

Promoting Social Justice in the Kindergarten Classroom: Creating a community of conscience

Caitlin Gostelow, Denis Walsh & Stephanie Lynch



WE are Not:
what OTHER PEOPLE
say WE ARE
WE ARE WHO WE
KNOW ourselves
TO BE and WE ARE
WHAT we LOVE
Lavonne Cox

SING A RAINBOW

By Arthur Hamilton

Does this song promote social justice? How or how not?

Introduction: Teaching Through a Social Justice Lens

Research Question: How can we incorporate social justice education in our kindergarten classrooms in an age-appropriate way?

*“You’ve landed a job as a kindergarten classroom teacher in an ethnically, economically, linguistically and culturally diverse neighbourhood.”
Fellow teachers, Syd and Sam, are passionate about social justice.*

In this research package, we will discuss what social justice education means, how social justice affects everyone and how social equity requires the participation of everyone to promote respect for group differences and their potential for building knowledge. (Kim, 2015)

Defining Social Justice in Education:



- Social justice education doesn't fall into one single facet, it's not a school subject and can't be taught with one single method of instruction
- One's race, gender, religion, sexuality, income level or disability should not be an obstacle, and teachers can strive to build a society where equitable treatment is achieved for all
- Requires critical examination of one's self, others, institutions and events
(Blake, 2015)

Image retrieved from

<https://education.cu-portland.edu/blog/classroom-resources/teaching-social-justice/>

Table of Contents

Slide No.

4. Introduction
5. Defining Social Justice in Education
8. A classroom without Equity
11. Incorporating social justice in the classroom: creating a community of conscience
12. BCTF Views: Interrelated principles of social justice
13. Myths on Social Justice in Early Childhood Education
15. Social Justice in the context of cognitive development theories
19. How to do this in a classroom setting: Applying theories in practice
23. Activity
25. Conclusion
26. Glossary
27. Annotated Bibliography

Equality



Equity



A Global Perspective in Education and Creating Multiculturalism...

Nancy Fraser's Social Justice Theory

Economic - Maldistribution	Cultural - Misrecognition	Political - Marginalization
Redistribution	Recognition	Representation

- Remedies must be exercised in tandem, one single remedy isn't sufficient in solving any injustice (Fraser, 1996).
- Social justice education should take into account anything outside the classroom that may intervene (ex. living conditions, access to materials, language spoken at home, etc.) (Gkofa, 2017).

A Classroom Without Equity...

Leads to lack of economical justice.



“Across OECD countries, almost one in every five students does not reach a basic minimum level of skills. In addition, students from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds are twice as likely to be low performers. Lack of fairness and inclusion can lead to school failure and this means that one in every five young adults on average drop out before completing upper secondary education”. (OECD, 2012)

Solution: redistribution

“a politics redistribution which attempt to reduce the obstacles caused by socio-economic inequalities through either eliminating economic barriers or reallocating resources to redress the deficit” (Power, 2012, p.481).

Examples: High quality and free education, allocating resources for poor schools, scholarship for academically able children from poor families (Power, 2012).

A Classroom Without Equity...



Perpetuates marginalization, and an imbalance of power within a culture.

Solution: Recognition

by alleviating differences or reallocating respect to marginalized/stigmatized groups

“One strategy is to try to dissolve the categories which create the group differentiation which leads to Misrecognition.” Example: In class, introduce culturally sensitive material and open conversation about our differences. Highlight that we are all different and let students teach others about their unique background and native language(s).

“Another is to reallocate respect to previously marginalized and stigmatized identities/groups through affirmation making visible ‘hidden’ populations and challenging negative stereotypes of the ‘despised’” (ex. indigenous peoples or ethnic minorities)” (Power, 2012, p.481).

Examples: Remedy positive affirmation of the identities of devalued groups. (Power, 2012).

A Classroom Without Equity...



Creates social injustice. Creates an environment that makes children feel invisible (misrecognition).

If children do not see themselves represented in the curriculum, they feel unvalued based on their identity, and therefore that their identities are not valid.

Solution: Recognition

Children feel empowered when they can tell their story. This allows them to explore their own identity and make sense of the world around them. In order to create conditions for student success and empowerment, ensuring that children have their identity needs met in the curriculum is essential. Equity means that all learners see themselves reflected in the learning environment (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2009).

