

**Equity from the Start: Examining In-Service and Preservice Teacher Beliefs and Discourse  
of Colorblindness in the Early Childhood Classroom**

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Colorblind ideology, or the belief that one does not and should not acknowledge race, is common across fields of education. Particularly in early childhood, there is a belief that children are too young and innocent to notice race. Researchers have found, however, that by the time children reach preschool age, they are making decisions about who to interact with and how based on skin color. Yet little is known about the beliefs and practice of early childhood educators in addressing race in the classroom. The purpose of this dissertation was to explore the colorblind beliefs and discourse of in-service and preservice early childhood teachers to understand current practice and preparation. Study 1 included a sample of preschool teachers and families across nine classrooms with varying racial compositions. The purpose of this study was to understand the alignment between teacher and parent beliefs about addressing race in the classroom. A combination of classroom observations, interviews, and parent questionnaires revealed that teachers unanimously believed children noticed race. While results were mixed about whether teachers believe they should talk about race in the classroom, none of the sample teachers were intentionally addressing race. On the other hand, parents largely believed teachers should be addressing race in the early childhood classroom. The implications of this misalignment are discussed. Study 2 focused on a sample of undergraduate education students (UESs) enrolled at a university's School of Education with a commitment to race and equity. Students were part of a

course focused on specific race-related topics. Pre- and posttest measures of race-related beliefs/experiences and demographic information were collected and examined across UESs. Results showed that over the course, there was some change in race-related beliefs across students. However, individual UES experiences may have also contribute to beliefs regardless of course experience. Implications for practice are discussed. Taken together, the findings of this dissertation add to the literature by illuminating the need for more intentional race-related in-service teacher training and preservice teacher preparation.

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## Preface

Thirteen years ago when I began my college career, I knew this was the end goal, but sometimes (I believed over and over again) it did not seem attainable. That's when my village stepped in.

To my advisor, my advocate, and my biggest fan: Shannon, the faith you've had in me since beginning this process in 2013 has been jarring. You have known when to push me, and when to give me space. You've told me I could do better, and you actually made me believe it. You picked me up at my lowest and held me up at my highest. Thank you for believing in me, again and again and again, even when I didn't believe in myself. A thank you will never be enough. To my lab mates over the past seven years, Joe, Ashley, and Bianca, thank you for being my sounding board – for making me laugh, listening when I cried, and reminding me time and time again that I've got this. I know you can and will change the world.

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mine. Without the support, love, and encouragement of the three of you, I don't know that I would have made it here today. Thank you for standing in my corner.

I want to dedicate this dissertation first to my beautiful children, Isla and Brady. I am absolutely enamored by both of you. On the days I was tempted to use you as an excuse for why I couldn't do this, your absolute adoration reminded me that you were the *reason I could*. You see me as strong and capable, invincible even, and I thank you for helping me to see myself that way, too. Yet hands down the most difficult part of this process was the time I had to sacrifice away from you – to return to work before society might expect me to, to always be torn between being present with you or writing. I hope you see that this was for you – that I persevered, fought, and sacrificed to make you proud. My sweet Isla O. – you, beautiful girl, are my moon and stars. I hope that when you look at me you know my love for you. I hope that as you grow you know that you *never* have to choose. You can be anything, do anything – you can do it all. And Brady, my gentle, loving little boy – I hope you will always feel surrounded by my love, and know that when the world is hard and cold and unwelcoming, I will always be your mama. Together, you make my world go round.

To my husband, whom over a decade later I'm still crazy about, this is really for you. Not a day has gone by that you haven't made it known just how much you love and support me. During this process, you never once asked "how much longer?" or "when will you be done?" You just held my hand and kept right along. You supported our family and built our life while letting me build mine. Your selflessness, love of the Lord, and commitment to me and to our family is seen, it is so clearly seen, even by those who don't know you. When you were sick and I feared it could be the last time I held your hand, it pushed me harder, it made me love you more, and it made me

demand more of myself. You truly are “...my first light, you find your way to places that only know lies, failed tries, and bruised skies... but like the dawn you push it all away.”

Above all, to God be the glory forever and ever! Amen. (Galatians 1:5)

## 1.0 Introduction

In her bestselling book, *Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria?*, Dr. Beverly Tatum describes racism in the United States as smog in the air – “Sometimes it is so thick it is visible, other times it is less apparent, but always, day in and day out, we are breathing it in” (1997, p. 5). Yet despite the persistent smog of racism, there is a widespread message that acknowledging race is wrong and it is best to be colorblind, or to ignore racial diversity. Race is socially, historically, physically (not biologically) and legally constructed to marginalize people of color through social systems of oppression, racism, and inequity (Bonilla-Silva, 2014; Milner, 2015). Colorblindness, or claiming to not *see* racial differences, contributes to maintaining the status quo. As such there are four frames, outlined by Bonilla-Silva (2017), for understanding how colorblindness prevails in our society. They include abstract liberalism, naturalization, cultural racism, and minimization of racism, each allowing us to understand how race and racism persist in our society through the lens of colorblindness. Each frame persists as a dominant ideological approach to dealing with issues of racial diversity in the United States in general, yet Husband (2016) holds that colorblindness is particularly prevalent and problematic in education.

While assumed to be neutral in the treatment of all students, colorblindness in education has been called both unreasonable and inaccurate (Castro Atwater, 2008). On the one hand, educators embrace the idea that race should not be a factor affecting their relationships with and treatment of students in their classrooms. On the other hand, the premise that race should not matter is often blurred with the message that race does not matter (Hein, 2004; Neville, Lilly, Duran, Lee, & Browne, 2000). Despite the ever-present importance of skin color to the treatment of individuals both young and old, colorblind ideology sends a powerful message to children that their skin color

does not matter, despite the fact that they may constantly be receiving a clear message that it does (Edwards & Few-Demo, 2016; Hyland, 2010; Ryan & Grieshaber, 2004). Instead, colorblindness conceals important aspects of identity, history, struggles, and legacies, often unintentionally exacerbating racial oppression (Boutte, Lopez-Robertson, & Powers-Costello, 2011; Kalin, 2002).

When teachers embrace a colorblind approach to education, they fail to acknowledge their own implicit and explicit biases and treatment of students. Often, teachers unknowingly hold racial or cultural biases, including colorblindness, which affects their expectations of students and, in turn, students' performance (Castro Atwater, 2008). For example, White teachers often rate Black students as exhibiting poorer classroom behavior and as being less academically engaged than white students (Downey & Pribesh, 2004; Graves & Howes, 2011). This is particularly concerning as we consider the changing demographics of public schools across the United States. Nationally, the teaching force is increasingly White, monolingual, middle class, and female, whereas the student population is increasingly diverse (Gay & Howard, 2000; McHenry, 2018). For example, in 1968, 80 percent of students enrolled in U.S. public schools identified as White. Fast-forward over 40 years later, and the percentage of White students enrolled in public schools has decreased to nearly 51 percent (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). Despite the changing demographics of students, the National Center for Education Statistics (2014) reports that 76 percent of teachers are female and 82 percent are White, leaving definitions and expectations of children's behavior to be interpreted through a White, often colorblind frame of reference.

Despite the risks and drawbacks of colorblind pedagogies highlighted in education scholarship, this approach remains increasingly salient in early childhood classrooms where teachers often believe "that discussions about racism are too advanced and complex for young, innocent children to understand" (Boutte, Powers, & Costello, 2011, p. 335) and it is best to keep

conversations “safe and politically neutral in nature” (Husband, 2016, p.4). Yet research shows that as early as three months old, children are aware of differences in skin tone, and by the time they are preschoolers (three to five years old), children are making choices about who to play with and how to play with them, based on race (Feagin & van Ausdale, 2001; Hirschfeld, 2008; Katz & Kofkin, 1997; Quintana & McKown, 2008). The impact of race and racism undeniably begins early as children are, intentionally or unintentionally, exposed to the smog of racism and are demonstrating an awareness of issues of race and power (Boutte, 2008; Earick, 2008; Tatum, 1997; Tenorio, 2007). Children quickly learn from the racial identities and race-related roles that they see played out in the larger society (Van Ausdale & Feagin, 2001). Edwards and Few-Demo (2016) find that mothers of Black children report feeling a lack of control over the racialized messages received by their preschool-aged children. Yet despite our knowledge about the influence of racialized messages on preschoolers, the topic of race remains relatively scarce in early childhood classrooms.

While some claim that teachers are hesitant to discuss race on the basis of political concerns (e.g., within the school/workplace and with parents) as well as a lack of experience in how to talk about race in a way that is developmentally appropriate, the majority of research examining race talk in early childhood is dominated by colorblind ideologies (Boutte, 2008; Boutte et al., 2011; Husband, 2012; Hyland, 2010). Researchers contend that a lack of race-related topics may have negative implications for both teachers and students. These include impaired relationships between teachers and students, bias in teacher expectations, and gaps in student achievement (Castro Atwater, 2008). To date, however, scholars have not taken a cumulative look across the systems that influence educators to continue to breathe out the smog of racism by adopting a colorblind

stance. This set of studies attempts to examine colorblindness broadly to look for patterns in findings across in-service and preservice teachers.

### **1.1 Positionality Statement**

It is important for researchers to engage in critical self-reflection to gain awareness and consciousness related to their own positionality before engaging in research related to race and culture (Milner, 2007). As such, it is imperative that I state my positionality as a White woman writing and researching about the experiences of Black children, their families, and their educators. I reflect on my path to this line of research, which was not straightforward. In fact, when I began my college career, I had no intention of conducting applied research in urban early childhood classrooms, let alone focusing on children at any age. However, opportunities along my educational journey pulled me towards urban education, particularly the education of young Black children being served in low-income areas. Over the past six years as a doctoral student at an urban university, I have been offered countless opportunities to learn from exceptional scholars and community members who have played invaluable roles as I engaged in critical reflection of myself and my relationship with others. In her book *Waking Up White* (a pivotal reading as I found myself in the story of race), Irving (2014) begins with this sentiment:

Not so long ago, if someone had called me a racist, I would have kicked and screamed in protest. ‘But I’m a good person’ I would have insisted. ‘I don’t see color! I don’t have a racist bone in my body!’ I would have felt insulted and misunderstood and stomped off to lick my wounds. That’s because I thought being a racist meant not liking people of color or being a name-calling bigot. (p. xi)

This statement feels like one I could have written it myself – claiming colorblindness, the quest for equality, and the need to deny noticing differences myself. There was a time when different felt wrong: not to *be* different, but to *see* different. After seven years of reading, writing, struggling with internal conflict, and talking with anyone who would listen, I grow more and more confident claiming my position as a privileged White woman. However, what I have learned is that I can use the privilege, access, and unearned power I have been granted simply by being White. I can speak up in situations where hate and bigotry prevail. I know that in the moments where I struggle to find the words, where I wonder if I am doing justice to the children and families I speak on behalf of, I must continue to surround myself with thoughtful and experienced colleagues, friends, and mentors who can help me see through the smog when I encounter periods of blindness. The research presented in this dissertation is an accumulation of expertise and support from my most trusted colleagues and mentors, and I am hopeful that it will do justice to the children, families, and educators who graciously participated in my studies.

## **1.2 Literature Search**

Literature for this dissertation overview was obtained after completing extensive searches, primarily through EBSCOhost and ProQuest databases, available through the University of Pittsburgh library. Additional searching was conducted using Google Scholar and federal and state government websites. Keywords and phrases used to find sources included, but were not limited to, (a) culturally responsive/relevant teaching/pedagogy, (b) colorblindness in early childhood education, (c) racial socialization, (d) preservice teacher education, and (e) early childhood education. A substantial number of relevant articles were obtained and reviewed. For example, a

Google Scholar search for the phrase color blindness in early childhood education yielded over 69,000 refereed journal articles. I attempted to focus on articles published within the last decade (2008-2018) where applicable, using notable scholars in the field of race and early childhood education as a gateway to important texts and citations (e.g., Geneva Gay, Gloria Ladson-Billings, Terry Husband, Beverly Tatum, and H. Richard Milner).

### **1.3 Brief History**

The impact of colorblind ideology on the lives of individuals of color has a long, historical underpinning. We can trace this notion to well over 100 years ago when, in 1886, Justice John Marshall Harlan ruled that Blacks and Whites should remain “separate but equal.” Harlan called for a society in which Americans made no distinction among individuals based on their racial group membership:

There is in this country no superior, dominant, ruling class of citizens. There is no caste here. Our Constitution is color-blind, and neither knows nor tolerates classes among citizens. In respect of civil rights, all citizens are equal before the law... The law regards man as man, and takes no account of his surroundings or of his color...

The premise of this ruling was that justice – in the form of equal rights and opportunity – should be blind to skin color and racial difference (Cose, 1997). Though progress has been made in the racial landscape of the United States and rights of Black Americans, the underlying problem of racism persists (Bonilla-Silva, 2014; Castro Atwater, 2008). Pahlke, Bigler, and Suizzo (2012) contend, however, that colorblind ideology persists through the widespread belief that paying attention to race is a precondition to racism, and thus failing to recognize race reduces racism.

Further, this ideology holds that members of different races are—on the whole—identical, and that collective colorblindness will lead to the end of racial inequality. Instead, the colorblind ideology has endorsed meritocracy, ignoring the salience of race and racism throughout the United States. Across legal and educational systems, colorblind ideology dominates as courts advise against the acknowledgment of race (e.g., “The way to stop discrimination on the basis of race is to stop discriminating on the basis of race” [Chief Justice John Roberts, 2007]) and teachers deny the visibility of race in their classrooms (“I don’t see color, I only see children” [Delpit, 2006, p. 177]; “I don’t care if they’re Black, White, or green with polka dots, I treat all children the same” [Boutte et al., 2011, p. 335]). Yet the salience of race in education is increasingly apparent.

In 1954, the Supreme Court case *Brown v. Board of Education* challenged the notion of equality in U.S. schools. This monumental legal case held that separate educational facilities for Black students were inherently unequal to those for White students. Justices in the case declared that segregation of children in public schools solely based on race deprived children of minority groups equal educational opportunities, even if physical facilities and other tangible factors were made equal. Yet more than 60 years after the *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling, which presumably should have dimmed the colorblind perspective, inequality in the educational system is ever-present (Brownstein, 2014). Black students are far more likely to attend high-poverty schools, with White students making up fewer than 8 percent of the high poverty school population and Black students representing nearly 50 percent of the population (Jordan, 2015). Segregation is even more pronounced in large urban cities. For example, in Chicago, 96 percent of Black students attend schools that have a majority of students of color, and 67 percent of White students attend schools with a majority of White students. While countless efforts have been made to support the educational attainment of Black students, some question whether the *Brown v. Board of Education*

ruling was the best decision for meeting the needs of Black students. For example, Ladson-Billing (2009) notes that, despite the lack of resources, when education was segregated, Black students attended schools in which the teachers and students had similar features, characteristics, and dialects. Even so, Pahlke et al. note that the rhetoric of “colorblindness” has emerged as a dominant ideological response to issues of racial diversity in the U.S. As a result, there is a contention that public schools throughout the U.S. are not sensitive to the specific needs and experiences of Black students.

## **1.4 Theoretical Foundations**

Although the historical roots of race in education play a critical role in understanding the contribution of the present research studies, this topic is also grounded in theoretical and pedagogical models. The topics that dominate the current research on colorblindness in early childhood education include the implications of colorblind ideology and potential mechanisms by which negative outcomes (e.g., low academic performance or school expulsion) may occur as a result. In turn, the major related theories to be addressed in this section are the Bioecological Model of Development and Culturally Relevant Pedagogy.

### **1.4.1 Bioecological Model of Development**

The primary tenets of the bioecological model of human development serve as a foundation for this research. Bronfenbrenner and Morris (2006) propose that development is the result of direct and indirect influences, emphasizing the critical role of process, person, context, and time.

