

Preface

Why This Book?

Culturally responsive practices are not new. Educators were introduced to this concept in 1994 by Gloria Ladson-Billings in her book *The Dreamkeepers: Successful Teachers of African American Children*. Early childhood professionals must question why culturally responsive practices are not delivering on the promise to change outcomes for children of color. It is not that these practices, which center the culture and experiences of all children, are ineffective. It is the implementation of culturally responsive practices that is flawed. Social justice champions have asked educators to implement practices based on culture without requiring them to learn about themselves as cultural beings. Culturally responsive practices cannot be fully implemented if teachers are not aware of how their own culture is centered, is measured against, and influences every interaction inside and outside of the classroom.

In addition, implicit bias must also be addressed. Effective practices can become ineffective when implemented through a biased lens. This book encourages educators to reflect and look within. It requires self-reflection and ownership of oneself as inherently biased toward one's own perspective and needing to adopt a humble, teachable attitude toward the cultures and experiences of children and families who do not share one's identities. By looking within, teachers come face-to-face with who they are, how they were socialized, how their racial identity developed, and, ultimately, how they show up in the classroom. This is a critical first step to responding to, sustaining, and affirming the culture of every child as beautiful, valuable, good, and best for the child, their family, and their community. It abandons the notion that children must assimilate and change who they are to be accepted and validated.

This book also supports the practice of cultural humility, relinquishing the idea that teachers are the authority and know what's best in meeting the cultural needs of children. Instead, we encourage teachers to discard this role as the authority and to place themselves in the position of a learner to listen to families and learn about children from their cultural perspectives. Together, families and teachers create an environment that reflects the needs, culture, language, and behaviors of the cultures of the children.

What to Expect from This Book

Teachers with a desire to implement culturally responsive practices frequently ask how to do so. They want a blueprint, a how-to book. The dependence on these kinds of strategies, however, diminishes the critical need to develop curricula that are consistent with the experiences of the particular children in a classroom or program. There is no cookie-cutter, one-size-fits-all approach to culturally responsive practices. Through this book, you will get to know yourself, your cultural lens, and the behaviors and expectations that may serve as barriers to being a

culturally responsive teacher. Culturally responsive teachers are always learning, growing, reflecting, and evolving. This book provides a framework for *becoming*, for meeting the needs of individual children as you get to know them and what they need to grow as cultural beings.

Throughout this book, you will find many vignettes from classrooms to help clarify the learning. The names of individuals and centers have been changed, but every story is something we, the authors, have experienced—in our own classrooms, in neighboring classrooms, or in classrooms we have visited over the years. It is important to approach these stories with an open heart and understand that sometimes the example shared is a beautiful, shining example of what *to do*, and sometimes it is a jarring reminder that we are not done learning as a professional community and that we all still make errors from time to time. It isn't the making of mistakes that is the problem; it is not knowing where the mistakes come from or how to find a way back to a healthy classroom that gets in our way as teachers. The goal of this book is not to promise you a clear pathway to a perfect teaching experience but to offer suggestions for how to continue growing and becoming a culturally responsive and sustaining teacher.