices are applied in real-life situations. Throughout this book, you will witness Program Apples make steps and missteps as they use the guide to become a more equitable environment. Use the case study to see the work in action and reflect on the experiences. In addition, throughout this book, we will walk through the steps of creating an equity-focused early childhood learning environment.

1. Assess the current status of your organization using the Anti-Ism Scale.

2. Plan the work to move forward based on the organization's assessment.

Slope 2 of the mountain
Increase equitable experiences in the classroom for all students to have windows, mirrors, and sliding glass doors and the 4 Crucial Cs.

Slope 1 of the mountain
Improve equity-focused education by evaluating practices and reflecting.

Foot of the mountain
Create policies, practices, and procedures that provide guidance and support of equity-based education (federal, state, and local).

Figure 1.   The DEIAB trajectory.

3. Implement the plan through various avenues such as creating a Diversity Workgroup, professional development opportunities, and book studies.

4. Reassess/reflect on the work for continued growth and development.

Finally, we are all moving up a mountain of learning, changing, and reflecting on our own individual journeys. Although you will see the image in Figure 1 again in the last chapter, we provide it here as a primer for the work we will be engaging in throughout this book, as well as beyond your time interacting with the words on the pages of this knowledge-sharing endeavor.

In the remainder of the Preface, we introduce overarching theories and concepts that are foundational pieces of knowledge needed for reading further.

THEORIES

Common theories associated with equity-focused transformations revolve around identities and how the human brain associates similar identities compared to dissimilar identities. Although we do not provide an exhaustive list of theories, we do provide these theories as a way to introduce the context of equity-focused work through the lens of various theories. The descriptions of the theories presented are a starting point for your reflection and further discovery. It is also important to note that many of these theories do not have to stand alone but can be combined in understanding reality.

Critical theories are grounded in two original theories: social identity theory and schema theory. The social identity theory was introduced by Tajfel and Turner in 1986 and is based on the physical, social, and mental

characteristics of an individual. Essentially, Tajfel and Turner (1979) proposed that a person's identity group is connected to their sense of self and self-esteem. This then provides the individual with a sense of belonging in the wider social world. For example, if you identify as a White basketball player, both descriptors (White and basketball player) are part of your identity and impact your self-esteem and association with the wider world. Essentially, the social identity theory is based on the concept of identities that are the basis of stereotyping individuals into similarities and differences. This overall concept results in people being grouped in in-groups (us) and out-groups (them).

The concept of grouping individuals into us (in-group) and them (out-group) is also based on the schema theory, which is a branch of cognitive science. Specifically, the schema theory is "concerned with how the brain structures knowledge" (Pankin, 2013, para. 1), which then influences our cognition and behavior. For example, if you always associate tall people as being basketball players, you will unconsciously categorize other tall people as basketball players upon seeing them or meeting them for the first time, regardless of whether they are actually basketball players. What is happening is the process of placing a tall person in the "file" or schema in your brain of tall equals basketball player. This then influences how you interact with tall people, which may include asking about what position they play on the basketball team or whether they have a good jump shot. The process of placing people into our cognitive filing cabinets (folders) is an implicit cognitive impulse; however, that does not provide an excuse for exclusionary practices.

Finally, critical race theory (CRT), which the schema theory and social identity theory are grounded in, was coined by Harvard professor Dr. Derrick Bell in the 1980s to focus on race equity (Ford & Airhihenbuwa, 2009). Essentially, CRT is a way to identify, analyze, and transform societal and institutional structures and cultural aspects that maintain power and oppression of BIPOC+ (Black, indigenous, people of color) individuals (Solorzano, 1997). Simply put, CRT critically analyzes structural and institutional racism to provide guidance for transformation that creates equity. Furthermore, CRT challenges the traditional claims of various social institutions, including education, that operate from "objectivity, meritocracy, color-blindness, race neutrality and equal opportunity" (Solorzano, 1997, p. 6). This means that CRT does not accept the answer of "because it has always been done this way" to explain policies and procedures that further oppress historically marginalized individuals and/or groups.

Branching from CRT, there are two theories that are often cited in the context of gender and sexuality: queer theory and feminist theory.

Queer theory is defined in the Merriam-Webster dictionary as "an approach to literary and cultural study that rejects traditional categories

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of gender and sexuality." It emerged as a way to dismantle traditional assumptions about gender and sexual identities, such as what it means to be a boy or a girl. Queer theory is grounded in the concept that gender and sexuality are socially constructed ideas that are embedded into humans through socialization (Indiana University, 2021).

According to Ferber and Nelson (2009, p. 1), feminist theory "explores the links between the social construction of scientific disciplines and the social construction of gender, to suggest reasons why differences in experience should not be dismissed as just 'historical digressions.'" Overall, the purpose of feminist theory is to focus on the status of women in society to help improve women's lives, such as providing equal pay.

A final theory to investigate is the critical disability theory, which is "rooted in a critique of traditional discourses and assumptions of disability, which serve to oppress persons with disabilities and infringe on their human rights" (Gillies, 2014, para. 1). The foundation of critical disability theory was built on the premise of power and oppression, much like the other theories described. Therefore, according to Gillies (2014, para. 1), this theory "challenges able-bodied supremacy and the oppression that arises from restricting economic and social benefits to persons with disability which are then redistributed as privileges to be negotiated."

Again, the theories described are not an exhaustive list but will help to start discourse and further investigation. When researching these theories, as well as others, it is important to think about them in the context of DEIAB: diversity (differences), equity (open-mindedness), inclusion (nonexclusionary), access (accessibility), and belonging (affinity).

REFLECTION

How do the theories described, or other theories you find in your research, support the concepts of DEIAB?

