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REVIEW

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"Who's got the power?": A critical examination of the anti-bias curriculum

Kerry-Ann Escayg*

*Correspondence:
kescayg@unomaha.edu
Department of Teacher
Education, College
of Education, University
of Nebraska-Omaha, 6005
University Drive North,
Omaha, NE 68182-0163, USA

Abstract

Ample research data indicate that young children recognize racial characteristics and subsequently exhibit both positive and negative racial attitudes toward their own and other racial groups. In the early childhood field, educators commonly adopt an anti-bias/multicultural curriculum to address such issues with young children and—with rare exceptions—such methods are subject to ongoing endorsement in the scholarly literature. This article, however, offers a more comprehensive critique of the anti-bias curriculum, including an analysis of the conceptual frameworks underpinning several of the associated teaching strategies. In addition, the present article illustrates how the anti-bias curriculum, though presented as congruent with the empirical evidence with respect to the education of young children and race, departs considerably from these data. Furthermore, the curricula under scrutiny fail to engage young children in critical discussions and classroom practices centering on: (i) power relations; (ii) racism; (iii) whiteness; and (iv) white privilege. This critique concludes with a preliminary conceptualization of anti-racism in early childhood education.

Keywords: Anti-bias, Anti-racism, Young children, Racial awareness, Racial attitudes

Young children are commonly perceived as being devoid of racist inclinations or behaviors, such that they are often characterized as "racially innocent." Yet, a long-standing record of scholarly investigations consistently indicates otherwise. Indeed, one of the earliest studies targeting children and race revealed that the onset of racial self-identification—that is, identifying with a particular aspect of one's racial ancestry, such as skin color (Aboud 1988)—develops between the ages of three and four (see, for example, Clark and Clark 1939). Since then, the pedagogical literature has begun to widely acknowledge that young children recognize racial criteria and identify with their respective racial group using collective labels and or physical characteristics (e.g., Aboud and Doyle 1995; Holmes 1995; Park 2011). Closely aligned with racial awareness and self-identification, and constituting a significant component of the children and race literature, are the racialized meanings children assign to in- and out-group members (and the processes that inform such perceptions).

Social scientists continue to examine how and when children develop racial attitudes, and how the content of such attitudes varies per majority and racialized group status. Correspondingly, many scholars have employed various methodologies to assess children's racial attitudes, including dolls (e.g., Clark and Clark 1947);

the preschool racial attitude measure developed by Williams et al. (1975); the multi-response racial attitude measure conceptualized by Doyle and Aboud (1995); and, to a lesser extent, observations of children's play and social interactions (e.g., Van Ausdale and Feagin 2001). Measures that involve photos, dolls, or other visual stimuli depicting persons of different racial backgrounds also include procedures such as asking the child to select a photo that he/she believes best corresponds to a particular trait (e.g., good, bad, or kind).

Findings from investigations employing these various types of methodologies and others have shown that young white children hold positive in-group attitudes (e.g., Aboud 2003; Doyle and Aboud 1995; Gibson et al. 2015; Jordan and Hernandez-Reif 2009; Pahlke et al. 2012) and, overall, prefer their own racial group (e.g., Kurtz-Costes et al. 2011). According to Aboud (2008), researchers note a marked decrease in white children's negative out-group racial attitudes after the age of seven. By contrast, research studies conducted with the participation of Black children have yielded mixed results. In particular, evidence suggests that Black children younger than age seven exhibit a pro-white bias, though such preference declines with age (see Aboud 1988 for review). Studies conducted with Hispanic children, though sparse, have found that they tend to prefer the dominant (white group) more than their own or other minority groups, including African Americans (e.g., Dunham et al. 2007; Stokes-Guinan 2011). In short, both white and Black and minority young children aged three-to-seven demonstrate a positive evaluation of whiteness. While some scholars attribute these findings to social cognitions, others have suggested that post-modern theories, in particular, anti-racism and critical race theory, may provide additional insights on how children draw on cultural messages, representations, and ideas about race to construct their own racial understandings (e.g., Escayg et al. 2017). In recent years, however, the implications of such data have informed both the scholarly dialogue and professional practices of early childhood educators.

Both theoretical orientations and empirical data on children and race point to the need for anti-bias strategies in early childhood education. Nonetheless, despite decades of research clearly indicating children's racial prejudice, it was not until the 1990s that the early childhood field took notice of children's racialized understandings of themselves and others (Derman-Sparks et al. 2015). Indeed, one practical response was the formulation of the anti-bias program (Derman-Sparks et al. 2015). While such body of work has received much support, this paper aims to provide a more comprehensive critique of the anti-bias curriculum along with a model of early childhood education that is framed around central tenets of critical race and anti-racism theory. Specifically, the critique is framed around three central questions: (1) What are the main tenets and conceptual underpinnings of the anti-bias curriculum, and how do these guide teaching strategies that either strengthen or limit children's understandings of race and racism? How can we deconstruct whiteness with young children by drawing on both the research data on children and race as well as central tenets of anti-racism and critical race theory, including but not limited to, the saliency of race, whiteness as property, and institutional racism?

