

EDUC6164: Perspectives on Diversity and Equity
“Diversity and Equity Work: Lessons Learned”
Program Transcript

NARRATOR: What are some of the key lessons that early childhood professionals learn working for equity and social justice in a diverse world? What makes this work professionally and personally so rewarding? In this program, the three early childhood professionals you met in week two reunite to discuss lessons learned from their diversity work. As you view the video, listen to their insights and suggestions for ways in which early childhood professionals can engage in, learn from and work toward greater equity and social justice.

LOUISE DERMAN-SPARKS: Okay, so you know what, I was thinking that among the three of us we've got, what, maybe 75 years of experience doing diversity and equity work. So, I thought it would be kind of fun to think a little bit about what we've learned, you know? What have been the challenges? What are some of the important lessons to us from these years of work?

NADIYAH TAYLOR: Oh, let's see. Some things that I've learned are to not take everything so seriously. I think when I first started learning about anti-bias education and diversity work, I really felt like I had to solve it all right away, and I had to know all the answers right away, and I had to understand every type of bias and know every family's culture in a really deep way, and I learned that that's a really quick way for burn out. And so I had to learn how to take things in measured ways, you know? So I think that was really important. I discovered that lack of support can be really, really hard, and so to surround myself or at least find those key people that I can call and ask questions to and say I don't understand or I feel bad that I didn't get this right, or, you know, having support was really important for me and is still 100% is still important for me. I've learned that it's important to be really open to my own growth in this process, that for me, I think, my understanding about any of these issues is--comes in a spiral format, right? So I get something, I understand it, and I work with it for a few years, and then I discover four years later, I'm at the same point asking the same question with a different level of understanding and then off on another journey to understanding. And so when I see it as a journey, as a progress, that feels better than, like, oh, my gosh, I still don't understand. So having some compassion for myself and really seeing the progress that I've made, and that it's a lifelong journey, I think.

LOUISE DERMAN-SPARKS: Julie?

JULIE BENAVIDES: I concur with Nadiyah. It's just a very complex process where it's always changing, and you're thrown into an influx of certainty of

knowing and then feeling secure about it and feeling insecure about it and trying to figure out what that work means. And I've learned that I don't have all the answers. We're not born to have all the answers. And it's been a journey of getting to know and appreciate other cultures, getting to understand institutions and how they impact children, and asking questions, constantly doing the work of studying, and not only studying but talking and dialoguing with others. It's so critical is that we have to have that shared communities of studying together and understanding what our construction of knowledge is in order to help support children. And in this work, I think, one of the biggest challenges that I've had to face is really looking at my limitations, what my skills are, what my dispositions are, what I need to change, and having what I call the or, being open and being really appreciating others and then also being respectful. I say respect, but at times, do we really engage in respect? And I think that this diversity work and anti-bias work, it's also having to do with working with other adults in our institutions.

NADIYAH TAYLOR: I think I found a voice by engaging in this work. For a lot of years, I felt like I was sort of just on the outs. You know, I wasn't white. I wasn't male. I, you know, was poor and wore glasses, right? I thought, like, I had nothing going on. And I felt, actually, really shy a lot of times, and I don't like conflicts, and it makes me nervous. And I found that by thinking about how to stand up for children and thinking about having--taking in information and being in collegial relationships with people that I found a voice. I found an ability to say, you know, that's not fair and that hurts, and that that's been really important to me. I still don't like conflict, but I've also found ways to have that voice without necessarily having to engage in conflict. And, I think, because I see the power of me feeling like I found a voice that I really want children to be able to have that too.

JULIE BENAVIDES: What you said about conflict, I--it makes me think about I like conflict now. I like conflict because it just produces more opportunities for change and more growth, so conflict is really good. It's not just in the words that we're saying, it really has brought such an in-depth change in me, thinking that how can I change myself before I change someone else.

NADIYAH TAYLOR: Totally.

JULIE BENAVIDES: And going from working from young children and families and working in an institution, at a college, I'm dealing with a lot of personalities and a lot of issues and a lot of different aims and goals that we want to create. And so I have found that I have to learn how to maneuver through that conflict. And so now I enjoy it. But for a while, I didn't know how to go through it. I felt like I--if I was becoming that passive person, that passive voice, but I had to renew myself coming from an early education background in the community to go into