At the core of the model are processes, which refer to the interactions occurring on a regular basis between a person and different facets of the environment. These processes can be either proximal or distal. Proximal processes are direct interactions in which people engage, and distal processes are those outside of the immediate external environment that impose indirect influences on development. According to Bronfenbrenner and Morris (2006):

The power of such processes to influence development is presumed, and shown, to vary substantially as a function of the characteristics of the developing person, of the immediate and more remote environmental contexts, and the time periods, in which the proximal processes take place. (p. 795)

This study focuses on the proximal process occurring between a teacher and student and a parent and child as they relate to colorblindness in early childhood education.

Moreover, bioecological systems theory maintains that development is a function of reciprocal relations between multiple levels of influence including the micro-, meso-, and macrosystems (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). This research focuses on interactions at both the micro and mesosystem levels. The microsystem is a “pattern of activities, social roles, and interpersonal relations experienced by the developing person in a given face-to-face setting ...in the immediate environment” (Bronfenbrenner, 1994, p. 1645). The microsystem includes those individuals with whom the person interacts with on a regular basis. In this study, the micro system includes the child and his or her teacher and parent. In addition, this investigation paid special attention to the mesosystem. The mesosystem is comprised of the relationships between two or more settings (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). This dissertation is particularly focused on the convergence or divergence of beliefs and practices between the home and school, representing the child’s mesosystem. This level of inquiry provides a useful framework for mapping the ways in

which interactions between multiple levels of the child's ecosystem may impact his/her development (Jackson, Ryndak, & Wehmeyer, 2009).

#### **1.4.2 Culturally Responsive Pedagogy**

The research presented in this dissertation is also grounded in Culturally Responsive Pedagogy (CRP) but narrows in on race; specifically. CRP is a framework for thinking about how teaching can encourage empowerment by promoting students' academic success, cultural competence, and critical consciousness (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Delivering teaching practices that are based in CRP is one way not to ignore race but to "teach to and through [students'] personal and cultural strengths, their intellectual capabilities, and their prior accomplishments" (Gay, 2010, p. 26). Methods of CRP are intentional about adapting curriculum content and teaching strategies in a way that is not colorblind, but uses cultural frames of reference to make the content personally meaningful to students and thus easier to master. CRP spans across the educational experience, starting in early childhood and continuing through the secondary and postsecondary years. A curriculum designed in a culturally relevant framework recognizes and accepts the differences that exist in all classrooms (Derman-Sparks & Ramsey, 2014). Further, it recognizes that all students enter the classroom with unique lived experiences as a result of their own cultural settings (Purnell, Ali, Begum, & Carter, 2007).

In her book, Gay (2010) outlines six tenets that essentially define the purpose of culturally responsive teaching. First, culturally responsive teaching is validating, wherein teachers intentionally create continuity between the home and school experience, acknowledge and praise multiple cultures, and validate students' worth as cultural beings. Next, culturally responsive teaching is comprehensive and encompassing of the whole child. Third, culturally responsive

teaching is empowering, affording students academic and personal confidence and courage. Fourth, CRP is transformative in students' education wherein it "defies conventions of traditional educational practices with respect to ethnic students of color" (p. 36). The fifth tenet of CRP is emancipatory or liberating, aimed at releasing the intellect of students of color from the mainstream. The sixth and final tenet is that culturally responsive teaching is multidimensional, wherein culturally responsive educators attune to the many facets of the classroom including curriculum, context, climate, relationships with students, instructional techniques, classroom management, and assessments.

Taken together, the tenets of CRP lay the framework for culturally and racially attuned teaching in early childhood and beyond. Early childhood teachers, however, have an especially unique opportunity when working to address issues of culture, and more specifically race, in the classroom. Many children enter the school setting with little to no exposure to the dominant race and the practices that are prominently viewed as valuable in schools. It is common for young children to be expected to engage in cultural practices that are different from those at home in order to be conceptualized as successful, ready, or capable (Souto-Manning & Mitchell, 2009). Teaching practices based in CRP, however, are intended to challenge us to acknowledge and value race and thoughtfully reconsider what we mean by "good" teaching (Ladson-Billings, 1995).

### **1.4.3 Bridging Theories**

In combining the underlying principles and tenets of the Bioecological Model of Development and Culturally Responsive Pedagogy, I hope to create a comprehensive framework for understanding students within a particular context. More specifically, the bioecological model challenges us to view students as a product of both their home and school contexts while

acknowledging the important interplay between these systems. CRP pushes this thinking by asking, “*Based on what we know about the individual characteristics of this student, how can we use this knowledge to best educate him/her?*” Together, the Bioecological Model of Development and CRP challenge researchers to see children not in isolation, but as multidimensional beings whose identity and experience contribute to who the child is, how he or she acts in the classroom, his or her potential to learn, and the ways in which the child will develop and thrive most effectively. Moreover, this model challenges us to think more deeply about teachers, both in-service and preservice, and what gaps and opportunities exist for providing these individuals with the skills needed to utilize these theoretical approaches in their work.

## **1.5 Dissertation Overview**

This dissertation aims to address gaps in the literature by looking across early childhood in-service and preservice teachers to examine how colorblind beliefs operate and are formulated in early childhood education. Using a Study 1 – Study 2 format, this dissertation employs a mixed-method approach across samples. First, Study 1 looks inside nine early childhood classrooms in a large urban school district. The purpose of this study was to explore the race-related beliefs of practicing teachers and to compare how those beliefs 1) influence teacher practice and 2) converge or diverge from those of the families represented in their classroom based on our knowledge of colorblindness as a dominant ideology across early childhood teachers (e.g., Boutte, 2008; Boutte et al., 2011; Husband, 2010, 2012; Hyland, 2005). Study 2 aims to explore the roots of teacher beliefs to understand how beliefs are impacted or changed and what factors impact race-related beliefs. This study used a sample of undergraduate education students, referred to as UESs, who

were enrolled in a required 15-week course focused on issues of race, culture, and equity. Throughout the course, students were challenged to engage in critical reflection, discourse, and assignments directly related to race and colorblindness, as recommended by researchers (Howard, 2003; Milner, 2006; Tatum, 1992). Study 2 used a pre-posttest design to examine UESs' beliefs on race-related topics, including the importance of race on educational outcomes and the colorblind perspective in early childhood. In addition, this study extended previous research in its efforts to identify individual factors, including UES demographic characteristics, background, and experience, that may support their race-related beliefs in addition to course content.

Taken together, these studies advance our knowledge of the colorblind ideology in early childhood in four ways. First, Study 1 provides an updated look at the presence of colorblind beliefs in a sample of diverse in-service teachers working in an urban district where the majority of students identify as Black. As such, this study provides a glimpse of if and how colorblind beliefs and race-related practice may differ by teacher race, parent race, and the race of the majority of the students in the classroom. Secondly, Study 1 extends previous research by including a mesosystem-based analysis of parents' and teachers' beliefs to examine the contrasting influence between these two important systems. Next, the combination of Study 1 and Study 2 provides a comparative look at the beliefs of in-service and preservice teachers' race-related beliefs to inform how beliefs are changing or remaining the same across these various samples. Finally, Study 2 advances the work exploring preservice teacher training related to race not only by using the 15-week course as an intervention to change beliefs, but by intentionally looking at individual characteristics that may influence preservice teacher beliefs related to race and inform a more personalized education experience. The findings from both studies help to provide a greater

understanding of colorblindness in early childhood and recommendations for next steps in the field.

## **2.0 Study 1: Colorblindness and In-Service Early Childhood Teachers and Parents**

Despite a persistent belief that young children do not notice racial differences, evidence suggests that, in fact, children recognize race very early on. Researchers contend that as early as three months old, children show a preference towards same-race faces; by the time they reach preschool age, children are making choices about who to play with and how to treat their peers based on race (Hirschfeld, 2008; Katz & Kofkin, 1997; Kelly et al., 2005; Quintana & McKown, 2008; Van Ausdale & Feagin, 2001). Despite growing evidence that racial awareness develops early, there is widespread rhetoric of colorblindness across the field of early childhood development and education (Boutte, Lopez-Robertson, Powers-Costello, 2011; Castro Atwater, 2008;). Many adults believe that children do not notice race or develop racial prejudices unless explicitly taught to do so (Husband, 2016). However, research continually shows that from a very young age, children receive and internalize messages about power and privilege with regard to race and ethnicity (Derman-Sparks & Edwards, 2010; Ryan & Grieshaber 2004). Whether adults choose to address race directly, ignore the subject, or actively damper any talk of race, each approach sends a message to children about how they should think about and understand racial differences, at the very age when children are noticing and acting on race.

### **2.1 Parent Race Talk with Young Children**

One process by which families may support the development of children's race-related knowledge and understanding is through the use of racial socialization practices. Racial

socialization is a broad construct used to refer to the process by which information regarding race and ethnicity is transmitted from adults to youth (Hughes et al., 2006). Racial socialization practices include teaching about discrimination, heritage, and the commonalities and differences among racial groups (Coard, Wallace, Stevenson, & Brotman, 2004). Although not limited by racial group, racial socialization practices have historically been used in Black and African-American families to promote children's ethnic-racial consciousness and to prepare them for discrimination (Aldana & Byrd, 2015).

Parents of Black children face unique parenting challenges due to social, political, economic, and cultural oppression in U.S. society. In turn, they will often use racial socialization practices to combat the effects of such experiences and to support their children's development. Caughy, O'Campo, Randolph, and Nickerson (2002) investigated the association between racial socialization practices and Black children's cognitive and behavioral competencies. Using both parent reports of racial socialization practices and measures of the sociocultural context of the home, researchers found that homes rich in African-American culture had preschool children who had greater amounts of factual knowledge, better developed problem solving skills, and fewer reported overall behavior problems. However, children's age has been shown to influence the kinds of racial messages parents deliver to their children (Suizzo, Robinson, & Pahlke, 2008). Research suggests that the frequency of racial socialization practices is less pronounced with younger children. Instead, adults often use colorblind approaches when talking to children under five about race, regardless of race (Hughes et al., 2006).

Colorblind approaches to discussions of race are prominent across early childhood (Winkler, 2009). Colorblindness operates under the assumption that recognizing race is a precondition to racism, and thus failing to recognize race reduces racism (Neville, Lilly, Lee,

Duran, & Browne, 2000). In turn, when talking about race, many adults encourage children to explicitly ignore skin color and to value individual qualities over racial group membership (Spencer, 1983). Studies suggest that such approaches are salient in parents across racial and ethnic groups (see Hughes et al., 2006). For instance, quantitative studies assessing colorblind approaches have found that two-thirds or more of parents across racial and ethnic groups report promoting more egalitarian approaches that value equal treatment and promote colorblindness as opposed to explicitly discussing the value and importance of race (i.e. Hughes & Chen, 1999; Phinney & Chavira, 1995). Pahlke, Bigler, and Suizzo (2012) examined these processes in a sample of White mothers and their four- and five-year-old children. Using race-themed books and measures of racial attitudes with both parents and children, researchers explored the ways in which mothers talked to their young children about race and about their children's racial biases. Using detailed qualitative coding, the authors analyzed parent-child book reading transcripts for discussion related to race/ethnicity, diversity, and/or intergroup attitudes. Across the sample, nearly all mothers unanimously deferred to a colorblind ideology when discussing race-related issues in the story, often responding with statements such as “[it’s silly to think looking different is strange because]... They’re all people” (p. 7). However, studies show that even parents of color often think that preschool-aged children are too young to have some of these discussions (Winkler 2009). Katz and Kofkin (1997) found that black parents were more likely to talk about racial identity with their preschoolers than were white parents (48 percent of black parents vs. 12 percent of white parents), but neither black nor white parents were likely to discuss the racial differences their children saw in media, on playgrounds, or in stores at this age. Doucet, Banerjee, and Parade (2016) investigated the ways in which Black parents talked to their young children about race. They found that across their sample of 19 Black families, the majority used messages of colorblindness with their child.

This message, however, was more prominent in families who identified as working class, and those who were less likely to report explicit experiences with racism compared to their peers. Likewise, in their study of Black mothers, Edwards and Few-Demo (2016) found that across their sample, mothers believed children were not developmentally ready for discussions of race and racism and chose to use colorblind messages. However, results also showed that Black mothers struggled to maintain control over the racialized messages their preschool children were receiving externally, and thus may struggle with when and how to address race with their children.

## **2.2 Teaching About Race in Early Childhood Classrooms**

From an ecological systems perspective, children's development occurs within the context of the systems of relationships that form within their environment (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). These relationships and environments may include their family, friends, neighborhoods, and, in many cases, their school or daycare settings. While the topic of racial socialization is typically focused on parents, there is reason to believe race should also be explicitly discussed in the context of the early childhood classroom. Researchers affirm that families play a critical role in shaping children's values on matters such as race, but classrooms are also essential as they communicate and reinforce strong, subtle, and repeated social messages about what is and is not valued (Hyland, 2010; Noguera, 2001). Although early childhood educators are well-versed in the importance of building relationships with children, they typically do so from a colorblind perspective (Husband, 2012). Very often, early childhood teachers will dismiss race with comments like "*the color of their skin doesn't matter; I love them all the same,*" Summer (2014) explores why two-pronged statements like this are problematic. The first part of the statement speaks to teachers' tendency

towards colorblindness, failing to acknowledge skin color in an attempt to treat all children the same. While teachers often justify colorblindness as an attempt to affirm a child's self-worth and to treat all students the same, these tenets operate in opposition to anti-oppressive education (Kumashiro, 2008). Instead, such colorblind positionality perpetuates racism (Boutte et al., 2011; Gay, 2010; Howard, 2010). The second part of the statement explored by Summer (2014) is "the naive and simplistic ideal of loving each other" (p. 196) as "care" is often referred to in response to topics of race. McIntyre (1997) describes the use of care as an ineffective solution to racism in schools by saying that "it frees them, as white teachers, to 'love' all students, while at the same time, relinquishing them from taking responsibility for confronting the conditions that keep people in poverty and ignorance" (p. 131). As such, researchers are calling for early childhood educators to abandon colorblind thinking and intentionally address race as a central part of teaching and learning (Boutte, 2008; Boutte, Lopez-Robertson, Powers-Costello, 2011; Husband, 2010, 2012; Hyland, 2010).

One of the most well-known approaches to addressing race in the classroom is Banks' (2004) Model of Multicultural Education. Within this framework, Banks proposes five dimensions by which teachers can implement topics like race into the classroom. The first is content integration, wherein teachers include examples and content from a variety of races and cultures in their teaching. The goal of this dimension is racial and cultural awareness. The second dimension is knowledge construction. Within this dimension, the construction of knowledge may vary across four levels – contributions, additive, transformation, or social action. Each level pushes teachers forward, from simply celebrating "heroes and holidays" (e.g. Martin Luther King Jr. Day,; See Derman-Sparks, 1998) towards teaching for social justice (Figure 1). The third dimension of Banks' model is prejudice reduction. This dimension focuses on how administration and teachers

work together to decrease racial stereotypes and prejudices in the school and increase democratic attitudes, values, and behavior. The fourth dimension is equity pedagogy. Equity pedagogy can be defined as classroom strategies and environments that help students from diverse groups attain the knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary to create and perpetuate a just, humane, and democratic society (Banks & Banks, 2010). The fifth and final dimension is empowering school culture, wherein the larger school culture and social structure are set up in a way to support and maintain equity.

Despite the existence of such models, early childhood educators have been slow to respond to research on the importance of talking to children about race on the basis of both developmental and political concerns (Husband, 2012). Although not specifically looking at race talk, a study by Black (2010) investigated the perceptions and practices of teachers, parents, administrators, and local professors regarding multicultural education and the Banks framework for implementing such practices. While results showed that teachers unanimously agreed that multicultural education is important, thinking and doing were very different. In one school, Black found that the contributions approach was present as the only mechanism for implementing culture into the curriculum. At the second school, there was some evidence of the additive approach, but Black described the implementation as “haphazard” (p. 12). In regard to transformative and social action approaches, Black found that parents described trying to encourage teachers to utilize and celebrate culture in a way that reflected the transformation approach. This finding brings to light how parents and teachers envision the role of race in the classroom.