Anti-bias education: history and overview

Derman-Sparks and the A.B.C. Task Force (1989) have been widely cited as the pioneers of the anti-bias curriculum. For the purposes of this paper, anti-bias education is delineated as "an active/activist approach to challenging prejudice, stereotyping, bias, and the isms" (p. 3). Congruent with this precept, anti-bias education accents a philosophy that foregrounds children's rights—specifically in the areas of supporting positive identity—affording equal opportunity to actualize their full potential, and providing opportunities for personal empowerment (Derman-Sparks and Edwards 2010; Derman-Sparks et al. 2015). More specifically, the goals of anti-bias education include the following tenets:

1. Each child will demonstrate self-awareness, confidence, family pride, and positive social identities.
2. Each child will express comfort and joy with human diversity; accurate language for human differences; and deep, caring human connections.
3. Each child will increasingly recognize unfairness, have language to describe unfairness, and understand that unfairness hurts.
4. Each child will demonstrate empowerment and the skills to act, with others or alone, against prejudice and/or discriminatory actions (Derman-Sparks and Edwards 2010, p. xiv).

These tenets form the crux of the anti-bias curriculum and guide both teacher-led as well as child-directed learning activities. More specifically, "children's questions, comments, and behaviors are a vital source of anti-bias curriculum" (p. 8). Conversely, educators create lessons specific to the anti-bias program, while also ensuring the classroom environment reflects anti-bias principles (Derman-Sparks and Edwards 2010). Given that the anti-bias curriculum is designed for the early years classroom, the document contains practical pedagogical advice on how to implement all four goals with children between the ages of two and five, though it is important to note that all learning activities are tailored to the child's "cognitive, social, and emotional developmental capacities" (p. 8).

For instance, one guideline for teaching goal three is to "assess children's misconceptions and stereotypes", which can be done by holding "planned conversations to draw out their ideas"; and using a picture, a question, or a book to spark their insights" (p. 5). The authors also suggested that teachers "plan activities that help children learn how to contrast inaccurate, untrue images or ideas with accurate ones" (p. 5). As I have argued elsewhere (Escayg 2018), such are commendable, but viewed from a more critical anti-racist perspective, can be classified as preliminary strategies to guide children in challenging and refuting stereotypical images; the foundational weakness, therefore, lies in the fact that the approach to teaching children about stereotypes largely centers on questioning the "accuracy of the message." This in of itself is not an issue, as children are encouraged to think critically; but rather, such an approach may in effect, jettison the role of racialized power in constructing and maintaining racialized imageries; in other words, failing to address the power dynamic results in a limited view on racism—and bias. In the ensuing sections, I address how educators can teach children aged four–five, and eight, about stereotypes using a critical race and anti-racist perspective.

Over the years, there have been extensions to such work (for instance, a recent contribution includes anti-bias/multicultural education for white children and families, see Derman-Sparks and Ramsey 2006; and a guidebook for administrators, titled *Leading Anti-Bias Early Childhood Programs*, by Derman-Sparks et al. 2015). However, the core precepts of anti-bias education remain the same, and have been routinely incorporated into the scholarly discussions on effective practices aimed at cultivating anti-bias behaviors in young children. Given its increasing popularity—and the dearth of extant critiques—in the early childhood field, it is safe to argue that the anti-bias curriculum retains a measure of pedagogical value worthy of further exploration; next, this assessment will proceed to unpack the potential strengths of the curriculum in greater detail.

One of the main advantages of the anti-bias curriculum is that it acknowledges children's ability to construct and engage in racialized discourse. Such a prospectus also recognizes the prevalence and reality of racism in American society. Indeed, foundational literature on the anti-bias curriculum makes an explicit case for anti-bias practices by highlighting empirical data that reveal children's awareness of racial differences and attitudes. In addition, this program fosters the development of positive racial identity of racialized children and connects such processes to outcomes beyond academic achievement, thereby accounting for children's social and emotional well-being. Of equal significance, the anti-bias curriculum engages not only with methods of teaching and learning, but also serves to emphasize the importance of "broad systemic changes" in contexts such as those of "program policies, structures, procedures, and processes" (Derman-Sparks et al. 2015, p. 11).

While the strengths of anti-bias education outlined above may signify a social justice approach to early learning, the limitations of this work reveal several oversights that—in the interest of scholarly and pedagogical integrity—must be addressed. Most notably, the gaps in the current discourse highlight a perceptible absence of meaningful critical discussions on the centrality of racism (not bias). Even so, bias pertains to "any attitude, belief, or feeling that results in, and helps to justify, unfair treatment of an individual because of his or her identity" (Derman-Sparks and the A.B.C. Task Force 1989, p. 3). By contrast, in this paper, similar to the conceptualizations of other scholars (e.g., Bonilla-Silva 2010; Feagin 2006), I advance the thesis that racism is not solely the adoption and enactment of racialized beliefs and attitudes, but rather, an integrated and institutionalized system of oppression— one which utilizes socially constructed categories of race, ideologies inhered in such categories, and various social structures, to maintain the privileged status of the dominant group.

With the preceding definition in mind, the fundamental flaw of anti-bias curriculum arises in that limited attention is paid to the mechanisms of white supremacy which also create, disseminate, and reinforce pathological imageries of racialized groups. Simply put, an anti-bias curriculum leaves educators—and perhaps many children as well, though I do acknowledge this as speculation on my part—with a question about the social and cultural forces that shape perceptions of other groups, namely, 'what are the origins of such influences?' 'What purpose do these serve?'

