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Chapter 2

A Family, a Fire, and a Framework: Emotions in an Anti-Bias School Community

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“I have learned that there are so many ways we can include all children and families in our educational community, children are naturally inclined to be inclusive of one another, and as educators we have the responsibility to foster that generous spirit.”

---EPCS community member

“An anti-bias community has the capacity to hold what is difficult.”

--Hannah

This chapter advocates anti-bias education as a framework for creating a supportive environment for social-emotional learning within a school community. It describes a traumatic event that occurred for a family and the role the school community played in helping the family process their emotions and cope with the hardship. We illustrate how the school’s anti-bias stance provided a means for one teacher, her students, their families, and eventually the larger

community to engage in emotional work around a traumatic incident. We aim to explore the relationship between social-emotional learning and anti-bias education through an account of actual events, and in this telling demonstrate how emotions and the anti-bias commitment are closely intertwined and mutually reinforcing, binding our school community together.

This piece is the result of collaboration between three authors: Caryn Park, postdoctoral fellow at the Eliot Pearson Children's School 2010-2012, Debbie LeeKeenan, its director, and kindergarten teacher Heidi Given. We begin our chapter by providing a brief discussion of the literature at the intersection of social-emotional learning and anti-bias education. Debbie then introduces the school and its core anti-bias commitment. Caryn, drawing on conversations with the family at the center of our story, describes the fire that occurred at the family's home in the winter of 2012 and the events that followed. Next, Heidi provides a firsthand account of how she and her kindergarten class responded. The section following refocuses on the family and includes Caryn's reflections on how individual members framed their experiences and processed emotions in different ways, demonstrating the complexities of emotional recovery. We discuss the mutually reinforcing connection between anti-bias education and social-emotional learning within our school and call for further examination of and theorizing on this vital relationship.

Literature Exploring the Intersections of Social-emotional Learning and Anti-bias Education

In situating our work within larger conversations regarding social-emotional learning and anti-bias education, we first sought to gain a picture of how authors framed the connections between the two domains. Finding few direct examples, we selected prominent samples from each domain, including texts on social-emotional learning (Epstein, 2009; Hyson, 1994; Riley, San Juan, Klinkner et al., 2008), and anti-bias education (Derman-Sparks & Edwards, 2010).

In the authoritative text by Derman-Sparks and Edwards (2010), some social-emotional learning goals are referred to specifically, but beyond the general sense that anti-bias education supports children's social-emotional growth, the emotional piece is generally seen as a by-product of the work. Pang (2001), and Pang, Rivera, and Mora (1999) emphasize caring-centered multicultural education as the key to supporting students from diverse cultural communities, but focuses primarily on understanding students' cultures (rather than emotions) as the vehicle for achieving educational equity. The connections between emotions and anti-bias education are largely implicit and assumed in the literature, calling for a closer examination of the specific relationships between the domains.

We broadened our search and found several examples of educators reflecting on their own emotions in their engagement with anti-bias and multicultural education (Gay, 2003; Jacobson, 2003; Paley, 1979, 2000). Jacobson (2003) offers personal exploration of bias and oppression as a vehicle for becoming an intentional and effective anti-bias educator for young children. She conceptualizes bias as part of a set of "survival skills" that we acquire as we negotiate painful experiences growing up. In order to serve children and families through powerful anti-bias work, educators must confront deep rooted biases, emotions, and personal histories by "engaging with our inner child and confronting our fears" (p. 68).

Another example is from esteemed kindergarten teacher and author Vivian Paley (1979, 2000). Although all of Paley's work reflects anti-bias thinking and practice, in her book *White Teacher* she examines her beliefs, language, and childhood experiences of feeling different with emotional candor and a spirit of inquiry. In her attempts to create a classroom that is inclusive of Black children during a period of school desegregation, she discovers a class community that,

through play, allows everyone to have a role, to feel understood, valued, and emotionally connected.

We aim to contribute to the literature connecting emotions with anti-bias work by further exploring the relationship between these two aspects of early childhood education. We believe our work is unique in that we do this in a way that encompasses not just teachers or children, but the whole school community.

Anti-bias Education at Eliot-Pearson Children's School

In this section, Debbie describes how anti-bias education looks in our particular setting. The Eliot-Pearson Children's School (EPCS) is a laboratory school for the Department of Child Development at Tufts University in Medford, Massachusetts. The school serves 80 children and families, from 3-8 years of age in five classrooms. Our community reflects a wide range of abilities and learning styles, as well as different economic, cultural, racial, linguistic backgrounds, and family structures. The school's longstanding commitment to anti-bias education is part of the core value and mission of the school.