## 2.3 Parent and Teacher Considerations of Race in Early Childhood Education

According to Bronfenbrenner (1977), the home and school provide the greatest influences children's lives, and the relation between the two contributes to children's development. Yet the interactions between parents and schools are often influenced by race and culture, and the inextricably interconnected elements of status and power. Researchers (e.g. Lasky, 2000; Nzinga-Johnson, Baker, & Aupperlee, 2009) contend that parents are likely to become uninvolved in their children's education and/or develop feelings of mistrust towards the teacher and school if they:

- Perceive a lack of cultural awareness or sensitivity
- Experience linguistic barriers
- Perceive practices that are inequitable and reinforce power and privilege
- Have had previous, negative experiences with schools

In the same way however, if parents perceive a sense of cultural awareness in their children's classrooms and are invited to engage, share, and participate in classroom activities, they are more likely to be involved in their children's education (Bernhard, Lefebvre, Kilbride, Chud, & Lange, 1998; Martisko, 2012; Powell, Son, File, & San Juan, 2010). Yet because of the persistence of colorblind beliefs in early childhood and the overwhelming presence of Whiteness in schools, race is rarely an intentional part of teacher practice. Summer (2014) reflects on her experience of being a White kindergarten teacher in a primarily Black school. She shares what she calls her "racialized awakening" when, despite her intention to not see race and treat all children the same, she was called a racist by a Black parent. In her exposition, she highlights the undeniable salience of race for the children and families in her classroom but acknowledges her inability to actively see or value race before this moment. The previous "good intentions" described by

Summer (2014) likely mimic the experience of countless early childhood teachers. While children of color and their families are constantly aware of and sensitive to the ever-present importance of race in their lives, early childhood teachers are often blinded by colorblindness and the belief that race is not yet relevant for the children in their classroom.

## **2.4 The Current Study**

Separately, researchers have explored race and colorblind beliefs in parents and teachers of children ages five and younger (e.g. Aldana & Byrd, 2015; Husband, 2012; Hyland, 2010). Yet to date, there has not been an intentional exploration of the convergence or divergence between parent and teacher beliefs about the salience of race for young children and the role, if any, of race-related content in the early childhood classroom. The purpose of this study is first, in line with previous research, to explore and expand our understanding of parent and teacher beliefs about race and colorblindness in early childhood education. In addition, this research extends previous findings in an effort to align parent and teacher beliefs related to the salience of race and the need for race-related content in the early childhood classroom. To do so, I examine three primary research questions:

### **2.4.1 Research Question 1**

Do parents' beliefs about colorblindness in early childhood relate to whether they talk to their children about race and if they think their teachers should incorporate race-related content in the classroom?

*Hypothesis:* I hypothesize that parent responses will vary, specifically across racial groups.

### **2.4.2 Research Question 2**

Do teachers' beliefs about colorblindness in early childhood relate to whether they think they should incorporate race-related content in the classroom and whether they actually do?

*Hypothesis:* I hypothesize that early childhood teachers will largely hold colorblind beliefs and that classroom practices will reflect this ideology.

### **2.4.3 Research Question 3**

Do teacher beliefs align with the beliefs of parents in their classrooms around incorporating race-related content in the classroom?

*Hypothesis:* I hypothesize that parents and teachers will largely diverge.

## **2.5 Methods**

### **2.5.1 Sample**

#### **2.5.1.1 Teachers**

Participants for this study included nine early childhood classroom teachers representing a large urban public school district. Classrooms were selected for participation by the district's Executive Director of Early Childhood Programming to represent the various schools and teacher and student demographics across the district. All teachers in the sample identified as women and

all were considered veteran teachers (i.e. not new to the district and had experience as early childhood teachers). Of the nine teachers, six identified as White and three identified as Black.

### **2.5.1.2 Classroom Composition**

Data were obtained from 129 parents/guardians of children across the nine classrooms, representing 80 percent of the total students in these classrooms. Per parent report, 13 percent were White, 65 percent were Black/African American, and 13 percent identified as both Black and White. All children were between the ages of 3 and 5 years old (mean = 3.9) and most were identified as either men (47 percent) or women (52 percent).

The majority of parents identified as either White (20 percent) or Black/African American (65 percent). Of the 129 parents, 26 percent held a high school diploma or GED, while 49 percent reported some college credit, vocational trade, or an associate's degree. Nearly half reported being single parents or divorced/separated (48 percent). Demographic information for each classroom is summarized in Table 1.

## **2.5.2 Measures**

### **2.5.2.1 Classroom Observations**

Classroom observations took place monthly between October and May of the academic year. Researchers asked teachers to draw as little attention to them as possible, allowing for the researchers to blend in during observations. A letter was sent home to parents informing them that researchers would be present in the classrooms but were there to watch teachers and not specific children. Researchers arrived in classrooms in the morning before parent drop-off and left just before lunchtime. They were interested in interactions between both teachers and parents and

teachers and children. Throughout observations, researchers took detailed field notes that included 1) notes about the classroom environment (e.g., evidence of race in books and posters), 2) the interactions between teachers and parents at drop-off, 3) the language used by teachers, 4) the way teachers interacted with individual students and groups of students, and 5) the content and curriculum presented by teachers as well as the classroom routine. A total of 20 to 25 hours of observations were completed for each of the nine teachers in the study.

### **2.5.2.2 Semi-Structured Interviews**

At the conclusion of the academic year, teachers were interviewed to discuss their experience in the study related to race and equity in their early childhood classroom. Researchers scheduled interviews with teachers, and they followed a semi-structured format for completing interviews. Specific questions were asked of all teachers, but prompts (e.g. tell me more, why do you think that was the case?) were used as needed. Each interview lasted between 60 and 90 minutes and was audio recorded with the teacher's consent. See Appendix A for specific interview prompts.

### **2.5.2.3 Parent Questionnaire**

Teachers sent a 27-item questionnaire home with each student in their classrooms. Parents/guardians were asked to respond to demographic questions, rate personal and parental stressors, and respond to inquiries about the role of race in their children's lives. Demographic information collected from parents/guardians included their age and race as well as those of their children, their relationship to the children, child gender, parent education level, marital status, and household composition.

Packets were sent home to parents in October of the academic year that included 1) a description and purpose of the study, 2) an informed consent form, and 3) the questionnaire. Parents who returned the consent and completed measures were entered into a drawing to win a \$100 gift card. One gift card was awarded per classroom. A total of 129 questionnaires were returned, representing an 81 percent response rate from parents across classrooms. See Appendix B for parent measure.

### 2.5.3 Analyses

#### 2.5.3.1 Research Questions

***1. Do parent beliefs about colorblindness in early childhood relate to whether they talk to their children about race and if they think their teachers should incorporate race-related content in the classroom?***

*Hypothesis:* I hypothesize that parent responses will vary, specifically across racial groups.

Chi-square analyses were used to address this research question. More specifically, beliefs about colorblindness in early childhood were drawn from interview question 27: *Do you think your child notices differences in people's race?* Parents were asked to respond by answering either *yes* or *no*. To explore the relationship between parents' colorblind beliefs and whether parents talk to their children about race, parent-race talk was derived from parent survey question 24: *How often do you talk to your child about race?* Parents responded with one of four options, including *never*, *sometimes*, *often*, or *always*. This variable was recoded as "Yes, I talk to my child about race" (*sometimes/often/always*) or "No, I do not talk to my child about race" (*never*). Next, analyses addressed the relationship between parent beliefs about colorblindness in early childhood and

whether parents want their children's teachers to incorporate race-related content in the classroom. Beliefs about colorblindness in early childhood were again drawn from interview question 27: *Do you think your child notices differences in people's race?* Survey question 25 was used to determine whether or not parents believed early childhood teachers should incorporate race-related content in the classroom. This item asked, *Do you think early childhood teachers should incorporate race-related content in the classroom?* Following the chi-square analysis, estimates of the effect size were calculated to understand the strength of the relationship between variables.

***2. Do teachers' beliefs about colorblindness in early childhood relate to whether they think they should incorporate race-related content in the classroom and whether they actually do?***

*Hypothesis:* I hypothesize that early childhood teachers will largely hold colorblind beliefs and classroom practices will reflect this ideology.

This research question was addressed by using in-depth qualitative coding of teachers' interview transcripts and observational field notes informed by the review of the literature. Coding was completed in several waves, beginning with open coding of transcripts. The purpose of open coding was to produce a coding scheme for in-depth axial coding wherein open codes were organized into major categories and subcategories. The aforementioned coding scheme was used to intentionally explore the way teachers 1) express their beliefs about colorblindness in early childhood, 2) describe the importance of race in the early childhood classroom, 3) feel it is their job to teach about race, and 4) incorporate race-related content into their classrooms. Codes were defined and data was analyzed and organized to address the research question until saturation of categories was achieved. Finally, matrices of codes across teachers were created to represent data (Appendix E).

### ***3. Do teacher beliefs align with the beliefs of parents in their classrooms around incorporating race-related content in the classroom?***

*Hypothesis:* I hypothesize that parent and teachers will largely diverge.

Analyses followed a comparative case-study design (Yin, 1993; 1994) to explore parent and teacher beliefs within classrooms. This design is used to investigate a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real-life context and, according to Yin (2009), is especially useful when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clear. Cross-case data matrices were developed to illustrate and compare profiles of teachers and parents within each classroom (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2013).

## **2.6 Results**

### **2.6.1 Research Question 1**

*Do parent beliefs about colorblindness in early childhood relate to whether they talk to their children about race and if they think their teachers should incorporate race-related content in the classroom?*

There was a significant relationship between whether a parent believes a child notices race and if they talk to their children about race  $\chi^2(4, N = 129) = 13.16, p = .01, V = .02$ . Table 2 illustrates the discrepancy between how often parents who believe their children notice race talk about race compared to those who do not. Most notably, of those parents who do not believe their children notice race, 39 percent report never talking about race with their children compared to 9 percent of parents who believe their children do notice race. Likewise, of parents who believe their

children notice race, 58 percent report talking to their children about race sometimes compared to 29 percent of parents who do not believe their children notice race. To further explore this finding, Table 3 shows the percentage of parents, by child race, who believe their children notice race, and, in turn, how often they talk to their children about race. Notably, parents of mixed-race children are more likely to believe their children notice race and to talk to their children about race compared to parents of white or black children. Further, parents of black children are more likely to believe their children notice race and to talk to their children about race than are parents of white children.

Next, there was a significant relationship between whether a parent believes their children notice race and if they think their children's teachers should incorporate race-related content in the classroom,  $\chi^2(16, N = 129) = 27.98, p < 0.05, V = .00$ . More specifically, Table 4 highlights, by child race, the percentage of parents who believe their children's teachers should incorporate race-related content in the classroom and how they would prefer teachers respond to race-related questions. Notably, all parents of white children reported that they believe their children's teachers should incorporate race-related content in the classroom, with high percentages of parents of Black and mixed race children sharing this belief as well.

## **2.6.2 Research Question 2**

*Do teachers' beliefs about colorblindness in early childhood relate to whether they think they should talk about race in school and whether they actually talk about race at school?*

Across the sample of teachers, there was consensus that preschool-aged children do see color. When asked directly, "Do you think children in your classroom notice racial differences? Why or why not?", teachers unanimously said yes, providing various reasons or examples for why they believe that preschool-age children in their classrooms see color or notice racial differences

in people. For example, teachers often referred to statements children had made directly addressing color (e.g., “your skin looks like chocolate” [Classroom 2]; “you’re not white, the walls are white” [Classroom 1]). However, the extent to which teachers believed this racial awareness mattered for students at this age and should be addressed in the classroom varied across the sample. Of the nine teachers, three were coded as believing race matters and should be addressed for preschool-aged children. Of these teachers, one was black and two were white. When asked questions such as, “Is race even an issue in young kids? Should race even be addressed in schools?” these teachers responded with rationales for why addressing race in preschool was in fact important. For example, the teacher in Classroom 1 talked about a situation in which a black student came to school and told her about an experience she had at a playground where a white boy said, “I can’t play with you because you’re black.” The teacher explained to researchers, “There might be two white kids in the class, and she comes to school and is thinking about [that experience] and uses that as a point of reference so you kind of have to address it.” In contrast, the remaining six teachers were coded as believing race should not be addressed in the classroom. When asked the same questions, teachers often made colorblind statements (e.g. “Nothing needs to be focused on so much. What’s more important is us being friends and treating each other well” [Classroom 2]; “I like this age because they love everybody. It doesn’t matter who is in the room” [Classroom 3]) and/or rationalized why it does not matter at this age (“They separate themselves by clothes and shoes, not race” [Classroom 4]; “I can see it with adults outside, but in my particular classroom with my little ones, no” [Classroom 5]).

Across the sample, however, most teachers (seven of the nine participants) responded to race with a colorblind approach. This included one of the three teachers who believed race should be addressed in the classroom. These seven teachers often made general colorblind statements (e.g.

“I look at all of my kids as being my kids – it’s not a color thing for me” [Classroom 5]; “I just look at them as kids... these are just little kids so I just treat them all like kids” [Classroom 7]) and referenced ignoring race talk or quickly addressing the issue and moving on when race did come up. The remaining two teachers emphasized a race matters approach to discussions of race in the classroom. Both teachers provided examples of ways they proactively tried to foster class wide discussions when race was brought up. Yet despite the efforts of these two teachers, all teachers were coded as incorporating race-related content at the Contributions level.

Across classrooms, researchers observed no direct race talk or race-related teaching. However, each classroom did have multicultural materials on display (e.g., posters including multiple races and multiracial baby dolls) and had books about race. Further, when asked if and how they include race-related content into their classrooms, teachers across the sample referenced either a program-wide activity called “All About Me” in which students are asked to look in a mirror and are provided with multicultural crayons or able to mix paint to create a self-portrait that represents their skin color, or deferred to activities or conversations during Black History Month and/or Martin Luther King Jr. Day. Some teachers described a desire to do more but said they either did not know how or the district did not provide them the tools to do so. However, none of the sample teachers described race as an intentional part of their teaching or the curriculum. See Appendix E for sample excerpts by coding category for each classroom.

### **2.6.3 Research Question 3**

*Do teacher beliefs align with the beliefs of parents in their classrooms around talking about race in the classroom?*

Across classrooms, when asked if early childhood teachers should incorporate race-related content into the classroom, the majority of parents responded yes. In contrast, only three of the nine teachers shared interview responses that were coded as believing they should be addressing race in the classroom (Table 5). To further address this concept, the question of how teachers should be addressing race in the classroom was explored. More specifically, parents were asked, “What do I want my child’s teacher to do when my child asks questions about race?” Parents chose one of four options: *Ignore the question*, *Answer generally* (for example, “We treat everyone the same,” recoded as “colorblindresponse”), *Give a clear answer to my child but then move on*, or *Use the question to have a discussion with the whole class* (recoded as intentional teaching). Parent responses were explored by classroom wherein frequencies for parents across classrooms were calculated to represent how parents in each classroom wanted their children’s teachers to respond. In addition, teachers were asked in interviews, “*If a student were to directly ask a question related to race, how would you address their question?*” Teachers’ responses were coded according to parent survey options (i.e. ignore the question, colorblind response, answer and move on, or intentional teaching). Teacher and parent responses were matched following Yin’s (1993, 1994) comparative case-study design. Across the nine classrooms, three teachers had responses to the question of how to address questions and issues of race directly with students that aligned with parent responses. Of these three, two described giving colorblind responses to questions of race, and one described using questions of race to create intentional teaching moments. The remaining six teachers had responses that did not match those of the majority of parents in their classrooms. Yet across classrooms, there was overall no match between teachers and parents in regard to if and how race should be addressed in the early childhood classroom.

## 2.7 Discussion

The goal of this study was to separately examine parent and teacher beliefs in colorblind ideology and race in early childhood. All findings and conclusions are considered in light of the strengths and weaknesses of the research design, and in terms of recommendations for future research and practice.

