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Addressing the "Elephant" in the Room:

Exploring Race and Social Justice in the Early Childhood Years

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Addressing the "Elephant" in the Room:

Exploring Race and Social Justice in the Early Childhood Years

by

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to the memory of my father, Dr. John Wesley Holmes. I'll always cherish your words of encouragement, support, and guidance.

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For a long time, I dreamt of following my father's footsteps and completing my Ph.D. in education. While at times my journey appeared to be never-ending, it has finally arrived with the support of friends, family, and colleagues.

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This critical case study examined young elementary students' understandings of race as they participated in an interdisciplinary Social Studies and English Language Arts unit in two kindergarten classrooms and one first grade classroom in two urban regions of the United States. The study utilized the principles of Critical Race Theory, Social Education, and Social Justice to analyze the young elementary-aged students' thought-processes on race. By implementing an interdisciplinary unit on counter-narrative stories about the past and present experiences of communities of color, the students were also able to examine the impact of race through multiple perspectives. There were distinct differences in classroom teachers' years of experience, their comfort level in addressing contentious topics such as race and racism, as well as their approaches to deconstructing complex information to their young students. This study also included an in-depth review of the teachers' thoughts on race and their rationale for teaching their students about it.

While the curriculum, lessons, and materials presented in each of the classrooms were slightly different, the common theme of developing a strong sense of community

emerged in all three classrooms. Each teacher discussed that, as a result of presenting the students with lessons focused on all different communities of color and their historical fight for equity, a stronger bond formed in their kindergarten or first grade classroom. Considering the curriculum, lessons, and materials all addressed how race and racism impacts different communities, this study presents the conversations that could occur when teachers begin to hold explicit conversations about race with young elementary-aged children.

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Chapter One: Introduction and Context of the Problem

"You're pink and I'm brown."

"Are Black people good?"

"Is it okay to play with him? He's brown."

The quotes listed above are verbatim statements from early elementary classrooms. They confirm the notion that children are not only thinking about race, and skin color in particular, but trying to understand the unwritten "rules" of race – how people perceive different racial groups and the subsequent impact of aligning with specific groups. By acknowledging that children do not only notice race, but are also intrigued by it, adults may begin to help children understand a complex notion that is commonly avoided. Although numerous child psychologists, sociologists, and early childhood educators have written extensively on how children come to understand racial categories and its impact on their interactions (Aboud, 2008; Hirschfield, 2008; Patterson & Bigler, 2006; Van Ausdale & Feagin, 2001; Winkler, 2009), there is a dearth of research that addresses how teachers engage children in the early elementary years in conversations about race and its impact on society.

If children's questions about race are left uninterrupted by adults, then they can potentially develop bias and stereotypical views towards individuals aligning with different racial groups as well as within their own racial group (Aboud, 1988, 2003; Davis, Leman, & Barrett, 2007; Van Ausdale & Feagin, 2001; Winkler, 2009). In *Why Are All the Black Children Sitting Together in the Cafeteria*, Tatum (1997) stated "the impact of racism begins early" (p. 3) and explained that children, like adults, can be exposed to misleading information about people who are different from themselves. If

young children do not interact with people who are racially, ethnically, linguistically, or economically different from themselves and/or lack the opportunity to engage in conversations countering biased information, then not only can they begin to believe stereotypes or biases but also develop deep-seated beliefs about racial groups. Racial and ethnic beliefs that are left unchallenged before a child is nine years old are increasingly difficult to alter at a later age.[1] It is these beliefs that must be addressed if we wish to build a stronger and more united community that works against injustices, such as racism.

DISSERTATION STUDY

Race relations have consistently been contentious in American society (Roediger, 2010), and globally. The events occurring between 2011 and 2015 have continued to highlight the problems associated within the American society. It was hearing the names of victims, learning the context around the events, and ultimately seeing the connections of the different events that led me to want to write about addressing race with young children in hopes of helping a younger generation accept all different types of people regardless of their race. It is through education that I believe future generations can attack, and hopefully overcome, societal problems associated with race and racism.

These discussions on race have not only been occurring in the media. Many educators have begun to address the current events through collaborative efforts on social media with hashtags such as #Fergusonsyllabus[2] and #Charlestonsyllabus[3]. Some educators have begun to recognize that PK-12 students are impacted by the images in the media as well as the ongoing conversations with family and friends. While race in the study of early childhood education has been traditionally overlooked, or quite simply ignored, (Berstein, 2011; Ramsey, 2004) there has been increasing pressure from a subset

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[1] http://www.socialstudies.org/positions/elementary
[2] https://twitter.com/hashtag/fergusonsyllabus
[3] http://aaihs.org/resources/charlestonsyllabus/

of early childhood researchers for the field of early childhood to discuss race as a way to address social justice, as well as injustices, in society (Doucet & Adair, 2013; Husband, 2008, 2012; Ramsey, 2004). While more educators are beginning to address race in the early elementary years (Doucet & Adair, 2013; Husband, 2008, 2012), the concept of race has yet to be thoroughly explored as a way to address social justice through an interdisciplinary unit incorporating both social studies and language arts. By integrating the subject areas, a more in-depth understanding of race and its implications in society can be better examined. It is through this unit that I conducted my study.

Specifically, I examined how young children in the early elementary grades (K – 1st grade) not only explore the concept of race but also how they apply it to their understanding of social justice. By enacting racial projects (Omi & Winant, 1994), my study's impact on the field of early childhood and social studies illuminated how teaching about race and its impact on communities could lead children to deepen their understanding of social justice. The racial projects occurred during the regular school day as an embedded aspect within their social studies and literacy curriculum. In particular, social education, which is a subset of social studies education, was addressed in order to align the racial projects with the mandated state standards for social studies and literacy. Through the use of multi-modal counter-storytelling, this study centralized critical race theory as a way to address social justice.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

In response to the need to openly discuss race and racial relations, this study sought to analyze early childhood classrooms that address race and enact racial projects through social justice teaching. Acknowledging children's awareness of societal inequities and their ability to advocate for their rights (Berstein, 2011; Oswell, 2013), the

study examined the differing ways young elementary students engage in these projects. The study addressed the following questions:

- How do young elementary students (PK-1ˢᵗ grade) discuss race during interdisciplinary social studies and language arts lessons?
- What understandings of race do young elementary students (PK-1ˢᵗ grade) demonstrate when engaged in racial projects?

DEFINING RACE

According to Bonilla-Silva (2013), most social scientists will agree that race is socially constructed and not biological. In addition to most social scientists agreeing on the definition, it appears that individuals who work in conjunction with the U.S. government have also adopted this definition. For instance, in a working paper for the U.S. Census Bureau Center for Administrative Records Research and Applications, Libeler, Rastogi, Fernandez, Noon, & Ennis (2014) cited the works of Barth (1969) and Haney López (1996) and defined race as "socially constructed (in ways that vary over time and place) by political regimes, through intergroup relations, and via personal interaction" (p. 1). Further defining race, Graves (2002) explained that "...'race' is the invention not of nature but of our social institutions and practices" (p. 2). Since race is socially constructed, meaning its definition and categories continue to change over time and are not fixed or due to biology, the racial groups acknowledged by the U.S. Census Bureau continue to grow and change.[4] In fact, depending upon the decade, an individual could easily "switch" races due to changes in the terminology and not by their own choice.

In his book, *The Emperor's New Clothes: Biological Theories of Race at the Millennium*, Graves (2002) stated that prior to the eighteenth century, individuals tended

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[4] http://racebox.org/

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to denote other differences and rarely mentioned physical attributes, like skin color. The racial system of the 21st century is a product of the Age of Discovery as a way for polygenists and naturalists to justify the treatment and enslavement of peoples (Graves, 2002; Roediger, 2010). Race, and more specifically racial hierarchies, had to be created as a way to establish a dominant race that prevailed against all others and could maintain its privileges in society (Bonilla-Silva, 2013; Feagin, 2010; Graves, 2002; Mills, 2000). Once created, these racial privileges granted whites more rights than non-whites in society. The racial structure then became so engrained in American society that it solidified itself as the racial status quo (Bonilla-Silva, 2013). Once racial hierarchies were formed along a continuum of White and Black, with numerous groups in-between, then the impact of racism begins.

Considering that race is a construct, it is essential to understand how people come to form their racial identities and how it impacts their lives. According to Omi and Winant (1994), race is a modern phenomenon and, like Graves (2002), also traced its origins back to the eighteenth century. Omi and Winant (1994) acknowledged that the color line existing between White and Black individuals is firmly engrained in the United States. They use the term racial formation to refer to the social, economic, and political nature of assigning racial categories and its subsequent impacts.

ADVOCATING FOR THE IDEAL: TALKING ABOUT RACE IN THE CLASSROOM

Although children have been exposed to more information than ever before due to technology, a young child's world still remains relatively small. A child's immediate environment directly impacts his or her world. This environment generally consists of where a child resides as well as the surrounding neighborhood. So, if a child lives in a racially or economically segregated neighborhood, then the chances of interacting with racially diverse individuals is limited unless specifically sought after by adults. Even

when children attend elementary school, the potential for increasing diversity relies on the racial and economic makeup of the neighborhood (Jargowsky, 2013; Rothstein, 2015). This means that if children live in segregated communities, then their direct exposure to individuals who differ from themselves is quite low.

Since elementary students recognize race at an early age (Bouette, Lopez-Robertson, & Powers-Costello, 2011; Chandler & McKnight, 2009; Earick, 2008; Van Ausdale & Feagin, 2001), encouraging students to share their thoughts about race helps to expose any preconceived racial stereotypes, biases, or prejudices the students may have already formed (Bigler & Liben, 1993). In addition to encouraging students to share their thoughts, educators must also seek to analyze the everyday school practices in order to confront and resist practices or actions that are racially or socioeconomically biased (Brown, Souto-Manning, & Laman, 2010). Educators can engage in racial projects (Omi & Winant, 1994) as a way to address social justice by acknowledging racist practices and altering them in order to encourage a healthy racial and ethnic identity for all children and hopefully positively impact social interactions between and among different racial and ethnic groups.

CURRENT REALITY: THE AVOIDANCE OF RACE IN THE CLASSROOM

Too often, educators, like many adults, assumed young children were not aware of race, (Berstein, 2011), race and racism was too abstract for young children to understand (VanSledright, 2002), or simply the educators, themselves, did not feel prepared to address the problems (Bolgatz, 2010; Dilg, 1999). However, considering the age when children develop preconceived notions about different groups of people, the early elementary years remain the optimal timeframe for talking about race and engaging in racial projects (Omi & Winant, 1994). According to Ramsey (2004), there has been a lack of integrating diverse racial, linguistic, and gendered perspectives in early childhood

classrooms due to two overarching beliefs. First, many early childhood teachers believe that contentious topics should be addressed in the older years, failing to recognize the fact that young children are aware of societal inequities (Berstein, 2011; Ramsey, 2004). Secondly, early childhood as a field continues to grapple with the notion of addressing race with young children and only recently produced documents to push the field towards addressing race and racism (Ramsey, 2004; Husband, 2008).

Addressing the Early Childhood "Innocence" Myth and Its Raced Ideology

During the late 18th and early 19th centuries, the idea of childhood evolved into a mythical, romanticized version where children were seen as innocent (Berstein, 2011; Duschinsky, 2011; Higonnet, 1998; Kincaid, 1992; Zelizer, 1985). Prior to this date, children were thought to be incompetent and often overlooked (Montgomery, 2009). However, this emerging belief that children were unaware of the world's problems or concerns was not attributed to all children (Goldstein, 1998; Montgomery, 2009). On the contrary, the idea of childhood innocence was specifically designated for White children. Interestingly, while the solidification of race and racial hierarchies in society was occurring, so was the emerging ideology of childhood, which served to further perpetuate raced viewpoints. In *Racial Innocence: Performing American Childhood from Slavery to Civil Rights*, Berstein (2011) states,

> childhood innocence – itself raced white, itself characterized by the ability to retain racial meanings but hide them under claims of holy obliviousness – secured the unmarked status of whiteness, and the power derived from that status in the 19th and into the early 20th centuries. (pp. 7-8)

By couching conceptions of race within an ideology of childhood innocence, the stereotypical assumptions and expectations of different groups of children was able to retain a specific racial lens without having to overtly state it (Berstein, 2011).

Only towards the end of the 20th and beginning of the 21st century did more early childhood researchers begin to expose the varying expectations and assumptions tied to children based on their racial make-up. For instance, in Ferguson's (2002) article entitled *Naughty by Nature,* she explored the representation of African American children not only in society but also in schools. Ferguson (2002) came to find that while young White children were often portrayed as innocent, the same could not be said of Black children. Instead, Black males were typically viewed as criminal or dangerous even from a young age. This assumption of presumed guilt and criminality impacted Black children, and males in particular, from before they even entered kindergarten. According to a March 2014 report from the U.S. Department of Education Office of Civil Rights, Black males were suspended from preschool significantly more often than their peers. In fact, while the entire Black preschool population, including both males and females, consisted of about 18%, almost 48% of all out-of-school suspensions were given to Black males.[5]

However, Black males were not the only children to be omitted from the childhood myth. Black females were also denied the latitude of being viewed as young innocents and were adultified alongside their male counterparts (Ferguson, 2002). The differential treatment of individuals was noted as far back as the 1890s when Anna Julia Cooper (1892/1998) discussed the notion of a triple identity for Black females. Like Du Bois' (1903/1994) "double consciousness", where individuals are simultaneously accepted due to their American heritage and not accepted considering they aligned racially as Black, Cooper (1892/1998) identified a triple threat for Black females due to their gender. This triple identity placed upon Black females reified stereotypical images associated with loudness and bad attitudes (Carby, 1987; Collins, 1990; Evans, 1980; Koonce, 2012; Morris, 2007). These depictions of Black children continue through

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[5] http://ocrdata.ed.gov/Downloads/CRDC-School-Discipline-Snapshot.pdf

adulthood supporting the need for these conversations about race to begin early and occur often.

Early Childhood's Call to Action

Bringing the issue of race to the forefront of the early childhood field, the National Council of Teaching English's (NCTE) Early Childhood Education Assembly (ECEA) published a statement concerning "the role of early childhood and racism"[6] in June 2015. This statement directly responded to the murder of nine African Americans attending Emmanuel AME Church in Charleston, SC by a White male in his mid-twenties. Once it was found that the shooter had posted racist comments towards African Americans, the incident became another sign of the racial strife continuing to engulf American society. According to the ECEA, the field of early childhood must no longer avoid addressing issues of race, bias, and stereotypes, but instead have an "essential role to play in educating tomorrow's adults so that [the Charleston murders] and other more insidious kinds of racism are no longer a possibility".[7] It is hoped that through education there can be not only a reduction in these types of crimes but an elimination of them due to educating youth about the impact of race and racism in American society.

Not only did the ECEA no longer condone the actions of early childhood educators seeking to avoid having conversations about race; they also compiled a resource to help educators begin to revise their current curricula. The resource provided by the ECEA was broken down into 6 categories designed to address anti-racist learning and teaching. The six categories were: (1) African American Histories: Curricular Resources and Information to Build Teachers' Background Knowledge, (2) Race Talk in the Early Childhood Classroom, (3) Africa's Influence on the World's Knowledge, (4)

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[6] http://www.ncte.org/positions/statements/early-child-educ-racism
[7] http://www.ncte.org/positions/statements/early-child-educ-racism

Understanding Bias, Privilege, and Profiling, (5) Understanding Racism and Educational Institutions, and (6) Anti-bias Teaching in Practice.[8] Within each section, the ECEA provided a document of resources to help early childhood educators plan lessons for their students as well as address their own biases, stereotypes, and/or lack of information. By acknowledging the lack of educator preparation on dealing with conversations on race (Bolgatz, 2010), this resource hoped to provide a starting point for teachers who are seeking to learn more about ways to address race in the early elementary years.

TEACHING ABOUT RACE IN THE ELEMENTARY YEARS

The existing literature on teaching about race primarily focuses on secondary education or college instruction (Bolgatz, 2010). However, whenever race is addressed in elementary classrooms, it is generally dealt with at the fourth and fifth grade level when students are learning about their state and U.S. history (Banks & McGee-Banks, 1998). However, since the end of the 20th century, the field of early childhood began to explicitly explore the teaching of race in more detail. Interestingly, many of these studies, which are examined in-depth in chapter two, solely addressed one specific subject area. Considering that many early elementary teachers teach multiple subjects to the same students, it is curious that race is relegated to only specific content areas, like literacy. Although race can be applied to all subject areas, the majority of studies focused on only one subject area and rarely utilized an interdisciplinary approach, which may have been more impactful. By solely focusing on one subject area, the core content, rather than race became the focus.

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[8] http://www.earlychildhoodeducationassembly.com/resources-for-educators-focusing-on-anti-racist-learning-and-teaching.html

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

Although researchers have discussed the impacts of bias and stereotypes on young children for decades (Cannella & Viruru, 2004; Dau, 2001; hooks, 1994, 2003; Lane, 2008; MacNaughton, 2005), there is a lapse in not only the critical examination of how anti-racist practices aligns with the concept of justice but also ways to implement racial discussions and projects in the early elementary years. My dissertation analyzed how children come to understand race and its connection to social justice through participating in racial projects. In order to enact these racial projects, the study utilized the theoretical frameworks of social education, social justice, and critical race theory.

Social Education

The concept of social education emerged towards the end of the nineteenth century as a broader or more generic term for school curricula that focused on social issues involving subjects such as history and geography (Saxe, 1992). Although social education was often used interchangeably with social studies, the two terms differ. While social education encompasses a vast overarching perspective based upon social science, social studies represents a narrower view and was initially designed "to prepare and serve citizens with 'democratic' skills through the specific course/topical areas found in the social sciences, history, and geography" (Saxe, 1992, p. 11). So, while the fields of social education and social studies overlap, they are not completely synonymous with each other.

Since the definition for social education is quite broad, there have been debates as to its exact definition. According to White, Marsh, and McCormack (2011), social education "has no 'true' definition" (p. 34) but addresses elements of critical pedagogy, cultural/media studies, and social studies education, all of which they asserted could support a social justice-oriented framework. Tyson and Park (2008) also saw the

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necessity of utilizing a social justice framework in social studies in order to critique the traditional teaching of civic and social education, which normalized the Eurocentric middle class perspective. Numerous scholars advocated for the need to critically examine the underlying premises of social education and whether it contextualized the information presented (Epstein, 2010; Kincheloe, 2001; Wade, 2007; White, Marsh, &McCormack, 2011).

Defining Social Justice

The term social justice has taken on different meanings depending upon the paradigm and the time period (Ayers & Ayers, 2011; Hytten & Bettez, 2011; Rizvi, 1998; North, 2006, 2008). Beginning with a simplistic view, social justice is essentially fairness (Rawls, 1971). While this succinct definition works well when dealing with young children, it lacks a critical awareness and acknowledgement of the structures and power dynamics underlying societal inequities. This study's definition of social justice aligns with North's (2006, 2008) definition, which encompasses three main aspects, namely redistribution/recognition, knowledge/action, and macro/micro. The first aspect of North's definition addresses the idea of redistribution and recognition. This component of the definition acknowledges communities that have been historically marginalized and their fight to be treated equally in society. North (2008), citing Fraser (1997; Fraser & Honneth, 2003) clarifies this component by stating that specific programs that have benefitted some in society should be allotted to all children and in particular children from communities that have been historically marginalized to begin to level the playing field.

The second aspect of social justice that North identifies is knowledge and action. Referencing Lynch and Baker (2005), North (2008) states that all individuals have the right to obtain satisfying work. This notion directly aligns with the inalienable rights

ordained within the Declaration of Independence stating people have a "right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness".[9] Although education is often referred to as an equalizer in society, North (2008) identified educational classroom spaces as both obstacles and opportunities for social justice. She explained that if individual classrooms were to redistribute power and let teachers "encourage learning for learning's sake" (North, 2008, p. 1193), which supports a more active stance, then schools would fall within a social justice-oriented framework. Without a readjustment of power, then schools simply perpetuate the same societal inequities existing in their communities (Kozol, 1991, 2005).

The third and final aspect of social justice focuses on both micro and macro levels. Referring to McLaughlin and Talbert's framework (2001), North (2008) explained that the macro level interactions contributing to social justice stem from societal influences, such as parents; the community at large; businesses; the local, state, and federal laws and practices; as well as the cultural context of society. All of these outside entities impact schools and schooling through the material that is taught and tested, the preparation of teachers, and the regulations of what is allowed to occur within classrooms. In addition to the macro level influences, North (2008) also addressed the micro level interactions and highlighted the individual interactions of people, such as how teachers and students or students and students treat one another. According to North (2006, 2008), in order to address social justice all three components of the definition must be addressed.

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[9] http://www.archives.gov/exhibits/charters/declaration_transcript.html

Why Social Justice as a Frame?

George Lakoff explained humans "think... in terms of systems of structures called frames" (Delgado, 2012, p.166). These frames, or what Yvette Jackson (2011) called cultural frames of reference, denoted how individuals see the world as well as how they perceive the world sees them. Not only did frames of reference impact individuals' value systems and behaviors, they also helped to determine one's sense of identity (Jackson, 2011; Delgado, 2012). Additionally, Lakoff explained the importance of these frames noting that once someone's frame is established, then he/she makes conclusions based upon that particular perception while disregarding other important factors or considerations (Delgado, 2012). By aligning the concept of social justice with how different individuals see the world, the hope is more people would become aware how people have been treated and the oppressive structures in society that have disproportionally impacted communities of color.

Critical Race Theory and the Importance of Counter-stories

One method of infusing diverse perspectives or counter-stories into the curriculum is to apply critical race theory (CRT) to the curriculum. Critical Race Theory (CRT) grew out of critical legal studies with the writings of Derrick Bell (1987, 2008), Alan Freeman (1978), Richard Delgado (1995), Kimberle Crenshaw (1995), Neil Gotanda (1995), and Mari Matsuda (1995). These legal scholars explained that race and racism needed to be centralized in order to challenge dominant constructions of race within the United States (Dixson & Rosseau, 2006). In Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic's (2012) book, *Critical Race Theory: An Introduction*, the scholars outlined several propositions of CRT: (1) racism is part of every day life, (2) "interest convergence" (p. 8) plays a pivotal role in the reasons behind supporting events to eliminate racism, (3) "social construction" (p. 8) recognizes race as a social concept

whose definition remains fluid, not fixed, (4) "differential racialization" (p. 9) acknowledges that members of the same racial group are treated differently depending upon their alignment to other social identities like gender or socioeconomic class, and (5) storytelling serves as a way for communities of color speak to articulate their lived experiences in terms of race and racism (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). When applying these five propositions, race and subsequently racism became a central focus and its impact could be discussed, evaluated, challenged, and, hopefully, changed.

CRT provides a necessary framework to highlight and analyze how institutional structures continue to perpetuate racism and promote societal inequities (Ladson- Billings & Tate, 1995; Yosso, 2002). CRT, in an educational context, adheres to three main tenets, namely that (1) race is still a contributing factor to inequity, (2) property rights are essential in the American society, and (3) the intersection of race and property perpetuate social and educational inequities (Ladson-Billing & Tate, 1995). This theoretical framework not only acknowledges the institutional and structural systems supporting inequities but also challenges, and ultimately, ends the racial injustices produced from these structures. CRT, which can be used quantitatively as well as qualitatively, focuses on the data as well as provides context of how it was collected or shared. Using CRT, researchers are able to share personal stories to illustrate the impact of racism on different communities of color. It is this ability to utilize storytelling as an impetus to "name one's reality" (Tate, 1997, p. 219) and accurately display both the micro and macro aggressions communities of color face on a daily basis. By giving voice to those who are usually silenced, CRT paints a more accurate portrayal of American society through its honest reflection of how all communities are faring in the American society.

Schools and their curricula are inherently political (Apple, 1992). Researchers have documented the ways in which state mandated curriculum standards and textbooks

silence communities of color (Brown & Brown, 2010; Heilig, Brown, & Brown, 2012). Specifically utilizing counter-stories, which present an alternative perspective to the stories that are generally part of the traditional curriculum (Solorzano & Yosso, 2001, 2002), this study seeks to include the voices of communities of color in order to provide a more nuanced and balanced view of lived experiences. By moving the stories of communities of color from the margins to the forefront through the use of racial projects, the study sought to analyze the impact on children's understandings about race and its connection to social justice.

OVERVIEW OF METHODOLOGY

Critical case study methodology (Rossman & Rallis, 2003) was employed to investigate how primary grade students conceptualize their understanding of race and its subsequent impact on social justice by participating in numerous lessons throughout the school year. Qualitative data in the form of observations, student work, and student interviews were collected in order to gain a better understanding of the children's thoughts. The use of different data helped to triangulate the information in order to provide deeper insight (Geertz, 1973) into the children's thought-process. I used constant comparison (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) in order to analyze the emerging themes that appear throughout the data. This information was further explained in subsequent chapters of my dissertation.

CHAPTER OVERVIEW

In the remaining chapters of my dissertation, I conduct an in-depth review of my theoretical frameworks as well as explain the methodology that I employed. More specifically, chapter 2 begins with an in-depth look at race and the forming of racial hierarchies in the United States. After the concept of race is thoroughly examined, then I

delve into how racial identity is formed in young children and the theoretical considerations for overtly teaching about race with young elementary students. Examples from previous work in elementary social studies are applied to shed light on how a teacher could embed critical conversations about race into prewritten standards and expectations for their curriculum.

Chapter 3 delves into the critical case study methodology that was utilized in this dissertation. More specifically, this chapter provides an overview of conducting a qualitative study and the aspects of critical case study. After a brief introduction to critical case study, the chapter presents the participants in the study, school context, proposed data collection and methods for data analysis. Ultimately, the chapter ends by reviewing the importance of trustworthiness in qualitative research and the researcher's positionality.