The anti-bias curriculum also lacks pedagogical strategies to obtain the recognition of constitutive elements of power and privilege in the construction of racial difference, including that of whiteness. Anti-bias falls short in providing strategies that encourage

children to understand how such structures comply with an unjust social order. A closer examination, however, reveals that such central flaws may derive from the conceptual framework (Escayg 2018) in which they are located. Accordingly, this article begins with an examination of conceptual tenets that frame anti-bias education, subsequently illustrating how central elements of the anti-bias framework pay minimal attention to power, privilege, and whiteness. The analysis of anti-racism that follows further problematizes the significance of such, while also explicating the dangers that such absences effect (predominantly the advancement of learning strategies steeped in the liberal rhetoric of tolerance while overlooking more empowering policies that facilitate discussions about racial issues, such as challenging racism). The final analysis concludes with a discussion on the principles of anti-racism in early childhood education.

Conceptual framework of anti-bias education: liberalism–pluralism

The anti-bias curriculum expounds upon key tenets of liberal–pluralism. Indeed, as Robinson and Jones Diaz (2006) have noted, such a framework shapes much of the approaches inherent in anti-bias and multicultural education. More importantly, the way in which these knowledges intersect necessitates a critical understanding of race, racism, and oppression in U.S. society. A recent definition of liberal–pluralism contextualizes such an account: the term liberalism engages with themes such as equality and individual rights (Castagno 2009, p. 756), whereas pluralism generally refers to "equality for all cultural traditions" (Leicester 1992, 2013, p. 221). In keeping with a more systemic critique, however, Daniel (2008) argued that pluralism, while recognizing such differences, namely, class, race, and gender, elides the role of structural/institutional practices in maintaining sharp and inequitable distinctions along racial, gender, and class lines.

Consistent with these omissions are curricular approaches that emphasize "intercultural understanding and prejudice reduction" (Leicester 1992, 2013, p. 220), at the expense of a systematic analysis of racism, including its historical origins and social permutations to date. Thus, the focus on addressing diversity grows increasingly evident in the anti-bias approach. For instance, throughout the primary and secondary goals of the pedagogical system under scrutiny, scholars identify the persistent topic or "theme" of appreciation of difference. Even linguistically, this curriculum's secondary pedagogics serve to further the main tenets of pluralism (that of finding "comfort and joy" with diversity). While I acknowledge teaching children to respect and appreciate human diversity as a commendable goal, the anti-bias curriculum instead poses a danger reminiscent of that associated with "tolerance" rhetoric, which fails to disrupt the meanings attached to racialized "others" and whites. To advance a critical consciousness in the early years, I propose that best practices facilitate critiques of the relationship between white power, privilege, and the construction of the meanings associated with whiteness and anti-blackness discourse.

In addition, an account of empirical data shows that white and minority children conceptualize whiteness in positive ways. At what point does the anti-bias curriculum provide opportunities for young children to deconstruct the meaning of whiteness? Or assist minority children in recognizing the role of power differentials in constructing representations of racialized groups? Although the more recent text, *What if all the kids are white? Anti-bias multicultural education with young children and families*

(Derman-Sparks and Ramsey 2006), makes an admirable attempt, the scope of the guide falls remarkably short in this regard (for a complete review, see Amos 2011). There are however, other conceptual similarities that illustrate the liberal–pluralism underpinnings of anti-bias education.

Apart from the preceding list, a third pedagogical goal attempts to instantiate a means of advocacy via the rhetoric of "unfairness." Such ambiguous terminology purports to account for the systemic underpinnings of racial oppression. By way of contrast, how can educators articulate equitable goals without situating these in a discussion of the historical processes—and contemporary ideological and material practices— that sustain privilege and power for the white dominant group? As Dei (2008) cautioned, in avoiding "the discussion of white identities and white privilege, we reproduce the dominance of whiteness" (p. 20). This poignant warning highlights one of the main limitations of the anti-bias curriculum.

This is not to say, however, that the anti-bias curriculum is bereft of pedagogical or scholarly merit. By challenging such simplistic, reductionist approaches as they center on prejudice and individual attitudes, the dialectical relationship between unequal power relations and the myriad social, economic, political, and cultural advantages afforded to the dominant group, foregrounds more in–depth analyses. In other words, anti-bias education does not link the individual with the systemic/institutional, a glaring and even harmful omission (the accumulation of data consistently reveals how white children tap into their privilege to construct their own identities and represent the "other" through dominant narratives of race). Given that the meanings superimposed on racialized bodies derive from a long-standing legacy of white privilege, and that white children clearly benefit from the "wages of whiteness," (Du Bois, 1935), the following line of interrogation befits the present critique: why are pedagogical strategies for addressing power and privilege absent in the anti-bias education curriculum? Alternatively, can we attribute such woeful critical neglect to an enduring commitment to developmentally appropriate practice?

