DEY
Defending the Early Years

FOSTERING HEALTHY IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT IN YOUNG CHILDREN

AFFIRMING RACE, ETHNICITY & CULTURE IN THE EARLY YEARS

A Framework for Early Childhood Educators, Advocates, Parents, and Caregivers

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www.dey.org

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INTRODUCTION TO FRAMEWORK

❯ DEY MISSION & GOALS

DEY's mission is to work for a just, equitable, and quality early childhood education for every young child by informing educators, administrators, and parents about how children develop and learn best and advocating for the active, playful, experiential approaches to learning informed by child development theory and evidence-based research. Our goals are to advocate at the grassroots, local, state, regional, and federal levels for education policies based on child development theory and research; to mobilize the early childhood community to speak up for age-appropriate standards, assessments, and classroom practices based on research; to promote appropriate practices in early childhood classrooms and to support educators in counteracting policies and practices that undermine whole child health and optimal learning.

❯ EARLY YEARS IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT

The early years are a crucial time for a child's development, meaning early childhood educators are responsible for supporting the whole child. In addition to supporting a young child's physical, cognitive, language, and social/emotional development, early childhood teachers must support healthy identity development. Healthy identity development is crucial to ensuring all children have the self-confidence required for leading healthy, fulfilling lives. Identity formation in the early years happens in stages through interactions with family, schools, communities, and society.

❯ ADDRESSING THE ELEPHANT IN THE ROOM

Though race is a social construction, the reality of living in a world constructed on race-based discrimination is very real. If we are to educate young people to build an anti-bias and anti-racist world, we must begin by fostering healthy racial, ethnic, and cultural identity in the early years. We can no longer hold on to the misconception that children are too young for this vital work, and instead, we must recognize how racial identity development can be healthy and unhealthy and accept our role in ensuring all children develop healthy racial identity development.

FRAMEWORK GOALS

▶ UNDERSTAND SOCIALIZATION OF SOCIAL IDENTITIES

To help young children develop a healthy identity, early childhood educators, parents, and caregivers must understand how we are socialized to accept our social identities. Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory describes how child development is influenced by nested systems that have varying degrees of contact with the child (i.e., family, school, neighborhood, government, media, etc.). The cycle of socialization explains how we are taught to accept our status based on societal positioning of identities.

▶ RECOGNIZE HOW RACIAL IDENTITY DEVELOPS

Racial identity development is a process that everyone experiences, but one that most have never been taught to recognize. Psychologists have identified various stages that members of different racial groups progress through as they process how they feel about themselves and how others perceive them as racialized or non-racialized beings.

▶ FOSTER HEALTHY RACIAL, ETHNIC & CULTURAL IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT

We have a responsibility to ensure that all children develop a healthy identity that includes healthy associations with their racial, ethnic, and cultural identities. A world fueled by white supremacy is designed to promote healthy white identity development and unhealthy Black, Latinx, Asian, Indigenous, and Bi-racial identity development. In addition to instilling anti-bias principles, we must affirm each child's race, culture, and identity.

▶ A NOTE ON LANGUAGE

Throughout this framework to use language to describe racial and cultural groups that are widely accepted as valid by members of those groups. Some terms such as Latinx and Latine are debated so we use both. We use BIPOC as an inclusive term for Black, Indigenous, and People of Color. We avoid using ableist language and instead replace those terms with more accepted words. We use stages when this word is described in the research, though we recognize that it can be limiting to define children in terms of pre-determined stages.

HOW TO USE THIS FRAMEWORK

We provide this framework to support early childhood educators, parents, caregivers, and advocates in fostering healthy racial, ethnic, and cultural identity in young children. Below are some suggestions on how to use the different parts of this framework. Additionally, please subscribe to DEY to receive information about upcoming webinars, professional development, and research opportunities connected to this framework.

▶ **INCORPORATE GUIDING QUESTIONS INTO DAILY INTERACTIONS.**

▶ **MODEL AFFIRMING LANGUAGE AND BEHAVIORS.**

▶ **USE SCENARIOS TO BUILD EMPATHY AND UNDERSTANDING.**

▶ **INTEGRATE RESOURCES INTO CURRICULUM AND ACTIVITIES.**

▶ **RECOGNIZE AND ADDRESS RACIAL SUPERIORITY AND INFERIORITY TALK.**

▶ **CREATE INCLUSIVE SPACES WITH VISUAL AND MATERIAL REPRESENTATION.**

▶ **EMPOWER CHILDREN, PARENTS, AND CAREGIVERS THROUGH CONVERSATION STARTERS AND TIPS.**

ESSENTIAL CONCEPT I: SOCIALIZATION

SOCIALIZATION AND SOCIAL IDENTITIES

This framework begins by exploring how we were socialized around our various social identities and how socialization happens in the early years. As early childhood educators, we must interrogate our social identities and unpack the healthy and unhealthy socialization we receive about ourselves and others. Then, we must critically examine the socialization messages we are giving to the children in our care and look for ways to disrupt the cycle of socialization that maintains the systems of oppression.

SOCIALIZED AS DOMINANTS OR TARGETS

Though socialization is a natural process that begins with interactions with our families and other loved ones, the cycle of socialization (Harro, 2002) is the systemic process of socialization from institutions to get us to assume pre-determined positions within various systems of oppression. The systems of oppression developed before we are born separate us into the "dominant or agent" groups or "subordinate or target" groups. Norms for behaviors, expectations, and rewards are built around the dominant groups, while target groups are invisible, discriminated against, or exploited. If our social identity is in the dominant group, then we tend to receive socialization that promotes our membership in that group and justifies excluding others. This can lead to internalized identity superiority, where we feel as though we are superior to those who belong to the target identity. If our social identity places us in target groups, we experience racial oppression and are the victims of prejudice. This can lead to internalized identity inferiority, where we believe that we and other targets are inferior to dominant groups. "Both groups are dehumanized by being socialized into prescribed roles without consciousness or permission" (Harro, 2022, p. 47).

SOCIALIZATION AND THE FAMILY

Most families begin the socialization process by helping to shape our self-concept and perception of self through shared family values, expectations, traditions, and preparation for the future. As children begin interacting with institutions outside of the family, they receive additional socialization messages that reinforce or contradict the socialization they receive at home.

SOCIALIZATION MESSAGES CAN BE HEALTHY/POSITIVE

"Mexican Americans have contributed great things to our society."

SOCIALIZATION MESSAGES CAN BE UNHEALTHY/NEGATIVE

"Mexicans come here to steal our jobs and commit crimes."

SOCIALIZATION MESSAGES CAN BE EXPLICIT

The school has Black Lives Matter signs and participates in the Week of Action and Year of Purpose.

SOCIALIZATION MESSAGES CAN BE IMPLICIT

Black people work in service positions (secretary, custodian, kitchen, etc.) while white people work in positions of leadership (teaching and administration).

SOCIALIZATION MESSAGES CAN BE CONGRUENT

The child receives healthy messages about Indigenous communities at home and at school.