ANTIBIAS EDUCATION

According to Teaching for Change (2022, para. 1), antibias education (ABE) is "an approach to early childhood education that sets forth values-based principles and methodology in support of respecting and embracing differences and acting against bias and unfairness. Anti-bias teaching requires critical thinking and problem solving by both children and adults." Derman-Sparks (1989) coined the term and designed the foundational aspects of ABE based on the concept that "young children are aware that color, language, gender, and physical ability are connected to privilege and power. Racism and sexism have a profound influence on children's developing

sense of self and others" (p. 161). Therefore, ABE focuses on the assets of each student while also helping students to understand differences and develop a sense of self in relation to the world around them. The four goals of ABE are as follows:

1. Each student will demonstrate self-awareness, confidence, family pride, and positive social identities.

2. Each student will express comfort and joy with human diversity; accurate language for human differences; and deep, caring human connections.

3. Each student will increasingly recognize unfairness, have language to describe unfairness, and understand that unfairness hurts.

4. Each student will demonstrate empowerment and the skills to act, with others or alone, against prejudice and/or discriminatory actions.

Specifically, as Derman-Sparks and Edwards (2010) stated:

> Anti-bias teachers are committed to the principle that every child deserves to develop to his or her fullest potential. Anti-bias work provides teachers a way to examine and transform their understanding of children's lives and also do self-reflective work to more deeply understand their own lives. (p. 2)

The overall goal of ABE is to build students, families, and educators who can confront and eliminate barriers of prejudice, misinformation, and bias about specific aspects of personal and social identity (Teaching for Change, 2022).

At the core of ABE is teaching and reflecting on the concepts of DEIAB. A great way to start the personal reflection when implementing ABE is to move through the following five activities:

- Increase your awareness and understanding of your own individual and social identities in their many facets (e.g., race, ethnicity, gender, ability, sexual orientation, family structure, economic class) and your own cultural contexts, both in your childhood and currently.

- Examine what you have learned about differences, connection, and what you enjoy or fear across all aspects of human diversity.

- Identify how you have been advantaged or disadvantaged by the -isms (e.g., ableism, classism, heterosexism, racism, sexism), and identify the stereotypes or prejudices you have absorbed about yourself or others.

- Explore your ideas, feelings, and experiences regarding social justice activism. Begin a dialogue with colleagues and families about all of these goals.

- Develop the courage and commitment to model for young children that you stand for fairness and as an activist voice for children.

PROGRAM CASE STUDY: PROGRAM APPLES

Throughout the book, we refer to a case study of a real program with the pseudonym "Program Apples." The purpose of using a pseudo-fictional early childhood program is to provide context, examples, and realistic descriptions of the work that is described throughout the book.

For background, Program Apples is a prekindergarten program we have worked with for more than 2 years. The program is located in the southern Midwest and serves 850 preschool students across 10 cities or towns. In addition, they serve around 50 families with infants and toddlers in those same cities and towns. Essentially, this large preschool program covers one entire county, excluding a large metropolitan area, which has their own early childhood program. For children to qualify for this prekindergarten program, they are assessed using an "at-risk" assessment that is utilized within their state. Although they are one program, with one overall work culture and environment, they have the unique advantage that each school and community within their program has its own unique identity. The one unifying statement or mindset among this group of educators, which was often vocalized, was: "We have no diversity. We have all-White kids, so why do we need to learn about this and change?"

We were brought in to help integrate, and ultimately transform, the structure of the program to be more inclusive as a program overall. With the support of the leadership in the program, we worked with staff to guide transformational growth. Our end goal was to empower the educators in the program to guide the work of transformation and accountability.

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Background on DEIAB for EI/ECE
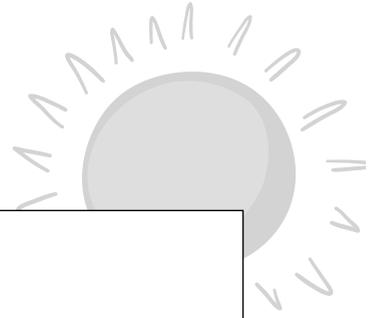
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Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, Access, and Belonging

"The history of America is built on the exclusion of certain groups of people, which is grounded in the power and oppression people are born into. However, this historical reality is often unaddressed and ignored in early childhood learning environments."

—Reinking and Thigpen

Whoa! You may be thinking, "This book is not for me if it starts with a statement like that!" Or, you may be thinking, "This book is going to speak truth to power and support my professional growth and learning." Regardless of your initial reaction to the first sentence of this book, you chose to open the book after reading the title. Therefore, yes, this book is for you. This book is for you on your own journey of learning and creating an inclusive classroom.

Throughout the book, we will use the analogy of walking, struggling, and racing up a mountainside to describe each of our learning journeys. On this mountainside, there are several paths, obstacles, and slippery slopes on our independent but sometimes collective and interconnected journey to the summit. The goal of this journey is to reach the point of transformative inclusive practices that focus on equity, access, and belonging for all children and families.

Will we ever reach the summit? No, because there is never a point we will not be learning. Will we all take the same path? No, because we all come with our own experiences and learn in different ways.

On our independent, sometimes winding and intersecting journeys, will we learn and strive for the summit? Our hope is yes!

Therefore, we encourage you to keep reading, discovering, and traveling along your path up the mountainside. Although we will not summit, we all will be somewhere on the side (and hopefully closer to the top) of our transformative mountain through our learning journey, which truly lasts a lifetime.

Where to begin? We must know our past in order to influence our future. So, let's begin by reviewing the history of America.

The history of America is built on exclusion, oppression, power, and privilege; however, this reality is often hidden in the lessons and conversations that occur in early childhood classrooms. Many early childhood professionals believe that young children are not ready for conversations surrounding the isms that America is built on, such as racism, sexism, ageism, and heterosexism. Isms are distinctive beliefs, theories, systems, or practices that are based on exclusionary, prejudiced practices.

