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The background is a vibrant red. It is decorated with various geometric shapes in black and white. On the left, there are several horizontal white bars of different lengths, some stacked vertically. On the right, there are vertical black bars of varying heights. In the center, a large white rectangle contains the title and subtitle. Two stylized pencil icons, one black and one white, are positioned near the top and bottom of this central rectangle. The title 'ISSUES IN TEACHER EDUCATION' is written in a large, bold, black sans-serif font. Below it, a thin black horizontal line separates the title from the subtitle. The subtitle 'A CALIFORNIA COUNCIL ON TEACHER EDUCATION JOURNAL' is written in a smaller, black sans-serif font. Another thin black horizontal line is placed below the subtitle.

ISSUES IN TEACHER EDUCATION

A CALIFORNIA COUNCIL ON
TEACHER EDUCATION JOURNAL

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Advancing Equity and Inclusion in Early Childhood Education

Introduction to a Special Issue

Amber Friesen, Maryssa Kucskar Mitsch, & Karina Du
San Francisco State University

Early childhood educators have the opportunity to create learning communities that nurture children's development while acknowledging and valuing the diverse and intertwined social identities they hold, including race, language, abilities, gender, socioeconomic status, and more (Division of Early Childhood [DEC] & National Association for the Education of Young Children [NAEYC], 2009; 2019). The long-term value of high-quality early childhood education on a child's education outcomes, lifelong health, and a family's economic stability are well documented (McCoy et al., 2018; Center on the Developing Child, 2010). This includes the opportunity within these settings to foster children's positive self-awareness, comfort, and joy with human diversity, recognition of injustices, and empowerment to speak up in the face of injustice (Derman-Sparks & Edwards, 2019).

Despite this recognition, there are persistent and systemic societal inequities that disproportionately impact some children's access and

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inclusion in early learning environments (Blanchard, et al., 2021; Lawrence, et al., 2016; Love & Beneke, 2021). For example, common barriers to early childhood education including affordability, ability to access, lack of supply in communities, and quality of care are often more complex, acute, and steeped in bias and discrimination for children and their families who come from traditionally marginalized backgrounds (Johnson-Staub, 2017). Further, many young children with disabilities continue to be segregated from their nondisabled peers for some or all of their early learning experiences (Lawrence et al., 2016). The COVID-19 pandemic has in many cases exacerbated the inequities around access and inclusion to early education systems (Warner-Richter & Lloyd, 2020).

We are at an important moment in which we can advance equity and inclusion as universal access to early childhood learning environments has become an important focus in the current administration. In addition to national-level initiatives such as Power to the Profession (American Federation of State, County, Municipal Employees et al., 2020) and National Early Childhood Inclusion Indicators Initiative (Early Childhood Technical Assistance Center and the National Center for Pyramid Model Innovations, 2022), many state-level actions have further reflected the desire for greater access and investment in its workforce. For example, California has committed \$2.7 billion towards an universal Transitional Kindergarten (TK) program that will be made available to all 4-year-olds in the state by 2025-26, effectively serving as the state's version of preschool for all (D'Souza, 2021). Further, the existing teacher credential focused on early childhood special education is expanding its age range in 2022-23 (birth through kindergarten) and there is strong advocacy for the reinstatement of the existing early childhood education credential (birth through eight) within the state (Alcala et al., 2020; Jacobson & Keeler, 2022). These policies have, or will have, a direct-impact on early childhood personnel preparation programs as well as the need for enhanced leadership and in-service teacher development in the field. Moreover, effective leadership in early childhood entails upholding and promoting ethical standards and policies while continuously self-reflecting and seeking professional development opportunities (Bruder et al., 2019; Nicholson et al., 2020).

The goal of this special issue of *Issues in Teacher Education* is to provide space to consider ways in which early childhood education can advance equitable access and inclusion for all young children and their families. The number of manuscripts submitted for consideration spoke to the awareness of the importance of this topic and the dedication to

work towards greater equity and inclusion. In the process of curtailing this special issue, we, as a special editor team, sought to engage in continuous reflective practices (Heffron & Murch, 2010). Central to this was acknowledging that our work would undoubtedly be informed by the identities and experiences that we each hold. Of upmost priority was the responsibility to listen, learn, and advocate. We are grateful for the expertise and engagement of the different author teams we had the honor to collaborate with in this work. As described in the following paragraphs, the resulting five original manuscripts forming this edition undoubtedly promote reflection, discussion, and further action.

In an important research contribution titled *Using Children's Literature to Advance Antiracist Early Childhood Teaching and Learning*, Spencer (2022) examines the need for early childhood educators and families to develop a deeper awareness of antiracist text selection. Enacting a year-long action research study, the article details the process and subsequent discoveries that emerged from eight teachers who gathered within a Critical Children's Literature Group (CCLG) to reflect and question a collection of inclusive children's literature. Findings suggest that participation in the CCLG provided an important space to intentionally deepen an understanding of their identities as educators committed to social justice.

In an article titled, "Examining California's Title 22 Community Care Licensing Regulations: The Impact on Inclusive Preschool Settings," McKee and colleagues (2022) consider the role of state regulations in guiding inclusion for children with identified disabilities with their nondisabled peers in preschool settings. A document analysis of state licensing, pertaining to preschool programs, resulted in three ways in which these requirements may support and also hinder inclusion: the role of the language used, the requirements for training/ education/ experience of educators, as well as ratio expectations. The implications stress the importance of advocating for policy and regulation change in supporting inclusive practices for all young children.

In a needed examination, Morris and colleagues (2022) authored an article titled, "Addressing Antiracism in Early Childhood Educator Preparation: Implications for Young Black Children and their Families." The paper examines how personnel preparation in early childhood routinely offers curriculum and instruction that centers on the White normative perspective and hinders Black family engagement. There is recognition of the need to integrate culturally sustaining pedagogies within teacher preparation. The authors detailed BlackCrit as a critical framework that can provide a means to dismantle *antiracism* through critical consciousness around

race. Recommendations for teacher preparation programs seeking to dismantle *antiblackness* provide a way for readers to apply this framework to their own work.

In the article titled “Building the On-Ramp to Inclusion: Developing Critical Consciousness in Future Early Childhood Educators,” Urbani and colleagues (2022) address the need to examine implicit biases of early childhood educators through the development of critical consciousness. While it is acknowledged that early childhood education can be a contributor to improved opportunities and learning for children, it is also recognized that it can be a conduit to segregation and inequity for children of Color and/or those with disabilities. The authors emphasize the ethical responsibilities that early childhood educators must have to address racial bias, have difficult conversations and engage in continuous reflection. Utilizing their work within their own preparation program, the authors provide examples and specific instructional practices to promote the development of critical consciousness in future early childhood educators.

In a timely submission, Chiappe and colleagues (2022) contributed a manuscript entitled “Family Group Conferencing in Inclusive Preschool Classrooms during Distance Learning.” The article details a pilot study that sought to examine the impact of Family Group Conferencing (FGC), an evidence-based approach that seeks to enhance the quantity and quality of teacher-family interactions to support the learning of young children within inclusive early childhood settings. The approach included providing teacher training on building family partnerships during the COVID-19 pandemic. The findings suggest that this approach can support collaborations, both between teachers and with families, and that providing specific training can support more meaningful family-teacher conferences.

In conclusion to the special issue, we take space as a special editorial team to discuss what we learned from these five manuscripts and consider their context within early childhood education in an article entitled, “Calling Authentic Leaders Promoting Equity and Anti-bias Curriculum for All Young Children and Their Families.” We reposition us all as authentic leaders, whether we are educators, family members, administrators, and/or committee members, who must hold responsibility to advocate for equity and inclusion within early childhood settings. With this comes the acknowledgment of the real and present inequities that are currently within our systems of care for many children and families including individuals of color and/or diagnosed with disabilities. In turn, we continue with persistent

advocacy and action to ensure early childhood settings are accessible, responsive, and inclusive to *all* children.

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Using Children's Literature to Advance Antiracist Early Childhood Teaching and Learning

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Abstract

All too often, race and equity are not discussed in early childhood contexts for fear that children are too young or innocent to grapple with such topics. In this yearlong action research study, I examine how children's literature can be used to implement an antiracist pedagogy in early childhood classrooms. Through the enactment of a critical children's literature teacher inquiry group, I examine the relationship between the use of diverse children's literature and a teacher's development as a social justice educator. Over the course of the academic year, the eight teachers received books written for young children that explicitly addressed diversity, equity, and justice. Through participation in the inquiry group and the opportunity to deeply examine children's books, teachers further developed into their identities as educators committed to social justice. This research sheds light on how teachers can be actively engaged in a teaching practice that disrupts patterns of inequity by bringing meaningful and relevant content into the lives of all the children in their classrooms. Findings also provide recent examples of antiracist early childhood texts.

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Introduction

In recent years, early childhood teacher education programs have turned attention towards advancing preparation practices to support antiracist early childhood classrooms (Allen et al., 2021). Kendi (2019) argues that the opposite of racist is not 'not racist.' Rather, the opposite is antiracist, one who actively works to eliminate systemic, organizational, and political racism (p.8). An early childhood educator's identities anchor how one perceives and enacts entry into the profession (Nieto & Bode, 2012; Tatum, 1992). While my entrance into the field of early education predates the term antiracist, I did enter the professional with a particular commitment towards teaching in school communities where the students shared my identity as a Black, Indigenous, Person of Color (BIPOC). My Black family shares the perspective that Harris (1992) notes, that one's ability to read embodies "the power of literacy to effect essential political, cultural, social, and economic change" (p. 276). Thus, for my family and many other Black families, early literacy development signaled meaning beyond oneself towards a practice that symbolizes liberation, joy, and freedom. Therefore, in my history and within the context of early childhood teaching and learning, children's literature plays a prominent and recurring role.

To be an antiracist early childhood educator requires a deep understanding of how racism is operationalized and enacted in the lives and experiences of children. Early childhood literacy curriculum, policies, and research is a human artifact and reflects the ideologies and assumptions of humans who define what does and does not count as valued. Approximately 83% of the teaching workforce in the United States is White, despite a nation with significant projected growth of non-White populations between 2014-2060 (Colby & Ortmon, 2015). Escayg (2020) writes, "White teachers, through the element of White privilege, reinscribe dominant racial meanings by constructing a classroom environment that reifies Whiteness as the standard and as the norm" (p. 3).

The careful selection of children's literature, both in the home and school environment, has long been understood as a hallmark of a young child's emergent literacy experience (i.e., Heath, 1982; Newman, 1996; Strickland & Morrow, 1989). As children's literature plays a central role in a child's classroom literacy development, this article examines how it can be used to support antiracist pedagogy in classrooms. Using an antiracist pedagogy framework, I describe the findings of a research

study that sought to understand how children's literature could be used to support educators' understanding of culturally responsive pedagogy and how it might be instrumental in the development of an identity as social justice educators in California classrooms. Only once educators have examined the longstanding structures of inequity that dominated early literacy pedagogy are we prepared to, then, consider the pivotal role books can also play in enacting an antiracist pedagogy in early childhood classrooms.

An Antiracist Framework in Early Childhood

While the field of early childhood education, both in its scholarly and professional arenas, has long valued multicultural and "anti-bias" perspectives (Derman-Sparks et al., 2020; Souto-Manning, 2013), the idea of an antiracist framework in early childhood is considerably less examined. The field has long used critical theories and post-modern perspectives to challenge broader systems such as developmentally appropriate practices (i.e., Greishaber & Cannella, 2001; Yelland, 2005), yet less explored is the everyday racism occurring in classrooms. Oluo (2019) defines racism as "any prejudice against someone because of their race, when those views are reinforced by systems of power" (p. 26). The lived experiences of young children remain profoundly unequal.

To be an antiracist early childhood educator, one must accept that someone can be child-centered and unintentionally practice everyday racism with young children (Kailin, 2002). According to Kendi (2019), an antiracist is "one who is supporting an antiracist policy through their actions or expressing an antiracist idea" (p. 13). Policies and curricula have long positioned language and literacy development as a tenet within our field. And, reading books aloud to children is considered one of the most valuable aspects of the early literacy environment (Bredekemp & Copple, 2009; Sulzby & Teale, 1991). Hoffman and colleagues (2015) aptly point out that "not all read-alouds are created equal" (p.8). They point to the following considerations when selecting a text to read aloud: thematically rich issues, round characters, illustrative quality, rich language, and an engaging and complex plot. An antiracist approach examines how a white-supremacist ideology is "operationalized in the field of early childhood education, as well as in classroom spaces, defining what is 'valuable' knowledge, 'appropriate' behaviors, and teaching practices" (Escayg, 2019, p. 3). Thus, given the significance of children's literature in the early childhood classroom, the tenets for considering quality children's literature must be critically examined, as well as the values and assumptions that undergird text selection and use.

While the use of the term antiracist to describe one's practice is somewhat recent to early childhood educators, the field has used the term "anti-bias education" since the 1990s (Iruka et al., 2020). Derman-Spark and colleagues (2020) recognize anti-bias early childhood education as a commitment to diversity and cultural competence in a world that is inherently unequal. Within this framework, anti-bias education (ABE) is:

based on the understanding that children are individuals with their own personalities and temperaments and with social group identities based on families who birth and raise them and the way society views who they are...ABE developed from the need to identify and prevent, as much as possible, the impacts on children from societal prejudice and bias. (p. 4)

Escayg (2012) critiques ABE as failing to foreground race as the dominant organizing principle in racial inequities in the United States. Escayg examines how ABE's guidelines are positioned within a framework that is informed by developmentally appropriate practice and one that has an inconsistent history that some characterized as marginalizing non-Eurocentric ways of knowing (Greishaber & Cannella, 2001; Yelland, 2005). When this critique is paired with early literacy instruction, an antiracist framework requires an approach to text selection that provokes a critical understanding of race and racism and its relevant impact on the selection of texts in a child's purview.

A Legacy of Racism in Books Written for Children

Storytelling and storybook reading are shared across homes and classrooms, offering a critical human vantage point to encode the lived experience, of oneself, or others (Heath, 1982). As Dyson and Genishi (1994) have long contended, "stories are an important tool for proclaiming ourselves as cultural beings. In narratives, our voice echoes those of others in the sociocultural world - what those others think is worth commenting on and how they judge the effectiveness of told stories" (p. 5). While children's books serve a central role in early childhood literacy development, a critical examination of how self and others are storied in children's books reveals a market that is pervasively middle-class and White (Souto-Manning, 2013; Tschida et al., 2014). Thomas (2016) notes that "over 85% of all children's and young adult books published feature White characters—a statistic that has barely moved since the 1960s" (p. 116). Children's books are a cultural tool that, when critically examined, reveal the ideology of those who publish the books and contexts in which they had intended use.

While books published for children in the United States first appeared in the early 18th century, mass publication did not begin until the mid-20th century (Stevenson, 2011). With efforts to compete with the Soviet Union in the space race, publishers developed a heightened interest in books intended for children's education and amusement (Pinkerton, 2016). Up until this point, children's books only portrayed the stories of White children or, if BIPOC were represented, it wasn't as humans but instead it was "as inferior in some way—comical, primitive, pitiable, or in need of paternalistic care" (Bishop, 2011, p. 225). This double legacy of both absence and distorted representation persists in the books that are published today. Thomas (2016) notes that "over 85% of all children's and young adult books published feature White characters—a statistic that has barely moved since the 1960s" (p. 116). Thus, children's literature is an artifact of the American experience and White supremacy. And, as Kendi (2019) notes, "Whiteness—even as a construction and a mirage—has informed [White people's] notions of America and identity and offered them privilege, the primary one being the privilege of being inherently normal, standard and legal" (p. 38).

Books for young children harbor racism, albeit in different forms but, "it is about how racist ideologies persist in the literature of childhood, frequently in ways that we fail to notice on a conscious level" (Nel, 2017, p. 4). Books written for young children are often shrouded in nostalgic language and principally subjective in the matter of whose stories are told. Anti-blackness, for example, can be seen in the omission of Blacks, misrepresentation or dehumanizing characterization of Blacks, or the perpetuation of myths or stereotypes about the Black community (Bishop, 2011; Mo & Shen, 2003; Pescosolido et al., 1997). Hughes-Hassell and Cox (2010) state:

Children of color absorb many of the beliefs and values of the dominant White culture, including the belief that it is better to be White. Stereotypes, omissions, and distortions, combined with an image of White superiority, play a role in socializing children of color to value the role models, lifestyles, and images of the beauty of White culture over those of their own cultural group. Countering the story of White superiority is critical to the positive growth and development of self-esteem and self-concept in children of color. (p. 214-215)

Reading aloud literature to children is often characterized as the ideal context for emergent, foundational literacy development (Heath, 1982; Strickland & Morrow, 1998). NAEYC et al. (2021) cite reading aloud to children as the skill most essential for building the understandings and skills essential for later reading success. And yet, despite the star-status children's books receive in early education, the

lack of representation of BIPOC in books targeted at young children remains staggering. Board books, with their wide thick pages, format, and predictability, are designed with the youngest readers in mind (children birth-age 3). And yet, as Hughes-Hassell and Cox (2010) research inventory of these books reveals, “board books that feature people of color are rare and often present inauthentic and monolithic representations. Even rarer seems to be the creation of board books by authors and illustrators of color” (p. 211). Thus, the omission of both representation and authorship yields what Nel describes as “how race is present especially when it is absent” (p. 4).

Antiracist Literacy Teaching and Learning

All too often, race is not discussed in early childhood contexts for fear that children are too young or innocent to grapple with such a complex topic (Tatum, 1992). Indeed, a common myth perpetuates that the minds of young children are either blank slates when it comes to race, incapable of racist actions, or only exposed to racism when it is learned in the home (Winkler, 2009). And yet, studies reveal that children develop an acute understanding of racial differences at an early age (i.e., Derman-Sparks & Ramsey, 2011; Tatum, 1992). What starts in infancy as a cognitive awareness of racial variation, evolves into curiosity and deep awareness, of racial differences in their daily lives and their actions, reactions, questions, and interactions with children and caretakers (Derman-Sparks & Ramsey, 2011). Simply put, when it comes to talking to children about race, no time is too early.

Growing up in a Black family and now as the mother of two young Black girls, I can affirm that our racial identity is simply in the oxygen of our home. Tatum (1992) describes how racial identity is developed in Black children at a very young age, whether the child is one of the only Black members of a community or in highly diverse or predominantly Black environments where the topic might include variation in skin tone, for example. An antiracist perspective on early childhood, however, situates race within a context where racism moves beyond one individual, racist act, or belief. Rather, racism is underscored by systemic power, as Oluo (2019) notes “you don’t have to be racist to be a part of a racist system” (p. 28).

Oluo (2019) describes White supremacy as “insidious by design” and “woven into every area of our lives” (p. 218). In children’s literature, this includes and is not limited to, the racist history of books for children (Stevenson, 2011), the publishing industry that selects which authors are published or rejected (Corrie, 2018), and the narrow representation

of young children or childhood in books. Data on books by and about BIPOC published for children and teens compiled by the Cooperative Children's Book Center highlight gradual, but slow progress, in the publishing industry as White main characters, or even animals, continue to dominate the main character roles. With close to 90 percent of children's books featuring a White protagonist, a child's exposure to books comes in tandem with the visual message that Whiteness is the norm. As Welch (2016) aptly argues, one can go out of their way to purchase books that feature BIPOC, however, it is the scarcity of these titles and the publishing mechanisms that maintain this inequity that continues to perpetuate the long-term harm.

Educators and families must grapple with the formidable ways in which White privilege also plays out, both in the content of children's literature and the curricular modalities that are used to teach these texts. That is, educators and White families must consider how White children bear witness to tangible and societal inequity and develop in-group bias, or favoritism towards the groups in which they are members (Patterson & Bigler, 2006). Children's books provide whimsical and imaginative spaces, stories of families, hope, and wonder (Thomas, 2016). Thus, when White children see themselves reflected in these stories as the protagonist, the astronomer, or the princess, these cultural artifacts reinforce their understandings of self within a societal system of power. Additionally, when BIPOC characters are portrayed as secondary, reinforcing anti-Black ideologies, or absent in the text altogether, children's texts reinforce detrimental patterns that reproduce systemic inequalities. Taken together, educators and families require a deeper awareness of antiracist text selection in early childhood classrooms, moving beyond simply a celebration of diversity to one that better captures children's lived experience with race.

Research Methodology

This study enacted an action research case study methodology (Dyson & Genishi, 2005). The study took place over the course of an academic school year (2020-2021) and asked the following research question: What is the relationship between the use of diverse children's literature and a teacher's development as a social justice educator?

This article draws upon the findings presented during a focus group comprised of preliminary and clear-credentialed California teachers. This phase of the research involved a Critical Children's Literature Group (CCLG) that met regularly to discuss select antiracist early childhood texts and served as a broader network for socially just

literacy education. The decision to characterize the group as an inquiry group built on the tradition of Nieto (2003) and Cochran-Smith and Lytle (2015) that puts inquiry and research at the center of teacher's work. During that year, the group of eight teachers met approximately once a month for a 1.5-hour CCLG session. The CCLG meetings were designed to be an informal, semi-structured space to support enhanced pedagogical knowledge. Before each meeting, participants received a comprehensive collection of inclusive children's literature books (i.e., Appendix 1). In between meetings, all participants were asked to maintain a written or audio memo to record their reactions to the text. Based on the work of Escamilla and Nathenson-Mejía (2003) they were asked the following questions every meeting: (1) What has this book led you to think about? (2) What questions does this book raise? and (3) How do you think your students would respond to this book?

All of the teachers worked in California schools (6 public and 2 parochial), self-identified as educators committed to social justice and equity, and were graduates from the same teacher preparation program. Except for one BIPOC male-identifying participant, all others were female-identifying women. Of the six women, one identified as multiracial (both White and Asian American). The five other women self-identified as White. Six of the eight teachers taught in early childhood grades (K-3), however, all texts selected were picture books appropriate for the early childhood spectrum (birth-age 8). It is critical to note that the teachers volunteered to participate in the group and brought knowledge, deep conviction, and interest in critical pedagogies in education. To analyze these data, I subscribed to methods akin to those put forth by Dyson and Genishi (2005), and Marshall and Rossman (2015) to inductively analyze these data. Building on these foundational qualitative methods, I used Phillips and Carr's (2014) three-part cycle for ongoing data analysis. In this model, "each data collection period builds on the one before, incorporates changes and adjustments as you analyze and interpret your ongoing work" (p. 122).

The Critical Children's Literature Group Procedures

Scheduled to begin in the Spring of 2020, the CCLG, like so many other aspects of society, was shifted to a virtual format due to the COVID-19 global pandemic. In addition, the *double pandemic*—COVID-19 and systemic violence and inequities for BIPOC in the U.S.—deeply impacted the lived experiences of the teachers and thus served as the backdrop for all conversations in the CCLG. For example, current events such as Floyd's murder and the subsequent protests or local hate

crimes that targeted Asian American Pacific Island (AAPI) individuals would come up frequently in our conversations about literature.

Each meeting began with a short period of time for participants to greet each other and update their profile name to include the grade they teach. Before the meeting, the teachers were sent a bundle of 5-6 children's books for inclusion in their classroom's library collection. The books and each session were loosely organized around Howlett and Young's (2019) categories of multicultural literature:

- Books that provide a diversity of perspectives
- Books that develop cultural competence
- Books that increase intercultural competence
- Books that combat racism, prejudice, and discrimination
- Books that develop the awareness of the state of a community, country, globe, or planet
- Books that develop social action skills

Appendix 1 presents sample children's books for each of these six categories. While not described in this article, texts were identified within preservice classes and in consultation with a graduate student researcher. We surveyed a broad range of sources to identify current titles in children's literature. Howlett and Young's categories of multicultural literature provided a tool to choose texts in a manner that moved beyond a visual diversity (i.e., a character happened to be BIPOC) to instead one that intentionally offered a lens or method to engage in explicit conversations about diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging. We selected texts by consulting with a local children's bookstore and referencing websites like *We Need Diverse Books* (2022), Bank Street College of Education's (2022) annual list of best books, author and trade book events through the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE), and traditional award category nominees (i.e., Coretta Scott King Award, Ezra Jack Keats Award). Given the state of the world at that time, we also noticed a flurry of discussions on diverse children's literature on social media and monitored them as well for additional titles. On some occasions, the CCLG members brought new titles to the group as well. Ultimately, it was not within the scope of this project to create an exhaustive list of books, but instead, its value and purpose was with the intentionality used to select texts and bring them to the CCLG for use and discussion. In sum, over 150 children's books were read and considered over the course of this research and the breadth of titles accounted for rich and complex conversations that ultimately led to the select list of antiracist children's literature presented here.