Anti-bias education is a stance that supports children and their families as they develop a sense of personal and group identity within a complex and multicultural society. This approach helps teach children to be proud of themselves and their families, to respect a range of human differences, to recognize unfairness and bias, and to stand up for what is right (Derman-Sparks & Edwards, 2010). At EPCS, this means working to create an inclusive community that encourages conversations among children and adults about all types of human differences in the context of classroom life. Curriculum topics come from the children, families, and teachers, as well as historical or current events, and can include culture, race, language, abilities, ethnicity, family

structure, religion, sexual orientation, gender, age, economic differences, and our many ways of being. Children learn about similarities and differences in individuals and communities. The anti-bias stance is integrated into classroom activities, in both planned curriculum and “teachable moments” based on children’s social interactions, conversations, and play. When children ask questions about differences, adults listen in order to facilitate conversations and responses.

The anti-bias stance is woven into the fabric of the school, including its policies and structures, physical environment, classroom curriculum, and interactions among children, teachers, administrators, and families. Staff meeting time is dedicated to sharing anti-bias education dilemmas and reflections. Teachers set anti-bias professional goals each year. The physical environment of the school reflects the community at large, with photos of families and books and images that portray all types of diversity. Being able to answer ‘yes’ to the question, “Do I see who I am, who my child is, who my family is?” in the daily school environment and curriculum is fundamental. This is how trust and belonging are fostered.

Families must feel accepted and respected in order to actively engage with anti-bias issues. Each family is unique in their life experiences, expectations of school, and parenting approaches. Families also belong to various subgroups (ethnic, economic class, religious), which affect how they live. Our work with families begins with getting to know families both informally and formally, from initial intakes and home visits to potluck socials and an open door policy where families are welcomed to visit anytime. Learning about families is a process, not a one-time event. It continues as families develop more familiarity, comfort, and trust with the teachers and director.

Anti-bias work creates a climate for dialogue, reflection, and risk-taking on diversity issues. Our goal is to be a place where people can disagree and discuss conflicting values and

ideas and work to find common ground. Over the years I noted new families' many questions about anti-bias education. What does anti-bias education look like at EPCS? Is it appropriate for young children? What is my role as a parent? What if I disagree with the school? During 2010-11, we invited families to collaborate with staff to develop a Frequently Asked Questions document about anti-bias education. The process took nearly the entire school year to complete and became a form of professional development for the staff and an empowering experience for parents. The final document became part of the school's handbook. From this process we all learned more about each other.

It is within this school culture that our story takes place.

The Family's Story: "Our house is burning... Can I come back to school with the kids?"

Ten Alarm

She told us they watched the thread
of fire go down the bedside table
across the floor, under the double doors
& into her daughter's room. Then they
were running, down & out, onto the street.
It was too early for stillness or sorrow.

My phone rang in another town.
Your house is on fire, said the neighbor
across the street & soon all the neighbors
were calling, curtained by fire trucks
& the Red Cross.

It was just our house. We were preserved
in a rental in another town, but the water
broke the floors, went pouring to the beds below,
the cribs & books, the pictures hung on the wall.

Before long, there were videos posted
of our house burning - the whole world could
watch it disappearing, helpless until
the shiny trucks came bearing heroes, used to this
routine. They used pick axes to knock down
all the walls just to make sure there were no more
burning embers hiding. They did not stop until
there was no doubt. Then they drove away
& men came in the dark with business cards -
insurance adjustors, contractors, even photographers.

This is how it happens, the unattended candle,
the end of one life, the way it gets traded for
another one, in the middle of the night, without
warning.

---Hannah

I (Caryn) first met Cooper's parents, Hannah and Toby, through the Diverse Families Group, one of our school's many Parent-Teacher Learning Groups. Before we began working together on this project, I knew them as strong advocates of anti-bias education, as kind,

gracious, generous members of our school community, and as loving, gentle parents to their two children, Cooper (age 6) and Hailey (4).

In 2011, the family lost their condominium to a fire (see poem above). They were not living in the building at the time, but had tenants and friends who were. Toby went to the scene of the fire in the middle of the night, but neither Hannah nor the children were present. Still it was a source of emotional and financial trauma for the family.

Almost a year later, on January 4, 2012, the children came home from school with their grandfather. When Hannah came home, she saw that Cooper had drawn a picture of the fire. He had been drawing these all year. She gently said to him, “We already have about 30 of these pictures, so do you want to give this one to grandpa?” A few minutes later they left the house and were getting into the car when her father said he smelled something burning. Hannah looked up. Smoke was pouring off the second floor deck (which belonged to neighbors in their multi-family house). It was an icy day in January, and neighbors brought blankets as Hannah stood with her children, waiting for the firefighters as they watched their home burn.

Having secured everyone’s physical safety, Hannah intuited what her children needed emotionally. She recounts:

I didn't feel like it would be fair to just whisk them away; I didn't know what their heads would do with just picturing our house going up in flames. So we stayed and we watched the firemen with their axes and stuff break into the roof and let the heat out, and we watched them put the fire out.

