RACIAL IDENTITY MATTERS IN PRESCHOOL ENVIRONMENTS

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Many teachers have good intentions but are not prepared to engage students, colleagues and parents in conversations about race and Black racial identity. This inquiry postulated that learning about Nigrescence theory helps educators better understand Black racial identity development. Accordingly, a cohort of urban early childhood teachers undertook capacity building activities through a pilot professional development program to learn about affirming young children's racial identities. Participants evaluated the professional development and participated in interviews. They also engaged in open-ended journaling to capture and share their lived experiences.

A deeper understanding of the four teachers that participated in four professional development sessions has been achieved. This interpretive description study captures the experiences and strategies of urban preschool teachers and their journey over four months. They learned about Black racial identity, implemented strategies and reflected upon how they affirm the identity of the children they serve. These teachers revealed a deeper understanding of Nigrescence theory and recognized their role in affirming the racial identity of their students. The identity of each teacher matters, and they reported a deeper understanding of Black racial identity development as a result of the pilot professional development program. It helped them to better understand the children they serve and how their actions influence students.

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PREFACE

The journey toward obtaining a doctorate degree and accomplishing this goal hasn't been easy and would not be possible without the prayers, encouragement, love, and support from family, colleagues, and friends. I am thankful that I seized the opportunity to enter the cohort program at the University of Pittsburgh and connect with other professionals that were working while they engaged in doctoral studies. I met professionals that were insightful, compassionate, and supportive. I am tremendously thankful for this experience and continue to be committed to serving as a racial equity leader and role model for my biological and school children.

I will begin with thanking my maternal and fraternal grandparents for instilling the need for education into my parents. My parents were the first in their families to go on to college and obtain a degree. Their modeling influenced me greatly. I was taught by my parents that every generation is to do better than the generation before them. So, I thank my mother for encouraging me and praying for my strength throughout this process. I would also like to thank my dad, who is a retired educator. Your experience and practical yet insightful suggestions have been meaningful and helpful throughout my career as an educator.   Thanks so much for your support and listening ear about serving as a principal and its challenges.

Next, I would like to thank my husband, Korey. I thank you for everything you do to "fill in the gap" with our children while I worked toward this degree. You are every bit of amazing and I thank you for encouraging me and making me laugh when I wanted to cry during

this journey. To my children, Robinson and Miyari, thank you for being who you are and for igniting this desire in me to better understand what can be done for Black children in schools to affirm their racial identity. Your experiences and challenges in preschool were the catalyst of my interest in Black racial identity development.

I would also like to acknowledge, Osly Flores and Christina Scanlon. Osly is a friend and scholar who has supported me during the last year of my studies and is a partner in working to elevate equity in schools and provide educators with information and tools to make schools more equitable environments. Christina was masterful in helping me analyze and interpret statistics. I am grateful for your expertise.

To my committee members: Drs. Mary Margaret Kerr, Michael Gunzenhauser, and Aisha White. I thank you for supporting me and agreeing to serve on my committee. Thank you for the feedback, questions, advice and encouragement. Your expertise, engagement with my study and insight were critical and truly appreciated.

1.0   INTRODUCTION

At 35 years old, I had my second child and immediately began to realize that she had a strong sense of who she was and what she wanted. When she entered daycare, she immediately began to make friends who happened to be brown girls. She enjoyed playing with everyone, but specifically preferred to play with the girls that looked like her. I immediately became interested in this phenomenon.

African Americans must simultaneously negotiate three areas of experience, (1) the mainstream, (2) the minority, and (3) the Black cultural experience (Boykin & Toms, 1985). I wondered what was driving her interest, sense of self and was curious about what was occurring in our home and at school that influenced her preferences. At the same time, my son was entering his second year in a new school. He was experiencing challenges with seeing himself in the school, specifically in the content and wondered why the adult educators didn't look like him. He often asked questions about who he was racially and why there wasn't anyone in the school that looked like his dad. He was receiving messages and being socialized while at school but did not have the language to express his experiences.

Socialization not only occurs in the home, but also while in school. It is a process that parents engage in to prepare their children for interactions and life beyond the immediate family (Thompson, 1994). However, Black parents engage in racial socialization. Peters (1985) argued that Black parents have the responsibility to raise healthy children that are physically and

emotionally prepared to be Black "in a society in which being Black has negative connotations" (p.161). Their school experiences and socialization were the beginning of my interest in the role that teachers have in affirming the racial identity of Black children they serve.

Racial identity is defined by Helms (1990) as "a sense of group or collective identity based on one's perception that he or she shares a common racial heritage with a particular racial group" (p. 3). Prior to desegregation, the racial identity of Black children was affirmed because segregated schools were places where Black children received instruction from Black teachers and developed a strong set of values about education, religious faith, and racial uplift (Steele, Perry & Hilliard, 2004). Racial identity is also referred to by DuBois (1903) as double consciousness of being a Black person living in America and a problem based on how white people see him. Understanding DuBois' definition of double consciousness can be helpful to educators, so they can consistently support Black children in negotiating their racial identity.

Positive Black racial identity was negatively influenced when American schools became desegregated. Desegregation forced Black children to assimilate into White society and give up their identity (Rury, 2005). Children of color should be encouraged to maintain their racial identity and educators play a significant role in helping them do that. It is important because Black children succeed using their racial identity and socialization in response to racism and oppression as a means of knowledge production and self-actualization (Hanley & Noblit, 2007). Therefore, research is needed to investigate how preschool teachers influence racial identity for students within their classrooms and respond when issues of race and racial identity emerge.

Early childhood classrooms in the United States are becoming increasingly more diverse and many early childhood educators have been slow to respond to these shifts in diversity. Kowalski (2003) shows that children not only recognize race from a very young age,

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but also develop by ages three to five racial biases that do not necessarily resemble the racial attitudes of adults in their lives. However, Copenhaver-Johnson (2006) suggests that Whiteness and privilege are not scrutinized, and it is invisible in their lives, which results in white children and white educators remaining silent about race and racism. The silence teaches Black children that their painful reality does not matter and negatively influences their racial identity. Developing and using one's racial identity to negotiate a racist society has positive impacts on senses of efficacy and self-understanding (Beardslee, 1989). Teachers have a responsibility to contribute to the development of positive racial identities in the children they serve. If this occurs, hopefully all children will have a deeper connection with their own racial group, which will positively influence social, emotional and academic outcomes.

1.1   WHY FOCUS ON RACIAL IDENTITY IN PRESCHOOL ENVIRONMENTS

Research has shown that very young children notice race through differences in physical characteristics. Adult behavior and indirect social interactions also influence their racial identity. Patterson and Bigler, (2006) suggest children collect information from the world around them to actively construct their own beliefs. So, while children are spending time daily in school, they are collecting information from that environment, thus teaching young children what is important. However, teachers aren't currently engaging with specific curriculum resources that support racial identity development, and they receive minimal professional development. Husband (2012) suggests that "anti-racist education must be implemented, and it seeks to exist in direct contrast to what is presented and implemented in schools due to the belief that schools are racist by being reflections of a larger racist society" (p.366). Anti-racist education is about

addressing "the smog in the air" (Tatum, 1997) and educators must explore topics of race and racism themselves while preparing to support students by facilitating conversations about these issues in a developmentally appropriate way. Silence or inaccurate information are not the answers. This inquiry addresses the absence of professional development in the preschool program that would enable teachers to affirm children's positive racial identity and serves as a call to action for educators in preschool environments. I believe educators have a responsibility and obligation to engage in conversations by enriching the curriculum so that Black children see themselves in the content.

Racial identity develops in predictable ways and it is a process that begins to unfold in adolescence; however, the seeds for identity are planted much earlier. Feeling good about self and having self-esteem are important. Our sense of who we are in the world is based on what people have reflected to us and is based on the feedback and messages received, which ultimately influences identity (Tatum, 1997). Young children can categorize people by race, but they are often not able to categorize a person according to multiple dimensions at once which suggests the immature cognitive structures of preschoolers make them rife for stereotyping (Aboud, 2008). The teachers I collaborate with have expressed an interest in developing a better understanding of how to respond when issues of race emerge, specifically during play, when students make honest statements or ask questions that involve race. These preschool teachers frequently share stories about how students are using color words to describe their friends and often see and hear issues when students are playing. They have engaged in equity training previously, but some still express an interest in what can be done to positively influence each child's racial identity. Van Ausdale and Feagin (2001) remind us that educating children about these issues "requires that we rethink our ideas about several dimensions of everyday life,

including the nature of racial and ethnic oppression, the intellectual capacity of children, our willingness to effect changes in oppressive social conditions, and the extent of children's social skills" (p. 199). Young children are experiencing life and receive messages daily from their peers, teachers, and parents. Those messages, positive and negative, shape who they are and how they see themselves in the world. Teachers in preschool environments have a responsibility to acknowledge who the children before them are and strategically engage them in content where they see themselves. They must also and respond in ways that allow children to explore who they are racially and others frequently and honestly.

1.2 PURSUING POSITIVE RACIAL IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT

Youth spend a significant amount of time outside of the family context and it is imperative to understand the role that "nonfamilial socialization agents and contexts play in ethnic and racial identity formation" (Umana-Taylor et al., 2014, p.31). With that in mind, this study has the potential to support capacity building of teachers. To be effective, I believe teachers should be knowledgeable about their own racial identity and the racial identity of the children they teach. Teachers have a responsibility to positively influence the racial identity of the children they serve. If this occurs, hopefully all children will have a deeper connection with their own racial group, which will positively impact social, emotional and academic outcomes. Developing and using one's racial identity to negotiate a racist society has positive impacts on senses of efficacy and self-understanding (Beardslee, 1989) which can ultimately lead to an achieved status if using Cross's Nigrescence model.

The perspective of preschool teachers showed how they identify racially and the practices used to develop racial identity with the students they serve. This perspective also elevated challenges and limitations related to engaging students in curricular activities that positively influence racial identity. Tatum (1997) suggests children learn lessons early about race and adults should talk about it in developmentally appropriate ways. Participants provided information about how they responded to children when issues of race or racial identity emerged. Their perspectives, challenges, and experiences were documented descriptively and evolved throughout a four-month time frame.

1.3   INTERPRETIVE DESCRIPTION

The purpose of the inquiry was to document lived experiences and explore change within a context of practice. The problem was explored by engaging a cohort of teachers in capacity building activities through a pilot professional development program and then evaluating the program through written feedback, participant interviews and journals. This approach was taken so that data collection and analysis occurred simultaneously (Mertens, 2015, p. 248) to capture a summary of events. The qualitative method of interpretive description offered a "comprehensive summary of events in the everyday terms of those events" (Sandelowski, 2000, p. 336). It was applied to a pilot professional development program and the lived experiences of the participants. The study was designed to constantly compare data about what was happening within the classroom and during learning sessions with teachers, resulting in a two-pronged study. Describing the phenomenon allowed me to capture what occurred during the pilot program. I was able to notice and document experiences or facts about the participants which

provided choice in what I described (Sandelowski, 2000, p. 336). With choice, construction of data occurred through the data collection process. As the researcher, I played an active role by continually reflecting and asking questions so that there was a logical reasoning process that provided answers to my research questions but also informed ongoing data construction.

First, this research evaluated the implementation of a pilot professional development program to increase preschool teachers' understanding of Black racial identity and what they can do in the classroom. The program relied on Cross's (1991) Nigrescence theory to put into context the stages of identity that occur developmentally with Black people over the lifespan. Competency in Nigrescence can serve as a reference for educators and help them support Black students' relationships with their peers and teachers (Cross, 1991). I used pre-post tests and journaling to measure changes in knowledge about Nigrescence and racial identity development. My goal was to understand change in knowledge and understanding about the theory while also understanding experiences teachers were having as they learned and used resources to affirm the identity of the students they serve. Quantitative analysis of the pre and post test data was challenging because of the sample size. However, understanding was gleaned from qualitative analysis by examining the changes in open-ended responses, which are described later.

The second component of this study included interviewing preschool teachers and providing open-ended journal prompts to share experiences in the classroom that documented resources and strategies used along with experiences that involved racial identity development with their students. Teachers also described what occurred in the classroom to influence positive racial identity which they believed was critical when supporting Black children. Gaining a deeper understanding of the participants as racial beings and their understanding of the students

as racial beings provided information about what they do in their classrooms. Learning about Nigrescence theory helped them better understand racial identity development as well as use strategies and practices that can positively influence racial identity of Black students.