This research study extends previous literature in that it does not isolate parent and teacher responses but instead uses a comparative case study design to look within and across classrooms and racial groups. While these conclusions are not considered causal or predictive, they do go beyond simply exploring colorblind beliefs in an attempt to look at systems of influence in early childhood. The topic of race is often taboo in early childhood, as many educators subscribe to the notion that discussions about racism are too advanced and complex for young, innocent children to understand (Boutte et al., 2011; Brown & Brown, 2012) – so much so that Jacqueline Jordan Irvine refers to race as another “four-letter word” in schools that teachers avoid (Darden, 2009). However, colorblind ideology goes much deeper than simply beliefs about what young children are “ready” to learn. Often it is the adult who is not comfortable or prepared to address the topic of racism. Stereotypes about race and racial groups are so deeply embedded in the U.S. that they are often perceived as the norm (Summer, 2014). When these beliefs are brought to the surface or challenged, individuals will often act out in anger, guilt, or fear, all of which have been associated with White supremacy and support colorblindness (Bonilla-Silva, 2017; Jensen, 2005). While teachers seek refuge in colorblindness, research demonstrates that young children reproduce and rework societal discourses on race often (Connolly, 1998; Earick, 2008; Van Ausdale & Feagin 2001). Yet, to quote Summer (2014), “I have benefited my whole life from being White, and now

I teach at a school where our population is mostly non-White, yet we still hold whiteness as the norm” (p. 197).

Beginning with research question one, results support the hypothesis that parent responses vary across racial groups. First, in general, there was a significant relationship between parents’ colorblind beliefs, both if they talk to their children about race and if they believe their children’s teachers should talk about race in the classroom. In other words, parents who believe their children notice race are both more likely to talk about race with their children and to expect their children’s teachers to incorporate race into the classroom. This is an important consideration when thinking about the role of parent beliefs in regard to race both at home and at school. Researchers contend that young children notice race very early, and responding through the use of racial socialization practices can have a positive impact on children’s development. We see through this research, however, that parents who hold colorblind beliefs are less likely to begin having discussions about race when their children are young. When race is not discussed, it sends the message that the child’s race and the race of others around them is not important despite the clear messages children are receiving that race does, in fact, matter (Hirschfield, 2008). It is important to note, however, that there may be limitations to the way colorblind beliefs are conceptualized for parents in this study. Colorblindness was coded as “yes my child sees color” or “no my child does not notice race” based on parent responses to the question “*Do you believe your child sees color/notices race? Why or why not?*” However, what this question does not delve into is the idea of *race matters* (Hein, 2004). In other words, many parents may believe their young children do not intentionally discriminate or make choices on the basis of race, but that is not necessarily a proxy for whether or not they believe race is an important part of their children’s identity and life. Yet many parents in this study, regardless of race, believe that teachers should be incorporating race into the

classroom. It is possible that parents feel as if teachers have more knowledge or capacity to discuss race in the classroom setting, or perhaps parents prefer to defer race talk to teachers rather than having their own discussions with their children. In the same way that parents expect teachers to address academic subjects such as reading or math, parents may likewise expect teachers to address topics like race.

Analyses that specifically explored differences between racial groups revealed a number of findings that warrant discussion. First, parents of mixed-race children were more likely to both believe their children see race and to talk to their children about race than were parents of black or white children. The presence of both races in the lives of children in this subsample may bode more conversation related to both the child's race and the race of others, but further examination is needed to understand this finding more clearly. Second, what the findings of this research question do not offer is a detailed look at *how* parents are talking to their children about race. For example, nearly half of all parents, regardless of race, reported talking to their children about race *sometimes*. What the questionnaire did not ask about was *how* they were doing so, what topics they were discussing, and in what context. According to Hughes (2003), African Americans report providing more preparation for bias messages to their children than their ethnic counterparts. African-American parents may provide preparation for bias messages in an effort to mitigate discrimination in a proactive manner. On the other hand, African-American parents may also provide these messages reactively, especially if their children experience racism (Hughes and Chen, 1999). Furthermore, egalitarianism may be prevalent among parents who are not African American, but more research is needed to address this finding (Copenhaver-Johnson, 2006; Derman-Sparks & Ramsey, 2014; Lewis, 2001).

Lastly, it is important to note the difference in percentages of parents, by racial group, who want their children's teachers to talk about race and how. Notably, on one hand, all of the White parents in my sample wanted their children's teachers to talk about race, half wanting them to do so in an intentional way. On the other hand, 75 percent of Black parents wanted their children's teachers to incorporate race, with over half wanting this to be done with a colorblind approach. This finding may be understood in a number of ways. First, because racial socialization is a practice most commonly used in Black or African-American families, these parents may prefer to keep talk of race confined to the home and to their own beliefs and experiences with race and racism. Other reasons may be perceived as lack of cultural awareness or sensitivity, linguistic barriers, perception that practices are inequitable and reinforce power and privilege, or previous negative experiences with schools (Bernhard et al., 1998; Martisko, 2012; Powell et al., 2010). Parents of white children, however, may be unsure about how to have difficult conversations about race and racism with their children and may defer to a teacher or school (Vittrup, 2018; Vittrup & Holden, 2011). It is important to note that teacher race did not change the results of this finding.

Next, research question two specifically addressed teacher beliefs. Contrary to parents, all teachers believe that children notice race but very few believe they should be incorporating race into the classroom. Many teachers adopted a colorblind response to discussions of race in the classroom, using phrases like "we're all equal," "I don't see color," or "I treat everyone the same" when discussing the presence of race in early childhood. Notably, teachers in this sample were aware that researchers were intentionally examining race-related talk and content with their classrooms, and interviews explicitly explored race-related beliefs. Further, a representative from a district specifically chose teachers for this study with a strong focus on racial equity based on their teaching experience. Yet the majority of the teachers denied the salience of race for young

children, noting that race does not seem to matter until children are older and should not be a topic of discussion in early childhood. Further, all teachers were coded as teaching at the contributions level, or simply celebrating “heroes and holidays” rather than intentionally making race a part of their curriculum. Though many teachers referenced race-related activities they did with students at the start of the year (e.g., All About Me) or during holidays, no evidence of intentionally bringing race into the classroom outside of having books and posters on display were seen or discussed. It is worth noting that some teachers expressed concern with their inability to discuss race, citing a lack of support from the district, a lack of resources, or a lack of knowledge of how to do so. This sheds light on a major gap in research. Although we know that the classroom, like the home, is an important context for development, there is little knowledge about how early childhood teachers in particular can intentionally bring race-related content to the curriculum at the transformative or social action level. Future research should seek to better understand this opportunity specifically for early childhood.

Finally, using a comparative case study design, this research expands on previous work to examine the divergence between teacher and parent beliefs regarding race in early childhood. Results reveal little agreement between teachers and the majority of parents in their classrooms regarding race in early childhood. Parents in this study believe that the classroom should be a context for learning about race, whereas teachers were less assertive about their role in discussing race. Further, teachers overall believe children do see race, though not all parents agree. Previous research holds that when discrepancies between parent and teacher beliefs and expectations exist, feelings of mistrust may develop and/or parents may become less involved in their children’s education (Bernhard et al., 1998; Martisko, 2012; Powell et al., 2010). From the perspective of teachers, there is a need for education and support as teachers navigate their roles in addressing

and incorporating race into their classrooms. Despite years of research suggesting that colorblind ideology is a futile approach, Cochran-Smith (2000) outlines the harrowing journey of "unlearning" racism:

The idea that racism is something that all of us have inevitably learned simply by living in a racist society is profoundly provocative... For many of us, it challenges not only our most precious democratic ideals about equitable access to opportunity, but also our most persistent beliefs in the possibilities of school and social change through enlightened human agency. (p. 95)

Teachers in this study, like countless others, are still refining their understanding of race for young children and their role in incorporating race-related content into the classroom, each at various levels. Yet parents of all races are seeking more for their children – more acknowledgements of race, more critical dialogue, and more social action – from their classroom teachers. In turn, there is reason to be concerned about the divergence in beliefs and expectations between teachers and students. Historically, Black children have not received the quality of education most White children receive. In many ways, the same is true for their current educational experiences as teachers must function in inequitable institutions within a racist society. Even more, they are serving a population of students that is increasingly diverse. Taken together, the way in which teachers navigate race-related content in their classrooms is critical for student success, especially the success of Black children and other children of color. Lee, Menkhart, and Okazawa-Rey (1997) urge educators to go beyond mere heroes and holidays in education and actively adopt curriculum that places race at the forefront of teaching and learning. Finally, parents may feel an urgency to ensure that discussions of race and equity are at the forefront of their children's

educational experience as teachers' worldviews, perspectives, and beliefs about race can shape students' school experiences (Milner, 2010).

In sum, this research brings to light the importance of understanding both the beliefs and experience of parents and teachers as they navigate issues of race in early childhood education. In his account of searching for a preschool for his Black daughters, Milner (2014) asks a pivotal question: How do I advocate for and choose a preschool educational environment that prepares my daughters with social and academic skills to transition into grade school ready to learn and concurrently foster and cultivate their identities as Black girls? He, like countless other parents of preschool-aged children, sought a balance between academics and identity. As evidenced in this study, parents are searching for a way to ensure their children are “school-ready, [but also] proud of their African-American heritage... develop[ing an] identity that embraces their language, history, hair, ancestry, and cultural roots in general.” In other words, parents want both. Teachers, on the other hand, are strategically taught how to, put simply, teach. While some teacher education programs may offer, but often not require, a course in “cultural competence,” teachers are rarely prepared to teach about race. This study illuminates the need to include parents in the conversation about what is needed in preschool classrooms and to better prepare teachers, both in-service and preservice, with the capacity to move beyond mere contributions and into social action.

### **3.0 Study 2: Colorblindness and Preservice Early Childhood Education Students**

United States classrooms are becoming increasingly racially diverse. It is projected that by 2035, White students will no longer make up the majority of the student population (Husband, 2016). Currently, Black students represent 30 percent of those enrolled in all U.S. public schools and 70 percent of those enrolled in large urban public districts where segregation between Black and White students is profound (Ladson-Billings, 1994). Despite these dramatic demographic shifts, the teaching force remains largely White, middle-class, and female (NCES, 2014). The discrepancy between racially homogeneous teachers and their racially diverse students is particularly pronounced in early childhood classrooms. Whereas 75 percent of early childhood educators are White, well over half of all preschoolers identify as students of color (NCES, 2017).

Trends across multiple decades of research indicate that despite the changing student demographics, the population of teachers will likely remain the same. This is concerning because, despite the salient role race plays in the educational experiences of children of color, many White educators report that race is not a salient topic in their personal or professional lives (Johnson, 2002; Sleeter, 1994). Research shows that White teachers often rate Black students as exhibiting poorer classroom behavior and as being less academically engaged than white students (Downey & Pribesh, 2004; Graves & Howes, 2011). This is likely because definitions and expectations of children's appropriate social competence are culturally influenced (Irvine, 2003). Such a disconnect may lead White teachers to be less effective than their counterparts in teaching in racially diverse classrooms. However, if teachers intentionally consider race and culture as critical components in the classroom, behaviors may be understood differently (Han & Thomas, 2010). Teaching through the lens of race and culture enables teachers to utilize children's cultural

strengths in curriculum and instruction (Gay 2010; Ladson-Billings 1992). As a result, researchers are urging early childhood educators to consciously develop practices and pedagogies that acknowledge the important role of race in their classroom (Boutte, 2008; Hyland, 2010).

Yet despite this knowledge, an overwhelming majority of educators who work with Black students opt to employ a colorblind approach to addressing race in the classroom (Husband, 2012). When teachers embrace a color-blind approach to early childhood education, they fail to acknowledge their own implicit and explicit biases and treatment of students. In addition, Husband (2016) identifies six consequences of teacher colorblindness:

- Curriculum that is not representative of students' race
- Lower expectations for their students of color
- Homogenous approaches to teaching that do not consider students' prior experiences and knowledge
- Overlooking school policies and practices that marginalize students of color
- Actively deemphasizing racial differences, leading to greater degrees of racial inequality
- Ignoring racist attitudes in and among students

It is essential to acknowledge that teachers bring their own race and culture into their classrooms. In turn, students are often expected to assimilate into mainstream or "White" culture, often conflicting with familial practices or values, in order to be seen as successful, ready, or capable (Souto-Manning & Mitchell, 2009). When students fail to conform to these expectations, they are labeled as problematic or academically deficit. Hyland (2005) describes this as the "unintentional racism" that is often present in early childhood and elementary classrooms. The presence of

Whiteness is simply embedded into everyday teaching practice and ideology in the schooling of young students of color, alienating a growing number of children.

Sleeter (2004) contends that undergraduate education programs responsible for preparing future early childhood educators typically take two lines of action to address race-related beliefs in teacher training: (a) they attempt to bring into the teaching profession more teachers who are from culturally diverse communities, or (b) they try to change the race-related attitudes and beliefs of predominantly White cohorts of preservice students. To date, neither of these approaches has been particularly successful. The teaching force remains primarily White, female and middle class despite years of recommendations to bring teachers of color into the profession. Likewise, literature suggests that simply taking a course centered on these critical issues may not be enough to counteract preexisting attitudes and beliefs (Garmon, 2004; Haberman, 1991). Despite an initial receptivity towards learning about diversity, many preservice students will maintain a colorblind belief system that hinders teacher change and action related to race – two desired outcomes of critical teacher education (Buchanan, 2015). In order to affect preservice teachers' attitudes and knowledge base, we need to do more than offer courses that provide “disjointed multicultural content” (Sleeter, 2001, p. 95). Along with building strategically designed race-related curriculum for preservice teachers, we may also need to identify the individual factors, experiences, and dispositions that might help or hinder the likelihood that early childhood educators will reject colorblindness (Causey, Thomas, & Armento, 2000).

### 3.1 The Importance of Addressing Race in Teacher Education

Within the last decade, preservice teacher training programs have begun emphasizing the skills needed to work in “diverse” settings, defined broadly. Few, however, specifically address race or the unique experiences of Black students. According to Ladson-Billings (2000), the educational needs of Black students are “folded into a discourse of deprivation” (p.206), often defaulting to talk of culture or ethnicity, which may be a more comfortable topic for White teachers to discuss rather than race, especially in early childhood teacher training programs. In her review of literature examining teacher preparation programs’ instruction on race and urban schools, Boutte (2012) found that only 8 percent of 429 reviewed articles focused on early childhood or elementary teachers. This lack of scholarship is alarming when considering the potential importance of racial identity development in the earliest years of a child’s life (University of Pittsburgh School of Education Race and Early Childhood Collaborative, 2016). Specifically, when young children are intentionally taught to have pride in their racial and cultural heritage, benefits include better cognitive, language, and behavioral indices of school readiness (Caughy & Owen, 2015).

Numerous researchers have investigated the supports needed to prepare preservice teachers to understand the important role race plays in education. Tatum (1992) contends that early childhood educators in particular must spend time understanding (a) how race and racism operate in their own lives; (b) how race and racism operate in the lives of their students; and (c) how race and racism operate within the broader institutional contexts where they teach (see Rubin, 2017). Howard (2003) mimics this recommendation, emphasizing the need “to engage in honest, critical reflection that challenges them to see how their positionality influences their students in either positive or negative ways” (p. 197). By doing so, teachers become attuned to the influence of their

own personal experience, attitudes, and beliefs and the role these may play in their assumptions about students. In their examination of the mechanisms that support the dispositions and teaching practices of undergraduate education students, Kidd et al. (2008) identify five experiences most related to changes in dispositions and teaching practice. These include material resources, diverse internship experiences, interactions with diverse families, critical reflection, and discussion and dialogue. However, the impact of these experiences may be dependent on specific characteristics of the preservice teacher (Cochran-Smith, Davis, & Fries, 2004).

### **3.2 The Role of Undergraduate Education Students' Beliefs and Prior Experiences**

In addition to the experiences teacher training programs are advised to offer their primarily White, female, and middle-class students, others have recommended that programs should consider what are referred to as the “critical factors” needed to work successfully in diverse settings. While engagement in critical reflection and field experiences are necessary, it is also important to consider aspects of individual teacher candidates – their prior beliefs, experiences, awareness, and predispositions (Garmon, 2004; Haberman, 1991, 1995, 1996; McCarty, Abbott-Shim, & Lambert, 2001; Shultz, Neyhart, & Reck, 1996; Taylor & Sobel, 2001).