Although Toby and Hannah’s memories of the fire and cleanup are vivid, it was difficult during our conversations for them to remember how the children reacted. Hannah tried to respond to my questions about the children’s emotional states during the fire:

I don't feel like I was doing a good job of tuning into how they were in the moment. I was shell shocked myself so I was making sure to be close to them physically and I kept saying to them we're okay, everyone is out of the house, no one's going to get hurt. But in terms of more than that, it was a traumatic experience in that I think we were all just frozen and waiting to see what was gonna happen next...I just felt like all I can do right now is just know that they're physically safe.

Even though she may not have felt “tuned in” to Cooper’s emotions, she knew with some clarity two things he needed emotionally: First, to see the fire put out. Then:

My very first thought as soon as the flames were gone was, we have to go to school... I just felt like from the very beginning there was no question that I was gonna call the school right away and there was no question that they were just gonna kind of hold us up. And that's what happened... I felt like, I need to bring my children right now to a safe place, where emotionally they are safe. I need to remind them even right now that life is going to continue and that their school is still safe. We could have gone to a friend's house too, but I just partly felt like I wanted to be with professionals in a way.

Toby added:

And school is this big community, it's like this ocean of support, all these people doing their thing, this big institution full of support... and so full of all these amazing adults who are focused on all the kids.

As a newer member of the EPCS community, I found Hannah’s choice to bring the children to the school remarkable. It made me want to better understand what it is about this school that creates such deep trust. In the following section, Heidi, Cooper’s kindergarten teacher, describes how she initially responded to the family’s crisis and gradually guided Cooper

and his class toward social-emotional growth. Through Heidi's account we begin to see how the anti-bias stance offers a framework for supporting individual children, families, and the larger community.

Heidi's Story: This is What Being in a Community Looks Like

The Day of the Fire

It was early afternoon, about an hour after kindergarten dismissal. Suddenly, Cooper's mother was on the phone. "Heidi, our house is burning," she said. "We're outside on the sidewalk. I don't know what to do. Can I come back to school with the kids?"

My heart began to race, my mind remembering that just nine months earlier Cooper's family had lost another home to a fire. Though the children had not witnessed the first fire, it had taken a toll on the family and fully captured Cooper's imagination. He was still drawing the same scene—a man walking down a tree lined path, when suddenly a fire appears in front of him. What would it mean now that there had been a second fire—one the children had seen and that would necessitate moving?

I had four minutes of panic and wondering what to do and say. I spent another four minutes running to the director, associate director, and Hailey's teacher until Cooper, Hailey, and Hannah walked through the door. You could smell the smoke on their bodies. My heart tightened. *Oh my god, this is so real.* I stepped into teacher mode, ready to listen and support. Hannah needed to figure out what to do and who to call. Toby was at the house and her mother was on her way. Could we stay with the three of them until she arrived? The answer was so clear—of course we could, this is what being in a community looks like.

The children appeared to need very different things. Hailey needed to have a snack and be comforted. Cooper needed to verbally process what had happened. This was true to his learning style and needs. Cooper was wonderfully insightful, observant, sensitive, and a bit challenging to have in a group. He exhibited a range of sensory needs. He fidgeted, crashed into others and furniture, and made sounds during meetings and as he worked. He thought deeply about all sorts of things and verbalized his thoughts with more descriptive detail than most five year-olds. Though fully engaging to adults, it was hard for peers to stay focused long enough to engage with all his ideas.

Cooper recounted his experience multiple times in great detail. I wondered and worried, was this productive, therapeutic, or was the telling and retelling too much? Should I try to distract him for a while? I decided to follow his lead.

Classroom Discussions, Children's Questions

I was concerned about what Cooper's needs would be in class the next morning and how he would tell the story to his peers. How would I support him? Would his friends listen? I tried to imagine the kinds of questions and fears that might arise. I consider myself a brave teacher, who is a fan of telling the whole story, but in this instance I found myself wondering how much was too much. I felt the need to balance aspects that might be scary for some and ones that could be interesting or even exciting.

I told the group Cooper had a serious and sad story to tell. He told every detail in a matter-of-fact way. He explained that the fire started on the porch of the apartment upstairs when a grill was left unattended (I was grateful that we knew how the fire actually started, as it was a cause that could be controlled and avoided). The children were riveted. With great enthusiasm and admiration, Cooper talked about how four fire engines came and blocked all the roads. The

fire fighters smashed windows and cut holes in the roof using axes and chainsaws. I explained that this releases the smoke and pressure and allows water in to extinguish the fire. Another child who lived nearby said that an ambulance came. I made the point that there was no one in the house and nobody was hurt. The ambulance was just in case there was a need, as fire fighters sometimes, though rarely, get hurt while putting out a fire. Children asked how Cooper and his family discovered the fire, where they were and what they did. We also discussed the importance of getting out of a house or building if there is a fire and how to do that safely. Children knew a lot.