Although many early childhood educators might believe that 3-, 4-, and 5-year-old children are too young to discuss isms, we believe children are ready. Research shows that infants as young as 6 months old can show a preference for an individual's skin color. In addition, infants can tell the difference between the sounds and intonations of voices, specifically the use of "motherese" (i.e., baby talk). This ability to differentiate based on environmental cues (visual and auditory) supports the idea that as humans we focus on surviving. We were built as a species to survive; therefore, we pay attention to differences and similarities in our environment. We pay attention to who is in our in-group and who is in our out-group. And evolutionarily, "different" has often been synonymous with "dangerous." (However, today, we know that different does not necessarily mean dangerous, but we must work against our initial reactions and assumptions.)

As Evelyn Green stated in a podcast focused on antibias education (Green et al., 2021), "We have so many things on television. Just take George Floyd for instance. I don't know why people try to pretend that 3-, 4-, and 5-year-olds don't know what is going on in the world." Children know what is going on. They see it, they hear it, and if adults do not provide an explanation to children in developmentally appropriate language, children's imagination can expand beyond reality into something that may seem scary or threatening. So, what is developmentally appropriate for conversations about isms?

Throughout this book, there will be many examples of developmentally appropriate conversations; however, at the core of all of these concepts are the simple ideas of fairness and empathy. Essentially, as the WGBH Educational Foundation (2014, para. 1) explains:

> Children need to learn about fairness and recognize how and when being unfair is hurtful. This lays a foundation for developing empathy and sensitivity that will, in turn, help prevent bullying. But fairness can be a difficult concept for very young children because it is abstract. Young children are often egocentric thinkers, and tend to see the world from their own perspective.

DEFINITIONS

Grounding ourselves in the definitions of diversity, equity, inclusion, access, and belonging will create stepping stones on our own paths up the mountain. In addition, providing definitions will ground you, as a reader and learner, in a common language for moving toward change and possibly cognitive dissonance, which is a good uncomfortable place to land in this work.

Identity (Social)

Some of our social identity attributes are highly visible, such as physical abilities or skin tone, and often collected by schools and other government organizations for reporting purposes. However, there are other attributes that are invisible but claimed by the individual as an identity, such as sexual orientation. As humans, we have a tendency to want to organize or categorize people by their identities, which are often based on social groups, such as race, ethnicity, gender, sex, sexual orientation, religion, socioeconomic status, physical/emotional developmental (dis)ability (body image), language and culture, age, and national origin. In later chapters, the social identities of individuals will be discussed further. However, the importance of this topic for early childhood educators can be summarized in the following statement: The preschool class of 2020 is the first time that the student population is not majority White (Krogstad, 2019). This means that as a nation we have crossed the "majority-minority threshold" and will continue to engage in social environments, including schools, that are increasingly racially and ethnically diverse.

The diversity of the student population is not limited to only race, however. Each individual person has multiple identities, and the intersection of these different identities helps create a lens to view the world. The concept of intersectionality was made popular by law professor Kimberlee Crenshaw in 1989. In an article, Crenshaw describes the complex identities individuals juggle throughout their lives; these identities often overlap with privilege, power, and oppression (Coleman, 2019). Failing to acknowledge the complexity of identities or the intersection of multiple identities within oneself or students "is failing to acknowledge reality" (Coleman, 2019, para. 11).

> **REFLECTION**
>
> Refer back to the Preface, where the theories regarding identity are described. How is the concept of intersectionality supported or not supported by the theories introduced?

Diversity

Diversity has been defined in research and various fields throughout the years. One set of researchers, in the field of science, define diversity as the differences that we see in the world and think about and the different ways

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to try to solve problems. In addition, diversity is embedded in the analogies we use, the life experiences we have, and everything that makes us who we are as individuals (Swartz et al., 2019). Although this definition is used in other fields, another way to describe diversity in simpler terms is as "all characteristics and experiences that define each of us as individuals" (U.S. Department of Commerce, 2001). Finally, Queensborough Community College (2020, para. 4) states that diversity is "more than just acknowledging and/or tolerating difference." Derman-Sparks et al. (2020) explains that as early childhood educators, we must intentionally use practices to help "children feel and behave respectfully, warmly, and confidently with people who are different from themselves" (p. 16).

In early childhood, diversity is centered in antibias education (ABE), which was discussed in the Preface. As a reminder, ABE is an approach to early childhood education that sets forth values-based principles and methodology in support of respecting and embracing differences and acting against bias and unfairness.

Equity

What is equity in the context of early childhood education? Clark (2019) explains that equity is "the quality of being fair and impartial" (para. 4). Equity is *not* the picture of children trying to look over a fence that is often portrayed when discussing equity (see Figure 1.1).

Why? To explain, Paul Kuttner (2015), a writer at Cultural Organizing, wrote:

> The problem with the graphic has to do with where the initial inequity is located. In the graphic, some people need more support to see over the fence because they are shorter, an issue inherent to the people themselves. That's fine if we are talking about height, but if this is supposed to be a metaphor for other inequities, it becomes problematic. (para. 3)

Essentially, adding boxes, an arguably easy task, does not speak to the structural and institutional barriers individuals face based on historical context that are not an "easy fix."

Furthermore, Aasha M. Abdill (2016), an independent evaluation and strategy consultant in Washington, DC, shared the following on LinkedIn (abridged) regarding a similar figure as illustrated in Figure 1.1:

> While I very much appreciated the intended purpose of the image—distinguishing equity from equality—the first time I saw it, I could not click the "like" button. Something about the image bugged me. . . .