1.4   SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS STUDY

Umana-Taylor et al. (2014) remind us that youth spend a significant amount of time outside of the family context and it is imperative to understand the role that "nonfamilial socialization agents and context play in ethnic racial identity formation" (p.31). This study's potential was capacity building by providing teachers with information and resources that helped them engage students in racial socialization which supports the development of racial identity. Nigrescence theory helped the participants better understand Black racial identity stages as well as identify strategies and practices that can use. I suggest knowledge of self and awareness of others culturally, socially, racially, and emotionally helps educators to be competent and effective. Mertens (2015) clarifies the meaning and importance of cultural competence:

> Cultural competence is not a state at which one arrives; rather, it is a process of learning, unlearning, and relearning. It is sensibility cultivated throughout a life-time. Cultural competence requires awareness of self, reflection on one's own cultural position, awareness of others' positions, and the ability to interact genuinely and respectfully with others. (p. 23)

Here, Mertens elevates that need for practitioners not to make assumptions about people whose backgrounds differ from their own. Race and racial identity are complex constructs and the dynamics of power, bias, and stereotypes are often at play within school environments. I believe, these constructs are often not explored and discussed consistently by educators.

In this study, the pilot program had an impact on teacher efficacy as they used specific practices that positively influence racial identity. Because of the inquiry, I hope the participants continue to demonstrate increased levels of cultural competency and use the meaningful new knowledge gained.

1.5 DEMONSTRATION OF SCHOLARSHIP

In addition to conducting this research, I have compiled all resources from the professional development modules and will share the modules with local school districts and early childcare centers. I have presented to preschool teachers across a large urban school district and in early childcare settings. This study elevated the need for additional training and one of the participants identified other learning opportunities to engage.   It also contributed by building the capacity of teachers and adding to the research from Hughes and Chen (1997) that supports racial socialization as parental practices that communicate messages about race or ethnicity to children. Teachers are caregivers in the absence of parents and send messages to children that are verbal, non-verbal, deliberate or unintended. My hope is that the participants in this study realized their role, deeply reflected about the messages they send and are very intentional about their language, activities, and resources used so that the children they serve are racially socialized in a manner that is positive and affirming.

The professional development modules influenced teacher practice and ongoing training, conversation and engagement in this area are essential to meet the needs of teachers and all children. Competency in Nigrescence can also serve as a reference for educators and help them

support Black students' relationships with their peers while affirming who they are as racial beings.

2.0   REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Research has shown that very young children notice race through differences in physical characteristics such as hair texture and skin color and that adult behavior, specifically indirect social interactions, influences racial identity (White & Young, 2016). Husband (2012) suggests that "anti-racist education must be implemented, and it seeks to exist in direct contrast to what is presented and implemented in schools due to the belief that schools are racist by being reflections of a larger racist society" (p. 366). With his in mind, Cross's (1991) Nigrescence theory can help put into context the issues that happen developmentally with Black students regarding their racial identity. Competency in Nigrescence can serve as a reference for educators and help them support Black students' relationships with their peers and teachers. Educators must understand that a positive racial identity serves as a resource that students can use to protect themselves against racial threats and can be a source of motivation to achieve at higher levels.

Neglecting to talk about racism and other social inequities supports misconceptions, bias, and discrimination by suggesting it is not the responsibility of all people (Hirschfeld, 2008). I believe exploring race helps children make sense of themselves and others. Furthermore, racial socialization practices are linked to cognitive and behavioral competence (Caughy, O'Campo, Randolph, & Nickerson, 2002). Their research examined if Black parents of children less than 5 regularly engaged in racial socialization practices and whether the practices were important in the development of competence. Caughy et al., 2002 found:

Messages of cultural socialization, those messages related to teaching cultural history and instilling racial pride and esteem, are consistently associated with more well-developed racial identity as well as better academic achievement among African American youth. (p.1613)

This finding indicates a clear link between what the adults in a Black child's life do to support their racial socialization and identity development. Black children will learn that race has been socially constructed and a societal problem through their experiences. Helping them to develop positive values, a positive self-image and respect differences are essential in early childhood environments.

2.1   KEY TERMS

To aid the reader, in this section I review specific key terms. For this literature review Black racial identity is defined as a set of attitudes held by individuals, specifically people of African descent. The attitudes held include thoughts about themselves as Black people, views of other Black people and individuals from other racial groups (Worrell, Mendoza-Denton, Telesford, Simmons & Martin, 2011). For the purposes of this review, Black identity, racial identity, ethnic identity and self-identity will be used interchangeably, but carry the same meaning. Racial identity is defined by Helms (1990) as "a sense of group or collective identity based on one's perception that he or she shares a common racial heritage with a particular racial group" (p. 3).

Another term, Nigrescence theory or "the Cross model" investigates racial identity and suggests there are four stages of Black racial identity. The four stages are (1) Pre-Encounter, (2) Encounter, (3) Immersion-Emersion and (4) Internalization which characterizes eight Black racial identities. It is important to note that Nigrescence theory was developed in 1971 and was

revised as well as expanded in 1991. The theory is associated with a scale entitled the Racial Identity Attitude Scale-Black.

The pre-encounter stage is defined by low race salience and individuals in this stage assimilate into mainstream society. Individuals in the pre-encounter stage hold attitudes that range from low salience to race neutrality to anti-Black (Cross, 1991). Little emphasis is given to race in this stage and people focus on other aspects of their lives including occupation, lifestyle, and religion as more salient. People do not acknowledge race as something that has affected their lives thus far.

In the encounter stage, individuals experience an event or situation that causes them to question their identity. People must work around or even shatter the relevance of their ideology and worldview. At the same time, others must provide some hint of direction in which to point the person to be resocialized or transformed (Cross, 1991). The encounter stage encompasses two steps, encounter and personalize. What matters is that the encounter has a personally significant impact to be the catalyst to spur change in their thinking.

The immersion-emersion stage of Nigrescence addresses the most sensational aspect of Black identity development, for it represents the vortex of psychological Nigrescence (Cross, 1991). It is during this stage that Black people will begin to revamp their old worldview and construct a new frame of reference with the information they now have about race. The person has not yet changed but commits to change. Cross (1991) said that "immersion is a strong powerful dominating sensation that is constantly energized by rage [at White people and culture], guilt [at having once been tricked into thinking Black ideas] and developing a sense of pride [in one's Black self, Black people, and Black culture]" (p. 203). During this period, the individuals

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are growing personally and recognizing role models from history and their work to uplift Black people.

Internalization-commitment focuses on the long-term interest of Black affairs over an extended amount of time (Cross, 1991). This stage is now combined with internalization. Cross (1991) explained that "consequently other than to repeat what has already been said about internalization a more differential look at internalization-commitment awaits the results of future research" (p. 220). Black identity development involves transitioning through stages simultaneously and Black people begin with less awareness about their identity then progress to internalize positive thoughts resulting in affirmation not only about themselves as a Black person, but about other racial groups as well (Ritchey, 2014).

Singleton and Linton (2006) suggest "race is socially constructed and attached to a variety of physical attributes including but not limited to skin color, eye color, hair texture, and bone structures of people in the United States and elsewhere" (p. 39). I define race as physical attributes but elevate skin color as a defining characteristic of race. The key terms and their definitions guided me as I read the articles cited in this review. They helped me to understand this complex topic of how Black identity is influenced positively or negatively.

2.2   BLACK RACIAL IDENTITY THEORIES

Little consensus has been reached when determining how racial identity evolves over one's lifespan. Questions remain regarding how best to conceptualize and operationalize racial identity (Smith, 1989). Nigrescence theory has been cited and used empirically across many of the articles discussing Black racial identity development. It is widely used because of the Cross

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Racial Identity Attitude Scale-Black (CRIS), which makes the theory accessible for researchers and clinicians. Vandiver, Cross and Fhagen-Smith (2002) engaged in a study that validated the revised 1991 model with Black college students. They found that scores were directly linked to self-esteem, not social desirability or personality traits. Furthermore, Nigrescence theory suggests that self-concept has two components that include personal identity and reference group orientation. Each component determines the value and importance of race to an individual. Preliminary evidence from the CRIS confirmed that it is a solid measure of six Black racial identities outlined in the revised Nigrescence model.

Another theory that has been used is, Phinney's model (1989). It argues that individuals' level of ethnic identity development is viewed in four statuses as a function of the extent to which they have explored the meaning of ethnicity in their lives and made a commitment regarding what racial identity means to them. The four statuses include diffused, foreclosed, moratorium, and achieved. Yip, Seaton and Sellers (2006) utilize cluster analytic methods to determine if identity status was related to identity content and achievement between various age groups. They note that when individuals have not explored the meaning of their racial identity or committed to a racial identity, they are in a diffused status but when individuals have committed to a definition of what their identity means to them, based on the influence of others without exploring, they are in a foreclosed status. In the moratorium status, individuals are actively exploring the meaning of racial identity, but have not committed to a definition; however, in the achieved status, there is a commitment to a specific definition of what their racial identity means because they have actively engaged in exploration.

There are differences between Nigrescence, which identifies four stages of racial identity development across the life span while suggesting that it develops through a variety of pathways,

and Phinney's model which proposes an invariant direction and moving in one direction of racial identity development (Cross & Fhagen-Smith, 2001). Kambon (2010) argues that these two models "emphasize coping with and adapting to the European-American cultural reality as the sole determinant of core African American personality functioning in terms of racial identity" (p. 90). Kambon identifies these theories as pseudo-Africentric or transitional because they emphasize reaction and adaptation due to the European American influence.

Africentric models utilize the Africentric worldview as a conceptual framework for explaining racial identity. Kambon's model is one that highlights two constructs, African self-consciousness (ASC) and cultural misorientation (CM). This model calls attention to a core system of African personality called African self-extension orientation and ASC. Kambon (2010) suggests, "ASC is partly biogenetic, but because consciousness evolves in large part through experience, it is also partly environmental-experientially based" (p. 98). This results in guiding the personality and the maintenance of African survival, affirmation, and empowerment. The ASC model has four components that include (1) awareness-recognition of one's African identity, (2) value placed on African survival and positive racial knowledge, (3) participation in African cultural activities and institutions, and (4) practice of resistance against systemic racism. When these components are combined, Kambon posits that African Americans are self-affirmed, self-determined, and working toward self-empowerment. ASC can be influenced due to environmental factors and has the potential to be modified under certain conditions resulting in it being nurtured or weakened (Kambon, 2010).

2.3   BLACK RACIAL IDENTITY SCALES

Researchers have not differentiated scale development from theory testing research (Helms, 2007). Many racial identity theories are tested using scales and the validity of the theory is also tested by utilizing various scales. Nigrescence theory has been associated with the Racial Identity Attitude Scale- Black (RIAS-B) since the 1980s. According to Vandiver, Cross, Worrell and Fhagen-Smith (2002), it has been used to explore the relationship between Black racial identity constructs and numerous variables, including academic achievement, acculturation, gender role conflict, self-esteem, social class, and student involvement. When Nigrescence theory was revised and expanded in 1991, the Cross Racial Identity Scale (CRIS) was designed to measure the constructs proposed in the new Nigrescence theory (Vandiver, et al., 2002) and they found CRIS to be a strong measure of Black racial identities while Worrell et al. (2011) found CRIS to be stable with consistent relationships between racial identity attitudes and personal adjustment being evident.

To assess Phinney's model, a few studies have used the Multi-group Ethnic Identity Measure (MEIM) to investigate the existence of the four ethnic identity statuses proposed by Phinney. Scottham and Sellers (2006) and Yip, Seaton, and Sellers (2006) found supportive evidence that four identities exist. These studies focused on how racial identity develops or evolves. Another scale is the Multidimensional Model of Racial Identity (MMRI), which assesses how race influences Black people and what it means to be Black. It seeks to uncover individual differences and attitudes. It identifies salience, centrality, ideology, and regard as its four dimensions. Finally, Kambon's theory is assessed using the African Self-Consciousness Scale (ASCS). It assesses four factors that include (1) sense of collective African identity and self-fortification, (2) resistance/defense against anti-African forces, (3) value for Africentric

institutions and cultural expressions, and (4) value for African culture. According to Kambon (2010), it is a reliable predictor of self-esteem; however, Vandiver et al., (2000) claim that "CRIS is the only Black racial identity instrument that has not been criticized for the psychometric properties and its scores" (p. 628).

