

The Anti-bias Approach in Early Childhood (3rd edition)

RED RUBY SCARLET (Ed.), 2016

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The Anti-bias Approach in Early Childhood is the latest compendium of work illustrating the anti-bias movement within the Australian context (see, Creaser & Dau, 1996; Dau, 2001). In the introduction, Editor Red Ruby Scarlet positions this third edition as, “a kind of celebration edition that collects original contributions, original authors re-writing their contributions, new narrators of past chapters, and new additions to expand the anti-bias conversation in Australia” (p. xxxi). This inclusive approach makes for an imposing volume, comprising twice the number of chapters and upwards of 100 additional pages compared to the previous edition.

Through both revisited and entirely new chapters about curriculum, pedagogy, policy, leadership, and activism, issues such as gender, race, ethnicity, language, disability, family, and migration are examined within the context of Australian early education. These wide-ranging chapters engage powerfully with the foundational goals of anti-bias curricular work established by Louise Derman-Sparks (1989), as both academics and practitioners detail positive and knowledgeable engagement with identities, empathetic orientations toward diversity, critical approaches to established ways of knowing and being, and thoughtful action/activism in the face of both everyday and extraordinary injustices.

There are, of course, elements of this book that are worthy of critique. From this reader’s perspective, the elements that make this volume difficult or disengaging are largely editorial and/or organizational in nature. With a volume of this breadth, it seems unlikely that every reader would employ a cover-to-cover approach. Thus, it would have been helpful to strategically and transparently group the chapters so that the reader might be able to more easily make connections across similar bodies of research and considerations for practice. For example, there are two contributions that deal explicitly with the ways in which anti-bias approaches intersect with language policies and practices – a chapter on the research, policy, and pedagogical factors surrounding diverse languages and dialects by Leonie Arthur and Jacqueline D’warte and a reflective chapter on bilingual pedagogy by Siobhán Hannan. These works are interesting and informative companions, yet 21 chapters separate them.

With regard to anti-bias approaches in early childhood, Scarlet rightly claims that, “it is tricky to know what to do or where to start – all the while being open to critically reflecting on the effects of your own practices” (p.xxxii). To this end, about two-thirds of the chapters provide *Questions for Reflection*, which call upon readers to examine their own knowing and being in relation to the anti-bias considerations presented in the chapters. Although this may seem like a small matter of editorial inconsistency, the absence of this format from so many chapters feels like a missed opportunity to push readers, especially current practitioners and pre-service teachers, into the challenging reflective space that comprises anti-bias work.

Although organizational missteps detract somewhat from the potential practical impact of the book, there is, indeed, much to celebrate. The looking-back/looking-forward nature of this new edition is moving. The addition of acknowledgements of country and the tributes to the late Elizabeth Dau testify to the ways in which knowing and being must be honored, shared, regenerated, and reconfigured, especially in the face of great loss.

In her introduction, Scarlet makes the claim that the current edition was meant to “grow the group” (p. xxxi). Although she is referring explicitly to the ways in which the (re)authoring of this 3rd edition was executed, this volume offers numerous points of entry for those who are ready to join-up or expand their role within the anti-bias movement. Although there is a complex

specificity to the Australian early childhood landscape, international scholars, practitioners, and students could find valuable insights in these chapters, as acting with bravery, teaching with empathy, and organizing for equity remain global issues.

Dr. Casey Y. Myers
Kent State University

References

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