Conceptual framework: developmentally appropriate practice

One of the most influential concepts in the early childhood field is developmentally appropriate practice, which argues for teaching practices consistent with children's age-related competencies. According to the National Association for the Education of Young Children position statement (2009), such a model refers to "practice that promotes young children's optimal learning and development" (p. 16), and is grounded in "what we know from theory and literature about how children develop and learn" (p. 10). In short, the terms acknowledge that multiple systems, such as cultural and social influences, stand to affect children's development. However, as a primary consideration or tenet reveals—along with the 12 revelatory principles of DAP—this framework puts a significant emphasis on developmental perspectives, which, in turn, further supports superficial conversations on race (based on individual attitudes, prejudice, discrimination, etc.).

Further exegesis reveals that the anti-bias curriculum is heavily influenced by developmentally appropriate practice. Thus, any interpretations of the theoretical and practical deficiencies found in the anti-bias curriculum stand to yield—as the extant scholarly

literature shows—negligible opposition. In fact, it may be perceived that abstract concepts such as power and white privilege present conceptual challenges to the understanding of young children. Interestingly, the perception of such discussions as beyond the comprehension of the preoperational minds of 4- and 5-year-olds furthers a critical exclusion of the contexts in which racial inequities operate (and their historical origins).

Such determinants may partially explain how the anti-bias curriculum yields strategies for addressing stereotypes with young children, while also failing to provide resources on how to teach them to recognize that such representations not only point to historical and economical origins, but also stem from white power and privilege. Moreover, an explicit example of evasiveness in terms of naming issues such as racism derives from the language itself (read "bias"). The preceding terminology implies subjective, individual attitudes, devoid of connection to larger societal structures; equally telling is that many apposite learning approaches are consistent with such a perspective. Of equal concern is the notion that children exhibit "pre-prejudice" and not "racism." In addition, both terms effect developmental interpretations of children's racial attitudes, for the predominant theories claim that until the age of seven or eight, young children do not express "true racial attitudes" (MacNaughton and Davis 2009).

In my opinion, such view is a theoretical myopia. For, it minimizes children's potential to internalize racialized discourse and to behave in a manner consistent with racist beliefs, thereby unduly emphasizing age-related cognition as a central determinant in children's understandings and expressions of race and racism. Furthermore, given that racism is endemic to American and Canadian society, and many other forms of oppression—for example, class and gender oppressions—are lived and experienced through race, educators may be held to account for the marginalizing of anti-racism discourses in early childhood education. More pointedly, in the context of early childhood education, when developmentally appropriate positions are used to classify children as "prejudiced" but not "racist", some of these interpretations function as obscuring opportunities for transformative teaching practice even further (Vandenbroeck 2007).

Yet, it is important to point out that while developmentally appropriate practice may function in such a manner with regards to teaching children about racism, the overall concept, that is, of recognizing how cognition—along with other social, cultural, and contextual factors shape children's development—is an important one to consider. Therefore, with a view towards elucidating both the strengths and limitations of developmentally appropriate practice, and in particular, analyzing this body of work from a critical race perspective, the scholarly and practical import is to problematize how developmental discourses have served as a dominant lens from which to create anti-bias teaching strategies—and how such an exclusionary focus may give rise to teaching practices that superficially address issues of race and racism with young children.

Indeed, to create research-derived teaching practices requires a multilayered, interdisciplinary lens: one which ascribes much salience to the empirical literature that shows how young white children recognize and utilize their understandings of the social privilege attached to their racial group, highlights the limitations of developmental interpretations of children and race in so far as racial discourse is concerned, incorporates post-modern perspectives (such as critical race and anti-racism), and ultimately, centers the child as an active, social agent. Drawing on all of these, in the last section (an

anti-racism approach), I propose specific strategies for deconstructing whiteness with young children. To contextualize and differentiate these suggestions, however, I begin with a brief review of the anti-bias curriculum guidelines.

"Learning about racial differences": toward an analysis of power and privilege

As applicable studies demonstrate, white privilege and power impinge upon the construction of racialized imageries and knowledges used to legitimate a racist social order. In a similar vein, anti-racism discourse affirms that power operates on both individual and institutional levels, and extends such analyses by linking the process of racialization as well as political, economic, and social white power to historical antecedents such as slavery and colonization (Adjei 2008). Anti-racism also recognizes that power relations shape social interactions between and among both dominant and racialized groups. Specifically, while anti-racism acknowledges the agency of the oppressed, or the ability to enact individual power, it also addresses the limitations of such practice, and attributes the latter to the hegemonic power of the dominant group (Dei 1996). To wit, the term "white privilege" generally refers to unearned advantages, but it is also important to note that white supremacy and white privilege are intimately linked; indeed, the former gives rise to the latter (Leonardo 2009).

Chiefly, the interplay between power and privilege—in particular, how such dominance relates to the social construction of difference—merits consideration chiefly, because this interchange will further illustrate a key limitation of the anti-bias curriculum. The anti-bias curriculum frames difference in remarkably similar terms to those of the grounding conceptual framework of liberal–pluralism. In fact, an additional tenet advocates for the "learning about racial difference" and the teaching of strategies aimed at demonstrating to children "the positivity of difference." To be sure, while an auspicious goal, anti-bias falls short in explicating how and why positive meanings are imputed to the racial physical characteristics of the dominant group. To further clarify, this analysis presents a list of rhetorically aligned goals:

1. To encourage children to ask about their own and others' physical characteristics.
2. To provide children with accurate, developmentally appropriate information.
3. To enable children to feel pride, but not superiority, about their racial identity.
4. To enable children to develop ease with and respect for physical differences.
5. To help children become aware of our shared physical characteristics—what makes us all human beings. (Derman-Sparks and the A.B.C. Task Force 1989, p. 31).

