Reifying and Resisting Racism from Early Childhood to Young Adulthood

Kindel T. Nash · Erin T. Miller

Abstract   This article explores parallel findings from two critical ethnographies (Miller in Whiteness, discourse, and early childhood: an ethnographic study of three young children's understandings about race in home and community settings. University of South Carolina, Columbia, 2012; Nash in Blinded by the white: foregrounding race and racism in a literacy course for preservice teachers. University of South Carolina, Columbia, 2012) of white early childhood teacher educators using a critical race stance as they researched race and racism in two contexts: an early childhood education course and home and community settings with the author's own three young children. In each context, the researchers/authors found that participants used discourse to both resist and reify racism. The authors share these findings, offering implications and questions for critical reframing of the socially and historically located meanings of race and racism in early childhood education and teacher education.

Keywords   Whiteness · Early childhood · Teacher education · Preservice teachers · Racism

The teacher education field is rife with promises and commitments to challenging inequities and promoting teaching excellence in diverse, urban settings. Current accreditation and licensure policies mandating attention to issues of diversity have resulted in a sprinkling of courses in urban education, culturally relevant pedagogy, revisions of mission statements, and increased attention to diverse field placements

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in teacher education programs across the country. Yet a large body of work clearly indicates that many preservice teachers (90 % of whom are white and young adult) possess unacknowledged and unrecognized racial biases and views of white superiority that are so deeply ingrained, they are rarely a match for reform efforts (Brown and Brown 2010; Garrett and Segall 2013; King 1991; Marx 2006; McIntyre 1997; Nash in press; Powers-Costello et al. 2012). The impact of teachers' internalized biases on children in schools is harrowing. Children of color, most often attending urban schools, are consistently overrepresented in special education (Scott and Blanchett 2011) underrepresented in gifted programs (Ford 2013) and disproportionately represented in discipline referrals (Brooks et al. 1999; Race Matters for Juvenile Justice 2013). If we are sincere in our efforts to facilitate critical actions to address these problems, then exploring whiteness or *the implicit normalization of the oppression of people of color* (Leonardo 2009), is an essential part of the discussion in redefining and rethinking the role racism plays in our discourses and practices around early childhood and urban teacher education

With these concerns in mind, we wondered *when and how children and young adults manifest and draw upon deeply and implicitly socialized views of race and racism? We sought solutions about how we might create spaces for young children and young adults to recognize, examine, challenge, and interrupt biases which may have been building throughout their lives.* Our studies document (a) ways that racist dispositions are often deeply entrenched across and over time beginning in early childhood and (b) young adult preservice teachers' responses to opportunities to acknowledge and unpack racist dispositions. The confluence of our studies can send powerful messages to early childhood teacher educators in ways that other work has not: because we know that many young people in teacher education programs were racially socialized from early childhood (Harro 2000), our work promotes discussions about supporting both young adults *and* children in recognizing and resisting racism.

Review of Literature

Critical race (Lynn and Dixon 2013) and critical whiteness (Thompson 2003) literature forefronts both *the importance of* and *the lack of attention to* dual explorations of whiteness in childhood and young adult contexts. Considered together, critical race and critical whiteness theories help us think about how people make sense of race and racism in various settings. Critical race and critical whiteness theories intersect with research on the impact of whiteness and racism on preservice teachers (Applebaum 2005; McIntyre 1997; Winans 2010) to form the conceptual foundation from which our studies were conducted.

As applied to education, critical race theory seeks to: (a) unmask and explore racism, (b) employ storytelling and counter-narrative to give testimony to voices of the oppressed, and (c) critique liberalism and its effects on laws and policies in schools (Ladson-Billings and Tate 1995, pp. 12–13) in the analysis of curriculum, instruction, assessment, segregation and economic policies and practices in schools. Critical race theory is infrequently applied to early childhood preservice teacher

education contexts (Nash 2013), where studies of race often center on teaching anti-bias, critical literacy, or culturally relevant pedagogy (Carter 2008; Derman-Sparks and Ramsay 2006; Durden et al. 2014; Kuby 2013; Souto-Manning 2011; Vasquez 2008). Studies of young children's construction of race have been conducted primarily in school settings (Aboud 1988, 2003; Ausdale and Feagin 2001; Rogers and Mosley 2006). While there are many studies that focus on children's learning outside of school (Corsaro 2004; Long 2004; Martens 1996; Valdés 1996; Volk 2004), few center on young children's construction of understandings about race. Thus, we assert that a critical race paradigm, which uses race as the framing theoretical lens, is essential in order for children, teachers, and teacher educators to learn to combat the "dysconscious racism" (King 1991, p. 134) or limited and distorted understandings of race, that are so prevalent in early childhood spaces.

Using a lens of critical whiteness (Bonilla-Silva 2013; Leonardo 2002; Roediger 2007) examinations of race and racism in teacher education have revealed several challenges. Sleeter (2004) spoke of the "tenacious resistance" (p. 158) she experienced in trying to interrogate whiteness with white teachers. Marx (2006) found that her students associated color with fear, while connecting whiteness to superiority and charity. Similar to many others (e.g. Aveling 2006; Ladson-Billings 2011; Lensmire 2013; Lensmire et al. 2013; Picower 2009; Trainor 2005), Jackson (2011) wrote that her white education students "do not fully grasp the endemic nature of racism, [and] cannot locate themselves within a larger system of racial oppression" (p. 436). This is not a surprising find since studies of implicit bias demonstrate that even children as young as 6 years old exhibit explicit and implicit preference for white people, associating people of color with negative attributes (Baron and Banaji 2006). Thus, understanding how whiteness manifests in early childhood is a critical step in understanding how to interrupt it.