Chapters 4, 5, and 6 contain the findings from the dissertation study. In order to contextualize the data, each chapter focused on a different classroom. Depending on the lessons and materials presented, different themes emerged from the data. In addition to presenting information about the students' thoughts and interactions during the interdisciplinary unit on race, each teacher's thought-process and willingness to address race was also analyzed.

The seventh and final chapter of the dissertation addresses the implications from the study and its findings. Considering the study focused on the young early elementary students, chapter 7 shifts to also include information for early childhood teachers and what they would need to address in order to implement aspects of the study. Chapter 7 closes by presenting the significance of the study to the field of early childhood.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

EXAMINING RACE

Because this study focused on young elementary children's understanding of race and its connections to social justice, it was imperative to take an in-depth look into how race was formed in American society. Once the forming of race is explored, the chapter continues to illustrate how race and racial hierarchies evolved in American society. After the evolution of race is examined, the chapter narrows to specifically analyze the interconnectedness of race and social justice and considerations early elementary educators need to take into account prior to and during teaching about race.

The Origins of Race

The concept of race did not solidify until the middle of the 18th century. Prior to this date, "race was used interchangeably with other terms such as type, kind, sort, breed, and even species" (Smedley, 1994 as cited in Mukhopadhyay, Henze, & Moses, 2007, p. 107). However, in 1758, the idea of race began to form when Carolus Linnaeus created the first system to name and classify organisms (Bhopal, 2007; Fuentes, 2012; Yudell, 2009). In particular, Linnaeus created four subcategories for Homo sapiens and divided humans into the following groups: americanus, asiaticus, africanus, and europeaus (Fuentes, 2012). According to Linnaeus, the defining characteristics of the sub-categories were:

Homo sapiens americanus - "red, ill-tempered, subjugated. Hair black, straight, thick; Nostrils wide, Face harsh, beard scanty. Obstinate, contented, free. Paints himself with red lines. Ruled by custom."

Homo sapiens europeaus - "white, serious, strong. Hair blond, flowing. Eyes blue. Active, very smart, inventive. Covered by tight clothing. Ruled by laws."

Homo sapiens asiaticus - "yellow, melancholy, greedy. Hair black. Eyes dark. Severe, haughty, desirous. Covered by loose garments. Ruled by opinion."

Homo sapiens africanus - "black, impassive, lazy. Hair kinked. Skin silky. Nose flat. Lips thick.... Crafty, slow, foolish. Ruled by caprice. (Linnaeus (1758) as cited by Fuentes, 2012, p. 74).

Notably, the Homo sapiens subcategories were different from Linnaeus's other classification systems. Instead of relying on an analysis of species and drawings like his other work, Linnaeus created each human subcategory based upon physical and sometimes behavioral characteristics of the group (Yudell, 2009), which he learned about from other people's interactions with different individuals (Fuentes, 2012). Many of the individuals Linnaeus consulted were involved in the transatlantic slave trade (Fuentes, 2012), which considering their occupations, complicated the accuracy of the information. Even in the initial creation of labeling and categorizing people, biased and stereotypical language emerged from Linnaeus' descriptions of different types of people. Although these depictions would evolve over time, some of the basic sentiments from Linnaeus continued to last for centuries.

After Linnaeus published *Systems of Nature* (1758), highlighting his biological classifications, a German scientist named Johann Friedrich Blumenbach built upon the information and created a racial classification system moving from four distinct groupings of humans in his first edition to five in his second and third editions (Bhopal, 2007). Additionally, Blumenbach altered his groupings from being geographically based to what he considered to be "genetic varieties" (Bhopal, 2007, p. 1308). At the end of the 18th century, Blumenbach published his five-group racial classification system based on these "genetic varieties". The five groups were broken down into the following categories: (1) Caucasians, (2) Mongolians, (3) Ethiopians, (4) Americans, and (5)

Malays (Bhopal, 2007). Blumenbach's groupings assigned physical attributes to specific races instead of aligning them with geographical locations (Bhopal, 2007).

During the timeframe that Blumenbach was revising and publishing his theories of racial categorization, many individuals in the scientific community began to take note of the concept of race. In Thomas Jefferson's *Notes on the State of Virginia* (1776), he built upon the scientists' work in depicting race as either biological, aligned with physical attributes, or as an impact of societal hierarchies when he explained his rationale behind why he believed Black individuals were inferior to White individuals. By infusing popular societal beliefs with the scientific community's viewpoints on race (Mukhopadhyay et al., 2007), the racial hierarchy between White and Black individuals began to formalize in American society and directly benefit the White ruling class and their colonial economic interests (Feagin, 2014; Menchaca, 1997).

The Formation of Racial Hierarchies

The formation of racial classifications, and ultimately hierarchical levels, is not surprising given the fact that the forming of racial understandings was occurring at the same time colonialism and the transatlantic slave trade were taking place (Mukhopadhyay & Henze, 2003). In order to justify the placing of some individuals into slavery, there was a need to differentiate between groups of people (Steedman, 2012). The ranking of these racial groups helped to support racial ideologies based on maintaining inequality and domination (Pulido, 2005). As Ferguson (2015) explained, "racial ideologies that portray people of color as intellectually underdeveloped, uncivilized children require parallel ideas that construct Whites as intellectually mature, civilized adults" (p. 297). So, once one racial group was placed towards the bottom of the hierarchy, another immediately was placed at the top.

In 1877, Lewis Henry Morgan, an American anthropologist, created three stages of human evolution that aligned with Blumenbach's racial classification and hierarchical system (Mukhopadhyay et al., 2007). Morgan called the stages: savagery, barbarism, and civilization (Sanderson, 2001). In addition to naming each stage, Morgan also created subgroups for the savagery and barbarism categories consisting of lower, middle and upper stages (Sanderson, 2001). Like Linnaeus and Blumenbach, Morgan, too, applied stereotypical and biased beliefs to groups while attributing the top status of human evolution, which he called civilization, to individuals of European or Caucasian descent (Mukhopadhyay et al., 2007).

These racial hierarchies, though not static, remained tools to support rationales for the inequitable treatment of people of color (Ansell, 2013; Pulido, 2005). Blumenbach's creation of racial classifications easily merged with 19th century evolutionists, like Morgan, who continued to uphold labeling groups as "savage", "barbarian", "civilized", "primitive", and "advanced" (Mukhopadhyay et al., 2007, p. 109). These statements helped to rationalize the inequitable treatment of people who were considered non-white and encouraged the rise of deficit thinking in American society (Menchaca, 1997).

While racial hierarchies were forming, they began to intersect with the class and gender hierarchies that were already prevalent in society (Steedman, 2012). When combined with gender, economics, and geography (location), racial hierarchies became challenging to identify and analyze due to the differential placement on the racial continuum. For instance, where the racial group was "placed" on the hierarchical continuum depended on one's gender, race, and socioeconomic status. This meant that men and women who aligned with the same racial and economic status could be placed at very different points of the continuum. The intersection of gender, class, and geography

made an already shifting definition of race and racial hierarchies even more difficult to decipher.

Since the definitions of racial groupings continued to shift and the racial classification system ranked particular groups as better or more advanced than others, the impact of these "findings" began to cement themselves into all aspects of society (Smedley, 1993). Evolutionary science continued to justify the differential treatment of racial groups as part of the rationale for defending institutions such as slavery (Mukhopadhyay et al., 2007). According to Mukhopadhyay et. al. (2007), the racial classification and hierarchies in American society solidified due to three reasons:

- A long-term policy of population expansion, fueled by a demand for cheap labor;

- The desire of dominant groups to maintain their economic, political, and cultural dominance; and

- The need to reconcile the reality of persistent and deep stratification with an equally persistent political rhetoric of individualism, freedom, democracy, and a meritocracy. (p. 123)

These contributing factors helped to centralize race and the differential treatment of racial groups. Although Linnaeus and Blumenbach's racial categories have been accused of being fraught with errors and deemed unscientific (Bonilla-Silva, 2013; Graves, 2002; Smedley, 1993), the underpinnings of their theories continue to remain in U.S. society.

The Race Debate Continues

Starting with the first racial classification system in the 18th century, scientists could not agree on the basis of race. Depending upon one's view, numerous definitions of race were used to justify differential treatment of people. During the 19th century,

abolitionists tried to counter the prevalent racial assumptions in society and present a more humanizing viewpoint of Africans, who were enslaved, in hopes of dispelling negative associations or beliefs (Poulson, 1794). However, race continued to be utilized as an impetus for needing differing societal rules based on racial classifications. For instance, in the 19th century, laws such as the Chinese Exclusion Act (Library of Congress, n.d.), which restricted immigration and barred Chinese immigrants from entering the US, and the Dred Scott Supreme Court decision (Library of Congress, 2015) that denied people of African ancestry the possibility of becoming citizens of the U.S., negatively impacted racial groups who were not considered White and of European descent.

Abolitionists, such as Frederick Douglass, pointed out the hypocrisy of laws in the state of Virginia in his *What To The American Slave Is Your 4th Of July?* (1852) speech when he stated,

There are seventy-two crimes in the State of Virginia, which, if committed by a black man (no matter how ignorant he be), subject him to the punishment of death; while only two of these same crimes will subject a white man to like punishment. (p. 3)

Throughout Douglass' speech, he continued to assert that the racial injustices in American society must be dealt with and undone in order to truly adhere to the inalienable rights declared in the Declaration of Independence, which preserved individuals' rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.[10] Douglass, along with

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[10] http://www.archives.gov/exhibits/charters/declaration_transcript.html

many others, challenged the validity of the racial classifications and sought to end the inequitable treatment of individuals due to assumptions about race.

In *The Souls of Black Folk*, W.E.B. Du Bois (1903) also denounced the racial hierarchical system and instead suggested,

> fostering and developing the traits and talents of the Negro, not in opposition to or contempt for other races, but rather in large conformity to the greater ideals of the American Republic, in order that some day on American soil two world-races may give to each those characteristics both so sadly lack. (n.p.)

Du Bois (1903) continued to expound upon his point by saying that America has a "Negro problem" wherein America's underlying principles are put into question with the sanctioning of inhumane treatment towards African Americans. Further compounding the problem, Julia Anna Cooper acknowledged the problems race and gender posed for African American women in society. In *A Voice From the South* (1892), Cooper explained that African American women must address both racial and gender bias in a racist and patriarchal society. Other activists, such as Ida B. Wells-Barnett (1893), also voiced their concerns about how African Americans and women were treated based upon negative assumptions and biases in society.

Race in the 20th Century

At the beginning of the 20th century, Black scholars like Booker T. Washington, W.E.B. Du Bois, Julia Anna Cooper, Carter G. Woodson, and Ida B. Wells-Barnett, to name a few, published their thoughts on race, racism, and its impact. While not always agreeing on how to approach the problem, the work of these individuals helped to influence other activists who came after them.

During the early to mid 20th century, a primary goal of Woodson, Du Bois, and John Hope Franklin was to begin to present a more accurate portrayal of people of color, and the African American community, in particular (Banks, 1992). These, as well as other, scholars sought to reverse the belief of "Negro inferiority" and White supremacy (Guinier, 2004) through the creation of textbooks, establishment of journals, and the formation a Negro History Week, which eventually became Black History Month (Banks, 1992). As Guinier (2004) stated, scholars recognized,

> Once blackness becomes the face of failure, race, then influences and constrains social, economic, and political opportunities among and between blacks and whites and among and between blacks and other people of color. (pp. 108-109)

Many scholars sought to eliminate deficit thinking by educating communities on the rationale behind racial classifications (Guinier, 2004). At the same time, the racial inferiority myth was being challenged on multiple fronts; the number of people of color entering America was drastically increasing. This, in turn, created an increase in the amount of people challenging the notion of White supremacy and calling for changes through the judicial and educational systems.

Racial Formation

According to Omi and Winant (1994), racial and ethnic formation went through three specific phases within the history of the United States. The first phase, which occurred prior to the 1940s, dealt primarily with the debate around race and biology. The second phase, lasting from the 1940s to the late 1960s, attributed the concept of race to a "common sense" (Omi & Winant, 2014, p. 60) approach and promoted assimilation for people of color and immigrants. The third, and final phase, began after the 1960s and

continued into the 21ˢᵗ century (Omi & Winant, 2014). This phase of racial understanding dealt with a more ethnicity-oriented approach and identified more cultural and ethnic groups than before. Across all three phases, understanding culture was necessary in order to comprehend the basis behind the concept of race (Omi & Winant, 2014; Mukhopadhyay et. al., 2007).

Although Omi and Winant (1994) believed individuals needed to understand culture, they maintained race, though socially constructed, is a master category that "profoundly shaped, and continues to shape, the history, polity, economic structure, and culture of the United States" (p. 106). It is the embedding of race into the fabric of American society that gives it the ability to intersect with other defining attributes like gender and class. Since racial ideologies are complex, it is important to explore the impact that they have on the forming of one's identity and self- esteem.

Studying the Impact of Racial Identity

While the definition of race was still hotly contested in the 20ᵗʰ century, many studies began to review the impact of racial identity on individuals. In particular, three studies conducted by Criswell (1937), Clark & Clark (1940), and Horowitz (1939), are often referenced when analyzing the impact of segregation on young children's identities and self-esteems. For instance, Criswell (1937), a developmental psychologist, interviewed 950 students from kindergarten to eighth grade who lived in Brooklyn, New York to see if they would accept children from different races. In his study, Criswell (1937) asked the children to select two classmates they wished to sit next to in class and explain their reasons for selecting the individuals. The results of this study showed while gender ultimately trumped race, meaning boys and girls were more likely to select the same gender, racial separation was still a factor. In Criswell's (1937) discussion of his findings, he mentioned racial separation was absent until third grade and the children

truly picked peers based primarily upon gender. However, after third grade, there was a noticeable increase in separating not only by gender but also race (Criswell, 1937).

Although Criswell's (1937) sociometric study found gender preference was stronger than racial preference in the young elementary years, Horowitz and Horowtiz's (1938) found just the opposite. During the study, the social psychologists interviewed 84 children in first through tenth grade who lived in three rural communities that were racially segregated (Horowitz & Horowitz, 1938). The children were shown pictures and asked the following six questions:

1. Would you rather play with a boy or with a girl?

2. Would you rather play with a rich [boy or girl] or with a poor [boy or girl]?

3. Would you rather play with a white [boy or girl] or with a colored [boy or girl]?

4. Would you rather play with a rich colored [boy or girl] or a poor white [boy or girl]?

5. Would you rather play with a white [boy] or a colored [boy]? Would you rather play with a white [girl] or colored [girl]?

6. Would you rather play with a rich [white boy] or a poor [white boy]? Would you rather play with a rich [white girl] or a poor [white girl]? Would you rather play with a rich [colored boy] or a poor [colored boy]? Would you rather play with a rich [colored girl] or a poor [colored girl]? (Horowitz & Horowitz, 1938, p.311)

After analyzing the children's responses, Horowitz and Horowitz (1938) initially found children had preferences for both the gender and race of their peers. However, the researchers (Horowtiz & Horowitz, 1938) ultimately found race was a more powerful

preference than socioeconomic status or gender. This led the social psychologists to conclude the social development of children does not solely come from mental development and is instead influenced by the environment (Horowitz & Horowitz, 1938).

The third study, and perhaps most famous, explored the impact of race on children's self- identity. This study consisted of showing white and black dolls to African American children ages 3-7 years old (Clark & Clark, 1940). Then, Drs. Kenneth and Mamie Clark (1940) asked the children questions to determine the connection between skin color and racial identity. The questions the Clarks asked were:

give me the doll that: (1) you like to play with or the doll you like best, (2) is the nice doll, (3) looks bad, (4) is a nice color, (5) looks like a White child, (6) looks like a colored child, (7) looks like a Negro child, (8) looks like you. (Jordan & Hernandez-Reif, 2009, p. 389)

After analyzing the children's selection of dolls, the Clarks (1940) reported children as young as three can be racially biased and the impact of segregation was psychologically damaging. These findings, which were highlighted by the Supreme Court case *Brown v. Board of Education*, contradicted other studies, which found that the African Americans most at risk for psychologically damaging self-esteem were Black children who had an increased exposure with White children (Guinier, 2004).

As soon as Clarks' doll study (1940) was published, problems emerged about the authenticity of the findings in the Clark's report. For instance, when the children's statements were separated by region, the study contained findings that were not highlighted in the *Brown v. Board of Education* case. When the data was aggregated, it was found that African American children living in the North, where there was more

integration, had preferred the white dolls more than African American children living in the South (Guinier, 2004). In fact, Guinier (2004) said roughly 80% of African American children from the South identified with the black dolls by saying they were "pretty," "nice," or "good" (p.110). Yet, this information was left out of Clarks' summary of the findings and instead the report highlighted the fact that Southern children often used a derogatory term, i.e. the "n" word, to reference themselves, which the Clarks deemed was not psychologically healthy (Guinier, 2004).

Since initially reporting the findings and the subsequent backlash about their data, others have sought to understand where the Clarks' assumptions originated. Freeman (2011) wrote how Kenneth Clark was influenced by the work of Alfred Adler and his inferiority/superiority complex, which encouraged the belief that people developed personalities based upon internal and external stimuli. Adler thought the external and internal stimuli could cause an inflated or deflated sense of self. Citing Adler's work, Clark went on to develop the "zoot effect", which he explained was when particular individuals sought to gain "psychological security" (Freeman, 2011, p. 279) in a society that considers them to be inferior. Freeman (2011) explained Clark's zoot effect was rooted in recognizing the impact White supremacy had on society and depicted a more complex understanding of people's racial identities and self-esteems. Clark's theory, named for the time period around the zoot suit riots, exposed a more in-depth and multi-layered approach to racial understandings (Freeman, 2011) than the doll study findings.

Additionally, other well-known psychologists also researched the impact of race and racial identities. In 1925, Edward Bogardus published information about how racial preferences encouraged individuals to enact avoidance behaviors as a way to distance oneself from a person or group perceived to be less desirable. Further supporting Bogardus's claims (1925, 1938), other psychologists built upon this notion and examined

the effects of desegregation on racial identity and performance in schools (Katz, 1964) as well as the impacts of being exposed to negative stereotypes about one's racial group (Allport, 1954; Clark, 1965; Erikson, 1956; Lewin, 1941; Steele, 1997). These impacts, which Steele (1997, 2010) called stereotype threats, were created when individuals were aware of the negative beliefs or stereotypes about the group they belonged to and how it could be applied to their behavior. Once stereotype threats were unconsciously enacted, individuals then were found to underperform and subsequently wound up supporting the bias or stereotype attributed to their racial group. Steele (2010) explained,

> Despite the strong sense we have of ourselves as autonomous individuals, evidence consistently shows that contingencies tied to our social identities do make a difference in shaping our lives, from the way we perform in certain situations to the careers and friends we choose. (p. 14)

With the solidifying of a racial hierarchal system in society, the impact of stereotype threats has lasting impacts on individuals in society.

Rise of Multiculturalism

During the mid-20th century, the concept of multiculturalism began to rise due to the Civil Rights movement and the fact that previous laws, such as *Plessey v. Ferguson,* were now being overturned (Banks, 1992). In particular, two groups, intergroup and ethnic studies, were at the forefront of advocating for learning about the contributions all groups of people made to American society. While the groups had slightly different agendas, both groups were influential in creating the rise of multicultural education.

With individuals like Banks, Baker, Gay, and Grant building upon the work of early 20th century scholarship, multicultural education was formed. However, the work of

multicultural education was inclusive of many racial groups. Scholars such as Donna Gollnick, Christine E. Sleeter, Ricardo L. Garcia, Hilda Hernandez, Sonia Nieto, Philip C. Chinn, and Valerie O. Pang were also part of the initial push of learning about the achievements of all ethnic and cultural groups (Banks, 1992). While the multicultural education movement contained different phases, according to Banks (1992), the overarching goal was "to cement and unify a deeply divided nation" (p. 283). This movement encouraged having racial and ethnic conversations in schools as a way to honor the diverse perspectives of individuals and their impact on society.

Racial Formation in the Early Childhood Years

Omi and Winant (1994) explained that once people are taught to "read" race, then it becomes "a way of comprehending, explaining and acting in the world" (p. 60). Notably, children, and adults "read" race by comparing different communities of color against White American middle class beliefs and values, which are treated as the norm (Ramsey, 1982). This comparison helps to 'other' communities who align with different racial groups. By lacking more information about the "everydayness" of communities of color (Holt, 1995), children, like adults, have been left to make assumptions about people simply based upon their physical attributes like skin color (Omi & Winant, 1994; Tatum, 1997).

According to Charles Hamilton, once children enter formalized schooling, the institution itself is designed to "instill a set of normative values which support, not challenge, the existing societal values" (as cited in Edwards, R.M. 1975, p. 406; Langhout & Mitchell, 2008; O'Connor, Hill, & Robinson, 2009). These normative "values" place societal expectations on children based upon stereotypes. These expectations or beliefs then form what is considered normal and question those who do not fit the image presented to them (Dutro, Kazemi, Balf, & Lin, 2008; Van Ausdale &

Feagin, 2001). Thus, negative associations are created for certain racial identities, impacting children, as well as adults, at micro and macro levels of society.

One way of counteracting biased or stereotypical beliefs about racial groups is to engage in racial projects (Omi & Winant, 1994). According to researchers, "a racial project is simultaneously an interpretation, representation, or explanation of racial identities and meanings, and effort to organize and distribute resources (economic, political, cultural) along particular racial lines" (Omi & Winant, 1994, p. 125). Racial projects can be utilized for macro-level as well as micro-level activities (Omi & Winant, 1994). The underlying premise of a racial project must address race and its connection to the social system existing in society (Omi & Winant, 1994). Through the enactment of racial projects, educators can help students unpack their understandings about race and its societal impacts.

Race in the 21st Century

The concept of race and its defining attributes have continued to be debated into the 21st century. Although the majority of social scientists agree that race is a social construct (Bonilla-Silva, 2013), there still remains support for biological and evolutionary definitions even when little to no research supports those claims. With websites dedicated to presenting the definitions of racial groups and documenting the changes over time, the evidence to support the belief that race is a social construct is stronger than ever. For instance, racebox.org is a website that displays the shifting racial categories in the U.S. Census from 1790 to 2010.[11] On this site, individuals can see an image of the 1790 U.S. Census that contained five racial categories ranging from: (1) Free White males of 16 years and upward (to assess the country's industrial and military potential), (2) Free White males under 16 years, (3) Free White females, (4) All other free persons, to (5)

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[11] http://racebox.org/

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Slaves.[12] The site, which contains the racial classifications for every U.S. Census until 2010, lets individuals easily compare how the classifications have changed over time. The racial categories in the 2010 Census, increased from five (in 1790) to 15 categories. In addition to the 15 categories, the 2010 U.S. Census also contained an additional question for individuals of Latinx descent to explain their racial group and heritage. The fifteen categories on the 2010 U.S. Census are: (1) White, (2) Black, African American, or Negro, (3) American Indian or Alaska Native with an invitation to enter the tribal name, (4) Asian Indian, (5) Chinese, (6) Filipino, (7) Other Asian with an invitation to enter a specific name, (8) Japanese, (9) Korean, (10) Vietnamese, (11) Native Hawaiian, (12) Guamanian or Chamorro, (13) Samoan, (14) Other Pacific Islander with an invitation to enter a specific name, and (15) Some other race.[13] The additional racial question for Latinx on the 2010 U.S. Census states, "Please answer BOTH Question 5 about Hispanic origin and Question 6 about race. For this census, Hispanic origins are not races. Is this person of Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin?"[14] The question is then followed by: "(1) No, not of Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin, (2) Yes, Mexican, Mexican American, Chicano, (3) Yes, Puerto Rican, (4) Yes, Cuban, (5) Yes, another Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin"[15] and provides a space for the individual to print their specific origin.

Although racial categories have expanded over time in the U.S. Census, the lasting effects of racism and racial hierarchies remains an integral part of the American society (Roediger, 2010). According to Feagin (2014),

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[12] https://www.census.gov/history/www/through_the_decades/overview/1790.html
[13] http://racebox.org/
[14] http://racebox.org/
[15] http://racebox.org/

Systemic racism is perpetuated by a broad social reproduction process that generates not only the recurring patterns of racial discrimination within institutions and by individuals but also a deeply alienating racist relationship—on the one hand, the racially oppressed, and on the other, the racial oppressors. (p. xv)

Since people are born into a society that ranks communities of color against White middle class norms (Doucet, 2008; Mac Naughton, Davis, & Smith, 2009), racism has become systemic and part of people's everyday experiences (Feagin, 2014). It is the normalcy of racism and the 'othering' of non-White groups that causes racial micro and macro level aggression (Davis, 1989; Feagin, 2014; Romero, 2008; Russell, 1998). The impact of such aggressions speaks to the need for more studies to be conducted examining race and its impact on young people in hopes of one day eradicating biased and/or stereotypical behavior.

EXAMINING RACE AND EARLY CHILDHOOD: THE INFLUENCE OF THREE FIELDS

Early childhood is a multidisciplinary field that encompasses the work of educational and social psychologists, sociologists, and educators (Waller, 2005). While each field has played a pivotal role in the creation of early childhood, they have at times contributed to the lack of diverse perspectives in the field (Park, 2011; Waller, 2005). Many scholars have advocated for the need to address race and social justice as an integral component of early childhood (Grieshaber & Canella, 2001; MacNaughton, 2004; Phillips, 2010).

The Field of Psychology

According to Park (2011), psychology has played a prominent role in early childhood. As early as 1929, psychologists attempted to disrupt the early twentieth century discourse on the innocence of childhood (Lasker, 1929). Lasker (1929) argued that not only were children aware of race but were also influenced by their parental viewpoints, the environment where they resided, as well as a historically biased school curriculum (MacNaughton & Davis, 2009).