That day I sent an email to the class parents to inform them about the fire and alert them to our conversation. I wrote:

Overall the discussion was calm, informed, and very engaging. The children asked great questions and shared their own experiences and knowledge about fire... Your child may want to share her/his understanding of what happened with you, as well as discuss your family plan for what to do if there were ever a fire in your house. When discussing this potentially scary topic, it is often best to give short, matter-of-fact answers. Reassuring your child that you, and if needed firefighters, would do whatever it takes to keep him/her safe is important.

The children also expressed strong empathy for Cooper, immediately offering to share some of their toys and belongings with him. Other families have also expressed an interest in helping. For now, it is a bit early to know exactly what is needed. What would be most supportive at this time is for people to sign up to prepare/donate a meal.

My letter elicited immediate responses, and many families throughout the school were eager to help.

Supporting Cooper's Process of Healing

Given the amount of stress and turmoil in Cooper's life, it was clear that his sensory and motor needs would escalate. My goal was for the whole class to support Cooper. For the other children, that meant more than just giving him toys or clothing. It would mean that they would need to step outside their own needs as well, which is harder for children than grandiose yet simplistic notions such as, "We'll just build a new house!"

We'd done a lot of work around understanding the distinct strengths and needs of the children in our group, and what accommodations each needed to do his or her best work. The children understood that Cooper might bump into them more and would certainly need to zoom around the bike path at full speed during outdoor time. Some children even offered supports to Cooper that they thought might help.

The children were attentive and engaged in revisiting the story of the fire the first few times. After that, teachers took on the role of attentive audience. In his oral storytelling and drawings, Cooper seemed to be finding resolution through narrative. During the first month, Cooper's drawings began to shift from the typical "man in a path encountering a fire" drawings that he had been "stuck" on for so many months, to drawings of the second fire (see Figure 1), to drawings of adventures he was having with his grandparents, to eventual drawings of his new garden and house.



Figure 1. Cooper's drawing of the second fire. Accompanying text read: "Once thar was a fiyr at my haose but the firemen put it awt."

Cooper's story inspired several curriculum strands, including an exploration of volcanoes and a study of homelessness. During the past few years I have been engaging with the constructs that kindergartners demonstrate and develop about social class. Cooper's experience gave life and depth to anti-bias concepts—about who are the people who make or receive donations, the differences between wants and needs, how we can truly be helpers in the community—challenging me, the children, and their families to articulate our core values and beliefs and to consider and respect the needs of others.

"Leaning into the Discomfort": Emotional Work as a Teacher

My goal as a teacher was to help develop children's awareness and empathy without making them worry. I pushed against the boundaries of my comfort zone when considering the potential risks in allowing Cooper to tell his story uncensored, how some children might become frightened about their own family's safety and home. I wondered: Is it okay to protect one group of children from stressors, while other groups live in emotionally hostile environments? Should

we expose the ‘protected’ to the truth, so that they may grow into fuller human beings who advocate for all?

Madrid (2013) emphasizes the importance of a teacher’s ability to “*lean into the discomfort*” (p. 7), even when it disrupts his or her familiar ways of knowing and feeling. At EPCS I have been supported in developing these abilities, and I hope to cultivate this in my kindergarteners by scaffolding difficult conversations, and allowing them to take risks and respond to one another with authentic emotions.

Engaging in the Emotional Labor of Recovery

Shifting the focus back to the family, in this section we dig deeper into the experiences of Hannah, Toby, and the children in the aftermath of the fire. As I (Caryn) learned through my conversations with Cooper’s parents, each family member’s journey toward healing was unique, with different emotional responses, processes, and needs¹.

Toby was at work when he received the call from Hannah about the fire and remembers shifting immediately into “protective mode,” accompanied by a kind of “stoicism.” He describes these as emotional states, ones that carried him through the following week of going through each room of their home hauling out belongings for storage or the dumpster, and through months of assuring his anxious children that he and Hannah were very careful about fire, that when everyone is extremely careful, they would all be safe. He describes how he and Hannah felt “a general sense of wanting to wrap ourselves around our kids and say, it’s okay, this is a terrible thing but it’s gonna be okay”, even when they weren’t feeling so secure themselves.

As Toby described his stoicism, he simultaneously reflected on it:

¹ The adults involved in writing this chapter agreed that we would make our best attempts to describe the children’s experiences without approach them directly to gather “data” for this project.

