

THE EARLY CHILDHOOD EQUITY- FOCUSED CLASSROOM OBSERVATION TOOL



FUNDERS

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INTRODUCTION



The Early Childhood Equity-Focused Classroom Observation Tool was developed by School Readiness Consulting with the support of our EELI partners Wonders Early Learning, The Campagna Center, Briya Public Charter School. The purpose of the tool is to highlight classroom practices that promote equitable learning environments for young children and to support program staff and leadership in their ongoing quality-improvement efforts. This professional-learning resource enables early childhood classroom staff and administrators to collaboratively identify strengths and areas for growth related to equity in the early childhood classroom.

What Is Equity in Early Learning?

Equity in early learning occurs when conditions are created in which race, language, socioeconomic status, and other social factors no longer predict young children’s access to opportunities, chances of success, or developmental outcomes (Derman-Sparks & Edwards, 2009).

Why It Matters?

As important adults in children’s lives, teachers have a unique opportunity to support children’s anti-bias development within the classroom and beyond. While young children do not understand the complexities of racism and other human injustices in our society, a vast and growing body of research indicates that they are exposed to bias and negative attitudes about race and other facets of identity (White & Young, 2016). Examples include culture, language, gender, sexual orientation, family structure, economic class, ability, etc.



This can negatively impact their social development, including their developing sense of self and their capacity to form relationships across diverse racial and social groups (Olson, 2013). For this reason, it is essential for the adults in early learning to intentionally promote a strengths-based view of children and families and to celebrate the human differences represented in the early learning program and in the larger community.

Consequently, the tool draws from research and professional insights on best practices for anti-bias education to characterize equity-focused instructional practices.

What Is Anti-bias Education?

Anti-bias education is an intentional approach to early learning in which young children learn to be proud of their own and their families’ racial and social identities, to respect and celebrate differences among people, to recognize bias, and to speak up for what’s right (Derman-Sparks & Edwards, 2009).

About the Tool

The **Equity-Focused Classroom Observation Tool** features five focus areas that reflect critical components of birth-through-age-five learning programs:



ENVIRONMENT

How materials, play spaces, and other physical attributes contribute to the early learning space



INTERACTIONS

How adults in the classroom facilitate and model communication



CURRICULUM

How adults in the classroom intentionally facilitate learning through the design and implementation of activities



LANGUAGE USE

How adults in the classroom respond to linguistic diversity and support children's oral language development across differing languages and dialectal traditions



FAMILY ENGAGEMENT

How early learning programs include families in coconstructing the learning environment of activities

Within each focus area, the tool identifies several indicators that specify ways in which each area can reflect four goals of anti-bias education as defined by Derman-Sparks & Edwards (2009):

- **GOAL 1:** Each child will demonstrate self-awareness, confidence, family pride, and positive social identities.
- **GOAL 2:** Each child will express comfort and joy with human diversity; accurate language for human differences; and deep, caring human connections.
- **GOAL 3:** Each child will increasingly recognize unfairness, have language to describe unfairness, and understand that unfairness hurts.
- **GOAL 4:** Each child will demonstrate empowerment and the skills to act, with others or alone, against prejudice and discriminatory actions.

The design of the Early Childhood Equity-Focused Classroom Observation Tool facilitates a process that builds the awareness of all early childhood classroom staff and administrators of instructional practices that align with the four goals of anti-bias education. This tool creates a sequence for gathering evidence of best practices, generating questions, and engaging in a reflective process that helps to identify areas of strength as well as areas for growth.

The tool was developed by practitioners for practitioners and does not contain an exhaustive list of indicators that signify an equity-centered early childhood classroom. Instead, EELI's goal is that this tool will serve as a resource for reflection to help early childhood educators in their journey on centering equity and antiracist and anti-bias education in their early



childhood environments. The intention is for the tool to provide an objective framework for identifying practices that impact equity in early learning classrooms. It is important to note, however, that the specific backgrounds, identities, and education/training of the individual conducting the observation will have an impact on the areas that come into the most focus and the blind spots that may occur during observation. In addition, power dynamics may impact the observation process, according to who completes the observation (such as an outside observer, a supervisor, a peer, or a self-observer). Early childhood educators should recognize these limitations as part of the nature of this work.

The recommended usage of this tool is to inform practice, support professional learning, and inform program goals. The tool has been piloted in early childhood programs and used for these purposes, but no validation research has been conducted to date. In particular, this tool has not been validated for use as an evaluation of teacher performance or to determine levels of quality in early learning environments, and therefore the authors do not recommend use of this tool for educator performance evaluations or in quality-rating and -improvement systems.

Before educators use this tool, we highly recommend that classroom teachers, administrators, and any observers complete the self-paced online introduction to the Equity-Focused Classroom Observation Tool.