As each LinkedIn colleague liked, shared and commented in its favor, I felt an irrational exasperation. I am not easily vexed so this was a clear problem that I knew I needed to address.

I stared at the image. It "stared" back at me. I frowned. I sighed. I furrowed my brow. I walked away. And, then it hit me. My voice in my head screamed with a mixture of indignation and relief, "That's why I can't stand you!"
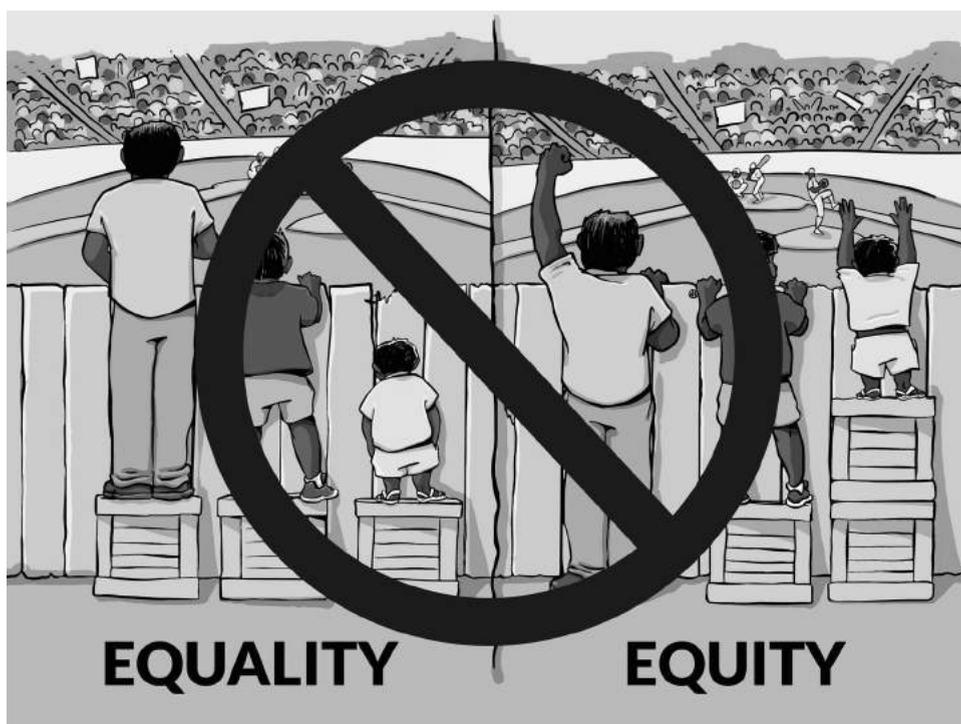
Figure 1.1. Equality versus equity. (Adapted from Interaction Institute for Social Change/Artist: Angus Maguire. Licensed under Creative Commons at https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/.)

Do you know why? If you don't, it's understandable because it exemplifies the insidiousness of implicit bias. So, I will not keep you entrapped for a second longer. Instead, I will ask you one question.

In the picture, why are the three individuals so observably different in capability (physical height and age)?

Social equity is imperative because structural inequality exists; that is, you can predict the outcomes of individuals based on social characteristics that should not have any direct correlation to the outcome. Why then, is it possible to predict? Because, social inequality is perpetuated by institutional and individual discrimination. So, to address social inequities, the boxes appearing in the second frame are necessarily doled out **unequally** so that **equity** can be achieved.

The problem with the picture is in its implicit bias that many do not see. If we believe, fundamentally, that all people regardless of race, class or creed are comparably able, there should be little difference between the individuals in this picture. What should be drawn as dissimilar are not the individuals but rather the bottom boxes they are standing on in the first frame.

While I fully appreciate the intended purpose of the image, its point regrettably rests upon a deeply ingrained belief of the inherent inequality
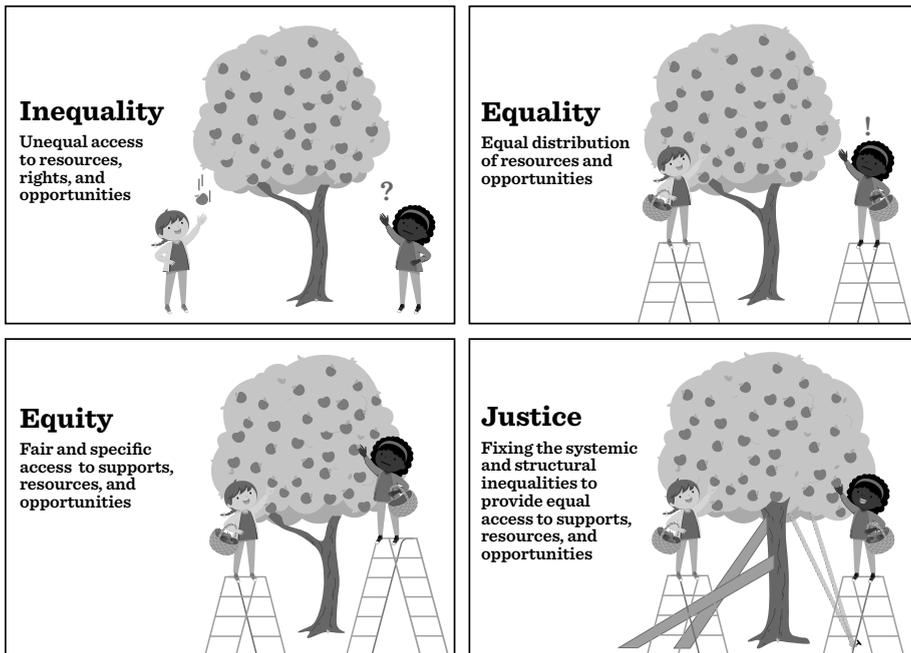
Figure 1.2. Inequality, equality, equity, and justice. (*Source:* Maeda, 2019.)

of people. And, despite the sincere explicit intention for increasing understanding, empathy, and justice for redressing social inequities, the picture's sentiment implicitly reinforces the idea that minorities (or those otherwise unprivileged) have inferior abilities. (paras. 2–9)

What is a good picture or graphic to use when discussing equity with adults? The picture in Figure 1.2 displays inequality, equality, equity, and justice through the use of an apple tree, a couple of ladders, some 2-by-4s, and rope.

