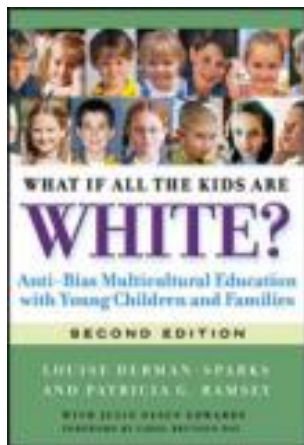


## Professional Book Review

Derman-Sparks, L., Ramsey, P. G., & Edwards, J. O. (2011). *What If All the Kids Are White? Anti-bias Multicultural Education with Young Children and Families*. New York: Teachers College Press. 224 pp., ISBN: 978-0-8077-5112-8. \$26.95

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How do we address issues of anti-bias and multicultural education (AB/MC) when all the children are White? In this second edition of *What If All the Kids Were White? Anti-Bias Multicultural Education with Young Children and Families*, Louise Derman-Sparks and Patricia Ramsey continue the vital conversation of cultural identity in young children's lives. Updated with new resources, current research, and analysis of the current political climate, the authors ask us to reflect on the effects of White culture in the formation of cultural values. Designed for the early childhood professional, the book focuses on teacher competencies, case studies, and activities in an easy-to-follow format that challenges early childhood professionals to reflect on their own perceptions of identity in the classroom. The authors stipulate that the book does not address the breadth of AB/MC education but is focused on early childhood teachers who want to explore the impact of the societal norm of "Whiteness" in greater depth.

The construction of identity is complex. Young children seek to make meaning from their experiences. In meaning making, young children ask questions or make assumptions about race, culture, and identity. Often when early childhood teachers are faced with questions about race and culture, they can fumble in their attempt to give the "right" answer. Teachers ask themselves how much information is too much or too little. What is developmentally appropriate? Early childhood teachers who are stumped by these questions miss the teachable moments that present themselves in working with young children. Derman-Sparks and Ramsey ascertain that teachers of young children need to be clear in their own thinking before they can answer children in a natural and meaningful way. The authors highlight three misconceptions that early childhood teachers hold: (1) children are too young to discuss the topic, (2) homogeneous groups of children do not develop assumptions about cultural identity, and (3) being White is not a culture-identifying marker.

The introduction of this book sets the stage for early childhood teacher inquiry into AB/MC practices. Part I focuses on the development of Whiteness and White identity and ways to bring this awareness to the classroom community and families. Part II builds on new knowledge to encourage children's critical thinking and activism as part of the human family. The appendixes provide useful resources for early childhood teachers in classroom settings. Two sets of case studies clearly identify the progression of AB/MC work with children and families. The incorporation of child development principles and the role of families in young children's lives, combined with the theoretical

work of social justice, provide teachers with both a theoretical and practical frame for AB/MC work.

Setting the stage for AB/MC work, the introduction encourages early childhood teachers to ask themselves hard questions about their perception of self and others in a teacher's journey as a White anti-racist educator. It provides the foundation to conduct self-reflective AB/MC work with children and families in early childhood settings. The authors put forward seven core learning themes, divided into two parts, designed for early childhood teachers to support White children in building an identity that helps them thrive in a diverse world. Learning themes are grounded in anti-bias practices to address teacher assumptions and develop a deep understanding of White identity, the role White identity plays in perpetuating inequality, and educators' responsibility to be agents of change.

Part I provides a context for civilizational racism and systems of oppression. This section weaves together the first three core learning themes: developing authentic identities of self and family characteristics outside of White superiority; knowing and valuing the range of diversity and social attributes among White people; and building the capacity for caring, cooperative relationships between individuals. It deals with the discomfort that White teachers often feel in doing authentic AB/MC work in the classroom, explaining why the *tourist approach* is often taken with multicultural education. Vignettes of children's perception of racial differences and teacher responses can be painful to read. The authors effectively use the vignettes to acknowledge that children "basing their identities on a sense of racial superiority puts White children at risk for developing an overblown, yet fragile, identity, instead of developing a solid sense of self that is based on their interests, connections to people, and contributions to the community" (p. 50).

Part II focuses on the final four core learning themes: understanding and respecting differences beyond the immediate environment; identifying and challenging stereotypes, prejudices and discrimination; equal distribution of resources for all people; and developing identity in AB work that leads to advocacy. Part II speaks to the development of White allies in the work of AB/MC from both a historical context and lived practicality. It discusses breaking the stereotypes of young children as a *tabula rasa*. "Young children have the capacity to grasp that racial prejudice is wrong, to care about others, challenge assumptions, and take action to remind injustice in their own world" (p. 112). It is the concept that children can be trusted with the AB/MC tools to see and advocate for change. Children have the ability to create their own empowered classrooms. The authors provide a framework for the practical application of skills with children and families leading to AB/MC advocacy.

The final section contains the appendixes. The first, Guidelines for Selecting Children's Books, highlights the unspoken messages that are found in children's books through illustrations, storylines, and children's self-identification, and provides website resources for finding AB/MC evaluated books. The second appendix contains website resources organized for personal and professional development and in support of working with children. The final appendix provides a selected list of modern-day White anti-racist activists for those wishing to do further reading or research.

*What If All the Kids Were White? Anti-Bias Multicultural Education with Young Children and Families* challenges readers to examine their own sense of identity in the classroom. Written for early childhood teachers, the book acknowledges the uniqueness of early childhood educational environments and the challenges faced in conducting AB/MC. The reflective questions at the end of each chapter are designed to further thinking in ways that are relevant to working with young children and their families. In particular, the authors focus on exploring White identity with staff and families, and cultivating activism provides insight into the skill it takes to hold families' experiences with care in AB/MC dialogues. Presented to reflect the realities of early childhood environments, the book tackles issues of racism, poverty, entitlement, and activism. Its case studies provide clear connections that "live" for the reader, demonstrating the successes, frustrations, and adjustments of working with family systems. The authors reflect, "As with all AB/MC work, it was often messy and often difficult, but it was also alive, daring, and full of hope and enthusiasm" (p. 167). For a White early childhood educator, it is a fundamental read. The authors' extensive AB/MC work challenges early childhood teachers to rethink the dominant epistemology that leads to civilizational racism. Examining our own biases and the framework that supports the continuation of racism is uncomfortable. This is the best type of book: a book that makes us think.