Each session began with an open-ended short discussion question to orient the conversation. Once the meeting was underway, the conversations were organized around three intentionally broad and open-ended questions: (1) What CCLG books did you read this month? (2) What questions or thoughts did these texts raise? and (3) How did the children respond to these texts? Rarely did the meetings end on time as the teachers were eager to talk to the group about the books, how they generated discussions in their classrooms, or their identity as social justice educators.

Findings

In this section, the findings of this action research study are presented, specifically themes that emerged to answer the following research question: What is the relationship between the use of diverse children's literature and a teacher's development as a social justice educator? These themes highlighted aspects of the work of social justice educators, such as the need to have ongoing and difficult conversations about race and identity, explore and identify antiracist texts collectively, and the opportunity to consider how their students grappled with these texts.

"We Need to Practice this Skill Intentionally and Frequently"

The teachers' participation in the CCLG was voluntary and most described the opportunity to deepen their understanding of what it means to be an antiracist teacher. For example, one teacher later reflected:

Racial literacy and social comprehension skills are a core foundation for me as a teacher. Every book that is read to children or read in a classroom creates an opportunity to have a conversation with students about race, social justice, and the numerous pieces a part of it. To create a more equitable and just society, individuals need to be made aware of, given tools and skills and be put in opportunities to practice identifying, discussing, and questioning race and the numerous layers that go along with it like systems, power, privilege, microaggressions, and bias.

Several teachers commented on the importance of talking about issues of race and equity with children and felt that an audience of young children was easier to talk to than that of adults. As one teacher noted, first graders can be more open than their family members. Another commented on the difference between a discussion with children and that with adults:

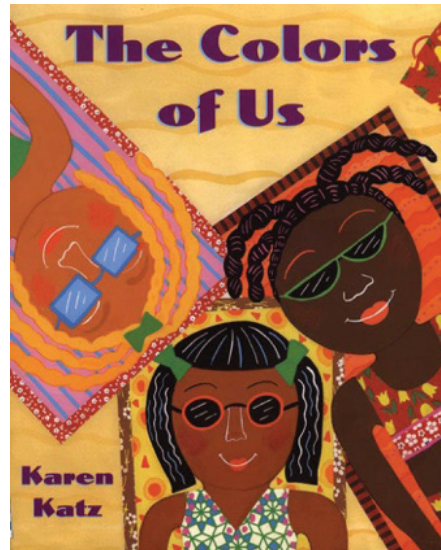
With adults, I'm still working on that part. I feel more comfortable talking about it with kids. And, if they're not, then that's what I'm here for. But most of the time, it's a lot of pushback in groups like—this shouldn't be talked about at school. Then where should it be talked about when they spend about six, seven hours a day with me?...Race is 100% a part of everyone's life, whether you're White or whether you're not. If you're White, it's 100% a part of your life, because, look at all that privilege you've got; for sure, it's part of your life.

In addition, some of the teachers avoided conversations about race with other adults as they feared “saying the wrong thing” or being misunderstood. One first-grade teacher noted her worries about reading books that explicitly discussed race, in front of her classroom aid (a Black woman). However, most agreed that children were the safest of audiences to develop these skills and that their anxieties could not drive their choices if they wanted to embody an antiracist approach to teaching and learning. Thus, talking to children intentionally and explicitly about race supported the teachers in their ability to have these conversations more frequently and more often. As one second-grade teacher stated:

Just like how it is a priority that my students learn how to add and subtract multi-digit numbers this year. If I'm dedicating two class meetings a week to that math skill, I need to dedicate just as much (if not more) time to talk with my kids about race and equity. The more that we get our students talking, the more comfortable they will feel in discussing these important topics and they will be more equipped to express their feelings and thoughts about race and identity. We need to practice that skill intentionally and frequently, like any other skill.

Early in the CCLG, we took note of “predictable conversations” that might occur when teachers are reading antiracist children's books. We challenged ourselves to move beyond “this student said” or “this parent feels” rhetoric, to one where we highlighted patterns when teachers engage in this type of work. For example, one teacher shared how his reading of *The Color of Us* (Katz, 2002) (see Figure 1) resulted in a White child saying she felt “left out of the pictures.” As a BIPOC, the teacher (Cameron) felt caught off-guard by the statement.

Several of the CCLG White teachers used this moment to pivot from the actual interaction and instead reframed the challenge to one that situated the event within an antiracist framework. While we always talked through our experiences, we also pivoted to the broader themes and challenges that present when one is engaging in this type of teaching. One teacher, affirming the BIPOC teacher's feelings of uncertainty in reading the text offered an alternative argument and

Figure 1

stated, “I’m White, I see so much White stuff all around me...all around heteronormative White stuff all over the place.” From there, she raised the reoccurring theme of the importance of text representation in classroom libraries, curriculum, and school programming. In addition, she encouraged Cameron to engage this child and the class of students in an analysis of the classroom texts that present this pattern.

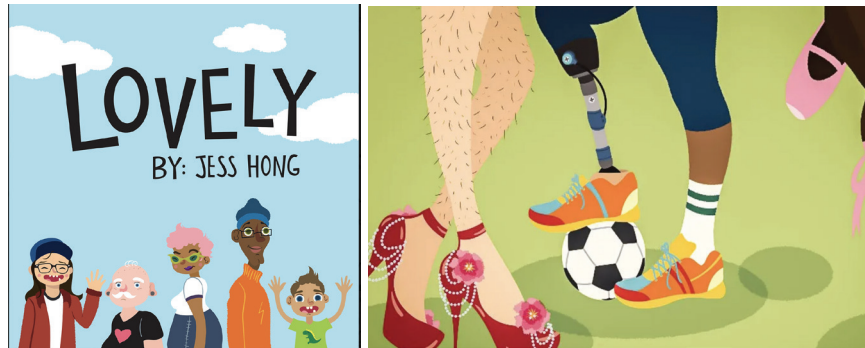
Lingering Over a Page

Each month, the teachers were provided with a bundle of books to be included in their classroom library. In all cases, the teachers took the opportunity to read the books independently and read all or some of them with their students. While many of the children’s books explicitly highlighted issues of race or class, some stood out to the teachers in the way that they just offered the “everyday” diversity of the world around us.

The teachers were drawn to the opportunities presented by the book *Lovely* (Hong, 2017) (see Figure 2). In her first book as a children’s author, through vivid and unexpected imagery, Hong showcases that “Big, small, curly, straight, loud, quiet, smooth, wrinkly. *Lovely* explores a world of differences that all add up to the same thing: we are all lovely!.” (Creston Books, n.p.).

Sally, a first-grade teacher described her experience bringing

Figure 2



Lovely into her first-grade classroom. With her CCLG book set, Sally would first put the books out on display. She observed how her first graders engaged in collective meaning-making activities born from their curiosities, questions, and interests when previewing the texts with each other.

I have not read *Lovely* to my entire class, but I had it out on my display bookshelf in my room. And because there are not a lot of words, and a lot of illustrations, two girls got to pick a book, and they chose that one. They didn't read any of the words because they can't read yet. That's okay. They were looking at the pictures. And they stopped at a page and they started talking about it...and they had this entire conversation by themselves about a page in a book without even knowing what the book was about. Never having a teacher read it to them. But just being able to have a conversation about similarities and differences, just from a picture in a book it was really cool to see them do that.

Another teacher described how powerful it was for her students to see a tattooed image in a picture book. While tattoos and body art are common amongst the adults in her school community, rarely do they see tattooed people on the pages of children's books. The teacher noted that one student commented, "that looks like my dad's arm!" As a result, the teacher embraced the opportunity to linger on the page and discuss the illustrations with her students. One teacher noted:

I really appreciate *Lovely*. We often see diversity in terms of culture, skin color, traditions, but I really like how *Lovely* included body positivity and people with disabilities because sometimes we forget to include that in what we decide is diverse. Things like that, and allowing the kids to ask questions like, why does that person look like that? Why does their skin look like that? Or why are they using that

device, or even just like, I'm someone who's struggled with my weight, so to see, like, lovely as being a little bit bigger, and that's okay, too. I love that that is being spoken and read to the kids, for them to start having that mindset of that is okay, that is lovely.

Sally's students who "discovered" *Lovely* highlighted a valuable early reading behavior that we coined lingering over a page. When discussing the texts, the teachers commented on pages that students "lingered over" and were eager to discuss and process in the community. In turn, the teachers modeled this practice in the CCLG. In the text, *All Are Welcome Here* (Penfold, 2018), the author unapologetically affirms diversity through a colorful and engaging portrayal of a diverse and inclusive school setting. The center spread (see Figure 3), a family event in the school's gym, was one of those pages that frequently reoccurred, both in our conversations in the CCLG and the teachers' classrooms.

One teacher, Ava, describes how her classroom often lingered on this page. She stated:

It is a space for kids to be okay to just be curious about some of the things that they notice about individuals on the page. For example, 'I see someone wearing something wrapped around their head,' that type of thing. Then it kind of opens [the conversation] up, that way it is not negative but more an inquiry...Then we can go back to it, [and say] 'well, ok, you perceive this person was this way because you saw them wearing this...' So, it is a good book to come back to later on.

The World is On Fire around Us

Over the year with the CCLG, despite our inability to meet in person, we collectively grieved and supported each other through the painful events that occurred in the world around us, just as we sat on our computer screens. The CCLG commenced just after the violent and

Figure 3



public murder of George Floyd and the teachers returned to classrooms in communities that were often draped with Black Lives Matter posters, murals, and protests. In addition, over the year, several visible and deeply harmful images and videos were shared publicly of hate crimes against the AAPI community. And so, the CCGI shifted into a critical space for the teachers to process how they were engaging with children, in these conversations, in real-time.

Several teachers commented on how Black History Month 2021 brought out several conversations about George Floyd. Ashley, a second-grade teacher, described a conversation that occurred that month on her classroom rug. The students had recently attended an assembly and the conversation turned to George Floyd. Ashley chose to read the CCLG text, *The Breaking News* (Reul, 2018). In this text, children feel the aftermath of a community that is distracted and troubled by recent news and it offers the perspective of children, who are bystanders in these moments in time. Ashley noted:

After George Floyd, my students really connected with [*The Breaking News*]...they were able to share, that they went to our schools' Black Lives Matters march, after that or made signs. They shared some tangible things that they had done to take action or to express their experiences after George Floyd's murder.

The CCLG group had spent significant time that year discussing unexpected turns conversations with children could take and Ashley's class soon entered one of those moments. She described how some of the children began to talk about how George Floyd was in the news again because the police officer's trial for murder had begun. Ashley recalled:

...one of my students said, 'Well, why did that police officer kill him? Like, what did he do?' And another student of mine raised his hand and he said, 'Oh, well, he didn't have a reason except for that he's racist.' And then another kid was like, 'You're not supposed to say that. And I was like, 'Why? Why are you not supposed to say that? Are you feeling worried that you're not supposed to call people racist?'

Ashley commented on how empowered she felt, at this moment, to have this conversation because she had also received the CCLG book *A Kid's Book About Racism* (Memory, 2019). Ashley described how she shared this text with her students, a text with no pictures, just words set against a crisp white backdrop that invites children to speak plainly and matter-of-fact manner about racism (see Figure 4).

She stated:

And so, this is a perfect moment to read *A Kid's Book About Racism*. I

Figure 4

told them [the second graders], we don't usually do back to back read alouds but I think we are really ready for this book right now. So we kind of shared what they understood for it to be...In *The Breaking News*, you really pay attention to the images of the people and the colors; it is all gray and the little pockets of light. With this book, it's all focusing on the words. They were just so—in trance—listening and absorbing what it was saying. ...it was just really such a unique reading, with them being able to go from one book to another... we spent, at least an hour, the first hour of school day, just talking about all of it and reading those two books. And it was really, it was a wonderful experience. And I think they all took something from it feeling like, more confident and recognizing racism when it happens... And so it was just a valuable experience. And I felt lucky to have those two books on hand and feel prepared to deliver them both.

Ashley worked in a progressive school district that supported the faculty in their efforts to engage in antiracist pedagogy. In that sense, the work was not new to the community, though Ashley's commitment and dedication indeed positioned her as a leader in their community. Through the CCLG the teachers also supported each other in school environments that were less open to the work of social justice educators.

"The World Does Not Look Like Our School"

Melanie, a resource teacher in a suburban public school was a valued member of the CCLG. In her fifth year of teaching, Melanie often expressed her appreciation of her school's new principal, who

was working to transform their school from one where a “color-blind” ideology was pervasive among some teachers and parents, to one that embraced diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging. In one of her first professional development events, Melanie recounted her new principal telling the faculty that, “the world does not look like our school” and therefore, it is the responsibility of the teachers, to bring that world into their classrooms.

With the support of her new principal, Melanie embraced the opportunity to understand how a social justice framework applied to her work as a special education resource teacher. Melanie described how her work, particularly in early literacy, is often reduced to a discrete set of skills, academic learning goals, or responsibilities separate from young children. Her students can also be characterized, by some, through a deficit lens or incapable of more complex conversations. And so, when Melanie’s third-grade students discussed the picture book, *Hidden Figures* (Shetterly, 2018) it was impactful, not just on the students, but also for the general classroom teacher who witnessed the event and subsequent conversation.

With the new principal *Hidden Figures* had been a school-wide read aloud. It had been read in a third-grade classroom where I co-taught during some of the readers and writers workshop times [with the resource room students]. I had a couple of students in that classroom and one of the students has autism, and it can appear like he is not paying attention. But then we’ll have these moments where it’s very clear, he is paying attention, it just doesn’t look like listening looks for most kids. So as we were reading the book, the student raises his hand in the middle of the book and was like, isn’t that segregation? For me, it was a special moment, for many reasons. But one was, it came from a student who, if you walked in the room and set eyes on him, people wouldn’t be able to tell he was listening. But he really was listening, was super intrigued by the book...and, he sparked this conversation in the class...and so, that book has held a special place in my heart in the way it sparked conversation for the class and that unique way.

Melanie’s reading highlighted the concern that the teachers raised that some parents or community members felt that conversations about race and equity were not appropriate for young children. As the teachers felt more comfortable reading the books, discussing the books, lingering over pages, and rehearsing the difficult conversations that might arise, they felt validation and pride to include these books in their libraries and curriculum. Ava noted how she now works to replace the “traditional” texts in her reading and writing workshops with ones that account for the diversity of the world around them. One

teacher did caution that she felt comfortable reading the books but felt uncertain how to continue the conversations with some members of her school community. At this point, one participant reminded her that the work we do functions on a continuum and so this was just another indication of that and her journey as a social justice educator.

Discussion

The findings of this action research study highlight how teachers of young children can actively engage in antiracist pedagogy. Whether their students were sitting in the presence of books that affirmed their identities or engaging in critical conversations about racism or Black joy, the CCLG teachers understood that their work as educators required persistent and embedded work that disrupted systemic inequities present in the lives of children. Through participation in the CCLG and the opportunity to analyze children's books, teachers were provided a space to examine their identities as educators committed to social justice. This study, therefore, adds to the scholarship on teacher development and the value and importance of teacher professional development that supports antiracist pedagogy in early childhood classrooms.

The findings of this study also demonstrate the need for professional spaces where teachers can speak candidly about race and racism to disrupt patterns of systemic oppression in schools. White and Wanless (2019) write that "because Black people have historically been assigned the lowest status in the American racial hierarchy, U.S. racism causes undue harm to Black children in particular" (p. 73). Early childhood educators require spaces to talk through societal harm caused by racism and identify tangible resources that can support facilitating productive and meaningful, developmentally attuned, conversations with young children.

As was mentioned, this study occurred at a time when the United States faced the COVID-19 global pandemic and systemic violence and inequities for BIPOC. Indeed, the findings demonstrate how these topics were prevalent in both the CCLG meetings and the classroom experiences for the teachers and children. Husband (2018) highlights the necessity of antiracist early education as "teachers should teach children about race and racial justice [to] develop a sensitivity to racial injustices in their everyday lives and within the broader society" (p. 1067). Thus, the presence of antiracist literature became a critical tool for early educators to use to assist in their discussions of the everyday world with young children.

Implications of this study also examine how young White children and families are impacted by the misrepresentation and omission of BIPOC in children's literature. Setting Whiteness as the default in children's literature underscores what some qualify as "White supremacy" in education, that is "Whiteness is supreme over others. We see that present in our values as a nation, in our culture, in our ways of being, and, therefore, embedded in all our systems" (Brown, 2021, p. 29). Here, the findings from the CCLG highlight teachers from a broad range of classroom settings—urban/suburban public and parochial—who saw that value in using an inclusive and nuanced classroom book selection that centered diversity, equity, justice, and belonging. As Appendix 1 demonstrates, using a critical lens, teachers can be intentional in the selection of literature and consider race and equity in the selection of texts for the classroom. Thus, the findings from this work underscore Escayg's (2019) synthesis supports antiracist teaching as it has the capacity for teachers to gain "additional insights on how children draw on cultural messages, representations, and ideas about race to construct their own racial understandings" (2019, p. 2).

Text selection alone does not mitigate or curb the impact of systemic racism in early childhood classrooms. Gaias et al. (2021), for example, considered the intentional focus on race, culture, and across domains of practice to include: Visual/Esthetic Environment, Toys and Materials, Activities, Interactions, and Organizational Climate. While this research only considered one aspect—classroom literature—it does shed light on how teachers can be actively engaged in a teaching practice that serves to disrupt White supremacy culture and bring meaningful and relevant content into the lives of all the children in their classrooms. In that sense, these practices reflect the ethos of a culturally sustaining pedagogy in early childhood that Paris (2012) defines as one that can "perpetuate and foster—to sustain—linguistic, literate, and cultural pluralism as part of the democratic project of schooling" (p. 93).

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Appendix I

Select Children's Books based on Howlett and Young's (2019) Categories of Multicultural Literature

Category	CCLG Select Children's Books
Books that Provide a Diversity of Perspectives	<i>All Are Welcome Here</i> (Penfold, 2018) <i>Lovely</i> (Hong, 2017) <i>Colors of Us</i> (Katz, 2002)
Books that Develop Cultural Consciousness	<i>Night Job</i> (Hesse, 2018) <i>Dreamers</i> (Morales, 2018) <i>Bedtime Bonnet</i> (Redd, 2022)
Books that Increase Intercultural Competence	<i>Saturday</i> (Mora, 2019) <i>Drawn Together by</i> (Lê, 2018) <i>The Proudest Blue</i> (Muhammad, 2019)
Books that combat Racism, Prejudice, and Discrimination	<i>A Kid's Book About Racism</i> (Memory, 2019) <i>Breaking News</i> (Reul, 2018) <i>Don't Touch My Hair</i> (Miller, 2019)
Books that Develop the Awareness of the State of a Community, Country, Globe, or Planet	<i>Hidden Figures</i> (Shetterly & Freeman, 2018) <i>Separate Is Never Equal: Sylvia Mendez and Her Family's Fight for Desegregation</i> (Tonatiuh, 2014) <i>We Are Water Protectors</i> (Lindstrom, 2020)
Books that Develop Social Action Skills (through history or present day events)	<i>Let the Children March</i> (Clark-Robinson, 2018) <i>Just Ask</i> (Sotomayor, 2019) <i>Shaking Things Up: 14 Young Women who Changed the World</i> (Hood, 2022)

Examining California's Title 22 Community Care Licensing Regulations

The Impact on Inclusive Preschool Settings

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Abstract

Access to general education preschool in California has varied for children with disabilities. One reason for the disparity of educational

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placement is the preschool regulations outlined in California Department of Education's Title 22: Community Care Licensing guidelines. These regulations, particularly in preschool, support or hinder preschool inclusion. Examining the preschool section of Title 22 through document analysis resulted in identifying three major themes that embrace or deter inclusive practices: (a) language (i.e., supportive language, antiquated language, and ambiguous language); (b) training, experience, and education; and (c) staff-student ratio. California's educational leaders should consider these results to provide opportunities for preschool children with disabilities to be in general education environments.

Keywords: California, community care licensing, early childhood, inclusion, special education

Introduction

Early childhood programs, such as preschools, start many children's education. Inclusion in early childhood education takes many forms, and despite several ways to define inclusion, there is no agreed-upon definition. Varying definitions include blended programming, integrated classrooms, and mainstreaming (Odom, 2000). Brown et al. (1999) defined inclusion as physical membership and critical mass. According to Lipsky and Gartner (2001), the first educational placement of a young child with a disability should be where the child would go if they did not have a disability. This principle allows flexibility for support services to be delivered according to individual requirements and meets the threshold for what is considered meaningful inclusion by most professionals.

According to Richardson-Gibbs and Klein (2014), for inclusion to be successful, support must encompass a collaboration process that delivers individualized services, accommodations, modifications, and flexible instructional strategies to meet each child's unique needs. Additionally, though the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) does not guarantee inclusion for students with disabilities (SWD), most preschoolers can be included with general education peers when provided with high-quality, needed support (Richardson-Gibbs & Klein, 2014).

Organizations Working Together to Make Inclusion Happen

The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) and the Division for Early Childhood (DEC) are the two most widely recognized organizations working for young children and their families. NAEYC (n.d.) is a nationally recognized organization

that supports public policy and advocacy for young children ages birth to 8 and their families. Similarly, DEC is a subset group of the Council for Exceptional Children. Council for Exceptional Children (n.d.) is an international organization dedicated to promoting policy, professional standards, conditions, and resources for the success of youth with disabilities. DEC focuses on young children ages birth to 8 with disabilities and their families. This organization is the international leader in promoting policy and evidence-based practices in early childhood with young children at risk for developmental disabilities or who have disabilities (DEC, n.d.). NAEYC and DEC/Council for Exceptional Children are professional organizations that set professional standards in early childhood.

Due to the lack of a federal definition of inclusion, NAEYC and DEC (2009) co-developed a joint position statement in *Early Childhood Inclusion* focused on key components of inclusion such as access, participation, and support, stating:

Early childhood inclusion embodies the values, policies, and practices that support the right of every infant and young child and his or her family, regardless of ability, to participate in a broad range of activities and contexts as full members of families, communities, and society. The desired results of inclusive experiences for children with and without disabilities and their families include a sense of belonging and membership, positive social relationships and friendships, and development and learning to reach their full potential. The defining features of inclusion that can be used to identify high quality early childhood programs and services are access, participation, and supports. (p. 2)

This definition provides clarity around high-quality programming and specific recommendations for inclusive education for preschool SWD, and was the basis for how language in Title 22 was examined.

Public Law 94-142 and Least Restrictive Environment for Preschool-Age Children

The Education for All Handicapped Children Act, Public Law (PL) 94-142, was enacted by Congress in 1975 to ensure children with disabilities receive a free, appropriate public education (FAPE) across the United States. This law was revised in 1990, containing several amendments, including the naming of PL 94-142 to IDEA, focusing on equitable access and opportunities for SWD, and establishing a distinction of four parts (i.e., Parts A–D) to this document. Part C of these revisions guaranteed special education for infants and toddlers

with disabilities, and Part B provided FAPE in the least restrictive environment (LRE) for children with disabilities ages 3–21.