Tracing an overarching theme throughout the five goals—namely, the acceptance of physical characteristics that differ in accordance with racial group membership—lays bare a clear ode to the liberal rhetoric of sameness (as evinced in goal number five). The visible emphasis on learning about these differences, particularly in concrete terms, characterizes the entire philosophy. For instance, the textbook's authors offered the following strategies:

> *In an all-White class, help children see differences in skin shades, including freckles, and emphasize that skin color differences are desirable. In classes of children of color, emphasize the beauty of all the different skin tones and hair textures to coun-*

ter the influence of racism, which makes physical characteristics closer to "white" more desirable. In a diverse interracial/interethnic class, emphasize the theme, "Beautiful children come in all colors," and that the classroom is a wonderful mixture of differences. (p. 36)

The foregoing excerpts shed light on several concerns. First, as a whole, similar guiding educational principles rely heavily on positive affirmation which, taken alone, is not problematic; however, when accounting for the realities of racism—and the evaluations children impute to racialized bodies—this issue calls for strategies that recognize how race and racism shape racialized and white children's lives (grossly overlooked in the anti-bias curriculum). Simply stated, informing children of diversity in racial features without the concomitant aim of countering the negative images of racialized bodies precludes any hope for an equal emphasis on the processes, both historical and social, which allow for certain racial characteristics to be valued more than others. Clearly, dialogue and associated pedagogical practices must serve to contextualize "racial difference" by examining how meanings encompassed by difference are created through unequal power relations and white privilege.

As the scholarship indicates (see for example, Dei 2000; Harris 1993), white privilege and power enable the dominant group to construct meanings of whiteness and Blackness. Dei (1996) presciently indicated that "it is simply not enough for an educator to teach, and for students to learn, about other cultures and not engage in a project that unravels the power relations embedded in the construction of knowledge" (p. 37). Therefore, neglecting such central relationship factors in any discussion on difference stands to reinforce the same power differentials attendant upon the process of "othering," an outcome that seems to depart, both practically and theoretically, from the explicitly stated goals of anti-bias education.

A focal point of analysis in the anti-bias curriculum, and one that reveals its fundamental flaws, most notably exposes the way in which whiteness and white identities—in relation to dominance and privilege—are absent from the proposed teaching strategies and suggestions. In fact, the supreme power of whiteness continues to refine the narratives of such models. However, to situate the discussion, this article provides a brief characterization of whiteness, and from there, it proceeds to illustrate how the learning activities found in the anti-bias curriculum and likeminded monographs, such as *What if all the kids are White?*, offer an inadequate exposition of the whiteness issue by failing to interrogate whiteness as privilege/property (and how this issue plays out in various social spheres, thereby creating an integrated system of racial privilege for the dominant group). Furthermore, I will illustrate how such procedures align with normative assumptions of race and racism and—even more insidiously—limits the implementation of critical anti-racism education with young children.

Deconstructing whiteness with young children

Prior to the advent of what is referred to in the scholarly literature as "Critical Whiteness Studies," African American scholars, thinkers and writers conceptualized the various meanings of whiteness (see Roediger 1998, for review). Building upon the significance of such writings, contemporary scholars describe whiteness as obtaining privilege (Dei 2000; Frankenberg 1993; Lipsitz 2006); property (Harris 1993); identity (Charbeneau

2015), and as a practice of power (Levine-Rasky 2013). Evidently, literary consensus indicates that whiteness obtains a system of power, albeit one not readily acknowledged by those who partake of the advantages it bestows (Applebaum 2010). These benefits vary in accordance with a range of positionalities (Lipsitz 2006), as Dei (2000) plainly stated: "Whiteness is not the universal experience of all whites" (p. 29). In keeping with such assertions, we consider how gender, class, ability, and other markers of difference may procure varied forms of white privilege. The effects of positionalities, however, while producing alternate experiences, do not negate the fact that whiteness provides a range of benefits for the dominant group (Dei 2000). Undeniably, the anti-bias curriculum fails to address this salient reality. Here, educators may further develop the critique by illustrating how the anti-bias curriculum reproduces the invisibility of whiteness. Such discussions inform the analysis of teaching suggestions found in *What if all the kids are White?*, and are further contextualized within the academic literature on whiteness and education.

At first glance, the authors offer a compelling apologia for whiteness, privilege, and institutional racism. Indeed, the text contains chapters entitled, "A short history of white racism in the United States," and "A short history of white resistance to racism in the United States". The inclusion of these chapters may lead readers to anticipate, in addition to a set of pedagogical tools, a contextualization of the teaching approaches/strategies in question. On the contrary, readers are left with a dearth of theory–practice connections. While the volume deploys a few sound anti-bias concepts, it fails to proffer appropriate teaching strategies that would allow for young children to name and challenge whiteness. For the purposes of this analysis, it is important to provide a comprehensive overview of the suggestions offered in the chapter entitled, "Fostering Children's Identities."