Incorporating Social Justice in the Classroom: Creating a community of conscience

How do young learners develop social conscience to transform the collective group?

1. It is the teachers responsibility and moral obligation to create social justice in the classroom; through **FACILITATION**.
2. How can teachers advocate for equity? In which ways?: provide **RESOURCES** and **SUPPORT**.
3. Is my classroom a place where students see themselves and are treated as individuals with the right and ability to cause change?: through **EMPOWERMENT**.
4. All hands up and all hands in goal...everyone feels valued and safe in their **body, mind, heart, and spirit** .
5. **CONNECT** with students by understanding their life circumstances outside of school as well as in the **classroom**
6. Create empowerment through exploring one's own **IDENTITY**
7. What are the consequences if we ignore social justice in the classroom?: THE GAP WITHIN SOCIETY WIDENS, building more BARRIERS; *disengagement, prejudice, exclusion, bias, racism, poverty.*

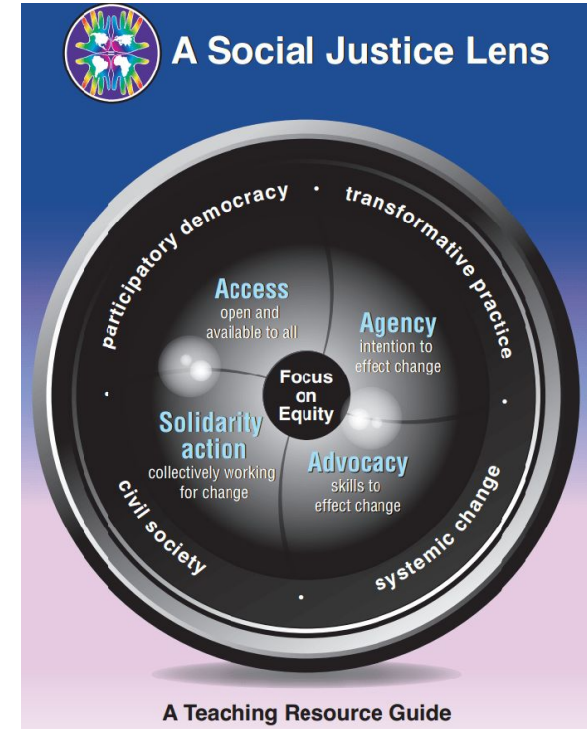
BCTF: Interrelated Principles of Social Justice

Access is the gateway to inclusion and participation.

Agency means that individuals know their rights. They have the capacity and the ability to voice their concerns and to take actions that create change for the better.

Advocacy is a deliberate process of influencing outcomes so that change can occur.

Solidarity action refers to working with others to act for the collective betterment.



<https://bctf.ca/uploadedFiles/Public/SocialJustice/SJ%20Lens%20Booklet-Revised%20July%202019.pdf>

Myths on Social Justice in Early Childhood Education

“Kindergarteners are too young to learn about social justice issues.”

- Kindergarten aged kids understand the idea of equality
- They may play cross-racially and culturally and, without stating so, display sophisticated understanding of race issues and power

(Boutte 2008; Delpit 2007; Earick 2008; Tenorio 2007)

“Social justice issues won’t affect my child, some of these problems don’t even happen here”

- “We’re big enough to know about these things because these problems are happening where we live. And we have the right to talk about them because it will be our life in the future.” - Anon. Student of Liz Klein
- Kindergarten students are within 2 years of reaching that level of cognitive development

Against unfairness: Young children’s judgments about merit, equity, and equality
The development of children’s preferences for equality and equity across 13 individualistic and collectivist cultures

https://www.ted.com/talks/liz_kleinrock_how_to_teach_kids_to_talk_about_taboo_topics/transcript?language=en



Myths on Social Justice in Early Childhood Education

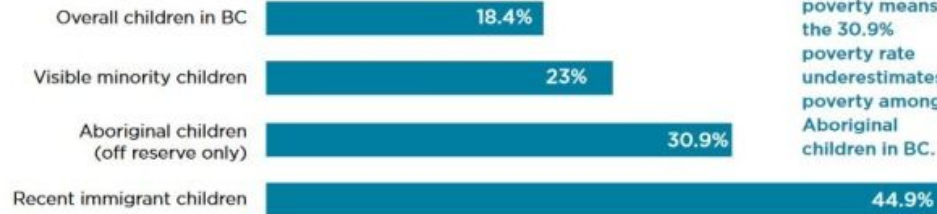
“Race is too complex an issue for my child to understand”