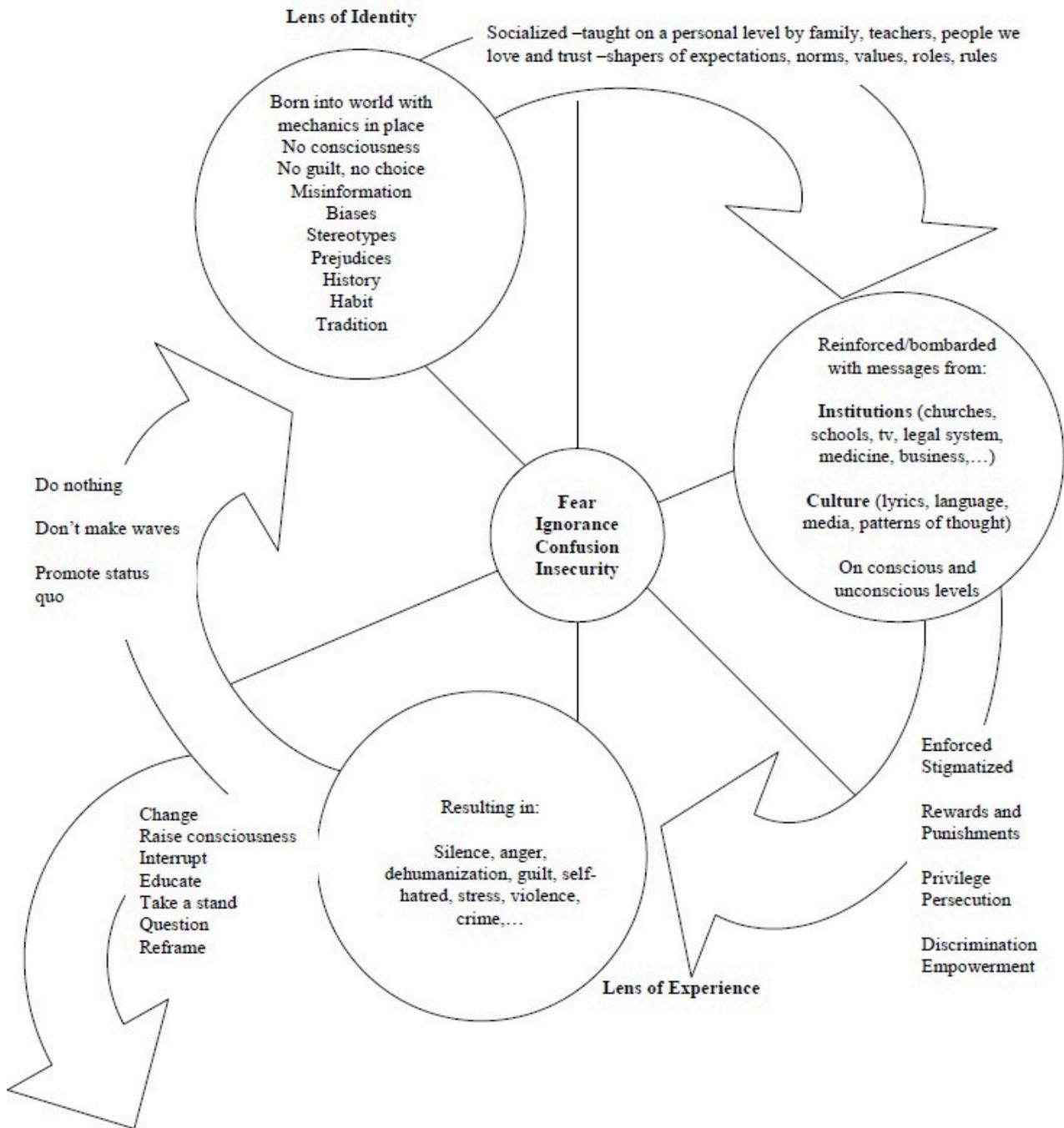## SOCIALIZATION MESSAGES CAN BE CONFLICTUAL

Socialized at home to honor Indigenous culture while at school taught stereotypes about Indians and Pilgrims.

THE CYCLE OF SOCIALIZATION

The cycle of socialization is perpetuated through systems of rewards and punishments that encourage us to assume those roles and stay in line. Accepting an internalized state of superiority or inferiority is rewarded while attempting to resist this internalization leads to punishment, stigmatization, and even persecution (Harro, 2002). If nothing happens to interrupt this cycle, then it continues on as we have come to accept our position in life and not question if what we have internalized is accurate or valid. "The core that keeps us in the cycle: ignorance, insecurity, confusion, obviousness, and fear" (Harro, 2002, p. 46).

Cycle of Socialization Figure 6.1 Bobbie Harro, 2002

Lens of Identity

Socialized –taught on a personal level by family, teachers, people we love and trust –shapers of expectations, norms, values, roles, rules

Born into world with
mechanics in place
No consciousness
No guilt, no choice
Misinformation
Biases
Stereotypes
Prejudices
History
Habit
Tradition

Reinforced/bombarded
with messages from:

Institutions (churches,
schools, tv, legal system,
medicine, business,…)

Culture (lyrics, language,
media, patterns of thought)

On conscious and
unconscious levels

Do nothing

Don't make waves

Promote status
quo

**Fear
Ignorance
Confusion
Insecurity**

Enforced
Stigmatized

Rewards and
Punishments

Privilege
Persecution

Discrimination
Empowerment

Change
Raise consciousness
Interrupt
Educate
Take a stand
Question
Reframe

Resulting in:

Silence, anger,
dehumanization, guilt, self-
hatred, stress, violence,
crime,…

Lens of Experience

THEME 1A: EXPLORING YOUR SOCIAL GROUP IDENTITIES

▶ WHICH SOCIAL GROUP IDENTIES DO YOU BELONG TO?

Can you name all your social group identities? Exploring your social group identities is the first step you must take to enact an anti-racist ECEC curriculum framework. We belong to multiple social group identities and have experienced socialization based on our membership in these different groups. Before examining the socialization messages within our curriculum, classroom, and pedagogy, we must examine our social identities and the messages we receive about dominant and subordinate groups. To break the cycle of socialization, we must question the messages we learned about ourselves and others and replace unhealthy beliefs and assumptions with healthy attitudes and knowledge.

GUIDING QUESTIONS

1. What social identities do you belong to? Identify at least one for each area:
   a. Race
   b. Ethnicity
   c. Social class
   d. Gender
   e. Sexual orientation
   f. Ability Status
   g. Age
   h. Religion
   i. Other (citizenship, native language, etc.)
2. Which identities do you think about the most?
3. Which identities do you think about the least?
4. Which identities place you in the dominant group?
5. Which identities place you in the subordinate group?
6. What socialization messages did you learn about the dominant and subordinate groups for each identity?
7. Were those messages healthy or unhealthy? Explicit or implicit? Congruent or conflictual?

DEFINITIONS

Cycle of Socialization	The process of being socialized by institutions into pre-determined roles that maintain inequality and systems of oppression.
Systems of Oppression	Historical and organized patterns of mistreatment braided into the fabric of a society's foundation including its culture, laws, and traditions. The isms: racism, sexism, heterosexism, ableism, classism, ageism, Anti-Semitism, and phobias: transphobia, xenophobia, homophobia, etc.
Social Group Identities	Memberships we hold based on various identities we are born into (i.e., race, class, sex, gender, sexual orientation, religion, ability, age, etc.)
Dominant/ Agent Groups	Members of social group identities deemed superior (i.e., white people, men, cis-gendered, upper class, college-educated, heterosexual, Christian, able-bodied, 35-55 years old, etc.)
Subordinate/ Target Groups	Members of social group identities deemed inferior (i.e., Black, Asian, Latine, working class/poor, women, non-binary, trans, lesbian, gay, bisexual, Muslim, Jewish, atheist, disabled, young, old, etc.)
Internalized Group Identity Superiority	When we believe that our social group identity membership makes us inherently better than others who do not belong to our social group.
Internalized Group Identity Inferiority	When we believe that our social group identity membership makes us inferior to others in the dominant group.

RESOURCES

- University of Michigan Inclusive Teaching Mapping Social Identity Timeline Activity

- Dynamics of Oppression/Cycle of Socialization Lecture by Taylor Allbright

- Readings for Diversity and Social Justice Edited By Maurianne Adams, Warren J. Blumenfeld, D. Chase J. Catalano, Keri Dejong, Heather W. Hackman, Larissa E. Hopkins, Barbara Love, Madeline L. Peters, Ximena Zuniga

- The Road to Socialization

- Cycle of Socialization Video: University of California Santa Cruz

THEME 1B: RACIAL SOCIALIZATION IN THE EARLY YEARS

▶ SOCIALIZATION AT HOME

Socialization begins with young children's interactions with their parents, guardians, and caretakers. Young children learn about our society's expectations, norms, traditions, and rules through socialization. Children learn what to say after someone sneezes, how close to stand to others when speaking, how to stop the spread of germs, and much more through socialization messages and practices. Socialization messages are passed on through direct verbal and physical demonstrations, such as telling a child to say thank you to the person holding the door for them, and through indirect unspoken messages. Images that promote Euro-centric standards of beauty socialize children into believing that princesses must have white skin and "bad guys" have brown skin, even if those things are never said aloud.