This is the first publicly accessible version of the Equity-Focused Classroom Observation Tool. The authors intend to update and revise this resource based on feedback and lessons learned from early childhood educators and administrators from across the country. We invite you to complete our survey to provide feedback on your use of this tool for possible inclusion in future revisions.

How to Use the Tool

The Early Childhood Equity-Focused Classroom Observation Tool captures the essence of the early learning environment. This includes noting how all focus areas are working together to promote children’s anti-bias development and identifying any factors that may be standing in the way. Each focus area highlights two to four broad indicators, along with several examples (not an exhaustive list) of what each indicator might look like. Some of the indicators and examples will be observable, while some may require further discussion with the adult(s) observed to gain clarity about actual practices.

When using the tool, the observer and the adults in the classroom being observed should follow this process to ensure the best opportunity to surface any findings of interest and have a productive dialogue about strengths, opportunities for growth, and next steps:



Decide whether the tool will be used as a self-assessment or an external observation.



For self-assessment, ask a peer, mentor, or supervisor to serve as a thought partner. This person will also observe the classroom for a consecutive one- to three-hour period and complete an assessment using the tool. Meanwhile, complete the assessment, and if possible, use a video recording to support accurate self-observation and reflection. Schedule at least one hour within the next 24–48 hours for a post observation debrief with the co-observer to compare notes and discuss opportunities.



For external observations, collaborate with the primary adults in the classroom to identify a consecutive one- to three-hour period for the observation. Schedule at least one hour within the next 24–48 hours for a postobservation debrief to discuss the findings.



Whether completing the assessment as a self-observer, thought partner, or external observer, record notes throughout the time period as straightforward factual statements without trying to interpret why something is said or why an event occurred. For example, if an adult mispronounces a child’s name and the child corrects the adult, record this interaction without trying to explain why this happened.



Review and discuss the suggested debrief questions below to highlight areas of strength, opportunities for growth, and additional resources or professional learning as needed.



Encourage the adults being observed to react to the observation experience and the information shared in the debrief and to set goals they want to accomplish by their next observation or self-assessment period.