- Young children are neither naive nor ‘colorblind’ and racial relationships are important aspects of their social worlds (Earick 2006, p. 112).
- Children understand differences in skin colour

“Teachers should just teach kids that all races are equal and we are all the same”

- It is the teacher’s role to talk about what these differences mean – not teach colourblindness
- Children notice differences between themselves and others and are shown to have a more favourable opinion of those that are seen to be “the same”, even if those similarities are meaningless. (Dunham and Emory, 2014)

**Child Poverty Rate for Different Population Groups,
LIM After Tax, BC, 2015 (based on 2016 Census)¹**

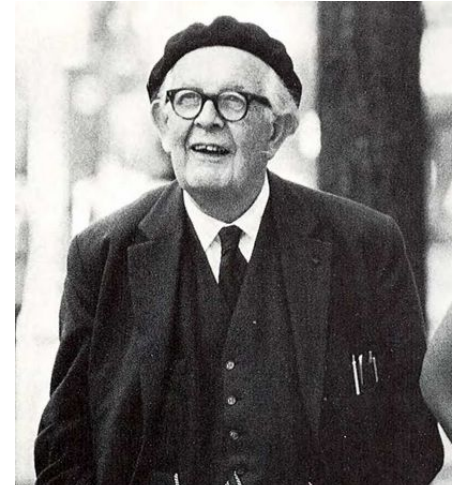


The failure of the census data to capture on-reserve poverty means the 30.9% poverty rate underestimates poverty among Aboriginal children in BC.

Social justice in the context of...

Piaget's Cognitive Development Theory

- Social justice concepts are new, and kids already have schemas formed regarding certain things or issues -- conversations around social justice need to keep this in mind (accommodation will likely occur- children are naturally adaptable and curious)
- According to Piaget, kindergarteners are in the preoperational stage (2-6 years). Children in this stage develop language and understand object permanence, but have difficulty connecting past and future and have not developed critical thinking patterns
- Piaget's theory may lead educators to believe that kindergarteners are not able to discuss issues like racism or poverty
- Piaget did not consider cultural and environmental factors in development



PIAGET'S THEORY OF DEVELOPMENTAL CHANGE VIA SCHEMAS

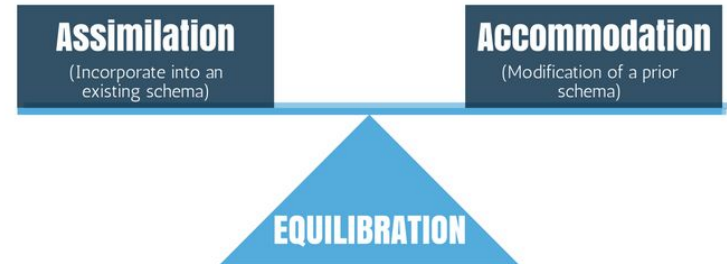
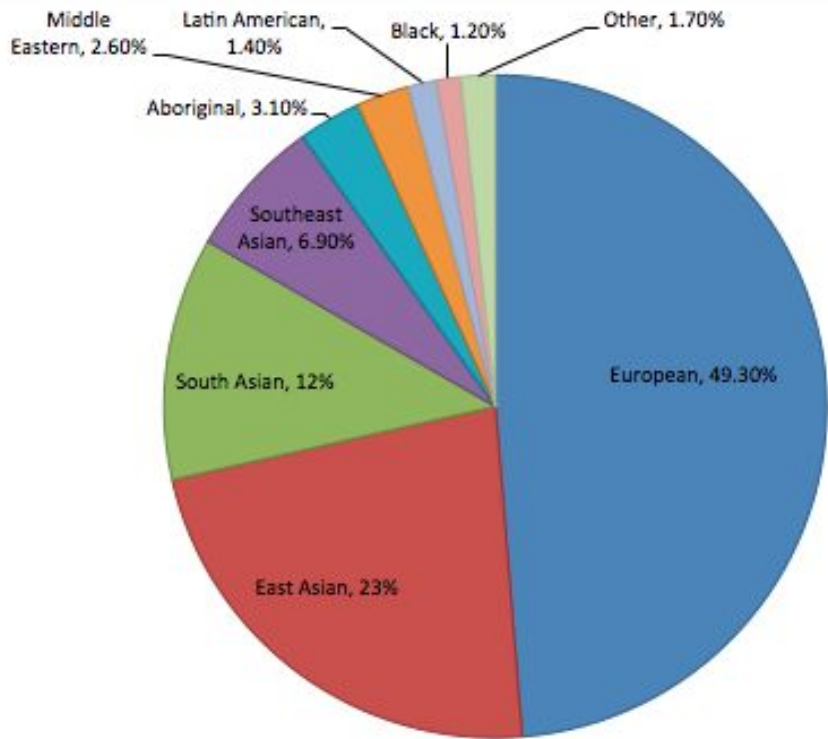


