WE'RE ALL IN THIS TOGETHER:
Relationships, Responsibilities, Reciprocity, and Resilience

By Helene Arbouet Harte

The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) Code of Ethical Conduct outlines areas of responsibility in professional relationships with children, families, colleagues, and the community. Integral to these areas of responsibility is the notion that they exist within the context of relationships. Whether the aspirational best practices described in the ideals or the requirements expressed in the principles of the code, the behaviors reside in relationships. These professional relationships can help strengthen families, support colleagues, enrich communities, create effective teachers, and build resilient children. Indeed, one of the core values emphasized in the preamble is a commitment to "Recognize that children and adults achieve their full potential in the context of relationships that are based on trust and respect" (NAEYC, 2011, p.1).

Professional ethics are about right and wrong. Ethical behavior and best practices are not the same thing. Ethical behavior involves engaging in actions consistent with the responsibilities outlined in the NAEYC Code of Ethical Conduct. Best Practices are what we know to be effective based on evidence from research and experience (Feeney & Freeman, 2018). While these are not the same thing, they are aligned. It is important to note that guidelines about the right things to do align with, and are grounded in, what we know about effective teaching and interactions. If early care and education providers act with inten-

tionality, honoring areas of responsibility and striving for those exemplary behaviors, this may be consistent with relationship building strategies and yield positive outcomes. The use of ethical behaviors relationship strategies and best practices overlap, ultimately helping children to be more resilient. (*See figure 1.*)

Best Practices

A few examples of best practices include developmentally appropriate practice, anti-bias education, supporting equity and diversity, and family engagement. All of these practices take into consideration the context in which children live, supporting children in developing a positive self-identity, and collaborating with families to meet the needs of children.

Developmentally appropriate practice involves teachers as intentional decision makers taking into consideration what we know about child development, individual development and the social and cultural contexts of children to inform practice (NAEYC, 2009). Anti-bias education strives for each child to have a positive social identity, be comfortable with diversity, make authentic human connections, and to recognize and respond to unfairness and discrimination (Derman-Sparks & Edwards, 2010). Kuh, LeeKeenan, and Given (2019) remind us that this is a daily act embedded in interactions that goes beyond activities. It involves experiences teachers plan as well as teachable moments. It is also important to examine our own assumptions and beliefs. Their framework for anti-bias teaching provides a tool for teachers to consider entry points into thinking about children and families, personal feelings, meaningful planning, responding, and sharing anti-bias learning. It is not a one-time event, but a constant search for opportunities to learn, process, and make learning visible.

All children have the right to equitable learning opportunities. If we recognize the context in which children live to inform

Figure 1. Practices supporting resilient children
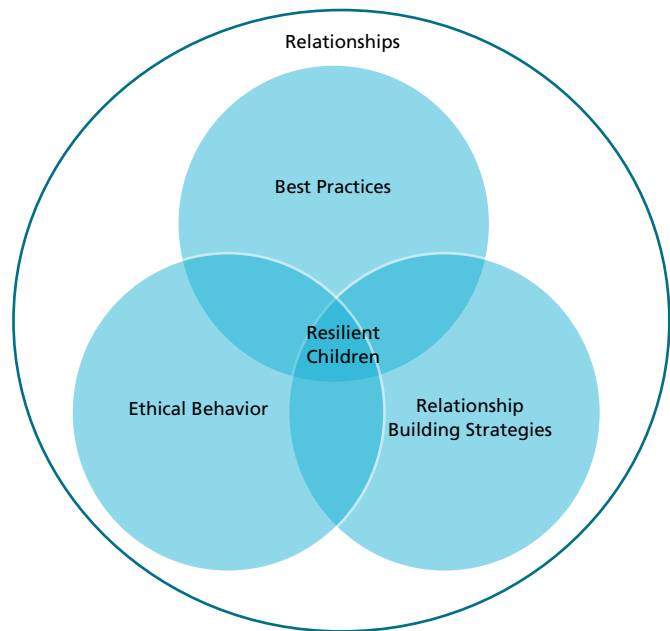
practice, it is important to be aware of structural and systemic inequities, personal bias and implicit bias. In addition, teachers must avoid a deficit perspective and learn about children's strengths and background knowledge (Gillanders, 2019).

Families also have "funds of knowledge" which include knowledge and skills that serve as a resource their households utilize to survive and thrive in challenging situations (Moll, Amanti, Neff & Gonzalez, 1992). Connecting with and learning from families can help build linkages between homes and schools. Family engagement supports children's learning as a key component of quality early childhood education (Koralek, Nemeth & Ramsey, 2019).

Professional organizations such as the Division for Early childhood of the Council for Exceptional Children (DEC) and the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) support family engagement. Working with families benefits children, teachers, and families.