2.3.1   How racial identity evolves over the life span.

Distinctions have been made between how individuals come to develop a sense of how racial identity unfolds in their lives, the meaning of their racial identity, and how important the racial identity is to the individual. Individuals may understand their racial identity; however, it is unclear what role racial identity plays in an individual's self-concept (Cross, 1991; Cross & Fhagen-Smith, 2001; Phinney, 1990)**.** Due to the long history of oppression in the United States, "racial categorizations play an important role in the meaning-making process of identity formation" (Umana-Taylor et al., 2014, p. 23).   Ethnic racial identity formation occurs throughout life and in early to middle childhood. Also, racial labeling of self and others begins based on experiences in childhood. In early childhood, racial identity is influenced primarily from family and media (Katz & Kofkin, 1997). The differentiation between self and others emerges and assimilation or accommodation occurs through labeling, knowledge and constancy. A few studies have distinguished between ethnic racial identity process and content (Syed & Azmitia, 2010; Yip 2006). Findings suggest that to explore or commit to one's racial identity, it requires that the individual hold that racial identity in a positive regard (Yip, 2006, p. 1515). The study's evidence found "that developmental period influences the distribution of individuals across four racial identity statuses" (Yip, 2006, p. 1513), which suggests that younger people or adolescents were still exploring what it means to be Black without making a commitment. As

individuals got older, specifically college students and adults, the percentages of achieved status were greater. Furthermore, individuals in the achieved status were also more likely to acknowledge that race is central to their racial identity (Scottham, Cooke, Sellers & Ford, 2010). Assessing racial identity has focused on how people of color develop attitudes and beliefs about the meaning of their racial identity (Burlew, Bellow & Lovett, 2000). Katz and Kofkin (2007) found that there is an interplay of social and cognitive factors that influence racial identity.

By age 3, children have an awareness of racial cues and the first step in racial identity development is self-labeling. After a child can identify self and others, play preferences emerge and stereotypes develop. Children that were 30 months old preferred to play with same race peers, but by age 3, Black children were more likely to exhibit pro-white bias (Katz and Kotkin, 2007). In contrast, research by Hughes and Johnson (2001) suggest that parental racial socialization processes play a particularly important role in the way African American adolescents form their attitudes about the meaning of race. Further supported by Caughy et al., (2002):

> A home environment rich in African American culture was associated with a greater wealth of factual knowledge and more well-developed problem-solving skills which results in greater achievement in school. (p. 1622)

Scottham et al., (2010) suggest a clear distinction between the process of individuals' racial identity development regarding how attitudes and beliefs develop and change across the life span and the content of individuals' racial identity attitudes and beliefs toward their racial group such as positive or negative feelings. Considering the process and content and how the two perspectives inform one another hasn't been developed. This literature suggests that racial identity development is a complex process that needs to be further researched specifically across the life span.

2.3.2   Reasons for discussing racial identity with young children.

Race must be understood, and educators can benefit from developing a working definition of it.Milner (2015) suggests, "race is constructed physically, socially, legally, and historically" (p. 8). Race matters in the work of educators because its construction and direct links to beliefs, preferences, and worldviews. Since the United States has a racially and ethnically diverse population, resulting in a highly racialized society, teachers must develop cultural sensitivity, awareness and ultimately competence in all racial or ethnic groups. They should recognize that their lived experiences aren't the norm. According to the United States census, it recognizes six racial categories: White American, Black or African American, American Indian, Alaska Native, Asian American, Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander. The census also classifies Americans as Hispanic or Latino and Not Hispanic or Latino as an ethnicity, not a race. However, Hispanic and Latino Americans are currently the largest minority group in the nation. Since race is socially constructed and created to separate, oppress, and marginalize groups of people, it should be addressed regularly in classrooms across the United States. Remaining silent or operating from a color-blind perspective is a disservice to all children, specifically those of color.

Positive Black racial identity was negatively influenced when American schools became desegregated. Desegregation forced Black children to assimilate into White society and give up their racial identity (Rury, 2005). Entering schools where they weren't wanted or understood was devastating for many reasons. Their racial identity was assaulted but also teacher bias and negative perceptions were operating. Allen (2010) suggests that Black males are alienated from the process of schools because of the incongruences between school culture and African American culture" (p.1) and I see this unfold daily at work. Aboud (2005) suggests that silence about race does not keep children from noticing race and developing racial biases and prejudices,

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it just keeps them from talking about it. Preschool teachers I work with often share stories of incidents that emerge in their classrooms involving race and issues of power between them and Black children. Students make comments about color and what they aren't allowed to do with children of another race or will make statements to the teacher that catches them off guard. The teachers often are shocked and tell students that their words aren't nice and not to say things that can be hurtful but do little to initiate or facilitate healthy and developmentally appropriate conversations.

Schools operate based on white middle-class culture and often children of color are misunderstood, overlooked, disrespected, and made to feel inferior because of the beliefs, bias, and actions of educators. Race is "a concept created in the modern era as a way of drawing distinctions between people such that some might benefit at the expense of others" (Milner, 2015, p. 8). Educational leaders must begin the journey of transforming themselves and supporting the people they work with to interrupt inequitable practices in schools. For example, it is important for teachers to not remain silent and respond to the students' curiosities, questions, and interests by posing open ended questions, listening to understand, and responding in ways that affirm and elevate similarities among people and their differences. Furthermore, reading books that deal directly and indirectly with issues of race and identity paired with read aloud and free response are powerful actions that will help children recognize what they may be experiencing and help them to understand race and racial identity.

2.4   CHILD DEVELOPMENT

Children develop a conception of self as they grow and learn by their cognitive abilities and life experiences.   According to Holmes (1995), people learn about their social universe by classifying individuals and events into categories (p. 40). This suggests that different people exist but can be placed into categories based on physical characteristics, such as skin color. Furthermore, comparisons emerge early, and children will describe themselves based on others (Holmes, 1995). Research suggests that caregivers should engage in open, honest, frequent, and age-appropriate conversation about race, racial differences, and even racial inequity and racism. Research has shown that such conversations are associated with lower levels of bias in young children (Katz, 2003).

Children lack cognitive maturity and use superficial characteristics and difference among people (Aboud, 1988), however comparing themselves to others begins in the early years and young children notice race and draw conclusions about difference on their own. Patterson & Bigler (2006) suggest children engage in "transductive reasoning" and are unable to see people who are alike in other dimensions such as intelligence and ability. Children do categorize people by race but are not able to see multiple dimensions of a person due to their immature cognitive abilities.

Black and brown children need to have a positive racial identity and it is important because they succeed using their racial identity and socialization in response to racism and oppression as a means of knowledge production and self-actualization (Hanley & Noblit, 2007). Since children describe themselves based on physical characteristics, gender, and personal possessions (Holmes, 1995), it is important for them to see themselves in the classroom through materials, resources, and programming.   Furthermore, Patterson and Bigler (2006) found that

environments teach young children categories that are important, and our society teaches children that race is a category of significance.

Learning occurs when our sensory systems are activated and embedded through life experiences, social interactions, and community membership (Ostroff, 2012). Learning is complex and by age 2, children recognize themselves, so processing begins and development of self including racial and gender identities begin to form (Holmes, 1995). Children also notice patterns of behavior, even if an adult never says anything. Unfortunately, "in-group bias" towards the groups in which they are members begins by 2 years of age (Patterson & Bigler, 2006). It is interesting that bias develops at such a young age, however children are learning and experiencing subtle and not so subtle messages from their caregivers. Biases are not random (Katz & Kofkin, 1997, p. 62). Therefore, investigating how preschool teachers influence racial identity for students within their classrooms and respond when issues of race and racial identity emerge is needed.

3.0   METHODS

In this chapter, I reintroduce the qualitative method of interpretive description used to study four preschool teachers in this research. The approach details what occurred during a pilot professional development series and summarizes lived experiences from the participants by documenting a thematic structure of main elements and relationships among them. Data collection and analysis occurred simultaneously and ultimately shaped each other. The human experience and the participants' realities were noticed and examined to capture meaning and implications. The design strategies borrow from aspects of naturalistic inquiry (Thorne, 2016) and the design techniques used "search out and explore features or elements of a common issue but seek an understanding that honors inherent complexity" (p. 75). The sample size for this study is small. Data collection methods include interviews, journal prompts, and document analysis of evaluations. Analysis resulted in identifying themes captured in a comprehensive, contextualized, and thematic manner for interpretation.

3.1   RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This study answers three inquiry questions that explored change in teacher perspectives and practices used to positively influence racial identity. The questions that guided the study include:

(1) How do teachers make sense of their own racial identity and does it relate to how they address the identities of their students?

(2) How do preschool teachers develop racial identity for students within their classrooms?

(3) How do teachers respond when issues of race and/or racial identity emerge?

I interviewed preschool teachers as a way of helping them explore their own racial identity. Much was gained, specifically an understanding of each teacher's racial identity, how they define themselves and what events or experiences shaped and continue to shape them as racial beings. Strategies and practices teachers used to influence or affirm each child's racial identity emerged. The second and third questions helped me understand what happens in preschool classroom environments prior to engaging in professional development and after learning experiences and discussions occurred. The lived experiences of the participants support the finding that reading achievement of Black elementary students is directly connected to teachers' beliefs regarding the importance of students' cultural identity and individual needs (Love, 2003).

3.2   RESEARCH DESIGN

Description is the constructed and contextual nature of the human experience while at the same time honors shared realities (Thorne, Reimer Kirkham, & McDonald-Emes, 1997) resulting in the identification of patterns and themes. Description provides an opportunity to describe what is seen and heard to inform interpretation, which supports knowledge development. By documenting patterns and themes, I was able to understand the participants' views related to Black racial identity development and support them in shifting their practices by sharing their

challenges during the professional development sessions. Furthermore, interpretive description allows for careful and systematic analysis of phenomena while providing the opportunity for intentional analysis that informs the context of practice (Thorne, 2008). While engaging participants in the pilot professional development program, their lived experiences with students was shared through journal prompts and interviews. Ultimately, meaning can be determined from their experiences which informed me, the researcher.

Concurrent data collection, analysis and interpretation were ongoing because of interpretative design methodology and due to the reality that race, and Black racial identity are socially constructed. By constantly comparing how they emerge and are influenced, I formed conceptualizations throughout the study. Since data construction was ongoing while engaging in interpretive description, an audit trail helped to manage and track information which supports credibility of findings. Tracking the decisions made along the way while engaging in inductive reasoning makes the study more credible. Generating questions from the data supported my understanding and helped me to identify complexity, variation, and relationships (Mertens, 2015, p. 249) as evolving insights emerged.

The two-pronged study spanned four months [see Appendix A]. This research evaluated the implementation of a pilot professional development program to increase preschool teachers' awareness of racial identity in the classroom. The program relied on Cross's (1991) Nigrescence theory and put into context the issues that happened developmentally with Black students as their racial identity evolved. Competency in Nigrescence served as a reference for the participants and helped them support the Black students' relationships with their peers and teachers. I used pre-post tests and journaling to measure changes in knowledge about this theory.

For this research study, I used purposeful sampling (Patton, 2002) to both recruit and select participants who are currently working in preschool classrooms. Patton (2002) describes purposeful sampling as a strategy used to learn and understand issues important to the research by examining the complexity of different conceptualizations. Specifically, stratified purposeful sampling unfolded because variations in the manifestation of the phenomena (Suri, 2011) occurred based on race and setting, which are factors that emerged. To select the participants, I consulted with the Executive Director of an Early Childhood program and a few school principals. I chose the site because it has many teachers to access and a large population of Black children.

The setting is in a large urban school district's Early Childhood Program. The program provides early childhood services to approximately 2,000 children from infancy through five years of age. Ninety-eight percent of the children are Black, and most of the teachers are white.

How each teacher identifies racially, and their experiences impact the strategies used to influence racial identity with the students they serve. Their perspectives elevated challenges and/or limitations related to engaging students in curricular and social activities that positively influence racial identity. Furthermore, it provided information about how teachers respond to children when issues of race or identity emerge. Tatum (1997) suggests children learn lessons early about race and adults should talk about it in a developmentally appropriate way. Specific and intentional actions can be taken by adults to help children make sense of who they are racially and to help them explore their identity and the identity of others.

3.3   DATA COLLECTION

3.3.1   Recruitment of participants

For this interpretive description study, I began with teachers who volunteered from one Early Childhood site. Even though recruitment efforts occurred in two sites, all participants were from one site. I contacted the participants through email using an introductory script and flyer. These appear in Appendix B.

