Book Review: Everyday Equity

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Book Review


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Fairness does not mean everyone gets the same. Fairness means everyone gets what he or she needs.

—Rick Riordan, *The Red Pyramid* (Kane Chronicles, Book 1)

Introduction

In her book, *Everyday Equity*, Dr. Patricia Nan Anderson explores the differences between equality and equity. When we talk about “open enrollment,” we assert our rights of equality—all children have a right to enroll in a preferred childcare, but do all children from different backgrounds get equal opportunities as others in the same childcare? Does a Black child’s expectations meet at the same level as a White child? Does a child with Down syndrome get the same level of social, psychological, and academic experiences and attention as a child with normal abilities? Here, we see a major difference between equality and equity—equality gives everyone the same access to one’s preferred choice, while equity fulfills the desired expectations on an individualized basis. Anderson says, “Equality can be a shield we hide behind, a
justification for bias and preference rather than the leveler it should be” (p.8). She further claims, “If our purpose is to create the best futures for children, then we must provide for them and for their parents what they need to succeed, not simply, what everyone gets” (p.7). In this book, Anderson further explores what biases and preferences are, how they develop, and how they affect our thinking. She suggests a pro-person curriculum rather than an antibias curriculum. Anderson says:

Our beliefs affect others around us, even if we keep our beliefs secret…. [O]ur beliefs are so much a part of us that we don’t even notice they are “beliefs” but just assume they are ideas everybody shares. (p.14)

She wonders how we get to this state and how we can get out of this.

The Less Traveled Path of Equity in Early Childhood Settings

But I Am Not Prejudiced
Everyone thinks he or she is not prejudiced, but just as equality and equity are not the same, so are prejudices, discriminations, and stereotypes not the same. Prejudice is a feeling system, in how we feel about something, and is nonvisible. Discrimination is an action, and visible to the eyes. A stereotype is what we think, or our notion about certain things, for example, people from various backgrounds such as ethnic, sexual orientation, ability, and so on. These three words are used interchangeably—some of these notions are fabrications invented to prop up our preexisting set of stereotypes and prejudices, and to justify discriminatory actions. Anderson gives an example of Ezra Jack Keat’s book, The Snowy Day. Published in 1962 by a White author about a Black child, this elevated quite a racial uproar. Anderson says:

The celebration that accompanied the publication of the Snowy Day, and all the self-congratulatory press that followed such an enlightened move to produce a book about a Black child, was dampened considerably by the outcry from the African-American community….It was—and still is—an example of the blindness of privilege, of White publishers (and White readers) who could assume that “only” White people are competent authors and illustrators, and that books by Black authors and illustrators about Black children…are unsuitable for mainstream publication. (p.30)

Anderson quotes Rosado of Eastern University in Pennsylvania that racial prejudice is the refusal to change one’s attitude even after receiving evidence to the contrary, so that one continues to postjudge people the same way one prejudged them.

My Brain Made Me Do It
We hold stereotypical and discriminatory views against some people without being aware of it. Anderson says, “We can begin blaming our brains” (p.38). The researchers from Harvard Implicit Association Test (IAT) indicate that our impulsive thinking acts on preexisting prejudices; therefore, to think, “I am not prejudiced,” is often not true. Our brain reacts and exposes our true feelings. Anderson says that to discriminate against some people and feel comfortable with others is hardwired into our brains. Our own self-centeredness inspires us to
see what we expect to see in other people. The implicit and confirmation biases get in our way in trying to establish equity in our relationships.

**The Development of Bias**
Preferences, prejudices, and stereotypes begin even before a child is born—the way we decorate the nursery or choose baby clothes starts to fit the parents’ own mental image. Children are biological and psychological extensions of their parents’ lives. How can we get over our prejudices, biases, and preferences? Anderson recommends broadening our own horizons, for instance, shopping in a culturally different neighborhood, developing a taste for ethnic food, getting involved in nonprofit organizations for the underprivileged, learning new languages, taking public transportation, and becoming more aware of instances of inequity and discriminations.

**Create a Pro-Person Curriculum**
A pro-person curriculum is different than many other diversity-based curricula. Anderson says:

> Antibias by definition is negative. It is against something (bias). … [T]o believe that other people are biased, but they themselves are not… promotes finger pointing. (p.74)

Pro-person is looking at people in a positive way. It provides a gateway to being more concerned about equity in others. Anderson says:

> Providing a pro-person curriculum begins with becoming more pro-person ourselves… seeing our own biases, and how these affect our interactions with children. Becoming a more open-minded person is the first step. (p.82)

A pro-person curriculum shows diversity in the environment through books, music, pretend play, pictures on the wall, and having open-ended conversations, both with children and parents. The world has changed, so should our value systems and teaching methods—reconsider how to teach traditional units, themes, holidays, and so on, which should be inclusive of children from all different backgrounds. Anderson points out:

> This is not an easy job, and many of us don’t have good role models…. [W]e may need to create our pro-person attitudes and actions as we go along as best as we can…. We may have to be brave. (p.111)

**Standing Up for Equity**
The last chapter focuses on being more humane as early childhood practitioners. Anderson cites the case of a three-year-old girl with Down syndrome who was expelled from a New Jersey school because she was not toilet trained according to the school’s policies. When the director tells the parents, “Your child is no longer welcome here,” through no fault of the child or the parents, it must be such a disheartening thing, both for the child and the parents. In pro-person culture, we work together with open hearts and open minds to solve problems for the best interest of the child.
Conclusion

In this easy-to-read book, Anderson has adroitly opened up the issues of equality and equity facing early childhood practitioners. Our own preferences and biases, without our knowing, occasionally get in the way of how we interact with children, and affect our teaching. Anderson argues for an equity–based, pro-person curriculum, and sketches the way in which we can achieve this difficult task. Dr. Patricia Anderson is an expert in child development, and has over 30 years of experience in innovative ways of teaching young children. A long-time professor of early childhood education, she is a sought-after speaker to early childhood staff, parents’ groups, teacher organizations, and social service agencies. *Everyday Equity* is a comprehensive guide which reinforces the idea that embracing everyday equity in early childhood organizations could create the future we want for our children—a must-read for all early childhood practitioners!

*Meenakshi Mohan has taught in several universities including Roosevelt University in Chicago, IL, National Louis University in Chicago, IL, Wheelock College in Boston, MA, and most recently Towson University in Towson, MD. She authored a children's book, The Gift (2014), and edited Tamam Shud: Poems of Kshitij Mohan in English and Hindi (2010). Her articles are published regularly in various journals, including Confluence UK. Some of her paintings are in private collections.*

References