



Talking Openly Thwarts Racism In Children

By Erin Burnette

Many parents believe that their own children are oblivious to racial differences, and believe racist behavior in youngsters is created when bigoted parents pass intolerant views to their children.

But research suggests otherwise. Racism among children, say psychologists, can be caused by another parental behavior: not talking about race. A lack of discussion makes racial differences a taboo subject and contributes to children's negative ideas.

A key factor in preventing racism, say many psychologists, is to get children to talk about it.

When stereotypes start

Young children have a tendency to categorize the world along simple and rigid lines, said Rebecca Bigler, PhD, a researcher and psychology professor at the University of Texas at Austin, who studies stereotyping and cognitive skills such as classification.

"Studies demonstrate that children are classifiers—they set up their world in categories such as male and female, black and white, and good and bad—in order to make sense of their environment," Bigler said.

Environmental factors

A widespread societal belief holds that parental and peer attitudes are the primary factors that shape a child's attitudes about race. But studies conducted by Frances Aboud, PhD, and

her colleagues at McGill University found otherwise. They studied whether the children's beliefs about race mirrored those of their parents. They also asked the children to predict their parents' answers to the measure. The investigators found that the children's attitudes toward race are not the same as their parents' or their friends'.

"We need to explore those differences and teach our children that differences don't translate into deficits."

Vonnie McLoyd, PhD
 Duke University

But while parents' and peers' attitudes toward race may not influence a child's own racial outlook, psychologists contend that the lack of dialogue about race in school and at home fosters children's development of negative stereotypes.

"Some parents don't talk about racial differences because they don't want to make it a big deal," Bigler said. "In not talking about it, however, children tend to guess what their parents' beliefs are and they are usually wrong."



People who don't see themselves as prejudiced often don't talk about race issues, said Vonnie McLoyd, PhD, a professor at Duke University. "But the societal circumstances that African-Americans confront are much different than those that white people experience," she said. "We need to explore those differences and teach our children that differences don't translate into deficits."

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Meet Our New Director!

Mary Ann Bradley, MSW, MA



I am truly fortunate to be joining aMaze at this time. This organization has a solid base, an amazing record of success, and many, many opportunities for the future. aMaze's greatest asset is its terrific supporters, people like **you**—the educators, families, community activists and foundations that help make our work succeed. I look forward to meeting many of you, working together, and guiding aMaze into a bright future.

Since I began as Director in January, aMaze has been very busy promoting education to counter bias and build respect. Here's a bit of what we have been doing:

- The *Families All Matter Book Project*: is now in Minneapolis, St. Paul, Edina, and St. Cloud school districts. Churches and synagogues are signing-on, too!
- A cable access television show: Terese and Lyn, both founders, were interviewed for KinPride, a GLBT- issues program produced in St. Cloud and aired throughout Minnesota.
- College class presentations: about anti-bias education at St. Cloud State University and at the University of Wisconsin, River Falls.
- Teacher workshops: our "Safe Belonging: Meeting the Needs of Today's Students" workshop to 100 special education teach-

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Parents give their children subtle messages without realizing it, says Beverly Tatum, PhD, a psychology professor at Mt. Holyoke College who studies racial identity in children. "A young child, for example, asks his mother why the man in the grocery store is so dark. Instead of answering, his mother tells him to be quiet, which tells the child it's not okay to discuss differences."

Thwarting racism

In the North Hampton public school district in western Massachusetts, a three pronged program was developed:

- Staff development, which offers teachers a four-month course



that defines racism, explores how educators and children manifest it, and provides tips on handling it in school.

- Youth groups, whereby students meet after school once a week for seven weeks with members of their own culture to discuss what it means to be part of that culture.

There's a group for Asian-Americans, African-Americans, Jewish-Americans, Latinos, whites and bi-racial students. The group facilitators then mix the groups so that they include a member of each culture. They meet for seven more weeks to discuss their differences and how they can get along.

- Parent groups meet once a month to educate parents about racism and help them more comfortably discuss race issues with their children.

The key to combating racism, says McLoyd, is being honest with children. "Racism is so deeply rooted. It's going to take hard work by open, honest, fair-minded people who are not easily discouraged," she says.

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Web Resources to Challenge Racism

1. www.pbs.org/race
2. www.faihringgold.com
3. www.teachingtolerance.org

Walk for Justice (and aMaze)

The AMAZE team would like to invite you to join us in the eighth annual **Headwaters Fund Walk for Justice**. The Walk is a community event for grassroots non-profits to raise awareness, solidarity and financial support for their organization. Last year's Walk was a tremendous success (almost \$3,000 raised) and we are expecting this year's to be even more incredible.