Toby: *It's almost like I wasn't gonna let myself feel bad about it. Which is actually kind of maybe an unhealthy kind of stoicism, honestly, and here I am a year later looking at that again and wondering if that was actually so wise, but that was what I felt at the time, it's just, I'm not gonna let myself feel bad about this because I just can't.*

Caryn: *What emotions would you have felt?*

Toby: *Just the sadness, and the loss and all the things you might naturally expect. The frustration with the neighbors and the sadness about having to leave our home, and the frustration with having to commute now and so much less time to do the things we wanted to do... so many negative emotions that would have been natural, they were there, they certainly crept in from various angles. I think partly it was a self-defense mechanism because I felt like—maybe not even consciously—if I allowed myself to feel how I really was feeling I would have been completely overwhelmed because we were doing everything we could just to hold it together...just the logistical work took everything we had, so to make any room for actually feeling the emotions that I naturally would otherwise have been feeling—I felt like I just didn't have time for it. Even though it probably would have been wise to make the time because it built up and then it takes more time to kind of unpack and deal with later, but that's just where I was at that time.*

Although Toby begins by describing his stoicism as an emotional state, it seems he also recognizes through our conversation that there were emotions which seemed to be “naturally” surfacing, and stoicism was more of an action/reaction he was using to respond to and manage the emotions. With all the logistics and the physical work to be done, Toby felt he could not take the time or space to put emotions at the center of his response. He needed to bracket negative

emotions that might interfere with handling so many practical issues. However, he recognizes that keeping his emotions at bay would not serve him in the long run.

One strategy for dealing with the trauma of the fire has been to maintain the family's core "big picture perspective that we're so lucky." Hannah explained that she told herself and others again and again, "This is not a tragedy." This idea was important to hold onto even as they assessed their many material and emotional losses as a result of not one but two fires. Hannah noted that the greatest loss affected her children, in that they no longer "just assume that you wake up in the morning and you go to school and everything's fine." She continued, "So that is a huge loss, but besides that, it was just stuff that was lost." They knew they had many places they could go and people to turn to, and they were able to find a new home in a few weeks. Two house fires in a year would have been enough to devastate many families, but Cooper's family seemed truly to be surrounded by a community of love and support which helped them rebound quickly.

However, I wondered whether the insistence that they were a "lucky" family—and that the fire was not a tragedy—might be preventing Toby from allowing himself to feel the full range of emotions he knew were looming close. Hannah, too, wavered at times between describing her family as incredibly fortunate, to feeling the "desperation" of their situation as their financial goals and dream home slipped away.

The children had their share of emotional work. They had to say goodbye to their house (see figure 2) and nearly all of their belongings. In the early days, Cooper had nightmares about accidentally setting fire to the house himself. He felt the need to monitor and worry about things far beyond a five-year-old's responsibilities. Hannah shared that even months later, during the

summer, he came home and told her, “If there was another fire at our house I would carry all of you out of the house.”

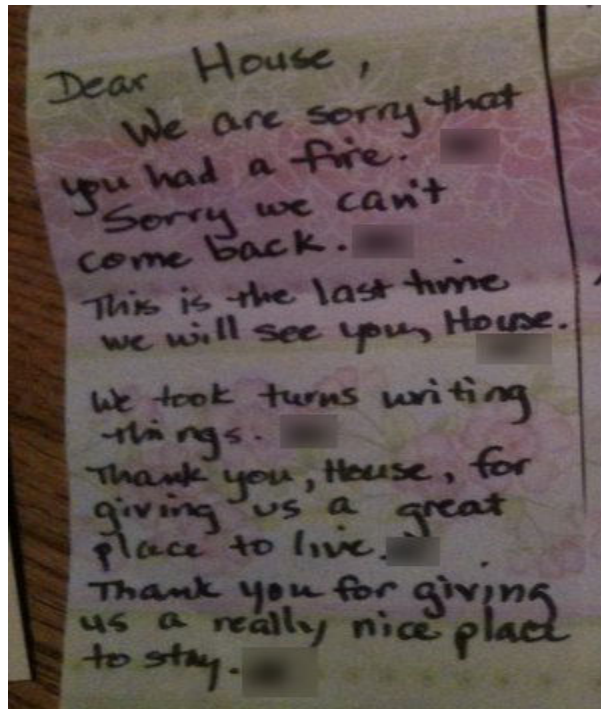


Figure 2. Cooper and Hailey’s goodbye letter to the house

The fact that Cooper eventually stopped making the same drawings of fire shows significant progress. His parents and teachers, who allowed him to show them hundreds of fire pictures day after day, and his class peers, who listened and asked questions and were there with him as he relived the details of the fire all played a vital role in Cooper’s healing. Madrid (2013) writes that “Being able to reveal our stories and concealed emotional pain is the path to reclaiming our spirit in and out of the classroom. Witnessing is the other side of vulnerability as it makes demands on the teacher to hear and hold the stories of students who have experienced injustices and emotional pain” (p. 8). Cooper’s family, teachers, and classmates participated emotionally in his process, bearing witness to his story and allowing it to gradually achieve

closure. Hannah and Toby credit the school for the way Cooper is now able to relate his own family's hardships to other things and people in the world. They describe how he seems to have more empathy for victims of natural disasters and other challenges. Hannah said, "Even though it is a kind of sensitivity, it's a positive kind of sensitivity."

