

Each & Every Child: Teaching Preschool With an Equity Lens

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[See table of contents](#)

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Friedman, S., & Mwenelupembe, A. (Eds.). (2020). *Each & every child: Teaching preschool with an equity lens*. Washington, DC: National Association for the Education of Young Children. 140 pages, \$36.99 (paperback). ISBN 1938113616

The edited book *Each & Every Child: Teaching Preschool with an Equity Lens*, by Susan Friedman (Senior Director of Publishing and Professional Learning, NAYEC) and Alissa Mwenelupembe (NAYEC National Governing Board Member), features the most recent and relevant work scholars and practitioners are doing to achieve equity in early childhood settings. The edited book was created in acknowledgement of the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC)'s published position statement on Advancing Equity in Early Childhood Education and their recommendations. The NAEYC is one of the leading professional organizations in the United States that works to promote high-quality early learning for all young children by linking early childhood education (ECE) policy, and research. In their position statement, the NAEYC advocates that “all children have the right to equitable learning opportunities that enable them to achieve their full potential as engaged learners and valued members of society” (NAEYC, 2019, p. 5).

This edited book was completed in response to the key messages of the NAEYC position statement. Editors Friedman and Mwenelupembe invited the expert knowledge of over 50 contributors and scholars in ECE to support the recommendations made by the NAEYC. Using clear, direct language, and a variety of real-life stories and scenarios, the book is organized to provide practical strategies and suggestions that are accessible and applicable for ECE educators (ECEs). Moreover, the editors provide a strong case as to why equity work is both appropriate and necessary in preschool settings. They caution against underestimating children's capability to understand and make sense of sensitive issues, and stress that all children have the right to equitable learning opportunities and that early childhood educators have an obligation to advance

equity. In this book some of the foremost experts in ECE in the U.S. use their work in anti-bias education, anti-racism, and culturally responsive pedagogies to provide ECEs with strategies and tips in developing an equity lens and achieving equity in their classrooms.

The book is organized in six parts, each part representing the specific recommendations made by NAEYC in their 'Advancing Equity' position statement. For example, one such recommendation, "Consider the developmental, cultural, and linguistic appropriateness of the learning environment and your teaching practices of each child" prefaces the second part of this book: "Creating an equitable classroom". Each part then includes three to seven chapters by contributors whose work dive deeper into related topics. Additionally, editors Friedman and Mwenelupembe begin each part with a brief introduction and a list of questions for readers to consider as they read each chapter and evaluate their own classroom practices.

Part one of the book (chapters 1 to 3) introduces the crucial prerequisite in doing equity work: addressing one's own implicit biases, understanding their own and others' historical and cultural contexts to be able to cultivate empathy and value diversity in the classroom. Friedman and Mwenelupembe argue that biases limit children's opportunities to reach their full potential and neither young children nor the best ECE educators are immune to bias. Therefore, the chapters in part one set the stage for developing an equity lens through self-reflection and the nurturing of empathy with young students. The ideas presented in this first section are well-supported through the foundational work by researcher and chapter 1 contributor Derman-Sparks' decades-long work in anti-bias education beginning in 1989 (Derman-Sparks & Edwards, 2020). In setting the stage for equity work in education, Friedman and Mwenelupembe are right to include one of the leading researchers in this area as Derman-Sparks' work continues to impact the area of early childhood education and development to this day.

Part two (chapters 4 to 10) represents the primary goal of the book: Creating an equitable classroom. The seven chapters in Part two aim to provide ECE educators with a diverse range of strategies in which readers can support the learning and development of children of every race, cultural background, language, ability, family structure, and even refugee background. This section focuses on how to support development through guided play, making and tinkering, storytelling, purposeful conversations, and culturally responsive curriculum. Much of the strategies and approaches in this section are familiar to ECE practitioners, as storytelling and play are integral to all early childhood learning. These chapters provide additional depth to these common ECE practices by illuminating the ways in which they can be tailored to cultivate diversity and celebrate difference.

Part three (chapters 11 to 13) is arguably the most noteworthy part of this book, delivering a timely and direct message about the negative impact of implicit bias on the education of Black boys. Instead of addressing gender and race bias broadly, editors Friedman and Mwenelupembe chose to directly address the alarming rate at which Black boys are disproportionately suspended and expelled from early childhood centres when compared to their White peers (US Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights, 2016). Research has revealed the ways in which educators' implicit biases can negatively impact black students and lead to more expulsions and suspensions for Black boys (Gilliam et al., 2016). By choosing to acknowledge this issue and speak frankly, the three chapters in this section focus on the pivotal work that must be done to address this ongoing issue – fighting against the deficit-lens that disproportionately affects Black boys and working to develop strength-based approaches to learning. Strength-based approaches to learning have long been connected to increase pro-social behaviour and academic success in students of BIPOC backgrounds (Butler-Barnes, et al., 2013; Day-Vines & Terriquez, 2008) and the disproportionate rate at which preschool expulsions affect Black students has scholars such as Iruka et al. (2020), leading researchers in the field of anti-bias classrooms, signalling an urgent call to arms – one that this book responded to by highlighting the ways on how to engage, strengthen, and give agency when teaching Black boys.



The following Part four (chapters 14 to 16) and Part five (chapters 17 to 20) tap into an important aspect of a strength-based approach. Namely, that children arrive to preschool with unique backgrounds, languages, cultures and experiences, and not as blank slates. These are children's "Funds of Knowledge" and must be both acknowledged and celebrated in preschool settings. These sections of the book provide guidance and strategies that support and work with emergent bilingual children and their families (Part 4) and how to engage with diverse families in our school communities (Part 5).

In the final section of this book, Part six (chapters 21-24), ECE readers are reminded about their role in advancing equity in the classroom, and the active activism this requires. Chapters in this section explore and address the daunting task this can be. Using stories and experiences shared by fellow ECE educators, they help to illuminate the small choices that one can make that help them to become an activist within their own unique settings. Friedman and Mwenelupembe admit there is no clear route to take when beginning this work, however, in the final chapter of their book they chose to showcase one such journey made by a former "teacher turned equity activist", Megan Pamela Ruth Madison. Through an interview format, Megan shares her journey from former babysitter in middle school to a leading social justice scholar in ECE.

It is important to note that much of the research and work presented in this book is situated within the context and policies in the U.S. For Canadian practitioners, the two countries' systems are inevitably linked and often reflect each other socially and institutionally and so this work has direct relevance to the ECE classrooms of Canada. For readers from other contexts, this book may be useful in some respects, such as cultivating family relationships and reflecting on implicit biases in one's own teaching practice. However, large sections of the book address the more pressing issues of ECE in the U.S. and Canada that may not be reflected abroad, for example, the focus on racial disparity in the teaching of Black Boys or the journey of Megan that is shared at the end of this book.



Nonetheless, this book can serve as a rich resource for those interested in designing their own programs and those wishing to enhance their teaching practice. Much of the work in these chapters has been formally published across academic journals and this book provides abridged versions that concisely summarize the key messages and implications of this research. I believe the most effective use of this book would come from engaging with the reflection questions of the book as a community of practicing educators and executing some of tools presented in their unique settings with their young students and their families. This would be most fruitful use of the suggestions and tips made in this book.

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