▶ RACIAL SOCIALIZATION ALL AROUND

Racial messages are directly and indirectly shared with children through media, education, family, and interactions with institutions (Abawi, 2021). Race neutrality and color-evasive approaches have been documented as harmful to pursuing racial justice and equity, yet they remain prevalent in many early childhood spaces (Boutte, et al., 2011; Ferlazzo, 2019; Shevin, 2017). Research has demonstrated that children are conscious of skin color and racial differences at a very young age. Instead of pretending not to see a person's race, ethnicity, or culture, we must embrace color or race consciousness as an ideology that challenges white supremacy and color-evasiveness.

INTERNALIZED RACIAL SUPERIORITY AND INFERIORITY

As young children observe their environment, they learn to internalize messages of racial superiority and inferiority. They notice if their parent locks their doors in neighborhoods where the people are predominantly Black, or if their caregivers only interact with people of the same race. As they attempt to make sense of the world around them, including the inequities they see, they use the racial socialization messages to guide their understanding.

For example, a young children might believe that Black people are poor because they choose to live in visibly impoverished areas, just like their family choose to live in a nice neighborhood. It is our job, as early childhood educators, to recognize racial socialization messages that promote white supremacy and color-evasiveness and replace them with color/race conscious messages.

They're not too young to talk about race!

0	1	2	3	4	5	6+

At birth, babies look equally at faces of all races. At 3 months, babies prefer to look at faces of their own race. (Kelly et al. 2005)

Children as young as two years use race to reason about people's behaviors. (Hirschfeld, 2008)

By 30 months, most children use race to choose playmates. (Katz & Kofkin, 1997)

Expressions of racial prejudice often peak at ages 4 and 5. (Aboud, 2008)

By five, Black and Hispanic children in research settings children show no preference toward their own groups compared to Whites; White children at this age remain strongly biased in favor of whiteness. (Dunham et al, 2008)

By kindergarten, children show many of the same racial attitudes that adults in our culture hold—they have already learned to associate some groups with higher status than others. (Kinzler, 2016)

Explicit conversations with 5–7 year olds about interracial friendship can dramatically improve their racial attitudes in as little as a single week. (Bronson & Merryman, 2009)

Young children notice and think about race. Adults often worry that talking about race will encourage racial bias in children, but the opposite is true. **Silence about race reinforces racism** by letting children draw their own conclusions based on what they see. Teachers and families can play a powerful role in helping children of all ages develop positive attitudes about race and diversity and skills to promote a more just future—but only if we talk about it!

Do some learning of your own to get ready for conversations with children. Here are some good places to start:
- Raising Race Conscious Children — raceconscious.org
- Teaching Tolerance — tolerance.org
- Embrace Race — embracerace.org
- Teaching for Change — teachingforchange.org

GUIDING QUESTIONS

1. What color-evasive messages have you heard or seen in early childhood spaces?
2. What racial messages about race does your classroom environment provide to children?
3. What racial messages have young children shared with you?
4. How do you respond when you hear a child repeat racial messages?
5. What steps have you taken to promote color/race consciousness in your classroom?

RESOURCES

- Embrace Race
- Buffet Early Childhood Institute: "What Is Anti-Racist Education?"
- Buffet Early Childhood Institute: "Racial Socialization as Resistance to Racism"

DEFINITIONS

Racial Ideologies	The meanings and beliefs we have about race and skin color.
White Supremacy	One of the three big racial ideologies. The belief that whiteness makes the thoughts, beliefs, ideas, and actions of white people superior to People of Color.
Color-Evasiveness	One of the three big racial ideologies. Believing that it is best to ignore race and treat everyone equally (this term is being used to replace the ableist language in the original term)
Color/Race Consciousness	One of the big three racial ideologies. Acknowledges that society is structured to benefit white people at the expense of People of Color and this awareness is necessary to purse racial equity.
Racial Socialization	The indirect and direct messages we receive about race and racism from people, media, and institutions.

ESSENTIAL CONCEPT II: RACIAL, CULTURAL, AND ETHNIC IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT

❯ WHAT IS YOUR RACIAL, ETHNIC, AND CULTURAL IDENTITY?

How would you describe yourself racially, ethnically, and culturally? I am a Black Panamanian-American. Black or African American is my racial identity, while Panamanian American is my ethnic and cultural identity. Scientists argue that a person's race cannot be determined by examining biological makeup because race is not a biological construction. It is a social construction, meaning race and racial categories have been invented by society. So racial identity is socially constructed as well. Given the history that race and racial identity have in this country and in the world, how we define ourselves in terms of our race, culture, and identity matter.

People of color are racialized, meaning their race is used to define them, while white people are not racialized and are rarely defined by their membership in the white race. As racialized people, we develop an understanding of what it means to be Black, Latinx, or Asian American from our families, friends, communities, media, and society. White people, though not racialized as white, also develop an understanding of what it means to be white from how we treat people of color. It is important to remember that everyone has one or more racial identities, and we receive socialization messages about race from our parents, friends, communities, media, and government.

What is Racial identity?

- Racial identity is externally imposed: *"How do others perceive me?"*

- Racial identity is also internally constructed: *"How do I identify myself?"*

Race and Racial Identity, National Museum of African American History
https://nmaahc.si.edu/learn/talking-about-race/topics/race-and-racial-identity

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❯ RACIAL IDENTITY AND SOCIALIZATION

Racial identity development can be healthy or unhealthy depending on how the child is socialized. Children of color who receive racial affirmations where they see themselves represented in books and stories and see people who look like them as role models in movies will develop a healthy racial identity. On the other hand, children of color who attend schools that fail to include the histories of people who look like them, or only tell those stories through the lens of pain and suffering, or espouse racist attitudes and practices will develop an unhealthy racial identity development.

In the 1940s, psychologists Mamie and Kenneth Clark conducted the doll test that demonstrated how racial segregation and prejudice damaged the self-esteem of young Black children. In this infamous study, Black preschool-age children were presented with a white and a Black doll and asked which ones they associated with positive terms, such as nice, pretty, and friendly, and which ones they associated with negative terms. They were also asked to indicate which doll looked like them. The study revealed that Black children have been negatively racially socialized, leading to negative associations with Blackness and themselves. A few years ago, <u>a young Black high school student recreated the doll study</u>, and the results were the same - Black children routinely labeled the Black doll as undesirable and representative of themselves. The cycle of socialization combined with racism results in unhealthy racial identity development for Black children.

❯ RACIAL IDENTITY IN NON-RACIALIZED PEOPLE

What about white children? What do they learn from seeing Black people on TV as gang members and criminals? Or Latines as vagrants and dirty? Or Muslims as terrorists? White children are socialized to believe in white superiority, which is an unhealthy racial identity. Thus, all children need support in developing healthy racial identity development.

Research on racial identity development in the early years found that racialized children's self-esteem increased when they became aware of prejudice and stereotypes. Young children who experienced frequent conversations about race, racism, and inequity were linked with lower levels of bias (University of Pittsburgh School of Education Race and Early Childhood Collaborative, 2016).

Psychologists have studied how racial identity develops in racialized and non-racialized groups. Though the stages tend to align with older youth, we know that young children develop ideas about race and racial identity. The stages of racial identity development help us understand how the cycle of socialization perpetuates unhealthy racial identity development and how we can interrupt the cycle and promote healthy racial identity development. The chart below summarizes the stages of racial identity development for white students and students of color.

