

# Book Reviews

## ***Anti-Bias Education for Young Children and Ourselves, Second Edition***

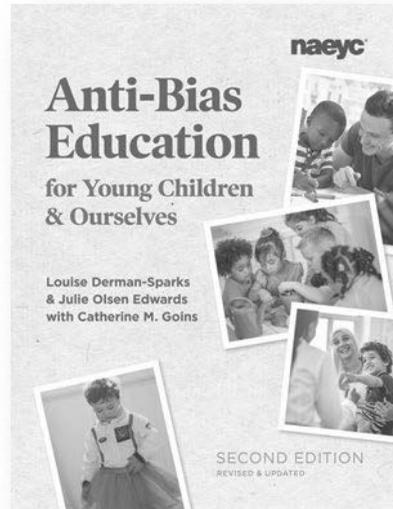
By Louise Derman-Sparks, et al.

Published by NAEYC

Reviewed by Nancy Blanning

This book had been in thoughtful and quiet preparation for a long time before COVID-19 began to turn the world upside down. The waking bad dream of the pandemic has shown in stark relief that racism and obvious and unconscious biases are systemically imbedded in our societal attitudes. This book was important from the start (this volume being a revised edition from its 2010 predecessor). Then came George Floyd's death and, with it, a roar of fury and anguish that is uncontainable. While this book would be helpful reading at any time, it is now essential and urgent. As Gandhi taught, "The change we want to see" begins with each of us. Unrecognized and denied *-isms* abound all around us. And this book is a tool for beginning to find one's way into this intimidating landscape of society and self.

First of all, be assured that this book is very readable, practical with lots of examples, non-scolding or shaming, and encouraging that we can all do better. We have to be willing to wake up, look objectively at



what we see happening around us, and listen to what we hear and say ourselves. Derman-Sparks lists the obvious biases, resulting in prejudicial conclusions about and discrimination toward race, culture, gender, religion, and sexual orientation. Overt discrimination is obviously damaging and demeaning. But equally destructive are implicit biases that are not outwardly expressed but which hover below a polite social exterior. *Implicit biases* are defined as "attitudes or stereotypes that affect our understanding, actions, and

decisions in an unconscious manner." When we begin to look inward, it is almost inevitable to find that we all carry some, if not actually a shocking number, to which we have been quite asleep.

The beginning of the book describes the landscape into which we must enter in anti-bias work. Quickly the material gets practical to help navigate the sensitive areas of this journey with the children, their families, and our colleagues. First of all come objective suggestions for how to look at our curriculum and physical classroom environment. One topic addressed, for example, is "Holidays in a Diverse World." Valuing all cultural identities comes with questions to ask of families so we can respectfully learn about and

support their personal practices. Specific chapters are dedicated to Diversity and Fairness—addressing racial, gender, sexual-orientation, economic, ability, and family differences.

As a reader, I have learned something new and important in every chapter. Yet one section that stands out in a special way is the chapter on “Relationships with Families and Among Teachers and Staff.” There are many suggestions given for building friendly and respectful relations with families. Many are already common practices within Waldorf early childhood programs. Some scenarios are shared of how conversations can be difficult and how differing views between adults can develop with tension. Sensible advice is given for how to not get enmeshed in a struggle. There are many different ways to view a situation, and each one has its truth and validity. The goal is to acknowledge our differences but keep genuinely speaking with one another to find a point we both agree upon as a new starting point.

Reflecting upon this, another implicit bias suggested

itself—“Waldorf knows best”—which implies that other views, including those of the parents and different educational streams, are short-sighted and inadequate. This is one to think about deeply. Memories bring shameful awareness of conversations with parents where the unspoken goal was to point out to them their error. The goal with this respectful listening is to hear and affirm all the positive things they are already doing to which we can join the wise insights of Waldorf education for the welfare of the child.

The spirit of *Anti-Bias Education* holds every child, parent, teacher, and colleague in high regard. This book is a handbook of guidance toward developing anti-bias attitudes toward other human beings—all human beings. It is also a workbook for the reader willing to take the plunge into self-reflection to uncover what biases live in one’s own being. And it is also a book of encouragement to bravely and honestly confront our personal shadows and step forward to affirm the worth and dignity of every human being. This striving will give our children noble models for imitation. ♦