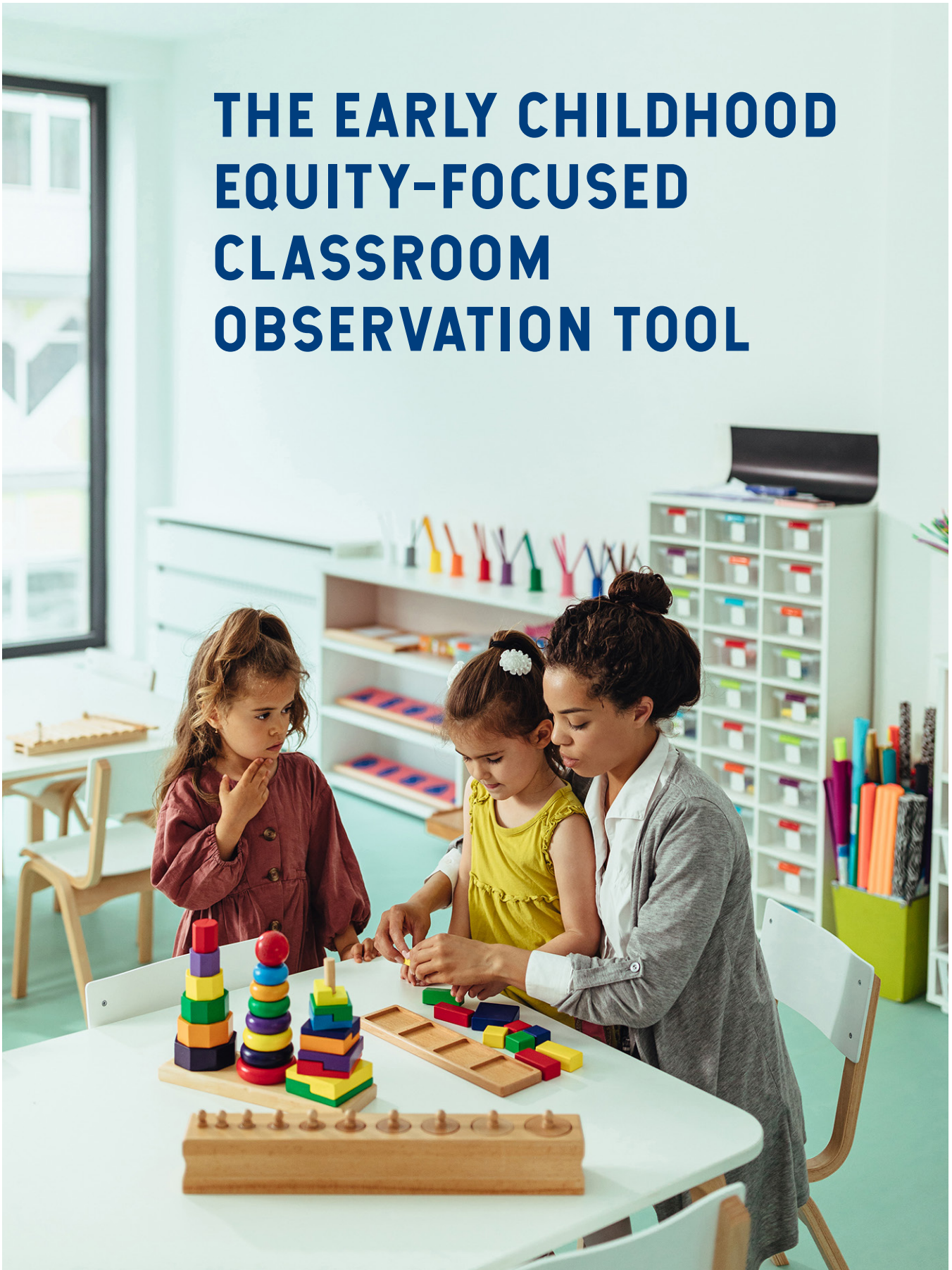


Seek professional-learning offerings that align with learning goals associated with equity-focused instructional practices.



Use the tool regularly to understand the development of best practices over time. We recommend conducting the equity-focused classroom observations at least three times per program year to see where growth is occurring and where new needs may be emerging.

THE EARLY CHILDHOOD EQUITY-FOCUSED CLASSROOM OBSERVATION TOOL



The following pages include five focus areas, indicators, and evidence notes to guide the self-assessment and/or external observation. Complete the classroom context information below before starting observations.

CLASSROOM CONTEXT

Name and Role of Observer(s): _____

Name of Adult(s) Being Observed: _____

Program Name: _____

Ages/Grade Level of Children: _____

Date: _____

Start Time: _____

End Time: _____

Self-Assessment or External Observation: _____

Focus Area(s): _____



FOCUS AREA: Environment

This section describes materials, play spaces, and other physical attributes of the classroom. To support children's anti-bias development, it is important to ensure that learning spaces.

- Are accessible and affirming to all members of the learning community and provide opportunities for children to see themselves, their families, and their various racial and social identities represented in positive and nonstereotypical ways.

- Reinforce positive images of diverse racial and social identities in the surrounding community, including showing diverse people enjoying a variety of positive activities, participating in their culture, and existing in various family structures and ways of life. In addition to providing diverse images, these materials should help to engage children in thought and/or dialogue about human difference and foster empathy, awareness, and connection.
- Support children’s emerging ability to recognize unfairness, to use language to describe unfairness in the classroom and larger community, and to understand how unfairness impacts others.
- Empower children to stand up for themselves, identify ways to be more inclusive with their peers, and challenge situations and instances of exclusion and unfairness within and beyond the classroom community.



The physical settings in which children play and learn are an integral part of the early learning experience, and they are rich with messages about racial and social identities. The spaces and the materials (books, toys, displays, etc.) signal to children who belongs, what is valued, what is OK, and how we interact (Fraser & Gestwicki, 2002). For that reason, early childhood professionals can and must intentionally design the early learning classroom to support the anti-bias development of all children.

Program members can reflect on how the early learning classroom demonstrates the following indicators:

INDICATORS	POSSIBLE EXAMPLES	EVIDENCE NOTES
Classroom materials reflect the various racial and social identities of the children in the program and promote self-awareness and pride in one’s own racial and social identities as well as self-efficacy.	<p>Photos of children and families are posted in prominent locations.</p> <p>Mirrors are accessible in children’s play and care areas, especially in the diapering, arts, and dramatic play areas.</p> <p>Spaces enable children with differing abilities to exercise an appropriate amount of independence and seek help as needed.</p> <p>Supplies enable children to artistically represent themselves and their families with accuracy (e.g., variety of flesh-tone crayons and paints, textiles, music/instruments, play foods, etc.). There is evidence that children are encouraged to represent themselves and their families using these materials (e.g., family books, self-portraits, etc.).</p>	<p>What examples did you notice?</p> <p>What questions do you have?</p> <p>What was not present?/Where are there opportunities for improvement?</p>