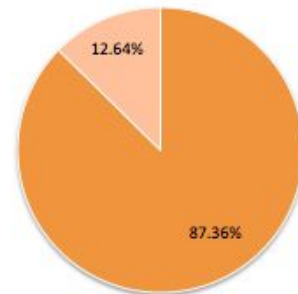
Image retrieved from

<https://www.learningclassesonline.com/2019/08/piaget-theory.html>



Pan-Ethnic Groups in Vancouver

Census Profile, 2016 Census Vancouver



68,982 English language learning (ELL) students
545,805 students total in BC

In today's climate, it is more important than ever to empower students with an understanding of the world around them....to understand and establish meaning in diversity. To be comfortable with diversity...not tolerant but accepting.



Vygotsky

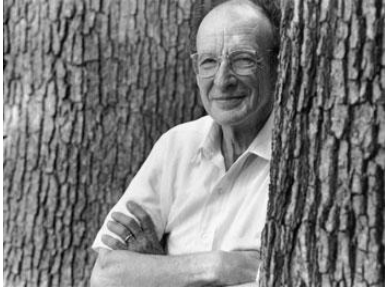
- Vygotsky takes into account cultural and environmental experiences on cognitive development. Diverse experiences can foster cognitive development.
- Vygotsky also states that in the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), knowledgeable peers can be teachers. Peers with varied life experiences can share with others to introduce new information.
- Supporting social justice in the classroom creates a community of learning. By respecting and discussing group differences, children can develop and learn from each other's environment and cultural experiences
- In the ZPD, scaffolding is necessary -- in the context of social justice in the classroom, this would mean guiding questions, accessible literature and sharing circles.



Images retrieved from

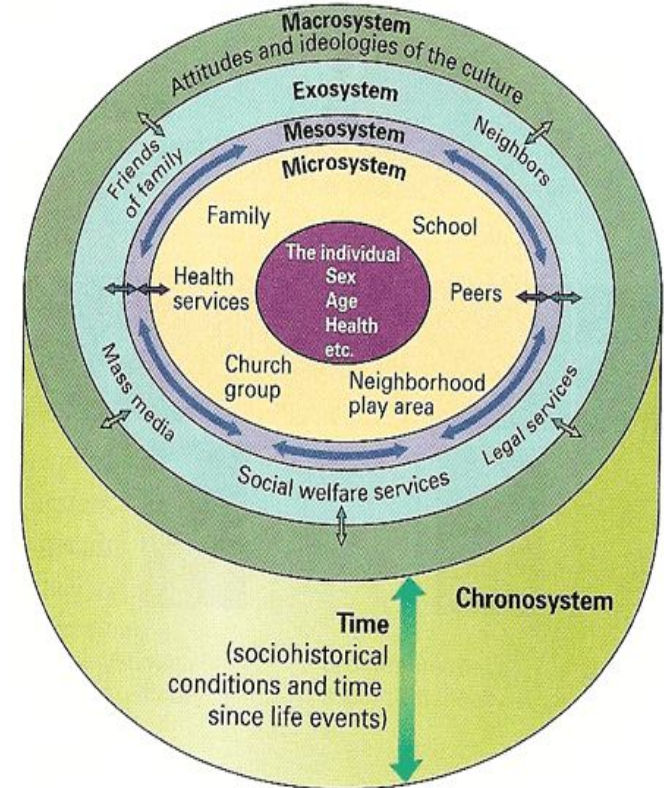
<https://en.mgpu.ru/the-19th-international-conference-in-honour-of-lev-vygotsky/> and