Methodologies

Both of our studies were designed as critical ethnographies. Critical ethnography is grounded in the belief that research is not driven by particular sets of values, but rather by exact ideas about how truth can be distorted in unequal power structures (Carspecken 1996). Noblit (2004) described critical ethnography as ethnography with a political purpose. At the heart of critical ethnography is the intention to confront the reproduction of unjust authority through collective engagement (Madison 2011; Willis et al. 2008). Dyson and Genishi (2005) remind us that it takes immersion over time to understand how certain discourses are socially evoked. Long term immersion with people in their cultural worlds and careful attention to how knowledge is constructed in fluid and contextual ways are hallmarks of ethnography (Carspecken 1996). Drawing on these ideas, we each sought to understand elements of oppression by immersing ourselves in social settings, simultaneously seeking strategies for alleviating oppressive acts as an intentional aspect of our research designs. Methodological details are outlined below. Beginning with Erin's study of her own children, we describe each element of our critical ethnographies below.

Purpose and Research Questions

Critical Ethnography A (Erin)

As a student of critical race theory, an early childhood teacher educator and the parent of three young children, I wanted to understand the ways whiteness emerged in early childhood. Realization of my own racial privilege happened late for me and I wanted to know how to do better for the students and children in my world. In relying in part on the cultural ways that whiteness can be understood within a larger system of oppression, I felt that critical ethnography could inform my study of race and young children, promoting awareness and self-critique of other white researchers, teacher educators, and parents. I continuously drew inspiration in terms of the advantages of my role from other parent–child(ren) ethnographers (Bissex 1980; Haddix 2014; Long 2004; Martens 1996; Shannon and Shannon 2014) whose positions as insiders in the worlds of their children led to studies that profoundly strengthened the knowledge base in their respective fields of study. Applying parent-researcher perspectives (Kabuto and Martens 2014) specifically within a critical race and critical whiteness paradigm, an unmined confluence of fields, I asked, *What can I learn about the dominant discourses that shape three young while children's construction of race, particularly what it means to be white?*

Critical Ethnography B (Kindel)

Like Erin, I am a student of critical race theory. In addition, my own experiences with race and racism shaped the purpose and method of this study. As someone connected to the African American community through marriage and as a parent of bi-racial children, I constantly see how racism impacts my family. Quite often, white nurses, school administrators and teachers make the assumption that my children are adopted—even though we look very much alike—because it seems so impossible that I might have children with an African American man. The pervasiveness of racism—the "racism smog" (Tatum 2003, p. 6)–that our society unknowingly breathes in allows for these kinds of assumptions to take place. As I teach young adults studying early childhood education, I often observe them dismissing the reality of racism- the result of breathing in racist smog- in assertions like, "race is not important," "homosexuality is the new racism," "racism is a thing of the past," and, "teaching kids about racism is not developmentally appropriate." Just as Erin was fed by a concern with how manifestations of racism might underlie her own children's experiences, I wondered how they might underlie my majority white students' interactions with children (Picower 2009). I also designed a study framed by critical ethnography (Madison 2011), whose clear aim is to address problems such as these, placing race and racism front and center in my literacy methods course through the use of critical race theory (Bell 1995). I drew on ethnographic methods such as long-term participant observation (McIntyre 2008) and phenomenological interviewing (Seidman 2006) in my field-based classroom environment, enabling me to "identify closely with the needs and concerns" (Thomas 1993, p. 26) of the early childhood preservice teachers. I asked, *What*

happens when critical race theory (CRT) is used as the foundational conceptual framework from which other theories and practices are explored in an early childhood literacy methods course for preservice teachers? I aligned each learning task in the course with the three tenets of critical race theory (Table 1).

Participants and Context

Critical Ethnography A (Erin)

Primary participants in my study[1] were my three young children: Ella (9 years old during the study), Olivia (6 and 7 years old during the study), and Max (5 years old during the study). I chose to study my own children because (a) at the time of the study, they fell within or near the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC)'s definition of what it means to be a young child in America which includes children from birth through age eight (http://www.naeyc.org) (b) they self-identified as being white children, and (c) they were growing up in a mostly white community in the Southeastern United States. I concentrated on my own children, rather than other children, because of the perspectives I had as their mother on their learning and growth and the opportunities I had to collect data ethnographically in the daily contexts of their lives. Although it can be argued that any study lacks objectivity because it is ultimately conducted analyzed, interpreted, and articulated to others by human beings who can never be completely objective, it is nonetheless important that I address my own subjectivity upfront: I am the mother of my research participants, Ella, Olivia, and Max. This is an enormous position of power and privilege. While these are undeniable aspects of this study, I believe the fact that my study of the discourse in my children's day-to-day worlds minimized some of the effects of my own power. That is, for the majority of this study I was a participant observer (Carspecken 1996), interacting with my children in ways that were consistent with the way I would be a part of their worlds even if I were not completing a study. An outside researcher would not have that level of day-to-day normalcy in his or her interactions with my children.

Critical Ethnography B (Kindel)

The 27 female participants, (26 white and one African American[2]) in my study, all in their early twenties, were undergraduate early childhood education students at a large flagship university in a mid-sized city in the Southeastern United States.[3] Like Erin, her children, and me, all students in the study (except one) were born and raised in small, racially segregated towns in the Southeast. The study and course took place at a local school located in an African American neighborhood near the city's center, Belle Vue Elementary, whose student population was 99 % African American. Each week

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[1] I received IRB approval from my university to conduct the study before beginning to collect data.

[2] The findings related to the African American student are described elsewhere (Nash 2012).

[3] I received IRB Approval from my university in August of 2009. All participants willingly volunteered to participate in the study. All person and place names for Study B are pseudonyms.