#### **3.2.1 Race-Related Beliefs**

Among early childhood teacher candidates, one of the most pervasive misconceptions and most pressing topics to address may be their colorblind beliefs (Castro Atwater, 2008; Choi, 2008). Despite research that says intentionally teaching children about their racial and cultural heritage

leads to greater academic skills (Caughy & Owen, 2015), early childhood educators at large are reluctant to discuss issues of race and racism with their students (Ramsey, 2004). While some believe that young children do not possess the cognitive capabilities to engage in critical discussions of race and racism in substantive ways, others believe that discussions of race and racism are inappropriate and/or too harsh for young children (Husband, 2012). As a result, the majority of early childhood educators adopt a colorblind approach to discussion of race and racism. On the one hand, educators embrace this notion by claiming that race should not be a factor affecting their relationships with and treatment of students in their classroom. On the other hand, the premise that race should not matter is often blurred with the message that race does not matter (Neville, 2000). Despite the ever-present importance of skin color on the treatment of individuals both young and old, colorblind ideology sends a powerful message to young children that their skin color does not matter, despite the fact that they may constantly be receiving a clear message that it does (Edwards & Few-Demo, 2016; Hyland, 2010; Ryan & Grieshaber 2004). Many researchers advocate for teachers to intentionally integrate race-related content into the curriculum as a means of helping students develop the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to function within a racially diverse society (Boutte, Lopez-Robertson, & Powers-Costello, 2011; Husband, 2015). Yet despite these recommendations, colorblindness remains a dominant perspective across the field of early childhood (Husband, 2010; 2012; 2016). National reports addressing early childhood education continually highlight the importance of other factors such as socioeconomic status, students' emotional or behavioral issues, family composition, parent education level, and English as a Second Language (ESL) status, yet the conversation is rarely about the importance of race.

### 3.2.2 Individual Experiences and Characteristics of Undergraduate Education Students

Undergraduate education students (UESs) enter their program of study with various experiences and aspirations, or what Taylor (2017) refers to as *racial touchstones*. More specifically, these are aspects of the teachers' own lives that they understand to be related to the nature of race and the experience of racism and whether and how they may respond to race in their pedagogy and practice. To date, however, few studies have examined the ways in which these touchstones may influence their race-related beliefs. It is not enough to know that their race is different from the increasing majority of their future students. Even within a population of White teachers, there is great variability in beliefs and experiences (Alvarez, 2018), and these have substantial consequences for their teaching practices. As Johnson (2002) notes, the predispositions teacher education students bring to teaching are a much more powerful socializing influence than either preservice education or later socialization in the workplace.

Studies that have examined successful teachers in diverse schools have identified common distinct touchstones. Johnson (2002) utilizes a life history approach to examine the experiences of six White teachers who were viewed as successful in working in racially diverse classrooms. She found that teachers' perceptions of racial awareness were dependent on specific characteristics of the individuals, including their own identity as "outsiders" (e.g., class background or sexual orientation), extensive experience living and working with individuals of other races, and religious/philosophical beliefs emphasizing equality and social justice. These findings are reflected in the work of Ladson-Billings (2000, 2001, 2009), who carefully documented the characteristics of successful novice and veteran teachers in urban schools and notes common race-related beliefs, practices, and goals among such teachers. Similarly, in a study investigating the factors that made a critical difference in preparing UESs to work in urban settings, Milner (2006)

notes that, among other factors, cultural and racial awareness and insight was key to preservice teachers' learning over the course of their semester. Finally, Alvarez (2018) examines characteristics of in-service teachers' feelings and beliefs related to race-talk in the classroom. Teachers' reported preparedness was often linked to their own self-study and personal experiences, such as a person of color they know, their interpretation of a text about race, having a racially diverse family, and/or working in diverse settings.

### **3.3 The Current Study**

Studies that have examined UESs engaged in courses addressing race-related topics show that most have had very few interactions with persons whose backgrounds and needs differ from their own and have limited knowledge of historical contributions made by individuals whose backgrounds differ from that of the dominant U.S. culture (Taylor & Sobel, 2001). As such, the purpose of this study was to explore a sample cohort of undergraduate education students (UESs) enrolled in a course centered on race to see if and how beliefs change as a result of the course, and what other factors might impact that change. Three primary research questions were addressed.

#### **3.3.1 Research Question 1**

To what extent do undergraduate education students believe that race is a critical factor for students' school experience at the start of a course related to race?

*Hypothesis:* UESs will not believe race matters relative to other factors at the start of a course related to race.

### **3.3.2 Research Question 2**

Do undergraduate education students' race-related beliefs (understanding of colorblindness, race in early childhood education, and rating of race for students' school experience) change during a course related to race?

*Hypothesis:* On average, students will have a stronger understanding of colorblind ideology and race in early childhood and will rank race as more important for students' experience in school at the conclusion of the course.

### **3.3.3 Research Question 3**

How do undergraduate education students' race-related beliefs at the conclusion of a course related to race differ by individual experiences and characteristics?

*Hypothesis:* UESs with advanced race-related beliefs will have notably different characteristics and experiences than their peers.

## **3.4 Methods**

### **3.4.1 Sample**

Forty-nine undergraduate early childhood education students (UESs) from a large urban university made up the sample for this study. Of the 46 UESs, 43 were women and three were men, which is representative of the larger early childhood education workforce. Similarly, 39 of

the 46 students identified as White, also reflecting the demographic trends of teachers in the U.S. (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). Most undergraduate students in the sample were 20 years old or younger (78 percent) and came from primarily Suburban neighborhoods (70 percent), which they perceived to have “very little” (41 percent) to “some” (43 percent) racial and ethnic diversity. Students primarily identified themselves as Christian (28 percent), Catholic (26 percent), or as having no religious affiliation (33 percent). In addition, the majority of students expressed plans to work in either an urban (44 percent) or suburban (50 percent) setting upon graduation.

The school of education at the university where students were enrolled has a strong focus on urban education and issues related to race and equity. All UESs were juniors in their program of study were enrolled in a 15-week course titled Developmental Meanings of Cultural Distinction, and volunteered to participate in the present study. The course is a requirement for all students in the program of study. The course was described to students as an “exploration of some of the major dimensions and issues of culture, with a particular emphasis of the impact on developing children and youth within the context of the family and school setting. Implications for practice in programs serving children, youth, and families will be explored.” As such, the course had five major objectives as outlined in the course syllabus:

1. Students will articulate the important impact of cultural elements in professional work with children, youth, and families.
2. Students will identify the developmental meanings that micro cultures such as socio-economic class, race, ethnicity, age, gender, ability, religion, and language have on professional work with children, youth, and families.
3. Students will define appropriate multicultural practices and education for children and youth and be able to identify appropriate anti-bias goals for children.

4. Students will explore the representation of culture in the media.
5. Students will become familiar with several religious institutions and attempt to understand unfamiliar customs, values, and perspectives.

Although the course was not centered solely on issues of race, the professor intentionally wove race-related discussions into topics and pushed students to critically consider race as a factor across domains. In addition, the professor assigned readings and class discussions about race-specific topics throughout the 15-week course, including White privilege, racial bias, racial microaggressions, racial bias in school discipline, and colorblindness.

Students were required to complete five major assignments throughout the course. Students each wrote a critically reflective identity paper and created a digital story to document the role race and ethnicity played in the world around them. They were also required to write papers about the way that biases influence children and their families, document examples of inequities in the media, and complete group projects ranging from topics directly related to colorblindness to engaging classmates in critical reflection of experiences at religious institutions. Assignments were supplemented with class discussions that engaged students in critical dialogue around current events and course topics.

### **3.4.2 Measures**

#### **3.4.2.1 Pretest**

At the start of the 15-week course, UESs completed a 36-item questionnaire including demographic items and questions about their experience with race. UESs were also asked open-ended questions to probe beliefs about race and equity with young children. For example, students were asked: “Do you believe that children under the age of 5 recognize racial and cultural

differences? Why?”, “Should early childhood and early elementary school teachers discuss issues of race and culture with young children in the school setting?”, and “What is the colorblind approach and should it be used with young children?” Next, using a 5-point Likert scale, students rated the extent to which they believe 17 factors influenced a child’s experience in school (e.g., child’s race, parent education level, socioeconomic status, students’ emotional/behavioral issues, and family composition). Finally, students were asked to select, from the list of 17 factors, the four items they believed were the most influential on a child’s experience in school.

#### **3.4.2.2 Posttest**

At the conclusion of the course, students completed a posttest measure. Students were asked the same questions at posttest as they were at pretest with the exception of their demographic information. In addition, items were added to the posttest specifically to address the utility of the course. For example, students were asked: “To what extent did your time in this course change the way you think about issues related to race, culture, and religion?” and “Which activities did you find most/least beneficial to your learning about race and culture, particularly race and culture that differs from your own and why?”

## 3.5 Analyses

### 3.5.1 Research Questions

#### **3.5.1.1 Research Question 1: To what extent do undergraduate education students believe that race is a critical factor for students' school experience at the start of a course related to race?**

*Hypothesis:* UESs will not believe race matters relative to other factors at the start of a course related to race.

This research question was addressed by comparing student reports of the 17 factors influencing children's school experiences at pretest to assess where and how they specifically view race compared to the other factors presented to them. To do so, I averaged students' ratings on each item using the 5-point Likert scale to understand which factors UESs believed were most important relative to race. In addition, I used the ranked data of the top four items UESs identified as mattering the most for a student's experience in school to determine where or if race would rank relative to the other items provided.

#### **3.5.1.2 Research Question 2: Do undergraduate education students' race-related beliefs (understanding of colorblindness, race in early childhood education, and rating of race for students' school experience) change during a course related to race?**

*Hypothesis:* On average, students will have a stronger understanding of colorblind ideology and race in early childhood and will rank race as more important for students' experience in school at the conclusion of the course.

To assess change in UESs' beliefs about the role of race in students' school experiences, change scores were computed between pre- and posttest responses to determine whether students' beliefs about the role of race in education stayed the same or changed from pre- to posttest.

Comparative qualitative techniques were used to assess differences in students' understanding of colorblindness at pre- and posttest. More specifically, pretest results were coded first utilizing open coding techniques to derive UESs' understanding of the ideology. Once categories of understanding emerged, the same approach was used to code posttest responses. I then compared pre- and posttest response categories to identify whether or not students' understanding of colorblindness changed or remained the same at pre- and posttest.

### **3.5.1.3 Research Question 3: How do undergraduate education students' race-related beliefs at the conclusion of a course related to race differ by individual experiences and characteristics?**

*Hypothesis:* UESs with advanced race-related beliefs will have notably different characteristics and experiences than their peers.

Levels of understanding derived from the second research question were used to assess differences across groups based on UESs' race-related beliefs at posttest. More specifically, individual characteristics were explored to understand if and what differences existed between emergent groups. Based on previous literature, I explored demographic information about individuals within groups based on 1) race, 2) background characteristics (e.g., where they grew up, experiences with diversity), 3) description of the majority of their friends and acquaintances, and 4) setting they aspire to work in after graduation. In addition, I investigated differences between individual responses regarding the role of race in education by emergent groupings.

## 3.6 Results

### 3.6.1 Research Question 1

*To what extent do undergraduate education students believe that race is a critical factor for students' school experience at the start of a course related to race?*

Across UESs, Likert-scale ratings of race were among the lowest of the 17 factors presented to students at the start of the course ( $M = 2.89$ ,  $SD = 1.24$ ), followed only by religion ( $M = 2.33$ ,  $SD = 1.13$ ). UESs identified exposure to trauma ( $M = 4.59$ ,  $SD = .16$ ), having a psychological or emotional disorder ( $M = 4.39$ ,  $SD = .73$ ), and having a learning disability ( $M = 4.37$ ,  $SD = .73$ ) as mattering the most. (See Table 6 for means and standard deviations across pretest ratings.) Looking specifically at how UESs rated race as a factor influencing children's school experience, 22 percent said race did not matter at all, 8 percent said race did not matter much, 35 percent said race mattered somewhat, 29 percent said race mattered, and only 6 percent believed race mattered to a large degree at pretest.

Further, when asked to select and rank the top four items UESs believed mattered the most for a child's experience in school, race was ranked first (matters the most) by one student and fourth by another. Race was not selected by any other UESs. Among the 17 factors, exposure to trauma was selected as mattering the most (13), followed by teacher-child relationship quality (8), a child's physical health (4), having a learning disability (4), a family's socioeconomic status (4), and school location (3).

### 3.6.2 Research Question 2

*Do undergraduate education students' race-related beliefs (understanding of colorblindness, race in early childhood education, and rating of race for students' school experience) change during a course related to race?*

Of the 46 UESs who completed posttest measures, 12 rated race on the 5-point Likert scale as mattering *less* for children's school experiences after completing the 15-week course, 13 believed race mattered more, and 21 remained the same. However, when responding to the three open-ended questions about colorblind beliefs, the majority of students believed first that young children notice race. When comparing pre- and posttest reports, 34 of 46 UESs' beliefs remained the same at pre- and posttest, while 12 reported a change in beliefs (five no to yes and seven unsure to yes). Next, when asked if early childhood educators should be addressing race in the early childhood classroom, 39 held the same beliefs at pre- and posttest while seven had a change in beliefs (three unsure to yes, one no to yes, one yes to no, and two yes to unsure). Lastly, when asked if colorblindness was an effective approach to use in early childhood, 27 UESs held the same belief at posttest, whereas 19 reported a change in beliefs (14 yes to no, three unsure to no, and two unsure to yes). Table 7 illustrates UESs' pre- and posttest frequencies of race-related beliefs about colorblindness. In general, at the conclusion of the course, UESs were more likely to believe that young children notice race, that race should be addressed in the classroom, and that the colorblind approach was not effective in early childhood.

Next, UESs' pre- and post-qualitative descriptions of colorblindness and the utility of colorblind teaching in early childhood were coded with four levels of understanding: advanced, general, inaccurate, and unfamiliar. (See Figure 2). First, advanced levels of understanding were defined as in-depth descriptions and insights, or profound understandings of colorblind ideology

and practice. For example, “children do not feel like differences are valued or even acceptable and instead feel like they need to fit into dominant/white culture.” Next, general levels of understanding were defined as a basic or textbook understanding of colorblind ideology and practice. Examples include:

[Colorblindness] ignores differences and pretends there are no issues surrounding race. It does not celebrate diversity or teach about other cultures. It is treating everyone the same by saying ‘I don’t see color’ but in doing that you are ignoring the differences that make people unique. It is important to celebrate differences as opposed to ignoring the things that make us unique!

The third level of understanding, inaccurate, was defined as an incorrect or skewed knowledge of colorblind ideology and practice. For example, UESs coded as having an inaccurate understanding of colorblindness described the ideology and practice as “you should ignore the child’s race and look at them all the same because even rich white kids may have problems or disorders in their life,” “it teaches children to be accepting of others, and to look past the color of someone’s skin,” and “good because it is important to appreciate people based on what’s underneath their skin and focus on the personalities and individuality of each child.” The last level of understanding, unfamiliar, was defined as no knowledge of colorblind ideology or practice. Students coded as unfamiliar reported, for example, “not really sure what it is.”

Comparative analyses of levels of understanding show first the change in general levels of knowledge at the conclusion of the course, and, more specifically, the ways in which UESs’ understanding of colorblind ideology and practice changed or remained the same. First, pre- and posttest frequencies of levels of knowledge show that the majority of students left the course with an advanced or general knowledge of colorblindness and a decrease in accurate or unfamiliar levels

of understanding (Table 8). However, qualitative results also show that the majority (25; 51 percent) of students entered the course with either an advanced or general level of understanding and left with the same level of understanding. Fourteen students did, however, increase their level of knowledge to either general or advanced during the course, while seven students left the course with an inaccurate level of knowledge (Table 9).