Relationship Building Strategies

Building strong relationships with all families is integral to family engagement (Koralek et al., 2019). Part of building relationships with families is learning about them and sharing some of yourself. It is a partnership, and the relationship is reciprocal. Communication goes both ways. Teachers are responsive to families by acting on information shared to meet the needs of children. Educators also recognize the expertise about how children learn and grow (Koralek et al., 2019). Relationship building strategies with families involve learning about them, listening to them and collaborating with them. Blue-Banning, Summers, Frankland, Nelson and Beegle (2004) identified six interrelated themes of family-professional partnerships. These include communication, commitment, equality, skills, trust, and respect. The behaviors in which teachers engage to create a shared sense of meeting

those themes are what build strong relationships. Relationship building with children includes responsive care and quality interactions. The quality of interactions between teachers and children influences outcomes for children socially, behaviorally, and academically (Burchinal et al., 2008).

Ethical Behavior

Ethical behavior involves intentional decision making in various areas of responsibility to do the right thing. We have responsibilities that outline what we must do such as not harm children, communicate effectively with families, and maintain confidentiality. Even when it is difficult or uncomfortable, we are bound to speak out and act adhering to the responsibilities in the Code of Ethical Conduct (Feeney & Freeman, 2018). The importance of relationships as a component of ethical behavior is evident throughout the Code. For example, "We shall encourage development of strong bonds between children and their families and children and their teachers (P.-1.4), collaborating with communities to ensure cultural consistency (P-1.5), work to create a respectful environment for and a working relationship with all families (P-2.1), establish and maintain relationships of respect, trust, confidentiality, collaboration and cooperation with co-workers (I-3A.1)." Whether an ideal or a principle, relationships play a key role in ethical behavior. Doing the right thing on behalf of children and their families, as professionals, will hopefully lead to positive outcomes.

Resilient Children

Relationships are integral to promoting effective teaching, meeting the needs of families, and creating a supportive work environment. If we look to guidelines such as Developmentally Appropriate Practice, the Code of Ethics, and tools for supporting equity and diversity, we will see relationships tied to resilience. Resilience is "a positive adaptive response in the face of significant adversity" (National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, 2015, p.1). While a range of internal and external factors influence resilience, certain positive influences can increase chances of developing resilience, helping the positive outweigh the negative. These include nurturing consistent, supportive adult relationships, helping children develop a sense of control in their lives, having a supportive context of cultural traditions and helping children develop executive function and self-regulation skills (National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, 2015). Explicit teaching of self- regulation skills can help children have tools to cope and problem solve. All of these factors necessitate relationships in order to practice skills, experience supports, and build resilience.

The areas of responsibility early care and education providers have all require building positive relationships. Engaging in intentional strategies to nurture these relationships may result in positive outcomes for all stakeholders. **Table 1** includes an overview of the areas of responsibility, various strategies and potential results.

It is important for educators to build meaningful relationships rather than surface level ones. Derman-Sparks and Edwards (2010) describe how anti-bias education helps teachers stay away from the "tourist curriculum." In the tourist curriculum

Table 1 Responsibilities, Relationships and Results

Area of Responsibility	Relationship Building Strategy	Potential Results
Relationships with children	Responsive interactions Culture of care Co-regulation Create a safe, welcoming environment	• Engaged learners • Self-regulation
Relationships with colleagues	Maintain confidentiality Share resources (NAEYC, 2011)	• Professional partnerships • Positive school culture
Relationships with families	Reciprocal communication Learn about families Be reliable and committed. Show that you value children and their families. (Blue-Banning et al., 2004)	• Authentic Partnerships • Informed teachers • Strong families • Trust and respect
Relationships with the community	Go into the community. Invite community members into the classroom.	• Making Learning Visible • Professionalizing the Early childhood profession • Problem Based Learning and Place Based education within the community

teachers focus on food, clothing and holidays. As a tourist you briefly visit, only getting a glimpse of a culture without the reality of daily life. When you return home from your visit that is viewed as the "norm." Just as one can have a tourist curriculum that minimizes people and reinforces stereotypes, you can be a tourist in a relationship. We can fall prey to minimizing families and children to assumptions and stereotypes. Rather than a tourist, one could be an ally. An ally works alongside members of a community to help meet their needs, listening to them, following their lead and recognizing unique strengths. In order to create a caring community of learners, a key practice identified in developmentally appropriate practice guidelines (NAEYC, 2009), building consistent, caring relationships with children, teachers and families we must use a range of relationship building strategies to listen, learn, and become allies.

Helene Arbouet Harte, Ed.D., is an associate professor of education at The University of Cincinnati, Blue Ash College. She has worked in the community as a classroom teacher, center director, coach, content expert, and consultant. Her research interests include family engagement, engagement of young children in inclusive settings, and the engagement of students in the college classroom. Dr. Harte is also a co-author of several programs to engage families entering kindergarten including bornlearning Academy, A Taste of Learning, and bornlearning communities.

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