Table 1 CRT-aligned learning tasks in an early literacy methods course

Learning task	Syllabus description	Tenet of critical race theory in education
Racial/cultural memoir	This is a written reflection on how our cultural and racial experiences have affected our own lives	Unmask and explore racism
Book club	This is an ongoing literature discussion group using texts that speak to issues of equity in education	Employ storytelling and counter-narrative to give testimony to voices of the oppressed
		Critique liberalism and its effects on laws and policies in schools
Readings about race and racism	This is a series of readings and written theoretical reflections and responses showcasing critical thinking about the texts you are reading	Unmask and explore racism
Literacy work with kindergarten buddies	This is an ongoing assignment in which you work with a young child, living through the reading and writing process and trying out culturally relevant literacy strategies	Employ storytelling and counter-narrative to give testimony to voices of the oppressed
Culturally relevant literacy lesson	This is a literacy lesson plan in which you explicitly use culturally authentic texts in an early literacy lesson	Unmask and explore racism
Home/community experience	You will plan at least one time when you will go beyond the school's walls to spend time in a child's home and/or community setting	Unmask and explore racism
African American symposia lecture series and discussion board response	You will attend one of the lectures offered through the African American symposia series and participate/reflect in a blackboard discussion group	Critique liberalism and its effects on laws and policies in schools
		Unmask and explore racism
		Give testimony to voices of the oppressed

my students worked with individual Kindergarteners who had all been identified as academically advanced in reading. Table 1 lists key course assignments framed by critical race theory that students participated in throughout the study. Serving as my students' teacher in the familiar space of our classroom enabled me to reflexively analyze our actions and discourse in the context of the "socially constructed nature of reality" (Denzin and Lincoln 2005, p. 10) of our course.

Data Collection and Analysis

Critical Ethnography A (Erin)

I collected data over a nine-month period of time using the primary data sources of: (a) audio and videotaped i-phone recordings, (b) ethnographic field notes,

(c) photographed artifacts, and (d) my researcher's journal. I also took field notes and asked informal interview questions. Informal interviews usually occurred when I transcribed or analyzed data and I asked the children to help me understand if I correctly understood the intent of their words or actions. Because our home activities held so much potential for data, it was important for me to decide when and where to collect data at home so that some parts of my life preserved the Mother-I more than the Researcher-I (Peshkin 1988). Ultimately, this occurred naturally as I made moment-to-moment decisions as mother and as researcher with my research questions in mind.

I transcribed data directly in NVivo 10 using its transcription tools. During the transcription process, I used NVivo to generate and code preliminary themes. Following the completion of all data collection, I read and reread the data and wrote notes and reflections about what I believed to be initial categories (patterns and anomalies to those patterns). Using NVivo 10's analysis tools, I analyzed data by running word frequency queries, tree diagrams, and colored coded node (or category) strips. As new relationships were formed in the data, categories were collapsed or expanded until I felt I had exhausted the data and sufficiently organized the findings. In this article, I highlight findings that specifically came from audio-recorded conversations as a partial representation of one of the three major findings in the study, *discourses of whiteness and blackness.*

Critical Ethnography B (Kindel)

I collected multiple sources of data over the nine-month period of the study, including (a) daily observational notes, (b) student responses to a pre/post racial attitudes questionnaire, (c) preservice teacher reflections and assignments, (d) 54 h of audio recorded discussions, (e) structured classroom observations, and (f) over 20 h of audio taped, three-part in-depth phenomenological interviews (Seidman 2006) with four focus students. Phenomenological interviews focused on race and racism, permitting race and racism to be at the forefront of the interviews (Seidman 2006). These multi-stranded reference points triangulated data, providing different forms and expressions of that data about race and racism in the literacy methods course (Denzin 2003; Moll et al. 2005).

Data were analyzed from a critical race stance using an inductive process of pattern analysis (Creswell 2007; Miles and Huberman 2004), a process through which I constructed patterns through careful reviews of data with my research question and theoretical frame in mind (Smagorinsky 2008). Data were initially reduced and displayed into three sets. Coding took place at three different levels, as I identified patterns across all data sets, collapsed similar coded themes into more finite categories, and coded data again as one set to collapse all themes into primary findings. Five drafts of findings summaries were member-checked by five different participants in the study. Although this study revealed multiple findings, I will focus on one primary finding: *white racial discourse as a deflection strategy.*

Findings

Findings from both of our studies were complex, wide-reaching and overlapping. This article concentrates on a small amount of data from each study; other findings are published elsewhere (Miller 2012, 2014; Nash 2012, 2013). Erin's study demonstrates how processes and discourses—structural and familial— abetted young children's construction of whiteness, while Kindel's study shows how these processes and discourses of whiteness,[4] learned in early childhood, infiltrated white preservice teachers' discourse as race and racism were placed at the forefront of an early childhood literacy methods course. Before a brief discussion of individual results, we discuss the intersection of our findings. Following, we offer further insights into how racialization into whiteness occurs from early childhood into young adulthood and how these discourses can be interrupted with specific *anti-racist discursive tools*.

The Intersection of Our Findings: The Complex Texture of Racial Discourse

We see two clear linkages between the way the young children and preservice teachers used distancing mechanisms against race and racism. First, the children and young adults in our studies consistently expressed understandings of whiteness as good, normal, and appropriate. Secondly, they consistently distanced white and black in their worlds–viewing blackness in opposition to whiteness. Mediated by racial discourse, both the construction of whiteness as goodness and racial distancing occurred in pivotal, explicit, yet mundane day to day edifices that largely went unnoticed, unnamed and uninterrupted. Pity, fear, denial, degradation, and subjugation of blackness were pervasive in the discourse and actions of young children and young adults. The participants in both studies drew in the racist discourse from their worlds, altered it to make sense out of their own racial experiences, and recycled those messages in interactions with others through distancing mechanisms. During this input and output cycle, the texture of racist discourse changed, meaning that it did not always sound the same way going out as it did coming in (i.e., what came in as pity, for example, sometimes was expressed as fear or negative assumptions toward people of color) but the shape of racism remained intact (Fig. 1). Figure 1 can be helpful in understanding this complex texture of racial discourse and can also be useful when thinking about how to change the shape of racist discourse through anti-racist discursive tools (discussed later).

Findings from Erin's Study: Learning Whiteness in Early Childhood

As I observed my children day-to-day, a wide range of findings about the children's racial discourse made it clear that they were being well taught—at home, at school,

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[4] Discourses of blackness and whiteness, primary in both studies, (rather than discourses about other people of color or marginalized societal groups) may have been the result of the geo-political context of the Southeastern region where our studies took place.