Revisions of IDEA in 1997 and 2004 focused on six primary areas: (a) individualized education program; (b) FAPE; (c) LRE; (d) appropriate evaluation; (e) parent participation; and (f) procedural safeguards with the intention for all SWD, including SWD of preschool age, to have meaningful access and opportunities as their nondisabled peers. Although the term inclusion was not defined in IDEA, LRE provided guidance for special education programming and services, which stated:

Students with disabilities receive their education, to the maximum extent appropriate, with nondisabled peers and that special education students are not removed from regular classes unless, even with supplemental aids and services, education in regular classes cannot be achieved satisfactorily. (§ 300.114)

Numerous challenges contribute to the difficulty of inclusion during early childhood. First, LRE poses a challenge due to limited placements for preschool SWD because of the lack of a universal preschool system. Few states in the United States currently offer universal preschool, limiting options for preschool-aged children to be educated alongside nondisabled peers. The Build Back Better proposal under the Biden Administration alters this structure with the release of funding in winter of 2022 for universal prekindergarten (UPK), which will address care for only 4-year-olds (CDE, 2022). The second barrier is working in different systems (i.e., general education and special education) governed by differing titles (i.e., Title 5 and Title 22).

Early Childhood Education and California Licensing

In California, for young children with disabilities, access to general education preschool placements has been impacted for various reasons, including state licensing requirements. This impact is due, in part, to two governing regulations direct early childhood education—Title 5 and Title 22. Each legislative document has distinct regulations focused on the licensing for early childhood education (California Child Care Resource & Referral Network, 2021). Special education preschool is regulated by Title 5 and general education is regulated by Title 22, which includes private preschools, federally funded preschool programs, and state-funded preschool programs. However, state-funded general education preschool programs are regulated by Title 5 and Title 22.

Title 22 is community care licensing, based on the health and safety code, overseen by the Department of Social Services. This California

code of regulations instructs human beings' health, safety, and care from birth through death, including community care facilities such as infant and toddler agencies, preschool programs, and assisted living facilities.

This study focused on regulations that mandate preschool-age children (i.e., 3–5 years old). Though preschool-age children are a small portion of these regulations, Title 22 has a significant impact on how preschool programs in the state of California provide inclusion. This study focused primarily on the language in Title 22 in terms of how it relates to promoting or hindering early childhood inclusion. Outdated regulatory structures that provide guidance for preschool programs can inhibit a child with a disability from being educated alongside nondisabled peers. In fact, less than one third of children with disabilities in California are educated in general early childhood programs (California Department of Education, 2021).

This study was developed as an inquiry to understand the language of Title 22 regulations and how the regulations impact inclusive practices. For example, in working with districts to support inclusive practices, the issue of districts having to file for waivers from the state of California for students with disabilities and students in state preschool programs to participate in activities together appeared problematic. This problem was evident in the Title 22 regulations for teacher-student ratio and shared outdoor space. Students in special education classrooms could not play outdoors with their peers in state preschools due to an increase in the teacher-student ratio. This instance led to the researchers wanting to examine the language in Title 22 that precluded inclusive practices. What language is in Title 22 that contravenes or supports inclusion? Once the language in Title 22 is analyzed, how can California revise Title 22 to support inclusive education practices? As California prepares to move into UPK, the existing child care programs under Title 22 will impact how UPK commences (CDE, 2022).

Methodology

To examine Title 22: Community Care Licensing regulations—a formal, public record derived from the California Department of Education—the research team used document analysis as a primary method. Document analysis is a qualitative method that allows for a systemic approach to reviewing and evaluating documents (Bowen, 2009), including private official documents (Johnson & Christensen, 2000). The research team used document analysis to identify content

that would inhibit or support inclusion efforts for preschool facilities. The following research questions (RQs) guided this study:

RQ 1: How are preschool-age children with disabilities addressed in Title 22?

RQ 2: How does Title 22 promote inclusion for children with disabilities?

RQ 3: What are the potential barriers to inclusion of children with disabilities in Title 22?

Data Collection and Procedural Analysis

Sections pertaining to “Child Care Center General Licensing Requirements: Preschool-Aged Children” in Title 22: Community Care Licensing regulations were analyzed and coded to identify categories of wording that resulted in text conducive to inclusive education practices or presented potential barriers to inclusion. Preschool-aged children were the primary focus of this analysis; therefore, only portions of Title 22 pertaining to preschool-aged children were analyzed. These sections included Articles 6 and 7: Article 6 (section 101212-101231; pp. 77–139) through Article 7 (section 101237–101239.2; pp. 140–150), resulting in a total of 73 pages analyzed and coded. Topic areas covered under these sections included (a) personnel and training of staff, (b) staff and child ratio, (c) transportation, (d) health (e.g., health/safety, health-related services, medical), (e) daily living (e.g., napping, food service), and (f) administration.

In analyzing these sections, three researchers independently identified patterns in the articles based on the research questions. Researchers used words and phrases to label the found patterns, which were then turned into codes (Bogdan & Biklen, 2016). Themes were then developed accordingly. Language focused on disability, primarily centered on children with physical disabilities. Reliability was enhanced by using a team of researchers to increase the comprehensiveness and accuracy of the research process (McMillan, 2000) by comparing codes to understand if the researchers came to similar conclusions (Guion, 2002).

Findings

In this study, the research questions were as follows:

RQ1: How are preschool-age children with disabilities addressed in Title 22?

RQ2: How does Title 22 promote inclusion for children with disabilities?

RQ3: What are the potential barriers to inclusion of children with disabilities in Title 22?

In the six topic areas explored in analyzing Title 22 regulations, three themes and three subthemes emerged. Three major themes were (a) language; (b) training, education, and experience; and (c) ratio. Three subthemes fell under language: affirming inclusion, antiquated language, and ambiguous language. These major themes and subthemes encompassed the six sections: (a) personnel and training of staff, (b) staff and child ratio, (c) transportation, (d) health (e.g., health/safety, health-related services, medical), (e) daily living (e.g., napping, food service), and (f) administration. Notably, when the Title 22 document addressed disability, it focused on physical disabilities and did not address other disabilities.

Language

The language used in Title 22 was an evident theme. In this theme, the researchers examined ways in which the language of this document could support or hinder inclusive opportunities for SWD. Language was divided into three subthemes, which were defined by the research team: (a) affirming inclusion, (b) antiquated language, and (c) ambiguous language. The researchers defined affirming inclusion as language that promoted inclusive practices or made inclusion in Title 22 possible. Antiquated language was defined as outdated information. Ambiguous language was defined as unclear language due to contradictory statements made in Title 22. Language played a significant role in the findings of this study through the following three subthemes.

Affirming Inclusion. The theme affirming inclusion encompassed language used in Title 22 that supports the inclusion of children with disabilities in a licensed program. Some themes identified clear barriers to inclusion; however, sections of Title 22 promote inclusion. For example, Title 22 discussed postural supports and protective devices in the health section of the document (101223.1). The language indicates how programs can include students who use postural supports and protective devices as prescribed, with California Department of Education approval. The section that described use of restraints to prevent a child from falling from a bed, chair, or wheelchair (101223.1[a1]) has specified that children with disabilities can be served under Title 22 and has outlined what can and cannot be used. Many devices are used to keep children with disabilities safe and can be used with guidance and prior approval from staff in child care settings.

The health and safety of preschool children were addressed in Title 22. Several medical requirements facilitate admitting children with disabilities into preschool programs because they permit the program to administer treatment or explain how to admit children with disabilities. The regulations aiding preschool programs are (a) health-related services, (b) immunization, (c) medical assessments, and (d) postural supports/protective devices.

The health-related services section of Title 22 provides medication and treatment guidance for all students, including children with unique needs. Prescribed and nonprescribed medications can be given to the child by the facility (101226[e4]). In the case of nonprescription medication, there is no requirement for doctor approval or direction. If emergency treatment for a child is required and the child's authorized representative cannot immediately be reached, the program does not need specific instructions from the authorized representative. Title 22 also stated that a licensed program must obtain a child's medical record when requiring treatment given by the program (101221[10]). The medical records must include any prescribed medications for the child and instructions on administering treatment. By including a way to treat a child with an illness or injury, Title 22 is inclusive of children with disabilities in its programs. It is unclear if "illness" includes a disability, and it would be helpful to add "disability" for clarification.

Lastly, Title 22 discussed personal rights for children (101223). The document was strongly worded and explicit that no child will be punished or penalized in any way. The examples provided are general but significant to providing a nurturing and safe environment for all children. This wording can be viewed as supporting inclusion, as it stated, the child is:

To be free from corporal or unusual punishment, infliction of pain, humiliation, intimidation, ridicule, coercion, threat, mental abuse or other actions or a punitive nature including but not limited to: interference with functions of daily living including eating, sleeping, or toileting; or withholding of shelter, clothing, medication or aids to physical functioning. (101223[a7])

However, though, this text regarding personal rights for children is supportive of inclusion, this passage may also be considered ambiguous as "aids to physical functioning" may be unclear. For example, this phrase could mean that a communication device or sound field system was withheld for a child with a hearing loss, which would be a barrier to inclusion.

Antiquated Language. For immunizations (101220.1), licensed

preschool programs are required to follow the California Code of Regulations' immunization schedule table and keep documentation of immunizations for each child. Each child enrolled in a licensed preschool program must follow the immunization schedule unless they meet certain exemptions. Allowance of exemptions may be necessary for children with disabilities, and properly documenting exemptions is a requirement. The current document has stated that a licensed program may exempt a child if they (a) have a written statement from the child's physical that includes which immunizations are exempt and for how long; (b) have a written statement from the child's authorized representative stipulating that their personal or religious beliefs prohibit immunizations; or (c) are enrolled in a public or private school. The stated exemptions have been updated, including the immunizations content, but these updates are not reflected in the original document. This lack of transparency in updates creates a barrier. The research team inquired about the updated information regarding immunizations and exemptions not being part of the main Title 22 document and were told that individuals accessing information would know these details; it is assumed if the updated information was public, center directors or those in charge of overseeing licensing at their sites would already know the public information and it need not be addressed here. Currently, updates are provided to this title through addendums. One issue with this process is the assumption the director or the individual in charge of ensuring their program licensing has that knowledge or knows how to seek out that knowledge. This outdated language proves challenging as programs plan and implement their practices.

Ambiguous Language. Ambiguous language was identified as a subtheme under language because there were several examples of contradictory language in Title 22. In the document, there are places where language both promoted and hindered inclusion depending on one's interpretation. In health and safety, the regulations require a medical assessment for all children in 30 business days or before enrollment in a program (101220). This regulation can benefit children with disabilities because the program can prepare and plan for their needs before they attend their 1st day of school. The medical assessment provides (a) identification of the child's specific needs, (b) prescribed medications, and (c) ambulatory status. Title 22 used the language "identification of child's special problems and needs" (101220, p. 106). Although the language in this section is positive about children with disabilities attending general preschool programs, this language is not conducive to an inclusive environment because the wording of

“child’s special problems” is negative in connotation. Placing special problems and needs together in the same sentence implies disability is a problem, which also could be viewed as antiquated language. Furthermore, obtaining a medical assessment for the child in 30 days or before enrollment may cause an unnecessary delay for a school district in making an offer of FAPE under IDEA.

Another example of ambiguous language that promotes—yet potentially contributes to barriers to inclusion—is centered around how early childhood programs can serve children using aids and equipment as needed. Language in this title discussed using pea gravel for outdoor spaces, inhibiting accessibility for children with disabilities using wheelchairs or walkers. Though the safety of children in the program is an objective of Title 22, this language may be confusing to providers because they want to ensure safety for children but may not understand how that translates to accessibility or how alternatives may make the environment accessible for all.

Another example of interpretation of language arose when outdoor space was examined. This section of Title 22 specifically focused on space and equipment, providing guidance on physical space for outdoor (i.e., 75 square feet per child) and indoor activities (i.e., 35 square feet per child). Article 7 stated:

- (e) As a condition of licensure, the areas around and under high climbing equipment, swings, slides and other similar equipment shall be cushioned with material that absorbs falls. (1) Sand, woodchips and pea gravel, or rubber mats commercially produced for the purposes of (e) above, are permitted.

The language in Section E provided safety guidelines, but also inhibits children who may use walkers, canes, or wheelchairs and children with low vision or blindness from accessing the outdoor equipment. Child care centers that use sand, woodchips, and pea gravel in their outdoor activity spaces create barriers to accessibility for all children to attend and meaningfully participate. The section intended to keep children safe; however, the outcome created barriers to inclusion.

Further, Article 7 of space and equipment addressed fixtures, furniture, equipment, and supplies. This article included verbiage addressing children with disabilities stating, “additional equipment, aids and/or conveniences shall be provided as needed in centers that serve children with physical disabilities” (101239[e4], p. 146). This verbiage conveys that a center can serve young children with physical disabilities, but the statement also highlights inequities in this setting. This regulation does not address adaptations for children with disabilities such as vision loss, speech impairments, hearing loss, and

autism. To serve young children with disabilities, child care centers often have to retrofit spaces to ensure accessibility. The language in Article 7 may impede centers from designing their environment using universal design from the start to develop more inclusive environments for all children.

The Administration section of Title 22 (101218.1) called for interviews with the child's parents or guardians to ensure the needs of the child can be met by the center and the center takes into consideration health, physical, and emotional development. This policy imposes full disclosure of the child's needs. However, the Administration section also delineated processes for the public, specific to preschool admission policies. The policies must be in writing and available to the public outlining the limitations and abilities to serve children. The admission criteria described "whose needs can be met by the center's program and services," (101218[a1], p. 102) indicating that not all children are welcome as they may not meet criteria to attend. These policies can discriminate as they can reject children with more extensive needs. A program can specifically tailor its programming and licensing to welcome the children they wish to serve.

Staff Training, Education, and Experience

The training, education, and experience of staff can hinder the acceptance of children with disabilities into the program. According to Title 22, director qualifications (101215.1) include options of (a) high school graduation, 15 units at a college with 4 years teaching experience; (b) an associate's degree in child development with 2 years of experience; or (c) a bachelor's in child development with 1 year of experience and a site supervisor or director permit from the state. The challenge with these qualifications is that Title 22 does not state directors must have education or experience pertaining to working with children with disabilities. Title 22 suggests obtaining a child development director permit from the state of California is an option to meet Title 22 director requirements; however, the education requirement through the California Teacher Credentialing office for a child development director permit requires more education than Title 22 requires.

Title 22 accepts years of teaching experience in a daycare center as an exchange for education (e.g., 4 years of teaching experience with a high school diploma and 15 college credits for a director). In 4 years of teaching in a daycare setting; however, the educator may never work with a child with a disability, especially if the center has designed admission criteria to position SWD out of admission. In all the requirements, regardless of whether it be a state director permit

or Title 22 director qualifications, there was no mention of taking a class that focuses on working with children with unique needs. Further, teacher qualifications and duties (101216.1) listed in Title 22 stated one teacher (or director) shall complete 16 hours of health and safety training, if necessary pursuant to Health and Safety Code Section 1596.866—Health and Safety Code 1596.886 stated training may include instruction in sanitary food emergency preparedness, evacuations, and caring for children with special needs. However, this is minimal training for staff to feel comfortable or have the knowledge to work and support the needs of SWDs.

Ratio

Staff to student ratios are addressed throughout child care center regulations as they play a significant role in ensuring appropriate and safe supports for children. In Title 22, daily living includes (a) food services, (b) napping, and (3) personal rights for students. For food services, programs must adhere to prescribed modified diets along with meeting “individual needs” when it comes to meal preparation. Additionally, self-help devices must be provided when needed.

In Article 6, Section 101216.3 Teacher/Child Ratios, there was specific guidance on community care licensing standards pertaining to ratio and servicing children with disabilities stating, “the program may exceed teacher-child and adult child ratios prescribed by Section 18290 by fifteen percent (15%) for a period of time not to exceed one hundred twenty (120) minutes in any one day.” This wording is important because the text highlights that SWD can be included, above the teacher-child licensing ratio, for a specific amount of time throughout the school day. Although this guidance allows for flexibility in a center, it does not account for the children’s needs or how those needs will be addressed. This text is needed to let centers know the ratio can be exceeded for a portion of the day to include children with disabilities. However, the wording does not consider the accommodations needed and how staff will support those accommodations, which may be vague for staff who need more guidance.

Class ratios are incorporated in the napping requirements of Title 22. This ratio affects programs where napping or quiet time may be implemented (e.g., full-day programs). Per Title 22, one teacher or aide older than 18 years who meets defined criteria can oversee 24 children during nap time. This guidance raises several questions: (1) If there are children who do not nap and are not able to play quietly due to a disability, can centers accommodate this child?; (2) Is this

staff-to-student ratio sufficient when a child with disabilities is in the classroom?; and (3) Should there be mention of exceptions when there is a need for another teacher or specialized staff in the classroom? These are questions not addressed in Title 22, which may cause centers to avoid accepting children with disabilities.

If guidance of Title 22 is not given, centers are left to address these questions as they see fit, which may include not accepting SWD, or adhering to a disability hierarchy. Disability hierarchy is a social construct making certain disabilities more acceptable than others (Deal, 2003). In this case, center directors may choose disabilities they feel need less support because they are limited in providing staff at certain times of day.

Discussion

Results of this document analysis demonstrate a need to examine how practices from the field and current licensing regulations should continually be scrutinized by experts in the field, because outdated information can inhibit best practices from being implemented, specifically regarding inclusive education. Every preschool facility (sans special education preschool) in California must abide by the Community Care Licensing Division of the State Department of Social Services, and its licensure document known as Title 22. The research team provided an analysis of Title 22 with a focus on preschool-age children (i.e., these sections include Articles 6 & 7: Article 6 [section 101212-101231; pp. 77–139] through Article 7 [section 101237-101239.2; pp. 140–150], resulting in a total of 73 pages). When addressing RQ1 (How are preschool-age children with disabilities addressed in Title 22?), the researchers found children with disabilities were addressed through three themes: (a) language used in the document; (b) training, education, and experience of the staff mentioned in the title; and (c) ratio requirements stated in the title. These themes mentioned disability directly or referred to information that has affected children with disabilities. Examining Title 22 confirmed the need for updated language; an understanding of how training, education, and experience affect inclusion; and the exploration of the ratio surrounding early childhood regulations to meet the needs of all children in the most inclusive educational environments.

When addressing RQ2 (How does Title 22 promote inclusion for children with disabilities?), under the theme of language, the subtheme of affirming language highlighted text used in the title that supported the inclusion of children with disabilities. This language included using postural supports (101223), the ability to give prescribed and

nonprescribed medications (101226[e4]), and the personal rights of children.

In the subtheme ambiguous language, some language supported children with disabilities. This ambiguous language included verbiage asking for a medical assessment before enrollment (101220) and mentioned serving children with “special needs and problems.” Although the researchers examined a deeper understanding of this language later in the document, at first glance, this language told centers they can serve children with disabilities. Additionally, this subtheme discussed providing students with aids and equipment as needed, which implied servicing children with disabilities.

Further, when addressing RQ2, Article 6, Section 101216.3 Teacher/Child Ratios indicated the program may exceed teacher-child and adult-child ratios by 15% for up to 2 hours per day, allowing early educators to include children with disabilities who are not enrolled in the program. These regulations provide ways to promote inclusion for young children in Title 22.

When addressing RQ3 (What are the potential barriers to inclusion of children with disabilities in Title 22?), researchers found language that prohibited inclusion. This finding is titled as the subtheme antiquated language, which examined outdated language in the title, such as immunization information. The immunizations updates are unavailable in the original title, causing potential barriers to inclusion when center directors cannot find the information or are unaware of the update.

The subtheme of ambiguous language also encompasses challenges in inclusion, including language used for environmental safety. Though some of Title 22’s language is meant for safety, this language may also impact accessibility for children with disabilities. Further, the mention of aids and services are limited to physical disability and lacks discussion of adaptations for other disabilities. Additionally, admission policies designed by the center may exclude children with disabilities.

When addressing RQ3, the theme of staff training, education, and experience arose. Title 22 requires staff to have a minimal amount (i.e., 16 hours) of health and safety training (1596.886), which encompasses food emergency preparedness, evacuations, and working with children with “special needs.” Staff may not feel comfortable or well-equipped to provide the support needed by children with disabilities in the 16 required hours.

Lastly, addressing RQ3, the ratio theme surfaced. Though the title states the ratio can be exceeded by 15% for up to 2 hours per day, this statement is vague and does not address how staff will implement it.

Additionally, ratios for napping may also be a barrier because of limited staff availability. These issues highlight barriers to including children with disabilities in preschool programs. This title should be examined in a variety of ways, as listed next, to address these challenges and expand inclusive opportunities for young children.

Public records that mandate processes for teachers, students, and care or educational facilities should be analyzed, as some may have innate biases influencing specific practices. It is critical to examine how these biases influence practices and programming for preschool facilities. As the shift to inclusive practices increases, Title 22 should reflect the best practices in serving all students' needs. Future revisions of Title 22 should include the expertise of professionals to develop regulations focused on inclusion, where barriers to learning, playing, socializing, and being part of an educational setting are identified, analyzed, and altered to develop universally designed approaches and spaces, where all students can participate, thrive, and learn. Specifically focusing on some disabilities without considering the broad needs of a diverse population can unintentionally exclude groups of children based on their disability and needs.

How child care center directors interpret this document can also provide opportunities for inclusive programming or hinder inclusive practices. Individuals employed at child care centers may examine these regulations from a different lens or perspective. Though some needs mentioned are developmentally appropriate (e.g., woodchips, gravel), they are not accessible to students with specific needs. Educational leaders should consider whether the title conveys it is more important to be developmentally appropriate than accessible. Further, disability-related language in Title 22 is primarily centered on children with physical disabilities. This focus may leave child care directors to believe that only children with physical disabilities can be included in their child care programs or the guidance only applies to children with physical disabilities.

In the area of staff, Title 22 needs revisions, including updating terminology between the title and the California Commission of Teacher Credentialing director permits to ensure consistency. As written, Title 22 allows for 4 years of experience in a preschool setting with minimal education (i.e., a high school diploma and 15 college credits). As written, one may trade education for experience to qualify for a directorship at a private preschool facility, allowing an individual with no-to-minimal interactions with SWD to oversee a facility that could include SWD. However, the document allows directors to write their own admissions criteria. Based on our review, the research team

wondered what training had been provided to directors and others working in Title 22. Training focused on Title 22 should be provided for early childhood and early childhood special education professionals, as they work in collaboration to provide high-quality inclusion for SWD. Both disciplines will need to understand and access this document, especially in consideration of the upcoming UPK.

Lastly, originally developed in 1998 (dates are listed in each section), Title 22 has been through several revisions and amendments. The revisions to Title 22 have not been reflected in the main document and have been added as amendments instead. Updates should be included in the main document with an updated date, not in addendums. For historical purposes, each revision can be archived to clearly document all changes and so the revision can be accessed when needed. This recommendation would prevent directors of preschool programs from having to search for addendums; they would have the entire document as they oversee their programs. This recommendation can eliminate confusion and support new directors as they begin work in their programs. The entire document should be evaluated and updated promptly instead of constant amendments to the primary regulations.

Conclusion

The purpose of this interpretive research was to analyze how preschool regulations inhibit or support inclusive programming for SWDs. Examining Title 22 provided insight into how these regulations impact preschool programming and practices. If regulations are written in a way that addresses a range of disabilities, clearly outlining what is needed for inclusion, then the document has the potential to support inclusion. When official documents that provide guidance have outdated or ambiguous language, this inhibits the understanding of these regulations and can hinder inclusive preschool programming. To make any significant change in preschool programming for SWDs “requires the kind of substantive support that can come only from policy changes” (Tye, 1987, p. 284). Thus, Title 22 will require updated and clear language, additional staff training and experience, and revised ratios for all students to have equal access and opportunities.

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Family Group Conferencing in Inclusive Preschool Classrooms During Distance Learning

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Abstract

The purpose of this pilot study is to understand the impact of Family Group Conferencing (FGC) on the collaboration among general education and special education teachers, teachers' attitudes toward family outreach and perceived outcomes of preschool students with and without disabilities enrolled in inclusive classrooms during distance learning. FGC is an evidence-based model that aims to increase family engagement in a child's academic growth by enhancing the quantity and quality of teacher-parent interaction. Six special education teachers and six general education preschool teachers from six inclusive preschool classrooms participated in the study. Teachers received training on how to work collaboratively to

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develop shared goals and support to parents during the COVID-19 global pandemic. This study positively impacted the relationships between the general education and special education teacher pairs at each school. Teachers reported improved outcomes for students with and without disabilities. Implications include using FGC to build co-teachers relationship and reimagining the traditional parent-teacher conference to involve parents.