❯ STAGES OF RACIAL IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT

White Students (Helms, 1990)	Students of Color (Cross & Vandiver, 2001)
1. Contact Unaware of own race and little to no concept of racism	**1. Pre-encounter** Internalization of racist messages (personal significance unrealized)
2. Disintegration Aware of racism and uncomfortable with this topic	**2. Encounter** Coping mechanisms vary
3. Reintegration Victim blaming used to cope	**3. Immersion/emersion** Desire to be with members of own race and to learn more about African and African American experience
4. Pseudo-independent Pull between feeling that change must happen and confronting one's own discomfort	**4. Internalization** Reframe internalized messages with positive self-image of one's race
5. Immersion/Emersion Seek out white role models who typify "anti-racist" stance	**5. Commitment** Commitment to solving problems faced by one's race
6. Autonomy Comfort in multicultural settings, positive association with change	

❯ ETHNIC AND CULTURAL IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT

Ethnic and cultural identity development are similar to racial identity development and should not be ignored. Some people have a stronger connection to their ethnic or cultural identity than their racial identity. However, this does not negate their racial socialization, especially for those who still benefit from whiteness. The cycle of socialization includes ethnic and cultural socialization messages that uplift dominant ethnic and cultural groups and ignore or diminish subordinate ethnic and cultural groups.

Most people associate their ethnicity based on nationality, race, and other factors, and some consider their ethnicity to be the same as their cultural identity. Others might have a distinct ethnicity separate from their cultural identity. The best way to know is to ask people how they identify racially, ethnically, and culturally. Some people might not have an answer and might say, "I'm just normal," meaning they don't see themselves as an ethnic, racial, or cultural person. More often than not, we hear these statements from people who are white and American, with the word "normal" implying that everyone who is not white and American is "other" and, thus abnormal.

EVERYONE HAS AN ETHNICITY AND A CULTURE

We want to dispel the myth that ethnicity, culture, and race are only for BIPOC individuals. Many white people identify ethnically as Greek, Polish, Italian, or British, while some identify culturally through their religion, such as Jewish or Catholic. When my college students would tell me they do not have an ethnicity or a culture, I would encourage them to talk with their families and learn more about their ancestors and how they identified. Once, a student asked why their ethnicity could not be American, and we discussed whether American was a nationality or an ethnicity. There was no correct answer, but it led to a fruitful discussion and an understanding that each person must decide how they identify racially, ethnically, and culturally.

ETHNIC IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT

Just as researchers identified stages of racial identity development, Jean Phinney developed a model for ethnic identity development. The model explores how people come to understand their ethnic identity and the role it has in their lives, notwithstanding the extent of their connection to their ethnicity.

Stage 1: Unexamined Ethnic Identity
- Characterized by the lack of exploration of ethnicity.
- Existing models suggest that minority subjects initially accept the values and attitudes of the majority culture, including internalized negative views of their own group held by the majority.

Stage 2: Ethnic Identity Search/Moratorium
- The initial stage of ethnic identity is conceptualized as continuing until adolescents encounter a situation that initiates an ethnic identity search.

Stage 3: Ethnic Identity Achievement
- The ideal outcome of the identity process, characterized by a clear, confident sense of one's own ethnicity.
- Identity achievement corresponds to acceptance and internalization of one's ethnicity.

Adapted from aurora.wells.edu/~vim/PhinneyEthnicIdentity.ppt and www.tomsegar.com and Nakkula and Toshalis, *Understanding Youth*

❯ CULTURAL DEPRIVATION VS. CULTURAL DIFFERENCE

Dr. James Bank explored two models for understanding how culture impacts education. The cultural deprivation model assumes that low-income students do not achieve well in school because of the "culture of poverty" in which they are socialized. This model assumes that characteristics such as poverty, disorganized families, and single-parent homes cause children from low-income communities to experience cultural deprivation and irreversible cognitive deficits (Banks & Banks, 2013). Cultural deprivationists assume that a significant goal of the school is to provide "culturally deprived" children with cultural and other experiences that will compensate for their cognitive and intellectual deficits. Teachers and administrators who embrace this paradigm often "blame the victims" for their problems and academic failure. They assume that low-income and students of color do poorly in school because of their cultural and social-class characteristics, not because of unhealthy racial socialization (Banks, 2014).

Unlike cultural deprivation theorists, cultural difference theorists reject the idea that ethnically diverse students have cultural deficits. They believe these ethnic groups have strong, rich, and diverse cultures. These cultures consist of languages, values, behavioral styles, and perspectives that can enrich the lives of all Americans (Banks & Banks, 2013). Ethnically diverse youth fail to achieve in school not because they have culturally deprived cultures but because their cultures are different from the culture of the school. Cultural difference theorists argue that schools often fail to help ethnically diverse students achieve because schools frequently ignore or try to alienate them from their cultures and rarely use teaching strategies that are culturally relevant, sustaining, and affirming (Banks, 2014).

Research has found that BIPOC students have some learning and cultural characteristics that are inconsistent with the school culture. For example, Mexican American students tend to be more field-sensitive than mainstream white students. Field-sensitive and field-independent students differ in behavior and characteristics. Field-sensitive students tend to like to work with others to achieve a common goal. They are more sensitive to the feelings and opinions of others than are field-independent students. Field-independent students prefer to work independently and to compete and gain individual recognition. This has a lot to do with the culture of these groups. Mexican Americans tend to favor a collective orientation over an individualistic one, whereas many European cultures favor individualistic orientations over collective ones (ERIC, 1996).

To promote healthy racial, ethnic, and cultural identity development, educators must reject cultural deprivation theories, examine how school culture can be inconsistent with the child's culture, and adjust their pedagogy and curriculum to be more culturally responsive. This requires a commitment to cultural competence and embracing culture as an asset to support development and learning.

Key Principles About How Culture Impacts Development (Bredekamp, 2016)
Everyone has a culture, and is a product of one or more cultural groups.
Most white people do not recognize themselves as having a culture. This leads to a tendency to see white children as exhibiting ordinary behaviors while thinking about children of other ethnic ancestries as exhibiting cultural behaviors. This is typical for members of any majority cultural group, but as teachers, it can harm how we educate children.
Culture is dynamic.
Culture is not a fixed, static entity. Over time, cultural traditions can grow stronger or change and evolve to societal changes. When people immigrate to different countries, they tend to bring aspects of their culture with them, but over time, some aspects might diminish or evolve as they adapt to the new culture.
Culture, language, ethnicity, and race are aspects of experiences that influence people's beliefs and values.
Culture is not the only institution that can affect people: race and ethnicity, along with history and socioeconomic status all contribute to how people orient themselves and their children to the larger society.
Differences within a cultural group may be as great as, or greater than, differences between cultural groups.
Just like all 3 year old children are not like, all children of a cultural group are also not alike. It is vitally important not to stereotypes individuals who are members of a particular group even while learning some of the common practices, values, or beliefs of those groups.
Culture is defined in terms of differences among groups and is complicated by issues of power and status.
In the US cultural groups are defined in relationship to the white European Americans. When one group becomes the reference point against which other groups are compared, that group is the one with the most class power and privilege in the society.

DEFINITIONS

Racial Identity	One's awareness and experience of being a member of racial group.
Racial Identity Development	Theories that discuss how different people in various racial groups develop their self-concept. Includes phases one can go through as they learn more about their racial identity.
Anti-Racism	Working to actively oppose all forms of racism.
Culture	Culture encompasses customs, rituals, ways of interacting and communicating, expectations for behaviors, roles and relationships, that are shared by members of a group. All aspects of human life are affected by people's cultural contexts. This includes how people communicate, think, behave, solve problems, and organize communities and governments. Acculturation is the process whereby children learn expected rules of behavior from their cultural group (Bredekamp, 2016)
Ethnicity	Ethnicity refers to the shared characteristics and experiences of a group of people, such as nationality, race, history, religion, and language (Bredekamp, 2016)
Ethnic Identity Development	How one identifies in relation to their ethnic group membership including feelings of belonging, perception, and behaviors.
Cultural Competence	Your ability to recognize your own cultural values and understand how they differ from others without subscribing to cultural deficit theories.
Culturally Relevant, Responsive, and Sustaining Pedagogy	Approaches to teaching that take a strength-based approach to culture.