Cooper's sister Hailey was only three when the fire occurred, yet her process was painful and lasting. Partly due to her age, she was not as clear in articulating her responses to the fire, and adults around her felt it was more prudent to allow her to initiate conversations than to take a more active approach such as Heidi did. She did not have the same opportunities to process her experiences and emotions with the type of classroom supports that were offered to Cooper.

Hailey's response to the fire manifested in several ways. For months she suffered from daily stomachaches. Her imaginative play became stuck on scenes of emergency and hardship. Two dollhouses were donated to them after the fire, and Hailey would want Hannah to sit with her while she moved all the people and furniture from one dollhouse to the other. Hannah remembers, "It would feel like a desperate concentration." Erickson viewed repetitive play as a way for young children to "gain control over upsetting experiences" (Hyson, 1994, p. 33). Hailey needed to process her emotions through repetitive play, just as Cooper needed to draw the same scene or tell the story repeatedly. However, as a mother it was difficult and painful for Hannah to accompany Hailey each time she engaged in these (re)enactments of trauma and loss.

Erikson's theory posits that individuals develop psychosocially through each resolution of conflict and achieve a greater sense of strength, autonomy, and trust (Hyson, 1994). In this sense, the family's loss might be seen as an opportunity to develop emotionally as individuals and as a collective. Such narratives of overcoming hardships to reap the rewards on the other

side are the stuff of classic moral tales. However, when asked about the positive outcomes that she saw as a result of this experience, Hannah did not offer a simple happy ending:

With me and Hailey, where we're at in our own process is that we've learned we can't count on life. There's nothing that's guaranteed. I still am working through my own hyper-vigilance about trying to protect everybody ... Hailey and I still have to move past our PTSD a little bit more before I'll be able to talk about what else we learned from it.

Hannah's awareness of where she is in her process gives her a perspective about where she may eventually be that her young daughter lacks. Whereas for Hailey the present pain might feel like the only and permanent outcome of the fire, Hannah understands that this story is not over yet, and some day they may look back and recognize that it changed them for the better.

According to Ahmed (as cited in Madrid, 2013), "Healing does not cover over, but exposes the wounds to others: *The recovery is a form of exposure*" (p. 7). As authors of this chapter, we wonder how the parents' desire to protect their children (and themselves) from the extent of their emotional and material losses may have delayed the emotional work that had to take place before they could move on. Do they need to allow room to grieve their losses by releasing the family from the narrative of being "lucky?" Would it now be helpful to expose each family member's deepest fears about what this loss means to them now and in the future? Might their participation in this writing project have played a role in the process of recovering through un-covering?

Further Reflections

A Community Response

Hannah and Toby both felt grateful to Heidi and the school community for the care and support they received. They noted “how happy and excited people were to come pitch in and help out.” Over 40 people helped them on their “move out” day. One of the kindergarten families came and removed twelve bags of smoky wet laundry from their basement floor. “They just came and put it all in their car, and said, ‘We’ll let you know when it’s ready.’” They remembered with appreciation how they ate meals cooked for them by EPCS families “every night for a whole month.”

Toby referred to the bonding and interactions that were made possible by the fire as a “nice side effect of this otherwise terrible event.” He concluded, “I think it’s easy to say that both of our sense of place and strong sense of community with the school which was already strong was cemented without a doubt.”

The school-wide anti-bias culture encourages all its members to come into the community fully and as they are. Racial, ethnic, and cultural identities are not the only forms of difference recognized. The fundamental spirit of acceptance and respect for the whole child, and the work of the community in exploring what it means to be accepting and respectful of difference allowed Cooper to be himself and move through his unique process of healing with love and support.

Kindergarten families welcomed the chance to aid a family in need. They felt generous and empowered. Heidi’s goals for working with parents became to support them as they grappled with topics they might not feel comfortable discussing with children, and personal values about economic inequality that may not previously have been articulated. She felt that the families responded more positively toward the anti-bias curriculum focus than in previous years. Cooper’s family’s experiences provided the community with an opportunity to explore the topic

of economic hardship in a way that was concrete and personally connected to them. There is a danger of reinforcing stereotypes when we try to talk about groups and communities that feel socially and emotionally distant (Derman-Sparks, 1989). But children’s emotional connection and empathy with Cooper strengthened the anti-bias curriculum. One possible indicator of the lessons learned by children is that during the course of the curriculum, Cooper was told by a friend that if he had another fire, “you can come home with us.”