REFLECTION

Look at the four pictures in Figure 1.2. Discuss or reflect on how this figure truly shows the definition of equity (and justice).

ANSWER

Look at equity and justice. What is needed on both sides for justice? Work and support are needed on both sides for justice, in addition to fixing the root cause rather than just getting a higher ladder.

CASE STUDY: PROGRAM APPLES

During one of our first meetings with the Program Apples staff, the apple tree graphic shown in Figure 1.2 was displayed on the screen. We then asked the staff members to freewrite for 1 minute on what they observed in the graphic. At the end of the 1-minute

(silent) freewriting session, we asked the staff to share what they wrote. Below are some of their reflections:

- "I have seen the first two [top] before, but the bottom two are interesting. This means we have to do work on both sides."

- "Justice is more than just helping the oppressed. It is the powerful doing work also."

- "We need to revisit this often. This is powerful that we need support on both sides of the structure—the structure or structural racism in our country."

- "I don't understand what it is showing us. Why is this the graphic we are discussing now?"

This handful of reflections shows the differences in responses we discussed and continued to discuss throughout the entire process of growth and learning. From the individuals who began to see the structural and institutional isms affecting their learning environments to the staff members who questioned why this was something to discuss, it displays the areas of growth and different places each person was starting from regarding their own process.

In response to these comments, we, the coaches, restated, identified, and previewed concepts that would support the insights of or provide more insights to each participant so that they felt they were in a brave space to share their thoughts and reflections. (*Note:* No one is ever called out or pressured to share because we all engage and learn in our own unique ways.)

Although the apple tree graphic is excellent to discuss with adults, it is not necessarily developmentally appropriate for young children. However, an excellent activity to explain what equity is to early childhood students is known as the "Band-Aid" activity. The activity was originally described by Tumblr user aloneindarknes7. This user outlined their approach to the concept of equality versus equity through a developmentally appropriate activity. So, as you are reading this, think about it in the sense of a young, developing brain (not a developed adult brain with many experiences and a whole lifetime of adventures). (If you are completing this activity with your students, please make sure to have clear Band-Aids or Band-Aids that represent all skin tones.)

In aloneindarknes7's own words:

> This is something that I teach my students during the first week of school and they understand it. I have each student pretend they got hurt and need a band-aid. Children love band-aids. I ask the first one where they are hurt. If he says his finger, I put the band-aid on his finger. Then I ask the second one where they are hurt. No matter what that child says, I put the band-aid on their finger exactly like the first child. I keep doing that through the whole class. No matter where they say their pretend injury is, I do the same thing I did with the first one.

After they all have band-aids in the same spot, I ask if that actually helped any of them other than the first child. I say, "Well, I helped all of you the same! You have one band-aid!" And they'll try to get me to understand that they

were hurt somewhere else. I act like I'm just now understanding it. Then I explain, "there might be moments this year where some of you get different things because you need them differently, just like you needed a band-aid in a different spot." If at any time any of my students ask why one student has a different assignment, or gets taken out of the class for a subject, or gets another teacher to come in and help them throughout the year, I remind my students of the band-aids they got at the start of the school year and they stop complaining.

This activity does a great job at teaching equity to children and the principle of giving each child what they need; it also provides an avenue for educators to reflect on teaching practices that often use a "one-size-fits-all" approach. *Note:* We suggest using clear Band-Aids for this activity.

Inclusion

What is inclusion in the context of early childhood education? Simply, it is the absence of exclusion. McManis (2021) describes inclusion as "accepting, understanding, and attending to student differences and diversity, which can include physical, cognitive, academic, social, and emotional" (para. 4). A question we often ask when working with groups of professionals centered on the concept of inclusion is: **Who/what group are you willing to exclude? If we do not include, we inevitably exclude.**

Although inclusion is often focused on the field of special education or students with disabilities/exceptionalities, it is also important to acknowledge other contexts of inclusion. Essentially, inclusion is assuming heterogenous normativity, or the assumption that everything is compared to the socially accepted "normal." For example, a common "it is normal" concept is to have stairs in buildings for people who are ambulatory; however, when ramps are added, it is considered "inclusive." Another "normal" that is often portrayed in classrooms, through language and books, is the concept of what a family looks like: a mom, dad, and children. The diversity of homosexual families, single-adult families, foster or adoptive families, multigenerational families, and so forth is not presented or included and thus provides a message (through silence) about what is normal and what is abnormal.

Now that we may have started you on a trajectory of thinking about inclusion in a critical way, reflect on the following quote by Reinking (2020): "Inclusion means the structure is made for everyone. Transformation is actually what we need to be doing. Don't focus on inclusion into a broken system but transform the broken system so that inclusion is inevitable."

> **REFLECTION**
>
> Read the quote by Reinking (2020) again. What is your initial reaction to the quote in terms of transformation? (Remember, the history of school was that formal education was built for White, wealthy Christians.)

True transformation in early childhood learning environments focuses on critically examining the hidden curriculum embedded into the classroom. Are there metaphorical windows, mirrors, and sliding glass doors in the learning environment, curriculum, and language?