<https://mathathome.org/puzzles-and-the-zone-of-proximal-development/>



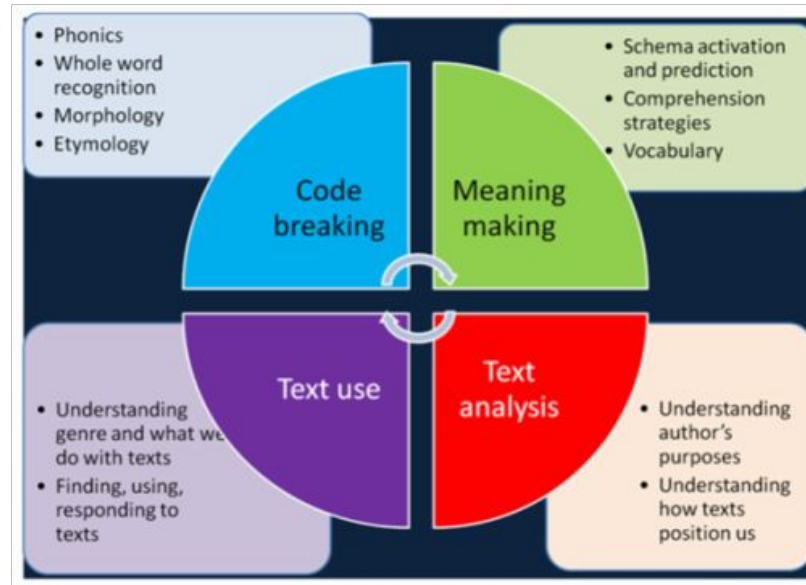
Bronfenbrenner

- **Bronfenbrenner** believed that a person's development was affected by everything in their surrounding environment. He divided the person's environment into five different levels: the microsystem, the mesosystem, the exosystem, the macrosystem, and the chronosystem.
 - Development diffused through life transitions and socio-historical events (time matters)
 - Development process increases over time
 - A child's environment has major influence on child's development; young learners learn from micro systems including social justice issues covered in school
 - Through experiential learning, the teachers role is to discourage stereotypes, try to dissolve barriers, break down stereotypes.



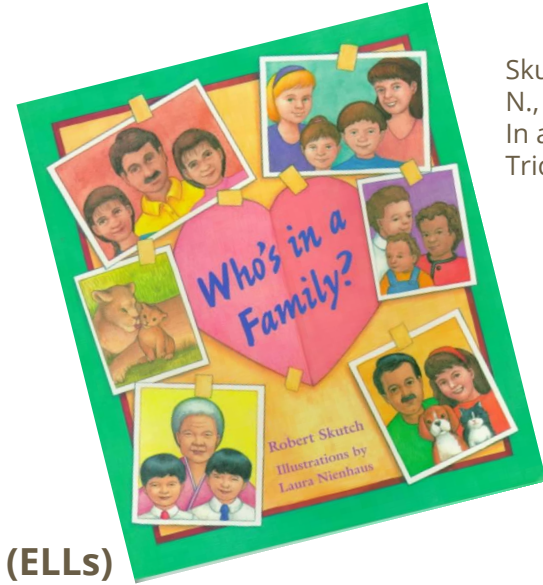
How to do this in a classroom setting: Applying theories in practice

- According to Allan Luke's Four Resource Model (Luke and Freebody, 1999), literacy practices should allow children to critically analyze texts and act on the knowledge that they represent particular points of views while silencing others (Chanicka and Gagné, 2015)



How to do this in a classroom setting: Applying theories in practice

- Literature dealing with specific social justice topics (race, socioeconomic status, SOGI) helps connect Ss with the cultures of those different from them, even when those people are not present (Kim, 2015)



Skutch, R., Laura, N., (1995), *Who's In a Family?*
Tricycle Press

Linguistically Diverse Students - English Language Learners (ELLs)

- Inclusive learning for ELLs: by using multi-language resources, (key words, stories, allowing the Ss to use their home languages etc.) ELL children participate in general education while receiving ELL services (Theoharis and O'Toole, 2011)
- Their voices and languages are heard and valued (Theoharis and O'Toole, 2011)

How to do this in a classroom setting: Applying theories in practice

Culturally Diverse Students - Apply the First Peoples Principles of Education (FPPE)