Three objectives undergird the suggestions provided by Derman-Sparks and Ramsey (2006). One, in particular, works toward supplanting children's internalization of white superiority via discussions and activities that focus on developing the self, an identity "based on personal abilities and interests, family history, and culture, rather than on white superiority" (p. 51). The authors go on to characterize a secondary objective as pertaining to a child's ability to "Know, respect, and value the range of the diversity of physical and social attributes among white people" (p. 52). A third point of reference echoes a similar spirit to that of its predecessors: "Build the capacity for caring, cooperative, and equitable interactions with others" (p. 52). Notably, the preceding objectives revolve around a central practice of emphasizing "sameness" and difference, along with opportunities for white children to acquire an "awareness of themselves as contributing and caring members of their family and their class" (p. 65). The standards for teaching and learning align with such aims, along with the conceptual underpinnings, in the promotion of a silencing of whiteness which, when juxtaposed with the authors' recognition that white children do indeed internalize white superiority, raises several questions concerning the validity of the anti-bias education framework as a useful pedagogical tool for challenging racism and the dominant narratives that inform much of the early childhood field.

Here, contradictions between the goals of the curriculum and the implementation techniques of its teaching strategies arise, most notably when white children are provided with learning activities that fail to name white as a racial category. In a troubling

invocation of white privilege, and a further normalization of whiteness, white children continue to see themselves as "individuals" and others as "raced"; therewith, we begin to gesture toward the crux of the critical issue at hand. However, the authors opt to justify their collective position by claiming that social–emotional skills such as empathy "are germane to white children in a way not usually mentioned, because they potentially help them to "unlearn" the unconscious assumptions of racial superiority and economic entitlement that have been woven into their earliest social perceptions" (p. 48). In other words, the assumption is such that if children are taught to "care," then prejudice and bias will yield to compassion and concern for others. By contrast, evidence shows that when some whites are confronted with the harm that racism causes to racialized persons, they may openly dismiss or deny such experiences. With a mind to unpacking pertinent generalizations, can we interpret such data as pointing to a lack of compassion or empathy in white individuals? In response, the present analysis takes a more critical anti-racist stance. The ability to distance oneself from the reality of racism and to ignore the rewards it bestows on whites at the expense of racialized persons is an advantage rooted in the structure of white supremacy, a system that insulates white power through various contexts such as education (often by precluding the naming of "white" as an identity and failing to address how the construction of such an identity converges with systems of power). Thus, I would argue that the anti-bias education framework can be characterized as more of a panglossian lens than an approach consistent with critical pedagogy and anti-racist praxis.

As a close reading demonstrates, the authors categorically ignore the vocational call to deconstruct whiteness through discussions, dialogue, and classroom practice. They offer several suggestions for each learning objective, but the following are the most relevant to the present analysis:

> *Ensure that all of your children's families and daily lives are equally visible throughout the environment and classroom activities. (p. 56)*

> *Ensure that children from different income levels experience equal visibility and respect from staff and other children. (p. 59)*

> *Engage children in investigating the physical similarities and differences among children in your classroom or center. (p. 61)*

> *Encourage children to learn about how they have similarities and differences in preferences and interests. (p. 61)*

> *Encourage children to expand their friendships to include the range of diversity within your group. (p. 63).*

> *Emphasize the ways in which each person expresses caring for others and contributes to the group. (p. 63).*

Common to these suggestions is an emphasis on teaching children about an individual identity far removed from any racial affiliation; for instance, class and family structure (as opposed to race); in addition, such approaches acknowledge key areas of children's

social-emotional competence, as expressed by the suggestions focused on acknowledging intergroup similarities, differences, and social skills (such as empathy).

Nonetheless, an implicit assumption persists—namely, that by removing race from the discussion and highlighting children's personal characteristics, along with providing opportunities to discuss intergroup class differences—white children will then somehow organically develop an anti-racist white identity. Perhaps, even more problematic and thus, necessary to address, is that such omissions, in effect, re-inscribe whiteness as a position of power by leaving white racial identity unmarked, unchallenged, and unexamined. Yet, to destabilize whiteness at its locus of invisibility, it first must be exposed. As Dyer (1997) so aptly noted, "White people need to learn to see themselves as white, to see their particularity" (p. 10). Such awareness is critical to dislodging whiteness from the twin archetypes of universality and normality, guises that legitimize racial dominance by ascribing difference and racialized meanings to non-white groups.

Frankly, I argue that it hinges on naïve optimism at best, and at worst, an oversight perhaps due to the authors' developmental perspective of children and race— if we are to assume that educators and parents can lead white children to divest their understandings of white privilege and power by avoiding substantive discussions on race and racism. More pointedly, can a colorblind approach challenge, and subsequently transform, white's children internalization of the prevailing ideological narrative—that is, whiteness as "good" and "innocent"—in support of a racist social structure? Similar thought-provoking questions inform the discussion largely, because the research findings and the socio-political exegeses of such data cast a more realistic and contradictory gaze on the practices/theoretical assumptions undergirding the anti-bias curriculum. Indeed, as evinced by the pertinent scholarship, white and non-white children exhibit an awareness of the currency associated with white identity (see, for example, Skattebol 2005; Van Ausdale and Feagin 2001).

