

# "Teacher they called me a...!"

## Confronting Prejudice and Discrimination in the Classroom

Schooling that is constant with democratic principles should actively teach and promote such basic concepts as freedom, equality, and individual rights and responsibilities. Children must learn to understand their rights, the rights of others, and concern for the well-being and dignity of all. One of the greatest deterrents to these democratic goals is prejudice. These preconceived ideas are usually based on stereotypes about those who are perceived as being different, due to race, religion, culture, gender, disabilities, appearance, language, sexual orientation, or social status. These prejudices are the basis of negative attitudes and often discriminatory actions. Adults in the United States like to believe children are immune to prejudice. Our culture celebrates the innocence of childhood; children are believed to be somehow morally quarantined from the corrosive nature of such a pervasive social problem as prejudice. Yet, the basis for prejudice is laid at an early age, prior even to children starting school. Children learn about prejudice and discrimination from their peers, their families, the media, community interactions and, at times, their churches. Our children become easy targets for those who engage in prejudice and discrimination when we fail to talk about how wrong such thinking and actions are. Children begin developing attitudes about various groups in society as early as age three or four. Initially such attitudes are quite flexible. However, as children grow older such attitudes become more difficult to change. Teachers can make a valuable contribution toward developing a more just society by taking an active role in addressing prejudice and discrimination in their classrooms.

3<sup>rd</sup> Edition

By Deborah A. Byrnes, Ph.D.

Department of Elementary Education

Utah State University

With

Jackie Thompson, M.Ed.

Davis School District

A publication of The Anti-Defamation League and

The Utah State Office of Education

Utah State Office of Education edition published 1985

Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith edition published 1987

1995 Anti-Defamation League and Utah State Office of Education.

Printed in U.S.A.

2007 (2<sup>nd</sup> Edition) Anti-Defamation League and Utah State Office of Education.

Printed in U.S.A.

2011 (3<sup>rd</sup> Edition) Utah State Office of Education.

**Training for this book is provided through  
The Utah State Office of Education, Educational Equity Section  
Please contact Educational Equity at 801-538-7640 or 801-538-7643.**