Our story illustrates the mutually reinforcing relationship between cultivating a school-wide anti-bias stance and fostering social-emotional learning. When a community member’s emotional wellbeing became the focus of the whole class, this deepened and personalized the anti-bias messages of the curriculum.

Caveat: Tensions Between the Need to Feel and the Need to Act

In anti-bias work, we encourage children to become active participants in the world, to stand for what they believe in, and to oppose injustice. This work is ongoing, and not without some perils. Heidi has observed children’s gut reaction to hearing about Cooper’s loss as wanting to see things get all better as quickly as possible. That sense of finding instant relief can feel comforting and supportive, but as anti-bias educators we also must step back and wonder how much fixing is really possible, how important it is for the children to at least get a glimpse of the complexity of the issues. Recognizing the ongoing reality of injustice and inequality, and learning to sit with the pain of unfairness are the hardest aspects of this work. There is a risk involved in moving children to action too quickly with little reflection, or missing the emotional aspect of the work—just feeling how it feels to encounter unfairness or suffering. Just as Madrid (2011) argues that emotional discomfort—more so than comfort—can push or motivate teachers to engage in social justice work, the same goes for children.

Theorizing the Relationship between Anti-bias Education and Social-emotional Learning

In Table 1, we list the four core goals of anti-bias education, as set forth by Derman-Sparks and Edwards (2010), alongside six of the 13 social-emotional learning topics covered by Epstein (2009) that are closely aligned with the anti-bias goals. The reader may notice significant overlaps in the goals for children’s development.

Table 1

Comparison of Anti-bias Goals and Related Social-emotional Topics

Anti-bias goals (Derman-Sparks & Edwards, 2010)	Social-emotional learning topics (Epstein, 2009)
Awareness of self and pride in one’s family and social identities	Developing a positive self-identity Developing a sense of community
Appreciation and knowledge of human differences, and deep, caring connections	Valuing diversity Feeling empathy
Recognition of unfairness, language to describe it, and understanding that it hurts	Developing a framework for moral behavior
Empowerment and action against prejudice and discrimination	Creating and participating in a democracy

Are social-emotional learning and anti-bias education simply different ways of talking about the same goals for children’s development? Could anti-bias work be understood as a collective version of individual social-emotional development? We propose a mutually reinforcing relationship: An anti-bias stance creates the conditions for every member’s social-emotional learning by focusing on equity as a framework and foundation. When a school community recognizes and actively resists bias and oppression, the culture created enables

members to explore their individual and group identities, emotions, and functioning in society. A school-wide anti-bias culture supports the emotional work of individuals and groups by serving as a framework, a language, and a provocation for this work to come to the fore of the learning experience.

Ongoing Emotional Work in an Anti-bias School Community

I think that if we hadn't had this experience in an anti-bias community, there is no way I would have shared so much vulnerability with the teachers, staff, and parents. An anti-bias community fosters a deeper kind of honesty, a "take me as I am" kind of honesty. That was why I felt comfortable calling the school that day to say, "This is what is happening for us right now."

--Hannah

The narrative offered in this chapter shows how anti-bias education can provide a framework for social-emotional learning across a whole school community. The school-wide anti-bias education framework allowed individuals and families to experience learning around issues, identities, and emotions that might otherwise be considered outside the realm of school and classroom conversations. The framework functioned as a catalyst for the emotional work of the community, opening up numerous entry points for engaging with Cooper's family's loss, supporting him and his peers, and guiding the direction of curriculum. It also moved and empowered the community to take their learning beyond school grounds to attend to the wider community.

Yet the work is never done. In preparing this chapter, as each of us reflected on the events, conversations, and curriculum, we noticed missed opportunities, unanswered questions,

and emotional work left to revisit. What might we do differently next time, or even tomorrow?
Are there limits to how much schools can support families through difficult events?

Scholarship is needed to further theorize and explicate the relationship between emotions and an anti-bias framework. In particular, we need a better understanding of how emotions operate in anti-bias work in early childhood education, not only for children but teachers and families. Additionally, scholarly work on emotions in early childhood education needs to be grounded in deeper understandings of diversity, equity, and justice. When schools engage in fostering cultures of recognition and appreciation of all of our differences, strengths, and challenges, they can become the first place of sanctuary for a family in a time of need.

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Chapter 2 Commentary

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This chapter is a vivid and heartfelt story of how anti-bias work prepares teachers, children, and families to work together as a community to meet emotional needs. It provides a concrete and compelling example of how caring and community underlie anti-bias work and vice versa. This account is particularly powerful as it includes voices of children and parents as well as teachers. For instance, the examples of Cooper's drawings and narratives over time show how, with skilled support, children can grasp and rise above personal disasters and gain the insight and courage to move on in their lives. Toby's honest discussion with Caryn about how he suppressed his feelings in order to appear strong for his family highlights the advantages of a community where teachers and parents talk openly and honestly about issues and roles – in this case gender roles. Heidi's ruminations about whether or not she should protect the children from the harsh realities of the fire and how she can balance the needs of one child with the interests of the whole group show us how teachers can sensitively and astutely embrace competing priorities and the widely ranging emotional capacities of children.