INDICATORS	POSSIBLE EXAMPLES	EVIDENCE NOTES
<p>Books, toys, displays, and other materials reflect the various racial and social identities of people in the broader community and promote children’s awareness and comfort with diversity.</p>	<p>Books and displays feature a variety of racial and social characteristics that allow children to see themselves and others represented in affirming ways (e.g., characters of color acting in a variety of nonstereotypical roles; actions and roles based on interests and capabilities rather than gender; a range of economic circumstances portrayed factually and without judgment; a variety of religions, faiths, and beliefs represented positively; same-gender, multigenerational, and other “nontraditional” family types represented positively; children with differing abilities represented as capable).</p> <p>Children have access to dress-up clothing items and dramatic play materials that represent a range of gender expressions, family and community roles, and careers.</p>	<p>What examples did you notice?</p> <p>What questions do you have?</p> <p>What was not present?/Where are there opportunities for improvement?</p>
<p>Classroom materials and displays promote and document children’s discussions and activities about fairness and unfairness.</p>	<p>Age-appropriate books about segregation and other human injustice based on racial and social identity, especially focused on how unfairness impacts the lives of children like themselves, are available.</p> <p>Charts, visuals, and other classroom artifacts are visible and document classroom studies or discussions of issues of injustice and unfairness. Classroom displays document children’s individual reflections and group discussions/activities that explore fairness.</p>	<p>What examples did you notice?</p> <p>What questions do you have?</p> <p>What was not present?/Where are there opportunities for improvement?</p>
<p>Classroom materials and displays promote and document children’s growing readiness to challenge unfairness and exclusion on the basis of racial and social identities.</p>	<p>Age-appropriate books about advocacy and activism – including nonfiction books about historical figures who have worked on behalf of justice as well as fictional stories about everyday people challenging exclusion, unfairness, and bias – are available.</p> <p>Charts, visuals, and other classroom artifacts document discussions/activities that support children’s growing ability to advocate for themselves and confront situations that lead to rejection, teasing, and exclusion based on racial and social identities.</p>	<p>What examples did you notice?</p> <p>What questions do you have?</p> <p>What was not present?/Where are there opportunities for improvement?</p>



FOCUS AREA: Interactions

This section describes how adults in the classroom facilitate and model communication in the classroom. Within an anti-bias framework, this includes the role of interactions to:

- Affirm the racial and social identities of all children by joyfully acknowledging each child’s racial and social characteristics, cultural heritage, expressions of identity, and family type. In doing so, adults in the classroom reinforce each child’s sense of value, belonging, and self-efficacy.
- Establish accurate and nonjudgmental language for adults and children in the learning community to name and become comfortable with human difference. Adults in the classroom can set the tone for how the classroom community will welcome, respond to, and discuss the contributions and needs of people across diverse racial and social groups.
- Build upon and reinforce children’s innate/emerging ability to recognize instances and patterns of injustice. Preschool-age children are increasingly aware and interested in issues of power and unfairness. Adults can use interactions to give language to these issues and build more-nuanced awareness and empathy among children.
- Highlight opportunities and strategies to act on behalf of justice and fairness. As children build awareness of identity-based injustice and empathy with those affected, thoughtful adult-child interactions can motivate and equip children to speak up and act in ways that promote justice.

Through daily interactions, children receive innumerable messages from the adults in their lives. Often, these interactions carry implicit messages (even if unintended) that communicate to children what is acceptable, valued, and fair. Interactions that convey these messages can include adults’ patterns of calling on children; their proximity, posture, and body language as they converse; the ways they arrange children in small groups; their tone as they talk to or about certain children or families; and how they deal with challenging behavior across races and genders (Capatosto, 2015).

Program members can reflect on how the early learning classroom demonstrates the following indicators:

INDICATORS	POSSIBLE EXAMPLES	EVIDENCE NOTES
<p>Adults use verbal and nonverbal communication to welcome, affirm the value of, and promote the efficacy of each child and family.</p>	<p>Adults share warm greetings, physical proximity, eye contact, smiles, laughter, and other signs of a positive relationship equally with all children.</p> <p>Adults have consistent expectations of behavior and thresholds for challenging behavior for all children, and responses/ consequences (including tone, body language, etc.) are applied consistently in similar situations regardless of a child’s racial and gender identities.</p> <p>Cultural and familial practices are acknowledged and embraced (e.g., the food choices of families are honored and differences in feeding practices are viewed and discussed positively).</p> <p>Adults use a variety of strategies and techniques to prevent favoritism in calling on children or selecting children for a particular job/task and to ensure all children have opportunities to share their ideas with peers (e.g., rotating the classroom helper chart and using video or audio reflection to identify children who are or are not called on frequently).</p>	<p>What examples did you notice?</p> <p>What questions do you have?</p> <p>What was not present?/ Where are there opportunities for improvement?</p>
<p>Adults affirm and build upon children’s natural curiosity by responding to their questions and conflicts surrounding human difference and by helping children examine their emerging biases.</p>	<p>Adults respond to/correct children’s biased ideas and language (e.g., Child: “That’s not Veronica’s mom. Her skin is black and Veronica’s skin is white.” Adult: “You’re right that Veronica and her mom have different skin tones, but that is Veronica’s mom. Some families share the same skin tone, and others have different skin tones. People do not have to look the same to love each other and be a family.”).</p> <p>Adults model inclusive language when discussing differences in traditions or preferences (e.g., “All our families eat different kinds of foods that have different aromas. What are some foods you eat at home that have an aroma?”).</p> <p>Adults use unassuming questions to avoid overgeneralizing or assuming that all children have had the same experiences (e.g., instead of asking “Did you have a birthday party?” the adult might say, “You turned five last weekend! Tell us about what happens in your family when someone turns a year older.”).</p> <p>Adults are comfortable using words and phrases that describe human difference with accuracy (e.g., “Nzrui’s hair forms tight coils, Jason’s hair forms loose curls, and my hair is straight. We all have different and beautiful hair!”).</p> <p>Adults notice and respond without shaming or silencing when children show curiosity or point out differences (e.g., Child: “Why is she wearing that scarf on her head?” Adult: “You are noticing her hijab. Some women of the Muslim religion wear that to cover their hair when they go out in public.”).</p>	<p>What examples did you notice?</p> <p>What questions do you have?</p> <p>What was not present?/ Where are there opportunities for improvement?</p>