Considerable research literature reveals white and minority children's positive evaluation of and identification with whiteness in American, Canadian, and international contexts. In a study examining how discourses of whiteness affect children's constructions of race, Davis et al. (2009) found that one participant attached a specific value to white skin. When asked by the researcher to select a doll that resembled her friend, the child chose a white doll. The researcher followed up by asking the child, "And what about Franca looks like your friend?" (p. 52); to which the child responded, "Ahh... Because, 'cause I think she's the prettiest" (p. 52). The child further elaborates her understanding of the associations between whiteness and beauty as follows: "Ahh, because she has white socks and I like white and she has blue jeans and I like blue and she has a green top and I like green. And she has, and she has white skin and I like white skin. And I like her hair" (p. 52). Germane interpretations of the data point to the influence of whiteness in shaping children's values regarding racial characteristics such as skin color. As the authors cogently noted, "For Spot white skin is something likeable. She locates herself within a discourse of whiteness as desirable" (p. 52).

Clearly, the topic of children's constructions of whiteness persists as a common thread throughout the research literature. In a study on the relationship between European and American mothers' colorblind racial socialization parenting, and their preschoolaged children's racial attitudes, findings revealed a pro-white bias, with a corresponding

negative bias toward African Americans (Pahlke et al. 2012). These data derive from a racial attitude measure which charted positive traits (nice, pretty, honest, generous, and happy) and five negative traits (cruel, bad, dumb, awful, and selfish). Employing a similar methodology, but with a sample of light-skinned and dark-skinned African American children aged seven-to-nine, data from Williams and Davidson (2009) interracial task activity showed that participants assigned more positive traits to photos representing European–Americans. Likewise, results from the intraracial task in which children were asked to assign positive and negative traits to stimuli depicting African Americans of light and darker skin tones revealed a similar bias for lighter skin tones. Indeed, these findings dovetail with previous studies that show the stark contrast in white and minority children's in- and out-group evaluations. Simply stated, children recognize the socio-cultural currency of whiteness, and white children, as the research suggests, are not only aware of their privileged position, but ascribe a measure of saliency to it as well. Considering the empirical data, it is, therefore, essential to critically examine how the anti-bias curriculum—via pointed teaching and learning activities—addresses such beliefs regarding whiteness in young children.

As previously stated, children raised in Euro-Canadian and Euro-American familial contexts recognize that whiteness obtains cultural and social significance. Working with this central notion, an effective deconstruction of white children's understandings of their identity and how the latter affords a position of privilege, calls for a concerted anti-racism approach. Similarly, for some racialized children, an anti-racism education in the early years may also assist in dismantling the myth of white superiority by not only providing counter-images but also counter-narratives; such critical discussions will allow children to understand how white power and privilege work to racialize "others," while simultaneously upholding whiteness as the standard of human worth.

Anti-racism education in the early years: an introduction

In developing a definition of anti-racism early childhood education, I draw on and extend Dei's (1996, 2011) and Kailin's (2002) anti-racism/racist theories, while considering some of Husband's (2012) elements of early childhood anti-racist pedagogy, and offering some of my own theoretical components. Although these contributions influence how I conceptualize an anti-racist approach to early childhood education specifically, I also build on such work by addressing not only the domains of teaching and learning, but also parental relationships, institutional practices (such as the lack of a national anti-racist early childhood policy, see Escayg 2018), play-based learning (Escayg et al. 2017), as well as the knowledge base of early childhood education (Escayg 2019a). For space purposes, however, this section explores practical ways to teach children (4–5-year-olds and 8-year-olds) about white privilege, racial ideologies (racial ideas/messages), as well as provide counter-narratives so as to equip students with the tools to identify and to reject the discourse of white superiority.

While challenging children's perceptions of race is a central goal, anti-racism early learning activities should also enable children to recognize how racial ideologies contribute to systemic inequities between dominant and non-dominant groups. Indeed, anti-racism foregrounds an intersectional analysis of oppression and the institutional nature of racism, in the interest of moving beyond the focus on "individual prejudice

and biases" most commonly found in the canon of anti-bias curricula. Taking the institutional analysis a bit further by locating such within the discipline of early childhood education, anti-racism examines and critiques the influence of Eurocentric knowledges on the governing epistemologies of early childhood education (Escayg 2019a). Concomitantly, early childhood education with an anti-racism underpinning "focuses on institutional and individual mechanisms that reify whiteness, limit critical discussions on race and racism, and silence diverse knowledges and experiences" (Escayg, 2019a, p. 11). An anti-racism approach in early childhood education—particularly with an emphasis on the four–five age group (as much scholarship on children and race indicates that this age group represents the onset of racialized thinking)—moves from emphasizing the individual attitudes and prejudices to opening new analytical pathways that will highlight the systemic nature of racism, link these to discussions of power and privilege and racial ideologies, and ultimately, demonstrate the interconnected relations among of all these components.