Along with Lasker's (1929) in-depth analysis of books and children's exposure to differing racial beliefs, psychologists also began to conduct studies on whether children were racially aware. As previously mentioned, three studies highlighted children's ability to recognize and begin to positively or negatively categorize race. Clark & Clark (1940), Criswell, (1937), and Horowitz (1939) all studied and analyzed children's racial awareness using photographs, drawings, or props like dolls to represent different racial groups. While the findings of these three seminal studies slightly differed, they all jumpstarted other studies that continued to analyze children's racial identity formation and how it impacts their self- esteem.

Psychologists overwhelmingly agree that children notice race, albeit from different perspectives including but not limited to a cognitive developmental perspective, which supports a Piagetian viewpoint believing children develop in stages, or a social identity developmental perspective, which states that children's development is impacted socially. For example, Mary Goodman, a cognitive developmental researcher identified three specific phases in children's development of racial awareness. The first phase, which Goodman (1964) called Racial Awareness, occurs when children are roughly two to three years old. Goodman asserted it was during the racial awareness stage when children first begin to notice racial differences between people. The second phase, Racial

Orientation, occurs when children are four to five years old. During the racial orientation stage, children begin to express both positive and negative attitudes about different racial groups. The third and final stage is True Racial Attitude. This stage occurs when children are seven to nine years old. This stage is when children first begin to display complex understandings of race as well as prejudiced and stereotypical beliefs (Goodman, 1964). Notably, other cognitive developmental theorists built upon Goodman's work in order to further explore children's understanding of race and their development of racial identities (MacNaughton & Davis, 2009).

Following the Piagetian developmental stages, cognitive development psychologists believe that children's cognitive abilities are directly impacted by children's views of the world. It was this worldview that psychologists thought impacted children's racial knowledge. However, social identity development theorists disagree and claim that the cognitive stages are only one aspect of how children develop their racial knowledge and awareness. These theorists believed children develop racial knowledge through cognitive and social development (Mac Naughton & Davis, 2009).

While both cognitive developmental and social identity developmental theorists believe there are stages to children's development, they do differ in the number of stages as well as what occurs during the four phases. For instance, Davis, Leman, & Barrett (2007) said children's racial identity develops in four phases. The first phase, undifferentiated racial identity, lasts from birth to about age three and lacks using race as a way to identify people. The second phase, racial awareness, begins when children are around three years old and start to classify people according to race. The third phase, depicting in-group preference, occurs when children are around four years old and want to be around people who look like themselves. The fourth phase that Davis et. al. (2007) identified deals with out-group prejudices and begins around seven years old. While the

stages identified by the two theorist groups somewhat differ, both cognitive developmental and social identity developmental theorists believe children can begin to exhibit racial prejudice as early as seven years old (Mac Naughton & Davis, 2009).

Perhaps what is most shocking about examining the development of racial attitudes in children is the extent to which the environment plays a direct role in the forming of children's opinions about groups of people. As researchers have reported over the last eighty years, it is essential to examine how social and political contexts impact the way children interpret race (Davis et. al., 2007; Horowitz & Horowitz, 1938; Mac Naughton & Davis, 2009; O'Loughlin, 2001). The fear is if children's thoughts on race and racial identities are left unchallenged, "the silence of racism that produces these 'racial' understandings, preferences, and awareness" (Mac Naughton & Davis, 2009, p. 29) may continue to grow and impact generations of children to come. If never addressed, children's racial assumptions and prejudiced beliefs likely remain into adulthood.

The Field of Sociology

According to Hirschfield (1995), psychologists for much of the 20th century overlooked examining the idea of race and children's notions of it. Instead, psychologists tended to assess either cognitive potential (Hirschfield, 1995) or racial identity. Using the perspective of sociology, which studies the behavior of people, groups, and society (American Sociological Association, n.d.), Hirschfield (1995) examined the racial categorization of 109 three, four, and seven year old children and how they came to understand race. In his study, the children were shown pictures that differed both in their physique as well as racially (Hirschfield, 1995). After asking the children to match the images, Hirschfield (1995) found that the majority of children matched racially, according to skin tone, and not through other attributes like size. Referencing Sugarman (1983), Hirschfield (1995) stated, "young children find color a particularly salient

dimension on which to sort objects" (p. 226). This statement differed somewhat from what other researchers had found.

While Aboud (1988) concurred that young children sort or categorize people, she noted that the children used more than just skin color to make their groupings. In this instance, children used other physical characteristics, such as people's shapes, noses, or clothing. However, Aboud (1988) and Ramsey (1987) found that while children did sort individuals according to racial features, children were less likely to see the features as static (Ramsey, 1987). Instead, the children tended to expect racial features, such as skin color, to fluctuate (Ramsey, 1987). In some respects, young preschool-aged children's ability to view race as more fluid actually aligned with a more accurate view of the categorization of racial groups and their continuously changing identities.

In Van Ausdale and Feagin's (2002) *The First R: How Children Learn Race and Racism*, the researchers conducted an ethnographic study of 58 children, ages three-to-six years old. During the 11-month study, the researchers found that not only were young children aware of racial and ethnic markers or characteristics, but they used it in order to gain control over other children in the class. The young children enacted the same racial hierarchy found in society in their classroom, which privileged white children over children of color (Van Ausdale & Feagin, 2002). During the researchers' observations of the children's interactions, they noted some children had a more nuanced understanding of race. In particular, the four African American children in the class seemed to be more interested in examining the range of skin tones within racial groups as well as understanding the notion of mixed or biracial heritage (Van Ausdale & Feagin, 2002). This study helped shed light on young children's examination and enactment of their understanding of race and its impact on society.

The Field of Education

Because the scholarship shows that young children can establish racial prejudice and bias at a young age (Aboud, 2008; Patterson & Bigler, 2006; Tatum, 1997; Van Ausdale & Feagin, 2001; Winkler, 2009), it is increasingly important to explore the role education has in helping to challenge some of the biases children may have. Although talking about race and racism is difficult for adults, not talking about it perpetuates the inequitable racial system that has existed in American society since the middle of the 18th century. Additionally, if the aim of education is to help individuals select their own pathways in life (Noddings, 2003), then social, political, historical, and cultural influences must be unpacked to ensure all individuals are given an opportunity to pursue their dreams. This study focused on how young children come to understand race within social justice teaching as a way to, not only provide a more accurate depiction of historical events, but also in hopes of reducing racial misconceptions and aggressions in future generations.

Exploring Race through Social Justice Teaching

Numerous scholars have researched and discussed the implications, some of which are long lasting, of a school's curriculum (Apple, 2004; Ayers, Hunt, & Quinn, 1998; Goodwin, 2010; Greene, 1995; Hackman, 2005; Pinar, 2004, 2011; Tyack, 1974). According to Goodwin (2010), the curriculum not only contains information about a specific subject and how to teach it, but also determines the type of information provided to students. This means that the curriculum shapes students' knowledge about the world around them by simply including or excluding particular individuals or groups from it or, for example, as a mechanism for distorting the information to downplay the depiction of violence towards particular communities (Brown & Brown, 2010; Goodwin, 2010; Heilig, Brown, & Brown, 2012). Additionally, there has been a prevalence "to begin

stories with 'once upon a time' and end with 'happily ever after'' (Bouette, 2012, p. 516) in the early elementary years. Dominating the literature, and subsequently the curricula, with only positive fictional messages, fails to address the reality and societal inequities that many children face on a daily basis (Bouette, 2012).

In an attempt to make the curriculum more realistic and relatable, learning about injustices, such as racism, is not only essential but also foundational for a curriculum that is more inclusive of diverse racial, linguistic, and socioeconomic groups (Bettez & Hytten, 2011). A curriculum that includes multicultural perspectives can empower students to become more active participants in their own education while simultaneously granting teachers the ability to create lessons that are "empowering, democratic, and critical" (Bettez & Hytten, 2011, p. 2). According to Picower's (2012) framework, there should be six elements of social justice education in elementary classrooms. Element one, self-love and knowledge, focuses on having the students learn historical information to build upon their background knowledge (Picower, 2012). An important aspect of element one involves providing historical information to students that illustrates the strength and resilience of historically marginalized communities instead of casting them as victims. Element two, respect of others, addresses empathy and concerns about being unfair (Picower, 2012). Element three, issues of social justice, exposes the historical and current issues impacting people and their identities (Picower, 2012). Element four, social movements and change, focuses on how communities worked to fight oppressive conditions through different movements (Picower, 2012). Element five, awareness rising, raises students' awareness of the various social issues in the past as well as present day (Picower, 2012). Element six, social action, encourages students to become active members of social change (Picower, 2012). Unlike previous frameworks, where one level is considered better than another, Picower (2012) clarifies that all six elements of her

framework were meant to build upon the other in order to provide the necessary prior knowledge for students to develop a more thorough understanding of the world (Picower, 2012). Picower (2012) expects these elements to be taught over the course of a school year.

Picower's (2012) social justice framework aligns exceptionally well with Tyson and Park's (2008) work concerning teaching social justice in the social studies curriculum. Tyson and Park (2008) explain "democracy, equality, and civic participation" (p. 29) are essential components of a social studies curriculum. In fact, the National Council for the Social Studies' (NCSS) *College, Career, and Civic Life (C3) Framework for Social Studies State Standards* lists civics as one of its four main overarching concepts while intertwining democracy and equality throughout the document. These three components, which are underlying foundational ideas in social studies, were also addressed in each of Picower's (2012) six elements. Like Picower, numerous researchers have advocated to teach social studies, and civic education in particular, by beginning with issues of racial injustice and ending with the ideals of equity and fairness (Daniels, 2011; Howard, 2003; Tyson & Park, 2008). Both Tyson and Park (2008) as well as Picower (2012) explicitly state that curriculum has to be altered to include inequities as a core component and not as an afterthought (Picower, 2012; Tyson & Park, 2008).

When the stories and lived experiences of communities of color are moved to the forefront of the curriculum, then the curriculum is expanded to include multiple perspectives and viewpoints. For instance, Dever, Sorenson, and Broderick (2005) described how picture books helped second grade students respond to issues of social injustice. Utilizing literature as a way to gain entry into more challenging topics, Dever et al. (2005) found that once young elementary children were exposed to social justice issues through storytelling, they exhibited more empathy. Additionally, Husband (2012)

also advocated for realigning the curriculum to address issues of social justice, especially race, with young children. Husband (2012) considered the realignment of the curriculum to include perspectives, which are often omitted, as a first step in creating a curriculum that is anti-bias. In his study, Husband (2012) provided several examples such as asking questions after reading books like *The Story of Ruby Bridges* (Cole, 1995) or discussing the so-called "flesh color" of Band-Aids when sharing different ways educators or young children can embed discussions about race into their classrooms. Doucet and Adair (2013) echoed this sentiment by discussing the need for early childhood educators to not only acknowledge that children notice race but also the necessity of holding open conversations in order to encourage equity. In their article, Doucet and Adair (2013) explained how popular approaches in early childhood, such as color-blindness or celebrating diversity, were embraced by many educators of young children and noted how anti-racist or social justice teaching "represent an evolution of the celebration of diversity approach" (p. 91). Specifically using examples highlighting skin color, Doucet and Adair (2013) shared how the discussion of race is aligned with a social justice and/or anti-racist teaching framework.

Like Dever et al. (2005), numerous educators and researchers alike have utilized literature as a way to address race through social justice teaching. By incorporating diverse literature, educators are able to create critical encounters for readers, prompting them to seek more information about the event or circumstance that surprised or shocked them (Appleman, 2000; DeNicolo & Fránquiz, 2006). By first portraying the information through texts and then helping the students not only decipher the information but also research more about the topics, educators can support learning about race through social justice teaching without feeling overwhelmed over how to introduce the topic. Langer (1995) refers to transacting with the text as envisionment building. When students are

given the possibility to walk alongside the characters in the text, make meaning, or apply the situation to previous experiences, then they are able to form a deeper connection and, subsequently, gain a better understanding of the information. The students' envisionment continues to shift when they encounter new or unfamiliar information in order to help make sense of the world around them.

Several studies have highlighted the impact of teaching about race in elementary classrooms. Schaffer & Skinner (2009) analyzed the type of interactions that occurred when fourth grade students were given the opportunity to discuss race alongside their examination of societal issues. The authors of this ethnographic study found some students participated in these difficult conversations more than others. This led the researchers to advocate for properly preparing students to have challenging and sometimes uncomfortable conversations about race. Like Picower (2012), Schaffer and Skinner's (2009) study encouraged learning about the background knowledge prior to engaging in raising social justice awareness in others or enacting projects to promote social action.

In 1999, Tyson noted that fifth-grade African American males in her study tended to relate to the realistic fiction she brought into the classroom instead of the "traditional" stories about the *Three Little Pigs* or *Little Red Riding Hood*. By bringing in literature that ignited the students' interest, Tyson (1999) garnered more sophisticated responses to the children's literature. Moreover, the boys' ability to walk alongside the characters (Langer, 1995) helped them not only comprehend larger societal injustices but also reflect on their own lived experiences. Through the use of children's literature, Tyson (1999) and others found children gained a deeper sense of issues and were not only able to respond but often moved towards more social action oriented activities (DeNicolo & Fránquiz, 2006; Dever et al., 2005; Kemple, Lee, & Harris, 2015).

Like Tyson, Hefflin (2002) also utilized literature as a way to link students' lives and experiences to the curriculum. While Tyson (1999) highlighted one classroom of fifth grade boys, Hefflin's (2002) study focused on African American students in kindergarten through eighth grade. Through deliberate and careful planning, Hefflin (2002) noted students were able to make text-to-self and text-to-world connections when the curriculum addressed issues the students experienced in their daily lives. Also integrating literature, Bolgatz (2010) analyzed how fifth graders discussed race within lessons on the Revolutionary War. Similar to the previous studies, Bolgatz (2010) found the students' understanding of the implications of race were well developed and thoughtful.

In a second grade classroom, Rogers and Mosley (2006) utilized books within guided reading groups to discuss race and ultimately social justice. Rogers and Mosley (2006) highlighted how when given the opening, students in the classroom openly shared their thoughts and observations about race in the text. Literature was the vehicle to having conversations based on race and inequities (Rogers and Mosley, 2006). Although the study only followed 10 students participating in guided reading groups, the researchers were able to capture numerous examples of how children not only talk about race but also their understanding to how it relates to social justice (Rogers and Mosley, 2006). Emphasizing the importance of embedding social realities into children's literature and classroom discussions, Tyson and Park (2006) discussed how sharing about historical inequities is needed in social justice teaching. Noticeably, the researchers included examples of books addressing race, class, and ability (Tyson & Park, 2006). The use of intersecting constructs highlighted how topics, such as race, class, and gender, can be taken up in classrooms in order to address issues of social justice. Kemple, Lee, and Harris (2015) also advocated for the use of children's literature in order to begin

conversations about race with three-to five-year-old children. Like other early childhood scholars, Kemple, Lee, and Harris (2015) acknowledged the continued lack of research directly speaking to race and outlined how they were able to do so with young children through the use of literature.

While observing a fourth-grade classroom, Chapman (2007) also noted understanding the impact of race and racism is essential for educators to think about when planning lessons. In the article, Chapman (2007) described how a lesson focusing on students' lineage immediately alienated several students of color who were unable to trace their familial lines. Chapman (2007) insisted the themes within stories and underlying assumptions must be thoroughly examined and CRT was one method educators could use to do so. For example, Bouette, Lopez-Robinson, and Powers-Costello (2011), examined second graders' drawings about racism to highlight how young children were not colorblind but aware of race and skin color and its impact. In all of the studies (Bouette et al. 2011; Chapman, 2007; Husband, 2012), the notion of race as being part of everyday society was important for the educators and students to acknowledge in order to discuss how it impacted their lives on a daily basis and not just historically.

In 2005, Yosso challenged a traditional view of communities of color as having cultural deficits, which supported the idea that school curricula needed to teach students of color the values and beliefs of the Eurocentric middle and wealthy members of society. Instead, Yosso (2005) advocated for an alternative view of communities of color called "community cultural wealth" (p. 70) where the knowledge and practices of these communities were respected and embraced as part of the schooling. Floyd and Herbert's (2010) article also built upon embracing the knowledge and experiences of communities of color. For instance, the researchers shared a story about an African American male

kindergartener asking about the type of occupations he could hold as an adult because he never saw himself portrayed in the literature (Floyd & Herbert, 2010). After being challenged to find books with images of people of color, the teacher began to incorporate more books featuring people of color to provide examples of different groups of people working in various fields (Floyd & Herbert, 2010).

However, Floyd and Herbert (2010) weren't the only researchers to challenge the current inequitable curriculum portraying a one-side or flattened narrative of students. Wood and Jocuis (2013) provided a vignette at the beginning of their article about another African American male questioning the type of texts he had been exposed to during school. Listening to the student, Wood and Jocuis (2013) proceeded to provide additional literary resources to engage more students of color, and African American males in particular, by seeing themselves and their communities depicted in a positive light. While researchers have challenged curriculum materials and their power over what students know about the world, researchers, like McCall (2004), also advocate for teaching educators the importance of examining the curriculum in order to infuse cultural diversity and social justice into it. In particular, McCall (2004) utilized poetry as a way to help her pre-service teachers learn how to expose students to a variety of viewpoints that may differ from their own.

Additionally, Labadie, Wetzel, and Rogers (2012) discussed how a second grade classroom utilized children's literature as a way to begin conversations on race. Like the studies involving older students, the researchers (Labadie, Wetzel, & Rogers, 2012) found a deliberate book choice was necessary to highlight the "understanding of race and inequality by exploring movements towards social justice" (p. 119). In order to analyze the students' thoughts, the researchers examined how students were impacted by the images in the picture book as well as the storyline (Labadie, Wetzel, & Rogers, 2012).

Furthermore, Tobin's (2000) analysis of young children discussing the media also shed light onto the intersectionality of race, class, and gender through conversations about who the children deemed were good or bad guys. While the seven and eight year olds in Tobin's study were not always able to explain why they tended to associate communities of color with the bad guys, Tobin (2000) reflected on their conversations and even revisited the discussion in order to understand how popular media impacted children.

Aiming to provide more perspectives into elementary social studies, Bolgatz (2005) worked with fifth grade students to highlight how teachers can hold discussions about historical events, such as the Revolutionary War, and the racial implications associated with it. Additionally, Rolling (2008) demonstrated how special areas, such as art, could also play a role in examining the intersectionality of race and property through drawings. By providing a more in-depth look at the curriculum through the inclusion of the lived experiences of communities of color, the intersectionality of race and property can be analyzed to help students develop a more critical understanding of their country and the world.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

In reviewing the notion that childhood innocence is a myth (Berstein, 2011) and the fact children not only acknowledge race but also begin to form biased and prejudiced thoughts by age seven (Davis et. al. (2007; Goodman, 1964; Mac Naughton & Davis, 2009; Tatum, 1997), I am reminded of the importance of addressing this topic with young elementary-aged students. As Jane Lane (2008) said, "Countering racism and ensuring racial equality in the early years is a process, not a one-off activity. It must be strategic and planned for in order to be effective" (p. 285). This means in order to effectively address race in young classrooms, educators have to be willing to provide the space for children to explore the complexities of it.

After reviewing the literature on the formation of race and racial identities as well as the theoretical considerations of teaching about race, there have been numerous studies depicting positive results, such as increased student engagement (Paley, 1998; Tyson, 1999), linking people of color to diverse occupations (Floyd & Herbert, 2010), and an awareness of race and its connection to ethical issues (Bouette et. al, 2011). For instance, the utilization of children's literature to facilitate conversations was a common practice enacted by researchers to provide a launching point for discussions about race (Chapman, 2007; Floyd & Herbert, 2010; McCall, 2004; Tyson, 1999). Also, the ability to align conversations about social justice and race with the required subject matter, especially in social studies and language arts (Chapman, 2007; Bolgatz, 2005; Floyd & Herbert, 2010; Husband, 2012; Tyson & Park, 2008; Wood, 2013) was a popular strategy to help ensure older students attending public schools were able to have these types of discussions while simultaneously meeting the required curriculum (Picower, 2011).

Perhaps one of the oldest, and most well-known, advocates for discussing race with young children was Vivian Paley (1998, 2000). In Paley's (2000) *White Teacher*, she openly discussed how she addressed race and racism with young students. Throughout the book, Paley (2000) shared her experiences as a White educator teaching a diverse group of children and how she had to address race if she wished to truly reach all of her students. However, *White Teacher* (Paley, 2000) was not Paley's only work addressing race with young children. In *The Girl with the Brown Crayon*, Paley (1998) highlighted how Reeny, an African American kindergartener, dealt with the intersectionality of race, class, and gender through the reading of Leo Lionni's books. In both texts, Paley (1998, 2000) was able to depict the importance of not only acknowledging race, but also recognizing how young children make sense of it.

Although there have been some studies in early childhood that focus on race, I have found there is a gap in the literature on interdisciplinary discussions and classroom activities based on race and its connection to social justice. For instance, though Rogers and Mosley (2006) explicitly discussed race to explore the concept of social justice with second grade students, they focused solely on how the racial construction impacted white children's understandings of literacy. In particular, they wanted to study how literacy acceleration occurred when students dealt with whiteness and race. While my study proposes to build upon Rogers and Mosley's (2006) research, it differs due to its focus on examining children's construction of race and the way it is taken up by students of different racial backgrounds.

The study I propose extends this scholarship on race by examining what young children discuss when given the freedom to talk about race but also to enact racial projects through interdisciplinary social justice teaching. When analyzing *Reading Teacher*, a literacy journal many elementary practitioners reference for continued professional learning, 104 out of 207, or roughly 50%, of the articles from September 2012 to January 2015 utilized children's literature. However, out of the 104 articles, only nine, or roughly 11.5%, explicitly mentioned race with students. While the majority of these articles incorporated race, they failed to directly discuss it within the study or article. Instead, race was merely utilized as a category but not as a teaching tool or explicitly addressed. Only a few of the published studies explicitly focused on addressing race as part of the curriculum to discuss social justice and systemic inequities in a democratic society. Although there are a plethora of reasons why articles addressing race have been left out, some possibilities may be due to the editors or peer-reviewers' preference as well as researchers' comfort level with addressing race (Miller & Harris, 2004). This in turn can attribute to the low percentage of studies specifically addressing

race and push the concept to the margins of the curriculum, where it is overlooked or ignored.

In addition to analyzing the elementary literacy journal, the elementary social studies practitioner journal was also examined to see if articles utilized children's literature as a way to address about race through social justice teaching. From 2010 to 2014, 72 out of 135, or roughly 55%, of the articles in *Social Studies and the Young Learner* referenced children's literature. Of those articles featuring children's literature, only 14, or 5%, specifically addressed race as well as social justice. This lack of practitioner-based articles specifically addressing issues of race as a bridge to social justice teaching in elementary schools indicates the need for not only this proposed study but many more.

This study is significant to the field of early childhood, social studies, and literacy for two reasons. First, by highlighting the conversations that occur during racial projects, the study will specifically demonstrate how young elementary aged students engage in conversations about race. Secondly, since the study has students engage in racial projects as part of social justice teaching, educators will be able to follow the framework provided in order to teach similar units in their own classrooms. For the purposes of this study, the racial projects will consist of three specific curriculum phases. The three curriculum phases are (1) analyzing similarities and differences, (2) promoting the "everydayness" of communities of color (Holt, 1995), and (3) examining history. While addressing similarities and differences is commonly applied in early childhood classrooms (Robinson, 2006), this proposed curriculum contains information that goes beyond having children simply learn about themselves, their families, and how people are alike or different. To avoid creating generalizations, the content of the curriculum expanded in order to capture the complexities of race and depict the "everydayness" of communities

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of color (Holt, 1995). It is the day-to-day interactions within and throughout communities of color that were examined in order to acknowledge the multitude of experiences individuals aligning to the same racial group experience on a daily basis (Holt, 1995; Yosso, 2005). Along with exploring the everydayness of communities of color (Holt, 1995), the third phase followed Picower (2012) and Tyson and Park's (2008) sentiments on addressing inequities first and present historical inequities while depicting the resistance from communities of color.

Analyzing Similarities & Differences	Promoting the "Everydayness" of Communities of Color (Holt, 1995)	Examining History o Ancient Africa o Slavery & Resistance o Civil Rights Movement o Present Day

Table 1. Three Phases of Addressing Race in Early Elementary Classrooms

In conclusion, this research addresses the call for more direct instruction and conversations on race in both early childhood and elementary social studies. By focusing on multiple phases of how race enters in the early elementary classroom, the study sheds light on how early elementary educators' instruction addresses race in their standards-based public school curriculum. Secondly, the study captures authentic conversations and thoughts from young students about race and its relationship to social justice. Data generated from classroom conversations, student interviews as well as classwork highlight the impact open conversations on race have on young elementary students' understanding of race and social justice.

Chapter Three: Methodology

The purpose of this study was to analyze how primary aged elementary students in kindergarten and first grade conceptualize their understanding of race while being exposed to a curriculum rooted in social justice. The study utilized the theoretical frameworks of Social Justice (North, 2006, 2008) and Critical Race Theory (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995) to examine the data collected from the students. Critical case study was employed as a means to illuminate how the participants not only reacted to particular situations but also the way they comprehended a social phenomenon, like race (Merriam, 2009). By utilizing critical case study with ethnographic methods, the data analysis provided a "thick description" (Geertz, 1973, p. 5) of the participants, the sites, and their interactions in order to address each of the research questions and to determine if any patterns emerged from the data. In particular, the study aimed to answer the following questions below:

- How do young elementary students (K-1st grade) discuss race during interdisciplinary social studies and language arts lessons?
- What understandings of race do young elementary students (K-1st grade) demonstrate when engaged in racial projects?

