

## Scaffolding Anti-bias Curriculum in Adventure Yard

By Suzanne Duarte Jones

As a Quaker, I was raised to be aware of, and to act upon, issues of social justice. As a teacher and as a mother of a biracial child, these issues have only grown in importance to me.

In kindergarten I was benched for fighting when I told another child not to push me. That same teacher changed all the names of my classmates with Latino-sounding names.

According to Louise Derman-Sparks and Patricia Ramsey (2000), classrooms which go beyond a multicultural approach to actively work against bias "Teach all children to interact respectfully with people of all backgrounds by promoting understanding of self and diversity. Encourage children to challenge prejudice and discrimination...".

Names are important to children and families. Our first curriculum at the beginning of the school year is to learn each others' names. Many of the four and five year olds in our class are working on the developmental task of learning to write their names ( and those of family and friends). By May, almost all of the children can read the names of their classmates and teachers. Because of the power of names we draw families in at the start of the school year by asking them to write down the story of how their child was named so we can share this story with the class. Children glow as teachers read their name stories. Some are short. Some are long. Some are playful. Some share nicknames, Chinese or Hebrew names. All share about that child's family. The group listens with rapt attention.

Learning about peers gives children the impetus for caring and understanding. Throughout the school year we ask each family to share something special that they like to do together. Children learn to count, greet each other and say other key words in each others' home languages. We post the name stories and photos of each family's share on our classroom walls, and families and children discuss them throughout the year, chatting about similarities and differences between each others' home lives.

By the end of the school year children are actively standing up for each other - "She can play - this playhouse is for everyone" and challenging stereotypes - "Boys can too like pink!"