GUIDING QUESTIONS

1. How do you define yourself racially?
2. What racial socialization messages (healthy and unhealthy) did you learn growing up about yourself? Others?
3. How have you experienced racial identity development? When you were in a particular stage, what do you remember feeling?
4. What is your ethnicity?
5. What cultural groups do you belong to?
6. How do your students identify ethnically? How do you learn this information?
7. What socialization messages (healthy and unhealthy) did you receive about different ethnic and cultural groups?
8. How do you provide healthy ethnic and cultural identity socialization for the children you care for?

RESOURCES

- Talking About Race, National Museum of African American History
- Doctors Kenneth and Mamie Clark and "The Doll Test", Legal Defense Fund
- Positive Racial Identity Development in Early Education (PRIDE), University of Pittsburgh
- Helping Your Child Embrace Their Cultural Identity
- National Center for Cultural Competence, Georgetown University
- Ethnic Identity Development, Kansas State University
- Culturally Responsive Teaching, National Equity Project
- Valuing Student Experiences: An Introduction to Culturally Responsive Education (CRE), Institute of Education Sciences
- Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy: An Introduction, Center for Professional Education of Teachers at Teachers College Columbia University

> **"**
> **As a culturally responsive educator, I focus on how to connect to all students' lived experiences by affirming and validating their own identities.**
>
> **- Vivian Yun**
> in Education Week Teacher

THEME 2: FOSTERING HEALTHY RACIAL, ETHNIC, AND CULTURAL IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT

▶ SOURCES OF HEALTHY RACIAL, ETHNIC, AND CULTURAL IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT

Most stages of racial identity development include an event or encounter that thrusts the person into the development process. More recent studies of Black racial identity development argue that racial socialization from the family and community can jumpstart the racial identity development process before a racist encounter is experienced (Jackson, 2012). Research has documented how Black families and other families of color engage in racial socialization as a way to prepare their children to navigate racist environments and foster healthy racial identity development (Lloyd, 2022; Huguley et al., 2019).

When educators and schools fail to engage in healthy racial identity development, this sends racial socialization messages that devalue the importance of developing healthy feelings about racial identity. Instead of downplaying or ignoring issues of race, skin color, ethnicity, culture, and racism, educators must commit to being a source of healthy racial identity development.

▶ ANTI-RACIST POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

Anti-racist policies and procedures provide a commitment to achieving racial equity through anti-racist practices. Anti-racist procedures outline the steps that the school or teacher will take to honor their commitment to anti-racism. We recommend schools develop anti-racist policies and encourage teachers to co-create an anti-racist policy for their classroom with their students.

▶ RACIAL, ETHNIC & CULTURAL AFFIRMATIONS

To counter unhealthy socialization, children need to receive and observe racial, ethnic, and cultural affirmations. Hearing adults make positive comments about a person's skin color/tone or kinky hair helps the child internalize healthy racial socialization messages and resist unhealthy messages that they often receive through the media.

▶ DIVERSE REPRESENTATIONS IN CHILDREN'S BOOKS

The lack of representation in children's books is well documented, but despite some changes, it is not enough. From 2015 to 2018, the percentage of books featuring white characters decreased, but the percentage of books featuring animals and others increased the most. There are more books about animals, trucks, and others than there are about BIPOC children. Representation matters. Children must see themselves as ordinary characters in the books they read.
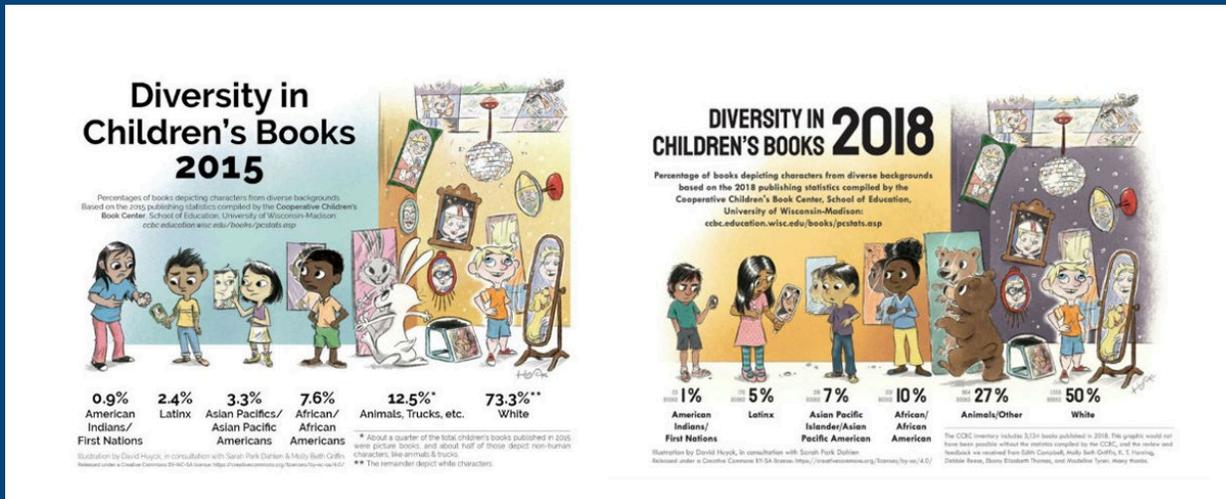
▶ POSITIVE DEPICTIONS OF PEOPLE OF COLOR IN CURRICULUM MATERIALS

In addition to ensuring your classroom library has diverse books, you should inventory all of your curriculum materials, including videos, to determine if they contain healthy depictions of people of color. Unhealthy racial socialization messages are often hidden in films that portray people of color as "villains" and "bad guys" and white people as "saviors."

▶ OPPORTUNITIES TO SEE PEOPLE WHO LOOK LIKE THEM IN A VARIETY OF HIGH-PAYING, RESPECTED JOBS AND CAREERS.

When you tell your students about potential career opportunities, include representation of successful people of color in these roles. When children only see people who look like them working in service and blue-collar professions, they internalize messages that limit their ability to see themselves working in white-collar professions.

▶ CURRICULUM MATERIALS THAT FULLY INTEGRATE PEOPLE OF COLOR

If your curriculum materials only include famous people of color and are only used during Black History Month or Hispanic History Month, you reinforce the message that only some people of color are worth studying and only as an add-on. The curriculum must fully integrate people of color throughout the year and go beyond heroes and holidays to include ordinary people they can see themselves as.

▶ TEACH DIVERSE HISTORY THROUGH POSITIVE CONTRIBUTIONS AND UPLIFTING NARRATIVES

Teaching Black history through the oppressor's narratives of enslavement and civil rights does not foster healthy racial identity development. Young children must first learn about Black people through stories that honor who they are and their contributions to society. Black people are more than the transatlantic slave trade, and their history should never be taught from that starting point. In the same way, most people do not solely teach the Holocaust as representative of Jewish culture because the Holocaust is an oppressive narrative and not representative of Jewish identity and culture; we should not use enslavement as the defining attribute of Black culture.

▶ SUPPORT FOR NAVIGATING RACIST ENCOUNTERS

Teachers must provide support for young children as they experience racism and discrimination. When BIPOC children, especially Black children, report racist experiences, they are often met with disbelief, claims of overreacting, or worse, blame. These responses lead to less reporting and an inability to trust adults. None of us have the power to go back and intervene in racist encounters, but having someone to listen, offer comfort, and provide space to think of how they can respond if it happens again is helpful for children seeking support.

"Curriculum is not just what you read...curriculum is a sense of belonging. Curriculum tells children they belong."
Bettina Love

❯ SCENARIOS

The following scenarios will help illustrate some of the main points of this framework.

Scenario: "The Playground Incident"

Setting:
A community playground with slides, swings, and a sandbox. Children of various ethnic backgrounds play together while caregivers watch from nearby benches. Among the children are Lily (4 years old, white), Amir (5 years old, Middle Eastern descent), and Jia (4 years old, Southeast Asian descent).

Scene:
Lily and Amir are playing in the sandbox, building a castle together. Jia approaches with a small bucket and asks if she can join.