Once the teachers agreed to participate, I shared the timeline for the study and the date for the first pilot professional learning session. During the first session, I provided participants with an overview of the IRB approval process that was granted by the University of Pittsburgh and the school district along with a rationale of the study. Participants also received the pilot professional development program timeline for the learning sessions. These appear in Appendix A. The participants were racially diverse and experienced educators. Eight or more years of each participant's teaching career has occurred in urban preschools and early childhood settings.

Table 1. Background of participants and experience in education information

Participants	Race/Identity	Gender	Years in Education	Years in Preschool
A	Black	Female	11	8
B	Black	Female	10	10
C	White	Female	13	13
D	Biracial	Female	10	10

3.3.2   Pre-post tests

Pre-post tests were used for data collection and comparisons specifically look for change in knowledge, mindset or practices. The tests measured their knowledge of Nigrescence theory, strategies that can positively influence racial identity, and how racial identity is defined. The pre- and post-test items appear in Appendix C and were given to study participants prior to the intervention, which were the professional learning modules and after the last session. Normality assumption for parametric testing was not met, therefore non-parametric testing was used. Pre and posttest were analyzed and compared the open-ended responses to identify differences in each study participant's knowledge. Understanding of Nigrescence theory changed after the intervention, the stages of the theory were understood and how they evolve over time was evident.

3.3.3   Semi-structured interviews

Semi-structured interviews occurred while participants engaged in the pilot professional development intervention. The interview guide appears in Appendix D. After each interview, I reviewed the transcriptions. The interviews occurred between the second and fourth session so that participants would feel more comfortable with me as a researcher and so they had basic knowledge of how Black racial identity evolves as well as an understanding about the research. Each interview was semi-structured and allowed time for scripted questions as well as opportunities for questions to be posed based on how the participant responded to initial questions. Ultimately, each interview was indeed a conversation and all participants spoke their truth while elevating challenges and lived experiences.

3.3.4   Journal entries

Periodic journal prompts were sent to participants and analyzed to specifically understand how often issues of race and racial identity occurred in the classroom and the teacher's response. These appear in Appendix E. Across the four-month study, participants shared their experiences that occurred with children, and adults in the school. Experiences were varied, and the ways participants responded appear to be based on the context of the experience and whether or not the experience was initiated by an adult.

3.3.5   Evaluation of the pilot professional development sessions

To evaluate professional development sessions in the pilot program, the five levels of professional development evaluation were used. According to Guskey (2002), including systematic information gathering and analysis as a central component of all professional development activities influences the success. Guskey (2002) suggests backward mapping and planning with what learners need to know and be able to do which helps in the development of learning experiences. So, each session had a clear focus outlined in the timeline resulting in efficient planning. The results were also easier to evaluate following this process.

The levels included in the evaluation are participant reactions, participant learning, organization change as well as participant use of new knowledge and skills. I reviewed the evaluations immediately after each session to inform the program design, format, or content of future modules. The session evaluations appear in Appendix F. I describe these later primarily for the purposes of the school district's professional development report, without using advanced statistical analyses.

During the data construction and conceptualizing findings journey, I revisited the literature and challenged myself to see elements within the data from different perspectives and considered who or what was missing from the picture. I worked to link data based on what was seen and heard to theoretical propositions, but my technique of strategic inductive reasoning ultimately helped guide the process so that data collection and construction uncovered what was real. The findings are credible and can be considered meaningful new knowledge. The table below lists the goals for each session.

Table 2. Session goal information

Session	*Goals*
Session 1	Participants will 1. Develop an understanding of racial identity, how it develops and its importance. 2. Learn about Nigrescence theory 3. Reflect upon their own identity and experiences they had with students they serve involving race or racial identity
Session 2	Participants will 1. Develop an understanding of racial identity and Nigrescence theory 2. Identify best practices to use when talking about race with young children
Session 3	Participants will 1. Develop their understanding of racial identity and Nigrescence theory by discussing and exploring strategies to use with students to support the development of a positive racial identity 2. Identify best practices to use when talking about race with young children

Table 2 continued

Session 4	Participants will
	1. Share an experience that involves race or racial identity from this past month
	2. Discuss and explore strategies to use with students to support the development of a positive racial identity

3.3.6 Ethical safeguards

In preparation to conduct this descriptive study, I engaged in an approval process with the Institutional Review Board (IRB) through Human Research and Protection within the University of Pittsburgh and through the school district. For the research to be approved, requirements such as minimal risk to human subjects, selection of subjects that is ethical, procedures for obtaining informed consent, and beneficence must be considered acceptable by the IRB. Since the research was conducted in a school, interviews occurred in private offices to provide confidentiality and pseudonyms were used when sharing the findings.

Part of the interview protocol [see Appendix C] requested for the participant to give permission to participate in the interview and for audio-recording. It also explained the measures taken to ensure confidentiality and confirm that the interviews were voluntary and could be stopped at any time. Data was maintained and monitored through a secured database by the researcher. The study was conducted in a school and an office was used to secure and lock data.

As I considered interpretive description and its emergent nature, I took care to consider and articulate the design for data collection and the relationship it has to analysis. I obtained consent throughout the study from the participants, not just during the first professional learning session and interview, but also when the journal prompts were sent periodically. In addition, I

previously worked with one of the participants about 5 years ago and took care to maintain professionalism and worked to acknowledge my bias and capture her lived experiences accurately.

3.4   DATA ANALYSIS

3.4.1   Statistical analyses

I began analyses by exporting the data from a web-based qualitative analysis program and importing the data through SPSS for descriptive statistics and finally into an Excel spreadsheet. The data was organized by month and captures participant feedback evaluation data and monthly journal entries. Descriptive statistics were used to analyze participant feedback involving ratings. Likert score ratings were used to run the average for each individual and across sessions. Finally, I was able to aggregate the scores by creating and entering a formula to obtain the average scores [See Table 3].

In addition, pre and post tests were administered in paper form and were assigned 10-points. The tests included multiple choice items and open-ended prompts. Both tests were scored and paired together to determine change over time. The Wilcoxon matched pairs signed ranks test was utilized. Due to the small sample, the scores when compared indicate no statistical difference when averaged across the four participants. The pretest average was 7.25 and the posttest average was 8.75 but the change was not statistically significant. As a result, tests were analyzed qualitatively.

3.4.2 Coding procedures

I initially read through the interview transcriptions for meaning and took brief notes in the margins when information stood out to me that was directly connected to my research questions. I then re-read multiple times and began coding ideas. I used open coding and was able to examine similarities and differences that describe who the participants were and their experiences as racial beings. As I analyzed the transcriptions, all participants reported similar responses regarding who influenced their identity, which were their parents and caregivers. Also, all participants discussed the lack of support they feel from administrators to address issues of race and identity in their environment while providing examples of how they navigate the complexity of race at work and in their personal lives.   Ultimately, the interview questions asked teachers to describe their experience, practice and resources used to address Black racial identity. Concepts that surfaced were growth in knowledge, gaps in knowledge, strategies they use, navigating race and racial identity and its complexity. In chapter 4, I will discuss the concepts in further detail.

4.0   RACIAL IDENTITY: ITS STORY IN AN URBAN PRESCHOOL ENVIRONMENT

4.1   INTRODUCTION

To review, I developed and facilitated a pilot professional development series of four modules. Each module lasted approximately one hour and was developed with specific learning goals. All sessions were designed to engage the learner in understanding Black racial identity development, specifically Nigrescence theory. Also, each session provided participants the opportunity to share their experiences and elevate intentional actions and strategies that can be used with students to address race and Black racial identity in the preschool classroom. The sessions and learning spanned four months.

This chapter begins with evaluation results from the professional development modules and the two measures that were used to address state department and Act 48 [continuing education] requirements. Evaluation occurred after each learning session to determine how participants felt about the session and next steps. Also, pre-post tests were administered before the first module and after the fourth module to understand change in knowledge. I also engaged each participant in an interview between the second and fourth module to better understand who they are as racial beings and to understand what they do with students to address Black racial identity. Furthermore, I share experiences and perspectives from the monthly journal entries.

They ultimately provide a snapshot into the experiences the participants were having with students and colleagues while navigating race and racial identity. As this chapter unfolds, the reader will come to understand the learning process that occurred, teachers' shifts in mindset, and the complexity these constructs demand.

4.2   PARTICIPANT FEEDBACK ON PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

As stated earlier, each participant was asked to complete an evaluation of each module. Each evaluation asked participants to react to the session by reflecting upon their learning and identifying how they plan to use new knowledge and skills. They also were asked to indicate if support was needed to move their learning forward into action inside the classroom. Participants rated questions using a Likert scale from 1 to 7, with 1 indicating strongly disagree and 7 indicating strongly agree. Below is a table that represents the average or mean scores across the 6 questions posed after each session.

Table 3. Participant feedback averages

Session	Mean
1	6.5
2	4.7
3	4.87
4	6.58

As I viewed the data across the sessions and analyzed specific results for each question, a trend presented itself. Across all four sessions, participants agreed (6) or strongly agreed (7) that

objectives were clearly articulated, the presentation was well organized, and the content was relevant and applicable to their role as teachers. However, the lowest rated question resulting in somewhat agree (5) or neither agree or disagree (4) across all sessions was time and how time was structured to allow for processing and reflection.

In addition, each participant was asked to choose a statement that described their thoughts as they pondered new learning. They also answered an open-ended question that asked about the support needed to implement what was learned. Across all four sessions, participants selected the following two options [see Appendix F], "I look forward to applying my understanding of Nigrescence theory when issues of race or racial identity emerge in the classroom" or "I would like to practice using open-ended questioning when issues of race or racial identity emerge."

A pattern emerged from participants as the sessions unfolded, specifically support needed. In the first month's evaluation, all participants shared their interest in applying their understanding of Nigrescence theory, using open-ended questions about race, and exploring more strategies to use with students. Their perspectives were encouraging and optimistic regarding addressing racial identity with their students. As the intervention continued and session 2 unfolded, all participants did not feel they needed additional support at the time. After session 3, all participants' comments regarding support involved needing more time to talk with colleagues to discuss racial identity, and requests for support from administrators in their department. Finally, in session 4, participants continued to express a desire for support from administration to sustain learning opportunities. This data represents the learning process and how their thinking changed as they spent time reflecting and discussing Black racial identity and how it emerges in their workplace.

4.3   SHIFTS AND EXPERIENCES

To capture change in teacher knowledge I compared the results of the pre-posttests. To understand participant experiences and perspectives, monthly journal reflections were shared that identified the frequency of incidents that involved racial identity or race during the workday. The responses also captured how their thinking or mindset shifted each month.   Again, the intervention occurred across four months and their experiences involved students and colleagues.

Table 4 shares the results from the pre and posttests. The Wilcoxon signed rank test was used because normality assumption for parametric testing was not met, therefore non-parametric testing was used. The Wilcoxon matched pairs signed rank test showed no significant difference between pre and post testing (z= -1.604, p = .109). However, sample size was extremely low, likely influencing these results. Because of this, pre and posttest were analyzed qualitatively by examining changes in open-ended responses. Below, table 4 lists the scores from the tests.

Table 4. Participants pre-post test results

Participant	Pre-test	Post test
A	8	8
B	7	8
C	7	9
D	7	10

Participants were also asked two open ended questions that provided an opportunity to explain their knowledge of Nigrescence theory and to share knowledge about the theory. The second question asked participants to explain how racial identity evolves over time.   As evidenced in the pretest, all participants had no knowledge of Nigrescence theory and none were

able to share the definition or stages. The posttest results after the professional development indicates they were aware of the theory and participants explained the theory demonstrating change in knowledge. The table below captures their open-ended responses from the posttest.

Table 5. Posttest responses explaining Nigrescence theory and racial identity evolution

Participant	Nigrescence theory	Racial identity evolution
A	Nigrescence theory is an outlined process that helps strengthen Black identity amongst individuals. The process has stages that evolve over the life-span.	Racial identity evolves over time by individuals encountering Nigrescence theory at various times in one's life. When individuals are at different stages, their identity evolves due to their individual life experiences.
B	Nigrescence theory has 4 stages of progression or development; pre-encounter, encounter, immersion/emersion, and internalization-commitment.	How students see themselves and how their culture is represented through the media along with their own experiences helps one to develop their racial identity.
C	Nigrescence theory looks at how racial identity may evolve over time.	Racial identity evolves, and changes based on personal experiences and feelings. One may feel one way about their racial identity and then it can change based on different influences.
D	Nigrescence theory is about Black identity development and there are phases.	Racial identity evolves through experience, conversations, and through play in preschool.