Fig. 1 The texture of racist
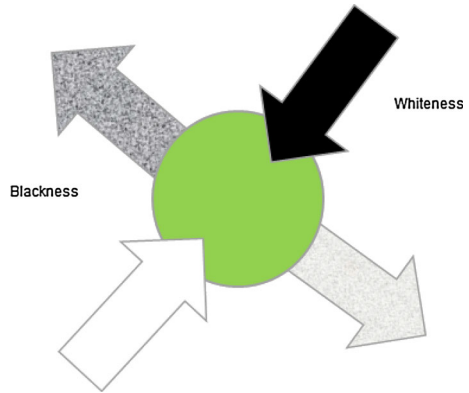discourse changes; the shape
does not

Table 2 Children's racial discourse

Whiteness learned through	Examples of discourse
Discourses of overrepresentation White people were everywhere	Magazines, journals, catalogs, schools papers, scholastic magazines, household pantry items, billboards, etc.), books in church and Sunday School rooms, images of Jesus as white
Discourses of omission Omission of persons of color and perspectives of persons of color was also dominant	Eurocentric school curricula, newsletters, daily mail, tv show, songs on the radio, billboards, advertisements, church bulletins, etc.
Discourse of citizenship White people as protectors against black crime	[white] tough on [black] crime was a common theme throughout political ad campaigns
Discourse of morality White people as wholesome	Household pantry items like Quaker Oatmeal, Grandma's Molasses Syrup, and White Lilly cornmeal mix
Discourses of re-appropriation Ella, Olivia and Max only portrayed white people in their reproductions of the world	Artwork, stories, imaginary play
Discourses of stereotypes Black people often represented as caricatures	Mammy picture on syrup bottles, or 'happy go lucky' black man on barbeque sauce bottles, color-in sheets of Sacajawea

at church, in our neighborhood—that whiteness is the norm. I will highlight two primary findings about the messages that were reified in their worlds: (a) learned discomfort around persons of color, (b) specific fear of African American males (discourse examples in Table 2). I will also discuss ways that my children were able to begin to disrupt those messages.

Learned Discomfort Around Persons of Color

During my study it was clear that the children felt uneasy about being in places where there were persons of color. For example, when visiting a local drug store,

I often noticed Olivia's discomfort when she saw people of color using the parking lot as a cut-through to the places they were going to or coming from. One day, as I parked, I told Olivia to "hop out of the car" and she replied, "Oh, cause you wouldn't want to leave me in the car because there are too many strangers here?" Further data demonstrated that Olivia aligned the term *strangers* with the term *criminals*: "people who robbed banks, stole children, killed people, and went to jail." All of my children also shared that they thought that criminals were usually black.

Another example of the children's discomfort around persons of color, reflecting beliefs about whiteness as the more comfortable norm, occurred one night when Ella's dance school invited families to sit in on the dance lesson. The girls were lined up at the ballet barre, ready to start class when Olivia, Max and I came in. All of the girls except Ella were African American. Max clutched onto my leg as we went to find a place to sit down among the African American families; he told me that he wanted to leave because "There's too much brown people in here."

Likewise, on a visit to an orthopedist after Max broke his arm, he demonstrated a view of white normalization, asking the African American nurse, "Hey, man, why are you black all over?" Throughout the course of his recovery, Max interacted with a number of white X-ray technicians, a white nurse practitioner, and a white orthopedist without asking any similar questions about why they were white. This white-as-normal, black-as-different dichotomy was one way of distancing himself from non-white people.

Fear of African American Males

Findings also demonstrate the children's discomfort sometimes gave way to downright fear, rage, and hostility toward people of color, particularly African American males. At one point, I took Ella and her best friend, Christine, on an outing to celebrate Ella's tenth birthday. The girls talked about memories they shared, including times when African American boys came to their white dominant neighborhood. These memories were recounted within a solid discourse of fear reinforced by the reactions of neighborhood parents as Christine remembered a time when she witnessed a group of African American boys take a [white neighbor's] baseball bat from his yard:

> I was going outside to see what Ella [was doing]… and so um I saw these boys coming. I was like, 'Mom, um some boys stole [a white neighbor's] baseball bat' and she was like 'What???' and like she ran down the stairs outside and she found the boys and she like talked to them… I was just like standing there outside and then this big boy, a big brother, came out and so he was being all nice at first. He was like, 'Yes ma'am, we'll stop' and so um they walked on but a little boy was playing in [a neighbor's] sprinklers so my mom she was like, 'Hey, don't play in the [neighbor's] sprinklers.' And then the big brother… started insulting her and then my dad… came out and… I *think* [with emphasis] he said 'I'm going to go, I'm going to take you out down the river and drown you.' And, because he wasn't he wasn't trying to be mean; he

was just trying to make them stop and get out of our neighborhood… And so they went along and my dad was chasing them and then they never came back since.

Ella and Christine both agreed that the white adults in the situation were trying to protect them. In fact, the parents evoked a code of white dominance, distinction, and demarcation between white people and persons of color. The African American child deferred to this white supremacist insinuation of black guilt when he said, "Yes, ma'am, we'll stop" and so the code of order was maintained. But, when the boys challenged the code by "playing in the sprinklers," and "insulting" a white parent, Christine, *thought* she remembered her father telling the boys they would be taken to the river and drowned. Ella and Christine maintained that the boys were the ones to be feared, having crossed racial boundaries by coming into the neighborhood, that the boys were the ones who had acted out of line. In other words, the girls felt—and through Christine's parents' actions were affirmed in their feeling—that the boys had threatened the security of whiteness unto which they felt entitled.

These findings reveal the insidious nature of whiteness at work in young children. Whiteness is learned early and deeply and in ways that are difficult for the untrained eye to see. By paying careful attention to the racialized discourses of my children, I realized that my children recycled the constant barrage of racist messages of their worlds. The children reappropriated, reconstructed and reassigned those messages, *but the racism remained in-tact,* as they sent them back out into their world.