- A BC school implemented an educational structure based on the oral teachings of the Stó:lō people of the region and found it promoted engagement with marginalized students (Fettes, 2010)
- As a class, brainstorm individual values and make them the whole classes values, create activities where these values are displayed, visually, through action, through text, through sound, etc. (Chanicka and Gagné, 2015)

Collage of student designed posters of Picower's six elements of social justice curriculum design (Chanicka and Gagné, 2015)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VNQNdM38hmA&feature=youtu.be>

(Aldergrove Public School Social Justice Education Montage)



Creating spaces for students, staff and community members

How to do this in a classroom setting: Applying theories in practice

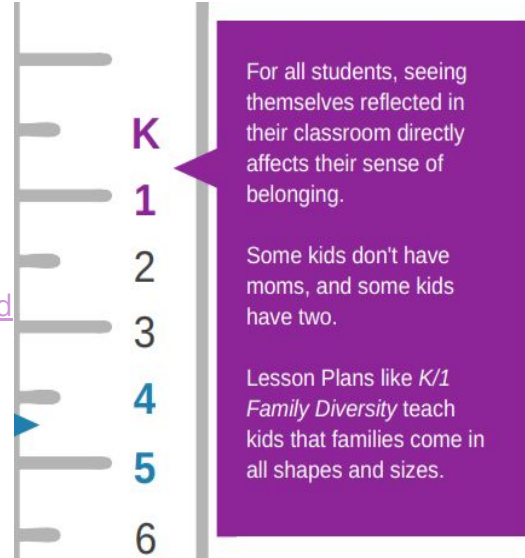
Family Diversity and SOGI

- Stories are a great tool for social justice education
- Early primary education on SOGI relates to family diversity

Lesson plans like “What is a Family” pave the way for inquiry and discussion on relatable family diversity among early childhood learners

<https://bctf.ca/uploadedFiles/Public/SocialJustice/Issues/LGBTQ/Whatisafamily.pdf>

- Asking questions and synthesizing responses allows for all students to know each other’s thoughts
- Guide students to think of specific, critical things during a story reading
- Have students display their learning by identifying the topics in the story and connecting it to their lives
- Foster positive representations to show that all people have value



For all students, seeing themselves reflected in their classroom directly affects their sense of belonging.

Some kids don't have moms, and some kids have two.

Lesson Plans like *K/1 Family Diversity* teach kids that families come in all shapes and sizes.

<https://bc.sogieducation.org>

<https://bc.sogieducation.org>



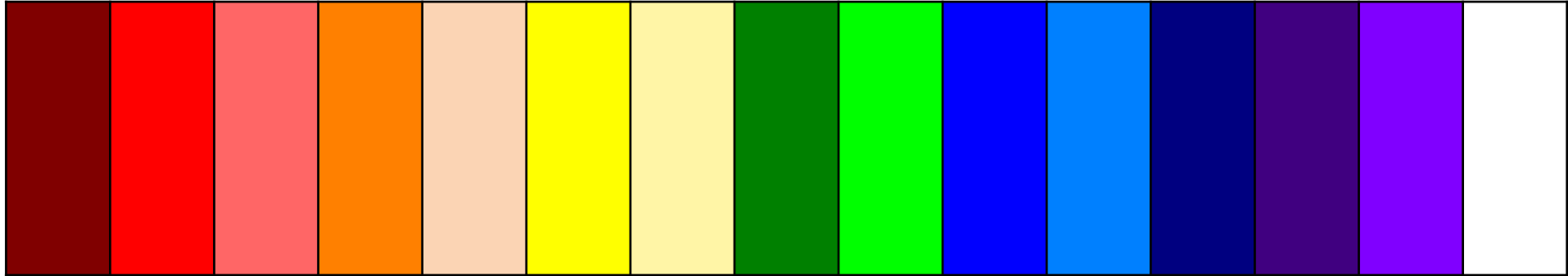
Exploring Family Diversity for Kindergarteners

- Family diversity scavenger hunt – Set up picture books around the room. Get students to draw pictures about the families they see in at least 3 books. Come back together and make a visual representation on the whiteboard or chart paper of what families are represented.
 - What kinds of families are shown most often? Least often? Are there any family structures that are absent? Ask students how they think kids whose families are not represented might feel when they never see their families in any of the books they read.