This story also prompts us think further about related issues and questions such as: Why is emotional growth viewed as a “by product” rather than a central focus of anti-bias work? In our society we tend to polarize individualism versus collectivism, private versus public lives, and personal connections versus conflict; and these divisions may affect our views of social justice

work. Often the media show militaristic images of protest groups here and abroad. Stern angry faces, upraised fists, or displays of weapons collectively imply that advocacy is confrontational and does not allow for gentler feelings and personal attachments. These portrayals also suggest that true activists have to forsake families and friends and commit themselves to following group dictates and perhaps live for long periods of time in treetops or tents in city parks. In fact, some people shy away from being involved in social justice work because they assume that the personal and emotional costs are too great.

Social justice work *does* require a degree of discomfort – putting oneself into unfamiliar and challenging situations, taking risks, confronting authorities and, at times, distancing oneself from family and friends. Conflict is also inevitable because individuals and institutions that hold power are not going to voluntarily give up their privilege and control. Furthermore, any movement requires a certain amount of conformity and adherence to particular values and strategies, because unity is necessary to send clear messages in our sound byte society. Balancing conformity and coherence with the variety and richness of individual views, talents, and needs is always a tension in any collaborative effort, and especially one that evokes passions as does social justice work.

These polemics are reflected in our personal lives. We stress self-sufficiency and go to lengths to present a public image of successful lives and well-being. Often we mask our pain and vulnerabilities, as so poignantly illustrated in the chapter by Toby's assertions about needing to be strong. Ironically, and perhaps as some type of compensation, the social media and many television shows vividly display the lurid details of personal tragedies and fraught relationships. Likewise, the media are saturated with violent images, but we often avoid conflict because we fear it will disrupt our personal connections.

These polemics also can undermine anti-bias work in early childhood settings. Teachers of young children, by nature and training, highly value nurturance, community, and the safety and comfort of children. Furthermore, many families with young children are protective of their youngsters and resistant to any risks or unpleasantness. Thus, teachers and parents often collude to avoid exposing children to the disturbing realities and controversies that are inherent in anti-bias work. Furthermore, many teachers see conflict among children as threatening and, as a result children do not learn how to productively disagree with others. In his comparison among preschools in different cultures, Bill Corsaro (2003) observed that teachers in middle-class preschools in the United States often went to great lengths to prevent or mitigate conflicts. Not surprisingly, the children perceived themselves as vulnerable and their relationships as fragile and often turned to adults for help when disputes arise. In contrast, the Italian teachers Corsaro observed generally ignored children's *discussioni*, vigorous arguments about many topics, and their playful physical fights. Rather than rely on their teachers, the children themselves usually moderated or resolved conflicts in ways that affirmed their sense of collective identity and connections.

The authors of this chapter, however, show us that these polemics are false and that we can find our way through tensions and conflicting pressures that arise. They remind us that what is lacking in popularized images of people working for social justice is the camaraderie and support among activists and the love and caring that both motivate and emanate from doing this work. As Valerie Pang (2001) asserts, "Caring and social justice in a democracy are intimately connected. When we care, we act...social justice flow[s] directly from what we care about" (p. 63). Audrey Thompson (1998), speaking from a Black feminist perspective, points out that, for poor people and people of color, caring can never be confined to the personal realm; loving and

caring *must* be about confronting and transforming inequities. Rather than motivating us to protect children's innocence, caring energizes us to embrace those who suffer and to challenge the inequities that cause pain to individuals and groups.

As I read this chapter, one particular question came to mind. This account illustrates the advantages of teachers and administrators and families having had time to reflect and talk with each other, before a crisis occurs. It is a testament to the sense of community that the school was the first place that the family turned to after the fire. Also it is noteworthy that the teachers and administrators were able to drop everything and be at the center when the family arrived. I wondered about places with fewer resources. Would these connections and availability be possible in centers where teachers are working 8 hours a day at minimum wages and often have to rush home to pick up children or get to their second job? What advice can we provide centers and staff that may not have time and resources to be responsive at this level?

While musing on this inspiring story, a lovely and surprising image of anti-bias work came unbidden to my mind: a big boldly colored pillow that provides a soft landing for individuals in crisis; a place where they can share their experiences and feelings honestly and openly; a place that honors vulnerability as much as strength; a place where individuals and community mutually support each other. At the same time, the pillow has a lot of bounce to it, and people cannot just sink into it. Rather, when the time is right, it gives them the momentum and courage to rise up and regain their footing, to embrace all who suffer, to expand the depth and breadth of their awareness and caring, and to re-commit to social justice.

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