You may be asking yourself, "What do you mean by metaphorical windows, mirrors, and sliding glass doors?" These are concepts coined in the literacy field, but they come into play when discussing hidden curriculum or curriculum that has historically been centered in ableism, eurocentrism, and heteronormative practices.

Metaphorical windows mean that children in your classroom can "see" into the lives of people who do not share their identity. The diversity of the community, country, and often world is presented in the classroom through a "window." The important thing to be aware of is that when embedding windows there should be no "token" or stereotypical images or assumptions made by the artifacts or media (books, music, or posters) in the learning environment. For example, we often enter early childhood classrooms that have many misconceptions about Mexico, such as all Mexican food is spicy, Halloween and the Day of the Dead are the same thing, burritos and fajitas are Mexican cuisine (they are actually just Americanized food often served at Mexican restaurants in the United States), and all Mexicans speak Spanish (currently, 92% of Mexicans speak Spanish, but not all Mexican speakers speak Spanish or are as fluent in Spanish as in their indigenous languages [Zyzdryn, 2020]). Embedding the concept of windows, in this example, would be to research and ensure that stereotypes or misconceptions are not taught through a westernized view of people who live in Mexico.

Metaphorical mirrors mean that children can see themselves represented in the classroom or learning environment. As is often said, representation matters. An easy way to embed mirrors of children into the classroom is through a family flag activity that is implemented throughout the school year. The case study used throughout this book provides a fantastic example of creating a yearlong family flag activity, which is described in a future chapter. However, a short description of the activity is that it encourages families to make a "family flag" (poster board or 8 × 11 paper) of items that are important to them as a family. It could include pictures of family members, words or pictures of activities the family enjoys together, or even things that are specific to the child in the classroom such as their favorite color or food. Creating these flags, posting the flags around the room, and discussing the flags (and ultimately the culture of the family) throughout the year bring families into the classroom on a daily basis.

Metaphorical sliding glass doors can easily be explained as embedding identities into your classroom so deeply that the children feel immersed. One example we often use during workshops is one that we experienced while working with Program Apples.

CASE STUDY: PROGRAM APPLES

The concept of metaphorical sliding glass doors is when you completely take over an environment so that you feel as if you are truly in the environment. In Program Apples, one classroom did this seamlessly. The teachers in the classroom chose several diverse books regarding hair, barbershops, and hair salons. Then, over the course of 1 week, they completely redid their classroom to emulate a hair salon/barbershop that may be seen in various communities. There were pictures of racially diverse children with different hairstyles including braids and natural hairstyles posted in the dramatic play area. Images that can be found in many barbershops showing various haircuts were displayed throughout the classroom. There were various real and pretend hairstyling tools such as blow-dryers and flat irons (with the cords removed), spray bottles, combs, and empty containers of hair products for the children to use on the dolls. In the block center, the children made blueprints of what their hair salon/barbershop building would look like and then used blocks to construct a model of the building. In the writing center, the students were able to design signs for their barbershop/hair salon. The teachers incorporated literacy and math by having the students write out the services and price of the service (haircut/style). By the end of the week, when the transformation was complete, the students were fully embedded into a simulated hair salon/barbershop.

In an early childhood classroom or learning environment, providing metaphorical sliding glass doors could be transforming the classroom into a salon/barbershop, having books about people going to the hair salon/barbershop, and fully embedding the concepts of hair, cutting hair, and the various meanings of hair for groups of people.

REFLECTION

What are ways you have created metaphorical mirrors, windows, and sliding glass doors in your early childhood learning environment?

CASE STUDY: PROGRAM APPLES

Program Apples reflected on the windows, mirrors, and sliding glass doors in their learning environments, specifically focused on the books in the classroom. Through this reflection process, Program Apples decided to buy new books to create more windows and mirrors, with the hope of building a foundation for creating sliding glass doors.

Through collective research and discussion, the team of educators decided to choose books that were located on the Here Wee Read website, specifically, the 2020 Ultimate List of Diverse Children's Books, with titles such as *Always Jackie, Bread for Words,* and *Hosea Plays On.*

Access

What are access and accessibility in the context of early childhood education? Ensuring access means that barriers to opportunities are eliminated, pathways for families and students to fully engage in the learning environment are fully provided, and all students/families are appreciated for their complete selves. Are there accessible parking spaces for families? Are the marketing and communication materials that promote events accessible for all? Are the toys in the classroom accessible for all children? Are the activities the school embeds into the daily schedule accessible for all children, regardless of their ability or "dis"-ability? Overall, are there accommodations that create a least restrictive environment?

When discussing accommodations, it is important that we all have the same definition of accommodation. An accommodation is a physical and/or environmental change to the learning environment that creates a space for all students to demonstrate what they know. For example, an accommodation for students who are English language learners would be to assess them in their home language (Special Education Resource, 2020). Accommodations are integral to access.

In an early childhood environment, access looks, feels, and sounds like purposeful play full of learning as well as building a sense of community. Access also means children and families have access to all learning within the environment. How does this affect children? I (Thigpen) once lived in an area that prevented me from getting a library card from the public library due to the address of my home. By not being able to access the library, I did not have access to books, media, and other services libraries provide. I was not provided the access to, arguably, a right I have as a member of a community.

Lack of access can be a lack of access to resources, such as described above, but it can also include lack of access to the categories at the base of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (see Figure 1.3), specifically, physiological and safety needs, such as a lack of access to affordable high-quality childcare, fresh produce (food desert), and affordable and safe housing, as well as a lack of access to a community with low crime rates.


REFLECTION

What does access or lack of access look like, sound like, and feel like in your early learning environment?

