

CHAPTER 2

Attitudes



TOOLBOX

- Figure 2.1. Components of an attitude
- Figure 2.2. Connection of the components of Making Friends to attitude influences
- Figure 2.3. The basics of attitude formation
- Figure 2.4. Strategies that promote accepting attitudes



As mentioned in Chapter 1, the Making Friends program uses attitude change research (Triandis, Adamopoulos, & Brinberg, 1984) as a foundation to create accepting multicultural inclusive classes. Therefore, this chapter provides more in-depth information on attitudes, including the definition of an attitude, developmental information on how and when attitudes are formed, a brief summary of research findings on attitudes, and implications for teachers and family members. For the seminal research on attitudes and attitude development, see Allport (1935). For more recent research on attitudes and attitude change, see Ajzen (2001), Wood and Fabrigar (2012), Yu and Ostrosky (2012), and Yu, Ostrosky, and Fowler (2012).

WHAT IS AN ATTITUDE?

While there are many ways of defining an attitude, the Making Friends program is based on one of the early definitions: “an attitude is an *idea* charged with *emotion* which predisposes a class of *actions* to a particular class of social situations” (Triandis, 1971, p. 2). Notably, attitudes are complex, with a *cognitive* component (ideas and thoughts), an *affective* component (feelings), and a *behavioral* component (behavioral intentions, behavior or actions toward/away from the attitude referent; Ajzen, 1988; Eagly & Chaiken, 1993; Triandis, 1971). In this case, the attitude referent would be a child who is different from oneself. Each component of an

We enjoyed,
as a family,
reading books
each week.
—Ms. Eacott

attitude generates something different: ideas and thoughts (he or she is bad or good, or like or unlike me), feelings (like/dislike, enjoyment/discomfort, anxiety/calm), and behaviors or behavioral intentions (to avoid or seek out). See Figure 2.1.

HOW ARE ATTITUDES FORMED?

Attitudes are formed over time by many influences that begin occurring when a child is very young. Simply put, children learn attitudes. Attitudes do not just happen; attitudes are encouraged and supported in particular directions (toward or away; positive or negative) by three primary sources: indirect experiences, direct experiences, and the child's primary social group (Derman-Sparks, Tanaka Higa, & Sparks, 1980; Triandis, 1971; Triandis, Adamopoulos, & Brinberg, 1984). Let's take a look at each source that influences attitude development.

I noticed during play centers that children without disabilities were more encouraging to friends who needed help.
—Ms. Muwana

Indirect Experiences

There are many indirect experiences or sources of information that shape attitudes by indirectly providing information. These include but are not limited to how individuals are portrayed in books, movies, television, photographs, and conversations. Each of these sources of information indirectly informs a child's sense of self and sense of others. Stated another way, each of these sources of information provides both a mirror (shaping perceptions of self) and a window (shaping perceptions of others; Blaska, 2000). Therefore, children are indirectly exposed to the attitude referent (e.g., child with disabilities, child from a different race or ethnicity, child who uses multiple languages, child who is from a diverse family structure) through the information they receive in print and visual media or through conversations in daily life. Over time, the collection of these indirect experiences plays a role in shaping the development of positive or negative attitudes. Here are three examples that illustrate the influence of indirect experiences:

- If a person is *not portrayed at all* in conversations, books, or popular media, this sends a strong and silent message that such a person is excluded, invisible, or does not belong (Blaska, 2000; Hughes, Rodriguez, Smith, Johnson, Stevenson, & Spicer, 2006). This is easy to see when you consider how people of color, people with disabilities, single-parent families, and people from diverse cultural backgrounds historically were not evident in books, television, and movies.

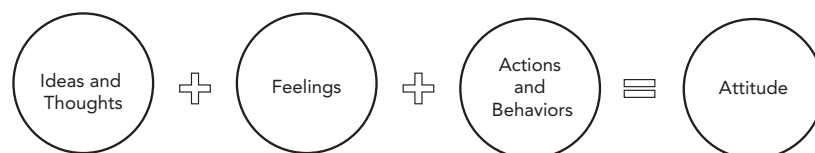


Figure 2.1. Components of an attitude.