INDICATORS	POSSIBLE EXAMPLES	EVIDENCE NOTES
<p>Adults build on children’s growing sense of justice by pointing out instances of injustice, demonstrating that fairness is valued, and modeling empathy.</p>	<p>Adults point out when a book or display fails to represent diversity (e.g., “I noticed that all the families in our family book have a mom and a dad. What other kinds of families do we know of?”).</p> <p>Adults engage children in age-appropriate discussions about discrimination occurring in the world (e.g., “This book is a true story about how children with brown skin had to go to a different school from children with peach skin. What do you think about that?”).</p> <p>Adults lead children in articulating classroom “rules” that specifically reinforce fairness (e.g., “girls can play anything they want to and so can boys” and “everyone gets what they need”) and refer to these rules when conflicts occur.</p> <p>Adults model and encourage strategies to interrupt biased speech and actions swiftly and directly (e.g., Adult: “I heard you calling Mira a different name today. In our class, we call each other by our real names because each of our names is special to us. Will you help to remind others of this rule if they forget?”).</p> <p>Adults reinforce children’s bids for fair treatment of themselves and others.</p> <p>Adults give encouragement, support, and specific feedback when children articulate unfairness or advocate for fair treatment of themselves or others.</p>	<p>What examples did you notice?</p> <p>What questions do you have?</p> <p>What was not present?/ Where are there opportunities for improvement?</p>



FOCUS AREA: Curriculum

This section describes how adults can intentionally facilitate learning through the design and implementation of activities. To support anti-bias development, planned learning activities should:

- Create opportunities for children to explore their identities, construct self-awareness, and develop a positive sense of self. Part of children’s healthy social development is forming the ability to name, describe, and celebrate the physical, linguistic, sociocultural, and familial characteristics that make them unique and connect them to their families, communities, and heritage.
- Intentionally teach children that diversity is beneficial to the learning community and the community as a whole.
- Activate and build upon children’s natural curiosities or fears related to sociopolitical events as a springboard for dialogues and teachable moments on topics related to fairness and injustice. Children can practice thinking critically about decisions and uses of power and their own impact on other people.
- Equip children to act on behalf of justice. Through books, images, and honest dialogue, children can learn about the advocacy and activism efforts of others. Children can engage in age-appropriate activities to voice their concerns, question unfair practices, and create more fairness in their spheres of influence.



Children thrive in settings where diverse racial and cultural identities are acknowledged, understood, and celebrated by adults. A learning environment that is built upon and responsive to the strengths, cultural contexts, and characteristics of its members can lead to positive racial identity development (i.e., a sense of belonging and connection to one’s own racial heritage and characteristics). For an early learning program, this could include considering a variety of cultural and community paradigms in curriculum, instruction, classroom organization, motivational strategies, etc. (Hanley & Noblit, 2009). Through the use of learning activities, adults can listen to children’s questions and comments, observe children’s behaviors, and support children’s positive ideas about identity, diversity, and social justice.

Program members can reflect on how the early learning classroom demonstrates the following indicators:

INDICATORS	POSSIBLE EXAMPLES	EVIDENCE NOTES
<p>Adults create opportunities for children to explore and express their racial and social characteristics through art, play, and language.</p>	<p>Projects and activities allow children to explore various physical attributes, such as hair color/texture, eye color, skin color, and differing physical abilities (e.g., self-portraits that enable children to represent themselves using a variety of colors and media).</p> <p>Adults use sentence starters and other prompts that encourage children to describe hair, skin color, etc.</p> <p>Adults incorporate experiences that reflect children’s cultural and community attributes (e.g., a dramatic play area that reflects a popular restaurant/shop in the community, children discussing their families’ celebration of special days, songs that integrate children’s names and physical attributes).</p>	<p>What examples did you notice?</p> <p>What questions do you have?</p> <p>What was not present?/ Where are there opportunities for improvement?</p>