The **Headwaters Walk is scheduled for Sunday, September 21** at Boom Island Park in Minneapolis. Mark your calendars! Registration begins at 11:00 AM, and the walk will begin at 12:00 PM. There will

be a community celebration with lunch at Boom Island Park after the walk, which is always a great time for family and friends to relax and enjoy a beautiful day.

This year walkers who secure pledges of \$100 (or more) receive our great "Families All Matter" T-shirt free. Collecting pledges is easy and fast, especially if you use the on-line tools provided by Headwaters.

Contact Monica Bryand to sign up to be a walker for AMAZE or to make a contribution to our important work. You can reach Monica at 612-879-0602 #10 or by e-mail at monica@headwatersfund.org.



aMaze Walk For Justice team, 2002

UN:

Racism an International Threat to Children

Carol Bellamy, executive director of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), called on world leaders to put children and education at the center of all their efforts to fight against racism. "No one is more vulnerable than a child when it comes to the effects of racism, discrimination and intolerance," said Bellamy, who attended the third World Conference Against Racism (WCAR) held in Durban, South Africa in September 2001. "Discrimination, in whatever form, compromises the right of children to survive, develop and reach their full potential," she said. "I am a firm believer that we must change the world not only for children, but within children," Bellamy stressed. "If children are to promote the values of equity, tolerance and respect for diversity that are so essential for democratic societies, world leaders must help them build their skills, their sense of responsibility and their self-confidence."

Meet Our New Director! continued from page 1

ers at their annual conference in Brainerd.

- Work is underway to adapt the FAM BP for very young kids (and their parents) in early childhood, pre-school and school readiness programs.

And now let me share a bit about myself. I received my BA in Elementary Education and Masters of Social Work degrees in Indiana, and recently completed my MA in Library and Media Education at Minn. University-Mankato. Now, with aMaze, I am finally doing my dream job—leading an anti-bias education organization! My partner is African American, we have an adopted an African American daughter, and we are choosing to live in a diverse neighborhood.

I was definitely not raised to be the Director of an anti-bias organization! I come from a conservative, white-suburban background in Indiana. As I reflect now on pivotal life experiences, I have an early memory of not being accepted for who I am, when, at three years old, I met opposition for wearing pants (rather than a dress) for a family portrait. This incident, and others like it, awakened my interest in social justice work. As a young adult, I realized that I must diligently apply myself to listening, watching, questioning, and critically thinking in order to understand beyond my life experiences as a privileged white woman. Definitely, the richest times in my life have come from fully immersing myself into experiences that were once foreign to me.

Working to counteract bias is an active process for every individual. Two articles in this newsletter invite you to engage in discussions about race and prejudice with the people in your life: Erin Burnette's *Talking about race...* and Faith Ringgold's story for children, "*How the People Became Colorblind*" on page 6. Those of us who were granted privilege (due to race, social economic status, gender, etc.) have an obligation to begin conversations about the "isms" that plague our society. And let us not forget, *we* are that society; I am NOT talking about an "*us helping them*" attitude.

Honoring difference and creating links between diverse people is what aMaze is all about. We believe in the power of stories to teach children about difference, bias, and how to create inclusive environments. Books that depict children's lives and their families can help children feel valued. aMaze's *Families All Matter Book Project* is a wonderful tool to help students recognize that they have a place at the table and to help them create a place-setting for their neighbors.

I am truly blessed to be leading this organization at a time of tremendous growth...and tremendous need. Requests for aMaze's programs grow in the midst of education cutbacks, political backlash, and foundation downsizing. Our staff and volunteers are running feverishly to keep up with the demands. I hope you will consider sharing your resources with us as we unite to create an inclusive society where all of our children can belong and thrive.

Board Member Profile:

Introducing Marguerite Vasshti Butler, PhD

By Terese Pritschet

Marguerite Butler identifies her life work as the “struggle for equity and respectful living”. So her involvement with aMaze makes sense. “I see aMaze’s work as courageous, cutting-edge, and comprehensive in the issues it addresses, she said. “As a lesbian woman of African and Native American descent, I am well acquainted with negative, harmful biases and prejudices, and I cannot NOT work to eliminate them. Amaze provides another avenue for me to promote social justice and peaceful solutions.”

Along with her passion for aMaze’s mission, Marguerite adds a great deal of experience and expertise. A child psychologist, she has worked 13 years with children and families primarily at Washburn Child Guidance Center in Minneapolis. She recently researched disparities in mental health care among African Americans. She is now working with the Minnesota Child Response Initiative conducting research and providing direct, immediate intervention with children affected by domestic violence or trauma.