I learned sign language!
—Jorge,
6½ years old

- If a person is *repeatedly portrayed in a negative light* in conversations, books, movies, television, or video games (e.g., a character with a disability or a character from a specific ethnic or racial group is often the “villain”) or is portrayed in ways that emphasize that he or she belongs to a different world (e.g., only Caucasian characters succeed, only Latino or African American characters live in poverty), it can predispose children to have a stereotypic view, to be less accepting, or to espouse negative attitudes toward others. For example, there are many characters with disabilities from animated movies that are portrayed as the “villain,” excluded from society, or ridiculed, such as Captain Hook in *Peter Pan*, the Hunchback of Notre Dame, Dumbo the Elephant, and Scar from *The Lion King*. While these movies may be viewed as entertainment for young children, they also convey subtle and often stereotypic messages of nonacceptance of those who are different (Hunt, 1991). Likewise, stereotypic and negative portrayals of Latino and African American characters in the media are well documented, which many speculate contributes to nonacceptance of individuals from diverse racial and ethnic groups (Dixon & Linz, 2000; Mastro, Behm-Morawitz, & Kopacz, 2008). These realities point to the need for informed conversations about diversity *representation* in the media (Vittrup & Holden, 2010).
- If a person is *repeatedly portrayed in a positive light* in conversations, books, movies, television, or video games (e.g., a Spanish-speaking child has friends, a child with two moms is happy and well loved) and is portrayed in everyday situations that demonstrate similarities with others (e.g., liking music and dancing, struggling with homework), this provides a positive narrative or sends a positive message that can predispose children to be more accepting (Jordan & Hernandez-Reif, 2009). Even the simple use of modeling positive behaviors (e.g., playing with toys that represent children from diverse racial and ethnic groups) or presenting positive color–word associations (e.g., “The black doll is beautiful just like you.”) can serve as a positive catalyst for changing children’s preferences and attitudes (Powell-Hopson & Hopson, 1992).

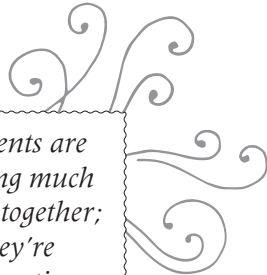


William [a child with a disability] was very welcomed back after his weeklong absence for surgery.
—Mrs. Cronin

Direct Experiences

A similar thing happens with direct experiences. Direct experiences are authentic, firsthand encounters with individuals who are different in some way. These experiences may include playing with a child with disabilities, a child who speaks another language, a child who is racially or ethnically different, or a child from a home with a unique family structure (e.g., raised by adoptive parents, two dads, or a grandmother).

- If repeated experiences and/or interactions with others who are different from one's self are negative, uncomfortable, or unsuccessful, this will likely have a negative impact on early perceptions, setting the stage for negative attitudes.
- If repeated experiences and/or interactions with individuals who are diverse are positive, comfortable, or successful, it will likely have a positive impact on early perceptions, setting the stage for positive attitudes (Aboud, Mendelson, & Purdy, 2003).



*Students are
playing much
better together;
they're
cooperating.
—Ms. Amaya*


Primary Social Group

Last, a child's primary social group greatly influences the attitudes that he or she adopts (Castelli, Zogmaister, & Tomelleri, 2009; Hughes et al., 2006; Jeynes, 2005; Peretti & Sydney, 1984; Sinclair, Dunn, & Lowery, 2005; Thornton & Camburn, 1987; Weinraub, Clemens, Sockloff, Ethridge, Gracely, & Myers, 1984). Families are the first primary social group for young children, and consequently, parents and other family members play a critical role in the development of perceptions and attitude formation.

- If family members make disparaging remarks about an individual of another race, a young child will learn to do the same.
- If a child is cared for by a relative who repeatedly demonstrates pity and discomfort when in the presence of children with disabilities, the child will likely do the same, mirroring the actions and words they have seen or heard.
- If family members show excitement and enthusiasm about their new neighbors who speak another language, the child will most likely mirror their behavior.