Recognizing and Interrupting Whiteness

In spite of the relentless whiteness messages my children absorbed, I also identified moments when they (and/or we) interrupted whiteness in a sort of "facing down of colonial ghosts" (López 2005, p. 5). One way that my children and/or I engaged in such a facing-down was by recognizing and pointing out when particular white texts and events were presented as the norm. For example, during the Christmas holiday season, I was frustrated with the white Santa Clauses that permeated my children's worlds as I attempted to find a decoration in which Santa was a person of color. I shared my frustration with the children and Ella immediately recognized the social construction of Santa Claus *as white*. As she and I discussed her acute perceptions, Olivia joined into the conversation and together, we began to interrupt the whiteness norm:

Ella: I don't really know what Santa looks like because everyone has different beliefs. Some people think he's black and some people think he's white and I just see him in pictures and he's always been white so that's always what I've always believed and he's really fat and jolly and [inaudible]

Olivia: Well, not all the times but sometimes it they um the pictures are colorful. Not just all white

Erin: No, his skin. It's usually like our color skin. I've never seen a Santa with skin that's brown or black. Have ya'll?

Ella: [Considering] I don't know…

Erin: Why do you think that is?

Ella: I just think the person who make, who drawed the original Santa made him white

By calling attention to the fact that multiple narratives *could* exist but did not, I sought to interrupt the dominant discourse of white-Santa-as-normal. With my comment, I drew Olivas' attention back to race and deliberately placed it front and center; Ella followed suit and used my centering of race to challenge hegemonic cultural invasions extending my own interruption in perceptive ways. Ella drew attention to an author's power to create a character and perpetuate it as the norm. Olivia challenged my assumptions at first, arguing that she had seen colorful depictions of Santa, taking us away from the racial discourse present in this context. Olivia's comments could have been considered an early emergence of color-blindness (Bonilla-Silva 2013; Boutte et al. 2011). If left unchallenged, Olivia's deflection could easily have become a part of the repertoire she was learning about how to excuse white dominance. In analyzing the conceptual overlays in our two studies, it becomes clear that without opportunities to interrupt the emergence of such colorblind discourse in the early years, they could remain intact, growing more deeply rooted over time as we will see in Kindel's findings.

Although Olivia did not participate much in the interchange above, because of a conversation she and I had a few months later, I believe that she was actively listening to our conversation about Santa, constructing new discourse tools as she was scaffoled by interactions with her older sister and mother (Vygotsky 1978). Later she used those tools to reconstruct her understandings of the racialization of the world. In the prior conversation, I talked about noticing that every image I saw of Jesus was white, but that Jesus would likely not have been white, because of his geographic origins. Olivia said:

> People don't think that he's black because they don't see him as black. I think Jesus should be all colors because some people, um, some people say he is white and some people say he is black but it's not fair. He can be all colors.

In contrast to deflecting from race as in her earlier colorblind discourse regarding Santa, I interpreted Olivia's assertion as a direct challenge to the white supremacy that excludes multi-racial narratives. In this situation, seven-year-old Olivia had support for interrupting the normalization of whiteness; her notion that "He can be all colors" demonstrates her ability to challenge normalized views and to describe that the man whose life guides our faith should not be possessed by race. Ella added to the conversation: "I feel really mad because the people who said that Jesus was white, they put it in pictures and I thought Jesus was white but that was wrong and it makes me think they are telling me a lie." The girls named the fact that the cultural images that are produced by the people who "put it in pictures" are largely responsible for the development of a (false) consciousness and this propelled Ella's anger and Olivia's assertion of injustice.

Table 3 Preservice teachers' white discourse

Whiteness learned through	Example of discourse
Discourses of negative assumptions Assumptions of poverty and inherent deficiency about black behavior	"I don't know why, but I think I kind of associated children who misbehaved with black children."
Discourses of surprise Believing myths and stories of deficiency, poverty, and lack of education	"I was so surprised when I found out his mother wasn't working because she lost her job during the recession."
Discourses of evaluation False perceptions of teacher-like behaviors and deficiencies of black families	"He is not much of a reader." "His parents are doing the best they can."
Self-redemptive discourse Unfamiliarity with the way racism had shaped their lives, and feelings of discomfort and culpability	"I know that *I* care about the children. I bought them gifts because I know the parents cannot."

Findings from Kindel's Study: Manifesting Whiteness in Young Adulthood

As I initially forefronted race and racism in the early childhood course, young adult preservice teachers acknowledged the importance of a focus on equity issues. However, as the focus intensified, many began to manifest whiteness and deflect issues of race and racism. They used *new* forms of veiled racial discourse not previously highlighted in McIntyre's (1997) work on "white talk, or discourse used to circumvent racism" (p. 152) in discourses of *negative assumptions, surprise, evaluation,* and *self-redemption* (Table 3 provides discourse examples). Rooted in feelings of fear, pity, and negative stereotypes, the students used discourses to abdicate themselves from responsibility of confronting issues of race and racism.

White Talk as Negative Assumptions

Many of the preservice teachers in the study rehearsed negative assumptions about African American children. Kaitlyn spoke of a first grade class she interned in at Belle Vue:

> Yeah, I know they bring a lot of emotion and stuff to school with them, and they have a lot of baggage because my [cooperating] teacher has told me about it, and I try to look past it. I mean sometimes you have to look *at* it 'cause you know that's why they behave a certain way and that's why they're upset, but I try not to judge them. Even if they're disrespectful to me I try to realize that that might be how they talk to their parents. It may just be different from what I would expect. And so I try, I try to not let it get to me, but I mean if it's something really bad, I'm going to say something, but I mean sometimes they don't say "Yes ma'am," I'm not going to get on them for that.

Kimber also revealed negative assumptions as she spoke of a child's behavior:

> And this one little girl at school she was always screaming in your face and you were like 'Kianna, be quiet, be quiet now'. It was almost like she couldn't help herself, she just had to let it out, and it's just funny because that is just the culture….

