John Nimmo started talking about diversity as soon as he arrived at UNH, and he hasn’t stopped yet. “Diversity permeates everything I do—teaching, research, and administration,” says the Australian-born executive director of the acclaimed UNH Child Study and Development Center and associate professor of family studies. “My interest in anti-bias education has found a home in New Hampshire.”

While some might find it ironic that Nimmo’s focus zeroes in on a community that might appear to be lacking in diversity, Nimmo sees a fit. “As a white male, I see even more reason for the need to be proactive in addressing issues like identity and bias,” he says.

When he arrived here in 2003, Nimmo found that “responding to diversity wasn’t on peoples’ lips,” but he also noted “a strong humanistic community with a respect for young children and families.” Two immediate goals for the center emerged: build a more diversified student body, and change the center’s curriculum to better provide a context for ongoing conversation and learning.

As a first step, he formed a Diversity, Equity, and Bias Committee of parents and staff to begin the dialog. The group met monthly for two years, and its efforts paid off. UNH President Mark W. Huddleston recently extolled the group’s achievement this way: “Their frank discussions about how to better the classroom climate led to open talks with the children about how families differ in makeup, how we can honor skin in its many shades and colors, and how we all differ in our abilities and ways of experiencing the world.”

It is not only okay to ask about differences—it is encouraged. The children are busy in classrooms filled with projects that reflect their growth and development. An ever-evolving library contains books in languages spoken at home. An organic garden yields snacks for the annual Harvest Festival and an environmentally friendly natural playground are just outside the door. The place hums with happy activity and it’s clear that not only has John Nimmo been talking, he’s been listening as well.

— Sarah Aldag

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