Keywords: inclusion, collaboration, family engagement, preschool teachers, distance learning, special education

Introduction

The global pandemic and distance learning changed the way teachers and parents collaborate together for student success. Distance learning was unsuitable for young children and students with disabilities and provided a heavy burden on parents (Misirli & Ergulec, 2021). Soltero-Gonzales and Gillanders (2021) found that Latinx families from under-resourced neighborhoods experienced insecurities at home due to reduced family incomes resulting from one parent having to quit work and take over the responsibilities of at-home child care. However, Soltero-Gonzales and Gillanders (2021) discovered that even with these challenges, parents effectively assumed the responsibility for their children's education. When children became frustrated with completing school-based activities at home, the parents integrated those activities into a variety of experiential play activities to keep the children engaged in learning (Soltero-Gonzales & Gillanders, 2021).

The pandemic also hindered parent, children, and teacher relationships for preschool families' first introduction to school, where parent and teacher roles had to be reevaluated (Anderson S   et al., 2022). At the same time, students with disabilities experienced a loss of services when the school closures occurred in March 2020 (Barnett et al., 2021). Similar to the recommendations for all early education practices (Division of Early Childhood, 2014), two critical pieces of educating students with disabilities during the COVID-19 pandemic were professional development and family involvement (Tremmel et al., 2020). Special education teachers also encountered barriers during distance learning such as adapting materials and monitoring progress (Supratiwi et al., 2021).

This pilot study used a Family Group Conferencing (FGC) model to engage in professional development for inclusive classroom preschool teachers. FGC is an evidence-based model that aims to increase family engagement in a child's academic growth by enhancing the quantity and quality of teacher-parent interaction. FGC provides

teachers and families with a two-way, regular system of engagement in which teachers work with groups of families to ensure they have the strategies needed to help their children with and without disabilities meet appropriate learning objectives. In this study, teachers and parents engaged in planned shared activities during distance learning, providing equitable access to parents for participation. FGC also provided alternative, meaningful ways for teachers to engage in family-centered practices.

Family-Centered Practices

Family-centered practices provides families the capacity to strengthen their ability to promote their child's development and learning (Dunst, 2002). Family-centered practices where schools and families partner as decision makers to improve children's academic achievement began to demonstrate powerful positive outcomes for all children in the early 1980s with the Harvard Family Project. In 1997, the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) formally recognized family participation in decision making activities in its policy statement. By 2014, the Recommended Practices for Division of Early Childhood (DEC) encompassed having family involvement in choices to strengthen child, parent, and family development.

A recent meta-analysis on family-centered practices reconfirmed significant and positive academic achievements and behaviors for children when the families and schools work together (Smith et al., 2020). They found that family-centered practices also improved social behavioral competencies and mental health. Further, parents from different race and ethnic backgrounds demonstrated the same positive improvements. On the other hand, school involvement for parents of color from under-resourced neighborhoods may look different. Based on experiences of families of color from under-resourced neighborhoods, their involvement includes helping their child navigate barriers in schools and assist in social mobility (Auerbach, 2007).

Inclusion of Students with and without Disabilities

Based on the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) 2004, all students with disabilities should be educated alongside their nondisabled peers to the greatest extent possible. Students receiving special education services have an Individualized Education Program (IEP) that specifies their present levels of academic performance, annual goals, and special education services (IDEA Sec. 300.320). The equity action plan from the U.S. Department of Education supports

access, equity, and justice and supporting students with disabilities. Students with disabilities have favorable outcomes when educated in an inclusive classroom (Gee et al., 2020). However, students with disabilities in under-resourced schools are more likely to be educated in segregated classrooms (Clampit, n.d.; National Center for Learning Disabilities, 2020).

In a joint position statement in 2009, the DEC and the National Association for Education of Young Children recommend improving inclusion of students with varying types of disabilities. Key personnel facilitate the inclusion of students in preschool classrooms (Lieber et al., 2000) such as the general education and special education teacher. An important factor to the success of students in inclusive classrooms is the collaboration between the general education and special education teachers (Solone et al., 2020). Conversely, Smith et al. (2015) recognized that one of the most common challenges in establishing inclusion is the lack of communication and collaboration among the service providers and families.

To promote the collaboration between general education and special education teachers, Robinson and Buly (2007) recommend teachers to engage in dialogue and co-teach together. Co-teachers need to understand their roles and responsibilities to have successful collaboration (Friend et al., 2010). Preschool teachers who have prior experiences with disabilities and inclusion felt better prepared to work in environments for students with and without disabilities (Leatherman & Niemeyer, 2005; Kwon et al., 2017). To move toward more inclusive practices, preschool teachers need to understand their role in inclusive classrooms and require more training to increase comfort levels of inclusive practices (Bryant, 2018; Leatherman & Niemeyer, 2005). In addition, collaboration is improved for co-teachers in inclusive settings when there is additional training and time to plan together (Scruggs et al., 2007).

Family Group Conferencing

FGC is a model used in social work, where the social worker, the client, and the client's families agree on common goals (Connolly, 2006). WestEd, which is a nonprofit agency that promotes equity and learning for children, modified and designed FGC to replace the traditional school conferencing activities that take place twice a school year (WestEd, 2012). FGC was adapted using parent involvement and learning from home (Epstein et al. (2019). The teachers and families learn from each other and the families learn strategies to assist children at home with their learning objectives from the teachers.

FGC was adapted to provide time for teachers and parents to work together on common goals and to increase family-centered practices. Traditionally, school parent-teacher conferences at the research sites occur once in the fall and once in the spring term. FGC is a method where families gather as a group with the teachers for 75 minutes in the fall. During the late fall, each family engaged in an individual 30-minute student conference appointment with the teachers. During the spring, the families met with the teachers twice as a group. FGC has not been studied in inclusive preschool classrooms with students with and without disabilities.

Family-school and teacher-teacher communications have typically occurred in-person. Recently, Poole et al. (2022) promoted the use of “tele-intervention” video conferencing platforms (e.g., Zoom®, Google Hangout, Microsoft Teams) as a beneficial and natural delivery model for providing coaching services to early intervention caregivers. This modality is especially supportive for families who have chronically ill family members, reside in large cities with traffic challenges or rural locations, or have nontraditional working hours. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, all FGC meetings for this study were conducted using Zoom® video conferencing. The pandemic also exacerbated racial and socio-economic inequities (Fortuna et al., 2020).

The purpose of the pilot study is to understand the impact of FGC between the preschool inclusive classroom teacher pairs working with students with and without disabilities. The preschool teachers taught in inclusive classrooms from under-resourced schools via distance learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. The study focused on the research gap between the collaboration of co-teachers using FGC in inclusive preschool classrooms from under-resourced schools during distance learning. This pilot study included three research questions:

RQ1: How does FGC impact teachers’ attitudes and practices relate to family outreach?

RQ2: How does FGC impact classroom practice, including collaboration among special and general education teachers?

RQ3: How does FGC impact perceived child outcomes?

Methods

Six teaching pair teams comprised of one special education and one general education teacher working together in an inclusive preschool classroom participated in this pilot study. The teaching pairs were from six different public schools in a large urban Southern California school

district. All schools were located in under-resourced neighborhoods serving families from racially diverse and ethnic backgrounds. The special education teachers were recruited from a group of early childhood special education teachers who previously participated in a U.S. Department of Education Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) teacher preparation grant. The purpose of the grant was to recruit, prepare, and place 60 early childhood special education teachers to work in inclusive preschool classrooms using family-centered practices.

After receiving Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval at the university and the school district levels, special education teachers who participated in the teacher preparation grant received an email with information about the study. The selection criteria included the special education teachers' work in an inclusive preschool classroom during the 2020 to 2021 school year. The inclusive classroom must be located in an under-resourced neighborhood and consisted of one special education teacher and one general education teacher that taught students with and without disabilities in the classroom all day. The special education teachers expressed interest via email and were provided informed consent from the research team. After that, the school principals received an informational email about the study. After receiving principal permission to recruit from the school site, the special education teachers' respective general education co-teacher was provided information about the study and recruited for the study. Once teacher pairs were successfully enrolled, the research team consented interested parents/caregivers of children with and without disabilities from their inclusive preschool classrooms to participate in FGC.

Participants

This study included special education teachers, their general education co-teachers, and parents/caregivers of children with and without disabilities.

Teacher Characteristics. Data on teacher demographics were self-reported by teachers at the beginning of the FGC pilot study. All 12 teachers in the FGC study were female. All but one teacher was from an underrepresented minority group, with 50% Latina, 42% Black and 8% White. Ages of the teachers varied, with over half of teachers between the ages of 40 and 59 (58%). Four teachers (34%) identified as between 20 to 39 years old. All six special education teachers had been in their current teaching positions for three years or less. General education teachers' time in their current positions varied, with two in

their positions for two years or less (33.4%), two in their positions for 19 and 21 years (33.4%), and two for 30 years (33.4%). The teacher demographics are presented in Table 1.

Parent/Caregiver Characteristics. Six schools engaged in the FGC pilot study and the number of parents/caregivers associated with each school site ranged from four to 10 family participants per school ($n = 38$). Over the course of the pilot study, there were 38 parents or caregivers who participated in some or all the FGC sessions. Caregivers provided demographic information on the pre-survey administered at their first session of FGC. Most parent/caregiver participants were female (82%) and identified as Latino/a/x or Hispanic (92%). All but two participants were the parent or guardian (95%) of the child, and the majority spoke Spanish at home (61%). The parent demographics are presented in Table 2.

Classroom and Child Characteristics. Data on classroom and child characteristics were self-reported by teachers and parents.

Table 1
Sociodemographic Characteristics of Teacher Participants at Baseline

	<i>n</i>	%
Gender		
Female	12	100
Male	0	0
Race/Ethnicity		
Latina/x	6	50
Black	5	42
White	1	8
Age		
20-29	2	17
30-39	2	17
40-49	3	25
50-59	4	33
60+	0	0
Prefer not to say	1	8
Teacher Role		
General Education	6	50
Special Education	6	50
Teaching Credentials		
Early Childhood Special Education	6	50
Child Development Permit	4	33
Multiple Subject	2	17
Other	3	25

The average number of students per classroom was 15.5 ($SD = 6.2$). On average, teachers reported six students (range one to 11) in their classrooms with IEPs. Teachers were asked to select from a list of disabilities that children in their classroom may have, and all (100%) indicated some of their students had speech and language impairments. Almost half (46%) of teachers said they had students with autism spectrum disorders. One teacher reported having a student with intellectual disabilities or a hearing impairment. One teacher reported having a student with Down Syndrome and another teacher had a student with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). Of the students receiving special education services, more than half of the students received speech therapy (66%). Ten parents indicated their child did not receive any special education related services.

Procedures

The FGC pilot study was intended to be in-person, however, due to the unexpected pandemic, all programming was modified for virtual delivery. The content was adjusted to meet the needs of teachers and families during this time. All materials were translated into Spanish and, if needed, teachers were provided translators. FGC included a Parent Group Meeting (75 minutes) in early Fall Semester and an Individual Parent Session (30 minutes) in the late Fall. After the

Table 2
Sociodemographic Characteristics of Parent Participants at Baseline

	<i>n</i>	%
Gender		
Female	31	82
Male	7	18
Race/Ethnicity		
Latina/x	35	92
Black	4	11
White	0	0
Other	1	3
Language Spoken at Home		
Spanish	23	61
English	15	40
Relation to Child		
Parent or Guardian	36	95
Grandparent	1	3
Aunt/Uncle	1	3

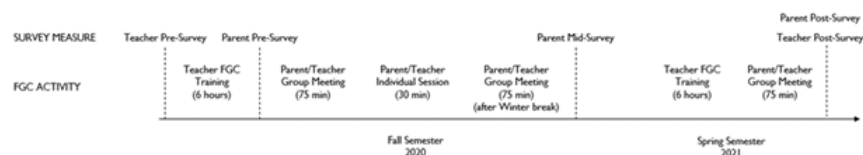
Winter break, parents received their second Parent Group Meeting (75 minutes) and in the Spring received their third Parent Group Meeting (75 minutes).

To implement FGC, teachers received 12 hours of FGC training via Zoom® throughout the 2020 to 2021 school year with the FGC consultant. The consultant has a background in administration, teacher leadership, and student-focused coaching. Each teacher received four 3-hour trainings. During the Fall Semester, a consultant trained the teachers and researchers for six total hours prior to the first meeting with parents. The initial training included an overview of the model and detailed lesson planning time for implementation to ensure teachers were well equipped to launch FGC without investing additional time for preparation. During the Spring Semester, teachers and researchers received six hours of training to prepare for their third, and final, meeting with parents. In addition to FGC training, each teaching pair received one-on-one coaching with the FGC consultant prior to implementing their second FGC session with families and thereafter. All participating teachers were compensated for their training time. See Figure 1 for the FGC pilot study timeline.

The general education and special education preschool teachers co-planned and instructed their students' parents together for all FGC meetings. For each of the three FGC Parent Group Meetings, the general format included teachers sharing classroom academic skills data regarding the expected end-of-year goal and current progress of all children in their classroom using de-identified data on a particular skill such as recognizing numbers or letter-sound correspondence. Each family received a report that displayed their own child's current progress on that same foundational skill to allow parents to compare where their child was relative to the class and evaluate it over time.

Throughout all FGC Parent Group Meetings, the teacher pairs decided the shared goals for the FGC meeting and shared activities for parents to complete at home that addressed the specific goals and academic skills (e.g., literacy skills, social emotional skills). The

Figure 1
FGC Pilot Study Timeline



activities varied by classroom based on the participation and feedback of the parents and coach. Families were centered in this process by building capacity to promote their child's development and learning (Dunst, 2002) by the sharing of activities as a group, role playing, and discussion of the activities. All Parent Group Meetings included teachers and parents sharing increased high expectations for preschool students with and without disabilities.

Measures

Online survey measures were administered to teachers and parents at different points during the pilot study. Teachers received pre- and post-surveys at two time points. The pre-survey was administered before the first FGC meeting, and the post-survey was administered after the third FGC meeting with parents in the Spring Semester. The pre-survey had 35 items (including demographics and classroom specific items) and took approximately 10 minutes to complete, and the post-survey had 33 items and averaged seven minutes finish. Participating families and teachers were provided \$20 gift card incentives each time they completed a survey for the study.

The teacher survey items aligned with the overarching goals of the FGC intervention which included increasing collaboration among co-teachers and increasing alignment and school involvement between parents and teachers. In addition, items focused on increasing parent-child interactions around key parenting practices, such as setting goals, ways to supplement classroom learning at home, and supporting families in acquiring services. These tools include the Head Start FACES national study, specifically the family engagement portion of FACES (2014 wave of data collection) and the ECLS-K. Items were developed or selected based on their relevance to the study goals and reflect key areas of family engagement, perceptions of interactions, collaboration with their co-teachers and the potential impact of FGC. For example, teachers were asked to rate the extent they agreed with the following statement: FGC will help me/has helped me collaborate with my co-teacher to support inclusive opportunities for children with and without disabilities.

Analysis

Teacher survey data were collected online and analyzed using SPSS statistical software. All 12 teachers completed pre- and post-surveys during the FGC study. Descriptive analyses were conducted and average scores were calculated to assess change on survey items over time.

Results

Overall, the effects of FGC during distance learning on teachers and parents of preschool children with and without disabilities were overwhelmingly positive from teachers' perspectives. In addition, teachers reported increased collaboration with their co-teaching partner. As a result of participating in the study, teacher participants also reported learning new skills to apply to their classrooms and observing improved student academic performance.

Research Question 1:

Teachers' Attitudes on Family Outreach

On the pre-survey, teachers were asked to reflect on the school at which they teach and provide an assessment for their interactions and communication with parents. Overall, 100% of teachers felt supported by their school to conduct outreach with families (50% 'strongly agree' and 50% 'agree'), but there was some uncertainty on whether the school provides workshops in a student's home language (16.7% 'don't know'). Teachers felt they communicated respectfully with family members of children with special needs (92% 'strongly agree') and valued the cultures and background of the children and families in their classrooms (83% 'strongly agree'). One in four teachers (75% 'strongly agree') said they encourage parents to make decisions about their children's education and care. Teachers also reported improvements in communication with parents.

Teachers felt they knew more about the families and children after working with the families more closely throughout FGC. After FGC, teachers reported knowing about the culture and values of 92% (25% 'all' and 67% 'most') of the families. FGC also impacted their family-centered practices in their own classrooms. Nine out of 10 teachers said it helped them develop family-centered practices in their classrooms. Teachers also felt FGC helped create more meaningful relationships (92% 'strongly agreed') and resulted in better understanding of a child's developmental status (100% 'strongly agreed'). After participating in FGC, teachers were more often able to provide suggestions on parenting (75% 'very often') ($M = 3.8$, $SD = 0.2$) and setting goals with parents (68% 'very often') ($M = 3.7$, $SD = 0.4$). Teachers felt this program helped create more meaningful relationships with students' parents. See Table 3 for teachers' instances of parental guidance.

Table 3
Frequency of Instances of Parental Guidance

<i>Statement</i>	<i>Percent %</i>				<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
	<i>Very Often</i>	<i>Sometimes</i>	<i>Rarely</i>	<i>Never</i>		
<i>How Often Are You Able To Do the Following?</i>						
Offer parents ideas or suggestions about parenting.	75.0	25.0	0	0	3.8	0.4
Provide parents the opportunity to give input on their child's needs at home.	83.3	16.7	0	0	3.8	0.2
Set goals with parents for their child.	66.7	33.3	0	0	3.7	0.4

Research Question 2:
Collaboration between Teachers

One of the primary aims of the FGC pilot study was to promote collaboration between general education teachers and their special education teacher partners. Utilizing program materials, teacher pairs were encouraged to work with all parents to address the needs of the children in their classrooms regardless of disability. Overall, teachers thought FGC promoted collaboration, which increased the ability to foster inclusivity in their classrooms for all students ($M = 2.7$, $SD = 0.6$). An additional benefit was for general education teachers to learn more about special education. One special education teacher commented, "It was very beneficial – I think my co-teacher learned a lot about special education and has more respect for what I do." Overall, 92% indicated their collaboration increased and resulted in more support for inclusive opportunities for all of their students. See Table 4 for teacher perceptions on collaborative teaching.

The majority of teachers felt FGC helped them develop more family-centered and inclusive practices in their classrooms. FGC allowed for both the general education and special education preschool teachers to work with parents of children with and without disabilities ($M = 2.7$, $SD = 0.6$). It also provided them an opportunity to use assessment data in a meaningful way for their own teaching. Many of the teachers expressed

they plan to incorporate components of FGC into their classrooms after this study was over. For example, one teacher stated “FGC is a great practice to add to one’s classroom. Families loved it and it allowed them to be [a] part of their student’s learning. I will continue to use it in my

Table 4
Teacher Perceptions on Impact of FGC on Collaborative Teaching

<i>Statement</i>	<i>Percent %</i>			<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
	<i>More Often</i>	<i>About Same</i>	<i>Less Often</i>		
<i>As a result of implementing FGC, my co-teacher and I do the following more often, about the same, or less often.</i>				<i>N/A</i>	
Work together to propose solutions to learning or behavioral challenges of any students.	75.0	16.7	8.3	0	2.7 0.6
Engage in parent outreach together.	75.0	8.3	8.3	8.3	2.7 0.6
Actively collaborate to accomplish educational goals for all students with and without IEPs.	75.0	16.7	8.3	0	2.7 0.6
Develop IEPs with input from both of us.	58.3	16.7	8.3	16.7	2.6 0.7
Plan lessons jointly for all students, including any differentiation that may be needed from some students.	58.3	33.3	8.3	0	2.5 0.7
Work together during class time to ensure active involvement of students with IEPs.	58.3	33.3	8.3	0	2.5 0.6
Split lesson planning so that each of us focuses on a different group of students or different subjects.	50.0	41.7	8.3	0	2.4 0.6
Conduct parent conferences together.	50.0	25.0	15.7	8.3	2.4 0.8

classroom.” Teachers also commented that FGC helped to “empower parents or family members in promoting student academic growth” and “provides a structure for family involvement and engagement.” FGC provided teachers with the tools to help parents incorporate learning activities in their homes and FGC “helped us better inform parents [about the] preschool standards, learning goals and objectives.”

Research Question 3: Perceived Child Outcomes

The teacher perceived impact of FGC on children with and without disabilities was overwhelmingly positive. Based on the analysis of the teachers’ pre- and post-survey data, teachers felt FGC had a positive impact on students. Almost all teachers (92%) ‘strongly agreed’ FGC resulted in improved academic outcomes for their students ($M = 3.9$, $SD = 0.3$). In addition, over half (58%) ‘strongly agreed’ FGC improved both behavioral outcomes and social outcomes ($M = 3.6$, $SD = 0.5$). See Table 5 for teacher perceptions of perceived child outcomes.

One of the key components of FGC is for increased parent engagement with their children’s learning during distance learning. Teachers also learned more about how to engage parents in learning with their children outside of the classroom (from 58% on the pre-survey to 92% on the post-survey). Through FGC and the relationship building that occurred, teachers were more often able to provide suggestions and goal setting to the parents. The average score increased from pre- to post-survey, from 3.3 to 3.8, respectively. Teachers also reported being more able to set goals with parents for their child, with an increase in average score of 3.4 on the pre-survey to 3.7 on the post-survey.

Discussion

FGC was conducted during distance learning in inclusive preschool classrooms from under-resourced schools. Although distance learning was unsuitable for young children and students with disabilities and provided a heavy burden on parents (Misirli & Ergulec, 2021), parents were committed to working with their children and adapting school instruction to meet their children’s needs (Soltero-Gonzales & Gillanders, 2021). The purpose of the pilot study was to understand the impact of FGC on teachers’ attitudes toward family outreach, the relationships between co-teachers, and perceived student outcomes.

FGC can support inclusive preschool classrooms as well as partnerships between parents and teachers from schools located in

Table 5
Teacher Perceptions of Impact of FGC

<i>Statement</i>	<i>Percent %</i>			<i>Strongly Disagree</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
	<i>Strongly Agree</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>			
Due to my experience with FGC this school year, I believe my classroom practice has changed to be more inclusive of all children.	91.7	8.3	0	0	3.9	0.3
In the past year, FGC has resulted in...						
Improved academic outcomes for the children I work with.	91.7	8.3	0	0	3.9	0.3
More meaningful relationships with parents.	91.7	8.3	0	0	3.9	0.3
A more collaborative relationship with my partner teacher.	75.0	16.7	8.3	0	3.7	0.6
Improved behavioral outcomes for the children I work with.	58.3	41.7	0	0	3.6	0.5
Improved social outcomes for the children I work with.	58.3	41.7	0	0	3.6	0.5

under-resourced neighborhoods from racially and ethnically diverse backgrounds. The traditional parent-teacher conference may not be an effective method to promote family-centered practices and family outreach. Similarly, a study conducted by Taylor and Kim (2020) changed the way pre-service teachers work with families outside of the traditional parent-teacher conference, which changed their confidence in working with families. By changing the traditional parent-teacher conference and using the FGC model, teachers in this pilot study felt they created more meaningful relationships with families.

As family dynamics have changed over the years, one way to involve families in early childhood education classrooms is to provide different ways for them to be involved (Knopf & Swick, 2008). During the global pandemic, family dynamics and stressors changed as families had to adjust to distance learning. Teachers also had to adjust parent involvement and teaching and learning. FGC provided a way to address some of these changes and how parents engaged their children's learning and development during distance learning.

The teachers in the study received professional development training before they implemented FGC. After receiving training, the teachers created more meaningful relationships with parents that helped them work with parents to assess the child's developmental status and more equitable ways to engage in learning. There is a need for continual professional development on how to work with families and teachers (Brown et al., 2009). FGC could advance equity and inclusion in early childhood education by preparing teachers to partner with families and teach targeted learning skills for their students with and without disabilities through continual professional development.