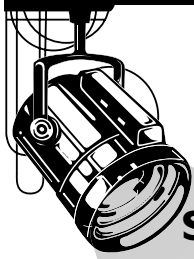
Marguerite regularly speaks for aMaze at conferences and trainings for the Families All Matter Book Project. She creates aMaze workshops, like “Safe Belonging: meeting the needs



of today’s students” and provides consultation to schools on anti-bias education and climate improvement. In the coming months, Marguerite will guide aMaze in the development of program evaluation tools.

The Black Psychologists Association, Minnesota Women in Psychology and the Minnesota Specialty Providers’ Network also enjoy Marguerite’s involvement.

In addition to her steady dedication to her work for social justice, and her thoughtful, grounded optimism, Marguerite brings a contagious playfulness to everything she does. The Pee Wee Basketball girls (that Marguerite coached) would agree that this woman is a gift to any group she joins. The board and staff of aMaze are incredibly grateful to have her on our team.



Spotlight on Community Builders:



June 2003's **Spotlight** is based on aMaze interview with Alan Horowitz, Director, Out for Equity, Saint Paul Public Schools (SPPS).

Since 1992, Out for Equity (OFE) has been the Saint Paul Public Schools' (SPPS) service and support program for GLBT students, families, and staff. OFE provides classroom instruction, staff development and student support to promote safe and supportive school environments for all students.

Alan Horowitz, OFE's director, says his work is inspired by words of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., "*We are all diminished when one is demeaned.*" Alan says, "We cannot hope for respect for one without respect for all. Affirming GLBT rights cannot be done in a vacuum or a bubble." Out for Equity's projects embrace these beliefs.

OFE's recent work includes

- The *Families All Matter Book Project* is coming to over a dozen SPPS elementary schools through a partnership between aMaze and OFE, funded by a Ramsey County grant. "This is the first time we've been able to offer a comprehensive elementary initiative working on respect for *all* families. That's huge," Alan stated. He is especially thrilled

because "so many new SPPS sites jumped at the opportunity to participate in the Families All Matter Book Project." (aMaze trained over 50 teachers and parents to lead the FAM BP next Fall in pre-K-sixth grade classrooms.)

- Gay/Straight Alliance groups have expanded to 6 of the 7 SPPS high schools *and* there is a weekly Friday night Recreation Center for GLBT students and their friends, which now averages 35 youth a week. Alan credits youth leadership for this success.
- A "Respect Campaign" is being piloted by OFE in 10 elementary schools to promote school environments that value diversity. School climate is surveyed, and staff chooses strategies to address respect issues that need attention, including staff development, curriculum, and student events.

When asked about the challenges OFE faces, Alan said "You might think I would say the right-wing attacks on GLBT rights or the budget cuts. But I see our greatest challenge as bringing folks from the mentality of 'mine' to the consciousness of 'ours'." He is most concerned with the complacency of stakeholders and constituents, stating "people see school issues

as only for school folks. They fail to see a connection between schools and communities. People are not recognizing how education impacts their lives beyond their own children."

Out for Equity's Alan Horowitz is energetic and optimistic in carrying forward OFE's mission. His joys include the successful community-building work now underway. Alan is especially pleased with the emergence of dynamic youth leaders and the increased youth participation in OFE's projects. "Community partnerships, like our work with aMaze, are what it's all about. Building *one* community with respect for *all*...It *is* working, and we are making progress".

Alan Horowitz has directed OFE for the past four years. Out For Equity is part of the SPPS Office of Educational Equity and is one of only 6 GLBT-issues school programs in the U.S. For more information about OFE, call 651-603-4942 or see www.spps.org/outforequity/.



Spotlight on Community Builders is our regular column to highlight organizations that make a difference in our community by challenging bias and creating community. Please tell us if you have ideas for future *Spotlights*.)

Kids Corner

How the People Became Color Blind

By Faith Ringgold

Once upon a time the world was a small place and all the people lived together and were very happy. No one noticed that everybody looked the same and was the same color. Until one day the world grew, and the people multiplied and wandered off to far away places. In time the earth and the people became separated by vast bodies of water. But then the people crossed the seas to explore these far away places, and discovered that there were now people of different colors in the world. And they began to compare the color of one people with another. And some people disliked those people who were a different color from them.

Despite this some people of different colors mated and their children were now a mixture of their colors. The world was even bigger now and a shortage of food and other necessities of life plagued the people. So the people began to use the different colors to separate the people who could eat and live well, from those who could not. And so there were many wars over land and other possessions. And many of the world's people lost their land, suffered and died due to the wars. And so one day the people prayed to the Angel of Color for a world where all the people could live in peace and forget about color.