4.4   MONTHLY JOURNAL ENTRIES

4.4.1   General findings

The data from 12 monthly journal entries were completed in a web-based qualitative analysis program. Open coding occurred once all participant entries were completed by using broad-based coding schemes (Thorne, 2008) and I was mindful of the analysis journey so that the implications could be considered as part of other themes or patterns.   The data from twelve monthly journal entries, from two to three teachers each month, revealed incidents that involved race or racial identity in the classrooms with students and adults.

Throughout the four months, the range in frequency was from two to six experiences the first month to two experiences per participant during the second and third month. Frequency in experiences increased during the last month ranging from one to four among participants. The issues emerging from month to month involved experiences with students and adults and adults with one another. Most of the experiences dealt with statements or questions about physical characteristics. Also, teachers explained what occurred when they used resources, tried new strategies or initiated conversations about race and/or racial identity. Below is a table that captures some the reported experiences from the participants through the web-based qualitative analysis program.

Table 6. Categories from journal entries with examples

Type of experience	Category	Example	Participant response
Preschool student to adult experience	Physical characteristics	We are currently learning about important African Americans, past and present. The students	I showed her pictures of the person they were coloring and by talking with them,

Table 6 continued

		were coloring, and one student asked, "What brown should I use?" One like her skin tone or the skin tone of another child.	we determined the need to use the color that was like her friend. The next day, I chose a person who had a similar skin tone to the student that asked the question, so she could see people of all skin tones.
Adult to adult experience	Physical characteristics	During the past few days we've had a Caucasian substitute who shared that she loves Black people's hair and commented on how versatile it is.	I smiled and said, "I understand, our hair is very versatile."
Student to adult experience	Physical characteristics	Why are you white and I'm brown? We are learning about eye colors and we noticed that all the brown children have brown eyes.	I said because I am the same skin color as my mom and dad. It's okay that we are different skin colors. We learned about why people have different eye colors.
Preschool student to adult experience	Physical characteristics	I was holding one of my student's hand and he said, "I'm brown and you are white."	I said, "Yes, but we can still be friends even though we have different skin colors."
Preschool student to preschool student and preschool student to adult experience	Physical characteristics	After reading the book *Skin Again*, a student talked about how her mom's friend has changing skin.	We discussed that people with lighter skin tones tan from the sun. Some people may go to tanning beds, so their skins gets

			darker and I further explained that all people's skin gets darker when we spend time in the sun. We also talked about how to protect our skin when in the sun.
Preschool student to preschool student and preschool student to adult experience	Physical characteristics	The boys were playing in the puppet theatre and they said, "We want the puppets that look like us."	I told them they can pick the puppets that look like them and they did. One was an African American policeman, and another was a mailman.

I think the frequency fluctuated due to each teacher's awareness or comfort with the experience, ability to log the experience through the web-based program and if they were internalizing their learning and consciously noticing the experiences. Most of the responses were categorized as physical characteristics which align with the research from Winkler (2009) which reports that children not only recognize race from a very young age, but also develop racial biases by ages three to five while White and Young (2016) report very young children notice race through differences in physical characteristics such as hair texture and skin color and that adult behavior, specifically indirect social interactions, influences racial identity. So, the experiences reported mirror previous research.

In addition, I believe more experiences occurred than were reported via the web-based system. During the professional learning sessions and while conducting the interviews, other experiences were shared that were not captured in the web-based program. It was interesting that the experiences reported were those that occurred during the workday. As stated earlier, racial

socialization and messages are received across contexts and I found that none of the experiences reported occurred outside of the school in their community or homes. I am unsure if this finding has something to do with the study's focus in the preschool environment or if the participants "turned off" reflection about racial identity before and after work. I am hopeful that the participants continue to reflect and are intentional with the language they use, and the resources selected to provide positive experiences for the Black children they serve

4.4.2 Incidents involving physical characteristics

The reported incidents all involved physical characteristics such as skin color, hair texture or style and shades of brown. The issues involved a combination of students making statements and teachers engaging students in activities that encourage discussion and exploration about race. This pattern confirmed prior research that children process social comparisons early and begin to describe themselves by referencing others and that they focus on "salient characteristics, such as skin color, for the purpose of social comparison" (Holmes, 1997, p.41). The reported experiences are confirmation of what was captured as findings from White & Young (2016) that young children are thinking about race and that young children of color need supports to develop positive racial identities. Furthermore, there are beneficial outcomes of having a positive racial identity. Caughy et al., (2002) found children experienced positive racial socialization resulting in improved behavior, better problem-solving skills and better recall of factual information. These findings suggest that adults in the lives of children cannot remain silent because they are thinking about and exploring race. These constructs are part of learning and can be addressed through daily interactions and experiences in early childhood environments.

4.4.3 Reported changes in practice and use of suggested resources

After the learning sessions, changes in practice were reported early on and all participants reported they were more aware and mindful of how students were viewing themselves. They identified intentional actions to use with students and families while remaining open-minded. In the middle of the pilot program, participants reported they were actively using resources provided and initiating experiences for students that involved race and Black racial identity. By the end of the study, Alexis reported:

> I think I'm more mindful about taking time to explain race and the similarities and differences among all people. Not all issues are about skin tone and that is something I need to be more aware of. It is important to acknowledge the differences students see even if it is about family dynamics or religious practices. The more they understand, the more accepting students will be.

My goal was to provide an opportunity for participants to learn about Black racial identity theory, reflect upon who they are as racial beings and how they deal with issues or race or racial identity, specifically for Black children. One of the strategies recommended was to not remain silent about race and racial identity with young children. It was recommended for teachers to be intentional by asking open-ended questions that help children make sense of the world around them, which includes who they are and who others are. During the sessions, as participants engaged with the content and with one another, they began to make connections, develop content vocabulary, and mention strategies to use daily while positively influencing the racial identity of their students. Prior to the intervention, some participants were not initiating experiences and conversations; however, during the intervention they all reported using resources and conveying what they needed to implement the strategies. For example, Christine wrote:

The kids do identify with a racial group in preschool. I need to make sure I have materials in my classroom that resemble them. I am reading books with more African American people. We are playing more cultural friendly music.

In addition, Rachel wrote:

I will continue to allow students to ask open ended questions about race. I will make sure I have materials that relate to them in my classroom and hope they develop a sense of pride in their race.

These entries as well as the ones below reveal an increased awareness of the need to address race and racial identity with students as well as the teacher's recognition of their role in affirming the identities of their students.

Table 7. Journal entries describing change

Reported changes in practice or mindset	Use of resources
This study has made me apply for a Positive Racial Identity Development in an Early Education teacher cohort because I've really enjoyed this study and the knowledge shared along with the resources provided.	I have been utilizing books in my classroom to initiate conversations about race.
I have made changes to my housekeeping area by putting African American babies in there, so the children can play with babies that look just like them. They love it. I keep thinking about what else can I can do during my teaching to meet the needs of all the students in my classroom. I have made a small group during circle to help some of them.	I am reading books with more African American people. We are playing more cultural friendly music.
The kids do identify with a racial group in preschool. I need to make sure I have materials in my classroom that resemble them. I think I'm more mindful about taking time to explain race and the similarities and differences among all people. Not all issues are about skin tone and that is something I need to be more aware of. It is important to acknowledge the difference our students see even if it is about family dynamics or religious practices. The more they understand, the more accepting they are.	

Furthermore, one of the participants also shared the need to engage with colleagues more and wrote:

> I need more time to talk with my colleagues about racial identity. I need to feel more confident in talking about racial identity to my students. I am afraid to say the wrong thing because I am a white teacher.

This entry further describes the complexity and challenges that emerge when exploring race and racial identity as racial beings. This teacher recognizes who she is, but also elevates the need to engage with her colleagues and her apprehension with saying something "wrong" based on how she identifies racially. I believe this study provided the opportunity for the participants to learn and create a common language for addressing Black racial identity. However, the participants need on-going training, support, and opportunities to share practices. Specifically, opportunities to share their struggles and challenges. As a researcher, there is still more that I would like to share, and the data indicates a desire from the teachers to continue learning.

4.5   INTERVIEWS

Individual interviews (one each) took place between the first and last professional development sessions. Scheduling the interviews in this way was purposeful so that study participants developed some comfort and trust with the researcher and hopefully gained knowledge about Black racial identity development. Interviews were uploaded into a web-based qualitative analysis program. Coding occurred once all participant interviews were completed. The goal was to see beyond the codes and my inductive analytic capacity was the primary resource for the analytic process (Thorne, 2008, p. 155). I was mindful of the potential traps that could occur such as misinterpreting frequency by referencing my audit trail. I took notes along the way for

future reference along the data analysis journey. I describe each interview and then highlight common themes that presented themselves across participants. To tell their story, I have assigned each participant a pseudonym. I begin with Alexis.

4.5.1   Interview synopsis: Alexis

Alexis has been teaching for over 10 years and always wanted to teach. She remembers playing school with her cousins when she was very young. She identified her parents as the primary influencers of her racial identity while proclaiming that she is Black. She does not like the term African American because of how the term was developed and used in this country. When she was applying to colleges, she remembers her parents discouraging her from applying to historically Black colleges and universities because they believed the schools did not represent how the world is. However, she desired to attend one of those schools to learn more about herself and feels that her parents taught her to work hard but "sugar-coated" everything about race. They made her feel like the world was a good place.

Alexis ended up attending a predominantly white university and reports often having race related experiences that influenced her and they continue in the workplace. She described attempts to incorporate culture in lesson plans and she believes that representation matters. She strongly believes that Black children need to see adults that look like them teaching. During the interview, she described working to make Black history come alive every day in her classroom and relying on herself to identify resources. Some of the strategies she reported include mindfulness, restorative practices and working daily to allow students to express themselves in positive ways. In her work with colleagues, she often feels compelled to speak up when inappropriate and negative statements are made, but sometimes just doesn't say anything. She is

navigating the challenges while making sense of who she is and deciding how she shows up in the school; however, she's encouraged and seeks to connect with the community in a deeper way.

4.5.2   Interview synopsis: Carmen

Carmen has been an educator for 10 years, loves working with children that look like her and has always liked working with children since she was little.   As a Black child, she noticed physical differences between children while she was in elementary school and remembers going home asking her mother about why her hair was a certain way. Her mother was honest and affirmed who she was by providing positive messages. She has been the only "Black girl" in many situations, specifically in elementary school through college and feels the experiences prepared her to serve in her current role. Carmen often feels compelled to speak up on behalf of Black children and interrupt negative comments about them and their parents. She is comfortable navigating the complexity of being one of the only Black teachers in her school.

Carmen believes identity develops over time and is shaped through conversations, specifically what is seen and heard and how children see people that look like them being treated. She works daily to listen to her students, reads books that reflect them and offers encouragement, compliments, and positive affirmations. She seeks out her own resources and believes people must possess a basic interest in Black children to affirm their racial identity. Carmen stated, "I feel like I have the resources within myself…they are within me."

4.5.3   Interview synopsis: Rachel

Next, I introduce Rachel, a teacher who attended schools in the same district where she works. She has been teaching for 10 years and identifies herself as multi-racial. She has navigated race since she can remember and believes that racial identity is influenced by messages from the community and ultimately influenced by what is seen and heard. Her family members were very negative, and she states:

> Identity is influenced by what you hear. I think that's a big part of it. What you hear and how people react to you when you walk down the street.

Rachel has memories and experiences of people looking at her family negatively because she has a white mother and Black father. Rachel spoke to the difficulty and complexity of finding resources for her students and is often worried about the children she serves and her own biological children. She believes there are barriers put up at her school to limit engagement with the community and parents. She often finds herself reacting to negative and inappropriate comments from her colleagues. She struggles with negative references about Black students and makes attempts to model and use positive and affirming vocabulary with them. Even though she feels support is lacking from administration, she works to find books that represent her students, and encourages them to engage in conversations about who they are and what they want in life. Rachel is struggling with her racial identity in the workplace and often finds herself challenged and uncomfortable. She ultimately believes in her students and works to provide positive affirmations, but feels she needs support.

4.5.4   Interview synopsis: Christine

Finally, I share the story of Christine, who has been teaching for 13 years and identifies herself as a white person. She became an educator to help people and students. She chose education as a second choice in college but worried about her prosperity. Her eyes were opened during student teaching that Black children needed good teachers. She remembers having very limited access and experiences with Black people until she went to college. She never interacted with Black people prior to teaching them. Early in her career, she experienced resistance from her father because of her choice to teach in an urban setting with Black children. Early on, she often found herself explaining what she did and how the children behaved to her father. It appeared that she often made attempts to convince him that the children were normal and pleasant. She believes that her parents influenced her racial identity, and that adults play a key role in racial identity development.