INDICATORS	POSSIBLE EXAMPLES	EVIDENCE NOTES
<p>Adults design activities that promote awareness and acceptance of human differences.</p>	<p>Adults proactively plan activities and discussions in the classroom that model inclusive language, problem-solving, and connections across human differences (e.g., field trips to local cultural institutions/festivals, multicultural story times at a local library, cooperative instead of competitive games).</p> <p>Adults incorporate language and vocabulary into projects, activities, and readings that highlight human differences (e.g., pauses to point out diversity among characters in a book).</p> <p>Adults intentionally read and discuss books that affirm, authentically represent, and “normalize” diversity across race, social class, gender, language, religion, ability, family structure, and more.</p> <p>Children are introduced to simple songs and concepts (e.g., counting, colors, etc.) in more than one language.</p> <p>Adults use flexible, heterogeneous groupings for small-group learning activities.</p>	<p>What examples did you notice?</p> <p>What questions do you have?</p> <p>What was not present?/ Where are there opportunities for improvement?</p>
<p>Adults act intentionally to help children recognize, name, and empathize with unfairness.</p>	<p>Adults use books, images, dolls, and/or role-plays to introduce and help children examine instances of unfairness.</p> <p>Techniques (e.g., using a mirror, feelings chart, etc.) are used to help children identify emotions that arise as a result of unfair practices and to build empathy.</p>	<p>What examples did you notice?</p> <p>What questions do you have?</p> <p>What was not present?/ Where are there opportunities for improvement?</p>
<p>Adults encourage, support, and celebrate children’s efforts to act for justice.</p>	<p>Adults support children in making a sign with an inclusive message to display in the classroom/school.</p> <p>Adults support children in writing a letter from the class to a company/organization to challenge biased or unfair circumstances (e.g., “flesh colored” bandages come in only one color, certain racial features are not represented in the selection of dolls, etc.).</p> <p>Children reillustrate the images in a book to be inclusive of multiple racial and social identities.</p> <p>Adults use role-play or personal dolls (dolls/puppets that represent a certain identity or circumstance) in a story that demonstrates a response to injustice.</p>	<p>What examples did you notice?</p> <p>What questions do you have?</p> <p>What was not present?/ Where are there opportunities for improvement?</p>



FOCUS AREA: Language Use

This section describes how adults affirm and respond to linguistic diversity in the early childhood classroom. To support children’s anti-bias development, adults can establish a culture of inclusivity by:

- Adopting and demonstrating a strengths-based perspective of children’s linguistic and dialectical traditions, understanding that all language supports children’s learning and represents a connection to family, community, and culture that is essential to children’s healthy development.
- Outwardly affirming the languages of all members of the learning community, as well as groups that are not represented in the learning community, as a way to build positive awareness and healthy curiosity about linguistic difference.

For young children, oral language is foundational for engaging with new concepts and communicating their thoughts and ideas. Adults in the early learning environment are tasked with providing a language-rich environment to support children’s learning in the classroom setting and to promote expressive and receptive language, vocabulary development, comprehension, writing development, etc. (Snow et al., 1999). Adults in settings where children speak native languages and dialects other than standard English must set a tone in the classroom community for celebrating linguistic diversity and acknowledging that children use all language to facilitate and demonstrate their learning (National Association for the Education of Young Children, 1995). For children who speak English as their native language, adults can intentionally work to break patterns of dominant-culture centrality (i.e., the tendency by children of dominant cultural groups to centralize their own cultural experience as “normal”) by building awareness and modeling inclusivity.

Program members can reflect on how the early learning classroom demonstrates the following indicators:

INDICATORS	POSSIBLE EXAMPLES	EVIDENCE NOTES
<p>Adults encourage the development of confidence and pride in children’s home languages by modeling inclusive, affirming, strengths-based practices.</p>	<p>Adults remember and correctly pronounce each child’s name, and they use children’s given names in all interactions.</p> <p>Adults encourage children to speak their home language and/or dialect and model standard English as appropriate to support children’s learning without demanding that children use standard English.</p> <p>Adults learn and use key phrases in each child’s home language.</p>	<p>What examples did you notice?</p> <p>What questions do you have?</p> <p>What was not present?/ Where are there opportunities for improvement?</p>
<p>Adults work proactively to avoid exclusionary treatment and dominant-culture-centric ideas among children of the dominant linguistic group, and they support the full integration of children whose home language/ dialect is other than standard English into the learning community.</p>	<p>Adults teach children key phrases in the languages represented by their peers—along with other tools (e.g., hand gestures)—to facilitate communication and play.</p> <p>Adults label classroom spaces and items in ways that send the message that multiple languages are equally valued (e.g., alternating which language is displayed first, taking special care to ensure words are spelled correctly, etc.).</p> <p>Adults avoid deficit-based language (e.g., instead of “Uzir doesn’t speak English,” an adult might say, “Uzir and his family speak Urdu at home, and now Uzir is learning to speak English as well. Soon he will be able to use two languages to talk to all his friends and family at home and school.”).</p>	<p>What examples did you notice?</p> <p>What questions do you have?</p> <p>What was not present?/ Where are there opportunities for improvement?</p>