Book ideas: <http://www.welcomingschools.org/resources/books/diverse-families/>

Who am I? Where do I come from?

As educators, it's important to acknowledge what privilege we bring to our practice. Let's explore this.



^

Discuss...

1. What were your thoughts and feelings as you did this exercise?
2. In what areas of your life do you share privilege?
3. What differences do you have?

Conclusion

Young learners benefit from a socially just education system. It is a teachers moral obligation to address barriers and provide solutions which promote inclusion. Advocating for equal access to education will help marginalized populations and vulnerable groups persevere and strive to reach their potential. Lack of resources (maldistribution), support, and diversity leads to economic and social costs. Receiving fair and high quality education creates more opportunity and optimism for young learners, closing the social gap. Facilitating activities which include all members of a group helps young learners develop critical thinking and cognitive abilities. Finally, it is important to connect students to the idea that, despite race, gender, culture, and economic status, we all have valuable similarities and differences. Learning from diverse worldviews is an excellent tool to explore, misinformed, preconceived notions that create inequalities in the classroom, community, and world. Equity in education is transformative and needs to be addressed in all classroom across the globe.

Glossary

Social justice: The equal distribution of resources and opportunities, in which outside factors that categorize people are irrelevant.

Equity: The idea that everyone is given the resources that they need to succeed. Equity often appears unfair, but it actively moves everyone closer to success by “leveling the playing field.”

Equality: The idea of everyone being given the same resources, in an effort to promote fairness; it only works if everyone starts from the same place and needs the same help.

Maldistribution: Uneven distribution of something, especially when disadvantageous or unfair

Misrepresentation: The action or offense of giving a false or misleading account of the nature of something

Marginalization: Treatment of a person, group, or concept as insignificant or peripheral.

Schema: an underlying organizational pattern or structure; conceptual framework. A schema provides the basis by which someone relates to the events they experience. (Random House, 2019)

Assimilation: In Piaget’s theory, the incorporation of information into an existing schema

Accomodation: In Piaget’s theory, the changing of a prior schema to suit new information

Equilibrium: In Plaget’s theory, the state in which a child can explain the world around them using their own existing schemas

Zone of Proximal Development: In Vygotsky’s theory, the range of tasks that a child is not capable of alone, but is with assistance

Microsystem: In Brofenbrenner’s theory, a child’s immediate surroundings

Mesosystem: The system of interconnections between microsystems i.e. the relationship between a child’s family and their teachers

Exosystem: Environmental elements that influence a child’s life, but are not directly involved with it

Macrosystem: The setting presented by the culture of a child, including their socioeconomic status and ethnicity

Chronosystem: The environmental events and transitions that occur throughout a child’s life

Annotated Bibliography

Blake, C. (2015, May 13). How to Teach Social Justice in the Classroom. Retrieved from <https://education.cu-portland.edu/blog/classroom-resources/teaching-social-justice/>.

This blog post concisely lays out some goals and philosophies of social justice education. Its focus is on creating a community in the classroom where children are aware of each others' backgrounds and see each other as co-learners. It also gives strategies for teaching how to apply these concepts to the world outside of school.

Boutte, G., Lopez-Robertson, J., & Powers-Costello, E. (2011). Moving Beyond Colorblindness in Early Childhood Classrooms. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, 39(5), 335–342.

This article counters the idea that young children are too innocent or naive to think about and experience racism. The authors argue that because children are not colourblind, teachers should not take the approach of colourblindness in their teaching. In our research package, this article was used to oppose the idea that kindergarten is too early to bring social justice topics into the classroom.

Chanicka, J., & Gagné, A. (2015). Our journey at Aldergrove Public School – social justice Praxis in one Canadian Elementary School. *Intercultural Education*, 26(3), 238–247. doi: 10.1080/14675986.2015.1048046

This successful transformation of Aldergrove PS in Ontario shows off the benefits of providing an elementary school with social justice education, and an enriching Indigenous educational foundation. Many of the stories, pictures, and videos from this article helped shape our understanding of the importance of social justice education.