Christine expressed that she doesn't fully understand her students and their experiences because her lived experience is different; however, she tries to be positive, helpful, and kind. She posed the question of, "What more can I do to connect with them?" during the interview. She realizes that there is more to be done and often feels that the parents don't connect with her because she is white. She also reported lack of support from the administrators regarding what to do when dealing with race and racial identity issues. During the study, she reports reading books that represented the children, adjusting the music she played, and engaging students in conversations about physical characteristics and that the students were very excited by the shifting activities. She is still unsure of what more she can do but appears to be interested and willing to learn more.

4.5.5   Interview findings

Here, I describe three themes I uncovered in the teacher interviews. These themes appeared across all participants. For each theme, I include verbatim quotes that reflect the theme. The themes include (1) adults influence racial identity in childhood, (2) teachers navigate racial identity individually and with difficulty, (3) lived experiences represent complexity, and (4) support is needed.

4.5.5.1 Adults influence racial identify in childhood

The adults in a child's life are the influencers of their identity. Racial socialization is direct and indirect, verbal and nonverbal, overt and covert (Stevenson, 1994). All participants reported that the adults in their lives specifically, their parents, messages received, and personal experiences whether positive or negative influenced their racial identity. This theme supports the research previously noted from Winkler (2009), Holmes (1995) and Tatum (1997) regarding the need for educators to ensure that children see themselves represented in the curriculum and that young children are making sense of who they are and identifying differences in physical characteristics. Children are developmentally capable of understanding race and racial identity, so teachers and adults cannot remain silent. Educators have the responsibility to help children make sense of who they are racially and the world around them. Research by Winkler (2009) suggests:

> The most important thing caregivers can do is provide children with ideas about how to fight against the continuing racial inequity and discrimination in our society and empower the children! (p.7)

As reported earlier, Rachel received negative messages from extended family members and members of the community. She states:

> I always knew my family was different than most people. When I was a lot younger we
> grew up in a community where majority, was like, strictly, white families with a white
> mom and the white dad and then there was mine. It's like, well, "Who's that guy?" It's
> like, "That's my dad." Then you get the looks like, "How's that your dad?"

Carmen received messages from school that resulted in her coming home to request changes with her appearance. She reports:

> When I was in kindergarten, I went to a Christian school and started noticing the
> difference between me and the kids that I went to school with. I would go home and tell
> my mom, "I want straight hair and I want to be lighter." People would say I talked white,
> so I changed my speech patterns based on the type of environment that I was in.

Her mother's response was that she was Black, and fine he way she was. She also reminded

Carmen that her hair was never going to be straight. So, Rachel and Carmen received messages

about their racial identity both from the home and environments outside of the home at a young

age while Alexis was influenced in the home much older, while in high school. She was

preparing to attend college and reports:

> Both of my parents who work in predominantly white fields told me that I shouldn't go to
> a historically Black college or university (HBCU) because that's not how the world is,
> it's diverse. That made me feel like, okay, we live in a diverse world, but it also made
> me feel like I want to learn more about who I am. My great grandmother is white and so
> it's something that I've always struggled with as in figuring it out. I wanted to go to an
> HBCU but didn't. While at college, I was called a nigger and chocolate.

These experiences confirm that adults and caregivers influence racial identity in childhood and

supports Tatum (1997) message that adults can't remain silent about race. She suggests that

talking with children about race is helpful, that caregivers need to learn how to do it, and that the

children need to observe us actively trying to learn (Copenhaver-Johnson & Bowman, 2007).

The benefits of dialogue outweigh the risks of silence.

4.5.5.2 Teachers navigate racial identity individually and with difficulty

The second theme that emerged is the difficulty and complexity of navigating racial identity. Each person's lived experiences are different and ultimately affect how they navigate life. Each participant shared personal experiences they dealt with in the past or are currently dealing with that shapes them as racial beings. In the school, Christine deals with being a white teacher in an environment where 98% of the students and parents are Black. She describes experiences where she must deal with parents that make comments about her race. Christine reports an experience with a parent:

> Parent: "You're just a white teacher, you know. You don't know". Christine: "I have to say, I have 13 years' experience teaching in the city. Please let me know what I don't know. We can be on the same page. I'm here to help your kid. I want the best for your kid and in due time they calm down".

While Rachel shared her feelings that teachers need to prepare the children and shares a story about a white child that didn't have previous experiences with Black children. She approached the Black children in her class with excitement but would say they were beautiful and pet their skin. Rachel intervened and explained that the children are not puppies and that everyone has different skin in the class. She initiated conversations about different skin tones and engaged the students in self-portraits while having them choose the color they felt represented their skin from multicultural markers.

Finally, Carmen describes how she feels about being a Black woman and coming from a Black family. She states,

> I try not to coddle my kids. I keep it all the way real with them. I make them feel good about the smallest things. I must get all the resources on my own, but I think the resources come from within, just being who I am, just knowing who the kids are and what they need.

Christine, Rachel, and Carmen have different experiences with children and parents, and are navigating their racial identity while supporting children in the preschool environment. Ultimately, they are dealing with who they are from messages received and their lived experiences while effecting the children in their classrooms differently.

4.5.5.3 Lived experiences represent complexity and support is needed

Teachers lack support for dealing with complex lived experiences. They need support to continue initiating conversations while identifying strategies and resources to use with young children that involve race and racial identity. They need school leaders to engage them in courageous dialogue and professional development that allows them to explore who they are racially and discuss ways to engage children in developmentally appropriate ways. The last theme that resonated was the support needed from school leaders and administrators to consistently engage in this work. The participants spoke about the lack of support they receive from administrators to discuss race and the limited opportunities to engage in learning about how to deal with race and racial identity with preschool children. They all have a desire to engage and learn, but the journey would be easier with support and a guiding coalition of teacher leaders and administrators. During the pilot, I was able to provide support and provide the opportunity for participants to learn and explore their own identity and their students' identities. As Rachel wrote:

> Thank you so much for gifting us such wonderful books! My students absolutely loved the two books that I read so far, *Skin Again* and the book about growing up and being anything, you want to be.
>
> When we read *Skin Again*, my students first said, 'no my skin is important'. After explaining that skin is important because it covers our bones and organs, but it didn't let people know about who we are, what we like, what we don't like, what we dream about being, what we are afraid of, etc. They did seem to understand. We did get a little off

topic about how we needed to protect our skin and use lotion. I also had a student who stated that her mom's friend had 'changing skin'. After asking more questions, I think she meant that her mom's friend goes tanning. We discussed why people go tanning and how the sun makes all our skin darker especially in the summer time (I'm pretty sure this is where lotion and sunblock came up). It was nice to deviate from the curriculum a little and discuss this topic with the students.

The other book, which I can't remember the title, was absolutely adorable. At the end, one of my little guys said 'Ms._____, I can be anything!' I think that is a book that needs to be read over and over again. It's such a positive message.

Thank you so much for allowing me to be part of your research. I really hope that you can teach Nigrescence theory to all preschool staff at some point. This is information that is necessary and needed. I've learned a lot and hope to continue to learn and grow not just for my students but also for myself.

Christine seeks to know more and wants to speak with parents. She states:

What more can I do? I would like to sit down with one of my parents and ask them about the expectations they have of me as a white teacher and what they think I need to do more of because they always say everything is good. I want to know what they would like to see.

In addition, Alexis reports about support needed from administrators and states:

I don't feel there is support from our administrators in the building, but there is support from outside resources. I believe the community tries to come together and provide support. Within the school, a big deal is made about different holidays, but for Black History Month, we are left to figure it out. So, I try to make Black History 365 in my classroom. We are required to email our supervisor what we wanted to do for Black History Month. I just feel like its isn't authentic. We really search high and low for materials related to African American culture and Black culture.

Rachel and Christine are interested in learning more about how to support the Black children they serve but need on-going support from administrators while Alexis is doing what she feels is needed to address the racial identity of her students. Sustained support through training and conversations with colleagues, parents and administrators is a necessity and can help everyone become more culturally competent. Also, curricular materials and resources to engage students in positive ways that are affirming, and empowering are crucial.

5.0   DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This study sought to answer three inquiry questions that explored change in teacher perspectives and practices used to positively influence racial identity. The questions that guided the study include:

(1) How are teachers making sense of their own racial identity and how does it relate to how they address the identities of their students?

(2) How do preschool teachers develop racial identity for students within their classrooms?

(3) How do teachers respond when issues of race and/or racial identity emerge?

5.1   TEACHER IDENTITY IS A FACTOR

This study attempts to capture phenomena and describe lived experiences of four preschool teachers during a four-month intervention while documenting changes in their practice. They are diverse racially and all identify with a race or multiple races. I learned that their racial identity matters and shapes their experiences. It also impacts what they do to address the identities of their students. The teachers that identified as Black reported ease with addressing the racial identity of Black children, however the biracial and white teacher reported more challenges with

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parents and colleagues in the school environment. All teachers reported challenges with the language that adults use with Black children and how they refer to them, at times.

To review, the four teachers teach in an urban pre-school environment where at least 98% of the population is Black or African American. The use of interpretive description is used to document and explain the data (Thorne, 2008). Describing their experiences prior to the pilot professional development and the experiences during the intervention align with the study design. I recognize similarities and differences in who the participants are as racial beings and how they address the identity of their students. I strived to explain the "lived context and the actions as they evolve" (Thorne, 2008, p. 49).

All teachers report an interest in serving their students and the desire to address the negative messages they receive by engaging in suggested activities and strategies during the intervention. They reported back during the learning sessions about strategies used or books they read that initiated conversations about race and racial identity. For example, Carmen and Alexis affirmed students, but in different ways. Carmen's approach was to provide encouragement, compliments and book discussions, with free response. Her actions provide opportunities for students to see themselves in the content. However, Alexis describes lessons that are culturally responsive, her use of restorative practices and infusion of Black history into lessons daily. Their approach was different, but both identify as Black women and report high levels of self-esteem and pride in their race. Tatum (1997) reminds us:

> Identity formation employs a process of simultaneous reflection and observations, a process taking place on all levels of mental functioning, by which the individual judges himself in the light of what he perceives to be the way in which others judge him in comparison to themselves and to a typology significant to them; while he judges their way of judging him in the light of how he perceives himself in comparison to them and to types relevant to him. (p. 100)

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The process of identity formation is complex and represents one's past, present, and future. It resides within a person but also within their culture.

Prior to the intervention, Christine was the only educator that was not actively using strategies and resources to affirm the identity of her students. She states,

> Racial identity develops through experiences. I didn't have diverse experiences growing up. I never experienced it until teaching here.

So, Christine's experiences shaped her and directly impacts how she thinks and what she does with students. As the intervention occurred, she reports reading books provided and experiences that occurred with students because of adding diverse puppets to the centers or initiating conversations and discussions about differences in eye color, hair or skin tone. Christine was encouraged to answer questions and respond to her students' curiosities about race because "questions and confusion about racial issues begin early" (Tatum, 1997, p. 112). Christine appreciated the technical strategies offered, however questions lingered of what more she could do as the professional development series ended. She articulated next steps after the sessions ended and am hopeful that she follows her plan.

5.2   INTENTIONAL ACTIONS MATTER

Preschool teachers can engage in activities that develop racial identity for students within their classrooms, but the approaches are varied and based on their beliefs, mindset, and knowledge. Tatum (1997) suggests "many adults do not know how to respond when children make race-related observations" (p. 116). Participants reported experiences they had each month and how they responded.

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The findings indicate that all the experiences with children and adults involved comments or statements about physical characteristics such as skin color and hair texture. They described their responses at times with a brief acknowledgement of the statement to more in-depth class discussions about skin tone, eye color, or hair texture. Responses also included adjustments to physical resources in the classroom such as making portraits with multicultural markers or adding diverse puppets to the drama center. In addition, they began to initiate conversations by reading books that involved race or identity. All participants report their students' excitement and engagement. Christine states:

> They notice anything different we do. The children are open to anything.

Rachel shares:

> I read a book and pointed out the little girl and they were so excited. I pointed out her hair and noticed her characteristics. I related it back to the girls.

Rachel also reports making attempts to "buffer against the negative messages" (Tatum, 1997, p. 114) by talking with students about what they can do.   She states:

> I tell them, don't let people tell you what you can't do. You can do anything.