And so the Angel of Color listened and made everything and everyone in the world black. All the rivers and seas and all the flowers and trees and all the animals and people and all the houses and churches and steeples were made black— as black as night. Even the sun and the moon were black. And there was no day only night. So everyone was silent and very sad because no one

could see anyone or anything. There was no light only darkness. And so all the people in the jet black world, and all the animals in the jet black forest, and all the birds in the jet black sky, and all the fish in the black-black sea prayed that they could have another color because there was too much blackness in the world.

And so the Angel of Color listened and made everything and everyone in the world white. All the rivers and seas and all the flowers and trees and all the animals and people and all the houses and churches and steeples were made white— as white as snow. Even the sun and the moon were white. And there was no night only day. So everyone was silent and very sad because no one could see anyone or anything. There was no contrast only light. And so all the people in the snow white world, and all the animals in the snow white forest, and all the birds in the snow white sky, and all the fish in the white-white sea prayed that they could have another color because there was too much whiteness in the world.

And so the Angel of Color listened and made everything and everyone in the world gray. All the rivers and seas and all the flowers and trees and all the animals and people and all the houses and churches and steeples were made gray— as gray as dust. Even the sun and the moon were gray. And there was no day or night only dusk. So everyone was silent and very sad because there was no beautiful color in the world only gray-gloom. And so all the people in the gloomy-gray world, and all the animals in the gloomy-gray forest, and all the birds in the gloomy-gray sky, and all the fish in the gray-gray

sea prayed that they could have at least two colors because there was just too much grayness in the world.

But the Angel of Color thought about the people fighting when there was color in the world and decided to leave things as they were. So everyone was very silent and very sad until one day a school of gray fish swimming in the gray sea looked up at the gray sky and saw a gray bird flying by and they turned green with envy. And the gray bird seeing the bright green fish fell on to the gray beach and broke his wings. The gray bird was so embarrassed that the beautiful green fish saw that he could no longer fly, that he turned red with shame. A flock of gray birds seeing the beautiful red bird with broken wings laying on the gray beach flew down out of the gray sky and plucked out his red feathers. Then the gray birds turned red too and they flew away to show off their beautiful colors in the sky.

The gray sky now happily dotted with bright red birds became blue when it looked down at the gray mountains below. But the gray mountains loved the beautiful blue sky and so the gray mountains turned brown and purple with respect. And the giant gray trees looked at the beautiful brown and purple mountains, and like the fish, they turned green with envy. And the flowers and plants were so happy to see the brown and purple mountains and the green trees that they turned all kinds of colors and everything in nature was happy because they were now all beautifully colored.

But the people remained gray, silent and very sad. They remembered how awful it was when everyone and



everything was all black and how it was just as awful when everything and everyone was all white. And now that all the people everywhere were gray no one could compare one people's color with another. Everything in nature had color and was beautiful but not the people. The people were still gray and looked ugly, gloomy and sad— And that was that!

“Now we have only the inner beauty of our good deeds, to distinguish us, not our color,” said the people. “And though we are not so good looking, as we were when we were many colors, we can no longer use color to separate one people from another.”

And that, my friends, is the true-story of How the People Became Color Blind. **The End**

Kids: This story is about being free of color prejudice— one of the most difficult things to achieve in our society. How do you deal with this problem in your life? Could you write a story? Could you draw a picture? What do you think of How the People Became Color Blind? Send your ideas to Faith Ringgold at www.faithringgold.com. Or mail it to aMaze!

Faith Ringgold is an award-winning artist and children's author (Tar Beach, etc) She makes glorious painted fabric quilts, which are displayed around the world. See more of her work at: www.faithringgold.com.

aMaze Needs Your Help!

People Power

(Please call aMaze for task descriptions, times, details)

1. Program planning advisors or committee members for Early Child application of *Families All Matter Book Project*.
2. Grocer connection (for snacks for training, etc.)
3. Book Box assemblers (teens welcome!) during summer, call for times.
4. Middle School Project program advisors
5. Walk For Justice coordinator(s) or pledge-seekers and/or walkers
6. Marketing and promotion advisors
7. Business plan advisor
8. House party hosts for aMaze fundraising/promotional gatherings
9. Printing services

Materials:

1. Fax machine
2. Copy machine
3. Laptop computer (Mac or PC)
4. Computer Projector
5. Storage space for books, printed materials



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Who do you know...

that would like to hear about the *Families All Matter Book Project*? Please let us know—use enclosed envelope, or email/call us.

Thanks to:

Dan Anderson for greater MN outreach extraordinaire
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FAM Reader volunteers
Ellen Lepinski for continued program support
Bob Schmitt for aMaze t-shirt design.

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aMaze Mission: aMaze is a group of parents and educators working to create safe and respectful learning communities for children, families, and staff by promoting the knowledge and skills needed to work together across differences of race, class, culture, gender, sexual orientation, ability, and religious differences.



aMaze

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