



RAISING *healthy* children

BY BRAD KERSHNER, PHD

Educators from Carolina Friends School in Durham explore
the relationship between health and education

how to approach equity for young learners

Being a mature and responsible adult and trying to do good in the world means being awake to the ways in which society is not fair or equitable, and working to make things better. Being an educator means helping children become people who will share in that work. In order to support children on their path to maturity, we have to help them understand themselves and their world in ways that illuminate possibilities for being helpful and making a difference. They have to come to know, in one way or another, that there are problems in the world, and that they are people who can help to fix them.

As adults working with young people, there are many important ideas and concepts that we strive to convey to our students. Collaboration, empathy, diversity, interdependence, and sustainability are some of the foundational cornerstones upon which we can build a meaningful curriculum. Additionally, if we want our children to live lives of purpose and positivity, we have to teach them about equity, both as a way to understand social problems and as an ideal to strive for.

With young children, it is often best to start close in. Young people are no strangers to conflict; none of us is. So we begin with helping children solve conflicts peacefully and respectfully, all the time. We start small by conveying through our actions, expectations, and words that everything matters and everything counts. Hurt feelings are important. So are sharing, caring, listening, and being heard. Little problems can feel like big problems, and when we take hurt feelings seriously,

empathize with each other, and establish consistent modeling and scaffolding for listening and perspective-taking, we teach that problems, conflicts, and hard feelings are a normal, inevitable part of life, and that we all have the capacity to work through and resolve them together in ways that maintain trust and love in our community.

It is this connection to a group that cares about us, and that we grow to care for, that forms the foundation for ever-widening circles of compassion and concern. When we feel an injustice has been done to us—perhaps we did not get a turn on the swings today, or someone called us a name—we can respond to that injustice in the context of a caring community that understands that frustration and takes steps to ensure the problem does not continue (and we get a turn, eventually, even if it feels like we have to wait a *loooong* time to get it). We have to experience what it feels like to suffer unfairness, and we have to experience for ourselves that injustice can be improved through the actions of people who care—people like *you and me*.

Fair is not equal. Equity does not mean equal outcomes for all, or standardization, or sameness. Equity is simply a framework for understanding fairness, and for thinking about why some things are not fair, and why we should try to make them better. Therefore, equity is at the heart of the educational process—which is, ultimately, the process of guiding and supporting others to fulfill their potential and purpose as unique, loving, intelligent forces of positivity and goodness in the world. *h&h*

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Carolina Friends School is an independent Quaker school serving students aged 3-18.
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