## ***The Dignity of the Young Child 1***

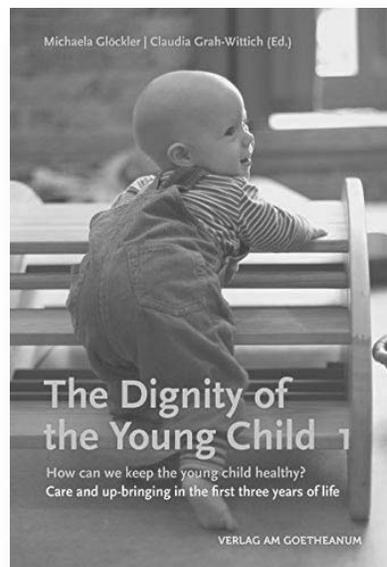
**Dr. Michaela Glöckler & Claudia Grah-Wittich, Eds.**

**Published by Verlag am Goetheanum as a collaboration of the Medical Section at the Goetheanum and the International Association of Waldorf Kindergartens**

**Reviewed by Nancy Blanning**

The time when children under the age of three spent their early years at home with a parent is becoming a “Once upon a time. . .” experience.

Cultural and societal attitudes and opportunities, family constellations, and economics have shifted dramatically in recent decades to both invite and push parents into the work force. Young children remain the same, however—vulnerable, tender, and needing the most loving care possible.



The Birth-to-Three movement in Waldorf early childhood education has stepped forward to protect these most vulnerable young ones with a louder public voice of conviction and intention. This newly published fifth edition of *The Dignity of the Young Child 1—How can we keep the young child healthy?* is a treasure of objective developmental information, pedagogical insight, and description of the capacities and intentions these souls carry with them from the spiritual world. The book contains a rich collection of presentations given in conferences at the Goetheanum on

everything from healthy information and advice on embryology, typical growth and development, support for the child’s forces of will toward autonomy, infant care, feeding and nutrition, and play—to name only a few topics—to the dark side of mistreatment and neglect. And there is ever so much more.

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I initially set to read this book for information. Just getting into the first article on embryology was so interesting (having just explored this topic in teacher training) that my reading accelerated. My original intention had been to skim the book to get an idea of the overview. But that soon deepened into reading every word with great interest and often awe.

The theme that runs through every presentation in this volume is clear, simple, and profound. Young children come from the spiritual world carrying gifts and talents, intentions, and great developmental wisdom embedded within them as their birthright. When given security and safety in their environment and embraced within a loving and respectful relationship with their caregivers, they will grow themselves beautifully. Gentle, age-appropriate stimulation; freedom of movement; rhythmic, predictable bodily care; feeding; exploring and playing; and rest are the essential supports that will allow the children to flourish. These are to be offered in a way that allows children to enter into each experience out of their own initiative. Coming to each milestone, skill, accomplishment on their own—without any artificial, untimely acceleration or insistence—grows healthy, independent will. This and growing a healthy, strong physical body and organ systems is what the first seven years of life are all about.

The book does not only speak about these things theoretically. Practical examples accompany every point with delightful photos of little children coming-into-incarnated-being through sleeping, eating, crawling, climbing, exploring, sensing, and finding joy in their own accomplishments.

As a reader, I found every article interesting. A few sections stood out particularly that call for reading several times. Dr. Michaela Glöckler's "The Dignity of the Young Child—Ethical Motives and Challenges" elucidates many essential points, including "Love as a Cultural Task" and "Working on a Healthy Self-Awareness." She discusses the connection of four foundational senses and the four social/spiritual

senses, as described by Rudolf Steiner. The descriptions of these pairings—touch with perceiving the I-being of the other, life with thought, self-movement with word/speech, and balance with hearing—are stunning in how she pictures the sensitive relationship between these sensory partners and the importance of healthy sensory development for the child. Others that call for additional re-reading are "To be separate and then together," by Claudia Grah-Wittich; "The Genius of Play," by Sally Jenkins; and "Speech development and speech promotion" by Elisabeth Wutte.

This publication is obviously an essential handbook for teachers involved with Birth-to-Three and Parent-Child programs. It is also essential reading for all Waldorf early childhood educators. No matter what our level—Birth-to-Three, nursery, or mixed age kindergarten—we need to know the whole scope of growth and development. We need to know where the child has come from, what the child's tasks and opportunities for development will be when they will be in our own class rooms, and what they will be heading toward when they progress onto the next setting. Whatever can happen next depends upon what did or did not happen well before.

I learned things I truly did not know before reading this book. It is naturally pleasing to have more information giving insight into this precious time of development. Yet perhaps the greatest gift from this reading is the mood of reverence, appreciation, and awe for this time of the child's life that this book has invoked within me. Being reminded of the purity, the dignity, and yes, really the majesty of the wise spiritual intention living in each of these little beings swells my mind and heart.

Along with the new WECAN publication, *Understanding Child Development*, this book is one that teacher training programs will do well to consider as an addition to other essential texts for their students. These titles will certainly become required reading for the courses I present in the future. ♦