Both Rachel and Christine had similar experiences when initiating conversations through literature. The students connect with the text and see themselves in it. These actions affirm them and are necessary daily.

5.3   TEACHERS HAVE A RESPONSIBILITY

Teachers respond when issues of race and/or racial identity emerge is situational and depends on who is involved. Tables 6 and 7, capture instances of how race and racial identity emerge during

this four-month research. Furthermore, I return to the evaluation data from the professional development sessions, specifically session four. An additional open-ended question was included in the last evaluation to gain an understanding of the impact of teachers' learning and the potential influence upon children. For example, Rachel's reflections spoke directly about her intentions moving forward:

> I will continue to allow students to ask open ended questions about race. I will make sure I have materials that relate to them in my classroom. I hope they will develop a sense of pride of their race.

Carmen spoke about her actions, but also referenced the theory that laid the foundation for the learning:

> Understanding the stages of Nigrescence theory will help me have a better understanding of what my students are experiencing and provide age appropriate materials and conversations that helps strengthen their pride in self.

While both participants hinted at their desire for students to develop a positive sense of self, their work to address and positively influence the racial identity of their students is not easy. They will need to remain committed to affirming the identity of their students and engage in continuous learning. I believe, they also need to find allies for support, so they don't get fatigued and discouraged. Van Ausdale and Feagin (2001) remind us:

> Educating children about these issues requires that we rethink our ideas about several dimensions of everyday life, including the nature of racial and ethnic oppression, the intellectual capacity of children, our willingness to effect changes in oppressive social conditions, and the extend of children's social skills. (p.199)

This work is difficult but should be a required part of every educator's daily practices. All educators play a crucial role in shifting practices and elevating issues of race and Black racial identity along with racial bias with young children. Tatum (1997) suggests that providing accurate information about race and racism will help children to think critically. Even young

children can be empowered and encouraged to negotiate these issues and think critically about ways to reduce bias and prejudice (Winkler, 2009). Educators must provide opportunities for children to engage in this way. This research and its findings can serve as a call to action for school leaders and teachers. I know there is a role that I can play in working with and supporting educators to engage children in conversations about race and provide experiences and messages that affirm the racial identity of all children, specifically Black children. Each person has a sphere of influence and can choose to chip away at layers of oppression and racism that are still operating in schools.

5.4   LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

As a pilot program evaluation, this study has limitations, including its single setting, small sample of participants, largely self-report data (i.e., no direct observations) and lack of parent involvement or engagement. In this section, I describe each limitation and suggest how future studies could address that limitation.

Conducting research in a single setting is a limitation because it impacts the findings. The findings represent one urban school in a large urban district, so assumptions cannot be made about all urban environments or other schools within the urban district. In future studies, it would be beneficial to select multiple sites within a district or across districts to compare findings across settings. The design of this study included more than one site in one school district, however participants that volunteered were all from one site.

The small sample impacted statistical analyses and significant change in knowledge from pre-posttests could not be reported. Having a larger sample size could have generated more

accurate results. Future research in preschool environments is needed and larger samples will provide an increase in data and opportunities for more in-depth analysis.

This interpretive description captures the lived experiences of participants through conversation solely through self-report. Formulation of my research questions and study design contributed to this limitation. Future research is needed in this area and observing within classrooms while having the opportunity to engage with students and exploring teacher moves and practices that address Black racial identity or race will add to the field. Also, engaging parents adds value. Obtaining data about their role in racial socialization and a perspective about the educator's role would beneficial, specifically considering parent racial socialization practices from (Hughes & Chen, 1999; Thornton, 1997).

All the adults in a child's life are influencers of how they understand race and the world around them. So, I return to the research from Butler-Sweet (2011) since Black children will "inevitably face racism and discrimination in American society, Black families emphasize the importance of teaching children how to cope with and survive prejudice" (p.749). It is necessary that Black parents provide positive racial messages that address self-esteem and develop positive Black identity. Black families have a role to play along with educators and must find better ways to work together in support black children. This requires courage and an understanding of who we are as racial beings which is a life-long journey.

Addressing the limitations would expand the body of research involving what can be done with very young children, at home and in school that shapes the development of their identity. Educators and parents can learn more about how to work together in service of Black children and hopefully become more knowledgeable about how to interrupt systemic racism and empower the next generation to continue breaking racism's stronghold in this country.

5.5   IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

Research from White and Young (2016) suggests:

> Although children are at the phase of development to begin understanding their own and others' races and are likely to let their conceptualizations of race inform their behavior, they are not initiating conversations about race in their classrooms. Teachers are also not initiating these conversations. Therefore, children are forming their own ideas about this aspect of their identity, without input from the important adults in their educational life. (p. 25)

The need for additional training and support from school leadership as well as training of pre-service teachers and certified educators. All educators can benefit from participating in on-going development and learning regarding race and how to actively engage in discussions with students and one another. Developing the skills and identifying tools with supports to consistently initiate and engage in conversations that are positive, proactive, and developmentally appropriate can be beneficial for students. It can be done, and all students can benefit from being affirmed racially while given the opportunity to discuss these constructs often. Winkler (2009) suggests:

> To address issues of racial bias and prejudice with children and help them understand race and inequity in our society, caregivers must first be comfortable addressing these issues themselves. (p.7)

Educators require support and on-going professional learning and training opportunities, but they also must possess a desire and will to engage in this way with students. Across all four modules, teachers reported in their evaluation that they looked forward to applying their learning and a willingness to practice what was discussed during the session. The books provided, and resources shared were received positively and reported in the open-ended monthly journal responses. However, due to the limited time for training, longer sessions of two hours with individual coaching between sessions could help the teachers process the information

individually and collectively. Combining modules and extending the session time provides additional opportunities for participants to engage in deeper dialogue and explore curricular resources and materials together. There was some time allocated in the session, but not enough. Reviewing materials together, co-planning lessons and creating activities produces shared knowledge. By engaging in this way, educators can deepen their relationships, share challenges, and authentically partner to support Black children. Engaging in consistent and intentional collaboration about how to affirm racial identity of Black children places them at the center. These actions suggest that they matter and signals a commitment to their development and well-being. I believe, addressing these implications can change the look and feel of individual classrooms and ultimately how schools function on behalf of all children.

Early childhood educators play a critical role and parents also need to be informed. Culturally responsive teaching begins with what the learner knows and leverages home cultural knowledge and connects academic learning so meaning and relevance emerge. The opportunity to engage parents and the community to surround young children is promises to yield impactful results. Aligning messages, making connections, and working in an interconnected way can be highly transformative not only for children but for the adults as well.

I revisit the definitions of Black racial identity and Nigrescence theory to reinforce the notion that who we are matters. Once we know who we are, there is a better understanding of our actions and strategic decisions can be made regarding what we do daily. Every educator should understand Nigrescence theory, which is a theory that describes the process of understanding self and ultimately becoming comfortable with being Black.

Furthermore, Nigrescence theory suggests that self-concept has two components that include personal identity and reference group orientation. Each component determines the value

and importance of race to an individual. Once the stages are understood by Black educators, they can make sense of where they are, where they are within the stages and better understand themselves. For white educators, understanding Nigrescence theory and its stages will hopefully help them understand what they need to do while supporting the racial identity development of their students. Becoming culturally competent suggests that educators have the skills to interact effectively with people from different cultures and races while being respectful and responsive to beliefs, needs, and practices of all cultures.

All the participants are experienced educators. Regardless of the racial identity, they conveyed a desire to learn more and identified gaps in their understanding about racial identity development prior to the intervention. Black participants spoke of connecting with their students, who were Black, and felt their racial connection served as a resource. Alexis and Carmen believed in the children and honored their students' voices daily by establishing caring relationships. Rachel and Christine were not as empowered to address the identity of their students but identified gaps in understanding; however, Rachel appeared to connect differently and authentically with students because of her lived experience as a child. There were connections that resembled her understanding and compassion with the students and she made attempts to counteract the negative messaging students received. Hilliard, Perry and Steele (2004) proposes the narrative of racial uplift must be returned to the education of contemporary Black young people to instill direction and purpose. If urban schools are to become spaces that uplift students, adults must take responsibility for them and become genuinely invested in their success and achievement by engaging them in meaningful ways.

5.6   CONCLUSION

Like the findings from Gholson & Martin (2014), my work suggests that race is ever present and operates within the classroom.   Race affects and directly impacts relationships and learning among students and with the adults.

As research has shown, teachers do not always respond effectively when issues of race and/or racial identity emerge in the classroom or school.   Teachers struggle to make sense of their own racial identity since it is complex.   I suggest that who the teacher is matters and where they are with their own identity impacts what they do with students.   Their journey as a racial being is important and directly impacts how they view and interact with their students.

Through this research, I learned that preschool teachers are well intentioned and are interested in developing the racial identity of their students, but do not always know what to do or how identity changes over time.   After the intervention of four professional learning sessions, teachers reported more confidence and knowledge.   They made efforts to use the recommend strategies and found students to be highly engaged and interested in the conversations and activities. This research contributes to the field of education by providing new knowledge about how racial identity can be influenced in preschool environments.   Everyone has a sphere of influence and the responsibility to act and touch lives (Tatum, 1997). My hope is that this research serves as a vehicle for positive influence to happen so Black children develop a "heightened sense of themselves" (Milner, 2015, p. 3) and deeply understand their assets and those of their families and communities.

Prior to segregation, Black children did not have to choose between one's race and being educated. Even though resources were unequal and civil rights were not being honored, segregated schools promoted high levels of academic learning (Ogbu, 1990). Because of school

desegregation, much was lost: Black students had to separate themselves from their race and engage in assimilation logic which was intended to "Americanize" people by rejecting one's identity and mimicking the cultural beliefs and practices of the dominant Anglocentric group so access to benefits of American society occurred (Spring, 1997). Unfortunately, this still operates in schools today. However, I am encouraged by the participants and their desire to learn. This research also confirmed the need for training and support to address the racial identity of Black preschool students. As a result, I hope that others will see a need for research that connects the use of culturally responsive pedagogy with identity development and its impact on the achievement and success of Black children.

PILOT PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT TIMELINE

	Pilot Program
January 2018 **Session 1**	Facilitate one professional development module The focus of the learning will include 1. A rationale regarding why understanding Black racial identity is important 2. What I hope to gain as a result of engaging in the pilot and brief overview of the IRB process 3. An introduction to Nigrescence theory 4. The unpacking of a scenario about race in an early childhood classroom in preparation for session 2 5. Questions they have about the pilot and study 6. Share the focus for the remaining professional learning sessions
February 2018 **Session 2**	Facilitate one professional development module The focus of the learning will include how to talk about race and what teachers can do to positively influence racial identity 1. Unpack the scenario about race and racial identity from an early childhood classroom 2. A professional learning community meeting will occur with teachers to process their learning and experiences. The observer will provide guiding questions and note taking will occur. 3. The strategy of posing open ended questions will be presented to participants to use when issues of race and identity emerge in their classrooms
March 2018 **Session 3**	Facilitate one professional development module The focus of the learning will include what teachers can do to positively influence racial identity

	1. Strategies to use that can positively influence racial identity in the classroom will be introduced and suggestions for how to talk about race will be shared 2. A professional learning community meeting will occur with teachers to process their learning and experiences. The observer will provide guiding questions and note taking will occur.
April 2018 **Session 4**	Facilitate one professional development module The focus of the learning will include teachers sharing their experiences while participating in the study and what they are doing to influence racial identity 1. Strategies to use that can positively influence racial identity in the classroom will be shared 2. A professional learning community meeting will occur with teachers to process their learning and experiences. The observer will provide guiding questions and note taking will occur. 3. Discussion about what happens after the study concludes

April 2018 **Session 4**	Facilitate one professional development module The focus of the learning will include teachers sharing their experiences while participating in the study and what they are doing to influence racial identity 4. Strategies to use that can positively influence racial identity in the classroom will be shared 5. A professional learning community meeting will occur with teachers to process their learning and experiences. The observer will provide guiding questions and note taking will occur. 6. Discussion about what happens after the study concludes

APPENDIX B

RECRUITMENT MATERIALS

B.1 RECRUITMENT LETTER

As some of you know, I am a doctoral student at the University of Pittsburgh and I am planning to conduct research on how racial identity is developed in preschool environments. Research has shown that very young children notice race through differences in physical characteristics and that adult behavior and indirect social interactions influence their racial identity. However, the teaching staff currently does not engage with specific curriculum resources that support racial identity development, and they receive minimal professional development. Many early childhood teachers have expressed an interest in better understanding this issue.