Belonging

What is belonging in the context of early childhood education? Belonging is the undeniable feeling of being welcomed. However, it is important to remember that everyone feels welcomed in their own way. We cannot live

FOR MORE, go to: https://bpub.fyi/Coach-DEIAB
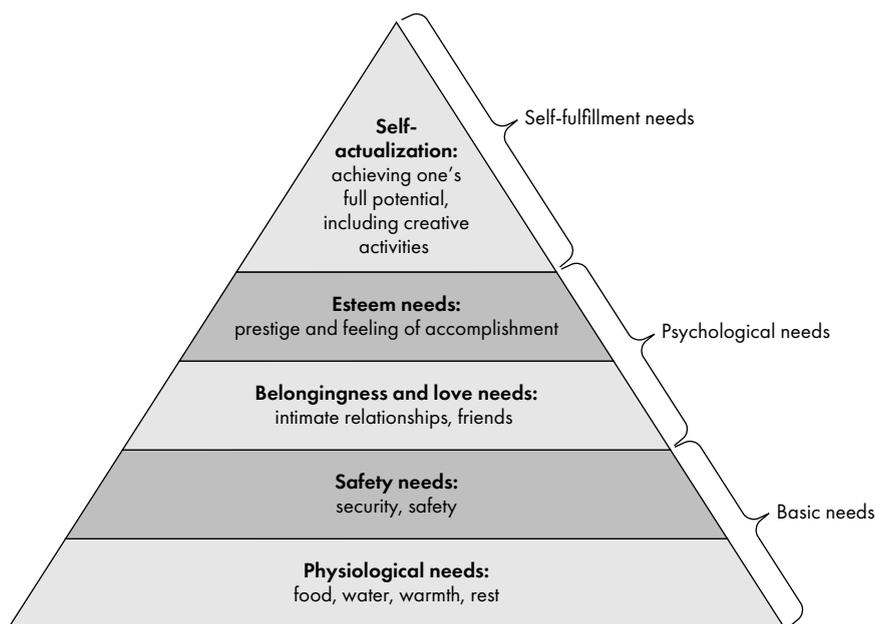
Figure 1.3. Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. (Adapted from Maslow, A. H. [1943]. A theory of human motivation. *Psychological Review, 50*[4], 370–396. https://doi.org/10.1037/h0054346. In the public domain.)

by the "Golden Rule" (I centered) of treating others the way we want to be treated, but rather, we should live by the "Platinum Rule" (you centered) of treating others the way they want to be treated. When creating an environment where everyone feels undeniably welcomed, we must ensure that we know what each person needs to feel welcomed (and safe).

How do families want to be welcomed? How do children feel safe?

An anecdote I (Reinking) often share in workshops focuses on the concept of a "calm down corner." In many early childhood learning environments, the calm down corner is full of soft things, such as beanbags, stuffed animals, soft fidgets, and big pillows. Classrooms that are arranged in this way are fulfilling the Golden Rule of intrinsically agreed upon norms of what it means to feel comforted and calm. However, I do not feel comforted and calm in soft areas. For me to feel safe, welcomed, and calm, I need hard chairs to push on and feel my body against, I like to have fidgets that are hard plastic, and I crave other angular items to rub my hands on. Therefore, when a classroom includes a calming area with soft objects, the Golden Rule is being implemented. Conversely, by providing many different calming spaces around the classroom (student choice), the Platinum Rule is being implemented, and therefore, a sense of belonging is being embraced.

One way to continually focus on the concept of belonging is to reflect on the 4 Crucial Cs created by Betty Lou Bettner and Amy Lew (1990). The 4 Crucial Cs are connect, courage, capable, and count. Betty Lou Bettner, a
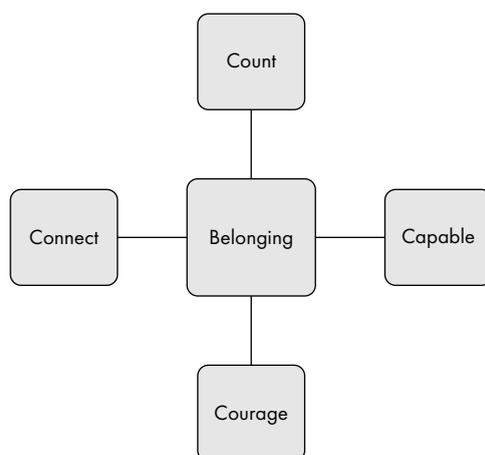
Figure 1.4.   The Four Crucial Cs of belonging.

family therapist and social worker, identified these 4 Crucial Cs that work together to help us feel a sense of significance and belonging in a constructive healthy way. Children, as well as adults, are constantly seeking ways to feel that they connect to others, that they are capable, that they count (are valued), and that they have courage. By focusing on the 4 Crucial Cs for each individual, a true sense of belonging is created (see Figure 1.4).

Examples of the 4 Crucial Cs, in the context of early childhood, include the following:

- *Count:* When a child is absent, they are missed, and you let them know it. When they come back to school, they are welcomed. In addition, implementing classroom jobs is a great way for children to feel as if they count as part of the community. Another way an entire school community can create a sense of counting is to welcome children, regardless of what time they show up, with a smile and a positive "Good morning" or "Good afternoon" greeting. When children are greeted with questions such as "Where have you been?" or "Why are you always late?" it decreases their sense of belonging.

- *Capable:* A child feels capable when the adults in their lives have provided them with the skills, knowledge, and foundation to complete what they are asked to complete. For example, children are provided the scaffolded guidance to complete a lacing activity or cutting with scissors on a line. The classroom consists of appropriately sized shelving and furniture that allows the student to independently move throughout the room.