OVERVIEW OF QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

Qualitative research can encompass several different paradigms. Since qualitative data provides context intertwined with data, it helps to depict the whole picture and not an isolated segment of it. In addition, critical qualitative data analysis allows individuals to expand upon the notion of one truth and the knowledge privileged in society (Mertens, 2010). It is with this understanding of how individuals see the world that I conducted my research. According to Marshall and Rossman (2011), critical paradigms not only assume

knowledge is subjective, but that it is "conflictual and oppressive" (p. 21). Since research aligning with a more critical stance begins with assumptions about power structures and inequity, it is important to analyze the initial research questions that are being asked as well as recognize that these questions may change throughout the process of data collection (Marshall, 1997; Scheurich, 1997) by illustrating how people interact in their natural environment. Qualitative research helped to answer the questions in this study and illustrated how people interact in their natural environment.

CRITICAL CASE STUDY

Critical case study is a methodology where the researcher guides readers to construct their own understandings through the use of descriptive analysis (Janesick, 2004). The participants in critical case studies are often viewed as "a constellation of individuals [within a classroom] rather than as a group" (Janesick, 2004, p. 33). Seeing the participants as individuals who each bring their own truths about the world (Mertens, 2010) and to classroom activities is helpful in providing a deeper understanding of how each participant constructs his or her understanding of race and its impact on society. It is the combination of these outlooks and understandings that impact the classroom. By reviewing classrooms in the primary grades - specifically kindergarten and first grade - I was able to find the commonalities that exist in the primary grades when enacting racial projects with young elementary school-aged children.

According to Janesick (2004), there are four elements that a critical case study must contain. The four elements are:

1. Who: Explain who the individual is and what the immediate setting looks like.
2. Why: Describe why you chose that particular student, why you are doing the study, and what changes you propose making at the conclusion of the study.

3. How: Discuss how and where you are going to conduct the study, what questions you will use, and how you are going to develop some assumptions that you will interpret.

4. Where: Describe the political context of the classroom, the school, the family, and the immediate community. (Janesick, 2004, p.36-37)

In the subsequent sub-headings of this chapter, I have provided a rationale for each of the required elements to further support selecting critical case study as the methodology for this study.

WHO: SETTING THE CONTEXT OF THE STUDY

Participant Overview

As noted earlier, the participants in this study attended urban public schools in two different regions of the United Sates. The first grade participants that attend Faircrest Elementary[16] live in the southwestern region whereas the kindergarten participants that attend Glendale School[17] reside in the northeastern region. In both instances, the participants, who are early elementary students, were recruited to participate in the study through the use of snowball sampling. Since a previous relationship was already built between the researcher and the primary grade teachers at Faircrest and Glendale, the recruitment of potential student participants as well as gaining entry into the classrooms was easier.

Prior to beginning the study, the teachers and administration were first contacted and asked if they were interested in joining the study. Once there was initial interest, then a formal letter was sent home with each of the students in the teachers' classrooms. In addition, the Faircrest teacher explained the project to parents at the Open House night.

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[16] The southwestern school name is fictional in order to keep the school, teacher, and students anonymous.
[17] The northeastern school name is fictional in order to keep the school, teacher, and students anonymous.

Since Open House had already passed at Glendale before I began my study there, the Glendale kindergarten teachers sent the information home with the students. Both Faircrest and Glendale teachers provided students' parents with the researcher's contact information to the students' parents in case they had additional questions. In order to accept, participants, students' parents or guardians had to sign the parental consent form. In addition to the parent consent, students' verbal assent was also necessary in order to become a participant in the study.

Faircrest Elementary Participants

The Faircrest student participants, who were all six or seven years old, lived in suburban neighborhoods located in a metropolitan city. Although Faircrest Elementary students resided in mostly suburban neighborhoods, the majority of the school was designated as "economically disadvantaged" by the state's education agency. Since Faircrest was a traditional public school, the students who attended it all lived within the school's zoning area.

During the 2014-2015 school year, there were four first grade classrooms at Faircrest. While there were four classrooms, due to researcher limitations, such as time and resources needed, this study focused on only one of the first grade classrooms in the school. The chart below indicates the gender and racial demographics of the first grade classroom participants.

Race	Males	Females
Asian Pacific Islander	-	-
Black or African American	4	-
Latino	4	3
Multi-racial	-	1
White	4	3

Table 2. This table displays the racial and gender demographics of the first grade

participants in the study.

The table above shows that the first grade classroom consisted of a racially diverse group of children. While the majority of students were students of color, their racial and ethnic backgrounds were quite diverse and may have impacted their differing perspectives due to different life experiences.

Glendale Participants

The Glendale School participants resided in urban neighborhoods within a metropolitan city. The majority of the participants arrived at school by bus or as walkers. Out of the 270 students that were in the primary grades (prekindergarten through third grade) during the 2014-2015 school year, approximately 211 of the students (78%) were considered economically disadvantaged according to the state education agency.[18] Children from prekindergarten to eighth grade attended Glendale School, however, this study only followed participants in two of the primary grade level (PK-3rd grade) classrooms. The grade level breakdown of the Glendale participants is as follows:

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[18] Taken from http://www.p12.nysed.gov/irs/statistics/enroll-n-staff/home.html

Grade Level	# of Participating Classrooms
Kindergarten	2

Table 3. This table displays the grade level and number of classrooms involved the study

at Glendale.

Since the Glendale participants were enrolled in kindergarten, their ages range from five to six years. The Glendale participants' racial and ethnicity breakdown was largely African American and was representative of the overall student racial demographic at Glendale for the 2014-2015 academic school year. Listed below are the 2014-2015 racial/ethnic numbers for the kindergarten grade level participants.

Race	Males	Females
Asian Pacific Islander	-	-
Black or African American	3	4
Latino	-	-
Multi-racial	-	-
White	2	-

Table 4. This table displays the racial and gender demographics of the prekindergarten

and kindergarten participants in the study.

Depending upon the classroom, the Glendale participants' peer interactions differed. While both of the classrooms did encourage collaboration, depending upon the teacher, the extent to which time was allotted for peer interaction differed drastically within the grade level. This variability was accounted for during the analysis and findings sections of the dissertation.

School Context

Although both schools were classified as urban, there were only a few similarities between them. First, Faircrest Elementary and Glendale School had a majority population of students of color at 69.7% and 96% respectively.[19] This demographic aligned with the national milestone that was reached in 2014 where the number of students of color attending public schools were now the majority of students.[20] Secondly, following another national trend, the racial/ethnic make-up of Faircrest and Glendale's teaching population was predominately White.[21] Lastly, both schools had a large amount of students who receive free and reduced lunch, which served as an indicator of socioeconomic status. During the 2013-2014 school year, the majority of students at Faircrest Elementary were designated "economically disadvantaged" by the state education agency.[22] Similarly, 85% of Glendale's total student population was considered

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[19] Racial/Ethnic Population of schools taken from
http://ritter.tea.state.tx.us/cgi/sas/broker?_service=marykay&year4=2014&year2=14&_debug=0&single=N&title=2014+Texas+Academic+Performance+Reports&_program=perfrept.perfmast.sas&prgopt=2014%2Ftapr%2Ftapr.sas&ptype=P&level=campus&search=campname&namenum=cunningham&campus=227901113 and self-reporting from Glendale School

[20] http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d13/tables/dt13_203.50.asp

[21] Racial/Ethnic Demographic of teachers taken from
http://ritter.tea.state.tx.us/cgi/sas/broker?_service=marykay&year4=2014&year2=14&_debug=0&single=N&title=2014+Texas+Academic+Performance+Reports&_program=perfrept.perfmast.sas&prgopt=2014%2Ftapr%2Ftapr.sas&ptype=P&level=campus&search=campname&namenum=cunningham&campus=227901113 and self-reporting at Glendale School

[22] Taken from
http://ritter.tea.state.tx.us/cgi/sas/broker?_service=marykay&year4=2014&year2=14&_debug=0

to be "economically disadvantaged" during the 2014-2015 academic year. So, both schools faced a racial/ethnic as well as a socioeconomic mismatch between the majority of the student population and their teachers.

Overall, this study focused on participants in one first grade classroom at Faircrest and participants in two kindergarten classrooms at Glendale. Although the study focused on the students, the classroom context including information about the classroom teachers was thoroughly examined along with the student data to better understand the conversations that occurred within the everyday activities of the classrooms. So, while the study did not focus on the teachers, it highlighted the ways teachers overcome racial and economic barriers to present culturally responsive teaching methods (Gay, 2002) through the use of a curriculum rooted in social justice.

Description of Faircrest Elementary

Faircrest Elementary served students in prekindergarten through fifth grade. It has been a neighborhood school since it opened in 1962.[23] The school building has undergone several renovations since its inception and was now a single story brick building with five wings. The front access of the school houses the main office, which contained the school administrative offices, cafeteria, gymnasium, nurse's office, bathrooms, and library. In the hallway where the library was situated, the building was split into two paths. One path led to the kindergarten and first grade classrooms. The other path led to the second and third grade classrooms. Between the two hallways was a courtyard where different plants and flowers grow. Inside the courtyard, there were two benches placed near different colorful plants and flowers. The courtyard was completely surrounded by the

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&single=N&title=2014+Texas+Academic+Performance+Reports&_program=perfrept.perfmast.s as&prgopt=2014%2Ftapr%2Ftapr.sas&ptype=P&level=campus&search=campname&namenum= cunningham&campus=227901113

[23] Information is taken from https://cunninghamcobras.wordpress.com/about/

school building. The paths that were along either side of the courtyard intersected with the hallway that led to the fourth and fifth grade wing. Figure A shows the entire layout of the school building and also contains a star indicating where the first grade classroom participants were housed within the school.
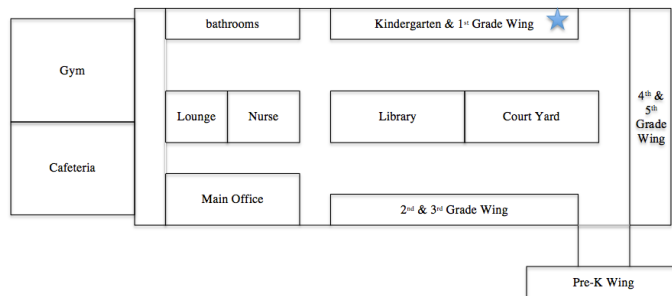
Figure 1. The diagram above is a map of Faircrest Elementary School. The pilot participants' classroom is denoted with a star.

While the school was mostly enclosed, with the exception of the prekindergarten wing, the majority of the interaction between students and staff at Faircrest was with the other students and staff housed within their wing. So, the participants in this study interacted with other first grade and kindergarten students more often than the rest of the school building simply due to their location. Also, since the classrooms were located within a wing or pod that had to be entered, the amount of people who passed by the classroom during instructional times was greatly diminished. A sense of solitude, from the lack of individuals walking by the room, was accounted for during the data analysis.

According to the school's website, Faircrest Elementary's mission states that the school aims to prepare students for success both academically as well as socially, and emotionally. In addition, the school website listed four goals the administration and staff were working towards achieving. All four goals were centered on academic outcomes and preparing students for college and careers. The results from the 2013-2014 school

reporting data, showed that Faircrest was designated a "Met Standard" school meaning that the school achieved the desired outcomes from the testing data.[24] This designation from the state education agency was the highest level a public school could receive that year. The only other possible designations public schools in this state could receive were improvement required or not related. By receiving this designation, the teachers gained a greater say in their daily lessons and no longer had to solely teach the district's lessons now that their students performed better on the standardized state examinations. Letting teachers plan their own lessons granted them freedom to deepen the content knowledge that they were required by law to teach.

In addition to posting the goals and mission statement of Faircrest Elementary on the school website, the administration and staff often referenced it when planning lessons or discussing academic achievement with colleagues. Since the elementary school aimed to prepare its students with a "global perspective", the teachers spent a large amount of time discussing different cultures and providing enrichment activities to help the children understand differing opinions and viewpoints. The school administration was aware of and supported the teachers' efforts to provide spaces for more diverse perspectives to enter the classroom curriculum. In fact, the principal of Faircrest planned faculty meetings and new teacher professional development sessions on exploring the impact of race and culture and was considered one of the district's leaders for their cultural proficiency initiative. This type of support from the leader of the school led to more interactive and inquiry-based lessons on contentious topics, such as race.

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[24] Taken from
http://ritter.tea.state.tx.us/cgi/sas/broker?_service=marykay&year4=2014&year2=14&_debug=0
&single=N&title=2014+Texas+Academic+Performance+Reports&_program=perfrept.perfmast.s
as&prgopt=2014%2Ftapr%2Ftapr.sas&ptype=P&level=campus&search=campname&namenum=
cunningham&campus=227901113

Faircrest Classroom Teacher

The first grade classroom teacher in the study was in her first year of teaching at Faircrest. The teacher, who was a White female in her middle twenties, was not entirely new to education. She had previous experience working with a private preschool and also completed her teaching internships at public schools within the same district. The teacher, who will be referred to as Amy Bevo, was the newest addition to the first grade team. In all, there were four first grade teachers at Faircrest, three generalist classrooms and one bilingual classroom. With the exception of the arts, the teachers taught every subject to their students but collaboratively planned lessons together. Although Amy was primarily responsible for the math and science content, she was able to embed social justice oriented activities within the lessons her colleagues gave her.

Description of Glendale School

Glendale School is a prekindergarten through eighth grade school located in the northeast region of the United States. In 2014, the local school board combined the newly remodeled Glendale with another school. As its first year as a combined school, Glendale served approximately 609 students during the 2014-2015 school year.[25]

The combining of Glendale has offered a unique situation for the principal, who was moved from a local high school to oversee its transition. The principal of Glendale, who will be referred to as John Miller had to bring two different school faculties together to work towards a common goal. The merger of the two schools wasn't without its share of controversy (Desmond, 2014). Parents and some staff from the closing school did not want to combine with Glendale due to the students' low test scores on the state's mandated standardized tests in grades three through eight. However, the schools were

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[25] http://www.p12.nysed.gov/irs/statistics/enroll-n-staff/home.html

merged for the start of the 2014-2015 school year and the principal began to work on creating a faculty of one who supported each other and planned collaboratively.

Since Glendale was a renovated high school that was converted into a PK – 8th grade school, the building was quite large. The two-story brick building had three main areas for the different grade levels. The prekindergarten through third grade classrooms were all placed in the same corridor on the first floor of the building. The fourth grade classrooms were placed in a different corridor on the first floor of the building. The seventh and eighth grade classrooms were also located on the first floor of the school building on the opposite side of the school from the primary wing. The fifth and sixth grade classrooms were located on the second floor of the building. The main office, library, auditorium, and cafeteria were located in the front of the building on the first floor and separate the PK-3rd grade and 7th-8th grade classrooms. Listed below is a diagram of the first floor of Glendale School.

7th-8th Grade Hallway	Offices for coaches	Cafeteria	Pk-3rd Grade classrooms	Pk-3rd Grade Classrooms ★
			Computer Lab	
Gymnasium		Music	Auditorium	Media Center	Assistant Principal
4th Grade Classrooms		Main Office	Main Entry	Nurse	stairs
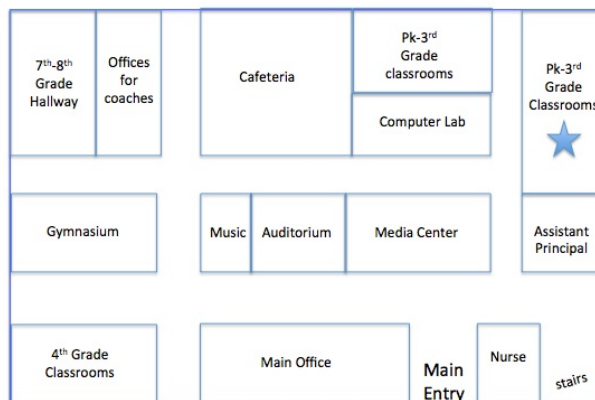
Figure 2. This is a diagram of Glendale School's first floor, which houses the study's participants in Prekindergarten - Kindergarten classrooms.

Considering this study focused on the kindergarten participants, the majority of the time spent observing students and their interactions during lessons was in the

students' assigned classrooms. Although all of the kindergarten grade classrooms were located in the same hallway, the students mainly interacted with peers in their own classrooms because their teachers taught all of the content areas except for art, music, and physical education.

Glendale School's mission statement has a strong emphasis on literacy and mathematics. The particular focus on math and literacy was due to the low test scores from the previous school years. Glendale was working to reform the instructional practices at the school in a response to the test scores that were lower than most of the schools not only in their area but also in the state (Desmond, 2014). During the 2013-2014 school year, Glendale was again listed on the school district's lowest performing schools list, so they were provided support to alter practices by working with an outside agency to turn around their school starting in November 2014.

The company that was the turnaround agent for Glendale school was the National Urban Alliance for Effective Education. This not-for-profit agency provided the teaching staff and administration with support to improve the teaching and retention of information for the students. Selected teachers in the different grades attended monthly professional development as well as provided opportunities for the consultant to work directly with their students. In addition, all of the teachers had the opportunity attend one Saturday professional development session each month. The classroom teachers were not required to attend the sessions, but did receive compensation if they choose to do so. Glendale's teacher participation during the weekday monthly trainings as well as on Saturdays was extremely high with more than 50% of the teaching staff reporting to the five monthly sessions.

Just as Glendale began to initially work with the National Urban Alliance to increase the academic success of students on state and district assessments, it was placed

on the state's receivership list. According to the 2015 report, Glendale was listed as a "Struggling School".[26] In order to be placed on this list, a school had to score in the bottom 5% of lowest performing schools in the state since the 2012-2013 academic school year.[28] According to state law, "struggling schools" were given approximately two years to indicate a large increase in their standardized test scores or they could be turned over to a not-for-profit organization, and individual, or another school district who would report directly to the state's Education Commissioner.[28] This type of scrutiny meant classroom teachers, particularly in grades three through eight, had to increase the outcomes on students' tests in order to avoid losing their positions. Although the study's participants were in the non-testing years, the impact of the state's scrutiny was evident across all grade levels by the increased walkthroughs and justification for deviating from the state's prescriptive language arts and mathematic modules. Adding a more in-depth learning experience for kindergarten students was certainly a risk the teachers in the study were not only willing to take but saw as important.

Glendale Classroom Teachers

During the 2015-2016 school year, both kindergarten classrooms had one licensed teacher and a part-time teaching assistant that would work between two different rooms. This meant that at times, the kindergarten teachers were the only adults in the classrooms.

The teachers, who will be referred to as Alicia Johnson and Lisa Howe, were two out of the three kindergarten teachers at Glendale. While there was a range of experience amongst the teaching staff, both of the classrooms in the study had teachers who taught for at least fourteen years and had received tenure (teacher interview, 2016). In addition, both of the teachers held valid certificates in order to teach (New York State Report Card,

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[26] http://www.nysed.gov/news/2015/commissioner-elia-identifies-144-struggling-and-persistently-struggling-schools-begin

2015). So, the teachers whose classrooms were part of this study were all considered qualified to teach at the elementary school level.

Like Ms. Bevo, the first grade teacher at Faircrest, Mrs. Johnson and Mrs. Howe were also responsible for teaching all of the subject areas except art, music, and physical education. Since the teachers taught all of the core curriculum, i.e. language arts, mathematics, science, social studies, they had to plan for each area. Unlike the first grade at Faircrest, the kindergarten teachers did not collaboratively plan as a team. While some of their lessons were similar due to the standardized curriculum that was provided for the teachers, their classroom environments were quite different. Mrs. Johnson created a more collaborative classroom where students often would get together to work as a class community, whereas Mrs. Howe's classroom tended to work individually or, at times, in pairs. Given this difference, the planning of the lessons and the way the teachers taught the interdisciplinary unit on race differed somewhat,

WHY: RATIONALE FOR THE STUDY AND PARTICIPANT SELECTION

As previously stated, the purpose of the study was to examine how children conceptualized race within a social justice curriculum. While much had been written on children's racial and ethnic identity formations (Omi & Winant, 1994), there had yet to be an in-depth look into how children take up race when granted the space to do so in the early elementary grades. Considering this study focused on students engaging in a social justice-oriented curriculum and discussing race, it was important for the researcher to be present in the classroom quite often.

In order to locate possible sites, snowball sampling (Mertens, 2010) was enacted for this study. Due to my previous relationships working with several schools and teachers, I already was welcomed at both school sites. My relationship with Faircrest Elementary administration and teachers began a year prior to the study when I conducted

research with a fifth grade teacher. From working with the fifth grade teacher, I was able to get to know the principal and was eventually invited to hold my social studies methods course at their school site. As for Glendale School, I first met the administration as part of a team to help led professional development on culturally responsive teaching. As a trainer, I worked with teachers in the primary grades and was often asked why I didn't do research with them when I would information about the research I was conducting. I explained that I would have to wait until I was no longer a trainer for their school. So, when there was an opportunity for me to ask if the school and any teachers were interested in working together on research, I did so. To participate in the study, the classroom teachers had to be willing to let more contentious conversations, such as race, be discussed in their rooms. While this study focused primarily on the young elementary students, the classroom teachers' willingness to hold such conversations as well as the teaching strategies they utilized to implement the content played an essential role in how the children discussed race.

Once possible teachers for the pilot and main study were identified, then I formally asked them if they were interested in joining my study. When the teachers agreed, I explained the need to gain parental permission in order for me to record the classroom lessons, take pictures of students' work, and interview selected students. Only when the teacher and the students/parents sign the consent/verbal assent forms were they included in the data. Since Faircrest Elementary was the pilot study, all of the consent/assent forms were signed and collected during the fall of 2014. All consent forms and verbal assent were distributed and collected during the fall of 2015 for Glendale School.

HOW: DATA COLLECTION

Pilot Study (Faircrest)

In order to understand how the first grade participants interacted with each other and the teacher (Cho & Trent, 2006), I visited the classroom at Faircrest one to two times a week for 2014-2015 school year. During my weekly data collection, I stayed in the classroom for approximately 2-3 hours at a time. In addition to the planned lesson observations, I observed the interactions between the students and participants during "unplanned" moments in the classroom, such as the time prior to the beginning of a lesson as well as arrival. By observing more than the planned lessons, I hoped to not only see how the participants comprehend social justice-oriented lessons, but also if the discussions occur outside of the planned academic timeframe.

Study Participants (Glendale)

Since I had previously visited the prekindergarten through third grade classrooms at Glendale School during the entire 2014-2015 school year, I was familiar with a large portion of the kindergarten students. My familiarity with the students and their teachers was helpful in maintaining a trusting rapport with them. Due to my previous interactions with the students, it did not take long before I was considered part of their classrooms.

I spent five months at Glendale School collecting data. Just as I spent an ample amount of time at the first grade study site, I did the same for these participants as well. Since there were two classrooms participating in the study, I spent about 1 ½ - 2 hours in each of the kindergarten grade classrooms. Since the racial projects were linked with social studies and literacy, I visited the classrooms primarily during their literacy and social studies blocks. Due to scheduling conflicts and sickness, I spent more time visiting Mrs. Johnson's kindergarten classroom than Mrs. Howe's kindergarten class. The time spent and data collected is discussed in the data analysis and findings sections.

METHODS FOR DATA COLLECTION

Qualitative research methods (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) were used to collect the following data sources for this study: field notes, artifacts from classroom lessons, and audio/video recorded interviews of the students. Data sources were used to triangulate patterns that emerged from the overall study (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). The data was analyzed inductively in three phases using a constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). In the first phase, I read, organized, and coded the data in relation to the research questions. Next, the data was revisited, specifically looking across the categories to combine and refine each category until I was confident that the themes selected accurately captured the patterns that emerged in the data. Finally, I returned to the data to reanalyze and recode the participants' data set based on the themes to develop a detailed report. There were four types of data gathered for this study:

1. **Individual interviews:** Interviews with selected participants occurred throughout the study to member check the data and ensure the validity of the information collected. Since the kindergarten and first grade students were interviewed, no interview lasted longer than 10 minutes. The interviews reviewed the artifacts that students created, discussed statements made by the students, or asked students for more clarifying information on their thoughts about social justice. The interviews were audio taped.

   Student Participant Interviews: In my pilot study, I interviewed eight (8) students twice. These students were selected because they interacted with me the most, showing that they felt comfortable, and were the most vocal in the class. In the main study, I interviewed seven (7) students three times. Like the pilot study, these students were selected because they either initiated conversations with me or were the most vocal during the unit. The reason the students were interviewed

one more additional time than the pilot study was because I often needed them to clarify what they meant when they wrote something or made a statement.

Classroom Teacher Interviews: All three teachers were interviewed at the beginning and end of the study. Each interview was approximately 20-30 minutes. In addition to the semi-structured interviews, the teachers would often share their thoughts with me during my classroom observations. Each of those additional interactions were recorded as field notes. The teacher semi-structured interviews consisted of questions such as the number of years they had taught, rationale for joining the study, what, if anything, they learned from the study, and whether they planned on continuing to teach the interdisciplinary unit in subsequent years.

2. **Observations:** Lesson observations were observed over a five-month timespan for the main study and an eight-month timespan for the pilot study. Lesson observations occurred during a 1 ½ - 3 hours timeframe depending upon the lesson's focus and activities that were planned for the students. During the lesson observations, I took field notes as well as audio/video recorded the lessons.

3. **Artifacts/Work Products:** Photos of the student work were taken to document their understandings how social justice teaching addressed race and gain a deeper insight into their thought out process on the racial projects. In some cases, the student work and videos were also taken from photos and videos posted by the teacher on their classroom Twitter site, which was only applicable to the pilot classroom at Faircrest.