Dunham, Y., and Emory, J. (2014). Of affect and ambiguity: The emergence of preference for arbitrary groups. *Journal of Social Issues*, 70(1), 81-98. Doi: 10.11101/josi.12048

This research shows that children treat peers perceived to be in the same group as them more highly than those who differ, even if the groupings are meaningless. This research supports the idea that children are not colourblind, and that teachers need to teach about race to counter the negative groupings and stereotypes.

Earick, M. (2006). *Racially equitable teaching: Beyond the whiteness of professional development for early childhood educators* (dissertation). Ann Arbor, NM, United States.

Mary Earick's PhD dissertation takes an in depth look at the entrenched institutional paradigm of the support of White racial ideologies in schools. She references the research of Van Ausdale and Feagin (2001) and their dimensions of racial and ethnic relations in young children. This dissertation provided research supporting the idea that young children are aware of racial issues at as young as 3 or 4 years old, and that any notion that they are unaware is an adult construct.

Fettes, M. (2013). Orality for all: an imaginative place-based approach to oral language development. *Language Awareness*, 22(1), 17–38. doi: 10.1080/09658416.2011.652633

This paper examines an elementary school in British Columbia that introduced 3-week units focusing on oral language teaching. The units were developed based on the traditional oral narrative of the Stó:lō people. The goal was to support engagement from more marginalised students. This was an example of how a school can benefit by transforming its curriculum to be focused on social justice education.

Annotated Bibliography

Fraser, N. (1996). Social Justice in the Age of Identity Politics: Redistribution, Recognition, and Participation. *Culture and Economy after the Cultural Turn Culture and Economy after the Cultural Turn*, 25–52. doi: 10.4135/9781446218112.n2

Fraser explores two sides of social justice: the redistribution of resources and claims for the recognition of cultural difference. Historically, the two sides have been associated as two separate ideas and this article links the the idea that neither alone is sufficient. To gain insight into today’s social justice climate we need to take a deeper look into how redistribution of resources and recognition of cultural differences influence one another.

Gkofa, P. (2017). Promoting social justice and enhancing educational success: Suggestions from twenty educationally successful Roma in Greece. *The Urban Review*, 49(3), 443-462.

This paper examines a minority group of twenty Greek, Roma students who enter higher education ‘despite odds’. Gkofa interviews students to understand implications that help students challenge economic and cultural barriers.

Hayes Nóirín, et al. *Introducing Bronfenbrenner: a Guide for Practitioners and Students in Early Years Education*. Routledge, 2017.

The first chapter in this book examines Bronfenbrenner’s systems theory and highlights his idea that children are influenced by their environment. The series of micro and macro systems are intertwined and are constantly in a state of diffusion. His theory states that children develop based on their surrounding influences in time.

Kim, S. J. (2015). “It is Not Fair”: Literary Discussions about Race and Social Justice among Korean-Origin Kindergarten Children. *The International Journal of Early Childhood Learning*, 22(2), 13–29. doi: 10.18848/2327-7939/cgp/v22i02/48438

Kim’s examination of bilingual students at a Korean speaking kindergarten highlights the importance of literature as a resource to teach about race. The children studied were shown to have a greater understanding of their sense of place and cultural identity when they read literature that explicitly dealt with race issues.

OECD (2012), *Equity and Quality in Education. Supporting Disadvantaged Students and Schools*, OECD Publishing.

This summary of an OECD report focuses on the importance of equity in education, and highlights ways to support disadvantaged students. It was used to show that a lack of equity in a classroom can have long term effects on students’ lives.

Ontario Ministry of Education. (2009) *Realizing the promise of diversity: Ontario’s equity and inclusive education strategy*. Toronto, Ont.

This government publication stresses the importance of allowing children to see themselves in the curriculum. Inclusive education for all is highlighted. This was used to back the idea that in order to combat misrecognition, students need to be reflected in the material.

Annotated Bibliography

Power, S. (2012). From redistribution to recognition to representation: injustice and the changing politics of education. *Globalisation*, 10(4), 473-492. doi: 10.1080/14767724.2012.735151

This paper analyzes the shift in social justice education based on past and current political climate. Power reveals the complex factors of education inequalities and fragilities

Theoharis, G., & O'Toole, J. (2011). Leading inclusive ELL: Social justice leadership for English language learners. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 47(4), 646-688

Theoharris and O'Toole discuss ways to ensure ELL students' voices and languages are heard to ensure social justice and identity building in classrooms. This included highlighting specific methods and techniques to use.