In short, anti-racism early years practice assists young children with understanding the range of experiences that white privilege produces for whites. As well, anti-racism early childhood education provides children with the knowledge and skills to critique white supremacy. From an educational standpoint, anti-racism pedagogy demands that we guide young children to recognize racism as a systemic and salient reality; it compels us to be truth seekers, tracing the origins of racial ideologies and exposing how such narratives (working in tandem with white power) are germane to racial inequities that continue to persist across a wide range of institutional contexts. Anti-racism recognizes that racism inflicts injuries to the intellect and the spirit; so, it actively supports the decolonization of children's minds. For, as Amos (2011) duly noted, "The attempt to educate White children about privilege and power from an early age has thus far been neglected" (p. 554). In order to do so, however, it is first important to translate these terms, such as white privilege and power, into teaching activities that while critical, are also within the reach of children's comprehension/ability levels.

Anti-racism: teaching and learning about white privilege and power

This is not to suggest that deconstructing whiteness should be approached from solely a developmental point of view, but rather, to consider how to retain central components by way of utilizing concrete yet substantive strategies. For instance, one central character of whiteness is white privilege. As scholars have noted, white privilege is both economic and psychological (e.g., Jackson 2011; Lipsitz 2006). For young children, learning activities that draw attention to the economic aspects of white privilege as well as a positive representation of whiteness (Escayg 2018) can offer tangible examples of the concept, thereby providing a richer understanding of race and class interconnections. One strategy, as I have stated elsewhere (Escayg 2019a), and which is congruent with Husband's (2012) activity of assessing children's prior knowledge about race, is for teachers to have discussions with children that tease out the connections between and among racial identity, privilege, and power.

For instance, one way to elicit if whether or not children recognize how white identity affords certain privileges, is to ask a question in a whole group discussion, such as, What does it mean to be white? For older children, such as 8-year-olds, questions such

as, What is life like for a child who is white? What is life like for a child who is Black? can also provide additional information about children's racial awareness (Escayg 2019b). Based on the responses, the teacher can also explain to the children the concept of privilege by creating a unit that focuses on not only the representation of whites and other racial groups in positions of power and authority, but also questioning the reasons for the power imbalances that allow for the underrepresentation (and misrepresentation) of racialized groups. The goal for this unit would be for children to recognize how white privilege and power work in tandem to construct racial ideologies (Escayg 2018), and how such representations, in turn, secure socio-economic opportunities for the dominant group (Escayg 2019a). Using a visual chart that depicts different racial groups along with visual representations of specific occupations, the teacher can ask the following preliminary questions:

1. Who can be a _____?
2. Why_____?
3. Who can never be a _____?
4. Why?

Drawing on the students' responses, the educator will then have to explicitly draw the connections among racial ideologies, and power and privilege. In order to do so, I suggest the educator use the analogy between a truth and a lie. The "lie" in this instance, would be the specific racial ideologies (i.e., white superiority). Then, the teacher would explain to students that this "lie" was created to ensure that one group of people maintained their power in society. To explain the term "power" to children, the teacher should use the term "control." The teacher can make this concept even more concrete by demonstrating to children how one group "controls" all the different areas of society (again, props representing different institutions would be useful). Similar to the anti-bias approach, the teacher can then ask students to consider if this system is fair to everyone. To challenge the stereotype further, the educator should use examples of individuals, for instance, Black or other minority professionals, who do not fit with the child's/children's stereotypical perceptions of the specific racial group. In doing so, the myth of white superiority is also undermined as counter examples show that positive attributes are not exclusive to the dominant group only.

However, the pedagogical practice of deconstructing whiteness, as it relates to the elements of power and privilege—including how and why such elements are normalized (and their benefits for the dominant group)—should not be confined to the participation of white children only. As the canon of anti-racist literature attests, African American thinkers and writers have also variously defined the meaning of whiteness. In sum, by extending such narratives to include the perceptions and lived realities of young African American and minority children, educators stand to strengthen the empirical literature, and to yield empowering opportunities for children of color to discover and critique the structural influences that give rise to and support negative representations of non-white persons (as well as the role of power and privilege in structuring divergent lived realities for racialized groups, ranging from the economical to the social).

Efforts to address diversity and afford young children with the opportunity to thrive in early childhood contexts have been well documented in the scholarly literature. These works, however, with few exceptions, offer teaching strategies aimed at educating young children about difference in ways that impute little analyses of race and institutional/systemic racism. Prominent in such regard is the widely cited anti-bias early childhood curriculum. Since developmentally appropriate practice and tenets of liberalism undergird the anti-bias approach, this may partially explain the content of its suggestions and learning activities.

Given the global hegemony inscribed unto white identity, and the ongoing racism confronting people of color, it would indeed serve as a form of gross negligence to the social development and well-being of children should current (and future) early childhood educators dismiss the significance of anti-racism education, and fail to engage in sustained self-reflection of their own understandings concerning race and racism. Contrary to the banter of the so-called colorblind ideologues, "race is real," to the extent that it imparts a range of privileges for the dominant group while constructing a separate and remarkably different reality for racialized persons. It is, therefore, both prudent and just to ensure that while we advocate for developmentally appropriate practice, we also assume our responsibility for guiding children in the adoption of ways of thinking, acting, and seeing their social worlds, such that, hopefully, we may preserve the collective pursuit of a more equitable, anti-racist society.

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