4. **Field Notes:** Field notes were recorded during the lesson observations. The notes included diagrams, charts, questions, as well as details of how the lesson was conducted and the ways the students participated in the activities. Interview

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sessions were utilized to member check the field notes from observations (Cho & Trent, 2006).

CRITERIA FOR TRUSTWORTHINESS

Considering critical case study was the selected methodology for the study, it was important to examine the impact of sociocultural influences, namely political, social, and historical impacts, through the eyes of the study's participants. According to Erlandson, Harris, Skipper, & Allen (1993), the data collected by the researcher must be "reconstructed in a way acceptable to the respondent" (p. 25). It is through this member checking that the data collected could be triangulated to ensure that the information presented was accurate and not influenced by the researcher's own constructed reality. Lincoln and Guba (1985) indicated six steps needed to be taken to ensure the analysis is considered credible. Listed below is a brief synopsis of the steps taken to ensure the credibility of this study.

Prolonged engagement – As previously stated, I spent approximately five months with the Glendale study participants and eight months with the Faircrest study participants in order to understand the daily events in their schedule and reduce the possibility of my own biases distorting the information.

Persistent observation – Additional information was not added to the data. All of the data came from what the participants provided through interviews, observations, and work samples.

Triangulation – I checked the participant interviews against their work samples and interactions during the lesson (observation of lessons) in order to verify the information given.

Referential adequacy materials – I made sure to understand the context around the participants' interactions and school culture in order to make sure the entire picture was depicted.

Peer debriefings – Occasionally, I checked in with the participants to gain a deeper understanding of their thoughts. Due to the age of the participants, these debriefings were relatively short and lasted for no more than 10 minutes at a time.

Member checks – I checked with the participants to make sure they agreed with what was written or stated. Since the participants were quite young, I had to read the information to them to make sure they agree with what was recorded.

WHERE: POLITICAL CONTEXT OF THE SCHOOLS

As previously stated in chapter two, many scholars have stated that school curricula is inherently political (Apple, 1992) and have documented the continued silencing of communities of color through the use of state mandated curriculum standards and textbooks (Brown & Brown, 2010; Heilig, Brown, & Brown, 2012). Since the participants were engaging in a social justice-oriented curriculum where discussion about institutional and structural racism occurred, the political nature of the curriculum was overt instead of covert. All of the lessons and activities in the public school classrooms aligned with the appropriate state standards from the 2014-2015 as well as the 2015-2016 school years. Although this study focused on the students' thoughts and conceptions, the curriculum itself was thoroughly discussed in order to examine how possible spaces occurred for students to have discussions about race and its impact on society.

In addition to the political nature of the curriculum, the teachers' willingness to discuss race and implement the interdisciplinary unit were also examined. Considering that the Glendale teachers were undergoing a potential state takeover of their school if test scores failed to drastically increase, both of the kindergarten teachers took a risk to

decide to implement this interdisciplinary unit instead of following the scripted curriculum provided by the state. By choosing to teach the unit, the main study teachers engaged in a political act. Their refusal to accept the status quo and instead openly educate their students on contentious topic, like race, and its impact was a way to resist against continuing to silence voices. Although the Faircrest classroom teacher was not facing a potential takeover and was a novice teacher, she too engaged in a political act by not only sharing the unit with her colleagues but also using social media to inform a larger audience of what her students were learning.

RESEARCHER'S POSITIONALITY

Throughout this study, I was positioned with both insider and outsider status (Merriam, Johnson-Bailey, Lee, Kee, Ntseane, & Muhamad, 2001). I was an insider because the teachers and students know that I used to teach at the elementary school level. As a former public school kindergarten teacher, this study interested me as someone who used to hold conversations about race and social justice with their students on a regular basis. Having worked with students residing in urban as well as suburban areas, I was very aware of the different conversations that occurred with children and was perplexed by not talking about race when the children often brought it up. However, it wasn't until my school district began to work directly on equity and hold mandatory sessions for teachers that I saw the drastic differences within and across grade levels when it came to having conversations about topics that are often contentious. Without a lot of research to support my claim, I believed in letting my kindergarteners openly discuss their thoughts and feelings with one another. Since the participants know me, they are aware of my experience in public school settings as well as work with me on classroom projects.

Another reason why I believe I was positioned as an insider is because I align with two historically marginalized groups, namely African Americans and women, and have experienced racial and gender stereotypes. Since I am an early childhood educator of color, when race was discussed in settings where the majority of teachers are White, I found there was more acceptance to what I was trying to say or the perspectives that I wanted to make sure were included simply due to my racial and gender make-up.

While both of those aspects strongly resonate as reasons why I was considered an insider, I also recognized that my positionality shifted depending upon the context. Since I was not a current educator at either public school, the teachers and students also saw me as an outsider at times. Being positioned as an outsider also came with a particular type of power or clout. Since I was viewed as a teacher educator from a prestigious research university, there was a chance that I was held in higher regard than if I was another teacher in the building. This sense of power associated with me was important to be aware of so that I did not alter the typical dynamics of the classroom by simply being present in the room.

While I acknowledge the duality that existed in my positioning as an insider as well as an outsider, I recognized that I needed to be conscious of it whenever I entered the school. Additionally, since my desire for achieving social justice drove what I do professionally as well as personally, I also needed to be cognizant of any potential biases I could bring to the data analysis. The complexity of my positionality added another layer to continuously examining the data throughout this study. As Ladson-Billings (2000) notes, "My research is part of my life and my life is part of my research" (p. 268). So, I recognize shifting from one status to another occurred frequently while I was researching and had to make the necessary adjustments as the data collection and analysis of the information continued.

DATA ANALYSIS

As Merriam (2009) stated, data collection and data analysis occur at the same time. Applying this understanding to my data collection and analysis process, I was constantly noticing different themes that would emerge during the classroom lessons or interviews with students and their classroom teachers. In addition, I would make analytic notes while observing the classroom lessons. These notes helped to identify possible themes that emerged from the collection of data.

My analysis of the data began with open coding (Merriam, 2009). Upon my initial coding, I identified eleven possible themes that emerged from the data. The eleven themes were (1) ethic of care, (2) agency, (3) human rights, (4) counter-stories, (5) racial empathy, (6) racial identity, (7) collectivism, (8) change, (9) culturally relevant teaching, (10) fairness, and (11) progress (See Table 4 below). Each of the themes that were created directly related to a body of literature.

Initial Coding Themes and Definitions
Agency [Standing for yourself or community; fighting back for rights; form of resistance]
Ethic of care [Actions that are considered moral; ways to treat someone]
Human Rights [Basic agreements that all individuals have access to in a country; "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness]
Counter-stories [Experiences of communities of color often left out of mainstream conversations and school curricula]
Racial empathy [Feeling towards someone else and/or their racial perspective]
Racial Identity [Skin color or other defining attributes and its impact on one's identity]
Collectivism [Gathering of the community to advocate/support one another]
Change [Advocating for improvements; actual alterations in laws/treatment of people, etc.]
Culturally relevant teaching [Acknowledges and honors the cultural backgrounds of students, inspires academic excellence; resists oppressive conditions (Ladson-Billings, 1995)]

Table 5. This table contains the themes that initially emerged from open coding and their subsequent definitions.

I used constant comparison (Corbin & Strauss, 1990) to continuously collapse codes into broader themes. As I continued to review the data and my notes, I was able to eventually collapse the emerging themes by applying the themes to Holt's (1995) notion of how everyday life is raced. In order to make sure the themes adhered to Holt's (1995) idea of "everydayness", the data analysis had to (1) highlight how race "is reproduced via the marking of the racial Other and that racist ideas and practices are naturalized" (p. 7) as well as (2) analyze racism in everyday experiences in order to understand how race is applied. After adhering to Holt's (1995) rationales for everydayness, two broad

overarching themes were identified. The two broad overarching themes were counter-stories and culturally relevant teaching. Once the two broad overarching themes were identified, three sub-themes emerged. The three emerging sub-themes were (1) human rights, (2) racial identity, and (3) collectivism (See Table 5 below).

Revised Coding Themes and Definitions	
Counter-stories [Experiences of communities of color often left out of mainstream conversations and school curricula]	
Culturally relevant teaching [Acknowledges and honors the cultural backgrounds of students; inspires academic excellence; resists oppressive conditions (Ladson-Billings, 1995)]	
Sub-themes	
	Racial Identity [Formerly race, racial conflict – Skin color or other defining attributes and its impact on one's identity; acknowledging the differences between racial groups]
	Collectivism [Formerly racial empathy, change - Gathering of the community to advocate/support one another; Feeling towards someone else and/or their racial perspective; advocating for/actual improvements]
	Human Rights [Formerly ethic of care, agency - Basic agreements that all individuals have access to in a country; "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness"; advocating for yourself and community]

Table 6. This table indicates the condensed emerging themes and their revised definitions.

Each of sub-themes was directly tied to the teachers' willingness to share various counter-stories with the students. This meant that in order to analyze the themes, the teachers and their comfortableness in talking about race had to also be addressed. In addition to the classroom teacher's willingness to discuss race, they also needed to be able to break down complex topics for young children and be knowledgeable about

various historical events that occurred and their impacts on communities of color. With this in mind, chapters four, five, and six present an in-depth explanation of the classroom environment, with an examination of the teachers' thought-process, and present student data in the form of participant statements and artifacts from lessons as evidence to document the emergence of these themes.

Chapter Four

Examining Young Children's Understandings about Race: Looking Closely at Amy Bevo's First Grade Classroom

Each classroom in the study had its own unique environment. Understanding each classroom culture is important because it speaks to each teacher's comfort level with regards to engaging difficult issues such as race. Once the classroom context is discussed, chapter four will examine the planning and implementation of the interdisciplinary unit as well as the first grade students' thoughts and interactions during the various lessons. Then, chapter four will close by summarizing the first grade classroom and presenting three findings from the student data.

CONTEXT OF THE CLASSROOM

As previously stated in chapter 3, Amy Bevo's classroom was located within the kindergarten-first grade wing of Faircrest Elementary. In order to enter her classroom, one had to first open the doors to the K-1 wing, which was located on the north side of the school. Once inside the K-1 wing, there was a large open space that contained two large rectangular tables. One of these tables was located on the left-hand side of the wing and was specifically for the kindergarten classrooms and another one for the first grade classrooms located on the right-hand side of the wing. In addition to the tables, there were coat hangers fixed onto the wall next of each classroom where the kindergarten and first grade students hung their backpacks and jackets.

Amy's classroom was located on the right-hand side of the wing and was in-between two other first grade classrooms. Additionally, her classroom was connected to one of the other first grade classrooms by a hallway that contained two restrooms. The common hallway was in the back of Amy's room so it did not serve as a disruption to the classroom lessons and activities that occurred either in the front of the room, where the

large rectangular green area rug was positioned in front of the white board, or at the students' desks.

Amy's classroom was divided up into specific areas, i.e. class meeting, desks/tables, computers, classroom library, writing center, and a calming down space. Due to the arrangement of the furniture and the purposeful grouping of the first graders, this environment promoted collaboration among students by always providing opportunities to work with their peers. First, Amy did not have a teacher's desk in the classroom. Instead, she opted to work with children all over the room. In the front of the classroom was the large green area rug where all of the first graders sat for class meetings, story time, and whole group lessons. The middle and back of the room consisted of five groupings of four desks to form table clusters. Along the backside of the room was a classroom library where books were placed in colorful baskets that were labeled. Next to two of the table groupings was a row of computers and a table with paper and writing utensils. This area was utilized primarily during their center time, which is a specified time in the academic schedule providing students time to work on identified literacy or mathematic tasks independently or with a partner or small group. The other side of the classroom contained two large cabinets as well as a small table and chair where students could go if they needed a break or time to just collect their thoughts. There were usually soft balls or water tubes placed on the small desk to help the students calm down for this purpose.

Overall, the classroom environment supported all types of instructional groupings, i.e. independent, partner, and group work, which were all utilized often. The room was easily modified to support any lesson activity that Amy planned for the first graders. There was a moveable technology cart where the LCD projector and laptop were placed. Depending upon the lesson, Amy would roll the cart to a side of the room or let it serve

as a barrier between the carpet and table groups so that the students would not be distracted by items on their desks. Technology was an integral part of the classroom. Often, Amy would "take" the first graders on virtual field trips to past and present events or play children's videos to help them gain a deeper understanding of the content. Amy used technology as a launching point for student discussions and linkages to new inquiry projects. Throughout the classroom, materials and resources were used to support the first graders while they collaborated on projects or simply just voiced their own opinions about different concepts or events.

AMY BEVO'S WILLINGNESS TO DISCUSS RACE

Amy Bevo's classroom environment was built for students to collaborate with one another. At any given time, a visitor would see the first graders working in pairs, small groups, or as a whole group. Amy believed in the power of collaboration and would often create lessons where students had to share their thoughts with each other. So, when embarking on the interdisciplinary unit on race, it was no wonder that Amy took the same approach that she expected of her students.

Even though race is considered to be a contentious topic that can cause tense situations in the classroom, Amy thought it was very important to discuss it with her students because of the lasting impacts of racism on all communities. She recognized that while she had a diverse classroom of students from different racial/ethnic backgrounds, the majority of them were students of color. During an interview with Amy, she stated that she wanted to make sure her students knew "true stories about history that are inclusive of all communities" (interview, 2014) and not just aspects of a singular story. Since Amy was a White female in her mid-twenties, she was aware of the racial/ethnic mismatch and the importance of making sure the curriculum her students were exposed to

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accurately displayed historical content as well as represented all of the students in her classroom.

Since Amy was willing to adapt the curriculum to better represent her students, her teaching disposition contained elements of a risk-taker. She was willing to have challenging conversations with her first graders regardless of the fact that she did not always know what they would say in return or where the conversation may lead. For instance, when a regional television station news station heard about the lessons on race that Amy was teaching, they decided to come visit her classroom and share what Amy and her students were doing on their news program. The news reporter interviewed her about aspects of the interdisciplinary curriculum on race. At one point in her interview with Fox News, Amy said:

> I think one of the big gaps is that we do teach the history of segregation and what happened 'oh so long ago' and I don't think students always do make that connection to the issues that are still happening today. (Fox News, 2015)

To Amy, it was important for her first grade students to see the connection between current and past events and how communities are still fighting for social justice. Although she was a first-year teacher, meaning that she did not have tenure with her school district and was new to the teaching profession, Amy did not stray away from sharing her opinion with the news reporter or posting images on Twitter of what the students were discussing in her class (See figures 3 and 4 below). By sharing what was occurring inside her classroom with individuals outside of the school and school system, Amy was informing the community of what she believed the social studies subject matter should cover for young elementary students.

Figure 3. Using Twitter, Amy Bevo tweeted that her students are learning about agency by examining the Underground Railroad and the pushback against slavery.

Figure 4. Amy Bevo tweeted a photo of different historical timelines the students put together to indicate the struggle and pushback against oppression across time.

While Amy was technically supposed to only create the science and math lessons for the first grade level, she decided to also take on the interdisciplinary unit on race (with some additional support from me). Again, due to Amy's risk taker disposition, she

felt that she wanted her students to be exposed to a curriculum that represented all of them. Amy thought that infusing the unit on race would help her students not only learn about various communities of color but also begin to examine the impact of race. So, Amy informed the other two first grade teachers, who were both veterans, about the upcoming unit and not only were her team members supportive; they actually asked to join the unit and taught their students the same information. Amy's willingness to not only talk about race with her students, but also share materials and resources with her peers, helped her alter and enrich the first grade social studies and English language arts curricula at Faircrest Elementary for this particular unit.

PLANNING THE INTERDISCIPLINARY UNIT ON RACE

A Discussion on Counter-Stories

Prior to beginning the interdisciplinary unit on race, Amy Bevo and I sat down to discuss the unit, the standards it addressed, and the rationale behind it. While Amy was excited to work together on implementing a unit on race, she, like many early elementary teachers, was not certain where to begin the conversation with her young students. During our conversation, I asked if she planned to address the national holiday celebrating the life of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. When Amy responded yes, I then asked her if she was going to start in the middle of the story about Dr. King. I explained that many elementary schools across the country begin to discuss race and racial relations around Dr. King's holiday and enter in the middle of the historical timeline. For example, I shared that many students hear about Dr. King's message for nonviolent protests in order for equal rights, but they are never informed as to why some people were fighting for equal rights in the first place and how rights were given to some individuals but not all. Banks & McGee-Banks (1998) agree that without this information, the message sent

to young students is confusing and tends not to be sorted out until the later elementary grades when students learn about their state and national history. Since Amy and I often had discussions about the school curriculum and the content, this conversation was comfortable and commonplace. Like many others, it allowed us to contemplate not only the impact the content presented in the curriculum had on students, but also consider the impressions that omitted content (of not providing the context for Dr. King's actions) had on students as well. As a result, both Amy and I wanted to make sure that the first grade students understood what occurred prior to the civil rights movement so that everything made more sense, the contributions of communities of color were presented, and, most importantly, teach children to embrace differences and the need for kindness and compassion in everyday life.

After this initial discussion, I shared with Amy a framework that I was developing to help educators teach about race with young children. Amy was excited to try the framework because it helped her find a place to begin a unit focusing on race. While Amy thought discussing race with first graders was important, she was unsure of how to do so. Since this framework was still in the development stages, Amy decided to pilot it with her students to see their responses and the type of understandings they had about race and its impact.

First Iteration of the Exploring Race with Young Children Framework

For the initial development of the framework, I created two specific stages that teachers would need to attend to while discussing race with young children. Listed below is an image of the initial stages of the framework that Amy began to implement in her classroom.

Exploring Race with Young Children
First Iteration

Stage 1

Examining the idea of fairness and social justice

Sub-stage - Looking at similarities and differences

Stage 2

Examining history with inequities

Substage 1 - Transatlantic Slave Trade
Substage 2 - Civil Rights
Substage 3 - Present Day
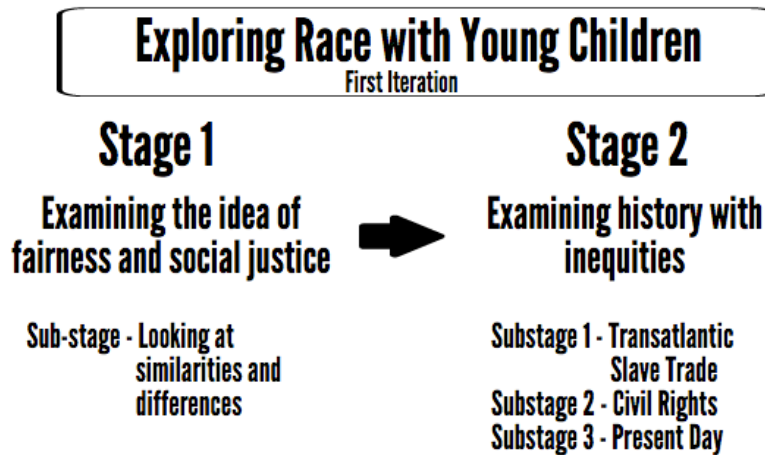
Figure 5. This image contains the three stages of the Exploring Race with Young Children (1st iteration) that Amy Bevo piloted in her classroom.

With my support, Amy planned specific lessons integrating the content areas of Social Studies and English Language Arts within the two stages of the Exploring Race with Young Children framework. We wanted the counter-stories to depict a sense of agency from communities of color and reject presenting victim-based historical narratives. In order to avoid a victim-based narrative, this meant we needed to share stories where slaves, as well as allies, fought against oppressive conditions and advocated for basic human rights. Since we utilized children's literature as an entry into discussing race, we both searched public libraries and bookstores for children's books that displayed the agency of communities of color within oppressive conditions. Following the suggestions of Jetton & Savage-Davis (2005), we looked for books that met specific criteria for multicultural literature, such as:

- High literary quality that includes well-developed plots and characters.
- Fiction that examines the historical trends in the roles of minority groups in America.
- Historical accuracy with no omissions or distortions

- Settings in the United States, so readers can understand the nature of cultural diversity in the United States and the legacy of several minority groups.

- No loaded words that have derogatory overtones.

- Carefully chosen illustrations to enhance the text quality.

- No negative or inaccurate stereotypes.

- Genuine lifestyles of characters who exhibit authentic and realistic behaviors.

- Genuine and complex character dialogue.

- Strong, independent characters not in need of a White authority figure.

- Women, the elderly, and the family portrayed accurately.

- Inclusion of nothing offensive or embarrassing to a child.

- Qualified authors/illustrators who deal with the cultural group accurately and respectfully.

- Minority characters as leaders and problem-solvers.

- Heroines and heroes accurately portrayed according to their cultural group, and literature that reflects their cultural values.

- Books written after the 1970s because they reflect a more pluralistic society (p. 32).

Our initial lessons for the Exploring Race with Young Children framework focused on the idea of fairness and social justice. We wanted to make sure the students had a good background in discussing what they thought was fair prior to addressing inequities. Then, we moved towards discussing slavery with agency, the fight for civil rights, and inequities that still exist today for the subsequent lessons. Framing the lessons to fall underneath each of the areas was of particular importance to the study. We wanted to make sure that while the counter-stories addressed inequities, they did so by also displaying the agency of people who were historically oppressed in order to not only

present a more accurate portrayal of US history but also to eliminate assumptions about different groups and their ancestors before they occurred.

AMY BEVO'S DISRUPTION OF THE STATUS QUO

Since the study was taking place in a public school, it was imperative each lesson within the Exploring Race with Young Children (1st Iteration) adhered to the Social Studies and English Language Arts state standards for first grade. Given that state standards often contain broad and ambiguous language, aligning the lessons to include communities of color was relatively easy—and necessary if we wished to present a curriculum that not only reflected the diversity of Amy's class but also portrayed a more accurate depiction of history. Notably, as Heilig, Brown, and Brown (2012) discussed, there are few references to individuals from communities of color within state standards and when they are addressed the phrase "such as" precedes it, meaning teachers are able to decide whether or not to even discuss it. So, it was of the upmost importance that Amy and I align the framework to her state standards to not only ensure she was in compliance with the content that the state required public school teachers to teach their students, but also demonstrate how teachers can add information about communities of color and still adhere to the required standards. Listed below are excerpts of the social studies state standards Amy had to address for first grade:

Social Studies State Standards for 1st Grade (Faircrest Elementary)[27]	
(2) History. The student understands how historical figures, patriots, and good citizens helped shape the community, state, and nation. The student is expected to:	(A) identify contributions of historical figures, including Sam Houston, George Washington, Abraham Lincoln, and Martin Luther King Jr., who have influenced the community, state, and nation;
	(B) identify historical figures such as Alexander Graham Bell, Thomas Edison, Garrett Morgan, and Richard Allen, and other individuals who have exhibited individualism and inventiveness; and
	(C) compare the similarities and differences among the lives and activities of historical figures and other individuals who have influenced the community, state, and nation.
(13) Citizenship. The student understands characteristics of good citizenship as exemplified by historical figures and other individuals. The student is expected to:	(A) identify characteristics of good citizenship, including truthfulness, justice, equality, respect for oneself and others, responsibility in daily life, and participation in government by educating oneself about the issues, respectfully holding public officials to their word, and voting;
	(B) identify historical figures such as Benjamin Franklin, Francis Scott Key, and Eleanor Roosevelt who have exemplified good citizenship; and
	(C) identify other individuals who exemplify good citizenship.
(15) Culture. The student understands the importance of family and community beliefs, customs, language, and traditions. The student is expected to:	(A) describe and explain the importance of various beliefs, customs, language, and traditions of families and communities;

Table 7. This table highlights 3 of the 19 social studies first grade standards required by the state education agency.

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[27] http://ritter.tea.state.tx.us/rules/tac/chapter113/ch113a.html

Noticeably, only one of the subsections of the three standards addressed in Table Six mandated teachers to discuss a person of color, namely Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. All of the other standards used the phrase "such as" to denote it was up to the teacher to decide who or what to teach in order to meet the specific subsection of the standard. While the standard and its subsections left it up to teachers to decide whether or not to infuse more perspectives into the curriculum, the problem lies in the teachers' knowledge bases of historical figures and events. If early childhood teachers were not exposed to a curriculum containing information about various communities of color and their impacts, then the absence or void of adding more voices to the curriculum occurred due to a lack of historical knowledge about the impact communities of color had and continue to have on US history (Brophy & Alleman, 1996; Chapin & Messick, 1999; Fritzer & Kumar, 2002).

Since Amy Bevo was a novice teacher that had only recently graduated from a teacher preparation program that discussed social justice, she had been previously exposed to a different perspective of school curricula than the traditional teacher preparation program, which accepted the traditional curriculum that often omitted or silenced the voices of communities of color. As Amy's former social studies instructor and student teaching supervisor, we worked together to make sure she was knowledgeable about the content by reviewing primary and secondary sources on various events and their impacts on communities of color. Since I had known Amy for more than a year, she was very comfortable sharing when she needed to learn more about different events or did not know where to find the information in order to break it down for her students to be able to understand.