Jia:
"Can I help? I have a bucket!"

Lily: (frowning)
"No, you can't. Your hands will mess it up. You should go play somewhere else."

Jia: (confused)
"Why? I'm good at castles!"

Lily: (crossing her arms and turning to Amir)
"Because I heard people like her don't do things the right way. We're better at it."

Amir looks uncomfortable but doesn't say anything. Jia hesitates, looks hurt, and walks away. A caregiver nearby overhears this interaction.

Analysis of the Behavior:
- Display of Racialized Superiority:
  - Lily's comment reflects an internalized belief that "people like her" (likely referring to Jia's ethnicity) are inherently less capable. This belief may not have originated with Lily herself but was likely picked up from overhearing biased remarks or attitudes from family, media, or society.
- Impact on Jia:
  - Jia experiences exclusion and rejection, which may affect her self-esteem and sense of belonging. Such experiences, even at a young age, can contribute to feelings of marginalization and internalized inferiority.
- Amir's Role:
  - Amir's silence shows discomfort but also complicity. As a child, he may not know how to challenge Lily's behavior, but his lack of response can inadvertently reinforce it.

Scenario: "The Playground Incident" (cont.)

Talking Points for Caregivers/Educators:
- Immediate Intervention:
- The caregiver who overheard should gently intervene in the moment to address the behavior.

For example:
- Caregiver: "Lily, let's talk about what you just said. Everyone's hands are good for building castles, and Jia wants to help, like you and Amir are helping each other."
- This statement reinforces inclusivity and gently challenges Lily's assumption without shaming her.

Discussion with Lily:
- Later, the caregiver can have a private conversation with Lily to unpack her comment:
    - "When you said Jia couldn't help, you mentioned something you heard. Can you tell me more about that?"
    - This allows the caregiver to understand the source of the belief and guide Lily in recognizing why such thoughts are unkind and untrue.
    - Reinforce values like fairness, kindness, and equality: "Everyone is good at different things, no matter where they come from or what they look like."
    - Affirm racial differences: "Jia has beautiful darker skin, and you have pretty lighter skin. People of all skin tones are good at building castles and doing all sorts of things.

Empowering Bystanders:
- Amir's discomfort is a starting point for teaching him how to respond:
    - "Amir, when Lily said Jia couldn't help, how did that make you feel? Did you think it was fair?"
    - This encourages reflection and equips Amir with phrases like, "That's not true," or "Jia can help us" for future situations.

Reinforcement for Jia:
- Jia might need reassurance to repair the emotional harm:
    - "Jia, I'm so sorry that happened. You're a great castle builder, and everyone deserves to feel included. Your hands are the same beautiful dark color as _____ (insert name of a similar dark skin person). I bet they are good at doing all sorts of things. Do you want to play with me for a bit?"

Broader Education:
- Caregivers and educators can incorporate books, activities, and conversations about diversity and fairness into everyday routines. For example:
    - Reading books that celebrate different cultures and friendships.
    - Encouraging cooperative play where all children contribute.

Scenario: "The Drawing Assignment"

Setting:
A first-grade classroom where children aged 6-7 are working on a drawing assignment. The teacher, Ms. Daniels, has asked the students to draw pictures of themselves and their families to share with the class. Among the students are Leo (6 years old, Black) and several classmates of different racial backgrounds.

Scene:
Ms. Daniels walks around the room, offering encouragement. She notices Leo staring at his blank paper, his head resting on his hand. His crayons are untouched.

Ms. Daniels:
"Leo, do you need help getting started? What's on your mind?"

Leo: (quietly)
"I don't know how to make my family look good."

Ms. Daniels: (kneeling beside him)
"What do you mean? Your family is wonderful, and I'm sure your drawing will be too."

Leo: (hesitating and looking down)
"Everyone else's families are better. My skin is too dark, and my house isn't nice like theirs."

Ms. Daniels pauses, realizing that Leo is expressing feelings of inferiority tied to his race and circumstances. She decides to address it gently.

Ms. Daniels:
"Leo, your skin is beautiful, just like you are. Lots of people have rich dark skin, and their families are just as beautiful as those with light skin. And your family is special because they love you. Every family is different, but that doesn't mean any family is better than another. I bet your house has many things in it that others don't have."

Leo looks uncertain but picks up a crayon and starts drawing tentatively. Ms. Daniels decides to follow up with the class later in a more general way.

Analysis of the Behavior:
Display of Racialized Inferiority:
- Leo's reluctance to draw his family and his unhealthy comments about his skin and house reflect internalized messages of inferiority. These feelings likely stem from exposure to societal biases, stereotypes, or comments from peers, media, or even well-meaning adults.

Impact on Leo:
- Internalized inferiority can affect Leo's self-esteem, academic engagement, and willingness to participate in social or creative activities. Over time, such attitudes may limit his confidence and aspirations.

Scenario: "The Drawing Assignment" (con't)

Role of the Teacher
- Ms. Daniels's response is critical in shaping Leo's self-perception and addressing the broader classroom culture that may have contributed to his feelings.

Strategies for Addressing the Behavior:
Immediate Reassurance:
- Ms. Daniels's words to Leo—affirming the value of his skin and family—are essential for counteracting the unhealthy messages he has absorbed. Highlighting his uniqueness and strengths helps build his confidence in the moment.

Follow-Up Conversation:
- After class, Ms. Daniels can have a one-on-one conversation with Leo to delve deeper:
  - "Leo, you said something earlier that made me think you might feel like your family isn't as good as others. Can you tell me more about why you feel that way?" This approach provides Leo with a safe space to express himself and helps the teacher identify specific influences.

Classroom Discussion on Diversity and Strengths:
- Without singling out Leo, Ms. Daniels can introduce activities that celebrate differences:
  - Reading books that feature families of various backgrounds.
  - Creating a "Family Wall" where each student can share what makes their family special.
  - Facilitating a discussion on what makes people unique and why differences are strengths.
  - Making self-portraits using a variety of skin tone paints that allow children to explore diverse skin tones.

Engaging Families:
- Ms. Daniels can reach out to Leo's family to build a supportive partnership:
  - "Leo shared something today that made me want to check in with you. I want to make sure he feels proud of who he is and his family. Are there things you've noticed or ways I can help at school?"

Ongoing Affirmation:
- Incorporating positive representations of Black culture and achievements into the curriculum can help counteract unhealthy stereotypes. For example:
  - Displaying artwork, stories, and photos of influential Black figures.
  - Celebrating events like Black History Month in meaningful, everyday ways.

Scenario: "The Art Project Conversation"

Setting:
A preschool classroom where children are working on an art project about self-portraits. The teacher, Ms. Carter, moves around the room, checking on the students' progress. Among the children is Mateo a 4-year-old of Afro-Latino descent.

Scene:
Mateo is carefully coloring his self-portrait, using a brown crayon for his skin tone and black for his curly hair. As Ms. Carter approaches, Mateo looks up proudly.
Mateo: (holding up his drawing)
"Ms. Carter, look! I'm drawing me! My skin is brown like my dad's, and my hair is curly like my mom's."
Ms. Carter: (smiling but quickly responding)
"That's nice, Mateo. But it doesn't really matter what color your skin is, does it? We're all the same inside."
Mateo: (frowning slightly)
"But my brown skin is part of me."
Ms. Carter: (nodding distractedly)
"Yes, of course, but remember, what's most important is that we're all friends and treat each other kindly. Keep going—you're doing a great job!"
Ms. Carter moves on to another child, leaving Mateo quiet and unsure. He continues working but with less enthusiasm.

Analysis of the Behavior:
Color Evasiveness Displayed by the Teacher:
- Ms. Carter's response dismisses Mateo's attempt to affirm his racial identity by downplaying the importance of his skin color and hair. Her emphasis on "we're all the same inside" reflects color-evasive attitudes that avoid directly engaging with race and its significance to the child's sense of self. It sends conflictual racial socialization messages that don't align with the pride Mateo receives from his family about his skin tone.