However, it is also important to realize that as children age, the social group expands to include teachers and peers (Horne, 1985; Jones, 1984; Wood & Fabrigar, 2012). Because of this, it is not surprising when children espouse new or different attitudes of acceptance or rejection as they become increasingly influenced by the words and actions of their teachers and later their peers. So it is important to include family members, teachers, and peers in programs that promote acceptance and inclusion and to ensure that these programs are ongoing, matching the ongoing nature of attitude development.

While attitudes are influenced by indirect experiences, direct experiences, and the primary social group, the strength of these attitudes is dependent on *how often children receive those positive or negative messages* and the *reinforcement* (praise, feedback, feelings of pleasure) they receive from espousing the attitudes (e.g., saying and doing positive things with someone with a disability or

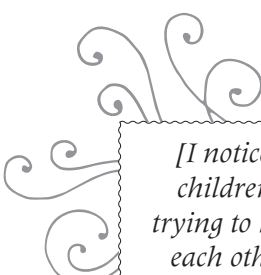


*Our whole
family
participated in
these activities
and really
enjoyed it.
—Ms. McQuaid*

an individual of a different race). If a child is praised or applauded for his or her actions, it is likely that the actions will increase or persist. For example, if a child is emboldened by his peers' attention and applause when bullying a child who is of a different ethnic background or who has disabilities, the behavior is reinforced, and the negative attitudes are strengthened. Both the reinforcement associated with actions and words and the frequency of positive and negative messages associated with the direct and indirect experiences and the social group can strengthen attitudes. Finally, it is worth pointing out that while attitudes can change, the longer a person has a particular attitude, the more difficult it may be to change the patterns of thoughts and feelings (internal narratives) and the patterns of behavior.

WHEN DOES ATTITUDE FORMATION ABOUT HUMAN DIFFERENCES BEGIN?

The presence of negative attitudes toward individuals who are different from oneself is not a new phenomenon, nor is it a phenomenon seen only in the United States. There is a long history of negative perceptions and attitudes toward people with disabilities, which date back to ancient Greek and Roman times (Munyi, 2012) and are still widespread. Likewise, there is a long history of nonacceptance and discrimination related to race. Many would say that racism originated with the slave trade as slaveholders from Rome and Greece created and perpetuated the belief that slavery was natural because Africans were not human beings (Taylor, 2000). Likewise, there is extensive research on attitudes toward individuals who speak different languages, with studies demonstrating that attributes such as competence, attractiveness, and personal integrity are assigned to individuals based on the language they speak or their accent (Baker & Jones, 1989). Finally, in recent years, attention has focused on the increasing numbers of children from nontraditional families who have encountered nonacceptance or bullying in school settings (Bliss & Harris, 1998; Fitzgerald, 1999; Lamme & Lamme, 2002).



[I noticed children] trying to help each other and helping students with disabilities when having difficulties.
—Ms. Santos

However, new research sheds light on the challenge of promoting acceptance of differences in young children. Children under 2 years of age already show preferences toward those whom they perceive as similar to themselves, even if the child who is similar to them engages in inappropriate or aggressive behaviors (Hamlin, Mahajan, Liberman, & Wynn, 2013). Infants and toddlers demonstrate a preference for others who match their preferences in choice of toys, food, and clothing (Fawcett & Markson, 2010; Manhajan & Wynn, 2012). As children age, ideas about differences become more established, and positive or negative behaviors in the presence of differences become common patterns depending on how family members and teachers respond to natural human differences. For example, by age 3, children notice gender differences in other children and begin forming early perceptions of as well as preferences for those who are the same gender. By age 4, early perceptions of race or skin tone are being formed, and by age 5, early perceptions of children with disabilities are

formed (Derman-Sparks & ABC Task Force, 1989; Gerber, 1977; Jones & Sisk, 1970).

These early perceptions are the beginning of attitude formation, and the strength and direction (positive or negative) of the attitude will depend on how it is influenced by the child's social group and the direct and indirect experiences he or she has. Moreover, there is a fundamental relationship between peer acceptance and children's socialization and full membership in early childhood classes. For example, children with disabilities are often assigned lower social status by their typically developing peers and are also nominated less frequently as friends (Dyson, 2005; Favazza, Phillipsen, & Kumar, 2000; Nowicki, & Sandieson, 2002; Yu, Ostrosky, & Fowler, 2014). Using evidence-based strategies to intentionally promote greater understanding and acceptance of children who are different is a critical step in efforts to create classrooms that are welcoming and supportive of all children. See Figure 2.2, which illustrates how the components of the Making Friends program connect to the attitude construct.