### **3.6.3 Research Question 3**

*How do undergraduate education students' race-related beliefs at the conclusion of the course differ by individual experiences and characteristics?*

Person-centered analytic techniques were used to explore differences between levels of understanding of colorblindness among UESs. More specifically, posttest levels of understanding, as derived from research question two, were used to explore the differences and similarities of individuals coded as advanced, general, and inaccurate. Based on past literature, I specifically explored past experiences with diversity, the setting individuals desired to work in after graduation, their own racial background, and the extent to which they believe race mattered for children's experiences in school. Table 10 highlights the differences across groups. Most notably, individuals coded as advanced in their level of understanding of colorblind ideology and practice were 1) more racially diverse, 2) more likely to come from and desire to work in urban settings, 3) had more experience with diverse individuals, 4) were more comfortable talking about race, and 5) were more likely to believe race is an important factor for children's school experience. Moreover, individuals with advanced levels of understanding were the only UESs to report that race matters to a large degree for children's experience in school.

### 3.7 Discussion

This discussion considers the results of the analyses outlined above in the context of existing literature, as well as implications of these findings for future research and practice. The results of this research contribute to the field by both exploring the pre- and posttest beliefs of UESs engaged in a course meant to challenge and change beliefs and by creating a schemata for conceptualizing UESs' levels of understanding of concepts like colorblindness. All findings, and conclusions that can be drawn from them, are considered in light of the strengths and weaknesses of the research design.

This study extends previous literature in an attempt to identify individual aspects, or the "critical factors," of UESs that may make them more successful when working with racially diverse students. While these conclusions are not considered causal or predictive of understandings of colorblindness, they do, as suggested by Shultz et al. (1996), look past simply the methods of preparing teacher candidates and seek to understand the influence of personal characteristics on students' race-related beliefs for their future students. UESs often enter their programs of study with a tenacity to cling to prior knowledge and beliefs about other people, along with a lack of exposure to races other than their own (Causey et al., 2000; Milner, 2003; Taylor & Sobel, 2001). Coupled with this factor, the notion of colorblindness is prevalent across UESs who may have been told throughout their lives that acknowledging race is wrong. As Gordon (2005) points out, the claim that "I don't see color. We are all just people" provides a way for individuals to absolve themselves of racism, as they have been led to believe that recognizing race makes them racist (Bell, 2003). It does not, however, address the issues of racism that are impacting their ability to teach and their future students' ability to learn.

Beginning with the findings of research question one, results support the hypothesis that UESs did not believe at pretest that race mattered to a large degree, relative to other factors, for students' school experience. Instead, students prioritized factors such as exposure to trauma, having a psychological or emotional disorder, and having a learning disability as mattering the most for a student's experience in school. While these factors do matter for student outcomes, understanding the implications of students' race on their school experience is critical. Yet across UESs, fewer than 10 percent believed race matters to a large degree for student success, while 30 percent believed race did not matter at all. This is an important finding to consider as we think about the larger population of UESs. The students in this sample come from an institution with a commitment to urban education and racial responsiveness, and were enrolled in a course strategically designed to address race-related content in the curriculum. However, if we consider that not all institutions have this same priority or are not emphasizing the importance of race in education, especially in early childhood, it is likely that UESs are entering the field without ever considering the impact race has on the children in their classrooms. Educating UESs on the historical significance of race in educational policy and reform, and shedding light on the current implications of race in education (e.g., standardized testing, expulsion), should be a priority for teacher preparation programs.

Researchers have continually highlighted the critical elements needed to support UESs as they challenge and adapt their race-related beliefs in the classroom. Engagement in critical reflection and self-study, understanding positionality, direct interaction and experiences with other races, and discussion and dialogue around critical issues are among those most pertinent highlighted in the literature (Howard, 2003; Milner, 2006; Tatum, 1992). During the 15-week course examined in this study, exposure to each of these critical elements was a part of UESs

learning experiences. Students were to complete assignments challenging previous assumptions, examine current issues related to race, meet and reflect on experiences with individuals different from themselves, engage in self-study, and participate in dialogue to challenge and alter their existing race-related beliefs. Yet, as some research suggests, simply taking a course centered on these critical issues may not be enough for all UESs to counteract preexisting attitudes and beliefs (Garmon, 2004; Haberman, 1991).

As evidenced in the findings of research question 2, the extent to which the course content impacted UESs' beliefs and understandings of race as a factor influencing children's school experience varied. Overall, UESs did not believe race was among the most important factors, relative to the other items, that might impact the educational experiences of their future students. In fact, at posttest, 12 UESs identified race as mattering *less* than they did at pretest. This could be understood in a number of ways. First, because the class focused on issues of race *in addition* to other topics (e.g., culture, religion, sexual orientation), UESs may have clung to knowledge of other novel topics, especially if race was not a topic they were comfortable discussing. Further, when asked at posttest what topics they felt were missing from the course, more than half who responded said they wanted more about topics like disabilities or gender bias, with some distinctly saying "less talk of race." This type of response mimics the idea explored by Pollock, Bocala, Deckman and Dickstein-Staub (2016) when considering in-service teachers' reflections on race-related topics. They found that teachers who perceive the inclusion of race or reflection in their work as insurmountable or "extra" might have difficulties teaching well in racially diverse school contexts. In parallel, UESs may choose to opt out of talking about race if they believe race is inconsequential to their practice or if they feel uncomfortable (Bonilla-Silva, 2017). Likewise, Sleeter (2001) states that many preservice students initially show receptivity toward learning about

diversity but often maintain strong colorblind beliefs (e.g., *I accept all cultures; We're all the same*) when entering their student-teaching experiences.

On the contrary, when I specifically explored open-ended responses from UESs related to race, many students did describe a change in their beliefs and knowledge as a result of the course. As Table 7 illustrates, most UESs at the conclusion of the course believed that young children notice race (65 percent pretest vs. 91 percent posttest), that race should be discussed with young children (80 percent pretest vs. 83 percent posttest), and that the colorblind approach is not effective to use in early childhood (52 percent pretest vs. 80 percent posttest). Moreover, qualitative analyses revealed that the majority of UESs left the course with a general (35 percent pretest vs. 54 percent posttest) or advanced (24 percent pretest vs. 30 percent posttest) level of understanding of colorblind ideology. It is important to consider, however, that of the 29 UESs who left the course with a general or advanced level of understanding, 25 came in with that same level of understanding (advanced to advanced [11] or general to general [14]). Because over half of the UESs already had an advanced or general level of understanding prior to their experience in the course, it is important to consider the implications of this finding in light of the research.

According to Ng, Nicholas, and Williams (2010), beliefs influence how individuals conceptualize teaching and encompass both what it takes to be an effective teacher and how students ought to behave. Further, Pajares (1992) argue that beliefs function as a filter through which new phenomena are interpreted. Each of the UESs in this study, and across UESs at large, enter with prior beliefs, experiences, and assumptions related to race and equity that may both influence their openness to course material and their overall experience with course topics. As stated, if UESs believe race is inconsequential to their practice or if they feel uncomfortable discussing race-related topics, they may disengage or divert their attention. In contrast, UESs who

interpret race as an important and/or relevant part of their lives may experience course topics very differently. Race reflection at large, as described by Milner (2003), is an active process through which one deconstructs and interprets conceptions of race to make meaning of prior experiences. As such, course content such as that presented in this study is received differently by different audiences depending on where they are in their journey with understanding race and colorblind ideology. Research question three was particularly focused on understanding what experiences and characteristics UESs with advanced understandings of colorblindness had that may have influenced their experience in the course compared to their peers. Based on the findings of this particular study, those students were more likely to be individuals of color, have had more experience with diverse populations, have stronger beliefs about the role of race in education, and have intentions of working in urban settings. As a result, these students may be more ready to explore and tackle issues related to race and equity compared to their peers, despite their apparent change in knowledge and beliefs.

While this work extends previous findings related to teacher education and race in early childhood, it is important to note the limitations. First, students in this sample represent only those from a single institution. As noted, however, students were enrolled at an institution where the school of education has a strong focus on issues of race and equity; thus we may expect these students would have a greater awareness of race-related issues than students at other institutions without that focus. Further, a sample size of only 46 preservice teachers cannot be generalized to the larger population of teacher candidates. Additionally, this study captures only a snapshot of preservice teachers' experiences across a 15-week course, and their undergraduate career at large. It does not, as is often suggested, follow teacher candidates into the classroom to understand whether or not the conclusions drawn in the results provide an accurate representation of teachers'

success (e.g. Tyler et al., 2006). Lastly, as noted, the course explored in this study did not exclusively address race, but explored other equity-based topics. Previous literature emphasizes the need to educate undergraduate students using a race-related curriculum that actively deconstructs and interprets conceptions of race to make meaning of prior experiences (Milner, 2003). In other words, race-specific curricula should not only provide opportunities to practice reflection but regularly include reflective techniques in practice. Despite this limitation, there was evidence of change in the race-related beliefs (understanding of colorblindness, race in early childhood education, and rating of race for students' school experience) of the majority of UESs enrolled in the course. Further, this study extends previous research in an effort to understand how we can better understand and prioritize individual characteristics when preparing UESs.

The two major pathways by which previous research suggests preparing UESs to work in diverse settings include recruiting more diverse teacher candidates and trying to change beliefs through coursework and experiences. The findings in this study extend this work by considering a third pathway by which schools of education might prepare future educators – through the exploration of UESs prior beliefs, experiences, awareness and predisposition (Garmon, 2004; Haberman, 1991, 1995, 1996; McCarty, Abbott-Shim, & Lambert, 2001; Shultz, Neyhart, & Reck, 1996; Taylor & Sobel, 2001). More specifically, program faculty and administrators might consider coupling their knowledge of effective teacher preparation with knowledge of their UESs to create a cumulative, personalized education experience based on the students' individual characteristics and future goals as educators. By doing so, schools of education could create well-designed programs to meet students where they are when they enter their programs, allowing them to deconstruct and interpret conceptions of race and tackle colorblind beliefs. According to Philip (2012), UESs often enter teacher education programs with an uninformed orientation toward

equity and fairness, which often bears on teachers' future practices. Individualizing teacher preparation pathways through knowledge of the UESs prior to entry into the program of study is one promising opportunity to do just that. In addition, this study also offers a new schema for conceptualizing the ever-present colorblind ideology often found in early childhood education. I hope that, as suggested by Buchanan (2015), these findings provoke teacher educators to position deliberate course experiences with race that unpack race and the negative impacts of colorblind beliefs. Future research should consider this opportunity when planning interventions for teacher preparation in early childhood and beyond.

#### 4.0 Dissertation Conclusions

This dissertation takes a cumulative look at the implications and importance of teacher beliefs, both at the preparation and practice level. As stated by Pajares (1992), attention to the beliefs of teachers and teacher candidates should be a focal point of educational research. This is particularly important as we consider the prevalence of colorblind ideology across the field of early childhood. This notion of colorblindness is rooted in the belief that children, particularly young children under the age of five, do not see racial differences between themselves and others and therefore should not be "taught" to do so. Yet renowned scholars assert that a colorblind ideology masks the significance of race and leads to increased inequities (Bonilla-Silva, 2006; Derman-Sparks & Edwards, 2010; Farago, 2016; Husband, 2016). Consideration of colorblind ideology and the implications of this approach should be at the forefront of our concerns for early childhood educators.

The population of teachers and teacher candidates remains largely white and female, while the percentage of students enrolled in public schools is becoming increasingly diverse (National Center for Education Statistics, 2014; U.S. Department of Education, 2016). This racial divide between early childhood teachers and their students may have significant implications for classroom practice. We know from previous research that White teachers often rate Black students as exhibiting poorer classroom behavior and as being less academically engaged than White students (Downey & Pribesh, 2004; Graves & Howes, 2011). Yet the findings in this study model the persistent presence of colorblind beliefs in early childhood educators. While in-service teachers were more likely to believe race was not relevant for young children in their classrooms, many preservice teachers initially believed colorblindness was a good approach for teaching young

children. These findings support decades of research exploring colorblindness, particularly in early childhood. As such, preparing teachers to center race in their work must be at the core of teacher education.

There remains, however, a lack of scholarship around racially responsive teaching practices in early childhood and teacher education. I suggest two major pathways for future research in light of this dissertation. First, teachers need more intentional preparation to learn to place race at the center of teaching and learning, and to create classrooms that go beyond simply celebrating holidays or hanging posters. Yet, as noted by Summer (2014), “there seems to be another deafening silence when we look into [preparing to talk about race] for in-service teachers” (p. 199). We must encourage and educate *both current and future teachers* to make race central in their classroom. This requires pushing past simple discussions of race and equity, and encouraging teachers to first become aware of and examine their own race as it pertains to the classroom and their students. In addition, teachers at all levels need concrete ways to bring topics of race into the classroom in ways they perceive to be developmentally appropriate. While racially relevant curricula exist for elementary and secondary education, there is very little to offer the teachers of our youngest children. Yet if teachers were able to bring race-related topics to the forefront of teaching, they would have a greater opportunity to connect with both their students and their families, thus creating a more cohesive and inclusive learning experience. According to Boutte et al. (2011), teachers are reluctant to discuss race, color, and racism not always because they do not want to but often because they do not know how to.

The second major pathway for future research addressed in this dissertation is the need to strategically design programs for teaching about race in teacher education. This research reveals that education students enter their programs of study with various levels of knowledge and

experience related to race. Further, even when they have the opportunity to engage in critical reflection on race, not all teacher candidates are at the same level of readiness. On the one hand, thoughtfully creating experiences and opportunities for teacher candidates based on their readiness offers great potential for learning and growth. On the other hand, when we allow teacher candidates to avoid race-related discussion and see race from a colorblind perspective, we are simply contributing to racial inequity. I envision future teacher education programs that have three primary aims – 1) Gathering baseline data on teacher candidates based on their beliefs and experiences, 2) Providing comprehensive course and field work that pushes and empowers the knowledge and beliefs of teacher candidates, and 3) Following teachers into the field to more thoroughly understand how learning translates to practice and informs future programmatic changes. Knowing where students are when they enter can inform how and what experiences they need while in their programs of study. Milner (2010) asserts that “Relevant, effective, and responsive teaching requires that educators know more than their subject matter; they must understand the differences, complexities, and nuances” (p. 40). This requires not only offering a single course or experience related to subjects such as race, but weaving these issues into the very fabric of preservice teacher education, from teaching elementary math or gym, to writing lesson plans, and beyond. Finally, teaching and learning must be iterative. Simply hoping that learning translates to practice is not enough. Opportunities to follow preservice teachers into the classroom both to support their teaching and learn how to improve future teacher education classes is necessary.

In sum, it is my hope that this dissertation contributes to both the knowledge and support of in-service and preservice teachers as they navigate and understand the role of race in their lives and the lives of their students. As racial tensions in the U.S. grow, the need to educate and prepare

teachers on the needs of their increasingly diverse students is essential. However, if teachers remain naïve to the effects of colorblind ideology and continue to believe that children under the age of five do not see or act on race, racism will only be exacerbated. As I worked with teachers and teacher candidates, I was encouraged by the passion of those wanting to address race in their current and future classrooms. Further, I am empowered by the work being done on a large scale to bring race to the forefront of our conversations in education and beyond. In turn, I envision a future where race is no longer unseen but central to the education of all children from the start.

*Racial discussions tend to be conducted at one of two levels—either in shouts or in whispers. The shouters are generally so twisted by pain or ignorance that spectators tune them out. The whisperers are so afraid of the sting of truth that they avoid saying much of anything at all. (Cose, 1993, p. 9)*

## **Appendix A Teacher Interview Prompt Questions**

### **General Interview Questions**

- 1) Tell us about some of your greatest successes this year, the things you are most proud of.
- 2) What did we miss in the moments we weren't in your classroom that you'd like us to know about?
- 3) What was the most difficult part of teaching this year?
- 4) What are your fears or concerns for students in your classroom?
- 5) What do you think kindergarten will be like for the kids in your classroom?
- 6) What, if any, is an early childhood teacher's role in reducing the achievement gap?