Impact on Mateo:
- Mateo may feel that his identity is not valued or worth discussing. His pride in his racial and cultural background is subtly undermined, potentially discouraging him from sharing similar thoughts in the future.

Missed Opportunity for Affirmation:
- Ms. Carter's approach prioritizes surface-level unity over acknowledging and celebrating Mateo's individuality. By not affirming his race and ethnicity, she misses a chance to foster his self-esteem and sense of belonging

Scenario: "The Art Project Conversation" (cont.)
Strategies for Improvement:

Affirming the Child's Identity:
- Ms. Carter could have responded in a way that celebrates Mateo's expression of identity. For example:
  - "Mateo, that's such a beautiful way to describe yourself! Your beautiful brown skin and silky curly hair are part of what makes you unique and special."

Encouraging Conversation:
- By engaging in a dialogue, Ms. Carter could create a moment of learning for Mateo and the other children:
  - "Can you tell me more about your family, Mateo? It sounds like they're really important to you."
  - This approach validates Mateo's identity and builds connections.

Modeling Inclusion for the Class:
- Ms. Carter can use Mateo's drawing as a springboard for a group discussion:
  - "Mateo is sharing something wonderful about himself. Who else wants to talk about what makes them special?"

Professional Reflection:
- Ms. Carter should reflect on her response and the impact of color-evasive language. She might consider training or resources to better understand how to affirm diversity in the classroom.

Cultural Representation in the Curriculum:
- Incorporating materials, stories, and discussions that celebrate diverse racial and cultural backgrounds can help normalize conversations about identity and pride. For example:
  - Reading picture books like Shades of People by Shelley Rotner or The Colors of Us by Karen Katz.
  - Including art projects that encourage children to explore and celebrate their heritage.

Scenario: "The Curriculum Concern"

Setting:
A first-grade parent-teacher conference. Ms. Brown, the teacher, meets with Mr. and Mrs. Hernandez, parents of Sophia, a 6-year-old Afro-Latina student. The parents have concerns about the history lessons Sophia has been learning in class.

Scene:

Mrs. Hernandez: (politely but firmly)
"We've noticed that Sophia hasn't been learning much about the contributions of Black and Latino people in her history lessons. She mentioned learning about George Washington and the Pilgrims but nothing about people who look like her. It's important to us that she sees herself in what she learns."

Ms. Brown: (smiling reassuringly)
"I understand your concern, but at this age, we keep the lessons very simple. The goal is just to introduce general concepts like 'sharing' and 'working together,' which is why we focus on stories like Thanksgiving."

Mr. Hernandez: (frowning slightly)
"But isn't this the age when children start forming ideas about themselves? Sophia told us she doesn't think there are any 'important people' who look like her. That's heartbreaking for us to hear."

Ms. Brown: (waving her hand dismissively)
"Oh, I think you're worrying too much. Kids don't notice those things as much as adults think they do. And we do talk about Martin Luther King Jr. during Black History Month—so diversity is definitely covered!"

Mrs. Hernandez: (frustrated but trying to stay calm)
"We're not saying you don't care about diversity. But it's about more than one person or one month. Sophia needs to see herself reflected throughout the year, not just during special occasions."

Ms. Brown: (laughing lightly)
"I really think Sophia is doing just fine. First grade is all about foundational skills like reading and math. History isn't a big focus yet, so there's no need to worry. She'll learn about those things when she's older."

Mrs. Hernandez and Mr. Hernandez exchange a glance, realizing their concerns are not being taken seriously.

Scenario: "The Curriculum Concern" (cont.)

Analysis of the Teacher's Response:
Downplaying Parental Concerns:
- Ms. Brown minimizes the importance of teaching diverse histories, dismissing the parents' valid concerns. Her reassurances are based on assumptions rather than a genuine understanding of how history lessons impact a child's self-concept and how curriculum representation is foundational for racialized children.

Missed Opportunity to Partner with Parents:
- Instead of engaging in a meaningful conversation, Ms. Brown avoids addressing the issue, potentially alienating the Hernandez family and missing a chance to build a stronger teacher-parent partnership.

Inadequate Representation:
- By relegating diversity to Black History Month or a few token figures, Ms. Brown perpetuates a limited and narrow understanding of history that fails to affirm Sophia's racial identity.

Strategies for Improvement:
Acknowledging Parental Concerns:
- A better response would have been to validate the parents' feelings and express a willingness to listen and learn:
  - "Thank you for bringing this to my attention. I can see how important it is for Sophia to see herself in what she learns, and I want to do a better job of reflecting that in my lessons."

Reflecting on Curriculum Choices:
- Ms. Brown could reflect on how her curriculum might unintentionally exclude diverse histories and commit to making changes:
  - Throughout the year, incorporate stories, lessons, and activities that highlight the contributions of Black and Latino individuals, such as Arturo Schomburg, Bessie Coleman, or Cesar Chavez.

Engaging in Collaboration:
- Instead of dismissing the parents, Ms. Brown could involve them in finding solutions:
  - "Do you have suggestions for books or resources that Sophia has enjoyed at home? I'd love to include them in the classroom."

Professional Development:
- Ms. Brown could seek training on culturally responsive teaching to understand the impact of representation and how to teach diverse histories effectively.

Classroom Practices:
- Implementing small but meaningful changes, such as displaying posters of diverse historical figures or incorporating multicultural literature into daily activities, could make a big difference.

EXAMPLES OF INTERNALIZED RACIAL INFERIORITY IN YOUNG CHILDREN

▶ DISMISSING THEIR OWN PHYSICAL APPEARANCE:

- "I don't want my skin to be this dark. I wish I was lighter like my friends."
- A child may express dissatisfaction with their skin tone, reflecting internalized preferences for lighter skin often seen in societal standards of beauty.

▶ DEVALUING CULTURAL PRACTICES:

- "I don't want to bring my food from home anymore. It's weird, and no one else eats stuff like this."
- This could indicate that the child feels embarrassed or ashamed of their cultural traditions due to unhealthy reactions or a lack of affirmation from peers or teachers.

▶ REJECTING THEIR HAIR TEXTURE OR STYLE:

- "I want my hair to be straight like hers. My curly hair is ugly."
- Comments like this show a child's internalized belief that their natural features, such as curly or textured hair, are inferior to Eurocentric beauty standards.

▶ ASSUMING THEY'RE LESS CAPABLE:

- "I can't do it because kids like me aren't smart."
- A child might express doubt in their abilities based on unhealthy stereotypes about their racial or ethnic group's intelligence or competence.

▶ BELIEVING THEY DON'T BELONG:

- "People like me don't live in big houses or have good jobs."
- This shows a belief that certain opportunities or lifestyles are out of reach for people of their racial or ethnic group, reflecting internalized economic or social stereotypes.

EXAMPLES OF INTERNALIZED RACIAL SUPERIORITY IN YOUNG CHILDREN

▶ EXCLUDING PEERS BASED ON RACE:

- "You can't play with us because you're not like us."
- This reflects an exclusionary attitude, implying that certain racial groups are inherently less worthy of participation or belonging.

▶ ASSUMING INTELLECTUAL OR SOCIAL SUPERIORITY:

- "We're smarter than kids like you."
- Such a statement may reflect an internalized belief in racial hierarchies related to intelligence or capability.

▶ MAKING JUDGMENTS ABOUT PHYSICAL APPEARANCE:

- "Your skin is too dark, so you're not pretty."
- This kind of comment reflects societal preferences for lighter skin tones, implying superiority based on Eurocentric beauty standards.

▶ MOCKING CULTURAL PRACTICES OR TRADITIONS:

- "Your food smells bad, and people like you eat weird things."
- Comments like this suggest that a child has absorbed unhealthy stereotypes about another group's culture, associating it with inferiority.

▶ CLAIMING OWNERSHIP OR ENTITLEMENT:

- "This playground is for kids like us, not for people like you."
- Such a statement reflects an exclusionary belief that certain spaces or privileges belong only to a specific racial group.