WHAT ARE THE IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE?

Research has consistently demonstrated that teachers and family members have a powerful impact on children's attitudes. In fact, every day, teachers and family members communicate their attitudes about a myriad of people, events, and situations to children through the ways they talk about others or answer questions, the ways they behave, and the ways they show approval or disapproval of children's actions and words (Innes & Diamond,

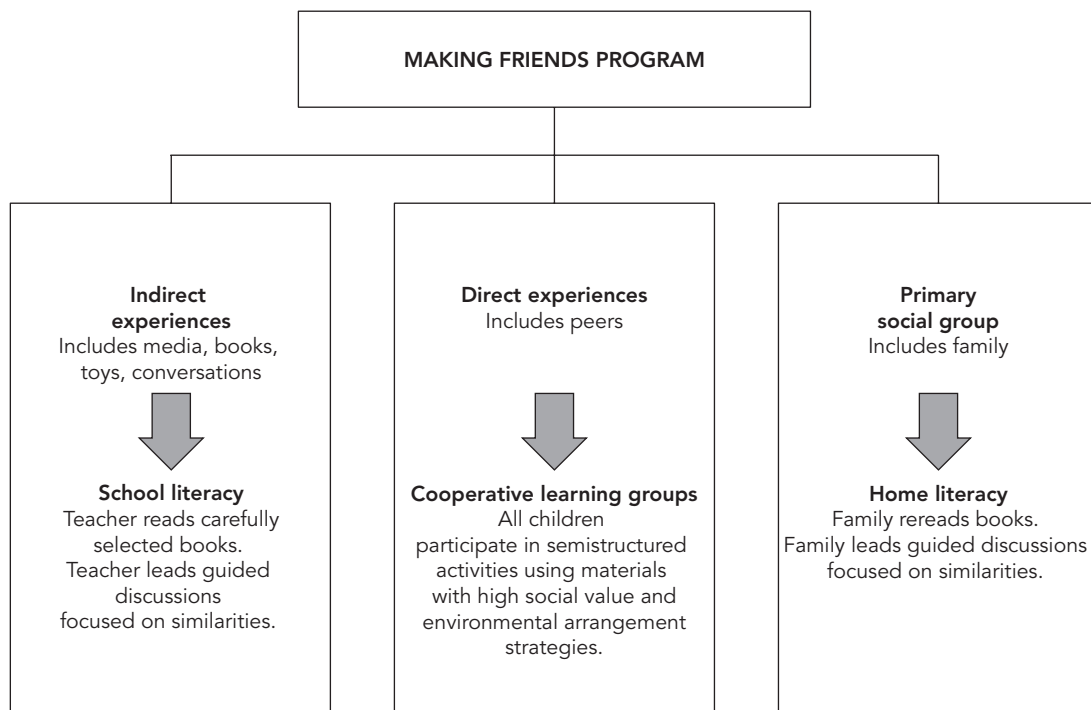


Figure 2.2. Connection of the components of Making Friends to attitude influences.

1999; Lieber, Capell, Sandall, Wolfberg, Horn, & Beckman, 1998; Park & Ostrosky, 2013). So what can be done to ensure that attitudes of acceptance are developed in children? The following things are important to consider:

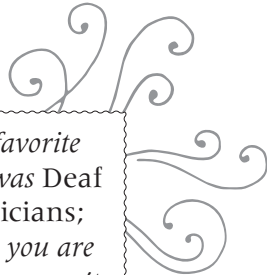
- *Knowing oneself and one's own attitudes.* Before beginning the Making Friends program, it is important that all adults involved understand how attitudes are formed and have a clear sense of their own attitudes (Garman, 2005). In Chapter 3, exercises are provided to enable participants in the Making Friends program to reflect on their own attitudes and understand the early influences on these attitudes (i.e., indirect experiences, direct experiences, and messages received from parents and other family members). It is important to take time to think about these components of the attitude construct and reflect on how to model attitudes of acceptance for all children.
- *Using a multicomponent approach.* It is important to keep in mind that an attitude is a multicomponent concept that is influenced by indirect experiences, direct experiences, and the child's primary social group, which are addressed in the Making Friends program through school literacy, cooperative learning groups, and home literacy, respectively. Previous research has demonstrated that addressing all three components of the attitude construct is more effective in promoting attitudinal change than addressing any single component (Favazza, Phillipsen, & Kumar, 2000). In addition, attitudes are multidimensional in nature, reflecting one's feelings, ideas, and behaviors. Therefore, it is important that these aspects of attitudes are reflected in conversations with children and that all components of the Making Friends program are implemented to optimize the outcomes.
- *Being a discriminating consumer.* All environments and the materials and activities in these environments influence children; therefore, it is important that environments are examined to maximize the positive influences in classrooms and the overall school setting. In Chapter 3, a checklist is provided for teachers to evaluate their school and class setting to ensure that the environment, materials, media, and activities in which children are engaged reflect others in positive ways and support conversations about the wonderful and unique ways people are different and the surprising ways in which people are all more alike than different. It is recommended that teachers and family members utilize these and other resources to infuse a positive perspective about the diverse world in which we live.
- *Involving family members, especially when children make the transition into a new class.* In this highly mobile world, children make the transition



into new educational settings on a fairly regular basis. It is important that teachers partner with family members to ease these transitions. Before a child arrives in a new class, teachers can think about ways to create positive connections for all children (Favazza, 1998). For example, teachers can have conversations with their students about the arrival of a new friend. In addition, teachers can engage in conversations with the new child and family members so as to prepare them for the new class and convey excitement about the new adventure. Research has demonstrated that parents and other family members have a powerful impact on children's attitudes toward differences and that children will often follow the lead provided by their family members and teachers (Castelli, Zogmaister, & Tomelleri, 2009; Jeynes, 2005; Peretti & Sydney, 1984; Sinclair, Dunn, & Lowery, 2005; Thornton & Camburn, 1987; Weinraub et al., 1984). Therefore, it is important to involve family members when a new child enters the class and throughout the Making Friends program.

- *Planning for maintenance of an accepting, welcoming, and inclusive setting.* Because children are continually influenced by the world in which they live, it is important to use Making Friends as an ongoing program that welcomes conversations and promotes acceptance and a sense of belonging. In doing so, children are more likely to be predisposed to be more accepting of the wonderful diversity that surrounds them (Siraj-Blatchford & Clarke, 2000; see also TeachingForChange.org).

Finally, in response to increasing diversity, the National Association for the Education of Young Children developed a position statement to guide



My favorite book was Deaf Musicians; when you are deaf, you can't hear, but you can use sign language.
—Shawn

Attitudes are complex, multicomponent cognitive structures.

Attitudes include *ideas, feelings, and behaviors*.

The attitudes of younger children are more malleable than those of older children and adults.

Teachers and family members can affect the formation of attitudes with careful attention to *indirect experiences, direct experiences, and the child's primary social group*.

Attitudes are relatively stable once they are formed.

Resistance to attitude change as one grows older is a reflection of this stability. Because of this, it is important to intervene during the early childhood years.

Without effective programs in place that are intentionally designed to promote acceptance of differences, significant change in levels of acceptance is less likely.

Infants, toddlers, and preschoolers typically show preferences for others that they perceive as similar to themselves. Because of this, young children need the influential adults in their lives to provide intentional and positive conversations and activities that model acceptance of human differences.

Figure 2.3. The basics of attitude formation. (Sources: Favazza & Odom, 1996, 1997; Favazza, Phillipsen, & Kumar, 2000.)



Figure 2.4. Strategies that promote accepting attitudes.

practitioners as they strive to create more inclusive and welcoming early childhood classrooms (NAEYC, 1995). The strategies suggested in this book are consistent with this position statement. A summary of key points from this chapter is found in Figures 2.3 and 2.4; these summaries can be used with teachers and family members when starting the Making Friends program.

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