Through the FGC pilot study, teachers reported that the study helped their collaborative relationship between co-teacher. The co-teachers planned together to engage with all families enrolled in the study and implemented their group conferences meetings together which improved inclusive practices. Shared vision is a challenge in inclusive classrooms (Purcell et al., 2007) and general education teachers need more training to learn more about students with disabilities and inclusion (Kwon et al., 2017). The FGC pilot study also allowed for general education teachers to learn more about the special education teachers' roles and students with disabilities. One teacher in the FGC pilot study mentioned that this process led to an understanding of the special education teachers' roles.

Two components that improve early childhood education include providing a space for collaboration and decision-making (Pacchiano

et al., 2019). FGC provided a space for general and special education teachers to work together to make decisions on how to create activities for parents. FGC allowed for teachers to have shared increased high expectations for all students. Another important aspect of successful collaboration and inclusion is building membership and ownership for the general education and special education teacher (Mogharreban & Bruns, 2009). Overall, the collaborative relationships between the teacher partners and between teachers and parents also improved in this pilot study, which leads toward improved inclusive practices.

Students in inclusive classrooms have more favorable outcomes (Gee et al., 2020). Parent involvement is also associated with positive child outcomes (Graue et al., 2004). However, parent involvement changed during the global pandemic and distance learning. The inequities of the pandemic on preschool education for students with and without disabilities during the school closures included attendance loss and loss of services for students with disabilities (Barnett et al., 2021), which could impact student outcomes. In this pilot study, a positive impact was noted on children's development and goal achievement. During this process, almost all teachers said FGC resulted in perceived improved academic and behavioral outcomes for their students. When preschool teachers and parents plan goals and strategies together, children met their goals and children had increased engagement (Palmer et al., 2019). FGC provided teachers opportunities to work with families to set goals and create activities to work toward achieving those goals.

Limitations

There are three limitations to consider in this pilot study. First, from the small sample size of this pilot study, it may be difficult to generalize results. However, this study shows the improvement in collaboration between co-teachers and fostered more inclusive practices for students with and without disabilities in the classrooms. The second limitation is in the recruitment sample. The sample started with the recruitment of special education teachers who participated in an OSEP teacher preparation grant and their co-teachers. Future studies should expand on the recruitment sample to better generalize the results. The last limitation is child outcomes were not directly measured. Due to the global pandemic, the preschool formal assessments were not collected. Future studies should address how to collect informal and formal child outcome data and compare student outcome data by groups.

Implications and Conclusion

The aims of the study were to understand the impact of FGC on teachers' attitudes toward family outreach, the relationships between co-teachers, and perceived student outcomes. Throughout the study, teachers developed partnerships with parents in under-resourced neighborhoods. As a result, teachers were better able to support equitable practices and work alongside the families from diverse backgrounds. Enhanced teacher-parent partnerships promote family confidence and competence and can result in increased student skills (DEC, 2014). Practical implications for stakeholders and policymakers include providing time and space to engage with families outside of the traditional parent-teacher conference.

In addition, FGC professional development and implementation provided opportunities for co-teachers to develop collaborative partnership through training which in turn, improved inclusive practices. Professional and family collaborative practices allow for joint problem solving to occur in a respectful and culturally sensitive manner (DEC, 2014). At the same time, the collaboration between co-teachers and parents improved perceived child academic and behavioral outcomes through shared increased high expectations between co-teachers and parents. Practical implications for teacher education programs and stakeholders include incorporating co-planning and FGC principles into pre-service and in-service teacher support programs which give an opportunity to develop family-centered practices and more equitable inclusive practices.

The implications for future research include examining parent engagement and perceptions of FGC during distance learning and FGC post-pandemic. Since this FGC study was conducted in Zoom®, a future study can examine the impacts of FGC when teachers are working with students in-person, and the impacts of conducting in-person teacher trainings, as well as in-person teacher and parent FGC Parent Group Meetings. Next, a future study can expand the sample of teachers. In addition, this pilot FGC study was also conducted for young children in preschool, but it is important to have a follow up study, which includes students at different stages of development from kindergarten through 12th grade or tracking students as they transition to kindergarten. Future studies can also be expanded to include more inclusive classrooms with a more robust evaluation design.

FGC is a unique approach to helping teachers and parents collaborate more effectively, especially during distance learning. Teacher participants agreed that children likely experienced important benefits

from FGC. This pilot study positively impacted the relationships between teachers and parents, and also between the general education and special education teacher pairs at each school. FGC provided a way for parents and inclusive preschool teachers from under-resourced schools to build partnerships and engage in family-centered practices during distance learning and move toward more equitable practices.

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Addressing Antiracism in Early Childhood Educator Preparation

Implications for Young Black Children and Their Families

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Abstract

Early childhood teacher preparation programs offer a curriculum that centers the White normative perspective (i.e., devoid of diverse perspectives). Because the young children and families that these

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Issues in Teacher Education

teachers will work with are representative of the U.S. demographic, it is important that these programs consider alternate ways of preparing their early childhood teachers. This paper examines how teacher preparation in early childhood programs operate in paradigms that perpetuate White Supremacy and hinders Black family engagement. Critical frames such as BlackCrit are useful as we look for ways to improve curricular and instructional approaches in teacher preparation. We believe that teacher preparation programs are the conduit for preparing teacher educators with the knowledge that *antiblackness* can be disrupted and dismantled through critical consciousness around race. In this article, a discussion of (a) a foundational context regarding teacher accreditation and preparation for early childhood education (ECE) candidates, (b) the integration of culturally sustaining pedagogies in ECE preparation, (c) a BlackCrit theoretical framework to examine and dismantle *antiblackness* in ECE preparation programs, and (d) how to dismantle *antiblackness* when engaging with Black families. Finally, recommendations are suggested for ECE teacher preparation programs seeking to dismantle *antiblackness*.

Keywords: *Antiblackness*, BlackCrit, teacher preparation, early childhood education, and early childhood special education

Introduction

Consistent family engagement in preK-12 settings is a critical component of student achievement in and out of school (Friesen et al., 2020; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Senechal & LeFevre, 2002). However, due to the practices and policies (i.e., *antiblack*) that often run counter to the cultures of children and families from minoritized backgrounds, many children and families disengage from the education process (Coles & Powell, 2020). If teachers are to dismantle those practices and policies of *antiblackness*, they must acquire the skills necessary for the cultivation of the engagement of young Black children with and without dis/abilities and their families. These skills, acquired in teacher preparation programs, could provide teachers with the pedagogical tools (i.e., culturally sustaining practices) that could assist in the facilitation of culture-affirming environments that meet the needs of young Black children (Caruthers et al., 2021). According to Bryan (2022), teacher education programs in the U.S. prepare pre-service teachers to operate within cultural norms that are rooted in White Supremacy and *antiblackness*. To disrupt this type of preparation, it is important to prepare teachers early and often so that they do not perpetuate *antiblack* ideologies and practices in the classroom environments.

As scholars from minoritized backgrounds, we submit that, to successfully prepare early childhood professionals, it is imperative that

we understand the impacts of *antiblackness* in teacher preparation programs. Further, it is important to address the lasting impacts of *antiblackness* that serve to disempower Black family engagement. In this article, we refer to Dumas and Ross's (2016) definition of *antiblackness*. They define *antiblackness* as a form of oppression that devalues Black life through interactions, practices, and policies.

Although the National Association of the Education of Young Children (NAEYC, 2020) identifies early childhood education (ECE) as birth to age 8 years old, this article refers to ECE to include children between the ages of 3-8 years old. These children receive early childhood education services from pre-school to second grade. Conversely, early childhood special education (ECSE) refers to children between the ages of 3 and 8 years old who receive special education services through the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act Part B (IDEA, 2004).

In what follows, we discuss (a) a foundational context regarding teacher accreditation and preparation for ECE candidates, (b) the integration of culturally sustaining pedagogies (CSP) in ECE preparation, (c) a BlackCrit theoretical framework to examine and dismantle *antiblackness* in ECE preparation programs, and (d) how to dismantle *antiblackness* when engaging with Black families. Finally, recommendations are suggested for ECE teacher preparation programs seeking to dismantle *antiblackness*.

ECE Teacher Accreditation and Preparation

Currently, ECE program accreditation is often aligned with standards developed by organizations such as NAEYC (2020) and the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC, 2020). These organizations provide frameworks for teacher quality and practices in ECE. In addition, the standards and practices of these organizations are essential in the development of culturally competent teachers that work with diverse groups of children and families.

The National Association of the Education of Young Children

NAEYC (2020) and CEC (2020) should play major roles in the way teacher preparation programs prepare early childhood professionals. For example, the NAEYC identifies six competencies and standards, including (a) child development and learning in context, (b) family-teacher partnerships and community connections, (c) child observation, documentation, and assessment, (d) developmentally, culturally, and linguistically appropriate teaching practices, (e) knowledge, application, and integration of academic content in the early childhood cur-

riculum, and (f) professionalism as an early childhood teacher. These ECE standards and competencies reflect how early childhood teachers must engage children and families to provide equitable and high-quality learning experiences. The Professional Standards and Competencies indicate that:

Early childhood educators must develop a habit of reflective practice, including integrating their knowledge and practices across all six standards in order to create optimal learning environments, design and implement curricula, use and refine instructional strategies, and interact with children and families whose language, race, ethnicity, culture, and social and economic status may be very different from educators' own backgrounds. (NAEYC, 2020, p.11)

For the purposes of this article, three of the NAEYC (2020) standards and competencies are addressed. Specifically, family-teacher partnerships and community connections, developmentally, culturally, and linguistically appropriate teaching practices; and professionalism as an early childhood educator are discussed in relation to ECE teacher preparation and family engagement. Each of these standards acknowledge the importance of developing reciprocal partnerships that value culture, diversity, and the needs of families. If teachers effectively implement these standards, then they can promote equitable ECE experiences for all children and their families.

Council for Exceptional Children

Like NAEYC (2020), CEC (2020) developed the *Early Interventionist/Early Childhood Special Educator Standards* for the preparation of special education teachers. Specifically, CEC addresses the following standards (a) child development and early learning, (b) partnering with families, (c) collaboration and teaming, (d) assessment processes, (e) application of curriculum frameworks in the planning of meaningful learning experiences, (f) using responsive and reciprocal interactions, interventions, and instruction, and (g) professionalism and ethical practice. These standards reflect how early interventionist and ECSE teachers must work with children with dis/abilities and their families.

Although the 2020 CEC standards address seven practice areas, this paper addresses the three that (i.e., partnering with families, using responsive and reciprocal interactions, interventions, and instruction, and professionalism and ethical practice) are specific to ECSE teacher preparation. Each of these standards acknowledge the importance of collaborative partnerships with children with dis/abilities and their families. Additionally, CEC standards highlight the importance

of teachers integrating culturally affirming practices and tools that meet the needs of families. If teachers effectively implement these standards, they may learn to be self-reflective in their teaching practices and interactions with families.

Currently, many ECE/ECSE programs are aligned to meet NAEYC (2020) and CEC (2020) standards. However, teacher candidates are not provided with enough cross-cultural experiential learning experiences (i.e., learning by applying knowledge and reflection; Kopish, 2016). Teacher candidates who leave teacher preparation programs in ECE/ECSE are supposed to be equipped with the pedagogical and theoretical knowledge to teach in diverse (e.g., racial, ability, etc.) contexts with children whose ages range from zero to eight. However, based on the inequities experienced in ECE/ECSE by young Black children and their families, the ways that teachers are currently prepared needs to be revisited. If young Black children (i.e., with and without dis/abilities) and their families are to benefit from EI, ECSE, and ECE services that these teachers will ultimately provide, then preparation programs must adopt a culture-sustaining position when preparing ECE/ECSE teachers.

Early Career Educators: The Importance of Culturally Sustaining Pedagogies

According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, 2022) the demographic of teachers are predominately White and female. However, with the increase in the number of students coming from diverse backgrounds, teachers must develop strategies to facilitate positive climates within which all students can thrive (Doucet, 2017). The literature cites culturally sustaining pedagogies (CSP) as one way to cultivate positive learning environments for children from diverse backgrounds in ECE (Wynter-Hoyte et al., 2019). For example, the literature suggests that exposing teacher candidates to CSP during their teacher preparation programs can positively shape teacher candidates as they develop instructional practices to support diverse learners in diverse contexts (Paris & Alim, 2017). Additionally, Souto-Manning and Cheruvu (2016) indicate that engagement in CSP can mitigate the potential negative effects of the racial mismatch between teachers and young children in early childhood classrooms.

Culturally sustaining pedagogies are rooted in Ladson-Billings' (2014) culturally relevant pedagogies (Paris & Alim, 2017) that aims to advance student learning by incorporating student culture into the classroom (Paris & Alim, 2017). Culturally sustaining pedagogies utilize asset-based approaches (i.e., funds of knowledge; Moll et al.,

1992), third space (Gutiérrez, 2008), and culturally relevant pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1995) to address and examine school diversity in education and were initially used in educational research to reposition linguistic, literate, and cultural practices amongst poor communities of color (Paris & Alim 2017).

Preservice teachers will eventually leave their programs. Therefore, it is important that their programs implement practices that facilitated their development as critically conscious teachers. These ECE/ECSE preparation programs must be intentional in how they address the concepts of CSP. Once teacher preparation programs begin to embed a culture of acknowledgement through difference, then teachers who leave the program can begin to understand ways to value a classroom that represents various types of difference (e.g., Black children and families, ability, gender). Most importantly, providing teacher candidates with an opportunity to enter the profession with a culture-accepting lens can begin to shift the deficit perspective that they may use when teaching Black children.

Black Critical Theory (i.e., BlackCrit) can be the lens that ECE/ECSE teacher preparation programs use to cultivate a perspective in their ECE/ECSE teachers that affirms the culture of Black children and families. Rather than viewing Black children and families as less/ than deficient, ECE/ECSE teachers would come to understand the structural inequalities and inequities that create a system where Black children cannot thrive and where they and their families are marginalized within that system. They will be able to counter the implicit (e.g., biases, microaggressions) and explicit (e.g., disproportionately suspended, overt racism) forms of *antiblackness* experienced daily by Black children in ECE/ECSE spaces. The following section focuses on what BlackCrit is and why it is imperative (i.e., to combat *antiblackness*) that ECE/ECSE preparation programs utilize it to prepare preservice ECE/ECSE teachers.

BlackCrit

BlackCrit is a theoretical concept that emanated from critical race theory (CRT). It helps to precisely explain the marginalization, disregard, and disdain projected onto Black bodies (Dumas & ross, 2016) in schools and other spaces. Additionally, BlackCrit uncovers the ways institutions reproduce Black suffering through policies and practices (Dumas & ross, 2016). Instead of tenets, BlackCrit offers foundational framings (i.e., *antiblackness*, Blackness in tension with neoliberal-multicultural imagination, space for Black liberatory fantasy) for

conceptualization (Dumas & ross, 2016). In this article, we focus on *antiblackness* to explain its impact on the ways that ECE/ECSE teachers are prepared, and how that preparation ultimately impacts the ways they engage with young Black children and their families. Figure 1 represents a theoretical framework regarding the relationship between *antiblackness* in teacher preparation programs, as well as how those programs ultimately prepare teacher candidates to perpetuate *antiblackness* subconsciously/consciously in ECE/ECSE practice during child and family engagement.

Dumas and ross (2016) define *antiblackness* as a form of oppression that devalues Black life through interactions, practices, and policies. In this framework, *antiblackness* serves as a filter through which teacher preparation programs train ECE/ECSE teachers, and ultimately how those teachers engage with children and Black families. Currently, *antiblackness* is filtered in multiple ways in ECE/ECSE teacher preparation programs (i.e., whiteness, bias, racism). This *antiblackness* lens clouds the way in which teachers are prepared to interact with Black children and families. For example, in our current system, teachers are prepared to perpetuate bias (i.e., *antiblackness*) when interacting with Black children and families. Oftentimes, this creates feelings of racial/cultural anxiety for Black children and families (Godsil & Richardson, 2017) with interactions with ECE/ECSE teachers because they fear those teachers will unjustly discriminate against them. This is a form of trauma. Conversely, when we train ECE/ECSE teachers to dismantle *antiblackness* (e.g., through BlackCrit) we prepare them to move towards being culturally competent teachers (e.g., culturally affirming, self-reflective, asset-minded approaches), therefore, unclouding their perceptions of Black children and families (see Figure 1).

As teacher preparation programs continue to perpetuate *antiblackness*, preservice teachers will continue to lack the necessary knowledge and skills to engage with and support young Black children and their families. Furthermore, young Black children and their families will continue to experience inequities during the IDEA (2004) Part B process (i.e., identification, inclusion, and access; Meek et al., 2020) and miss out on the benefits that ECE/ECSE provides. This framework helps us interpret the dismantling of *antiblackness* in educator preparation programs.

Utilizing BlackCrit to Dismantle *Antiblackness*

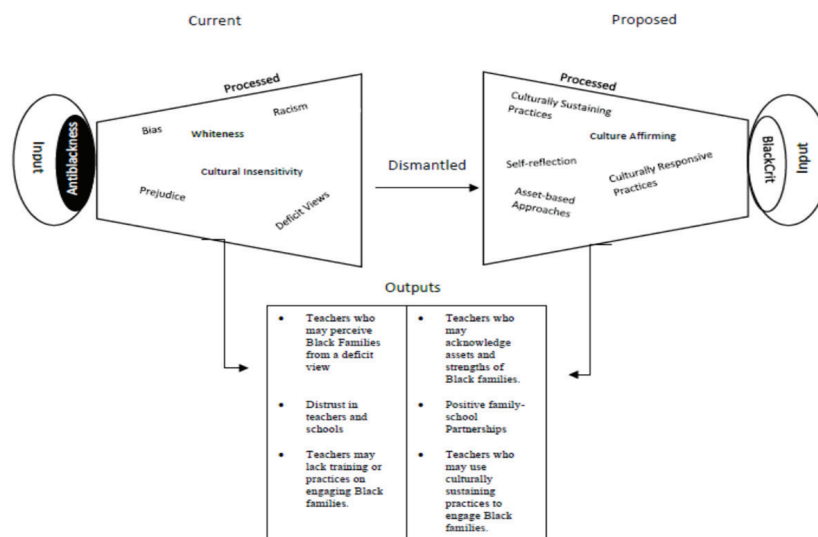
BlackCrit helps examine how *antiblackness* is perpetuated through educational policies and practices (Dumas & ross, 2016). Thus, Black-

Crit may help teacher preparation programs identify the *antiblackness* perpetuated through pedagogy, curriculum, discourse, and field experiences. However, teacher preparation programs must engage in the critical work necessary to address and dismantle the practices of *antiblackness*. For example, teacher preparation programs must provide opportunities for pedagogical practices (e.g., critical reflection, journaling; Shandomo, 2010). Also, teacher preparation programs must intentionally include curricula that promotes pro-Black perspectives. The following sections uncover the ways that *antiblackness* exists in ECE/ECSE teacher preparation programs.

Antiblackness in Early Childhood Teacher Preparation

The increasing amount of emotional and physical violence inflicted on Black and brown children and families in the U.S. has been the impetus for more critical consciousness among teachers in preK-12 settings, as well as teacher educators (Souto-Manning & Cheruvu, 2016). For example, in teacher preparation programs, preservice teachers are constantly engaging in field experiences that magnify the perceived deficits (i.e., unintelligent, lazy; Bryan, 2020; challenging behavior, unteachable; Wright & Counsell, 2018) of Black and brown children and their families as opposed to placing their focus on the assets that they bring to ECE/ECSE spaces.

Figure 1
Dismantling Antiblackness: Shifting the Paradigm in ECE/ECSE Teacher Preparation



Additionally, Shah and Coles (2020) emphasized the need to bring race and racial issues to the forefront of teacher preparation. The use of an *antiblackness* lens to dismantle hegemonic practices in early childhood teacher preparation is necessary. Shah and Coles (2020) stated that, “being a teacher in a nation where racism is endemic means that no one is exempt from being complicit or directly engaging in racism at points in their lives and careers” (p. 596). Further, with the influence of *antiblackness* on the everyday lived experiences of Black children and youth (Dumas & Ross, 2016), schools of education must examine practices and policies rooted in *antiblackness* (Waite, 2021). Thus, teacher preparation programs should work towards the dismantling of *antiblackness*, as it could interfere with Black children’s early and later development, and hinder Black family engagement.

Understanding Black Family Engagement

Black families of young children often engage in home and community-based activities. For example, Black families provide the space for learning activities in the home (e.g., reading books, asking about the school day, and activities in the community; Jarrett & Coba-Rodriguez, 2019). Black families’ engagement is positively correlated to future preschool competencies (e.g., persistence, attention, motivation; Jarrett & Coba-Rodriguez, 2019). Thus, Black families have educational expectations (Jarrett & Coba-Rodriguez, 2019) and dreams for their children (Matute-Chavarria, 2022).

Although Black families have dreams for their children, they have many negative encounters (e.g., bias, discrimination) when engaging with the education system (Matute-Chavarria, 2022) that leads them to disengage from the school (Loque & Latunde, 2014). In addition, there are several reasons (e.g., lack of access to screening, evaluations, and services) why Black families may not engage in ECE/ECSE services. Latunde and Clark-Loque (2016) found that Black families are interested in and desire to be a part of their children’s education. However, there are many challenges (i.e., racism, limited opportunities to engage, and not being invited) that sometimes prevent Black families from engaging (Fenton et al., 2017). For example, because educational environments are situated in White ways of being (Carela, 2019), Black children and their families are often viewed as inferior or deficient (Parks, 2018). Additionally, young Black children experience frequent degrading and racial assaults (Bryan, 2022) at school leading to increased feelings of alienation by Black families (Parks, 2018). Using BlackCrit as a paradigm-shifting framework, ECE/ECSE

teachers can address the challenges (e.g., Black families don't value education) Black families face when making the decision to participate in ECE/ECSE and/or when interacting with ECE/ECSE teachers. The following sections elaborate on the challenges Black families face when engaging in White normative schooling spaces.

The Value of Education

Because *antiblackness* is pervasive in schooling spaces (Dumas & Ross, 2016), school staff often perceive that Black families do not value education (Latunde & Clark-Loque, 2016). However, this is a misconception that teachers have regarding the engagement of Black families in schools. Howard and Reynolds (2008) found that Black families value education highly and have dreams for their children. Additionally, because Black families often engage in their child's education in the home (i.e., homework, recreational sports, church; Latunde & Clark-Loque, 2016), teachers tend to devalue these experiences because it does not conform to their narrow ideas of involvement/engagement (Boutte & Johnson, 2014).

The traditional and acceptable practices of engagement are based on a White normative perspective (Boutte & Johnson, 2014). However, this perspective marginalizes Black families and perpetuates *antiblackness*. Because these practices look different from the traditional ideas (i.e., visiting the school, attending parent nights), teachers are not prepared to understand different practices of family engagement and/or how these different practices may appear across different cultures. Additionally, teachers may not understand how these practices may impact the outcomes of Black children. Therefore, it is important for teacher preparation programs to prepare teachers to gain cultural competence on the dynamics and practices of how Black families engage with their child's education. This is key to dismantling the perpetuation of *antiblackness* within schools. For example, Souto-Manning and Cheruvu, (2016) support that when Black ECE teacher candidates are among their White peers, conversations surrounding Black children and families are rooted in White Supremacy and deficit language.

Lack of Cultural Sensitivity in Family Engagement

There are many cultural considerations (i.e., lack of cultural sensitivity and communication) that contribute to the lack of family engagement of Black families in schools. Due to the cultural mismatch, teachers often do not understand how Black families engage in schools. However, recent research is clear that Black families are engaged in

their child's education (i.e., communication between home and school) and communities (Latunde & Clark-Louque, 2016). However, because practices are based on the Eurocentric experience (Hyland, 2010), the cultural value for the practices of Black families are devalued and unacknowledged. This devaluing of culture is rooted in *antiracism*. Thus, it is important that teachers understand the dynamics of Black families and how they engage in their child's education. Teachers should create an environment for Black families to feel welcomed and part of the ECE/ECSE community. Schools and Black families would benefit greatly when teachers create environments that are culturally sustaining. When schools and programs are not willing to create these types of environments, Black families may be apprehensive to engage with teachers and their previous negative experiences (Loque & Latunde, 2014) may persist.