In the first example, Kaitlyn pities the children, assuming that the children 'were upset' and behaved 'disrespectfully' because of a deficiency in their parents' expectations for behavior at home. She believed she was accommodating students by lowering her expectations to 'realize that that might be how they talk to their parents.' In the second example, Kimber also seemed to excuse a child's behavior out of pity. She assumed their behavior was abnormal and culturally grounded, rather than developmental.

In both cases, reactions to children's' perceived misbehavior seem to arise out of negative assumptions of poverty and/or inherent deficiency about black families. As demonstrated in Erin's study, where Ella and Christine's discussed the black boys who purportedly misbehaved in the neighborhood, black children's' behavior becomes inextricably linked to their culture and race. Thandeka (2011) describes how society rarely ascribes a white person's race, ethnicity, or culture as a predictive or associative attribute of behavior—this is because whiteness carries with it the assumption of goodness, irrespective of class or gender. In contrast, blackness, in the white mind, is the antithesis of this goodness—it is everything, real or not, that whiteness is not supposed to be (Fanon 1967).

White Talk as Surprise

Growing up in segregated towns and cities, few of the preservice teachers had had long-term experience with people of color. As shown in the examples of discourses of negative assumptions, the preservice teachers clearly held deeply rooted stereotypes about black students. However, as they spent time in black communities and schools, some began to notice strengths that countered their negative assumptions. Yet, many expressed *surprise* at these positive aspects of blackness and black communities. For example, as Ann reflected on a home visit she made to a Belle Vue student's home, she exclaimed, "I would never have thought that Zyan's aunt had her Ph.D.!" Ann made similar remarks about Zyan's home and about his grandmother and mother:

> Little did I know about Zyan! Zyan's home was full of old, beautiful antiques. His *two* rooms were full of books and educational toys. When we got there, there were Easter baskets and supplies everywhere because his grandmother was coordinating a neighborhood egg hunt! Zyan lives with his grandmother because his mom got sick and died in her twenties while in college.

Preservice teachers also expressed surprise that homes in the Belle Vue community were nice, commenting; "I was very surprised by their home. It was the nicest one on their street," and "Once we got there, we were surprised by their home… They had a nice two-story home." Surprise at "nice" "two-story" "full of antiques" and

"educated" black people masks uncertainty about the character and potential of African Americans. Similar to Erin's son's assertion that "there's too much black people in here" when he had a black nurse at an appointment, my students did not or could not view African Americans as normal, functional, or prosperous human beings.

Ensconced in assumptions and stories of deficiency, of poverty, and lack of education, discourses of surprise indicate whites' need for people of color to *prove* themselves as financially stable, educated, or having nice possessions. Yet, children and families who live in white, suburban, or wealthy neighborhoods do not have to provide proof of their education or ability to organize neighborhood events, keep house, or live in a nice, two-story home with antique furniture—it is assumed.

White Talk as Evaluation

Working with children of color in instructive roles, preservice teachers also used *evaluative discourses* that exposed unexamined racist views similar to how Erin's children expressed fear about being left in the car in a predominantly African American neighborhood. Despite the fact that the Kindergarteners we worked with at Belle Vue had all been identified as reading above grade level, preservice teachers often made comments like, "You can tell his parents don't read to him" and "I can tell he's not much of a reader." They seemed to latch onto the power being a teacher affords and cycle into the widespread tendencies of blaming the (black) student (and family) for perceived deficiencies (Delpit 2012). For example, evaluative discourse was clear as the preservice teachers reflected about the statement "Some parents just don't care about their kids"[5]:

- Some parents care about their kids just not in the ways that other parents do. They are busy with their own lives or don't know exactly what to do to help their kids learn. (Maria)
- I don't think it's so much that they don't care, but just that they are busy. (Tiffany)
- This can be true in some cases but it's not my place to judge and I'll be there for the children. (Haley)

Maria evaluates some parents' care for their children as substandard: 'they don't know exactly what to do to help their kids…' Tiffany implies that if parents are busy, they cannot care. Haley patronizes families, saying 'in some cases this is true,' that parents don't care, qualifying the assertion with, 'but *I'll* be there for the children,' bringing the focus to herself and how much *she* will be there for the kids, evaluating parents-as-less-than capable of doing so.

Preservice teachers' evaluative discourse, akin to the discourses of fear used by Erin's children, was embedded in a lack of knowledge about people of color and about the Belle Vue community, combined with feelings of pity and fear towards

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[5] Item 12 on a pre/post racial attitudes questionnaire. Responses are from the post-questionnaire.

black children and families. Even though the children we worked with had been identified as reading above grade level, and visits to homes and communities revealed that the Belle Vue community was financially stable and resilient, evaluative discourse justified their biases and fears about black families, distancing themselves in superior "teacher like" roles.

White Talk as Self-redemption

Another frequent type of discourse included preservice teachers' attempts to re-center racially tinted conversations, reflections, and actions back to their own goodness. Orally reflecting on a lesson on Martin Luther King, Jr. she had implemented, Kaitlyn declared,

> I think by showing, by coming from me, like having *me* showing them how, how, awesome *I* think Martin Luther King Jr. is, it will show another side. *I* appreciate Martin Luther King and I'm a white person and I think what he did was right. I just think that even though people from my race were so mean about everything, we've come a long way and I want to show my students that I would have stood behind him.

Reinscribing the narrative so that it both told the story of *her* goodness *and* reinforced the idea that whites are no longer racist, made her feel more comfortable with herself as a good white person. Others reiterated self-redemptive talk, particularly as they attempted to foreground content that had to do with race or culture in their teaching. For example, Krista remarked, "When I teach students I see a lot of smart kids ready to learn. I *never* focus on their skin color. The color of their skin is not a big deal."

Yet throughout the study, white preservice teachers described in detail how race and racism had shaped their lives in terms of where their families chose to live (segregated, gated communities), who they were not allowed to date (black people), how their families spoke of blacks (the n-word), and even what toys they were allowed to play with as children (*not* black dolls). Their unfamiliarity with the way race and racism had shaped their lives made them feel so uncomfortable that they constantly shifted the dialogue back to themselves in discussions and in lessons about race.