As previously stated, Amy followed the framework I was developing to help teachers know where to begin to discuss race with children. Since the first stage of the Exploring Race with Young Children (1ˢᵗ Iteration) framework began with examining the idea of social justice and fairness, she decided to start the unit by introducing the concept of fairness through children's literature. For Amy's first lesson, she read the book, *It's Just Not Fairy* (Asquith, 2013), and then asked the students to help her create a chart about what they thought was fair and unfair (See Figure 6 below).
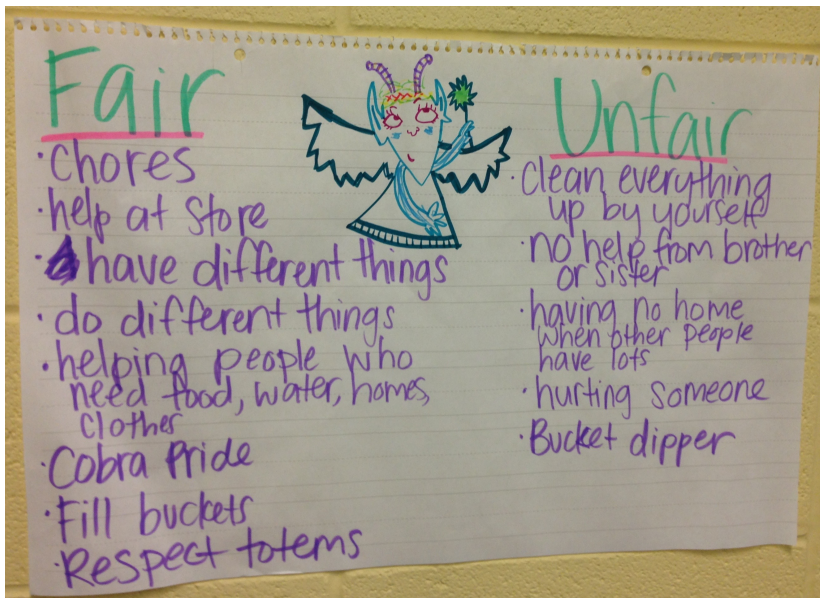
Figure 6. The students in Amy Bevo's classroom helped her create a list of things they thought were fair and unfair.

The children's thoughts about what they considered to be fair and not fair ranged from helping people to doing chores versus being homeless or hurting someone. Amy wondered if the students would naturally bring up the topic of race when talking about fairness, but the students did not reference race or its impact on different communities at

all. To begin to move more towards social justice and race, in particular, we then co-planned the next lesson.

Identifying Similarities and Differences in Phenotype

In this case, Amy read *The Crayon Box that Talked* (Derolf, 2014) to the students. This story is about crayons that judged each other based upon their different colors. Amy and I hoped that since the book referenced crayon color, it would serve as an impetus for the students to discuss their own skin colors. Once she finished reading the story, the students were assigned pairs and had to decide three ways they were similar and three ways they were different. Starting with the first pair of students, race, specifically the color of one's skin, was mentioned. However, the students mentioned race as a fact without any negative or positive associations rather than assigning value to one color or another. For example, Jeremy (White first grader) stated, "Well, we don't have the same color skin" (field notes, 2014) when he was sharing how he was different from his partner who was Latina.
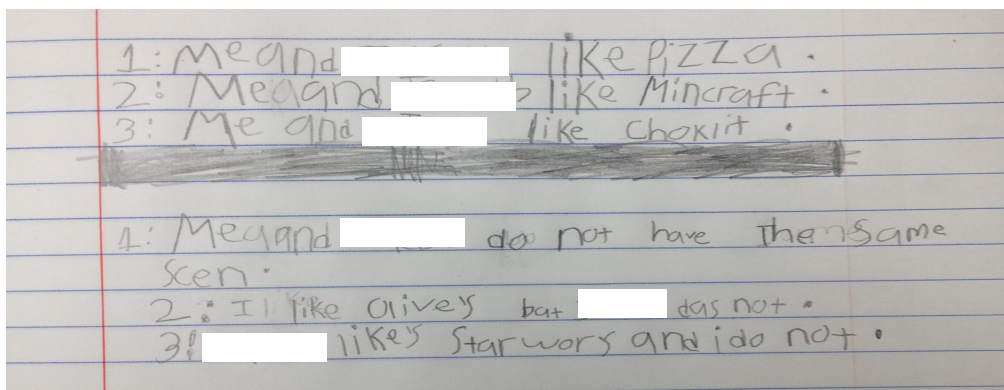
Figure 7. Jeremy and his partner wrote down their similarities and differences. Under number one of their differences, they specifically mention skin color.

Interestingly, the first grade students did not solely raise skin color when it came to differences but also when it came to similarities. An example of this was when Lisa (White female) stated, "We both have the same skin tone" (field notes, 2014) when asked to discuss how she was similar to her partner, who was also another White female. Notably, the majority of the pairs discussed their skin color regardless of whether or not they aligned with the same racial group as the student(s) they were addressing or not. In addition, none of the first graders referred to actual colors or used terms that might be associated with a particular race other than saying "lighter" or "darker" (field notes, 2014). Only one student in the entire class mentioned a specific ethnicity when discussing his similarities and differences with his partner. Although the student tried to state a specific ethnicity, i.e. Mexican, he used the terminology to describe his "brown spots" (field notes, 2014), or what I would call freckles, on his arms and called them "Mexican" and was unable to articulate his rationale behind using this vocabulary. This prompted Amy to share that the brown spots are called freckles in order to provide the student with the correct terminology and avoid incorrectly attributing them only to people who are from—or whose parents and/or ancestors are from—Mexico.

Talking about Slavery with Resistance

As Amy transitioned the students from talking about social justice and fairness, she wanted to see what, if anything, her students knew about slavery. Amy knew that the children had heard of Dr. Martin Luther King and based upon our earlier conversation, she was curious to see if the students knew why people were fighting for equal rights and what occurred leading up to this moment. So, before she began to read any story, she created an activity where she briefly asked the students to tell her about Dr. King. The students remembered he "gave a speech" and "wanted people of different colors to play together" (field notes, 2014), but none of the students stated or alluded to why people

didn't play together in the first place. When Amy introduced the concept of slavery to the students, she shared that people were forced to work for others without being paid and were taken from where they lived in order to do so. Amy then asked the students what questions they had about slavery and wrote them down (See Figure 8 below).
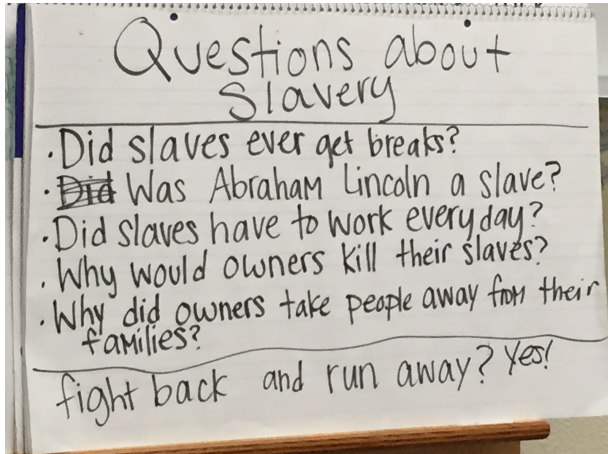
Figure 8. This is a picture of the chart where Amy recorded the first graders questions about slavery.

Through the process of responding to the questions, a few of the students exhibited some knowledge of history by asking about President Abraham Lincoln, but they were confused about who the slaves were, how the slaves were treated, and frankly, why the system of slavery existed in the first place. Armed with the questions that the students had asked about slavery, Amy and I met in order to design the next set of lessons that would fall underneath Stage 2. As previously mentioned, it is common for the agency and resistance exhibited by those who were enslaved to be omitted from the curriculum and classroom discussions. Since we wanted to address slavery and simultaneously avoid a victim-based narrative, we purposefully decided to focus on the Underground Railroad,

highlighting the pushback that slaves demonstrated against the forced condition of slavery.

Making Text-to-Text Connections

Amy began the second stage by reading *Follow the Drinking Gourd (Winter, 1992)*. This book explains how slaves used the song "Follow the Drinking Gourd" (Parks, 1928) to escape slavery and follow the directions for the Underground Railroad. While Amy was reading, she came to a page in the book where a slave was being auctioned off. Later, Amy shared that she began to feel uncomfortable when she saw the illustration so she had "planned to skip that page in the book because [she had] several African American males [in her classroom] and didn't know how they would handle the information" (field notes, 2015). However, one of the African American male students sitting close to her saw the image before Amy was able to turn the page. As Amy attempted to turn the page, Robert (African American male) asked, "What is that?" (field notes, 2015) and reached out to stop Amy from turning the page. Reluctantly, Amy showed the page to the class and shared that a male was being sold to a slave owner. Several of the students said the image of the slave being auctioned depicted something that "wasn't fair" or "wasn't right" (field notes, 2015). However, Robert remained quiet. It wasn't until a couple of days later that Robert would demonstrate the impact that particular picture had on him. While analyzing the wordless picture book, *Unspoken* (*Cole, 2012)*, with a small group of students, Robert stood up abruptly and went to find the book, *Follow the Drinking Gourd*, which was placed in the students' classroom library. He then laid the book down next to an image from *Unspoken*, which is a wordless picture book that also references the Underground Railroad, and made a text-to-text comparison between the events in the two books (See below).

Figure 9. A small group of first graders examine the wordless picture book, *Unspoken* (Cole, 2012), and its connection to *Follow the Drinking Gourd* (Winter, 1992).

Robert told his group that, "two men [referring to the picture of two men on horses] are looking for someone" (field notes, 2015) and pointed to the picture of the African American male being sold. His peers then moved in closer to examine both images. Mike (African American male) agreed and said, "Yeah. They took him from his family and then he got away" (field notes, 2015). This prompted Vanessa (Latina female) who was part of the group reviewing the book, to chime in and say, "This is like the drinking gourd" (field notes, 2015) in reference to how slaves traveled on the Underground Railroad. Then, Mike responded and said, "I'm pretty sure it is the drinking gourd" (field notes, 2015). By Robert's comparison of both books, the small group of his peers began to make connections to previously read books and discussions that they had in class.

While making a text-to-text comparison is a common instructional strategy in the primary grades, what stood out to Amy was the fact that Robert made this strong

connection. This was a child who struggled identifying alphabet letters and their corresponding sounds but, in this instance, was able to begin to make quite sophisticated text-to-text connections through this unit. It all started with the image of the African American male being sold as the impetus to unlocking Robert's potential and his complex understanding of literacy. This, however, was not the last time Robert made a connection with the image from *Follow the Drinking Gourd* (Winter, 1992). He would again reference the image of the slave being auctioned off when learning about a different time period in U.S. history.

Making Historical Connections

Over the course of this unit, Robert continued to pull out the image of the slave being sold in order to explain the rationale behind Dr. King's speech and what he was fighting for. While Robert struggled on basic literacy assessments, such as concepts about print and phonemic awareness, he was one of the only students in his first grade classroom that was able to connect the image of selling a slave, to slave owners/hunters looking for escaped slaves, to explaining why Dr. King wanted equal rights. In fact, the day after the Martin Luther King, Jr. holiday, it was Robert who came into the classroom with a newspaper clipping about Dr. King. He then presented it to the class as he grabbed the books, *Follow the Drinking Gourd* (Winter, 1992) and *Unspoken* (Cole, 2012). Again, Robert turned to the page with the illustration of a slave being sold and the page of the slave hunters. Robert explained, "Dr. King wanted everyone to be treated the same. He didn't want slavery [as he pointed to the selling of the slave and the slave hunters]" (field notes, 2015). When reflecting back on this particular student, Amy Bevo opened up and shared that she "wouldn't have known Robert's capabilities if [she] hadn't taught this unit on race" (interview, 2015). Amy was excited because Robert became a leader of the class when discussing this unit and was able to let his fellow peers see a more confident

side of him instead of struggling with reading and letter identification. She made sure to inform the principal about Robert's connections because she was so impressed with the literary skills he was demonstrating.

However, Robert wasn't the only student to demonstrate his understanding of race and the various historical events that impacted communities of color. During the unit on race, the first graders learned about different celebrations, struggles, and accomplishments of individuals and communities of color. Continuing to share what the students were learning, Amy Bevo tweeted that her students were going to read about *Henry's Freedom Box* (Levine, 2007) (See Figure 10 below).

Today we will continue learning about agency during US slavery by reading Henry's Freedom Box, A True Story from the Underground Railroad.
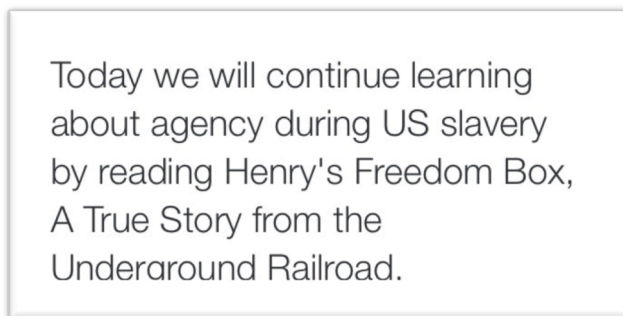
Figure 10. This is an image of Amy Bevo's tweet sharing what her students were learning about during Stage 2 of the Exploring Race with Young Children framework.

After Amy Bevo read *Henry's Freedom Box* to the first graders (a true story featuring how Henry Brown was able to escape slavery by mailing himself to freedom), she asked the students to draw and/or write about how they felt after learning about this story. Elizabeth (biracial African American and White female) drew three panels (See Figure Eleven below). In the first panel, she drew herself crying about the story and how Henry was made to be a slave. Then, she drew Henry crying because he was taken away from his family. Finally, she drew the scene from the end of the book where Henry was

free. Elizabeth later shared to Amy that she was "happy Henry wasn't a slave anymore" (field notes, 2015).

illustrated three panels: how the book made her feel, how Henry felt, and a scene from the end of the book!
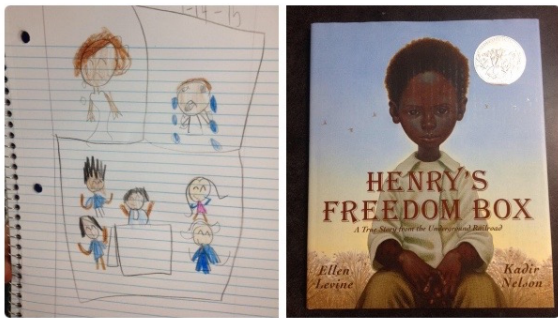
Figure 11. Amy Bevo tweeted a picture of Elizabeth, one of her first graders' thoughts about Henry's Freedom Box.

Elizabeth wasn't the only first grader to make a powerful connection to the book. Jason (White male) decided to draw a picture of Henry happy to be free. Since they had already read *Follow the Drinking Gourd* (Winter, 1992), Jason decided to draw the Big Dipper as a way to display his understanding of the Underground Railroad (See Figure 12 below) and how slaves were able to find their way to freedom. While the story of Henry Brown is different because he mails himself to freedom, Jason was able to make sense of multiple texts by comparing the various ways slaves resisted and pushed back against oppressive conditions.

drew Henry (from Henry's Freedom Box) following the drinking gourd. Great text to text connection!
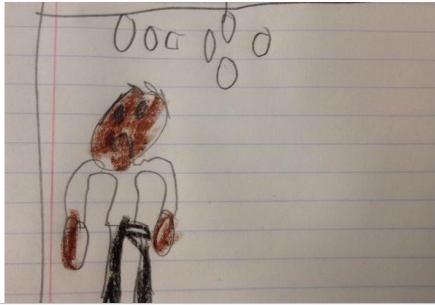
Figure 12. Amy Bevo tweeted Jason's drawing to show how he was making different text comparisons.

From being introduced to these types of counter-stories, the students were constantly trying to figure out 1) how they would be treated in a similar situation and 2) the types of choices they would have faced. For instance, while the participants in the first grade pilot study were watching a video on Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and talking about segregation, Elizabeth raised her hand and asked, "What school would I go to?" (field notes, 2015) In this case, Elizabeth wanted to know what her educational choices would have been in this situation. When Amy Bevo shared additional images of different communities of color (i.e. Mexican Americans and Native Americans) attending segregated schools as examples to serve as a response to Elizabeth's question, several first graders began to voice their opinions. Jake (Latino male) said, "That's not right" (field notes, 2015) while Charlotte (White female) brought up Dr. King as an example of how to push against injustices. Later during their writing time, Charlotte continued to voice her opinion against treating people differently and wrote, "That he [Dr. King] helped white be with black because he didn't care what your skin color was. I can make the world [better] by changing [the] rules" (see Figure 13 below). In this instance,

Charlotte not only shared what occurred during the Civil Rights Movement, she also stated the choices and actions she could take.

That he help white be with brake bucase hed idn't care want kiet skin colet was.

I can make the world by changing ry les.
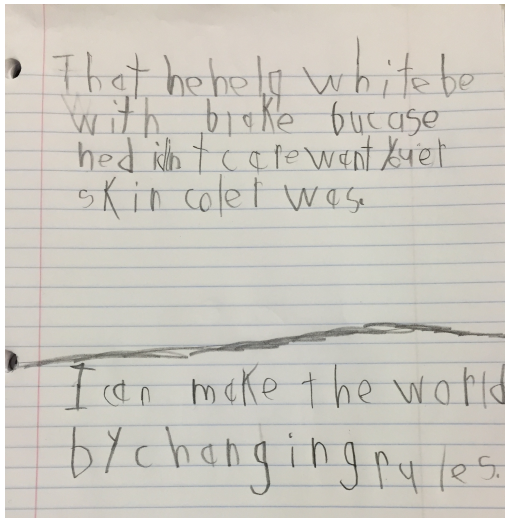
Figure 13. This is a picture of Charlotte's thoughts about Dr. King's legacy as well as her thoughts on what she could do to make the world better.

Conversations on the Inequitable Treatment of Communities of Color.

Drawing upon their learning about counter-stories, the first grade participants often spoke about the historical inequitable treatment of communities of color and how people of color deserved to be treated better. For example, when the first graders were listening to their fifth-grade reading buddies read *Ruth and the Green Book* (Ramsey & Strauss, 2010), which highlighted the Negro Travelers' Green Book that existed between 1936 and 1964 to help African Americans safely travel throughout the United States (Green & Company, 1936-1967), an impromptu discussion began between the younger and older students. Kevin (Latino male) said, "They don't want to be doing the stuff they tell them to do. They want a happy life" (field notes, 2015). In this case, Kevin was reacting to how African Americans were being treated during the 1950s and dealing with and responding to the impact of Jim Crow laws. However, the conversation about

fairness and resisting inequitable treatment did not stop there. Once they were finished reading, Andrea (Latina) picked up the books *Ruth and The Green Book* and *We Shall Overcome* (Levy, 2013), which is a book highlighting the fight the Civil Rights Movement, and laid them side-by-side. She then stated, "They both had dark and white people fighting for freedom and some had happy endings and some had bad endings" (field notes, 2015). In her statement, Andrea made text-to-text connections about not only how people resisted inequitable treatment, but also addressed the fact that all endings are not happy. Andrea's acknowledgement that stories sometimes have bad endings was a significant departure from the traditional stories shared with children at school (Souto-Manning, 2009). Typically, the individuals in children's literature or even elementary texts have either happy endings or the violence that occurred is glossed over to make the outcome appear more amicable (Brown & Brown, 2010; Souto-Manning, 2009). Although the statement from Andrea was brief, it displayed her knowledge of people's resistance towards oppressive conditions and how resistance didn't always lead to a happy ending.

Although the prior conversation occurred within a small group of six students (three first graders and three fifth graders) during their reading buddy time, the sentiment carried over into the whole group Social Studies and English Language Arts lesson the next day when Kevin shared about the books he read with his reading buddies and said, "They were trying to change the laws and wanted justice" (field notes, 2015). This prompted his other classmates to state different ways they would resist or protest when something wasn't fair. David (White male) said, "Rosa Parks went to jail" (field notes, 2015) and then Vanessa responded to him and said, "Sometimes they used their words" (field notes, 2015). Vanessa then pointed to an image of a protestor holding a sign from one of the books in the classroom library. When Amy asked the students other ways they

would protest or resist something that isn't fair, several additional students began to share how they would push back against injustices. For instance, Vanessa referenced the use of technology and said, "text the store" (field notes, 2015) so people could tell the store what they didn't like. This prompted Elizabeth to also highlight ways to protest in the 21st century and say people could "email them" (field notes, 2015). Next, David, who was looking at the image of protestors holding signs, reiterated what Vanessa previously stated and said, "[they could] make signs" (field notes, 2015). Then, Lisa who was normally very quiet, spoke up and said "people shouldn't shop there anymore" (field notes, 2015). Interestingly, the students were able to cite numerous ways people could resist oppressive conditions. When Amy asked why people resisted or protested, the first graders would often say one of three statements, which were "people should be nice to people", "to be more fair", or "it isn't right to treat people badly" (field notes, 2015). These statements led Amy as well as myself to think about possible next steps to take with her first grade students.

Impromptu Race Discussion with Reading Buddies

During another reading buddy session between the first graders and fifth graders, an impromptu conversation about skin color and how people treat each other arose. While the fifth graders were reading Jacqueline Woodson's (2012) book, *Each Kindness* (a story about a new African American female student working to become friends with a couple of her peers), to a group of first graders, one of the fifth graders asked the first graders why they thought the girls were mean to Maya, the African American character in the story. Unintentionally, a discussion about race was brought up by one of the first graders in order to answer why he thought the girls were being mean to Maya. Interestingly, the fifth graders were caught off guard by David's statement.

Matt (Latino 5th grader): Why do you think the girls were so mean to Maya?

David (White 1st grader): Because she's light skinned.

Matt (Latino 5th grader): What? [Matt's eyebrows were raised and eyes seemed to widen at David's statement.]

David (White 1st grader): Cause she has light skin.

Matt (Latino 5th grader): Aww… yes, but no. [The fifth grade boy acknowledges that the character Maya in the story is African American but does not think the other characters were mean to her because of her race.]

Alicia (White 5th grader): She's new, so… [Alicia suggested an alternative answer by sharing that Maya was new to the neighborhood when Charles, a 5th grader, interrupted her.]

Charles (White 5th grader): So that's not the answer. Why do you think that… [David made an "Oh" sound and looked directly at the three fifth graders' faces. Charles stopped talking when he heard David's reaction.]

Charles (White 5th grader):   Yes

David (White 1st grader): Oh, I think I know…Ahhh.. [David never finished his thought and continued to look at the picture of Maya, the character in the book. Eventually, the fifth graders asked one of the other first graders what they thought and never addressed the racial comment that David made.] (field notes, 2015)

The previous exchange occurred during the second reading buddy meeting with the fifth and first graders. While the fifth grade students were used to talking about social justice, they appeared to be shocked by either David's assumption that the girls wouldn't like a character due to her skin color or his willingness to bluntly state his opinion. In either case, no other first or fifth grader in the group spoke up to try to understand David's thought process and instead chose to end the discussion abruptly.

Seeking Confirmation of Allies

Continuing to learn about historical inequities, the first graders were constantly looking for evidence of when people came together to help one another. For instance, when Charlotte was looking through a board book about Dr. Martin Luther King, she

exclaimed, "Look! People of all different colors of skin went to see Martin Luther King, Jr!" (field notes, 2015). When asked why she stopped at that particular page in the book, Charlotte explained that people who looked like herself also helped "make the world better" and were "kind to everyone" (See Figure 14 below).

Figure 14. This is a picture of Charlotte holding the board book page (Moore, 2002) that displays people of all different racial backgrounds supporting Dr. King's *I Have a Dream* speech.

However, this was not the only time the students spoke about various communities coming together to help support one another. One day, Lauren (White female) was closely inspecting the globe that was sitting on the carpet. After moving the globe around several times, Lauren got up and went to get Amy Bevo. After getting Amy's attention, Lauren brought Amy back to the globe and stated, "This is Canada where the slaves went on the Underground Railroad to be free" (See Figure 15 below).

Figure 15. Lauren is pointing to Canada and explaining about the Underground Railroad.

Lauren was particularly interested in the fact that slaves were able to be free in a different country where, according to Lauren, they "treated them nicely" (field notes, 2015). Both of these impromptu statements from the students showed their interest in not only the subject matter but also the importance of being kind.

Developing a Strong Sense of Community

During chapter one, the importance of conducting interdisciplinary units on race was outlined as a possible method to reduce the amount of racially motivated violence occurring in the United States. The underlying premise of conducting units on race, wherein counter-stories addressed oppression and resistance, was to expose children not only to historical inequities but also to help them learn and explore the ideals behind embracing differences and what kindness and compassion could look like in everyday life. Throughout the lessons, the underlying premise of the unit was addressed through the reading of various stories and discussions with students, but it was near the end of the unit where the students demonstrated how we hope individuals would treat one another.

When the unit was almost over, the increased closeness of the participants was evident in the way the students played and interacted with one another. For example, one morning, Alyssa (Latina female) entered the classroom and was noticeably upset. When Amy, Alyssa's first grade teacher, asked her what was wrong, Alyssa shared that her grandmother had fallen and her family didn't know she was hurt for a while. She then stated that her grandmother was now in the hospital and she didn't know if she was okay. Amy Bevo hugged Alyssa while the other students were unpacking their backpacks. Once the students finished unpacking, Amy began the morning routine by letting students talk about what was happening in their lives. When asked who wanted to share, Alyssa raised her hand and shared the story of her grandmother falling with the class. Without any prompting from Amy, Elizabeth, one of Alyssa's classmates, said she would like to make a get well card for Alyssa's grandmother. Amy said that was fine and Elizabeth went over to the writing center in order to create the card. After Elizabeth got up, several other first graders also asked if they could make a card for Alyssa's grandmother. In a matter of minutes, the entire class was engaged in making a get-well card for Alyssa's grandmother. In addition to making the cards, several of the first graders went up to Alyssa and hugged her. While this impromptu activity occurred first thing in the morning, the students continued to console Alyssa throughout the morning. The strong sense of family and the showing of affection and concern for someone's family member was exhibited through this unplanned activity (field notes, 2015).

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

This study and its use of an interdisciplinary unit on race illustrated how a novice teacher, Amy Bevo, approached the teaching of race with her young first grade students. While the Exploring Race with Young Children (1st Iteration) framework was still in its initial stages, it was embedded into the curriculum in Amy's room. Since the unit relied

on the sharing of counter-stories to embed communities of color into the curriculum, the themes that emerged from the data highlighted the students' understanding of race. The six themes that emerged were the students began to (1) *identify similarities and differences in phenotype, (2) talk about slavery with resistance, (3) make historical connections across time periods, (4) engage in planned and impromptu conversations on the race, (5) seek confirmation of allies, and (6) develop a strong sense of community*.