Alienated Due to Negative Experiences

Black families have addressed their negative experiences. For example, disproportionately suspended and expelled (Barbarin & Hoffman, 2017; Meek & Gilliam, 2016), overrepresentation in special education (Mahon-Reynolds & Parker, 2016; Wright & Counsell, 2018; Wright & Ford, 2016), and negative experiences with schools (Latunde, 2009). These negative experiences for Black children create barriers to engagement for Black families (Louque & Latunde, 2014). Consequently, the disparities experienced in school by Black children have caused tensions in the formation of the relationships that Black families have with schools (Delpit, 2012). Oftentimes, this leads to a lack of trust between Black families, teachers, and their child's school (Skiba et al., 2011). However, Black families may seek engagement opportunities through their community and churches (Latunde, 2017). Unfortunately, these engagement activities often do not fit the traditional ideas (i.e., visiting the school, attending parent nights) of engagement that are valued by teachers and schools.

Although Black family's negative experiences can lead to alienation, they may also lead to parent advocacy. Research indicates that parental advocacy in early childhood may promote empowerment, as it relates to receiving better services for children (Wright & Taylor, 2014). These opportunities for advocacy suggest that both parental involvement and advocacy could lead to long term academic advantages (i.e., less grade retention, less school mobility, increased reading achievement, and a lower rate of special education placement; Wright & Taylor, 2014) for young Black children.

Recommendations for Practice

There is much discussion in the literature regarding the improvement of teacher preparation programs for early childhood educators (McLean et al., 2020). However, a lot of this discussion centers on the fact that ECE/ECSE teacher preparation is complex. In this article, we have discussed ECE program standards in teacher preparation, as well as the disparity in ECE participation by young Black children and their families. We specifically offer what we believe are the issues with teacher preparation, and how that preparation leads to unhealthy engagement with young Black children and their families. We provide a thorough line (i.e., *antiblackness*) from ECE/ECSE teacher preparation to the ways that ECE/ECSE teachers engage with young Black children and their families.

As a potential reform mechanism for ECE/ECSE teacher preparation, BlackCrit can be used to address and dismantle implicit and explicit *antiblackness* teaching (i.e., the absence of culture sustaining practices). Specifically, in Table 1, recommendations are offered for programs that prepare ECE/ECSE teachers to work with young Black children and their families. For example, when there is no instruction regarding the implicit and explicit biases that preservice teachers may hold regarding young Black children and their families, programs could be intentional about providing instruction through self-reflection assignments. Another example might include providing preservice teachers with opportunities for internships and/or field experiences in communities that serve Black families. This could be a way for the pre-service teacher to address any deficit views that they have. Table 1, “*Recommendations: Dismantling Antiblackness in Early Childhood Teacher Preparation Programs*” is not an exhaustive list of recommendations, but it could be a good start for programs to implement reforms that address *antiblackness*, implicitly or explicitly.

Conclusion

ECE/ECSE programs are integral to the development of young children with dis/abilities. As such, organizations dedicated to the children who require these services created guidelines and standards for the preparation of pre-service ECE/ECSE teachers. Unfortunately, training programs in the U.S. have not fully addressed the implicit and explicit *antiblack* messaging present in the ways ECE/ECSE teachers are trained. To address these racialized and/or inequitable practices, teachers and educational researchers must first identify where *antiblackness* shows up in ECE/ECSE programs. For example, a colonized

Table 1**Recommendations:****Dismantling Antiracism in Early Childhood Teacher Preparation Programs**

<i>Antiracism Manifested in Teacher Preparation</i>	<i>Antiracism Manifested with Families</i>	<i>Opportunities for Teacher Preparation</i>	<i>Standards Addressed (NAEYC/CEC)</i>	<i>Recommendations for Instruction</i>
Lack of instruction on implicit and explicit biases (Ladson-Billings, 2014).	The perpetuation of implicit and explicit biases when engaging with Black children and families.	Provide instruction on implicit and explicit biases and the impacts those biases have on teaching practices.	NAEYC 6d, 6e. CEC 7.2.	Provide opportunities for a self-reflection paper on implicit and explicit biases. Provide an opportunity to engage in a privilege walk activity and/or White privilege checklist (McIntosh, 2020).
Deficit views and references towards Black children and families within courses (Souto-Manning & Cheruvu, 2016) and field	The use of deficit language when speaking about or to Black families in school environments (i.e., classrooms, hallways).	Address the inequities Black children and families experience from the literature (i.e., disproportionate suspensions and expulsion, overrepresented in special education, and deficit perspectives; Wright & Counsell, 2018). Address the strengths and positive aspects of Black children and families.	NAEYC 2a, 2b, 2c, 4c, 6d, 6e CEC 2.1, 6.7, 7.2.	Provide pre-service teachers the opportunity to volunteer or do field work in communities that serve Black children and families (Gay, 2018).

Table I (continued)

<i>Antiblackness Manifested in Teacher Preparation</i>	<i>Antiblackness Manifested with Families</i>	<i>Opportunities for Teacher Preparation</i>	<i>Standards Addressed (NAYEC/CEC)</i>	<i>Recommendations for Instruction</i>
Lack of asset and strength-based approaches to working with Black children and families (Paris & Alim, 2017).	Using a deficit lens when working with Black children and families.	Address the literature regarding the assets Black children and families bring to ECE/ECSE.	NAYEC 2a, 2c, 4c, 6d, 6e. CEC 2.1 2.3, 6.2, 7.2, 7.3.	Provide pre-service teachers with the opportunity to create a project that focuses on the assets Black children have. Reflect on the importance of using a strengths-based approach (Gay, 2018).
Lack of culturally sustaining pedagogical practices (Paris & Alim, 2017).	Difficulty building positive relationships with Black children and families due to lack of cultural sensitivity and awareness.	Embed culturally sustaining practices within <i>all</i> coursework using activities that build preservice teachers' cultural awareness and competence.	NAEYC 2a, 4b, 4c. CEC 2.1, 6.2, 6.3	Embed lessons and curricula that represent the dynamics and strengths of Black culture (Gay, 2018).
Lack of emphasis on culturally sustaining relationship building (Ladson-Billings, 2014).	Creating environments that are unresponsive and non-inclusive for Black children and families.	Provide pre-service teachers with instruction and activities on building relationships and trust with Black families.	NAEYC 2a, 2c, 4c, 6d, 6e. CEC 2.1 6.2, 6.7, 7.2	Provide teachers with opportunities to observe the interactions of churches (Emdin, 2016) and community-based organizations involving Black families.

curriculum, use of deficit-centered language, lack of culturally sustaining teaching practices, and lack of relationship building may illustrate the ways in which *antiblackness* appears in the preparation of early childhood teachers.

To combat /dismantle the implicit and explicit *antiblack* teaching in preparation programs, we offered BlackCrit as a framework. BlackCrit proposes that we acknowledge *antiblackness* and address White Supremacy within educational systems (Dumas & ross, 2016).

More research on how teacher preparation programs prepare ECE/ECSE professionals to dismantle *antiblackness* through curriculum and field experiences could enhance the way curriculum is designed, as well as enrich field experiences for pre-service teachers. BlackCrit as a lens of interpretation for disrupting *antiblackness* in teacher preparation programs offers opportunities for teachers to reimagine early childhood education for all children and particularly for those children who have been pushed to the margins.

Additionally, *antiblackness* in ECE/ECSE services was discussed as a roadblock to strong and meaningful relationships between early childhood teachers and Black families. Because young Black children (i.e., with and without dis/abilities) and their families are often viewed through the cloudy lens of *antiblackness*, it makes it very difficult for ECE/ECSE teachers to view young Black children (i.e., with and without dis/abilities) and their families as valuable members of the ECE/ECSE environment. We offered BlackCrit to clear the EC teacher's lens so that they might be better able to serve Black children (i.e., with and without dis/abilities) and their families. For example, we propose to use BlackCrit as a lens to identify biases in practices that serve to devalue Black families. Therefore, by using BlackCrit we can challenge the biases and racism that exist when engaging Black families in schools.

Finally, preparation programs should consider modeling culturally sustaining teaching (Paris & Alim, 2017) so that ECE/ECSE teachers can take these skills to their ECE/ECSE settings. Once there, they can use the skills and knowledge they learned in their programs to cultivate more meaningful relationships with young Black children and their families. By doing this, ECE/ECSE teachers can improve the academic outcomes of the young children in their charge. In fact, Bennett et al. (2018) reported that building meaningful relationships as early as Head Start and pre-K positively impact the students' readiness in all subject areas.

Although research on Black family engagement is growing, there is still a need to address the experiences of Black families that encounter early childhood teachers who engage in CSP. Additional research can

inform how early career early childhood educators use CSP to build relationships with Black children and families. If we are to truly make ECE/ECSE equitable for young Black children and their families, then it is time that we address the systemic issues present in the preparation of ECE/ECSE teachers. The schooling experiences of *all* Black children will not improve until there is an all-inclusive effort to acknowledge and dismantle *antiblackness*. In essence, we must critique the current pedagogies and practices of early childhood professionals and foster new ones that foster sustainable school-family connections. This must and should begin while the child is young.

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Building the On-Ramp to Inclusion

Developing Critical Consciousness in Future Early Childhood Educators

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Abstract

This article addresses the need to uncover and examine implicit biases of early childhood educators through the development of critical consciousness. As a key point of entry to the school system, preschool has the capacity to be an on-ramp to inclusive education, where diversity in its many forms is seen as a benefit to all and a natural part of society. But it could also be the on-ramp to the school-to-prison nexus, as diverse students—especially students of color and with disabilities — are expelled at higher rates in preschool and are

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found eligible for services in subjective disability categories that are more likely to lead to a segregated placement. Research indicates that racial biases, most often unconscious, are at play. The development of critical consciousness, particularly around the intersections of race and disability, is therefore necessary to build an on-ramp to an equitable and inclusive education for all students. Teacher educators have an ethical responsibility to model critical consciousness, facilitate difficult conversations, and emphasize the lifelong endeavor of reflection. Following the four core goals of anti-bias early childhood education, examples are provided from the authors' own college classrooms to support this work as a crucial component of high-quality early childhood educator preparation.

Keywords: Implicit bias, critical consciousness, preservice teachers, school-to-prison nexus, inclusion

Introduction

Inclusive education is founded on the tenet that the diversity of human beings should be valued and respected in schools, and that all children should have access to the same learning spaces and opportunities (Division for Early Childhood & National Association for the Education of Young Children, 2009). Early childhood teachers hold an honorable entry point, or on-ramp, into America's public school system as children transition from toddlerhood to the classroom setting. The on-ramp to inclusive education is critical, and not only for academic purposes. Research demonstrates that early childhood education leads to improved opportunities for education, employment, housing, health, and longevity (Meloy et al., 2019; Watts et al., 2018). In addition, children with and without disabilities benefit from inclusive education (Lawrence et al., 2016; Odom et al., 2004). For example, preschoolers with extensive support needs showed more progress on language and social development (Odom et al.; Rafferty et al., 2003) and elementary students with disabilities were engaged more often with the curriculum and peers, were provided more learning opportunities, and demonstrated greater progress in communication, literacy, and math skills (Gee et al., 2020). Within inclusive settings, children without disabilities showed higher levels of understanding, tolerance, friendships, and peer acceptance from their inclusive education (Kart & Kart, 2021).

However, students have historically been segregated by race and disability, even in early childhood settings (Ferri & Connor, 2005; Yell, 2022). With a majority white teacher workforce (de Brey et al., 2019) and the growing racial/ethnic and ability diversity of the student population, early childhood teachers must develop cultural, racial, and

disability literacy. Specifically, they need to integrate a critical lens to proactively challenge how implicit bias may hinder their relationships with and the success of the diverse young children with disabilities in their care (Kohli et al., 2017; Wetzel et al., 2021).

This practitioner report supports teacher educators and their students, from undergraduate and graduate-level credential programs, to collectively explore the implicit biases they hold to ensure an equitable pathway is guaranteed for all students. Through research, the authors identified three responsibilities of teacher educators for supporting this learning, which are described in detail. In addition, a collection of impactful instructional practices are organized around early childhood anti-bias goals (Derman-Sparks et al., 2020) to promote recognition of the relationship of biases to instructional practices. The purpose of such work is to set an authentic and meaningful foundation for future early childhood teachers by which they can develop an asset-based approach to working with diverse children with disabilities and their families, thus establishing the on-ramp to an inclusive and equitable education.

Literature Review

What is Implicit Bias?

Implicit bias is defined as an individual's "attitudes or stereotypes that affect their understanding, actions, and decisions in an unconscious manner" (Staats, 2016, p. 29). These automatic predispositions become problematic when they negatively influence one's interactions with and decisions about others, particularly children with marginalized identities, such as disability and race. Such biases are the building blocks to inequitable on-ramps, resulting in segregated learning.

In order to create a more equitable society, educators need to use critical thinking to examine these internal prejudices, a process identified by Paulo Freire as critical consciousness (Freire, 1998). Critical Consciousness (CC) occurs as people identify inner beliefs by assessing their words and actions, as well as the circumstances under which they occur (Bem, 1972). For future teachers of young children, the practice of CC is particularly important to identify how oppressive systems—including the educational system—have sustained and perpetuated inequities and how one's individual prejudices and practices may support or disrupt them (Jemal, 2017; McNeal, 2016).

Developing CC can occur through the lens of Dis/Crit, a theoretical framework that combines Disability Studies and Critical Race Theory to ground equity for individuals with intersecting marginalized

identities, by actively prioritizing the agency and voices of those individuals and engaging in a critical analysis of various oppressive systems (Annamma et al., 2016; Danforth, 2015; Goodley, 2007). The combination of CC and Dis/Crit provides vital tools for early childhood teachers to be a positive force in the lives of their students and families (Freire, 1974; Hancock et al., 2021; Love & Beneke, 2021). In doing so, teachers are empowered to support an on-ramp to inclusion instead of a segregated learning ramp and the school-to-prison nexus.

Why Should Early Childhood Teacher Education Address Implicit Bias?

Preschool has been called the “on-ramp” to success (Casey et al., 2019), a stepping stone to a more equitable education, where diversity in its many forms is seen as a benefit to all and a natural part of society. But preschool can also be an on-ramp to the school-to-prison nexus, an alternative trajectory for children that starts in their formative years. Young students of color, including those with disabilities, become part of this nexus, as they are closely monitored in classrooms, labeled as displaying challenging behaviors (i.e., noncompliance, hitting, biting, kicking) when no such behavior occurred (Gilliam et al., 2016), and suspended for misunderstood behaviors (Goldman & Rodriguez, 2021). Research indicates that such harsh disciplinary actions lead to academic failure, school dropout, and, ultimately, an increased involvement in the juvenile legal system (Bayat et al., 2010; Skiba et al., 2008).

Deficit thinking leads to a host of problems. Students of color receive more severe punishments for less serious offenses than their white counterparts (Skiba et al., 2008) and are expelled at higher rates. In fact, young black boys are expelled at a rate three times higher in preschool than in the K-12 population (Civil Rights Data Collection, 2014, 2021). Furthermore, preschoolers who receive special education services under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) are 2.5 times more likely to be expelled than their peers without disabilities (Civil Rights Data Collection). In addition, the disproportionate representation of students of color in special education has been present and consistent over time (Artiles, 2011; Artiles & Trent, 1994; Cruz & Rodl, 2018; Sleeter, 2010), often leading to removal from the general education placement (Ferri & Connor, 2005; Kohli et al., 2017). Specifically, African American and Native American students are overrepresented in special education in subjective disability categories, such as learning and emotional disabilities (Bal et al., 2014, 2017; Coutinho et al., 2002; Karagiannis, 2000; Zhang & Katsiyannis, 2002). Students of color also receive more

stigmatizing disability labels requiring more extensive support needs, and these tend to be equated with a need for segregated placements (Kurth et al. 2019). Startling statistics such as these indicate that implicit biases of teachers may influence their perceptions of and expectations for young children (Annamma & Winn, 2019; Wetzel et al., 2021), thus negatively impacting their educational experience.

Recently, research has indicated that students of color may be *underidentified* in special education (Farkas et al., 2020; Morgan et al., 2015, 2017; Wiley et al., 2013). This line of research has led to a hotly contested debate, as it flies in the face of decades of research detailing overrepresentation (Connor et al., 2019). Numerous researchers have raised concerns with the studies, including the oversimplification of identity markers (Artiles, 2017; Cavendish et al., 2020), the use of deficit thinking (Blanchett & Sealey, 2016), the methods used and the potential consequences to federal laws, policies, and funding for special education (Skiba et al., 2016).

In teacher education, educators cannot wait while researchers battle this out. Regardless of whether children are under- or overrepresented, they are not having their needs met: they are either not receiving the services that will help them succeed, or are having limitations placed upon them. Educators disagree with the idea that services should be provided only when a diagnosis or label has been identified. Instead, the authors see the role of teacher education as providing the knowledge and skills for teachers to address the needs of all the children in their care with competence and confidence (WestEd, 2021).

Using the frame of Dis/Crit, teacher education must move beyond talking about overrepresentation to doing something about it (Connor et al., 2019). The authors believe examining implicit biases is a good way to start, as educators can then better recognize the gifts and strengths in children to cultivate their development within inclusive settings. Through this asset-based approach, educators are better positioned to create an educational system that “is a doorway to opportunity—and not a point of entry to our criminal justice system” (Holder, 2011).

Methods

To develop this practitioner report, the authors examined their course syllabi, course evaluations, and student work across multiple courses from two universities in Northern California that offer programs in child development and the Early Childhood Special Education (ECSE) preliminary credential. The courses consisted of undergraduate and graduate students and were not exclusive

to students in those specific programs. The activities shared in this article were drawn from introductory courses in inclusive schooling as well as more advanced ECSE credential courses taught by the first two authors (and taken by the second two authors). Many of the students identified as people of color, female, and first-generation college students. Instructional practices were then analyzed through a DisCrit lens and grouped into categories based on similar purposes, which the authors aligned with the four goals of anti-bias education used by early childhood educators to teach young children (Derman-Sparks et al., 2020). The authors realized that all practices are connected by foundational responsibilities of teacher educators that cut across practices. To highlight these practices, assignments submitted by three separate students, one of whom was an undergraduate, are shared. The two graduate students held intern credentials, which meant they were working as the teacher of record in the classroom while completing requirements towards the preliminary teaching credential. Permission was first requested in writing, to share the students' work with current and future students. When developing this article, the authors again reached out for permission to use the students' work with their names. The students all responded affirmatively and approved of a final version of the article.

Responsibilities of Early Childhood Teacher Educators to Develop Their Students' Critical Consciousness

Early childhood teacher educators must intentionally create opportunities by which their students develop equitable instructional practices while they simultaneously analyze oppressive policies and practices, at both the institutional and individual levels. The authors propose that teacher educators have three responsibilities for developing the CC of their students: (1) model self-examination, (2) facilitate difficult conversations, and (3) emphasize the lifelong endeavor of reflection.

Responsibility #1: Early Childhood Teacher Educators Are Models

Teacher educators have the responsibility to serve as instructional models for their students. For example, in their college classrooms, teacher educators model how to be culturally responsive so their students, future teachers, are more likely to enact similar practices in their own teaching (Aleccia, 2011; Baumgartner et al., 2015). Teacher educators must integrate an asset-based approach in how they discuss

young children with disabilities by presuming competence, modeling the theory of Dis/Crit, and integrating relationship-building strategies during class activities that could be used with young children and their families, such as turn and talk, reflection activities, and check-ins.

Moreover, of high importance is how teacher educators teach and model CC. Jemal (2017) stated that teacher educators, by virtue of their authority, can demonstrate the work of CC and therefore support its development in their students. Teacher educators bear the responsibility of identifying their implicit biases and demonstrating reflective actions to disrupt them (Clark & Zygmunt, 2014). In essence, teacher educators model CC by intentionally weaving conversations, analysis, and advocacy into key aspects of educators' preparation.

Responsibility #2:
Early Childhood Teacher Educators
Are Facilitators of Difficult Conversations

In order to engage one's students in developing CC, educators first need to acknowledge that addressing these biases is a difficult and painful task (Jacobson, 2003; Watt, 2007). For people going into a service field, and certainly into education, it is difficult to acknowledge internal prejudices and the potential harmful effects to young children (Edge, 2019). As identifying biases contradicts one's sense of self, students may become resistant to engaging in and continuing this kind of reflective practice (Kumashiro, 2000). However, educators need to bring underlying biases to the surface to "better align our implicit biases with the explicit values we uphold" (Jemal, 2017, p. 31).

Teacher educators have the ethical responsibility to establish a safe and connected environment for their students to explore internal biases, especially in regards to the multiple marginalized identities of the children and families with whom they work. Students must also reflect on how those biases may appear in words and behavior, and determine what actions need to be taken (Jacobson, 2003; Kohli et al., 2017; Rausch et al., 2019). Let us be clear: safe does not mean comfortable. In fact, developing CC requires people to leave their comfort zone to explore the origins and effects of their previously unconscious biases (Zembylas & Boler, 2002). By sitting with the tension of difficult topics, students question what could produce their perceptions and what could disrupt them, resulting in individual and institutional changes (Greenwald & Lai, 2020; Houser & Overton, 2001). Teacher educators have the obligation to specifically create spaces for difficult conversations that examine

the lived experiences of the children and families with whom they work.

While conversations such as these can be difficult, dialogue can result in deep learning. In fact, Freire identified dialogue as a necessary element for developing CC (1974), which has been described as “listening with the willingness to have one’s mind potentially changed by what one hears” (Cohen, 2011, p. 414). In particular, dialogue and reflective questioning focus on the various systems of inequity, power dynamics, and necessary action steps for change (Garcia et al., 2009), a process that encourages social construction of meaning around educational equity.

Responsibility #3:

Early Childhood Teacher Educators Are Lifelong Reflective Learners

The goal is not to engage in CC only during one class, but for its development to progress during courses within the student’s program, emphasizing the need for this internal work to continue throughout one’s career. Teacher educators need to explicitly affirm that developing CC is an ongoing endeavor, and “that nobody is ever free of bias” (Mendoza et al., 2016). With new experiences and knowledge, individuals are constantly reorganizing information about the world around them and making sense of it. Continuous reflection brings possibilities for new ways of thinking, acting, and teaching.

Impactful Instructional Practices for Developing Critical Consciousness

The question of *how* to address implicit biases in order to disrupt ongoing discrimination has been the subject of much research (Calanchini et al., 2021; Fazio & Olson, 2003; Greenwald & Banaji, 2017; Lai et al., 2013, 2014, 2016). Devine and colleagues (2012) explained that individuals first need to be aware of bias and subsequently need to demonstrate concern over the consequences to both individuals and society. In particular, they noted that it is vital for individuals to be able to “translate their knowledge of bias reducing strategies into action” (p. 1276).

In this section, the authors provide numerous strategies, examples, and resources for developing CC. They believe that connecting the work of future early childhood teachers to the rights of and equity for young children is a way to highlight the consequences of internal biases. Therefore, the following learning activities were organized by the four early childhood anti-bias goals for early childhood education (Derman-

Sparks et al., 2020). These goals are: (1) Identity (children construct their own positive personal identities); (2) Diversity (children celebrate human diversity); (3) Justice (children recognize unfairness); and (4) Activism (children are empowered to act against prejudice). Using these anti-bias goals as an organizing framework, teacher educators can model the goals in a meaningful and authentic way and guide students in moving from the theoretical to tangible action in their own practices. The recommendations below allow teacher educators to consider where their students are in addressing implicit biases and can thus support the integration of similar activities throughout courses. Also, student comments and assignments are included that highlight their developing CC.

***Learning Activities to Develop Critical Consciousness
for Anti-Bias Goal #1: Identity***

When developing CC, identity requires examining and reflecting upon one's own experiences, assumptions, and privileges, and how these influence one's individual identity. This includes reflecting on one's experiences with and messages received from society about people with disabilities. Students engage in a process of rethinking what they have learned to be "true." The main goal is to turn their gaze inward to examine initial "gut reactions." Students analyze if and how implicit biases may prevent them from seeing the strengths of diverse students, and may lead to reactions that miss, and perhaps amplify, the needs of a child. In essence, students need to reflect upon how racist and ableist beliefs contribute to a negative view of a child and may interfere with their pedagogical practices moving forward. This is an effort that does not end.