Recognizing and Interrupting Whiteness

Even though preservice teachers used white racial discourse to recycle negative assumptions and narratives of pity and deficiency about communities of color, some did begin to learn to challenge racist dispositions. Two useful strategies that facilitated this included: (a) hearing and discussing counter-narratives of people of color, and (b) reading about cultural patterns of language and behavior.

Hearing and Discussing Counter-Narratives   Counter-narratives by distinguished scholars of color seemed to move students beyond white discourses. Counter-

narratives are discursive stories that counter the "validity of accepted…myths about people of color" (Delgado and Stefancic 2011, p. 142). For instance, after listening to a lecture about persistent media stereotyping of blacks at a symposia on African American Education by the esteemed scholar Dr. Joyce King, Emily reflected, "I was ashamed that I actually believed that certain stereotypes were true". Furthermore, Alexis admitted, "I don't know why, but I think I kind of associated children who misbehaved with black children" and, Samantha said, "I feel like I always sort of associated people of color with people who misbehave." Dr. King's counter-narrative made the students reconsider their assumptions in ways that were powerful. Similarly, a counter-narrative on the strength inherent to African American families by Dr. Evelyn Bethune (granddaughter of Mary McLeod Bethune) had a powerful effect on Emily:

> Listening to Evelyn Bethune speak gave me a lot to think about. One of the first things she said when she began her speech was the importance of the strength of African American families and their children. I thought was interesting to begin with, but it really set the stage to what she spoke about. I agree with her statement about how strong African American families are. So many of us are quick to judge African American families as not being supportive or not begin their for their children, but after working with the children at Belle Vue Elementary this past school year, I have learned this is not true. I too have thought this particular thought before, but after listening to Evelyn Bethune speak I have a new outlook on African American families and their love and ties to each other.

Reading About Cultural Patterns of Language and Behavior   Particular readings about cultural patterns of language and behavior (e.g. Boykin 1994a, b; Boutte 2007; Brown 2003; Delpit 2012; Morrow et al. 2009), raised preservice teachers' awareness about culturally relevant interaction and teaching. Kimber talked about this as she discussed differences in social interaction styles:

> Brown's (2003) article on culturally relevant classroom management has convinced me furthest in believing that race is an important topic to focus on as he points out why children of color act the way they do. For example, he notes that African American children tend to speak over the teacher and that 'these remarks are meant as acknowledgements of agreement or perhaps concerns about teachers comments' rather than rude disruptions or demonstrations of disrespect' (p. 280).

 Kimber later extended this learning, reflecting on previous internship experiences:

> I also know that Brighton [a predominantly white school], the two girls who were always in trouble…*were* focused, but it was always like you know when the teacher was reading they'd be having a little side conversation and I know *now* they were still listening.

Tiffany reflected on the idea of using a more direct approach to speaking and communicating with children of color:

At Wallace Elementary, it was mostly White children [and so] I would ask them if they wanted to do something instead of just telling them. [Articles we read] told us that African American students like to be told because generally that is how they get talked to at home. I have been trying to practice this with my Belle Vue buddy and the [African American] children at my school and it seems to be very effective.

Kaitlyn echoed similar thoughts on the concept of culturally responsive classroom management (Brown 2003):

The article entitled Urban Teachers' Use of Culturally Responsive Management Strategies (Brown 2003)….is an example of how I learned it is more racist to ignore color, than it is to acknowledge it, and I know that now because it explains that children from urban backgrounds must be acknowledged and spoken to in a different way.

Continuing to Use White Talk   Despite the fact that these and other strategies were effective, as I have followed many of the preservice teachers into their work as early childhood teachers, they continue to use white talk. Recently Kimber (now a pre-K teacher in a very large, urban city) discussed teaching a lesson about Martin Luther King, Jr. to her mostly African American pre-K students:

I think about my own classroom and how I often omit certain details of stories so that I don't 'scare' my kids. One that sticks out clearly in my mind is when I taught about Martin Luther King Jr. [MLK] One of my kids mentioned that he died (which caused a small uproar due to my students' love for MLK—they liked his voice a lot) but I never mentioned the root of MLK's fight and/or what he essentially got killed for. I stated his cause simply as 'He wanted things to be fair for his kids.' Race, the obvious issue, wasn't mentioned once.

The process of developing racial consciousness is not learned easily or automatically. The white racial discourse used in and after the study stemmed from growing up in a society where groups of people are racially stratified both educationally and economically, where the experiences of people of color are rarely highlighted except in punitive or stereotypical ways.

Implications for Anti-racist Discursive Tools

Therefore, key to our work as early childhood teacher educators is the recognition that uninterrupted whiteness will continue to cause disproportionalities in education. Toward that end, we offer implications that build from instances in each study when the children and young adults were able to interrupt and challenge racist or white dominant perspectives. While there is much written about interrupting the racial biases of preservice teachers (Aveling 2006; Lensmire et al. 2013; Marx 2006; Picower 2009) when considered together, what is striking is that the same general understandings about whiteness that the young adults demonstrated in Study B were

also demonstrated in the children of Study A. In other words, our findings vividly portray how racial socialization starts early in childhood and is literally maintained and preserved ubiquitously in day to day actions in young adulthood. Thus, when considering working with both children and teacher education students, recognizing the complex *texture (*as shown in Fig. 1) of socialized racial attitudes, accumulated from days and months and years of constructing whiteness as the norm, is paramount to understanding why and how anti-racist discursive tools for both young children and preservice teachers is so important. Our findings also show that when we provide discursive tools to children and young adult preservice teachers, we *can* begin to interrupt the construction of whiteness and racist discourses of black subjugation, reversing the trend toward racial bias against people of color.