Interestingly, while the six themes directly illustrate the students' understandings about race, it is essential to note the importance of their teacher's ability to break down concepts so that they were not too complex for this age group to understand. While the interdisciplinary unit intentionally focused on race, the "everydayness" (Holt, 1995) of conversations about race and its impact on various individuals and communities of color unintentionally appeared throughout the lessons. Recognizing the need to intentionally address 'everyday' conversations and interactions about race (Holt, 1995), I wondered what would occur if this aspect was embedded into the Exploring Race with Young Children framework. In chapters 5 and 6, the framework is revised to address Holt's (1995) notion of "everydayness" and see what happens when the interdisciplinary unit purposefully focuses on everyday conversations about race.

Chapter Five

Examining Young Children's Understandings about Race: Looking Closely at Alicia Johnson's Kindergarten Grade Classroom

Chapter five highlights another classroom that utilized the previously described interdisciplinary unit on race. Like chapter four, chapter five will start by examining Alicia Johnson—a kindergarten teacher at Glendale School—particularly in regard to her comfort level and willingness to discuss race with her students. However, unlike Amy Bevo, the first grade teacher at Faircrest Elementary, Alicia Johnson aligned with the same racial group as the majority of her students, i.e. African American. This chapter will highlight the classroom context of how a teacher who aligns with the racial majority of the students in her classroom discusses race. Then, the chapter will provide excerpts of students' conversations and work samples that arose during the interdisciplinary unit on race. Finally, chapter five will conclude by summarizing the kindergarten classroom and present four themes from the student data.

CONTEXT OF THE CLASSROOM

Background on Alicia Johnson

Alicia was an African American kindergarten teacher who had taught for 29 years at the time of data collection. In addition, she was only one of two African American teachers in the prekindergarten to third grade wing. During different professional development sessions, Alicia would share her experiences and the challenges she faced as a teacher of color with the rest of her colleagues. Alicia often advocated for a more racially inclusive curriculum where her students can see people who look like themselves.

About Alicia's Kindergarten Classroom

Alicia Johnson's room was located on the first floor in the primary wing of Glendale School. Each of the kindergarten rooms were next to each other with the second grade classrooms across the hall from them. Prior to entering Alicia's classroom, decorations were visible on the outside of her classroom door that changed seasonally.

Alicia's classroom was noticeably bright and had colorful patterns around the room. There were long rectangular windows that lined the entire back wall of the classroom. These windows let in a lot of natural light and provided a view of the school parking lot. In addition to the large windows, the ceiling was also quite high and made the room feel even larger. In the middle of room was a large rectangular rainbow-colored rug, which was placed directly in front of the Smartboard. Cubbies lined two walls near the classroom door. This was where the students placed their bookbags and jackets. The back of the room contained a sink and a door that led to the shared restroom space with another classroom. Alicia's teacher's desk was pushed near the wall with the windows because she was rarely ever sitting at her desk. Instead, Alicia was often sitting with her students at the carpet area.

On the carpet area, the students had their class meetings, listened to stories, interacted with technology and videos, and completed the calendar. Next to the Smartboard, there was a bulletin board and white board. The border for the bulletin board contained images of a kente cloth, which symbolized African cultural heritage. Along with the carpet area, there were three rectangular tables that framed the rug and a fourth table placed further back in the room. Each of the kindergarten students had an assigned seat at one of the tables. In the middle of every table, there were tubs that held the students' writing utensils and journals. The students would sit at their desks whenever it

was writing time, during specific centers, and math time. Otherwise, most of the lessons were conducted on the carpet area.

ALICIA JOHNSON'S WILLINGNESS TO TALK ABOUT RACE

Although Alicia shared the same racial identity as the majority of her students, she was only one of two African American teachers in the entire primary (PK-3) wing. As a teacher of color, Alicia often spoke about race with her colleagues with the intention of helping them begin to understand a different perspective (field notes, 2015, 2016). For Alicia, addressing race felt natural. She discussed how, as an African American female teaching predominantly African American children, she felt the need to share more stories about people who looked like her own students (teacher interview, 2015). Alicia was very concerned about the lack of knowledge the students had about their own ancestry.

To ensure that she was creating spaces for curriculum that reflected the culture and history of her students, Alicia integrated aspects of African culture into her classroom routines and culture. For example, when getting the students' attention, Mrs. Johnson used a call and response of "ago" and "ame", which derives from the Akan language of West Africa and means "listen" and "I am listening" ("What Ago! Ame! Means," 2015). The idea of a call and response is considered connected to African American cultural practices and many of Alicia's students immediately responded to the prompts, or "call", due to their familiarity with the attention signal ("What Ago! Ame! Means," 2015). Along with using an African call and response, Mrs. Johnson regularly referred to her students as "kings" and "queens" and would explain to them that they are "descendants of greatness". She took time to talk about African and African American history and wanted to make sure her students knew information about their descendants.

Reflecting on her experience teaching the interdisciplinary unit, Alicia said, "The children were so ready to absorb and share [the information learned in the interdisciplinary unit on race]. They really are quite aware of social justices and injustices and even try to make the injustices right" (teacher interview, 2016). Alicia commented that while she believed in embedding the perspectives of communities of color into the curriculum, she was never taught how to implement it and did not feel that she went into depth with the information prior to joining this study (field notes, 2016).

PLANNING THE INTERDISCIPLINARY UNIT ON RACE

A Discussion on Counter-Stories

A similar conversation about the importance of telling the entire story and not just aspects of it occurred when I discussed the interdisciplinary unit on race with the kindergarten teachers. Both Alicia Johnson and her fellow kindergarten colleague, Lisa Howe (second teacher participant at Glendale that will be the focus of chapter six), were excited to address race with their students. Since the majority of their students were African American, they also recognized the need to infuse counter-stories in order to make the curriculum more culturally relevant to their students.

As discussed in chapter four, the counter-stories shared with the kindergarteners highlighted the lived experiences of African American, Latino, and Multi-racial communities of color. By purposely choosing to share these communities' past and present experiences, Alicia's kindergarteners were exposed to a variety of perspectives instead of only a Western European viewpoint. An assortment of instructional artifacts, such as children's literature, videos, and images, were used to expose counter-stories to the participants. These artifacts served as a way to help the students to essentially walk alongside the individuals depicted in the books, videos, and images. By sharing stories

about different events, the kindergarteners were able to gain a deeper insight into the situations and their eventual outcomes. Listed below is a chart identifying the types of artifacts utilized during the unit, the name of each artifact, and the community of color the artifact highlighted.

Type of Artifact	Name of Artifact	Community of Focus
Children's Literature	*One* (Otoshi, 2008)	All
Children's Literature	*The Crayon Box that Talked* (Derolf, 2014)	All
Children's Literature	*That's Just Fairy* (Asquith, 2013)	All
Children's Literature	*Marisol MacDonald Doesn't Match* (Brown, 2011)	Multiracial
Children's Literature	*My name is Johari* (O'Brien, 1994)	African American
Children's Literature	*We're all Alike, We're All Different* (Cheltenham Elementary Kindergarteners, 1991)	All
Children's Literature	*Grandpa's Face* (Greenfield, 1996)	African American
Children's Literature	*Lola at the Library* (McQuinn, 2006)	African American
Children's Literature	*Africa Brothers and Sisters* (Kroll, 1993)	African American
Children's Literature	*Africa is not a country* (Knight, 2002)	African American
Children's Literature	*Cultures of the World: Somalia* (Hassig, 1997)	African
Children's Literature	*National Geographic Kids Everything Ancient Egypt* (Boyer, 2012)	African
Children's Literature	*We're Sailing Down the Nile* (Krebs, 2008)	African
Children's Literature	*DK Eyewitness Books: Ancient Egypt* (Hart, 2014)	African
Children's Literature	*Mandela* (Nelson, 2013)	African
Children's Literature	*At the Crossroads* (Isadora, 1994)	African
Children's Literature	*National Geographic Countries of the World: South Africa* (Mace, 2008)	African
Children's Literature	*Charlie's House* (Schermbrucker, 1991)	African
Children's Literature	*Follow the Drinking Gourd* (Winter, 1992)	African American
Children's Literature	*The Patchwork Quilt* (Celebration Press, 1985)	African American
Children's Literature	*Unspoken* (Cole, 2012)	African American

Table 8. This table identifies the various artifacts (literature, videos, and images) utilized throughout the interdisciplinary unit and the specific community of color the artifact represented.

Children's Literature	*Martin's Big Words* (Rappaport, 2007)	African American
Children's Literature	*Rosa* (Giovanni, 2007)	African American
Children's Literature	*If a Bus Could Talk: The Story of Rosa Parks* (Ringgold, 2003)	African American
Children's Literature	*The Story of Ruby Bridges* (Coles, 2010)	African American
Children's Literature	*We March* (Evans, 2016)	African American
Children's Literature	*We Shall Overcome: The Story of Song* (Levy, 2013)	African American
Children's Literature	*Separate is Never Equal: Sylvia Mendez and Her Family's Fight for Desegregation* (Tonatiuh, 2014)	Mexican American
Children's Literature	*The Case of the Lovings* (Alko, 2015)	Multiracial
Children's Literature	*Si Se Puede! / Yes, We Can!: Janitor Strike in L.A.* (Cohn, 2005)	Latino
Children's Literature	*Henry's Freedom Box* (Levine, 2007)	African American
Video (looked at images)	Abraham Lincoln (biography.com)	African American
Video	Reading Rainbow on MLK	African American
Video	Brain Pop Jr video on MLK	African Americans
Video	One Penny More (Coalition of Immokalee Workers)	Latino
Image	Slave ship drawing	African Americans
Image	African King and Queen posters	African African American
Image	Family Poster	Variety of groups African American Latino Multi racial White
Image	Protest images from Ruby Bridges	Variety of people
Image	Protest images (60s)	Variety of groups (primarily African American & Latino)
Image	Somalia	African
Image	South Africa	African
Image	Egypt	African
Image	Africa posters	African
Item	Globe/ world map	All communities

Table 8. Continuation of table to identify the various artifacts (literature, videos, and images) utilized throughout the interdisciplinary unit and the specific community of color the artifact represented.

Second Iteration of the Exploring Race with Young Children Framework

As previously discussed in chapter four, the "exploring race with young children" framework was a pivotal component of the study because it helped center the curriculum on counter-stories. This framework was developed to help early elementary teachers have conversations addressing race within interdisciplinary social studies and English language arts units. Since the framework does not serve as a canned curriculum (Yu-le, 2004), where lesson plans are previously constructed with no regard to the students, teacher, or community, a variety of instructional strategies align with each stage of the framework. Depending upon the class structure, the teachers utilized instructional literacy strategies such as turn and talk, draw a face, panel books (Mann, 2008), and writer's workshop (Graves, 1994) to help the students better comprehend and analyze the event(s).

After initially implementing the framework into Amy Bevo's classroom, I saw there were areas of the framework that were missing and sought to revise it prior to embedding the unit into Alicia Johnson and Lisa Howe's kindergarten classrooms. The framework was expanded from two stages to three and an additional substage [Ancient Africa] as added. The first major change to the framework was an expansion from two stages to three. By adding Holt's (1995) idea of the everydayness of race, I wanted to purposely address the everyday interactions and daily events of communities of color. This purpose of this new stage, which was appropriately called Stage Two: The "Everydayness" of Communities of Color (Holt, 1995), was to avoid exoticizing communities of color and promoted understanding the daily impact of race.

The second major change to the framework after moving the initial iteration of Stage Two: Examining History with Inequities to the third stage was adding an additional substage. This substage was added to avoid having students potentially define African

American history exclusively by oppressive conditions such as slavery. The new substage of Stage Two, which was called Ancient Africa, highlighted information prior to the Transatlantic Slave Trade in order to introduce students to events that occurred before slavery. This first substage was necessary in order to avoid defining peoples of African descent solely by oppression and to instead present a more positive aspect of the continent of Africa prior to the Transatlantic Slave Trade (King & Swartz, 2016).

The second iteration of the Exploring Race with Young Children framework, included three distinct stages. The three stages for exploring race with young children were (1) examining similarities and differences, (2) promoting the "everydayness" of communities of color (Holt, 1995), and (3) examining historical systemic inequities, which contained four distinct subsections (See Figure 16).
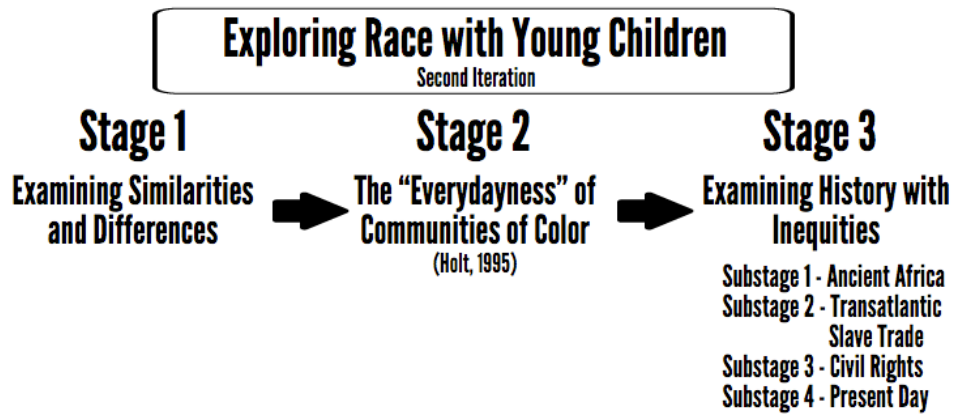

Figure 16. The three stages of the second iteration of Exploring Race with Young Children framework are outlined in the image above.

Listed below are brief explanations of each stage and substage in the second iteration of the Exploring Race with Young Children framework.

Stage One - Examining Similarities and Differences

During this stage of the study, different activities were created to help the children identify ways they were similar and different from their peers. In addition to focusing on themselves, lessons addressing different types of families and communities, i.e. urban, suburban, and rural, were also taught to help expand upon the participants' knowledge of the world around them.

Stage Two - The "Everydayness" of Communities of Color (Holt, 1995)

While addressing similarities and differences is commonly applied in early childhood classrooms, it was important the unit contained information that went beyond having children learn about themselves, their families, and how people are alike or different. To avoid generalizing groups, the unit was expanded to encompass more complexities of race and depict what Holt (1995) called the "everydayness" of communities of color. During this stage, the day-to-day interactions within and throughout communities of color were examined in order to acknowledge the multitude of experiences individuals aligning to the same racial group face on a daily basis. Stage Two helped children not only relate their own experiences to different ethnic or racial groups but also indicated how race impacts people's experiences in different ways.

Stage Three - Examining History with Inequities

The last and final stage of the study highlighted systemic inequities existing in society. Both current day and historical events were unpacked in order for children to see not only the linkages to the past but also how justice or injustice has played a role in the shaping of society. In order to present a nuanced view of historical events and the impact on communities of color, this stage began on a positive aspect exploring communities of color's history before delving into the inequitable situations that individuals and communities continue to address. While the substages can occur for any community,

African American history was selected due to the racial demographics of the students at Glendale School.

Substage One - Ancient Africa

The first subsection of examining history with inequities began with learning about Africa as a continent with different countries, values, systems, languages, etc. According to Bently-Edwards (2016), students' learning about African Americans should begin with Africa and not slavery because a focus on Africa emphasizes African American's humanity. King and Swartz (2016) further expanded upon this idea when they stated,

> all cultures have heritage knowledge, which "holds" the cultural legacies and patterns produced by worldview that inform what is taught and how it is taught. For African Americans, this birthright is embodied in knowledge of shared African Diasporan cultural continuities, such as mutuality, spirituality, service to others, justice, and reciprocity (p. 4).

Along with learning about heritage knowledge, students from different cultures gain what is called "cultural knowledge" when learning about other races or ethnicities (King & Swartz, 2016). In both instances, it is important for the students to learn about individuals and events in context and avoid a flattened narrative (King & Swartz, 2016, 2014; King & Goodwin, 2006), which lessens the impact of presenting a more humane perspective and understanding of the group.

Substage Two - Transatlantic Slave Trade

This substage began to address inequitable treatment and oppressive conditions. Substage 2 introduced slavery and oppression, however, it depicted the agency of enslaved Africans by showing the different ways people resisted being taken into or escaped from slavery. Displaying the agency and pushback against enslavement was pivotal to ensure that a victim-based narrative was avoided.

Substage Three – Civil Rights

The Civil Rights Movement was broadened to depict numerous individuals who worked together as a collective to fight against injustices. While some individuals like, Rosa Parks, Dr. Martin Luther King, and Cesar Chavez, were highlighted; other less known individuals were also presented to give students a better sense of how many people had to join together to advocate for equal rights.

Substage Four – Present Day. Since most social studies lessons only focus on the past, in this study, I wanted to discuss present events in order to begin to understand the historical connections to earlier situations that occurred. Twenty-first century events advocating for human rights and equitable treatment were highlighted during this substage. Due to the recent information, books as well as videos were used to inform the students.

ALICIA JOHNSON'S DISRUPTION OF THE STATUS QUO

Like Ms. Bevo, the first grade teacher from the pilot study, Alicia Johnson and her colleague, Lisa Howe, also chose to infuse communities of color into their social studies content while still adhering to the broad required social studies standards for their state. Listed below is a chart of five of the eight required social studies concepts/themes that the Glendale students must learn in kindergarten.

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Main Study's Social Studies Standards for Kindergarten[28]	
Identity	• Myself and others • My physical self includes gender, ethnicity, and languages. • Each person has needs, wants, talents, and abilities. Each person has likes and dislikes. • Each person is unique and important. • People are alike and different in many ways. • All people need others. • All people need to learn and learn in different ways. People change over time. My family and other families • My family and other families are alike and different.
Change	• Myself and others • All people need to learn and learn in different ways. People change over time.
Culture	Myself and others • People use folktales, legends, music, and oral histories to teach values, ideas, and traditions.
Interdependence	• People helping one another to meet needs and wants (e.g., recycling and conservation projects) • People rely on each other for goods and services in families, schools, and the neighborhood. People make economic decisions and choices
Government	• People making and changing rules and laws • Rules affect children and adults. People make and changes rules for many reasons.

Table 9. This table contains 5 out of the 8 social studies concepts/themes public school kindergarten students were expected to learn in the main study's state.

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[28] http://www.p12.nysed.gov/ciai/socst/pub/sscore1.pdf

While the social studies state standards for the Faircrest first graders did include names of individuals, the social studies standards for kindergarteners were even less specific. Again, this meant early childhood teachers were technically able to infuse as much information about communities of color into the curriculum as they desired and still adhere to the state requirements. But, due to either a lack of knowledge (Brophy & Alleman, 1996; Chapin & Messick, 1999; Fritzer & Kumar, 2002) or materials, the majority of teachers teach a similar social studies curriculum to the one that they were taught when they were younger (Fritzer & Kumar, 2002; Turner, 1999), which is almost void of any mention of communities of color. While the embedding of contributions from communities of color is quite easy to do with such broad standards, if (1) teachers do not know the content knowledge or (2) regress to teaching the same content they were exposed to anywhere from fifteen to fifty years earlier, then not only does the subject matter never change, but the rationale behind why the curriculum was presented this way in the first place continues to persist and serve as, what Goodwin (2010) called, a "colonizing effect curriculum" (p. 3106). When the curriculum turned into a colonizer, it then could potentially impact people's "identity, socialization" (Goodwin, 2010, p. 3106) as well as their understanding of resistance and the historical fight for equity.

Alicia's willingness to discuss slavery, which was one of stage three's subsections in the interdisciplinary unit on race, demonstrated the safe space that was created in order for students to share their thoughts without having the conversation interrupted due to the emotional as well as contentious nature of the topic. When asked about the students' conversations throughout the unit, Alicia shared that having these types of conversations with her students was what she signed up for when she asked to be a part of the study (teacher interview, 2016). As an educator of color, she wanted her students to know their history and make sure they understood there was a lot of pushback and resistance that

occurred in the fight for freedom and equality. Alicia's willingness to let her students share their thoughts and emotions freely without restricting them led to other conversations about the importance of human rights.

KINDERGARTENERS AND THE INTERDISCIPLINARY UNIT ON RACE

Conversations on the Inequitable Treatment of Communities of Color

The kindergarten students in Alicia's class were very adamant about how to treat people. For example, when the kindergarteners were analyzing the photograph of a slave ship, a conversation began about the treatment of people. Michelle, an African American female, said, "They going to another country and sell them. If they selling the African[s] for money, that is not right. They will miss their family real bad and cry" (field notes, 2016). Michelle's sharing about what was going to happen to Africans who were taken during the Transatlantic Slave Trade prompted another student to speak up as well. Anthony, an African American male, responded and said, "They won't see their mommy" (field notes, 2016). Anthony was personalizing what occurred and connecting to aspects he could understand like being taken away from a parent or his family. After Anthony shared his thoughts, Michelle then stood up on the carpet and placed her hands on her hips. In a loud voice, Michelle projected, "You shouldn't get rich off of selling people" (field notes, 2016). Michelle's assertiveness and the fact she decided to stand up so everyone would hear what she had to say led another one of her peers to do the same. As Michelle sat down, Ja Quan, an African American male, stood up and said, "Slaves didn't want to leave family, leave school, leave work, leave jobs or country. They didn't want to be slaves!" (field notes, 2016). Alicia agreed with the kindergarteners and reiterated what the three students had said (field notes, 2016).

During another lesson about events that occurred during slavery, Monica, an African American female, said, "They [the Africans] wanted to be treated like a real human. They wanted to be free" (field notes, 2016). Again, the concept of humanity and being a "real" human stood out the children. Even at this young age, they understood Africans and African Americans were looked down upon during slavery. However, the children did not accept a victim-based narrative and pushed back against it. For example, Ron, an African American male declared, "It wasn't right" (field notes, 2016) when they were reading *Henry's Freedom Box* (Levine, 2007) and found out Henry was taken away from his family. Since the children had read and discussed several stories about resisting slavery and oppression, the kindergarteners began to share different ways people resisted. Anthony said, "Africans fought so they can be free" (field notes, 2016). In response to Anthony, Michelle said, "Sometimes they ran away" (field notes, 2016) and referenced a book about Harriet Tubman and the Underground Railroad. Monica joined the conversation again and said, "They [the Africans] could get killed or whooped if they were caught" (field notes, 2016) noting the risk people took in order to be free. Ja Quan chimed in and added, "The slaves decided to fight back" (field notes, 2016). When asked about his response later, Ja Quan added that some slaves would fight in order to get away (Student interview, 2016). He shared that they talked about it at home and at school. Responding to both Monica and Ja Quan, Ron summarized the whole conversation when he stated, "People hurt people" (field notes, 2016). Interestingly, after Ron's statement, the conversation stopped and Alicia continued with her lesson since no one else said they had anything they wanted to share with the group. These insightful statements were made by the kindergarteners when discussing slavery through the use of counter-stories.

While only five and six years old, the kindergarteners were capable of having conversations about the inhumane treatment towards African Americans and others who

were enslaved during slavery. In addition to discussing the oppressive conditions, they also identified ways individuals and groups resisted and how communities advocated for their rights. Like Ms. Bevo's first graders, the kindergarteners in Alicia's class discussed different ways to confront oppressive structures (field notes, 2016). However, one notable difference between the classrooms was Amy Bevo's class only listed non-violent ways to reject oppressive conditions, whereas Alicia Johnson's kindergarteners were aware of and openly discussed the non-violent as well as violent ways people fought for their freedom (field notes, 2016).

Exploring Afrocentricity in the Primary Years

As previously mentioned in this chapter, a revision was made to the second iteration of the Exploring Race with Young Children framework in order to expose students to information about communities of color—in this case African Americans— prior to enslavement. Again, it was decided to include information prior to enslavement to make sure African Americans and, subsequently, African American history were not solely defined by an oppressive aspect in history such as slavery. According to Traoré (2007), Afrocentricity deconstructs Eurocentric versions of African history and recontextualizes it to provide a different perspective of Africa and people of African descent. By sharing counter-stories to present new perspectives specifically regarding the continent of Africa, the kindergarteners in Alicia's room were able to learn about various countries in Africa apart from a colonialized perspective. This meant that the information was presented in a positive light rather than compared to such traditional Eurocentric norms.

While the kindergarteners engaged in lessons about Africa, they became fascinated with the images of kings, queens, and learning about different countries in

Africa. Often, during centers the students would take the posters and look at them on the floor (See Figure 17 and 18 below).

Figure 17. A student looks at a picture of different individuals from Africa.

Figure 18. This poster showed on the kings and contained information about where he ruled and the time period.

During center time, Ron excitedly stated, "That's the king!" (field notes, 2016) and leant towards the poster of an African King (see Figure 18 above), which was flat on the rug, to inspect it more closely. After Ron's exclamation, Anthony, one of his classmates, joined him and stated, "This is my favorite king. I look like him" (field notes, 2016). Anthony then held up his hand, showed Ron the backside of it, and placed it next to the poster. When I asked Anthony why he thought he looked like the king in the picture, he replied matter-of-factly, "We have the same color skin. We're brown" (field

notes, 2016). Then, Michelle joined the two boys on the carpet area and said, "We could all be kings or queens" (field notes, 2016). After Michelle's statement, the impromptu conversation subsided as the participants began to look at different books about various countries in Africa.

From learning more in-depth information about Africa, the kindergarteners spoke eagerly about the different countries and were very apparent in their word usage of country versus continent. For example, while Michelle was filling in a country on her Africa continent cutout (See Figure 19 below), I decided to ask her about what she was learning (student interview, 2016). Michelle explained,

"We learned about countries in Africa. South Africa, Somalia, and Egypt. They are countries. They don't have the same letters in words and they don't have the same sound. Africa is part of a map. [Michelle pointed to the map of the world and showed me where Africa was located on it] The continent of Africa has lots of different countries."