I have developed a two-pronged study of racial identity development that seeks to understand how teachers influence racial identity in the preschool setting. Professional development modules will occur with a post-test after each session. I will interview preschool teachers as a way of helping them explore their own racial identity and engage them in learning which strategies and practices are used to influence racial identity in the classroom.

All responses are confidential. Reporting will be anonymous, and pseudonyms will be used. Your participation is voluntary, and you may withdraw from this project at any time. This research seeks to understand practices that influence racial identity and assesses the benefits of providing professional development to preschool teachers. Its purpose is to influence change within a context of practice.

Would you be interested in participating? If so, I can be contacted via email at rar120@pitt.edu. Please contact me if interested or if you have any questions.

Have you ever wondered if you can positively influence the racial identity of your students?

This research study is looking for teachers who are currently working in an early childhood setting. The purpose of this study is to understand what occurs in the preschool setting that influences the racial identity of students and offers professional development to impact practice. If you are interested in participating in an interview to share your experiences and professional development sessions, please contact Ruthie Rea @ rar120@pitt.edu.

APPENDIX C

PRE- AND POST-TEST

Have you heard of Nigrescence theory? Circle YES or NO. **If you answered yes, please explain your understanding of the theory below.** _____ _____ _____
Explain how racial identity evolves over time. _____ _____ _____
Circle True or False after reading the information below. Nigrescence theory has five stages and progress as follows: Pre-encounter   Encounter   Immersion/Emersion   Internalization   Internalization-Commitment
What strategies below can be used in the classroom to influence students' in developing a positive racial identity? Circle all the strategies that apply. A. Engage students in a variety of literature and visuals that represent who they are racially and developmentally B. When students make comments or ask questions, direct them to talk with their parents C. Provide visuals that give students the vocabulary to ask questions D. Provide students toys and materials that help them see themselves in the classroom E. Bring in parents and people that represent various cultures and racial groups to share information and engage students in activities

TRUE or FALSE (Circle one after reading the definition below)

Racial identity development is a sense of group or collective identity based on one's
perception that he or she shares a common racial heritage with a particular racial group**.**

**What is the potential value of incorporating strategies and techniques to positively
influence Black racial identity in your classroom? Choose <u>one</u> statement below that
best captures your thinking.**
A. To support students in developing a positive self-concept and healthy connection to their race.
B. To help students understand who they are and where they fit within the world
C. To support students in understanding who they are and who other people are in their classroom in hopes
   that a mutual respect and understanding develops
D. To answer questions about who students are and provide an opportunity for them to learn about others

**Choose the practices below that you will use when addressing issues of race or
identity in your classroom?**
A. Read books that are representative of the students in your class
B. Ask questions of students when issues about who they are or when their physical characteristics are
   questioned
C. Respond to the child in an age-appropriate way that demonstrates respect for the comment and others.
   Also, share that it is okay to be different, look different from others and that each person is special.
D. Ask students to explain their thinking when statements are made and help them to make sense of their
   words
E. All of the above

Thanks for taking the time to complete this assessment about Black racial identity.

TEACHER INTERPRETIVE DESCRIPTION INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Interviewee (Title and Name): _____

Interviewer: <u>Ruthie Rea</u>

Date of Interview: _____

Start Time of Interview: _____

End Time of Interview: _____

Location of Interview:_____

Interview Topic: <u>Racial identity in the Early Childhood setting</u>

Introduction

Hello! My name is Ruthie Rea. I'm a doctoral student at the University of Pittsburgh and I'm here to learn about how Black racial identity is influenced or impacted in early childhood settings. I have been an educator for 17 years and am currently an elementary school principal. You have been selected to interview because you are someone who has a great deal to share about teaching and learning in the early childhood setting. My research project's focus is on understanding how racial identity is influenced in the early childhood classroom, with a particular interest in how the identity of Black children is impacted and addressed. I am also interested in how the teachers respond when issues of race and identity emerge in the classroom. My study does not evaluate you, your techniques or experiences. Rather, I am trying to learn more about what actually occurs in the early childhood setting regarding Black racial identity development, and hopefully learn about teacher practices that help improve or positively influence the identity of Black and brown children in the early childhood setting.

I would like to begin by thanking you for your willingness to participate in my study and for engaging in this conversation today. There are no right or wrong answers, or desirable or undesirable answers. I would like you to feel comfortable saying what you really think and how you really feel.

To facilitate my note-taking, I would like to audio tape our conversation today and receive your verbal permission for me to record this interview. If it is okay with you, I would like to record our conversation since it is hard for me to write down everything while simultaneously carrying an attentive conversation with you.

Do I have your permission? If so, please state your name and indicate yes, you agree with this interview to be recorded or no, if you do not agree.

In addition, please note that (1) all information will be held in a secure file and your name will never be shared with anyone and (2) your participation is voluntary, and you may stop at any time. Thank you for your agreeing to participate.

I have planned this interview to last no longer than one hour. During this time, there are several questions that I would like to cover. Let's begin with your background.

A. Interviewee Background

1. How long have you been a teacher?
2. And how many of those years were in early childhood?
3. How many of those years were within this school district?
4. Please tell me about anything that occurred in your formative years that influenced your decision to teach and/or your decision to teach in a setting where majority of the children are Black or brown.

Racial Identity --Teacher

5. As mentioned earlier, this study is structured to better understand racial identity development and how it is influenced in the early years within a school setting.
6. How do you identify yourself racially?
   - I would like to hear about an early memory of when you began to make sense of your identity, if you can recall.
   - Who was responsible for influencing your identity?

B. Institutional / Personal Perspective

7. Please tell me your ideas about how young children's racial identity is developed.
8. If you think back on the past year, could you share any racial comments children made or perhaps interactions that focused on race?
   a. How did you respond to these comments and situations?
9. Now, let's talk about if your identity influences the way you address the racial identity of the students you serve. Just share anything that comes to mind.

- 9a. Tell me about anything you do specifically for all children?
- 9b. For Black and brown children?

9. Tell me your thoughts about whether you have the resources and/or supports to address the identity of your students.

- 9a. How about any consultation, coaching, or professional learning that specifically supports you in affirming the racial identity of children, specifically Black and brown children?

11. How do you feel about using specific strategies and resources to affirm the identity of Black and brown children in your classroom?

- 11a. I would be interested in hearing more about the strategies you would recommend.
- How do you think students would respond?

Wrap up

Thank you for taking time to share your thoughts and perspectives. You have been very helpful. Would you like to share anything else about your thoughts or feelings regarding racial identity development in the early childhood setting? Do you have any questions for me at this point? Thanks again.

After the Interview (comments from the interviewer)

Post Interview Comments and/or Observations:

APPENDIX E

JOURNAL PROMPTS

To be organized and analyzed in Qualtrics and sent via an online link the last week of every month.

1. How many experiences regarding race or racial identity occurred during the month?

                             0   1-3   4-5   6-10   More than 10

2. What type of issues emerged?   Open ended response

3. How did you respond?   Open ended response

4. What has changed within your practice or with your mindset regarding racial identity development over the last month?

                       Open ended response

EVALUATION OF PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT SESSIONS

Participants' Feedback of Professional Development (session 1)

Your Reactions to the Session

Were objectives clearly articulated?   Select your response below.

 Strongly disagree   Disagree   Somewhat disagree   Somewhat agree   Agree   Strongly agree

Were the objectives aligned to understanding Black racial identity development?

Strongly disagree   Disagree   Somewhat disagree   Somewhat agree   Agree   Strongly agree

Was time structured to allow for processing and reflection on learning? Select your response below.

Strongly disagree   Disagree   Somewhat disagree   Somewhat agree   Agree   Strongly agree

Was the presentation well organized? Select your response below.

Strongly disagree   Disagree   Somewhat disagree   Somewhat agree   Agree   Strongly agree

Your Learning

The content was relevant and applicable to my role as a teacher. Select your response below.

Strongly disagree   Disagree   Somewhat disagree   Somewhat agree   Agree   Strongly agree

Based on my participation, I am confident in returning to my classroom and using or implementing what I learned. Select your response below.
Strongly disagree   Disagree   Somewhat disagree   Somewhat agree   Agree   Strongly agree

Your Use of New Knowledge and Skills

Which of the following statements best describes your thoughts based on what you learned in today's session?

Select one.

   A. I look forward to applying my understanding of Nigrescence theory when issues of race or racial identity emerge in my classroom over the next few weeks.
   B. I would like to practice using open ended questioning when issues of race or racial identity emerge.
   C. I don't think that the information shared will work with my students.

Organization Support & Change

What support do you need in order to implement what you learned during the session?

_____

_____

_____

Modified from National Staff Development Council www.nsdc.org

Guskey, T. (2002). Does it make a difference? Evaluating professional development. *Educational Leadership, 59*(6), 45-51.

Participants' Feedback of Professional Development (Sessions 2 & 3)

Your Reactions to the Session

Were objectives clearly articulated?   Select your response below.

Strongly disagree   Disagree   Somewhat disagree   Somewhat agree   Agree   Strongly agree

Were the objectives aligned to understanding Black racial identity development?

Strongly disagree   Disagree   Somewhat disagree   Somewhat agree   Agree   Strongly agree

Was time structured to allow for processing and reflection on learning? Select your response below.

 Strongly disagree   Disagree   Somewhat disagree   Somewhat agree   Agree   Strongly agree

Was the presentation well organized? Select your response below.

Strongly disagree   Disagree   Somewhat disagree   Somewhat agree   Agree   Strongly agree

Your Learning

The content was relevant and applicable to my role as a teacher. Select your response below.

Strongly disagree   Disagree   Somewhat disagree   Somewhat agree   Agree   Strongly agree

Based on my participation, I am confident in returning to my classroom and using or implementing what I learned. Select your response below.

Strongly disagree   Disagree   Somewhat disagree   Somewhat agree   Agree   Strongly agree

Your Use of New Knowledge and Skills

Which of the following statements best describes your thoughts based on what you learned in today's session?

Select one.

- D. I look forward to applying my understanding of the theories shared about Black racial identity development in my classroom in the next few weeks.
- E. I would like to seek out additional resources such as bringing parents in to share information about their culture or ensuring that the materials I use with students are representative of their race and culture apply, but I don't have the materials or resources that I need.
- F. I don't think that the strategies shared will work with my students.

Organization Support & Change

What support do you need in order to implement what you learned during the session?

_____

_____

_____

Modified from National Staff Development Council www.nsdc.org

Guskey, T. (2002). Does it make a difference? Evaluating professional development. *Educational Leadership, 59*(6), 45-51.

Participants' Feedback of Professional Development (session 4)

Your Reactions to the Session

Were objectives clearly articulated?   Select your response below.

Strongly disagree   Disagree   Somewhat disagree   Somewhat agree   Agree   Strongly agree

Were the objectives aligned to understanding Black racial identity development?

Strongly disagree   Disagree   Somewhat disagree   Somewhat agree   Agree   Strongly agree

Was time structured to allow for processing and reflection on learning? Select your response below.

Strongly disagree   Disagree   Somewhat disagree   Somewhat agree   Agree   Strongly agree

Was the presentation well organized? Select your response below.

Strongly disagree   Disagree   Somewhat disagree   Somewhat agree   Agree   Strongly agree

Your Learning

The content was relevant and applicable to my role as a teacher. Select your response below.

Strongly disagree   Disagree   Somewhat disagree   Somewhat agree   Agree   Strongly agree

Based on my participation, I am confident in returning to my classroom and using or implementing what I learned. Select your response below.

Strongly disagree   Disagree   Somewhat disagree   Somewhat agree   Agree   Strongly agree

Your Use of New Knowledge and Skills

Which of the following statements best describes your thoughts based on what you learned in today's session?

Select one.

- G. I have already applied my knowledge of Nigrescence theory in my classroom.
- H. I have already practiced questioning when issues of race emerged and am reading diverse stories that are representative of the students in my classroom, and it seemed to work well.
- I. I have already used various strategies to positively influence the racial identity of my Black and brown students in my classroom, but it was not appropriate for them.

Organization Support & Change

What support do you need in order to implement what you learned during the session?

_____

_____

_____

Student Learning Outcomes

Based on your learning over the last four sessions, what will be the impact on students?

_____

_____

Modified from National Staff Development Council www.nsdc.org

Guskey, T. (2002). Does it make a difference? Evaluating professional development. *Educational Leadership, 59*(6), 45-51.

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