Both studies demonstrate that to be able to talk about race—*with adults and children*—something many whites have been taught *not* to do–requires an active anti-racist/anti-white supremacist stance. We name actions within that stance, *anti-racist discursive tools,* or *discursive linguistic actions taken to confront racism in the moment* (Gee 2011). These are tools that can be used to move toward a critical race framework in early childhood teacher education. They are small pedagogical and linguistic strategies that respond to the idea that if we are socialized racially through language, linguistic interruptions of the development of a racialized conscious are necessary.

Anti-racist Discursive Tools for Young Children

For Erin's children, adult silence secured white supremacy because racist messages were too insidious to be avoided as part of daily life. Yet, when the children were taught and encouraged to construct counter-narratives, new possibilities for challenging whiteness emerged. For example, Erin's study shows that we can use snapshots of our daily lives as the basis for racial inquiry as we interact with children in varied contexts: textbooks, picture books, curricula and daily mail all provide structures from which teachers, teacher educators, and adults can begin to ask children important questions about race and racism. These discussions, grounded upon simple lessons into white supremacy, create spaces to explain to children that white people took and continue to take things that were and are not theirs and they have set up laws that have kept them in charge so that they can continue taking those things. Children, more than any of us, will understand how unfair this is. Once lessons including discussions about the notion of racism take place, children can begin to examine artifacts and experiences with questions such as:

- Where *is* race and racism in this snapshot or event (political campaign ads, worksheets, dance classes, ball games, drugstores)?
- How is this snapshot/event as it appears today located in time in terms of the historical racial antecedents that led to it?
- Whose voices are missing in this snapshot/event?

The bottom line is that, without childhood discussions of race children will figure out on their own how they are racially located. Thus, we must get beyond the

overriding assumption by many white people that young children will not understand racism (a deflection strategy used habitually by white adults), or that they should be shielded from it until they have reached a particular maturational age.

Anti-racist Discursive Tools for Preservice Teachers

In Kindel's experience, preservice teachers do not become teachers to racially subjugate their students. They are willing to learn, so providing tools and creating spaces that help reconceptualize racial understandings is crucial. Perhaps the most important anti-racist discursive tools involves creating carefully scaffolded classroom environments where race and racism are foregrounded. One way to do this is to align courses with critical race theory (Table 1). I will now present some of the most helpful strategies that have resulted from constructing my courses in this way.

Presenting counter-narratives (Delgado 2000), through reading and inviting scholars of color into the classroom (virtually and in person) can be very helpful in countering assumptive and evaluative discourse, as can engaging in professional and theoretical readings about the syncretic (Long et al. 2013) and cultural nature of children's linguistic and behavioral development (e.g. Boutte 2007; Boykin 1994a, b; Foster 1997; Rogoff 2003). In addition, when we engage our students in making carefully structured visits to homes and communities of color, this can lead to "the recognition of the resources that all children and families bring to classrooms… to reverse deficit perspectives that often exist more from habit, hearsay, and institutional tradition rather than from real experience and knowledge" (López-Robertson et al. 2010). Other tools to confront negative assumptions and evaluative talk include reading and engaging actively with professional texts and resources that address a wide body of topics including culturally relevant pedagogy (e.g. Boutte and Johnson 2013; Ladson-Billings 2009; Moll et al. 2005; Paris 2012), whiteness *beyond* white privilege (e.g. Lensmire et al. 2013; Lensmire 2013), the social construction of race (Winans 2010), structural inequalities (Ladson-Billings and Tate 1995), stereotype threat (e.g. Perry et al. 2003), cultural authenticity (e.g. Bishop 1991; Gangi 2008), and hidden racial bias (e.g. Earick 2009). Defining whiteness as *the implicit normalization of the oppression of people of color*, explaining an explicit focus on race, and sharing educational statistics and facts pointing to disproportionalities (e.g. Blanchett 2006; National Council of Education Statistics 2013) is imperative both to validating a focus on race and racism and interrupting discourses of surprise and self-redemption.

To interrupt self-redemptive talk it can also be helpful to interrogate *other*'s white talk (using performance narratives containing white talk in a reader's theatre style reading). Viewing certain films/websites visually foregrounds how whiteness is normalized in society, the media, schools, toys, and books (e.g.-*Race, the Power of an Illusion, American Promise*, *The Color of Fear,* or *What a Doll Tells us About Race*). Writing racial and cultural memoirs and participating in literature discussion and exploration of culturally authentic (Bishop 1991) children's and Young Adult books (bibliography included in reference list) are also supportive anti-racist discursive tools. It is also key to study theories of racial identity development (e.g.

Cross and Vandiver 2001) which help students locate how racial ideology is constructed. Finally, it is critical to interrupt racist discourses through follow-up questions or inquisitive silence—*during* those moments when you hear and see racism being reinforced.

Conclusion

In a country whose wounds still bleed from racism and whose wounds are continuously reinjured as we metaphorically and literally lose people of color to an unjust justice system (Alexander 2012) where black youth are arrested, incarcerated, or murdered at double the rate of white youth (The Children's Defense Fund 2014); where children are color do not yet see their histories legitimized in school (Nieto 2011; Souto-Manning 2011) and where people of color face the perils of economic disadvantage at disproportionate rates compared to their white peers (Kunjufu 2006), it is time that we address how such racism is ignited in the human experience and equally, how such racism can be challenged. Collectively, our studies show how racial discourse, structures, and cultural socialization work throughout early childhood and into young adulthood to perpetuate racism. Our studies are important, because when race and racism are more deeply understood in relation their discursive energy, contextualized by both structures and culture, we no longer need to wonder *if* particular interactions are or are not about race–we can assume that *every* interaction is racially laden because we are socialized to think racially. Only then can we can begin to search for the ways racism is always at work as a precursory effort to dismantling it.

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Children's and Young Adult Texts

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Before there was Mozart by Lisa Cline Ransome.
Each Kindness by Jacqueline Woodson.
Meet Danrita Brown by Nikki Giovanni.
One by Kathryn Otoshi.
Monster by Walter Dean Myers.
The Absolutely true diary of a part time Indian by Sherman Alexie.
The house on mango street by Sandra Cisneros.
Pinned by Sharon Flake.
The Jacket by Andrew Clemets.