### **Race-related questions**

- 1) Do you think it is the teacher's job to incorporate race into the classroom? Why or why not?
- 2) If a student were to directly ask a question related to race, how would you address their question?
- 3) Do you think the way kids see race or think about their race has any implications for how students learn?
- 4) Do you think race matters differently for boys and girls?
- 5) Do you think racial match between teachers and students in school matters?
- 6) Does racial match between you and a parent change the way you interact with them?
- 7) Do you think children in your classroom notice racial differences? Why or why not?
- 8) Is race even an issue in young kids? Should race even be addressed in schools?
- 9) Should race be directly addressed in school or, if we just didn't talk about it, would it go away?
- 10) If you were teaching in a private, upper class early childhood classroom, how would your teaching look the same or different?

11) We teach preservice teachers; we want to talk to them about race. What advice would you give them?

## Appendix B Parent Measure

1. What is your relationship to the child in this classroom?

- Biological Mother
- Biological Father
- Grandparent
- Other Family Member (*please specify*): \_\_\_\_\_
- Other Guardian or Caregiver (*please specify*): \_\_\_\_\_

2. What is your age?

- Less than 20 years old
- 21-30 years old
- 31-40 years
- 41-50 years
- 51 years old+

3. How do you describe yourself? (*check all that apply*)

- White
- Hispanic or Latino
- Black or African American
- Native American or American Indian
- Asian / Pacific Islander
- Other (*please specify*): \_\_\_\_\_

4. How do you describe your child? (*check all that apply*)

- White
- Hispanic or Latino
- Black or African American
- Native American or American Indian
- Asian / Pacific Islander
- Other (*please specify*): \_\_\_\_\_

5. What is your child's gender?

- Boy
- Girl
- Other

6. How old is your child?

- Younger than 3 years old
- 3 years old
- 4 years old
- 5 years old or older

7. What is the highest education level you have **completed**?

- No schooling completed
- Less than 8<sup>th</sup> grade
- Some high school
- High school diploma or GED
- Some college credit, no degree
- Trade/technical/vocational training
- Associate degree
- Bachelor's degree
- Master's degree
- Professional degree (for example, PhD, MD)

8. What is your marital status?

- Single, never married
- Married
- In a relationship
- Widowed
- Divorced
- Separated

9. How many adults live in your home?

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4 or more

**In preschool, some children may start asking questions about race. Please tell us what you think about this.**

24. How often do you talk to your child about race?

- Never
- Rarely
- Sometimes
- Often

25. Do you think teachers should incorporate race into the classroom?

- Yes
- No

26. What do I want my child's teacher to do if a child asks questions about race?

- Ignore the question
- Answer generally (for example, "We treat everyone the same.")
- Give a clear answer to my child but then move on.
- Use the question to have a discussion with the whole class.

27. Do you think your child notices differences in people's race?

Yes

No

Why or why not?

***Parents and caregivers are often stressed. Please answer the following questions on a scale of 1 (never) to 5 (always).***

10. I have time for myself.	1	2	3	4	5
11. I worry that I do not have enough money for basic necessities (for example, food or clothing.)	1	2	3	4	5
12. I have trouble with transportation.	1	2	3	4	5
13. I am concerned about the safety of my neighborhood.	1	2	3	4	5
14. I have enough time to do the things I need to do.	1	2	3	4	5
15. I have trouble finding or keep a job.	1	2	3	4	5
16. I am concerned about my child/children's health and safety.	1	2	3	4	5
17. I feel overwhelmed by my responsibilities as a parent.	1	2	3	4	5
18. I have trouble with housing.	1	2	3	4	5
19. I am concerned about my health.	1	2	3	4	5
20. I worry about the future.	1	2	3	4	5
21. I have someone who I trust to care for my child when I cannot.	1	2	3	4	5
22. I have a good relationship with my spouse or partner.	1	2	3	4	5
23. I have recently experienced a major life change (for example, loss of a loved one, pregnancy, health related issue, job loss or change, divorce or separation).					
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes					
<input type="checkbox"/> No					
If yes, please describe the change(s):					

## Appendix C Undergraduate Education Student Pretest Measure

1. What is your age?
  - 20 years old or less
  - 21-23 years old
  - 24 years old +
  
2. How do you describe yourself? (*check all that apply*)
  - White
  - Hispanic or Latino
  - Black or African American
  - Native American or American Indian
  - Asian / Pacific Islander
  - Other (please specify): \_\_\_\_\_
  
3. How would you describe the **majority** of your *friends and acquaintances*?
  - White
  - Hispanic or Latino
  - Black or African American
  - Native American or American Indian
  - Asian / Pacific Islander
  - Other (please specify): \_\_\_\_\_
  
4. What is your religious preference?
  - Christian (non-specific)
  - Catholic
  - Protestant
  - Jewish
  - Mormon
  - Other (please specify): \_\_\_\_\_
  - No religious affiliation
  
5. What is your gender?
  - Male
  - Female
  - Other
  
6. Which of the following best describes the area in which you grew up?
  - Urban
  - Suburban
  - Rural

7. In what type of setting do you hope to teach following graduation?

- Urban
- Suburban
- Rural

8. In what type of setting do you hope to teach following graduation?

- Public
- Private
- Non-traditional (e.g. cyber, charter)

9. On a scale of 1-5, how would you best explain the **area/neighborhood/town in which you grew up?**

1	2	3	4	5
Not at all diverse	Very little diversity	Some diversity	A lot of diversity	Extremely Diverse

10. On a scale of 1-5, how would you best explain the elementary school you attended? *(if you attended multiple schools, reflect on the school you attended for the longest period of time)*

1	2	3	4	5
Not at all diverse	Very little diversity	Some diversity	A lot of diversity	Extremely Diverse

11. On a scale of 1-5, how would you best explain the secondary school you attended? *(if you attended multiple schools, reflect on the school you attended for the longest period of time)*

1	2	3	4	5
Not at all diverse	Very little diversity	Some diversity	A lot of diversity	Extremely Diverse

12. On a scale of 1-5, how comfortable are you discussing topics related to race, ethnicity, culture, and religion?

1	2	3	4	5
Not at all comfortable	Very uncomfortable	Comfortable	Very Comfortable	Extremely Comfortable

13. Do you believe that children under the age of 5 recognize racial and cultural differences?

- Yes
- No
- Unsure

*Please explain your answer below:*

13. Should early childhood and early elementary school teachers discuss issues of race and culture with young children in the school setting?

- Yes
- No
- Unsure

*Please explain your answer below:*

14. If a young child in my class were to ask me a difficult question related to race and/or culture, I would...

- Probably ignore the question.
- Answer generally (for example, "We treat everyone the same.")
- Give a clear answer to the child but then move on.
- Use the question to have a discussion with the whole class.

*[15-31 below]*

32. Please define the "color blind approach" to early childhood education:

33. Do you think the color blind approach is a good approach to use in early childhood classrooms? Explain your answer below.

34. What programs or activities have you been a part of that have exposed you to populations that are different than your own race, culture, or ethnicity? Please list below.

35. Which foreign culture class did you take as a prerequisite to this course?

Please rate each of the following items on the extent to which you think it *matters for a child's experience in school*

- 1= Does not matter at all  
 2= Does not matter much  
 3 = Matters somewhat  
 4 = It matters  
 5 = Matters to a large degree

15. Child's Race	1	2	3	4	5
16. Child's Culture	1	2	3	4	5
17. English as a Second Language (ESL) Status	1	2	3	4	5
18. Parent Education Level	1	2	3	4	5
19. Parent Stress Level	1	2	3	4	5
20. Child's Exposure to Violence or Trauma	1	2	3	4	5
21. Child's Behavior	1	2	3	4	5
22. Child's Physical Health Status	1	2	3	4	5
23. Family Religion	1	2	3	4	5
24. Having a Learning Disorder	1	2	3	4	5
25. Having a Psychological or Emotional Disorder	1	2	3	4	5
26. Family's Socioeconomic Status	1	2	3	4	5
27. Family Makeup (e.g. single parent family)	1	2	3	4	5
28. Homework	1	2	3	4	5
29. Child's Relationship with Teacher	1	2	3	4	5
30. School Type (public or private)	1	2	3	4	5
31. School Location (urban, suburban, rural)	1	2	3	4	5

Please select and rank order the **TOP 4 items** from the list above that you think *matter most for a child's experience in school.*

## Appendix D Undergraduate Education Student Posttest Measure

1. To what extent did your time in this course change the way you think about issues related to race, culture, and religion?

1	2	3	4	5
It did not change the way I think about these issues	To a small degree	It somewhat changed the way I think about these issues	To a large degree	It completely changed the way I think about these issues

Explain your answer below:

2. Which activities did you find **most beneficial** to your learning about race and culture, particularly race and culture that differs from own and why?

3. Which activities did you find **least beneficial** to your learning about race and culture, particularly race and culture that differs from your own and why?

4. Following your time in this course, *what issues/topics do you feel like you still need to learn more about and/or what do you feel like was missing from this course?*

5. In what type of setting do you hope to teach/work following graduation?

- Urban
- Suburban
- Rural

6. In what type of setting do you hope to teach/work following graduation?

- Public
- Private
- Non-traditional (e.g. cyber, charter)

7. On a scale of 1-5, how comfortable are you discussing topics related to race, ethnicity, culture, and religion?

1	2	3	4	5
Not at all comfortable	Very uncomfortable	Comfortable	Very Comfortable	Extremely Comfortable

8. Do you believe that children under the age of 5 recognize racial and cultural differences?

- Yes
- No
- Unsure

*Please explain your answer below:*

9. Should early childhood and early elementary school teachers/practitioners discuss issues of race and culture with young children in the school setting?

- Yes
- No
- Unsure

*Please explain your answer below:*

10. If a young child in my class/practice were to ask me a difficult question related to race and/or culture, I would...

- Probably ignore the question.
- Answer generally (for example, "We treat everyone the same.")
- Give a clear answer to the child but then move on.
- Use the question to have a discussion with the whole class.

11. Please define the "color blind approach" to early childhood education:

12. Do you think the color blind approach is a good approach to use in early childhood classrooms? Explain your answer below.

Please rate each of the following items on the extent to which you think it *matters for a child's experience in school*

- 1 = Does not matter at all
- 2 = Does not matter much
- 3 = Matters somewhat
- 4 = It matters
- 5 = Matters to a large degree

15. Child's Race	1	2	3	4	5
16. Child's Culture	1	2	3	4	5
17. English as a Second Language (ESL) Status	1	2	3	4	5
18. Parent Education Level	1	2	3	4	5
19. Parent Stress Level	1	2	3	4	5
20. Child's Exposure to Violence or Trauma	1	2	3	4	5
21. Child's Behavior	1	2	3	4	5
22. Child's Physical Health Status	1	2	3	4	5
23. Family Religion	1	2	3	4	5
24. Having a Learning Disorder	1	2	3	4	5
25. Having a Psychological or Emotional Disorder	1	2	3	4	5
26. Family's Socioeconomic Status	1	2	3	4	5
27. Family Makeup (e.g. single parent family)	1	2	3	4	5
28. Homework	1	2	3	4	5
29. Child's Relationship with Teacher	1	2	3	4	5
30. School Type (public or private)	1	2	3	4	5
31. School Location (urban, suburban, rural)	1	2	3	4	5

Please select and rank order the **TOP 4 items** from the list above that you think *matter most for a child's experience in school*

Please rate the extent to which you feel you have personally grown and developed in the following categories **as a result of this course**.

1 = Same as when I began the course.

2 = I have grown or developed somewhat.

3 = I have grown or developed to large degree.

4 = I have grown extensively.

Openness to races, cultural, ethnicities, and religions that differ from your own	1	2	3	4
Willingness to teach or work in a setting that serves races, cultural, ethnicities, and religions	1	2	3	4
Comfort is teaching or working in a setting that serves races, cultural, ethnicities, and religions	1	2	3	4

Comfort in discussing issues of race, cultural, ethnicity, and religion	1	2	3	4
Standing up for injustices related to race, cultural, ethnicity, and religion	1	2	3	4
Overall awareness of the issues facing various races, cultures, ethnicities, and religions	1	2	3	4

## **Appendix E In-Service Teacher Coding Excerpts – Beliefs and Practice by Classroom**

Classroom ID	Do children see color?	Should race be addressed in preschool?	How does the teacher respond to race? Colorblind vs. Race Matters (Hein, 2004)	How does the teacher integrate race into the classroom?	At what level does the teacher integrate race-related content?
<b>Classroom 1</b>	<p><b>Yes</b></p> <p>He said “You’re not white, the walls are white!”</p> <p>You kind of have to address it because they’re aware.</p>	<p><b>Yes</b></p> <p>There might be 2 white kids in the class, and she comes to school and is thinking about [a bad experience] and uses that as a point of reference so you kind of have to address it.</p>	<p><b>Colorblind</b></p> <p>I think I responded with “that was unfortunate that boy said that, that wasn’t very kind”</p> <p>[When it came up] I just left it alone.</p>	<p><b>Race/Cultural Posters &amp; Books</b></p> <p><b>“All About Me”</b></p> <p>At the beginning of year we do all about me, talking about how we aren’t all the same so we are going to notice differences... but in every unit? I don’t know how we’d talk about race in wild animals or transportation.</p>	<p><b>Contributions</b></p>
<b>Classroom 2</b>	<p><b>Yes</b></p> <p>Ya! [they notice differences in each other]</p> <p>They’d make comments like “your skin looks like chocolate”</p>	<p><b>No</b></p> <p>Nothing needs to be focused on so much. What’s more important is us being friends and treating each other well.</p> <p>I try to enforce in my room that different is cool.. I’ll ask “do we like being different?” and they’ll be like “its cool!” but we don’t talk about like black, white, Spanish.</p>	<p><b>Colorblind</b></p> <p>[Race talk] happened a lot around the time of them doing the skin color, I’d hear more discussion of like “your skin looks like chocolate” and I’d chime in and be like “mmm chocolate my favorite!”</p> <p>Direct, to the point, move on. You are what you are and you should be proud..</p>	<p><b>Race/Cultural Posters &amp; Books</b></p> <p><b>“All About Me”</b></p> <p>At the beginning of the year we do a lesson with paint and skin color and we have class discussions and we’ll read books that go along with that, its really cool.</p>	<p><b>Contributions</b></p>

<b>Classroom 3</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>Colorblind</b>	<b>Race/Cultural Posters &amp; Books</b>	<b>Contributions</b>
	Yes [they notice race] but it's not like "I'm not going to play with you" because of it	<p>I like this age because they love everybody. It doesn't matter who is in the room – they just want to be their friends and do the same thing as their friends.</p> <p>There was a year we had one girl – she was the only white child in the class. It didn't bother her.</p>	<p>We address the teachable moments but otherwise we don't bring it up.</p> <p>I don't see color, I see them as kids. Our kids.</p>	<p><b>MLK Activities</b></p> <p>They're seeing the multicultural books, talking about MLK and black history month. Just incorporating it in the environment, like the signs I've made. I've made sure they're equal. I'm not going to have just white kids on them cause that's not relatable to all the kids in here. So I'm hoping that they're seeing all of this.</p>	
<b>Classroom 4</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>Colorblind</b>	<b>Race/Cultural Posters &amp; Books</b>	<b>Contributions</b>
	I do think they see [race] and all.	<p>It's not like "I'm not going to play with you because [of race]" you know what I mean? They're noticing those differences but they don't care.</p> <p>They separate themselves by clothes and shoes, not race.</p>	<p>I don't want to make it all about that. I don't want to push them too far.</p> <p>I feel like if a child asks a question then answer it, But if they don't, leave it alone</p>	<p><b>MLK Activities</b></p> <p>We talked about MLK, we read a book, we did an ipad book too, and did some activities with it</p>	
<b>Classroom 5</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>Colorblind</b>	<b>Race/Cultural Posters &amp; Books</b>	<b>Contributions</b>
	<p>I think they notice [race] even if they don't say anything</p> <p>[one girl said] "only the brown kids can come here"</p>	<p>I can see it with adults outside, but in my particular classroom with my little ones, no.</p> <p>I don't want them talking like "you can't play with us because you're white or you're black" so we don't go into all that. I don't think we should at this point.</p>	<p>I look at all of my kids as being my kids – its not a color thing for me... I want to give everybody that knowledge, that opportunity to learn, and race does not play a part with me.</p> <p>What we do is incidental learning. If it comes up we address it, its not something that we harp on.</p>	<p><b>MLK Activities</b></p> <p>We talk about [race] when its black history month just to let them know that there are famous African America's who make great contributions to history but that's it. We only really talk about it during black history month... it doesn't really come up otherwise.</p>	