- *Courage:* This is supported by the notion of "If I [the child] fail, I know I will learn." Essentially, children feel supported, and therefore

courageous, to try, not succeed, and learn with the concept of "failing forward," which is learning something from a failure to continue to gain knowledge and skills. Teachers use language to motivate children to try new or more complex activities, and children are encouraged to reflect on why they were not successful to learn for next time. Most importantly, children are given the opportunity to try the activity again with the newly learned knowledge and skills.

- *Connect:* Teachers can create a sense of connection through welcoming activities where children learn each other's names or complete collaborative problem-solving activities such as answering the question of the day. Teachers encourage peer interaction by allowing multiple children to "learn through play" in the various centers in the classroom.

REFLECTION

How do the concepts of diversity, equity, inclusion, access, and belonging intersect with the 4 Crucial Cs? How is the concept of belonging supported in your learning environment?

The concept of belonging is not only important (and a newer piece of the diversity, equity, inclusion, access, and belonging [DEIAB] concept) but also assists all individuals as they traverse their path up the mountainside. Arguably, critics of DEIAB say that the work should be changed to belonging, justice, and dignity (BJD) (Davis, 2021). Why do they suggest this change from DEIAB to BJD?

- Belonging is one's physical, emotional, and psychological safety—the indescribable feeling of being welcome.

- Dignity is one of the most universal concepts to describe the sacred nature of each individual's personhood.

- Justice is the repairing and restoring of individuals.

As is evident from the definitions, BJD focuses more on individual identities and repairing a history of oppression and power dynamics.

REFLECTION

After reading these definitions, go back to Figure 1.2 showing the tree that was used as the updated version of understanding equity. How does the figure provide a place for reflection and growth in all of our learning spaces?

MYTHS OF EQUITY

Finally, stemming from many of the concepts introduced and discussed in this chapter, it is important to ground our thinking in a concept known as the "Myths of Equity."

What are the Myths of Equity? They are a list of myths that are often accepted when discussing equity-focused work, specifically in the field of early childhood. Therefore, we are going to take time to address each of these myths.

Myth #1: Children in early childhood are too young to learn about equity. As stated earlier, children as young as 6 months are aware of race and gender differences and are beginning to form ideas about diversity. These same children are growing older and experiencing their own power and privilege, or lack of power and privilege, based on their identities. Although some may question if teaching about equity is developmentally appropriate, the truth is that children are already learning about DEIAB through life experiences and their understanding of fairness. It is important that we create schools and organizations that are a place where our students can be their authentic selves without the punishment that society has placed on historically marginalized identities.

Myth #2: It is fine to just keep things like they are. The fear of the unknown can stop us from questioning practices that we have always done. If we are truly going to transform environments for all, we cannot continue to use the same policies and expectations that we have always used because, frankly, they are built on exclusionary practices and mindsets.

Myth #3: This is just more work for teachers. Change takes time and intentionality. DEIAB work is not just another task for teachers to complete once a year. Building equitable learning environments requires individuals to constantly question, reflect, analyze, and implement transformative practices. Through this process, teachers will be able to learn how their own socialization and privilege or oppression have influenced the hidden curriculum in their classrooms. Yes, it does require effort, but these reflective practices are part of the learning and growing journey.

Myth #4: "I don't see color." The world that we live in is becoming more and more diverse. In fact, as stated in the Preface, the preschool class of 2020 is the first class to have a majority of students who identify racially as Asian, Black, Latinx, Native American, biracial, or multiracial. Therefore, when teachers choose not to see the whole child, including all of the child's identities, educators are using privilege, consciously or unconsciously, to decide who is seen (represented) in the classroom. By stating, "I don't see color," the message is, "I do not see all of you." Furthermore, when "I don't see color" is stated, the intentional representation of all students in the curriculum is also often absent. As Bishop (1990) explained, "When children cannot find themselves in books, or when they see themselves presented only as

laughable stereotypes, they learn a powerful lesson about how much they are undervalued in the society in which they are part" (p. 5).

Although you may not personally believe in the myths listed, they are documented and prevalent in education. Therefore, take time to truly reflect on your reactions to the five myths described. If needed, take some of the information regarding definitions into consideration when reflecting as part of your overall journey of growth, learning, and discovery.

"Built on a foundation of sound scholarship and rich personal experiences, Reinking and Thigpen acknowledge the challenges of working toward support for diversity, equity, inclusion, accessibility, and belonging—and provide meaningful strategies for individuals and programs regardless of where they are in this important journey. Whether you are just beginning conversations about the complexity of equity or are farther along the path, this book is an outstanding resource to guide you on your way."

—Elizabeth A. Sherwood, Ed.D., Professor Emeritus, School of Education, Health, and Human Behavior, Southern Illinois University, Edwardsville

"This text is not only timely but has the ability to be transformative if intentionally applied. Reinking and Thigpen provide detailed, practical strategies for early education leaders to advance all aspects of equity in early childhood environments. The need for change is long overdue and this text contributes to the work that pushes those changes forward."

—Tameka N. Ardrey, Ph.D., Program Chair, Birth–Kindergarten Teacher Education, School of Human Ecology, Georgia Southern University

As early childhood learning environments grow more and more diverse, schools and programs must address inequitable practices and policies so that every child learns, belongs, and thrives. The practical solutions programs need are in this groundbreaking book, the first guide to coaching early childhood educators in **Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, Accessibility, and Belonging (DEIAB)** practices.

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LEARN HOW TO:

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- Create an **effective action plan to coach educators** on a journey toward greater equity and inclusion
- Put your DEIAB plan into action through **book studies, Equity and Diversity Workgroups,** and other **team learning opportunities**
- Implement **structural changes** to support a multicultural curriculum, diverse staffing, and policies that uplift everyone
- **Overcome obstacles** to DEIAB work, from communication blocks to staff and community resistance
- Ensure **continuous growth and improvement** through ongoing **assessment and reflection**

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