FOCUS AREA: Family Engagement

This section describes how early learning programs can include families in coconstructing the learning environment. Some ways programs can leverage family partnership as an anti-bias strategy include:

- Understanding and affirming the social realities, cultural experiences, and value systems families possess. This includes an intentional effort to acknowledge and honor the racial, social, cultural, and linguistic identities of all families without judging or expecting compliance with dominant values and cultural norms.
- Providing opportunities for families to share their important cultural experiences and traditions related to parenting, language, family, work, community, and more with other adults—and with groups of children as appropriate—as a way of building connection, understanding, and support systems.
- Engaging families as colearners and cofacilitators of anti-bias practices to support children’s growing identity development, comfort with human difference, and ability to think critically about racial and social injustice. This includes providing avenues through which families can help name and overcome discriminatory or exclusionary practices that may be inadvertently perpetuated in the early learning program.
- Creating shared resources and surfacing age-appropriate opportunities for all families to take action against bias and discrimination in their communities in a variety of ways.

To advance the goals and live fully in the values of anti-bias education, the adults who care for children at home and in the community must be known, included, and honored as both key partners and beneficiaries of the early learning program. To that end, program leaders and staff must constantly redefine and create family engagement opportunities that are meaningful, reciprocal, and aligned to the values, strengths, and capacities of families (National Association for the Education of Young Children, 2019). Family engagement is essential to the success of anti-bias education. By building connections between anti-bias experiences at school and at home, all can partner to support the skills, awareness, and empathy that are central to children’s anti-bias development.

Program members can reflect on how the early learning classroom demonstrates the following indicators:

INDICATORS	POSSIBLE EXAMPLES	EVIDENCE NOTES
<p>Adults value the experiences children and families have outside of the classroom as equally important and complementary to what children are experiencing in the classroom.</p>	<p>Families are asked to share their hopes and dreams for their child and to help inform goal-setting related to children’s identity and anti-bias development.</p> <p>Families are not penalized or shamed for periodic decisions to prioritize family gatherings or important events over school attendance, and program staff seek ways to connect classroom learning with these valuable experiences.</p> <p>Program staff are careful to schedule special events (e.g., field trips, celebrations, assemblies) not to conflict with religious and cultural holidays.</p> <p>Families are encouraged to share their experiences and funds of knowledge with the classroom and school community in multiple ways (e.g., program staff ask about family traditions and values during home visits, family members visit the classroom to share meaningful stories or songs from their tradition or to help their child share about a special day or family custom, family members are encouraged to speak their home language when interacting with their child in the classroom).</p>	<p>What examples did you notice?</p> <p>What questions do you have?</p> <p>What was not present?/ Where are there opportunities for improvement?</p>
<p>Adults model inclusivity and respect by honoring the social identities and family structures of all adults who care for the children in the learning community.</p>	<p>Each visitor who enters the classroom is greeted and an intentional effort is made to accurately remember and correctly pronounce each person’s name.</p> <p>Program staff seek clarity about roles within each family unit and use accurate language when referring to members of a family (e.g., the teacher acknowledges that Nya has two dads and refers to Nya’s parents using the same names Nya uses for each of them).</p> <p>As requested by family members, adult caregivers other than biological parents or legal guardians can be included on regular communications related to children to honor the full array of family and community support structures.</p>	<p>What examples did you notice?</p> <p>What questions do you have?</p> <p>What was not present?/ Where are there opportunities for improvement?</p>

INDICATORS	POSSIBLE EXAMPLES	EVIDENCE NOTES
<p>Families' experiences of identity-based discrimination and exclusion (inside and outside of the learning community) are believed and addressed within the early learning program.</p>	<p>Program staff work with families to develop and distribute a clear statement about the program's intentions to include and respect all members of the learning community, resist all forms of discrimination, and act as an anti-bias learning community.</p> <p>Programs seek the feedback of families on ways to honor their racial, social, and cultural identities and have a formal grievance process for families to report exclusionary or discriminatory practices.</p> <p>Adults avoid deficit language (e.g., at-risk, high-need, hard to reach, language barrier) when referring to children or the social identities of families.</p> <p>Families are invited to codevelop, facilitate, and participate in discussions and activities focused on their own experiences with identity-based inclusion/exclusion, fairness, and advocacy alongside program staff and other families.</p>	<p>What examples did you notice?</p> <p>What questions do you have?</p> <p>What was not present?/ Where are there opportunities for improvement?</p>
<p>Program staff and families support one another in children's anti-bias development.</p>	<p>Families and program staff are encouraged to share ideas for books and materials with one another that support shared goals for children's anti-bias development. A library of such books and materials are available for families to borrow and use at home.</p> <p>Program staff and families communicate about children's anti-bias development as they would about other subject areas (e.g., providing updates on anti-bias concepts explored, sharing anecdotes of children noticing human differences and standing up against unfairness, etc.).</p> <p>Families help generate ideas for and participate in advocacy efforts (e.g., children, families, and program staff together create posters for a program-wide antibullying campaign, or they make signs and attend a local demonstration for Black Lives Matter).</p>	<p>What examples did you notice?</p> <p>What questions do you have?</p> <p>What was not present?/ Where are there opportunities for improvement?</p>