<b>Classroom 6</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>Race Matters</b>	<b>Race/Cultural Posters &amp; Books</b>	<b>Contributions</b>
	<p>Some people say “oh they’re just kids and we shouldn’t talk about it” but I’m sure in their home someone has said to them “white people are this or that”</p> <p>I had a girl tell me once “You are Black.”</p>	<p>I think we should talk about it especially in a school where they’re all black because you want the kids to know like yes I am your teacher, but I don’t know everything just because I’m white. I don’t want them to look at me and think ‘I have to listen because this woman is white.’</p>	<p>I feel as though it should be talked about. Some people say “oh they’re just kids and we shouldn’t talk about it” but I’m sure in their home someone has said to them “white people are this or that”</p> <p>You tell [them] there are going to be biases. There are going to be people that judge you based on the color of your skin whether you’re white or black.</p>	<p><b>MLK Activities</b></p> <p><b>“All About Me”</b></p> <p>We talk about MLK and those stories from a long time ago... we do their self portraits, we put out multicultural crayons and tell them “look in the mirror, look at your beautiful skin”</p>	

<b>Classroom 7</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>Colorblind</b>	<b>Race/Cultural Posters &amp; Books</b>	<b>Contributions</b>
	<p>I don’t hear anyone say anything directly about it, but it seems like [they notice]</p>	<p>I don’t think its race that matters its more what you’re getting at home, your family morals.</p> <p>I want to say its more SES... its not just because of the color of your skin</p>	<p>I just look at them as kids. And I mean people will say “I don’t see color,” and I probably would have said that too before, but these are just little kids so I just treat them all like kids.</p> <p>Nobody in my class looks down on anybody else cause of the color of their skin.</p>	<p><b>MLK Activities</b></p> <p>I think the only thing we do is talk during black history month, look this person looks like you! Like the president, or this person invented the stop light and he was African American. We go through all the people.</p>	

<b>Classroom 8</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>Colorblind</b>	<b>Race/Cultural Posters &amp; Books</b>	<b>Contributions</b>
	<p>I think when I had more of a diverse class you could really see the difference – the kids would talk like “you don’t look like me,” and that would really spark the conversation.</p> <p>I think more so just observation like skin tone, hair type, that they’re really noticing.</p>	<p>I don’t think [race matters]. I think they notice the differences, I think everyone does, but I don’t think its something that’s gonna stop them from playing with each other or talking to each other.</p>	<p>Once they get to know each other they’re best friends – playing and all that stuff.</p> <p>We talk about how we’re all different, we don’t all look the same or do things the same. But with everyone being the same ethnicity it didn’t cause too much riff.</p>	<p><b>MLK/ Black History Month Activities</b></p> <p>Maybe Black History Month, but not so far as the curriculum</p>	

<b>Classroom 9</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>Race Matters</b>	<b>Race/Cultural Posters &amp; Books</b>	<b>Contributions</b>
	<p>They’re all saying “I’m white” and the other girl said “I’m Black”... the biracial girl was like “I’m black too,” and they’re like “you’re not black!”</p>	<p>She is light[skinned], but she dresses like them. Her mom sounds like she’s black so she has more of a “black” dialect so she was allowed in their clique.</p>	<p>I heard them talking [about race] and I said “Well I’m black,” and they were like “You’re black?” I said “Ya that is the race that I belong to – African American. It’s not just the color of my skin, it’s who I am and the race I belong to.”</p> <p>I hang pictures of their families up, even my personal family. I’ll show them ‘this is my dad, this is my grandma, she is very fair.’ I’ll tell them ‘[my mom] isn’t alive anymore but she was very light like me, but all my family is black. We say we’re part of the African American race.’</p>	<p><b>MLK/ Black History Month Activities</b></p> <p>We talk about race of course if it’s a writer or a story or Black History Month, but I need to read up on how better to explain all that.</p>	

## Appendix F Tables

**Table 1. Racial Composition of Students and Teachers by Classroom**

Classroom	Black	White	Mixed Race	Teacher Race
1	64%	14%	7%	White
2	7%	36%	21%	White
3	68%	21%	11%	White
4	93%	7%		White
5	68%	11%	21%	Black
6	77%		15%	White
7	83%	8%	8%	White
8	100%			Black
9	44%	13%	25%	Black

**Table 2. Parent Race Talk by Colorblind Beliefs**

		How Often Parent Talks to Child About Race			
		Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often
Child Notices Race	Yes	9%	25%	58%	8%
	No	34%	24%	29%	13%

**Table 3. Percentage of Parents Who Believe Their Child Notices Race and Talk to Their Child About Race by Child Race**

Child Race	Total Beliefs	Total Race Talk	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often
White	29	71	29	24	47	
Black	55	83	17	30	45	8
Mixed Race	59	88	12	12	41	35

**Table 4. Percentage of Parents Who Want Their Child’s Teacher to Incorporate Race Content into the Classroom and How by Child Race**

Child Race	Total	Colorblind	Answer & Move On	Intentional Teaching
White	100	18	41	41
Black	75	51	14	32
Mixed Race	88	41	6	53

**Table 5. Alignment of Teacher and Parents Beliefs on Talking About and How to Address Race in the Classroom**

Classroom	Teachers		Race Content in the Classroom (%)	Parents		
	Race Content in the Classroom	Response		Colorblind (%)	Answer & Move On (%)	Intentional Teaching (%)
1	Yes	Answer & Move On	Yes (57)	57	14	29
2	No	Answer & Move On	Yes (85)	29	21	43
3	No	Colorblind	Yes (84)	58	11	32
4	No	Answer & Move On	Yes (71)	50	36	14
5	No	Colorblind	Yes (90)	21	21	58
6	Yes	Answer & Move On	Yes (77)	39	23	31
7	No	Colorblind	Yes (67)	50	8	42
8	No	Intentional Teaching	Yes (88)	25	13	63
9	Yes	Intentional Teaching	Yes (69)	56	6	31

**Table 6. UESs Pretest Ratings of Factors Influencing Children’s School Experiences**

Factor	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Child's Exposure to Violence or Trauma	4.59	0.61
Having a Psychological or Emotional Disorder	4.39	0.73
Having a Learning Disability	4.37	0.73
Child's Physical Health Status	4.35	0.63
Child's Relationship with Teacher	4.27	0.78
Child's Behavior	4.17	0.66
Parent Stress Level	4.04	0.93
English as a Second Language Status	4.02	0.8
Family's Socioeconomic Status	3.78	1.03
School Location (urban, suburban, rural)	3.53	0.98
Homework	3.47	0.96
Parent Education Level	3.31	1
Family Makeup (e.g. single parent family)	3.21	1.07
Child Culture	3.02	1.33
School Type (public or private)	2.92	0.98
Child Race	2.89	1.24
Family Religion	2.33	1.13

**Table 7. UESs Pre- and Posttest Beliefs about Colorblindness**

	Do young children notice race?		Should race be discussed in early childhood?		Is the colorblind approach effective?	
	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post
Yes	30	42	37	38	17	7
No	6	1	2	2	24	37
Unsure	10	3	7	6	5	2

**Table 8. UESs Pre- and Post Levels of Knowledge of Colorblindness**

	Pre	Post
Advanced	11	14
General	16	25
Inaccurate	16	7
Unfamiliar	3	0

**Table 9. UES Change in Understanding of Colorblindness**

	Advanced to Advanced	General to Advanced	General to General	Inaccurate to Advanced	Inaccurate to General	Inaccurate to Inaccurate	Unfamiliar to General	Unfamiliar to Inaccurate
Frequency	11	2	14	1	9	6	2	1

**Table 10. Characteristics by Levels of Understanding**

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	Race (Person of Color)	Grew Up in Urban Setting	Desire to Teach/Work In Urban Area	Diversity Growing Up	Extremely Comfortable Discussing Race	Race Matters/ Matters to a Large Degree
Inaccurate	14%	1%	27%	43%	0%	14%
General	8%	14%	52%	48%	8%	44%
Advanced	29%	35%	79%	78%	36%	56%

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## Appendix G Figures

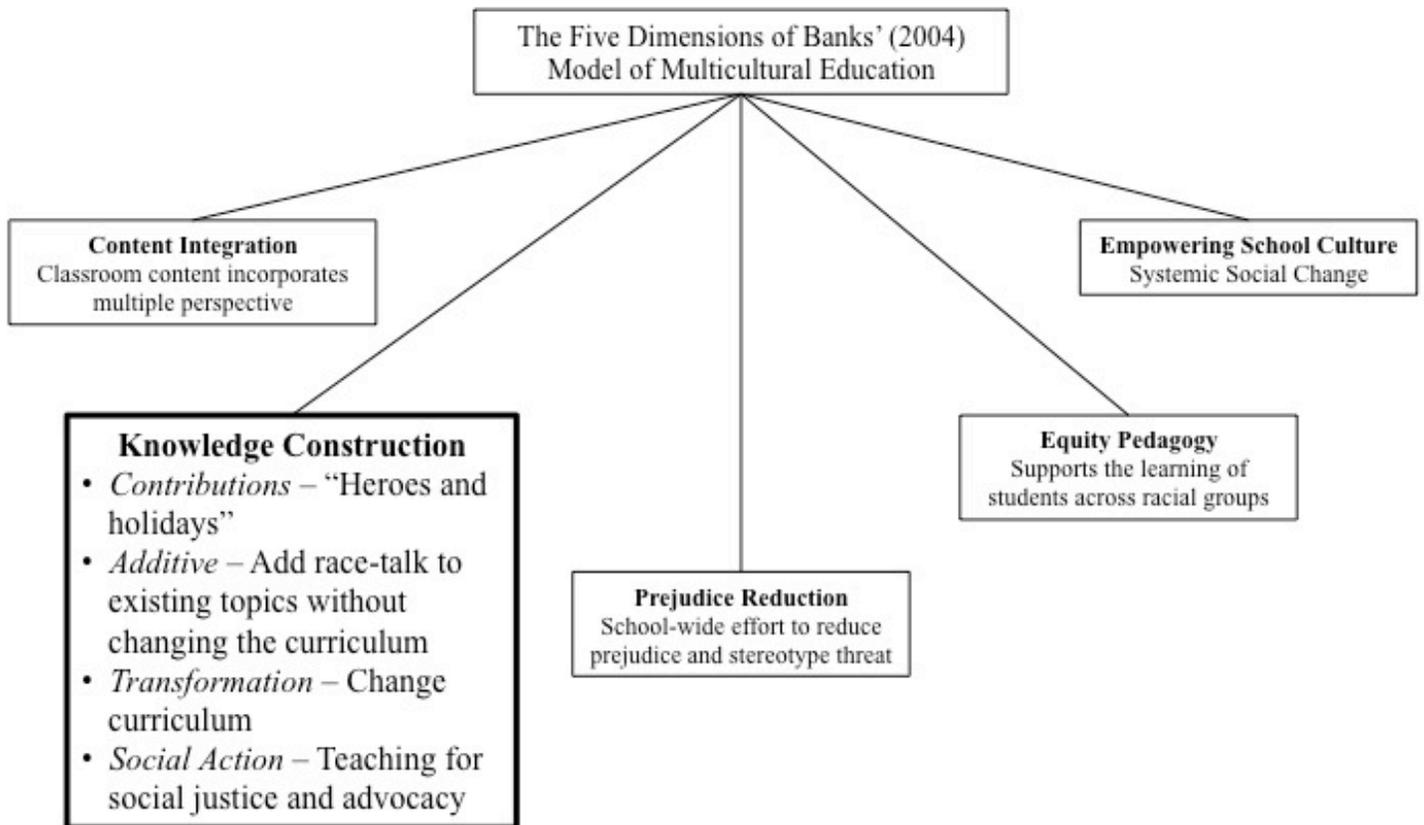
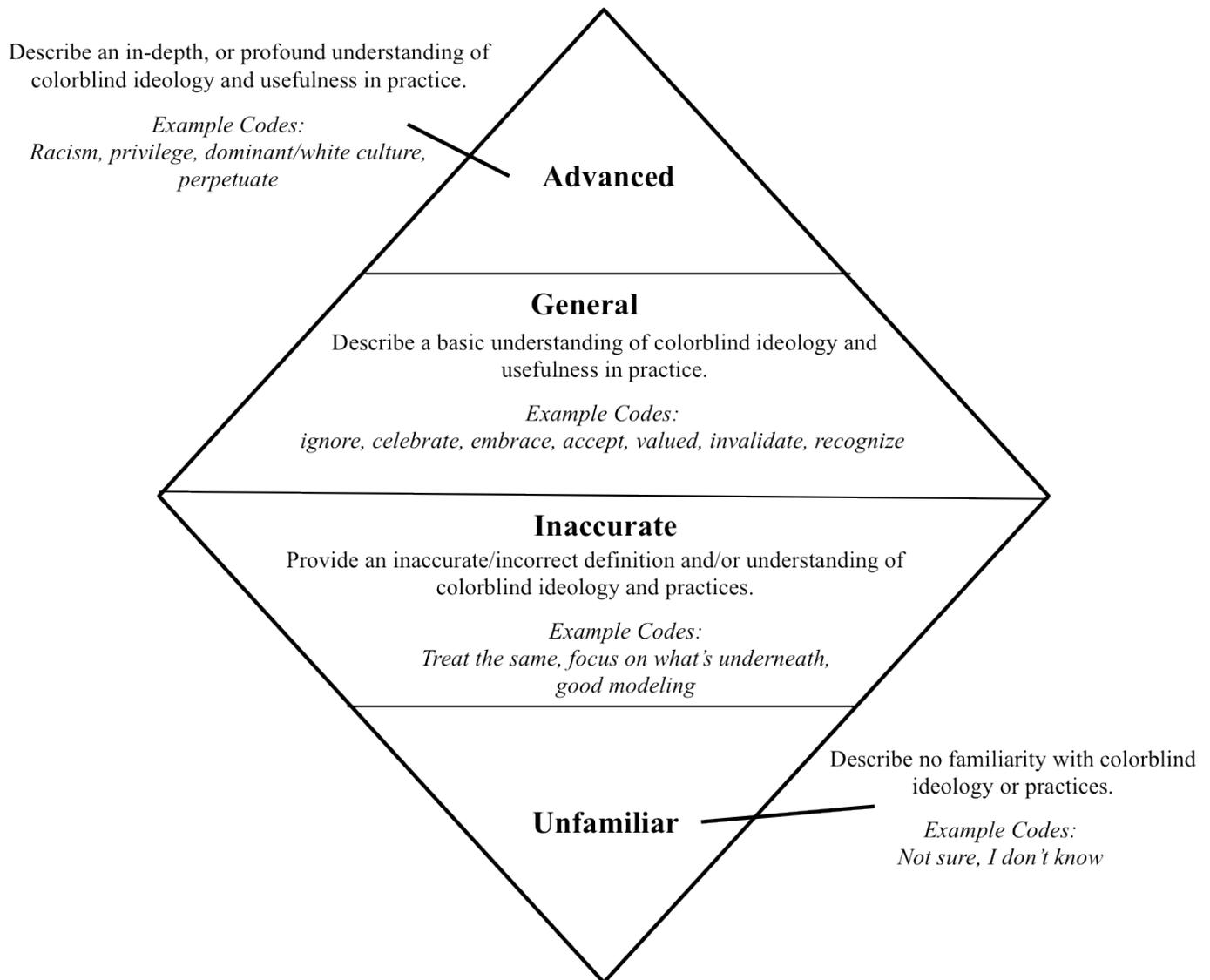


Figure 1. Banks' (2004) Model of Multicultural Education



**Figure 2. Levels of Understanding of Colorblind Ideology and Practice in Early Childhood**

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