Multiple activities are recommended to confront past experiences and assumptions. This is especially important as most have not grown up in an inclusive society; therefore, drawing students' attention to these sheltered experiences and the subsequent impact on one's perceptions of marginalized individuals is an important first step in examining implicit biases. Activities that explore identity include writing autobiographies and philosophy statements written through a Dis/Crit lens, discussing scenario-based vignettes that highlight common myths or biases, and viewing films to counter long-held stereotypes about people with disabilities.

Teacher educators also purposefully engage students in metacognitive activities that continuously examine their changing perceptions as they gain more information and insight. For example,

in learning about emotional and behavioral disabilities, a QuickWrite was used first, where students wrote five words that came to mind when thinking about children exhibiting “problem” behaviors. Then, they read an interview with Dan Habib about the documentary, *Who Cares About Kelsey*, and watched the trailer (see Wang, 2013). Next, students completed the IRIS module, *Addressing Disruptive and Noncompliant Behaviors (Part 1): Understanding the Acting-Out Cycle* (see The IRIS Center, 2005, 2022). Finally, they repeated the QuickWrite and reflected on how their words might have changed and why. This series of tasks challenged the students to reconsider their perceptions of behavior, allowing them to recognize the connection between implicit biases and deficit-based thinking. (Additional resources can be found in Table 1. The resources supplied throughout this article are by no means exhaustive, but have been used with success to stimulate discussion and support student learning).

Implicit Association Test (IAT). The Implicit Association Test was developed in 1998 (Greenwald, McGhee, & Schwartz) and is now

Table 1

Developing Critical Consciousness for Early Childhood Anti-Bias Goal #1: Identity

Teacher Educator Resources for Early Childhood Anti-Bias Goal #1: Identity
Harvard Implicit Association Test (IAT)

<https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/takeatest.html>

Countering Stereotypes via Films

- *Crip Camp* (Netflix)
- *The Reason I Jump* (Netflix)
- *Rebound* (Amazon)
- *Temple Grandin* (Amazon)
- *Including Samuel*, Dan Habib <https://includingsamuel.com/>
- *Far from the Tree Documentary*, Andrew Solomon www.farfromthetree.com/
- *Disabling Segregation*, Dan Habib <https://youtu.be/izkN5vLbnw8>

Examining Common Myths About Children with Disabilities

- *Myths: Dis/Crit Factors in Early Childhood* (Raush, Joseph, & Steed, 2019) www.zerotothree.org/resources/3094-dis-ability-critical-race-studies-discrit-for-inclusion-in-early-childhood-education-ethical-considerations-of-implicit-and-explicit-bias
- Scenarios can be generated from students based on their Hot Button triggers: https://challengingbehavior.cbcs.usf.edu/docs/Self-Care_Teachers.pdf
- QuickWrite before and after learning how to teach students with specific needs

housed in Project Implicit, a non-profit organization exploring the implicit bias of individuals on multiple topics, such as race, disability, religion, sexuality, and weight. This educational tool can be used within your courses to help students examine their potential biases toward individuals with disabilities. It is important for students to understand their results may be influenced by environmental factors, such as social media, culture, and experience. When using the IAT, ask them to identify and discuss their general feelings while they take the test(s) and upon viewing the results. It has been helpful to use this test in conjunction with watching a video, like Dan Habib's TedTalk, *Disabling Segregation*, and asking students to share how their experiences with people with disabilities (or lack thereof) may have molded their implicit biases. The tests can begin conversation about the influence of society and language on one's unconscious perceptions of others. For example, one student commented, "I need to continue challenging my own beliefs, keep my ableist privileges in check and most of all make space and be an active listener and allow the ones that I seek to ally and advocate to lead."

Researchers warn to not use the IAT as a standalone activity because students may be uncomfortable with their results, leading to distress or an outright dismissal of their potential for bias (Clark & Zygmunt, 2014). The IAT website notes that the results are not diagnostic of prejudices, but are rather "possible interpretations that have a basis in research" and make no claim to the validity of the results. Keeping that information in mind, this activity is a good entry point for initiating uncomfortable conversations about implicit biases.

Countering Stereotypes. Research has indicated that countering stereotypes can be a successful strategy for confronting implicit biases (Calanchini et al., 2021; Lai et al., 2013, 2014, 2016). In teacher education programs, one such assignment required students to watch the Academy Award nominated movie *Crip Camp*. Students were asked to consider how their understanding of disability studies, intersectionality, special education, inclusive education, and civil rights were informed by the movie. Specifically, students were asked: Did/how did the movie change your perceptions of disability and your role as an educator? Below is one student's response:

The things that struck me most about *Crip Camp* were the scenes that were so humanizing and just raw and honest and real (i.e. the camp getting crabs, the sexuality, the drag performance, the messiness and flirtiness of camp, and sarcasm, and just the true humanity of humans). It feels so wrong that I was struck by the need to humanize

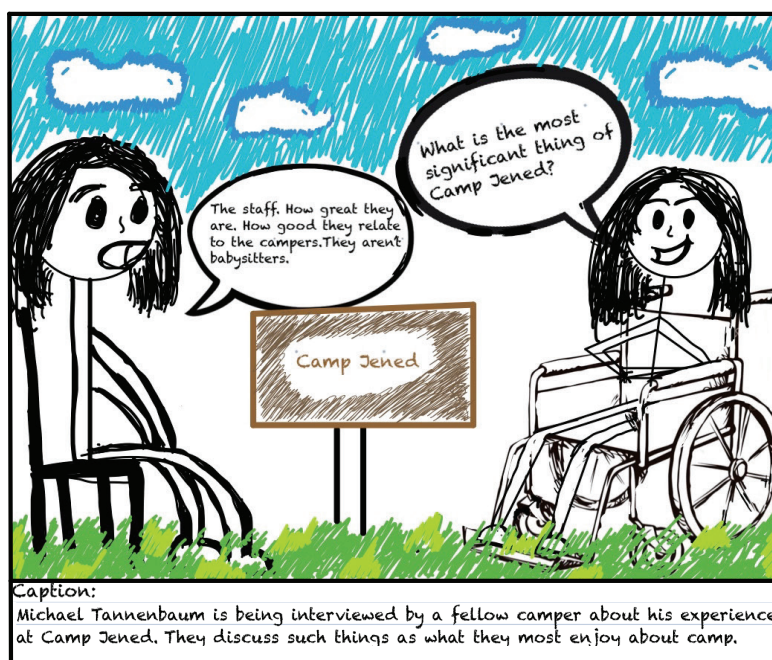
disabled folks because they are all human, and should not have to face dehumanization in the first place.

This quote demonstrates the students' own understanding of how oppression dehumanizes both the oppressed and the oppressor (Freiri, 1998).

Another student, Josephine Guzman, decided to share her thoughts about *Crip Camp* via a cartoon (See Figure 1 for one panel of her work), where she reflected on the inclusion of teachers of color to support student learning.

Figure 1

Assignment Submission of a Critical Reflection on "Crip Camp," by Josephine Guzman



As I watched *Crip Camp*, I started developing my thoughts between my current/future career in education. The main connection that I automatically resonated to was the way the campers talked about their counselors. In education building a bond with each student is how you gain trust and a connection. What I thought was most important about this scene is that the counselors understood their campers in their own unique and personal way. Now I see how working in a predominantly black and brown school is helpful for my students and I to build a connection because of our culture similarities. As I see this it's critical for educators to do their research and educate themselves to understand their students as much as possible.

**Learning Activities to Develop Critical Consciousness
for Anti-Bias Goal #2: Diversity**

As CC develops, it is necessary for individuals to reflect upon similarities and differences between themselves and others and to critically analyze the impact of inequitable systems on young children and families. In particular, the goal of diversity in anti-bias education is to promote “comfort and joy” with diversity, resulting in empathy towards and respect for people from a multitude of backgrounds (Derman-Sparks & Edwards, 2020, p. 5).

Intergroup Contact. Some of the most powerful learning occurs not from learning about people with disabilities but learning *from* people with disabilities. This strategy of intergroup contact has been successful at addressing implicit biases over time (Calanchini et al., 2021; Lai et al., 2014; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006). “Nothing About Us without Us” is the slogan of the Disability Rights Movement (Charlton, 2000) and educators need to honor that by providing learning opportunities from people with disabilities. Therefore, bring in members of the community who are recognized at the local, national, and international levels. One student commented, “I really appreciate how (the guest speaker) talked about her experiences and thoughts on disability studies. She had some great suggestions for teaching students with disabilities, especially in nontraditional ways.” An often untapped resource is local family resource centers. For example, in California, these are referred to as Family Resource/ Engagement Centers (FRC/FEC) and can be found on the Family Resource Centers Network of California website (FRCNCA, 2020) and the Seeds of Partnership website (Seeds of Partnership, n.d.). Teacher educators can connect with their local FRC/FEC to learn about their resources and to invite family members raising children/ youth with disabilities to share their personal experiences with their students.

Another way to learn from members of the disabled community is by reading their work and inviting students to reflect upon how their perspectives have been challenged and/or changed. After reading *The Reason I Jump*, written by an adolescent with autism, a student noted: “This book changed my understanding and perspective on my students with autism. My teaching has totally changed because of it.” (See Table 2 for additional recommended learning activities for intergroup contact).

Jigsaw Activities. As detailed previously, an integral strategy for developing CC is dialogue (Freire, 1974). The value of dialogue is derived from the cyclical nature of “reading, dialogue, reflection

and action” (Watts et al., 2011, p. 45), which has been supported by numerous researchers (Gutierrez & Ortega, 1991; Jemal, 2017; Smith-Maddox & Solórzano, 2002). A learning strategy centering dialogue is a jigsaw activity, where students learn about different aspects of a similar topic and then teach it to their peers. Students can learn from a variety of materials, such as blogs, videos, poetry, podcasts, children’s books, or music.

Within one class, students used TED Talk videos, where the speaker was a person with a disability, to compare the social and medical models of disability. Students chose one of multiple videos and met with others who viewed the same video to discuss and respond to guiding questions, while also being charged to develop questions of their own. Collaboratively, students created a presentation to highlight the learning they found most significant (the use of Google Slides or Jamboard is recommended so there is one space for the information). After the initial discussion, students moved to mixed small groups,

Table 2
Developing Critical Consciousness
Through Learning Activities for Intergroup Contact

Teacher Educator Resources for Early Childhood Anti-Bias Goal #2:
Diversity Learning Activities for Intergroup Contact

- Family panel, inclusion symposium of educators, disability activist guest speakers
- Discuss stories, memoirs, and fieldwork experiences using the following:
 - Higashida, N. (2007). *The reason I jump: The inner voice of a thirteen-year-old boy with autism*. Random House.
 - Harry, B. (2010). *Melanie, bird with a broken wing: A mother’s story*. Brookes Publishing.
 - Interactive story panel at: Solomon, A. (2012). *Far from the tree*. www.farfromthetree.com/
 - Saxton, M. (2009). *Sticks and stones: Disabled people’s stories of abuse, defiance and resilience*. World Institute on Disability.
 - Video stories at: Story Corps. (2003 - 2022). *Stories*. <https://storycorps.org/stories>
 - SBSK. (2018). *Special books by special kids: Normalizing the diversity of the human condition*. <https://sbsk.org/>
 - Case studies in: California Department of Education (CDE). (2021). *Inclusion works! Creating child care programs that promote belonging for children with disabilities* (2nd ed.). www.cde.ca.gov/sp/cd/re/documents/inclusionworks2ed.pdf
 - Videos of personal stories in: California MAP to Inclusion & Belonging: Making Access Possible (n.d.). *Video Collection*. <https://cainclusion.org/camap/resources-and-links/video-collection/>

where each student had experienced a different video. Instead of talking specifically about the content of each TED Talk, students compared their learning across guiding questions, using their recently developed presentations to facilitate the conversations. Below are student responses to this specific activity on co-constructed knowledge around disability through dialogue:

“I found the initial discussion so helpful and it also brought up new ideas for me to share with others.”

“It was nice to see different group’s ideas and how our slides connect, overlap, and relate to different existing ideologies, principles, ideas, themes, analogies, and symbols brought up in the (first) group discussion.”

“There was so much to learn and having in-depth conversations amongst all of us is awesome.”

Students were encouraged to discuss not only the specific content of each class activity but also how it related to prior learning experiences, as seen in this student comment: “The final line of the video about society taking a collective approach to prioritizing access is not only the main thesis of the video but a thru line that I see appear again and again in our readings.” (See Table 3 for a list of recommended resources for jigsaw activities).

Book Clubs and Literature Circles. Book Clubs and Literature Circles provide an excellent opportunity to engage with diversity and further explore previously unchallenged perceptions and attitudes. Guiding questions can be provided by teacher educators in a general format or specific to the chapter or source. In addition, students can generate the questions to lead discussions. Dialogue supports the development of CC by integrating new ideas and understandings into one’s view of self and by questioning and challenging long-held perspectives (Levy, 2011) (see Table 4 for a list of recommended books).

After a Book Club with selected chapters from *The Disability Studies Reader*, a student commented:

We discussed how issues around legal and cultural views of disability engender oppression, and reinforce segregation of Disabled individuals in school and society, limiting non-Disabled individuals interactions and thus opportunities to be presented with a reality that challenges their expectations, and so there’s a lack of opportunity for critical reflection about ableism biases, reinforcing the need to include voices and bodies of the Disabled living full human lives.

Language Usage. One way respect for human diversity is demonstrated is in one's language usage. Learning in the college classroom should examine varied perspectives. For example, in learning about the differences between the medical and social models of disability, students were asked to watch two TED Talks on autism (see

Table 3
Developing Critical Consciousness Through Jigsaw Activities

Teacher Educator Resources for Early Childhood Anti-Bias Goal #2: Diversity Jigsaw Activities

TED Talks

- TEDx Talks. (2018, Feb 13). *Changing the way we talk about disability*, Amy Oulton, TEDxBrighton [Video]. YouTube.
<https://youtu.be/4WIP1VgPnco>
- TEDx Talks. (2015, Sep 1). *The truth about growing up disabled*, Dylan Alcott, TEDxYouth@Sydney [Video]. YouTube.
<https://youtu.be/tvNOzJ7x8qQ>
- TEDx Talks. (2019, Mar 18). *DeafBlind: Blind but not blind*, JennyLynn Dietrich, TEDxSalem [Video]. YouTube.
<https://youtu.be/6uxZ4u6nses>
- TEDx Talks. (2018, Jun 7). *I'm deaf, but we can still talk*, Rebekah Afari, TEDxExeter [Video]. YouTube.
https://youtu.be/M3f_mENOQaE
- TEDx Talks. (2015, Jul 1). *I have one more chromosome than you. So what?* Karen Gaffney, TEDxPortland [Video]. YouTube.
<https://youtu.be/HwxjoBQdn0s>

Podcasts/Videos

- Wong, A. (Executive Producer). (2017 – 2021). *Disability Visibility: First-Person Stories from the Twenty First Century* [Audio podcast] Disability Visibility Project.
<https://disabilityvisibilityproject.com/podcast-2/>
- Heumann, J. (Executive Producer). (2021 – Present). *The Heumann Perspective* [Audio Podcast].
<https://judithheumann.com/heumann-perspective/>
- Heumann, J. (n.d.). Judy Heumann [YouTube Channel]. YouTube. Retrieved August 11, 2022, from www.youtube.com/channel/UCB7pemkbDQYezB6PeDFXTvg
- Swift Schools (Executive Producer). (2015 – Present). *SWIFT Unscripted* [Audio Podcast].
<https://swiftschools.org/unscripted>
- Villegas, T. (Executive Producer). (2012 – Present). *Think Inclusive* [Audio Podcast]. www.thinkinclusive.us/
- Moore, S. (n.d.). 5MM Library. 5 Moore Minutes with Shelley Moore.
<https://fivemooreminutes.com/inclusion-library/>

Table 5 for links). The first speech is by a medical doctor and the second is by Temple Grandin, a scientist with autism who earned a doctorate and is a leader in the field of animal husbandry. Students were asked to consider questions around the use of language and the models of disability in relation to each video. By challenging how language was used in the videos, and in particular how language portrayed ableist

Table 4

Developing Critical Consciousness via Book Clubs and Literature Circles

Teacher Educator Resources for Early Childhood Anti-Bias Goal #2: Diversity Book Clubs/Literature Circles

Books: 1st Person Accounts

- Heumann, J. (2020). *Being Heumann: An unrepentant memoir of a disability rights activist*. Beacon Press.
- Linton, S. (2007). *My body politic: A memoir*. University of Michigan Press.
- Longmore, P. K. (2003). *Why I burned my book and other essays on disability*. Temple University Press.
- Piepzna-Samarasinha, L. L. (2018). *Care work: Dreaming disability justice*. Arsenal Pulp Press.
- Sutton, M. (Ed.). (2015). *The real experts: Readings for parents of autistic children*. Autonomous Press. (Note: while this book is out of print, the blogs can be located individually online)
- Wong, A. (Ed.). (2020). *Disability visibility: First-person stories from the twenty first century*. Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group.

Books: Young Adult Novels

- Bell, C. (2014). *El deafo*. Abrams.
- Draper, S. (2012). *Out of my mind* (Vol. 1). Simon & Schuster.
- Erskine, K. (2018). *Mockingbird*. Usborne Publishing Ltd.
- Gerber, A. (2019). *Focused*. Scholastic Inc.
- Hunt, L. M. (2017). *Fish in a tree*. Penguin.

Books: Disability History and Rights

- Annamma, S. (2017). *The pedagogy of pathologization: Dis/abled girls of color in the school-prison nexus*. Routledge.
- Charlton, J. I. (2000). *Nothing about us without us: Disability oppression and empowerment*. University of California Press.
- Davis, L. J. (Ed.). (2016). *The disability studies reader* (5th ed.). Routledge.
- Longmore, P. K. & Umansky, L. (Eds.). (2001). *The new disability history: American perspectives (The history of disability, 6)*. New York University Press.
- Pelka, F. (2013). *What we have done: An oral history of the disability rights movement*. University of Massachusetts Press.

Table 5
Developing Critical Consciousness by Examining Language Usage

Teacher Educator Resources for Early Childhood Anti-Bias Goal #2: Diversity
 Examining Language Usage

TED Talks

- TED. (2014, Apr 28). *Autism—what we know (and what we don't know yet)*. Wendy Chung [Video]. YouTube. <https://youtu.be/wKlMcLTqRLs>
- TED-Ed. (2013, Feb 10). *The world needs all kinds of minds - Temple Grandin* [Video]. YouTube. <https://youtu.be/UKhg68QJlo0>

Person First vs. Identity First Language Videos

- Andrea Lausell. (2018, Apr 16). *Why I don't use person first language, #SpinaBifida* [Video]. YouTube. <https://youtu.be/lCajTVTj0-g>
- Annie Elaine. (2016, Nov 22). *Disabled person OR person with a disability?* [Video]. YouTube. <https://youtu.be/SMKKze48Qbo>

perspectives, students explored how the social model of disability can lay the foundation for the on-ramp to inclusion.

**Learning Activities to Develop Critical Consciousness
 for Anti-Bias Goal #3: Justice**

Justice entails recognizing fairness, or where it is lacking, and how people with “othered” identities are marginalized in society. Developing a CC around justice also involves recognizing how intersections of identities result in compounded oppression (Crenshaw, 2017).

Critical Analysis of Data. Teacher educators must challenge current practices and systems by intentionally presenting data from governmental reports and research, such as annual reports to Congress on IDEA and the Civil Rights Data Collection (2021). Specifically, when teaching about assessment and identification practices, teacher educators need to facilitate a critical analysis of inclusion/segregation statistics and disproportionate representation of students of color in various disability categories and the use of biased assessment tools, most often by race and/or language (Kohli et al., 2017). Teacher educators have an obligation to present data about expulsion and suspension rates of students of color, particularly boys, when presenting on Positive Behavior and Intervention Supports (PBIS), as observations based on white norms lack insight into their lived experiences (Wetzel et al., 2021).

Examining Intersectionality. Centering stories of real individuals and their experiences of discrimination can tap into one's humanity and provide keen insight into issues that cannot be fully understood through statistics (Neimand et al., 2021). Be explicit about the repercussions of the intersection of race and disability. For example, the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960's led directly to the Disability Rights Movement. In fact, the argument used to end segregation of schools based on race, "Separate is not equal," was used—albeit almost 20 years later—to end the educational segregation of children with disabilities. The similarities between these movements for basic human rights can be a powerful realization for students.

Students were directed to read the book *Warriors Don't Cry* by Dr. Melba Patillo Beals, a member of the Little Rock Nine who integrated Central High School in 1957. In addition, students watched an episode on school integration from the series, *Eyes on the Prize: Fighting Back (1957-1962)* and listened to a National Public Radio (NPR) interview with Dr. Beals, *'They Didn't Want Me There: Remembering the Terror of School Integration'* (see Table 6). (These materials contain derogatory and violent actions, images, and words, and may be disturbing and/or triggering). Specifically, students were asked to consider how the actions of those teenagers paved the way for education for students with disabilities. Instead of the standard college essay, students were encouraged to demonstrate their thoughts and learning across multiple resources in a manner of their choosing, such as a podcast, cartoon, or artistic creation. One graduate student, Leah Garcia, shared her learning via a poem, which demonstrates her explicit understanding about school segregation across identity markers (see Figure 2).

Another student demonstrated their CC of intersectionality in a written response to class activities:

When answering the question about how to integrate Disabled students into [general education] classrooms, I was reminded of the historical arguments between Booker T. Washington and W. E. B. DuBois regarding how to best navigate racism and segregation. Under this framework, should a DuBois stance of full integration now to halt current oppression, centering the lives of the Disabled, be taken for "general" oppression from Ableism?

Another graduate student, Jerome Tatum, also used a poem to illustrate how a teacher's implicit biases—disguised in "support" for the student—can stifle the potential of children (see Figure 3).

Other activities examining intersectionality include the use of videos, case studies, and stories to uncover the ingrained racism and ableism that impact the education system's youngest learners (See

Table 6 for additional resources for addressing the anti-bias goal of justice).

**Learning Activities to Develop Critical Consciousness
for Anti-Bias Goal #4: Activism**

Activism addresses inequities present in education settings and its larger system. Educators first must address implicit bias that supports the school-to-prison nexus and be purposeful in creating an equitable on-ramp to inclusive education. One's teaching is an act towards change and justice.

Establishing an Asset-Based Approach. In practice, CC requires

Figure 2
Assignment Submission on the Intersection of Race and Disability

Critical Reflection: Civil Rights

Leah Garcia

My thoughts are scattered, I do not know where to begin
How could education for all be a sin?
Black, brown, disabled, or queer
Because of The Little Rock Nine, our dreams are near.
The 14th amendment, ratified in 1868
Gave "equal protection to all"
But did not eliminate hate.
1896 "separate but equal," what a joke
We are still denying people the right/access to vote!
1954 "Brown v Board"
It took 33 more years for Section 504.
Melba and her cohort of eight
Walked into Central High without showing any hesitation in their gait.
In 1957 The Little Rock Nine
Lived in fear of being attacked from behind.
They paved the way for the Civil Rights Act of 1964
But wait... there is more:
It is not until 1990 that ADA was signed into law
But we still have to fight to change educational flaws.
Faith seems to be Melba's driving force
I will take her lead as I walk my course.
85% of prisoners have learning disabilities imagine a system where they had
received Special education services such as IEP's.
Dr. Melba Patillo Beals has confirmed my choice
to educate those who don't have a voice.
I will give them the platform to voice what they need
I will plant the seeds for them to succeed.

Issues in Teacher Education

an asset-based approach in how educators speak to, with, and about young children and their families (Rausch et al., 2019). In developing an asset-based approach, students learn first to presume competence, regardless of disability, race, or additional marginalized identities. In the college classroom, teacher educators model the use of language, and take ownership of and responsibility for mistakes. A student evaluation noted the use of language by an instructor: “She was very mindful of people in the class as well as the humans that we discussed. I appreciated her care and attention to the systemic issues around people with disabilities and intersecting marginalized identities.”