OBSERVATION DEBRIEF & PLANNING FOR NEXT STEPS



Self-Assessment

- During the observation debrief, critically review the notes within each area with another adult (e.g., co-teacher, teacher assistant, instructional coach, director/principal) using the suggested debrief questions below as needed.
- Collaboratively identify one to three areas of strength, one to three areas for growth, and outstanding questions for each of the five focus areas.
- Identify at least one specific and attainable goal and a timeline to reach that goal in each focus area.
- Discuss materials, strategies, professional knowledge, and/or support needed to meet the identified goals.

External Observation

After conducting the observation, take 30–45 minutes to **review observation notes** and plan for a debrief.

During the observation debrief, note one to three **areas of strength**, one to three **areas for growth**, and **questions based on your observations of the classroom**. For unobserved indicators (e.g., family engagement activities, aspects of the curricula, etc.), plan to ask questions and/or give prompts that provide teachers/adults the opportunity to discuss how they may or may not meet those indicators.

Use the suggested debrief questions below to guide your conversation and **support teachers/adults in planning for next steps**. This should include having them identify at least one specific and attainable goal and a timeline to reach that goal in each focus area.

Discuss **materials, strategies, professional knowledge, and/or support needed** to meet the identified goals.



Suggested Debrief Questions

When building a culturally responsive learning community and curriculum, it is most appropriate to begin with what you know about the individual children enrolled in your classroom and their families and communities. Tell me about the children and families in your classroom. How do you go about learning about the unique context of the children and their families so that the books, materials, and curriculum reflect their beliefs, values, and experiences?

How do you capture children's understanding of human differences, whether through conversations or reflections, so that you and the children can continue to explore questions and build new understanding? In what ways do you or the school/center engage and support families in these conversations and ideas?

As it relates to equity in your classroom and the goals of anti-bias education, which of the indicators of this tool do you see as things that you are doing well, or areas of strength? What contributes to your success in these areas?

Which of the indicators do you see as challenges, or areas of growth? What information, knowledge, resources, and/or support would help you in these areas?

According to the recent observation, what indicators not observed during this period do you feel are important to discuss?

What questions do you have about any of the indicators, this observational tool, or anti-bias education overall? What specific goal(s) do you want to set for each area? What do you need to do or what support do you need to meet these goals?

In relation to your goals, what personal and professional concerns, if any, do you have for achieving equity in early learning and successful anti-bias education? Which goals are within your circle of control (what you can do on your own)? Which goals are within your circle of influence (what you can do with the help of another adult, e.g., co-teacher, assistant teacher, instructional coach, director, family member, member of the community)?



Debrief and Action Planning

Use the charts below to record areas of strength, areas for growth, questions, goals, and so on for each focus area.

FOCUS AREA: Environment	
Areas of Strength	
Areas for Growth	
Questions	
Reflections	
Goal(s):	
Next Steps:	
Resources Needed:	

FOCUS AREA: Interactions	
Areas of Strength	
Areas for Growth	
Questions	
Reflections	
<p>Goal(s):</p> <p>Next Steps:</p> <p>Resources Needed:</p>	

FOCUS AREA: Curriculum	
Areas of Strength	
Areas for Growth	
Questions	
Reflections	
<p>Goal(s):</p> <p>Next Steps:</p> <p>Resources Needed:</p>	

FOCUS AREA: Language Use

Areas of Strength	
Areas for Growth	
Questions	
Reflections	
Goal(s):	
Next Steps:	
Resources Needed:	

FOCUS AREA: Family Engagement

Areas of Strength	
Areas for Growth	
Questions	
Reflections	
Goal(s):	
Next Steps:	
Resources Needed:	



Essential Approaches for Success

Success in using this tool requires a willingness to be present and attentive, to share perspectives and listen to others. Even if teachers are self-assessing, it is important for them to stay curious and open to what others are saying and feeling when discussing the evidence collected in the observation—all the while showing respect, recognizing our shared humanity, and suspending judgment. Engaging with those who have different experiences and viewpoints is not always comfortable, but those who stay engaged get better at it over time and are better prepared to make a positive impact on their work environments and the children and families they serve.

Cultivating equitable learning environments for young children requires that teachers engage in ongoing and challenging conversations to increase their own personal and group awareness and to build confidence and skills to speak out against the full range of prejudiced and exclusionary practices—racism, classism, ableism, sexism, and heterosexism, to name a few—whose purpose is to maintain power over others. The journey toward understanding and embracing the critical role adults play in fostering children’s positive identity development is unique for everyone and requires personal reflection, commitment, risk-taking, and ongoing support.

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