▶ ADDRESSING RACIAL INFERIORITY TALK:

These statements often arise from societal messages that children may not fully understand but have internalized. Adults can address these moments by:

1. Validating Feelings: Acknowledge the child's emotions without judgment.
2. Affirming Identity: Provide positive reinforcement about the child's physical appearance, culture, and capabilities.
3. Introducing Representation: Share books, media, and stories celebrating the child's racial or cultural background.
4. Creating Safe Spaces: Encourage open conversations where children feel comfortable discussing their thoughts.
5. Modeling Positive Attitudes: To counteract negative influences, adults should model respect and pride for all racial and cultural identities.

▶ ADDRESSING RACIAL SUPERIORITY TALK:

1. Intervene Immediately: Calmly but firmly explain that such language is unkind and unfair.
   - "Everyone is important and deserves to feel included and respected."
2. Foster Empathy: Help the child understand the impact of their words by asking reflective questions:
   - "How would you feel if someone said that about you?"
3. Encourage Inclusivity: Promote cooperative activities and highlight the value of diversity within the classroom or group.
4. Educate About Bias: Use age-appropriate books and discussions to challenge stereotypes and teach how oppression is unhealthy and harms everyone.
5. Model Respectful Behavior: Adults should demonstrate inclusive attitudes and language, providing children with positive examples of how to treat others.

Suggestions for Promoting Healthy Racial, Ethnic, and Cultural Identity Development	
Learn about racial, ethnic, and cultural identity development.	Assess internal attitudes, practices, and policies.
Commit to creating a welcoming inclusive environment.	Provide racial, ethnic, and cultural affirmations.
Normalize talking about race, ethnicity, and culture.	Model disrupting stereotypes and discrimination.
Talk to children about big ideas (i.e., oppression, discrimination, ideologies, racism, liberation)	Situate young children as present civic actors, capable of understanding and taking action.
Model empathy and life-long learning.	Admit when you make a mistake or when you don't know something.

CONVERSATION STARTERS FOR FOSTERING HEALTHY RACIAL, ETHNIC, AND CULTURAL IDENTITY IN YOUNG CHILDREN

▶ EXPLORING SELF-IDENTITY:

- "What do you love most about yourself?"
- This encourages children to reflect on and appreciate their unique qualities, including physical features, abilities, and personality traits.

▶ CELEBRATING FAMILY AND TRADITIONS:

- "What are some special things your family does together? Can you tell me about a favorite celebration or tradition?"
- This allows children to share their cultural practices and take pride in their heritage.

▶ LEARNING ABOUT DIFFERENCES:

- "Did you know people around the world eat different kinds of food, wear different clothes, and speak different languages? What are some cool things about your family or friends that are different from you?"
- This fosters curiosity and respect for diversity.

▶ AFFIRMING PHYSICAL FEATURES:

- "Your hair/skin/eyes are so beautiful and special! Can you tell me what you like about them?"
- This helps counteract societal biases by affirming the child's natural features.

▶ INTRODUCING ROLE MODELS:

- "Did you know there are amazing people who look like you and have done incredible things? Let's learn about someone together!"
- Highlighting diverse role models helps children feel empowered and inspired.

MORE CONVERSATION STARTERS

▶ ENCOURAGING PRIDE IN CULTURAL BACKGROUND:

- "What is something about your culture or family history that makes you feel proud?"
- This helps children connect with and value their racial and cultural heritage.

▶ DISCUSSING FAIRNESS AND INCLUSION:

- "Have you ever noticed someone being left out because they looked different or spoke another language? What can we do to make sure everyone feels included?"
- This introduces the concept of fairness and encourages empathy.

▶ CREATING SPACE FOR QUESTIONS:

- "Have you ever wondered why people have different skin colors or speak different languages? Let's talk about it!"
- Inviting questions helps demystify differences and fosters understanding.

▶ EXPLORING MULTICULTURAL STORIES:

- "This book is about a child who has a family that's similar to yours. What do you notice about their story?"
- Reading together creates opportunities to connect children's experiences with those of others.

▶ HIGHLIGHTING SHARED HUMANITY:

- Even though people come from different places and have different traditions, we all have things in common, too. What do you think we all share?"
- This balances celebrating diversity with emphasizing commonalities.

⟩ WHAT NOT TO DO

It is important early childhood educators, caregivers, and parents do not reinforce unhealthy racial, ethnic, and cultural identity development.

Never Touch Someone's Hair
- Racialized people are often treated as objects by white people. Touching a person's hair, even if you ask them, is not okay. Racialized people are not pets.

Avoid Ignoring or Minimizing Differences
- Dismissing children's questions about race, ethnicity, or cultural differences with phrases like "We're all the same" can deny the importance of their observations and experiences.

Avoid Overgeneralizations and Stereotypes
- Avoid using broad statements like "All people from [a group] are like this," which reinforces stereotypes rather than celebrating individual diversity within groups.

Avoid Failing to Address Bias or Discrimination
- Ignoring or dismissing acts of bias or discriminatory comments sends the message that such behavior is acceptable or unimportant.

Avoid Only Showcasing One-Dimensional Perspectives
- Highlighting only holidays, food, or festivals of different cultures can oversimplify their richness and contribute to tokenism.

Avoid Assuming Children Are "Too Young" to Discuss Race
- Skipping discussions about race and culture assumes that young children don't notice or are unaffected by these issues, which is not supported by research.

Avoid Misrepresenting or Appropriating Cultures
- Using inaccurate representations of cultural practices or appropriating cultural symbols for activities without proper context can perpetuate misinformation.

Avoid Enforcing Color-Evasiveness
- Saying things like "I don't see color" denies the realities of racial and cultural identities and the experiences tied to them.

Avoid Unequal Representation
- Providing materials, books, or activities that predominantly showcase one racial or cultural group over others can imply a hierarchy of importance.

Avoid Dismissing a Child's Identity
- Failing to affirm a child's racial, ethnic, or cultural identity (e.g., changing their name or mispronouncing it without effort) can damage self-esteem and create feelings of exclusion.

> "When children cannot find themselves reflected in the books they read, or when the images they see are distorted, negative, or laughable, they learn a powerful lesson about how they are devalued in the society of which they are a part."

WHAT NOT TO DO (CONT.)

Avoid Focusing Solely on Differences
- Overemphasizing differences without highlighting shared humanity and values can foster a sense of separation rather than inclusion.

Avoid Treating Race and Culture as Taboo Topics
- Avoiding open and honest discussions about race and culture can lead children to believe these subjects are shameful or negative.

Avoid Overburdening Families or Individuals From Minority Groups
- Expecting families or staff from underrepresented groups to carry the sole responsibility of representing or educating others about their culture is unfair and burdensome.

Avoid Inflexibility in Curriculum
- Using a rigid curriculum that doesn't adapt to include the diverse backgrounds and identities of the children in the group overlooks their unique needs.

Avoid Overreacting to Mistakes
- Correcting children harshly or shaming them for using inappropriate language or expressing biased ideas can stifle future conversations and learning opportunities.

Avoid Invalidating or Dismissing Feelings
- Dismissing or downplaying a child's feelings or experiences related to their identity can harm trust and emotional growth.

Resources

- Black Lives Matter at School- http://www.blacklivesmatteratschool.com/
- Abolitionist Teaching Network- https://abolitionistteachingnetwork.org/
- Education for Liberation Network- https://www.edliberation.org/
- Rethinking Schools- https://rethinkingschools.org/
- Lee and Low- https://www.leeandlow.com/books/what-we-believe
- Social Justice Booklists- https://socialjusticebooks.org/booklists/
- 28 Black Picture Books- https://scottwoodsmakeslists.wordpress.com/2016/01/30/28-black-picture-books-that-arent-about-boycotts-buses-or-basketball/
- Liberated Ethnic Studies- https://www.liberatedethnicstudies.org/
- Asian American Studies Curriculum Framework
- Indigenous Reconciliation Webinar & Toolkit for Early Childhood Educators
- Latinx Parenting- https://latinxparenting.org/

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