Teacher educators can advocate for a social model of disability that focuses on the whole child, and in particular their strengths, interests, and funds of knowledge (Biklen & Burke, 2006; Collado, 2021; Collins & Ferri, 2016). This can be done through consistent projects that require strengths-based descriptions of students and analysis of strengths-based language used in various spaces like classrooms, Individualized Education Program (IEP) meetings, and team meetings.

Figure 3
Assignment Submission on the Expectations
and Intersectionality in Special Education

Who Has a Learning Disorder?

Jerome Tatum

My teacher said, “Poor kid I know why you can’t read,
 It’s because you have a learning disability.
 Those things are permanent you see,
 so you will never be able to read like me.
 It would be a waste of time and effort to try and see.
 if maybe you could learn in a different way than we.
 It might seem unfair but it’s my responsibility,
 to make sure that we lower our expectations of what you can be.
 You should be glad that you have an IEP.
 Thank God for S. P. E. D.”
 After processing what I heard I said, “Look teach,
 I don’t believe that I have a learning disability.
 That’s a general diagnosis for a wide group of peeps,
 so much so that we really don’t know what you mean.
 And why when white kids struggle their cognitive ability,
 compared to me isn’t under the same kind of scrutiny.
 They still go class to class and earn their degree,
 while I’m stuck in the same class all day with the same teach.
 Have we considered racism, sexism or poverty?
 Maybe one of these is the reason I can’t read.”

Building an On-Ramp to Inclusion through Action Plans. Students will need guidance in setting achievable goals with actionable steps for implementing asset-based practices, facilitating inclusive education, and explicitly breaking down the school-to-prison nexus.

Table 6

Developing Critical Consciousness for Early Childhood Anti-Bias Goal #3: Justice

Teacher Educator Resources for Early Childhood Anti-Bias Goal #3: Justice

Critical Analysis of Data

- Office of Special Education Program's (OSEP). (2021). Annual Reports to Congress on the Implementation of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).
<https://sites.ed.gov/idea/annual-reports-to-congress/>
- Civil Rights Data Collection (CRDC). (n.d.). Special Reports.
<https://ocrdata.ed.gov/specialreports>

Media for the Intersection of Theory and Practice

- Barnard Center for Research on Women. (2017, May 9). *Ableism is the bane of my (expletive) existence* [Video]. YouTube.
<https://youtu.be/IelmZUxBIq0>
- PBS (Writer & Director). (2021, April 4). *Fighting back (1957-1962)* (Season 1, Episode 2) [TV series episode]. In PBS, Eyes on the Prize.
www.pbs.org/video/fighting-back-19571962-0wxrve/
- Davies, D. (Host). (2018, January 15). *'They didn't want me there: Remembering the terror of school integration* [Audio podcast episode]. In Fresh Air. NPR. www.npr.org/transcripts/577371750
- Brewster, J. & Stephenson, M. (Filmmakers). (2014, Feb 3). *American promise* [Video]. Point of View (POV).
<http://archive.pov.org/americanpromise/>
- *Intelligent lives*. A film by Dan Habib (n.d.). <https://intelligentlives.org/>
- The Opportunity Agenda. (2017). *Ten tips for putting intersectionality into practice*.
www.opportunityagenda.org/explore/resources-publications/ten-tips-putting-intersectionality-practice

Books for the Intersection of Theory and Practice

- Connor, D. J. Ferri, B. A. & Annamma, S. A. (Eds.) (2015). *DisCrit: Disability studies and critical race theory in education* (Disability, culture, and equity series). Teachers College Press.
- Baglieri, S. & Shapiro, A. (2017). *Disability studies and the inclusive classroom: Critical practices for embracing diversity in education* (2nd Ed.). Routledge.
- Baglieri, S. & Lalvani, P. (2019). *Undoing ableism: Teaching about disability in K-12 classrooms*. Routledge.
- Jacobson, T. (2003). *Confronting our discomfort: Clearing the way for anti-bias in early childhood*. Heinemann.

Depending on where students are located within their CC journey, these plans could range from further reading, to educating others about inclusion as a civil rights issue, to writing an advocacy letter to the superintendent. (See Table 7 for additional resources for addressing the anti-bias goal of activism).

Conclusion

Teacher educators must continue the challenging work of confronting one's implicit biases around race, disability, and other identity markers that are traditionally marginalized in our society, and

Table 7

Developing Critical Consciousness for Early Childhood Anti-Bias Goal #4: Activism

Teacher Educator Resources for Early Childhood Anti-Bias Goal #4: Activism

Resources for a Strengths/Assets-Based Approach

- Analyze the connections between a strengths-based approach, equity-based approach, and inclusive approach to writing Individualized Family Service Plans (IFSPs) and Individualized Education Program (IEP) goals and commit to apply to one's own practice (see Vandercook et al., 2021)

Resources for Action Plans

- Self-assess current inclusion practices at the state and local level through a DisCrit lens and identify priority areas for improvement (see ECTA, n.d., Tools on Inclusion)
- Self-assess barriers to inclusion using the Managing Complex Change framework (Knoster, 2000; Lippitt, 1987) and identify goals to advocate for an equitable inclusion on-ramp (see King, 2019)
- Identify specific practices that represent the Least Dangerous Assumption by using the TIES Center Inclusive Practice Series Tips and make a plan to implement in one's own practice (see Taub et al., 2019)

Resources for Advocacy

- Use current position statements and policies to advocate at the local and state level for inclusion as a social justice issue (see ECTA, n.d., Policy and Position Statements on Inclusion)
- Join your school/district level teams and committees that support students and integrate an equity approach in conversations and decisions
- Practice advocating for change using RAFT, whereby students craft their assignment by choosing one of each aspect (e.g., Role: student, teacher, desk; Audience: superintendent, community, school; Format: podcast, letter, OpEd; Topic: inclusion, ableism, intersectionality) (see Reading Rockets, n.d.)

support our students in doing so as well. Although one's biases may be unintentional, they can still perpetuate inequities, as evidenced by expulsion rates and over/under-representation of students of color in special education, and may lead children to the school-to-prison nexus (Artiles & Trent, 1994; Blanchett, 2006; Civil Rights Data Collection, 2021; de Brey et al., 2019; Ferri & Connor, 2005; Gilliam et al., 2016). In moving towards a more equitable, inclusive education, educators need to recognize misrepresentation as "a social, cultural, and historical issue" (Cavendish et al., 2020, p. 4) rather than as deficits located within the child (Connor et al., 2019).

Learning about internal, unintentional biases can be powerful, as seen in this student's comment about a disability studies class: "You've completely changed my perspective on teaching students with disabilities. Before I was resistant, now I'm engaged. It's their civil right and they deserve no less of an education."

Future research needs to examine students' perspectives of bias before, during, and at the culmination of teacher preparation programs. In addition to evaluating the development of CC, research should also evaluate its possible ramifications in early childhood learning environments. It is imperative for teacher educators to engage students in reflective practices towards CC for their practices to intentionally employ an asset-based approach with the children and families they serve, thereby providing the on-ramp to an equitable and inclusive education, where diversity is embraced as a joyful aspect of learning and living.

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Calling Authentic Leaders

Promoting Equity and Anti-Bias Curriculum for All Young Children and Their Families

**Conclusion to a Special Issue
of *Issues in Teacher Education***

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Introduction

Leadership in inclusive early childhood education and care is complex due to competing priorities, requirements, funding, and collaboration across related fields. There is a shared responsibility among professionals, institutions of higher education (IHEs), and state and federal bodies in prioritizing and promoting high quality early childhood education for *all* young children, regardless of race, ethnicity, native language, gender, and other characteristics (American Federation of State, County, Municipal Employees et al., 2020). Yet, many children continue to be excluded from inclusive settings including

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those with disabilities and other marginalized backgrounds (Connor et al., 2015; Harper, 2017; Lawrence et al., 2016; Love & Beneke, 2021).

Authentic leaders in early childhood can create more equitable systems that support the learning and development of young children and their families. Authentic leaders strive to elevate shared goals, build and nurture relationships with stakeholders, engage in lifelong learning, and embody behavior they wish others to exhibit (LaRocco & Bruns, 2013). Professionals seeking authentic leadership elevate their contributions to the field when they work intentionally to build relationships, capacity, and partnerships (Mitsch et al., 2022). Authentic leadership is demonstrated in different ways and therefore action must be taken across all levels of leadership within the early education system to achieve more equitable outcomes and overall well-being for *all* young children and families.

The articles in the special edition of *Issues in Teacher Education: Advancing Equity and Inclusion in Early Childhood Education* address the importance of engaging in critical consciousness on social identities (Urbani et al., 2022), as well as deconstructing power and privilege. Leaning into difficult conversations includes developing a deeper awareness of more equitable practices as seen in antiracist text selection (Spencer, 2022), as does utilizing BlackCrit in teacher preparation programs (Morris et al., 2022) in order to promote acceptance and inclusion for young children. Meaningfully partnering with families (Chiappe et al., 2022), reflecting on pedagogy and discourse, and utilizing more inclusive curriculum and instruction are shared for readers to consider their role in enacting change. Last, advocacy for regulation changes at the policy-level are needed to support inclusive practices for all young children (McKee et al., 2022). We can build from this work and commitment as authentic leaders.

As an extension to the articles in this special issue, we raise awareness to the topics of ableism and intersectionality as a way to better understand social identities and strengthen how we support children and families. In addition, we briefly share how adopting an anti-bias education (Derman-Sparks & Edwards, 2020) and DisCrit frameworks (Annamma et al., 2013, 2018) within the early childhood workforce can help to develop inclusive early childhood learning environments and elevate authentic leaders. These frameworks allow space for meaningful discourse and application in areas of early childhood workforce development, such as personnel preparation training, professional development, curriculum development, research, evaluation, consultation, policy, and advocacy. The discussion below provides an overview and perhaps a starting point for readers to check in and consider what their role is when embodying

what *authentic leadership* means to them in their work, and how they can continue to push the field forward to a more equitable, inclusive, and anti-bias system.

Ableism

As we envision early learning systems to promote acceptance and valuing of all social identities, we must also acknowledge the pervasiveness of ableism in our education systems that challenge these values. Ableism is defined as, “the negative or prejudicial beliefs about disability that arise from, and result in, the systemic oppression of people with disabilities” (Baglieri & Lalvani, 2020, p. 1). At the root of ableism is the belief of what is normal and valued in terms of abilities; if one does not exhibit these abilities they are viewed as less than. In the context of education, systemic oppression of people with disabilities may include policy, environments, pedagogy, and attitudes (Goodly, 2014). Ableism is rooted in special education as it excludes students with disabilities by placing them in separate learning environments, segregating them from the general education system that favors able-bodied individuals. This creates a negative view or ableist perception of disability. In personnel preparation programs, IHEs must work to “disrupt structural ableism and reimagine disability” (Keefe, 2022, p. 115). Others in the early childhood ecosystem must reflect on their unconscious beliefs and seek to break down barriers so that all individuals are included.

Intersectionality

Early childhood learning environments should honor the unique abilities and identities of each child and family. Intersectionality recognizes how social identities may overlap and impact each other, leading to increased discrimination/marginalization and/or privilege (Crenshaw, 2017). One cannot separate race, class, gender, ability, and other identities from one another; they are intertwined and evolve as one’s identity strengthens and shifts with personal growth. Each individual, including young children and their families, are part of multiple social and cultural groups, contributing to the formation of diverse social identities (DEC/NAEYC, 2009; NAEYC, 2020). These intersections are often complex, impacting the needs, characteristics, and experiences of the individual.

Early learning and teacher preparation programs must better understand and address how intersectionality impacts the workforce. Racism is present in early childhood through white cultural dominance

in education (Matthews & Jordan, 2019). Early childhood professionals, especially those in childcare settings, are more likely to be women, people of color, and work at lower income levels (Whitebook et al., 2018). We must seek to understand and disrupt oppression of not only young children and their families, but also honor the unique diversity of the early childhood workforce. The interconnectedness of one's identities is not complementary to an antiquated education system that has traditionally considered one or two identities when engaging with the early childhood workforce or the young children and families they impact.

Anti-Bias Education

Anti-bias education aims to foster a world where all children can grow and develop to their fullest potentials as valued members of society (Derman-Sparks & Edwards, 2019). Teachers are key leaders in teaching the four core goals of anti-bias framework, including identity, diversity, justice, and activism. This framework seeks to create a safe and supportive learning environment for every child as they navigate environments, adults, peers, routines, schedules, materials, and more. A young child's first exposure to education is within early intervention or early childhood learning environments and therefore, it is important they feel supported and a member of the classroom community (Sreckovic et al., 2018). It is within these learning environments that children can build confidence in their identity without superiority. Moreover, when a learning environment honors the core goals of an anti-bias framework, young children with and without disabilities are supported to be empowered to do what is right when faced with injustice in themselves or others, and honor human diversity (Derman-Sparks & Edwards, 2020).

Across educators, anti-bias education also requires reflection and deep understanding of our own experiences, backgrounds, and values (Derman-Sparks & Edwards, 2019). Reflective practice is defined as:

A way of working that spans disciplines and encourages staff members to a) consider the possible implications of their interventions while in the midst of their work; b) slow down, filter their thoughts, and more wisely choose actions and words; c) deepen their understanding of the contextual forces that affect their work; and d) take time afterward to consider their work and the related experiences in a way that influences their next steps (Heffron & Murch, 2010, p. 6).

When utilized in early childhood, reflective practice allows individuals to examine their own positionality, biases, and experiences, and

consider how this impacts their work within their own unique contexts. Reflective practice is ongoing and may serve as a foundation for any leader, especially teachers, seeking to understand how their actions support anti-bias practice within the greater early childhood ecosystem. Organizational supports must also be in place to support classroom implementation of anti-bias education. Anti-bias programming requires shifting away from dominant culture that permeates program's thinking, organizational structures and practice, and intentionally incorporates other cultural ways of thinking and doing (Derman-Sparks et al., 2020). All individuals must do their part to advance diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging (NAEYC, 2019). The Division for Early Childhood's [DEC] position statement on Ethical Practice (2022) outlines:

Regardless of their role or discipline, EI/ECSE [early intervention/early childhood special education] professionals must advance equity and inclusion for all young children and their families, particularly those who have been subject to historical and ongoing marginalization; use the best available evidence, including family and professional wisdom; collaborate with young children, their families, and other professionals; understand and adhere to all relevant legislation, policies, and professional guidelines; and engage in ongoing learning and reflection. (p. 13)

Specifically, faculty at IHEs and workforce leaders, such as administrators and program directors, have a responsibility to the early childhood field to uphold and promote ethical standards and policies within their scope of practice while they have a social influence on practices and policies (Nicholson et al., 2020; Division for Early Childhood [DEC], 2014; 2015; NAEYC, 2019). Issues of equity and social justice require us to change *what* and *how* we teach future educators.

DisCrit

In alignment with anti-bias education, DisCrit is a framework that draws from Critical Race Theory, Disability Studies, and other scholarly work to examine how constructs about race and ability, and subsequently racism and ableism, are often interdependent and work together to uphold ideas of normalcy (Annamma et al., 2013, 2018). Within the framework's tenants, there is a call to recognize the legal and historical acts that have suppressed, and continue to suppress these identities, and that activism is required for equity and social justice to honor and amplify these voices as experts (Annamma et al., 2018). The early childhood field sees the intersections of race and

disability with the disproportionality of children from marginalized populations in special education and the higher likelihood that they may experience discipline and/or expulsion in preschools (Aratani et al., 2011; US Department of Health & Human Services [USDHHS], 2014). The need for culturally responsive and justice-driven personnel in the early childhood workforce is indisputable (Love & Beneke, 2021; USDHHS, 2014). Moreover, authentic leaders must seek to understand the impact of policies and practices on the early childhood field, take action within their role and capacity, and intervene in the face of injustice.

Enacting Change at All Levels

Advocacy can come in many shapes, forms, and different levels (Stegenga et al., 2022). The promotion of meaningful inclusion can be supported by anti-bias curriculum, education, and care (DEC, 2020; Derman-Sparks & Edwards, 2019; Lalvani & Bacon, 2018). With the collaborative efforts led by the “Power to the Profession” initiative (American Federation of State, County, Municipal Employees et al., 2020) and work stemming from the Institute of Medicine and National Research Council (2015), it is predicted states and IHEs will be evaluating their current standards, requirements, and curricula to meet the evolving needs of the field, including the promotion of equity and inclusivity. In early intervention/ early childhood special education, new personnel preparation standards (DEC, 2020) promote inclusion and responsiveness to cultural diversity, encouraging reflection and action towards dismantling ableism and other forms of marginalization in personnel preparation (Love et al., 2022) and in-service professional development (Tomcheck & Wheeler, 2022). These initiatives provide a unique opportunity for stakeholders and personnel at different levels of the greater early childhood workforce to be informed, follow their intuition, and partner together with those from diverse backgrounds and histories, including those with intersectional identities and those with different lived experiences.

Whether one’s role focuses on personnel preparation training, professional development, research, policy, or advocacy, all individuals must do their part to dismantle oppressive systems and advance diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging (NAEYC, 2019). Further, there is a need for interaction across personnel, professional preparation and development, and local, state, federal, and organizational governing bodies in order to best support the early childhood workforce and ecosystem (DEC, 2014, 2020). It is time to rise to the occasion for

all early childhood personnel to reflect on their role, their actions, and embody authentic leadership in their own context.

Conclusion

While there has been awareness and a growing discussion, inequities in our current systems of early childhood learning and care continue to exist for many children and families including individuals of color and/or diagnosed with disabilities. There is an ethical and shared responsibility for every individual to do their part in leading the disruption of oppression and separation that have historically been the status quo in early childhood. Without intentional action of individuals at different leadership levels of the early childhood ecosystem, including the workforce development (e.g., personnel preparation, professional, policy, advocacy), outcomes and overall well-being of all young children and families will remain stagnant. Adopting anti-bias education (Derman-Sparks & Edwards, 2020) and DisCrit frameworks (Annamma et al., 2013, 2018) within development of the early childhood workforce can help to develop inclusive early childhood learning environments and elevate authentic leaders who go on to directly impact young children and their families. Persistent advocacy and standing up for what is right in the face of injustice ensures early childhood learning environments honor diversity and are accessible and inclusive to *all* young children.

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Issues in Teacher Education

Guidelines for Submissions

Issues in Teacher Education (ITE) is a peer-reviewed journal published twice yearly by the California Council on Teacher Education (CCTE). The journal publishes original manuscripts focusing on topics, concerns, and methodologies for improving the quality of teacher education, broadly conceived to include pre-service preparation, the induction years, and the professional development of career teachers. The journal welcomes submissions in a variety of genres, including empirical research, philosophical or theoretical investigations, reports by practitioners in various field settings that ground teacher preparation (e.g., descriptions of innovative practices/curriculum situated in the literature), and book reviews related to the theme. All submissions must be scholarly in nature and demonstrate substantive knowledge of teacher education as a field of study. Submissions should be between 5000-7000 words (exclusive of references).

Manuscripts are reviewed year-round. To submit a manuscript for publication consideration, please click on the submission portal on the journal's website (www.itejournal.org) to begin the electronic submission process. ITE uses Open Journal Systems (OJS), a user-friendly online manuscript submission and review interface that allows authors to track the review process in real time. If you are a new user, click on "Register" in the upper right corner of the screen and follow the prompts to complete the registration process. You will receive a confirmation email with your user name and password. Login to the website again and follow the steps for Author and/or New Submissions. Additionally, please consider signing up to serve as a reviewer at this time, as well. A pool of responsive and active reviewers is crucial to maintaining the rigor and quality of publications, as well as to the health and well-being of the journal as a whole.

Manuscripts should follow the style outlined in the most recent edition of the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association* and should be submitted in Microsoft Word. Submitted files should: be "blind" (all identifying information removed, including in Word's "properties"); have "track changes" turned off; use 12-point font; be unlocked; and not exceed 2 MB in size (including embedded graphics, if any). If your submission includes graphics, you may need to consult your institution's electronic media department for assistance in re-sizing them to assure they do not make the Word document in which they are embedded too large. Graphics should be camera ready at the time they are embedded in the Word document, and if published, will be reproduced in the journal in black and white. *Issues in Teacher Education* will not consider manuscripts that do not meet these style or electronic file standards.

Please send editorial correspondence to:

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Information on the California Council on Teacher Education

Founded in 1945, the California Council on Teacher Education is a non-profit organization devoted to stimulating the improvement of the preservice and inservice education of teachers and administrators. The Council attends to this general goal with the support of a community of teacher educators, drawn from diverse constituencies, who seek to be informed, reflective, and active regarding significant research, sound practice, and current public educational issues.

Membership in the California Council on Teacher Education can be either institutional or individual. Colleges and universities with credential programs, professional organizations with interests in the preparation of teachers, school districts and public agencies in the field of education, and individuals involved in or concerned about the field are encouraged to join. Membership entitles one to participation in semi-annual spring and fall conferences, complimentary subscriptions to *Issues in Teacher Education* and *Teacher Education Quarterly*, newsletters on timely issues, an informal network for sharing sound practices in teacher education, and involvement in annual awards and recognitions in the field.

The semi-annual conferences of the California Council on Teacher Education rotate each year between sites in northern and southern California, feature significant themes in the field of education, highlight prominent speakers, afford opportunities for presentation of research and discussion of promising practices, and consider current and future policy issues in the field.

For information about or membership in the California Council on Teacher Education, please contact: Alan H. Jones, Executive Secretary, California Council on Teacher Education, Caddo Gap Press, 3145 Geary Boulevard, PMB 275, San Francisco, California 94118; telephone 415/666-3012; e-mail alan.jones@ccte.org; website www.ccte.org.

The next semi-annual conference of the California Council on Teacher Education will be the Fall 2022 Conference, October 20-22, which will be held in-person at the Kona Kai Resort in San Diego, as well as virtually. For details see the CCTE website (see above).

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- Participation in ongoing deliberations about teacher education policy in California and nationally;
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Call for Proposals for CCTE Conferences

The California Council on Teacher Education (CCTE) invites submission of proposals for each of its semi-annual conferences which address: (1) Research related to teacher education, including policy issues, classroom-based issues, teacher effectiveness, or other related topics; (2) Projects or programs reflecting best practice; and (3) Other innovative sessions related to teacher education. While proposals specifically related to the theme of each conference are desired, other topics within teacher education are always considered and often accepted. Proposals are invited for several diverse formats: presentations, roundtables, demonstrations, interactive sessions, and poster sessions.

General Procedures: CCTE is interested in receiving proposals from faculty directly involved in teacher education programs, school district personnel engaged in teacher development efforts, and graduate students conducting research related to teacher education.

How To Submit Proposals: Go to the CCTE website (www.ccte.org) to complete the online proposal submission which involves the following information: proposal title; lead author name; affiliation; address; work and home telephone numbers; and email addresses; along with an indication of whether the proposal focuses on research, practice, or policy analysis; and the preferred session format. Then attach your blinded proposal as a Word file.

Content of the Proposal: Include the following: A brief overview of the study/project/program session including purpose/objectives, theoretical framework, methods, data source, results/conclusions/points of view, and significance to the field of teacher education.

Criteria for Selection: The criteria are: the proposal contributes to the knowledge base of preservice and inservice teacher education; the proposal is methodologically or theoretically sound; the proposal format is well organized and clearly described; and the proposal clearly states its significance for teacher educators.

Deadlines: The deadline for proposals for spring conferences is January 15 of the year of the conference. The deadline for proposals for fall conferences is August 15 of the year of the conference.

Questions: Questions may be addressed to the co-chairs of the CCTE Research Committee:

Kimiya Maghzi, kimiya_maghzi@redlands.edu
Marni Fisher, mfisher@saddleback.edu

Issues in Teacher Education Subscription Form

Issues in Teacher Education, a semi-annual journal of the California Council on Teacher Education, focuses on topics, concerns, and methodologies for improving the quality of teacher education, through publication of empirical research, philosophical or theoretical investigations, reports by practitioners (e.g., descriptions of innovative practices/curriculum situated in the literature), and book reviews. The journal is emailed each spring and fall to all members and delegates of the California Council on Teacher Education, and subscriptions are available to other interested individuals or institutions.

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