Figure 19. This picture shows a cutout of Africa with different countries (Egypt, Somalia, and South Africa) identified on it.

What was so noticeable about Michelle's summarizing of what they were learning about was Alicia, Michelle's kindergarten teacher, did not teach about the continent in isolation. Instead, the kindergarteners learned about the continent of Africa as well as

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where it was located on the map while they engaged in the first subsection, i.e. Ancient Africa, of the interdisciplinary unit's Stage Three: Examining History with Inequities. This contextualized view of the continent of Africa helped the students discuss the various countries on the continent and avoid a flattened, and often stereotypical, narrative of the continent of Africa (Kete, 1991).

However, Michelle wasn't the only student who would discuss the three African countries they were learning about in class. While I was having a conversation with Michelle, Monica, another student in the room, came up to us and reiterated what Michelle said by stating, "Africa is a continent" (field notes, 2016). This led to other kindergarteners near us to repeatedly chant, "Africa is continent" and then insist on showing me their maps as well (field notes, 2016). When I later asked Alicia about how the unit was going, she replied, "This is the first time the students remembered where the continent was so quickly. They liked learning about Africa and the different countries" (teacher interview, 2016). Alicia then explained her rationale for selecting the three countries: Egypt, Somalia, and South Africa, to focus on when she shared that they have students from Somalia at the school (teacher interview, 2016). She also shared that the kindergarteners talk about the African kings and queens daily (teacher interview, 2016). She mentioned while she had always talked about the continent of Africa, she didn't go into depth with the content like she was now. According to Alicia, she could see how "proud they [her students] are of their ancestors" (teacher interview, 2016).

Developing a Strong Sense of Community

An increased sense of community also occurred in Alicia's kindergarten classroom. During one lesson, the kindergarteners listened to *Henry's Freedom Box* (Levine, 2007) and then drew and wrote about how they felt during three particular portions of the book. The first section that they had to write about was when Henry was

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taken away from his family. The second section focused on when Henry was mailing himself to freedom. The last section that the students wrote about was when the box was opened and Henry was free. Monica wrote, "I will [sic] be sad. I will be excited because they were [sic] free. Today I excited. We are free" (See Figure 20). Monica explained that she would be sad to be taken away from her family if she was Henry. Then, when Henry was mailing himself in the box to escape, Monica shared that she would be excited because she would become free soon. Lastly, Monica shared that she would be excited when the box was opened because she was free (field notes, 2016). Interestingly, Monica's description of how Henry felt changed from using "I", which is a singular first person pronoun, and putting herself directly into his shoes to using the plural first person pronoun, "we", and aligning Henry as well as herself as free. This statement, although simplistic, displayed the depth of Monica's understanding. Since she was not alive during slavery times, she did not associate with it so she put herself into Henry's shoes, but when it came to being free, Monica could relate to the idea and then moved from walking in the character's shoes to walking beside him. Monica's ability to switch perspectives indicated a more advanced understanding of perspective-taking and could easily be missed if both her written thoughts and accompanying statements weren't analyzed.
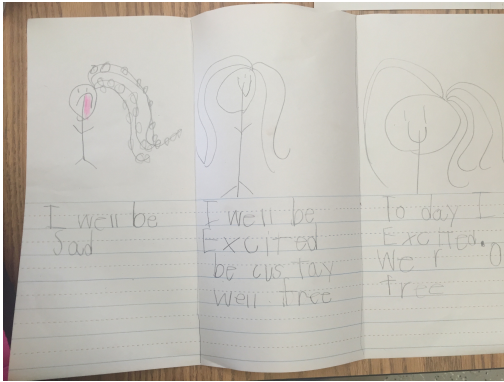
Figure 20. This is a picture of Monica's, a student in Mrs. Johnson's class, written
response to how she thought Henry felt during their specific parts of
Henry's Freedom Box (Levine, 2007).

Michelle, another student in Alicia's classroom also had similar statements. In this case, Michelle stated that first she would be sad to be taken away from her family. Then, she shared that she would be happy when she mailed herself because she was escaping. Last, Michelle shared that she would feel happy because she wasn't a slave anymore and could do what she wanted to do (see Figure 21 below).
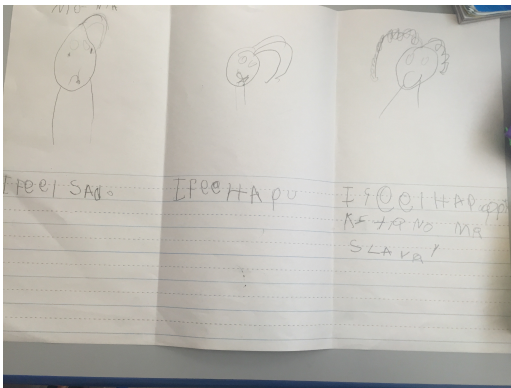
Figure 21. Michelle, a student in Mrs. Johnson's class, wrote down how she thought
Henry would feel during three specific portions of Henry Freedom Box
(Levine, 2007).

While most of the students in Mrs. Johnson's class wrote similar sentiments for each portion of the story, one kindergartener, Ja Quan, had a different take on the story. In this case, Ja Quan wrote, "I feel sad. I feel sad. I feel sad." for each section of the story (See Figure 22).
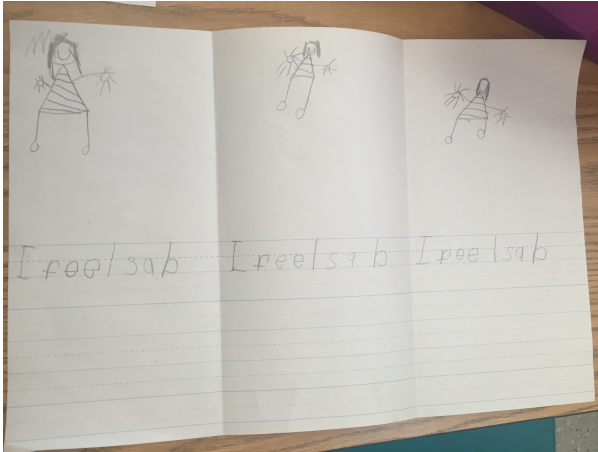
Figure 22. Ja Quan, a student in Mrs. Johnson's class, wrote down how he thought Henry would feel during three specific portions of Henry Freedom Box (Levine, 2007).

When Ja Quan was asked about why he wrote the same thing three times he explained his rationale. Ja Quan stated that he would first feel sad that he was taken away from his family. Then, he shared that he would also be sad when he was mailing himself in the box because he would be alone with no one to care for him. Finally, Ja Quan said he would be sad because while he would be happy to be free, he wouldn't know where his family was or what happened to them (field notes, 2016). This thoughtful explanation of three simplistic sentences showed the importance of family and community.

Black History Month Celebration with the Acknowledgement of Resistance

Not only was Alicia Johnson responsible for making sure her kindergarteners learned the necessary content that was required by the state, she was also the planner of

the school's annual celebration of Black History Month. Considering the demographics of the school, Alicia felt that it was extremely important for her school to honor the heritage of African Americans while making sure the students actually learned and celebrated their history (teacher interview, 2016). Since Alicia was managing the celebration, her students were slated to perform. The Black History Month school program was considered to be an extra event at Glendale, which meant that teachers could decide whether or not they wanted their students to participate in the event. While all classrooms were required to attend, only a handful of teachers contributed to the actual program. Since Glendale was a PK-8 school, they held two Black History Month programs, one for the prekindergarten through third grade and the other for fourth through eighth grade. The grade levels that participated in the Black History Month program are listed below.

Black History Month (PK-3 session)	
Grade Level	**Number of Classrooms Participating**
Prekindergarten	2 out of 2
Kindergarten	3 out of 3
First Grade	1 out of 3
Second Grade	0 out of 3
Third Grade	3 out of 3

Table 10. This table identifies the grade level and number of classrooms that participated in the Black History Month program.

While the majority of the PK-3 classrooms did participate (nine out of fourteen), there was one grade level that did not have any students participate in the program and three grade levels that had complete participation. When I later asked Alicia about the participation levels, she explained that she sent out an email to everyone and spoke about it at a faculty meeting. While Alicia thought it was important for the students to

participate, she recognized that she did not have any authority to make teachers participate nor did she want people to trivialize the program (teacher interview, 2016).

Although the majority of the primary teachers did have their class participate, what stood out was the depth of knowledge of each presentation. For example, the prekindergarten teachers had their students sing, "We All Sing With the Same Voice" (Miller, 2005) as part of the program (field notes, 2016). In this case, while the song highlighted similarities and differences, its intent was to truly promote oneness. The first grade class had four students read what they learned about Mae Jemison (field notes, 2016). The third grade classes sang, "I Believe I Can Fly" (Kelly, 1996) and focused on what they can overcome when they hit hurdles. It was only the kindergarten team that acknowledged the resistance and fight for freedom and equality during slavery. Alicia Johnson's class performed the poem, *Harriet Tubman*, by Eloise Greenfield (1986). From the very beginning of the poem, it addressed standing up for yourself and fighting for what you believed was right. For example, the first stanza says,

"Harriet Tubman didn't take no stuff

Wasn't scared of nothing neither

Didn't come in this world to be no slave

And wasn't going to stay one either" (Greenfield, 1986)

All of Alicia's kindergarteners recited the poem from memory and put some actions to different words. When I asked her how long it took for her students to remember the poem, Alicia stated, "They learned it so quickly. I don't think it took two weeks" (field notes, 2016).

Even though the Black History Month program occurred in early February, Alicia later commented that her students still continue to perform the poem and they can't go a week without an impromptu performance occurring in her class (teacher interview, 2016). Alicia attributed her focus on resistance during slavery and her students' continued interest in it to the interdisciplinary unit on race (teacher interview, 2016). In fact, she said that she planned on starting to address the unit at the beginning of the following school year and weave it into the curriculum throughout the year (teacher interview, 2016). According to Alicia, she "will have to take time to carefully plan the year… [she] will start with Africa (general) and then three (Songhay, Mali and Ghana) kingdoms until the present.…The goal is to branch out into other cultures to compare and contrast their own culture, African culture and cultures of others" (teacher interview, 2016). Alicia further shared her thoughts about the unit when she stated, "This will teach there are more similarities than differences and yet we are specially designed to be UNIQUE and there is GREATNESS in all of us! Thanks for helping [bring me] back to my ROOTS!!!!!! You have now awakened the passion again. The world better watch out. These students are rising up to stand for what's right. Wow, what a difference!" (teacher interview, 2016).

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Once again, this study and the interdisciplinary unit on race demonstrated how an early elementary teacher, Alicia Johnson, discussed race with kindergarten students. Although Alicia was a veteran teacher with 29 years of experience, like Amy Bevo, she didn't feel like she was trained to address the concept of race but knew it was something that her students needed to openly discuss. Utilizing the second iteration of the Exploring Race with Young Children framework, Alicia was able to purposely plan a unit that delved deeper into concepts that she normally brought up with students. *Because* the unit

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facilitated deeper, more meaningful conversations about race, the specific themes that emerged logically addressed race. The four themes that emerged from the data were (1) *conversations on the inequitable treatment of communities of color*, (2) *exploring Afrocentricity in the primary years*, *(3) developing a strong sense of community, and (4) Black History Month celebration with the acknowledgement of resistance*.

All four themes directly relate to the students' understanding of race. However, the kindergarteners would not have been able to demonstrate this understanding if it wasn't for the fact that Alicia was willing to discuss race openly with them and worked to create lessons that they could understand. Again, Holt's (1995) idea of the "everydayness" of race and the types of conversations and/or activities that emerged from it appeared in Alicia's classroom.

Continuing to wonder what themes would emerge from the interdisciplinary unit on race, I visited one more classroom. Chapter six, which is the final data chapter of this study, highlights Lisa Howe, another kindergarten teacher at Glendale, and what occurred in her classroom when she held conversations about race with her students.

Chapter Six

Examining Young Children's Understandings about Race: Looking Closely at Lisa Howe's Kindergarten Grade Classroom

Chapter six features the last classroom that utilized the interdisciplinary unit on race. Like chapters four and five, chapter six begins by examining Lisa Howe—a kindergarten teacher at Glendale School—in regard to her comfort-level and willingness to address race with her students. Although Lisa Howe was a teacher of color, her racial affiliation (Native American) did not align with the majority of students (African American). So, while many of Lisa's discussions addressed what it was like being a teacher of color, she presented a different perspective than her African American colleague, Alicia Johnson. Once Lisa's views about discussing race with young children are explored, the chapter then presents the student work that resulted from and conversations that occurred during the interdisciplinary unit. Chapter six concludes by sharing a summarizing analysis of Lisa Howe's kindergarteners and presenting three themes that emerged from the data.

CONTEXT OF THE CLASSROOM

Background on Mrs. Lisa Howe

Lisa Howe was a Native American teacher who had taught for 14 years at the time of data collection. While there was an additional teacher of color at the kindergarten level, Lisa was the only Native American teacher in any of the primary grades (PK-3rd grade) at Glendale. As a teacher of color, Lisa noted that she felt it was important to address race with the young students, but she did not know exactly how or where to begin the conversation with her students (teacher interview, 2015). Later on in the data collection process, Lisa explained that she asked to join this study because she had

wanted to make the curriculum more relevant for her students and felt that this project would provide the support she needed in order to do so (teacher interview, 2016).

About Lisa's Kindergarten Classroom

Lisa Howe's classroom was located in the primary grades (PK-3rd grade) hallway on the first floor. Lisa's kindergarten classroom was in the middle of the three kindergarten teachers. Like Alicia Johnson, Lisa Howe consistently decorated her classroom door with seasonal decorations and often displayed her students' work on it.

Just inside the entryway of Lisa's classroom, large cubbies lined the wall to house book-bags and jackets by the door. In addition, there was a kidney-shaped table and another round table that was only used during center time for independent student work. Also next to the kidney table was a large rainbow-colored rectangular rug that was placed in front of the Smartboard and a whiteboard. In addition to the Smartboard, next to the kidney table was a chair placed next to an easel that held big books, which are oversized children's books with print large enough for students to read, and large chart paper. Lisa's desk was placed catty-corner to wall and the Smartboard. Like Alicia Johnson's room, one of the walls in Lisa's classroom was lined with a large set of windows that looked out at the parking lot. The large set of windows brought a lot of natural light into the classroom. Unlike Alicia, Lisa had a bathroom directly inside her classroom, which was near one of the rectangular tables.

Due to the L-shaped design of Lisa's classroom, the tables where the kindergarteners sat were placed behind the rainbow rug. In the rectangular portion of the room, there were three tables in a straight row and then a fourth table behind them. Roughly four to five kindergarteners sat at each table. To ensure the kindergarteners had enough room at their tables, there were large white tubs placed on the floor in front of each table to accommodate students' supplies. Each tub contained the students' pencil

box with their name on it and their individual student journals. When it was time to write, the student who was assigned as the captain, or head of the table for that day, would pass out the pencil boxes to their tablemates.

LISA HOWE'S WILLINGNESS TO TALK ABOUT RACE

In one of her interviews, Lisa Howe stated that, as a Native American, she understood what it felt like for people of color not to see people from their ancestry as part of the curriculum (teacher interview, 2015). It was this feeling that led Lisa to want to alter what she had taught kindergarteners for the last fourteen years in order to make the curriculum more relevant to students and their racial background. However, as previously stated, while Lisa knew she wanted to change or alter the curriculum in order to have discussions about race, she did not know how to do so. After reflecting on her participation in this study, Lisa shared that teaching an interdisciplinary unit on race encouraged her to become more aware of "[her] own deficits teaching racial inequality" (teacher interview, 2016). When asked to elaborate, Lisa explained that while she thinks it is extremely important to discuss the information with the students, there were times when she began to feel uncomfortable or worried that she didn't know what to say (teacher interview, 2016). She added that if it wasn't for the support of Alicia, the other kindergarten teacher at Glendale who was part of this study, as well as myself, she wasn't sure she would have had the background knowledge to know how to address the different events or would have even known about the materials that are available to facilitate discussions regarding races geared specifically for the primary years (teacher interview, 2016). Lisa's sentiments echo many early childhood educators that fear talking about race in the classroom due to their lack of historical knowledge (Brophy & Alleman, 1996; Chapin & Messick, 1999; Fritzer & Kumar, 2002) or fear of upsetting people (Aveling

2006; Picower, 2009; Salas, 2004). In fact, she was very concerned about making sure she understood the information that she regularly discussed addressing race with the other kindergarten teachers as a way to ensure she was on the right track and would not offend anyone (field notes, 2016).

PLANNING THE INTERDISCIPLINARY UNIT ON RACE

A Discussion on Counter-Stories

Although Lisa Howe and Alicia Johnson, Lisa's colleague and fellow teacher participant in the study, were both teachers of color, (Native American and African American, respectively) due to their racial backgrounds as well as how the community "read" them, their experiences as teachers of color differed drastically. Since Lisa was very fair skinned, she was usually mistaken as being White (teacher interview, 2015). Lisa shared that since people usually assumed she was White, she rarely addressed her racial alignment (teacher interview, 2015). Unless directly questioned, which did not occur often, Lisa would typically avoid discussing race altogether (teacher interview, 2015). Deciding to teach the interdisciplinary unit on race was her first attempt at blatantly holding these types of conversations (teacher interview, 2015). Although Lisa had previously avoided discussing her own race, after participating in numerous professional development sessions on culturally responsive teaching, she started to believe as well as verbalize the importance of not only stating one's race but also seeing it included in the daily curriculum (teacher interview, 2016). In fact, although her colleague Alicia Johnson, taught the same grade level and had a classroom that was down the hall from Lisa, this study was the first time that the two teachers engaged in conversations about race as a kindergarten team (teacher interview, 2016). In spite of their different comfort-levels, both teachers planned on using the framework for

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exploring race with young children as a guide to help them not only begin conversations on race but also know where to go next.

The Implementation of Counter-stories: Teachers' Impact on Curricula

School curricula—inclusive of state standards, books, and other resources for teachers use in their classrooms—vary widely within school districts and across states within the United States. Depending upon teachers' access to materials, along with the extent of their own knowledge base of the specific subject area content, the information passed onto young elementary students can differ from class to class. Additionally, the nature of curriculum often extends beyond explicit subject-level information. As Yosso (2002) stated:

> [t]eachers may not be able or willing to incorporate a challenge to the traditional, Eurocentric versions of history conveyed by textbooks into their class lectures or discussions. Barring textbooks or teachers who bring a multifaceted version of U.S. history to the curriculum, students have little access to academic discourses that decenter white upper/middle class experiences as the norm. Traditional curriculum discourses tend to marginalize the knowledges of students of color. (p. 94)

Considering that teachers have the ability to serve as gatekeepers of information and decide which content to share with their students and which to omit, it was imperative for the teachers in this study to feel comfortable enough (or at least be willing to) create safe spaces for their students to discuss and learn about counter-stories as part of their curriculum. By infusing an interdisciplinary unit on race into the existing

curriculum, Lisa demonstrated how racial conversations can occur within the school curricula and not outside or in addition to it.

Second Iteration of the Exploring Race with Young Children Framework

As discussed previously in chapter five, the second iteration of the exploring race with young children framework was extremely important because it not only centered the curriculum around counter-stories to make the information more culturally relevant, it also helped to humanize African American historical experiences by beginning prior to the establishment of slavery. While Lisa and her colleague Alicia both participated in the second iteration of the framework, there were some notable differences in the amount of depth that each teacher went into when addressing the content with the students. Although Lisa adhered to the three stages of the framework (See Figure 23 below), she did not go into as much detail with Stage Three, Substage 1: Ancient Africa due to the limited amount of information she knew about various countries on the continent of Africa (field notes, 2016). However, she did read the books that were listed in chapter 5's Table Seven (field notes, 2016).
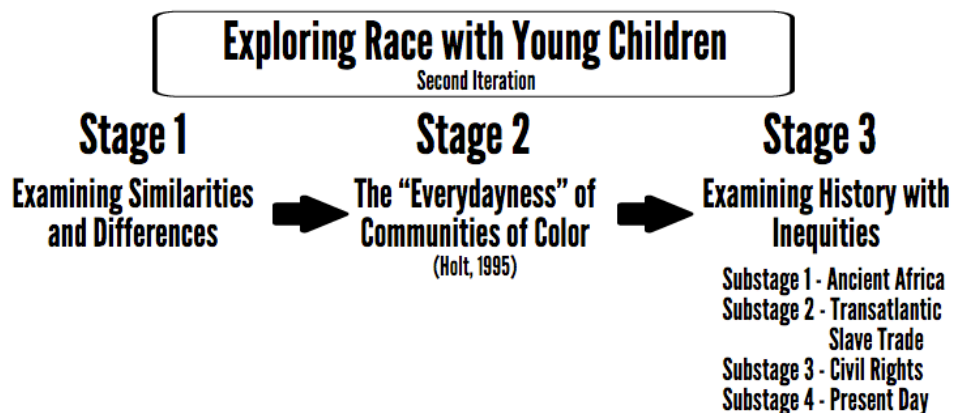

Figure 23. The second iteration of the Exploring Race with Young Children framework is outlined in the image above.

LISA HOWE'S DISRUPTION OF THE STATUS QUO

Just like Amy Bevo, the first grade teacher at Faircrest Elementary, and Alicia Johnson, kindergarten teacher at Glendale School, Lisa Howe also chose to disrupt the curriculum by implementing counter-stories into the curriculum. Since Alicia and Lisa were kindergarten grade level team members at Glendale school, together they pushed against the status quo by infusing the content to make it more culturally relevant while still maintaining to adhere to the required state standards. To Lisa, the curriculum for her five- and six-year-olds needed to depict multiple perspectives in order to provide young children with a broader, and more accurate, view of society and she often reflected on how her own education did not (field notes, 2015). So, while Lisa did not always feel comfortable addressing race, which she was well aware could be contentious due to the historical nature of race relations in the United States, she felt it was essential to share a broader depiction of the world with her students and was willing to take the risk by creating a safe space for her students to share their thoughts about the subject matter (field notes, 2015).

KINDERGARTENERS AND THE INTERDISCIPLINARY UNIT ON RACE

The Absence of Race

While Lisa worked to embed race into the curriculum, there were times when she did not know how to prompt the kindergarteners to begin to discuss skin color and race. For example, during the second iteration of the exploring race with young children unit during Stage One: Examining Similarities and Differences, Lisa decided to show a poster of different types of families to her students (See Figure 24 below).

Figure 24. This is a poster that Lisa borrowed from a prekindergarten teacher at Glendale to begin conversations about race with her kindergarten students.

Since this was one of her first lessons to gain entry into discussing race, she simply asked the kindergarteners, "What do you see in the pictures?" (field notes, 2015). Later Lisa shared that she decided to ask a broad and open-ended question because she was curious to see if any of her students would bring up the different racial skin tones as part of their observations (field notes, 2015). However, since the question did not prompt students to discuss race, which they had never formally addressed in class before, the students responded with comments such as "They're outside. They're smiling", "A mom and a baby playing", "A baby, a daddy, and a mommy", and "A dad and a kid" (field notes, 2015). After the students failed to discuss or mention race or skin tone, Lisa wondered if her kindergarteners actually did notice race or skin color and was worried to bring it up herself without any prompting or being led there by her students (field notes, 2015).

Continuing to see if her kindergarteners would automatically bring up race, Lisa decided to plan a lesson using the children's book, *Grandpa's Face* (Greenfield, 1996) during Stage Two: The "Everydayness" of Communities of Color (Holt, 1995). Again, Lisa strayed far away from focusing on race and instead chose to have the children focus on one of the character's varying emotions throughout the story. Once again, the students responded to Lisa's prompts and talked about how they would feel if they were Tomeika, the character from the story. The kindergarteners shared that they would feel "mad", "sad", or "happy" (field notes, 2016) during different portions of the story. Once again, there was an emergence of the absence of race because the students were never directed to acknowledge that the story featured an African American family. Instead, race was ignored and subsequently instead of removing the exoticism around communities of color by presenting them in the context of doing everyday activities, choosing not to see the characters' race failed to confront this perspective and provide insight into different everyday activities of individuals from differing racial groups. After observing lessons in both Stage One as well as Stage Two that failed to address race, Lisa and I reflected on how to set up conversations about race with young children. After reassuring Lisa that she was on the right path, Lisa, Alicia and I, discussed various lessons they could teach in order to encourage these types of conversations with the young elementary-aged students. By promoting co-planning with the teachers, I hoped to help foster a collaborative environment in which Lisa could plan with another teacher, Alicia Johnson, who was also part of the study and more knowledgeable about and comfortable with discussing race.

Developing a Strong Sense of Community

During the Stage Three, Substage Two: Transatlantic Slave Trade , Lisa brought out the book, *Henry's Freedom Box* (Levine, 2007), to read to the students. Lisa, who had co-planned the lesson with Alicia, explained that she was going to read the story and stop

at specific points in order for the kindergarteners to write down how they, or Henry, would feel at that specific moment (field notes, 2015). While Lisa read and paused, the students began to write down their thoughts about the various portions of the story. Interestingly, students in Lisa's room reacted similarly to students in Alicia's room. For example, Kenya (African American female), using inventive spelling stated, "Sometimes I feel sad. I feel happy. I feel happy because I'm free" (field notes, 2016) (See Figure 25 below). Similarly, Gabby (African American female), another student in Mrs. Howe's room wrote, "I am angry. I feel happy. I am excited because I'm free" (field notes, 2016). Just like Michelle and Monica from Alicia's class, Kenya and Gabby both stated they would be sad or angry to be taken away from their families but happy to escape and be free.
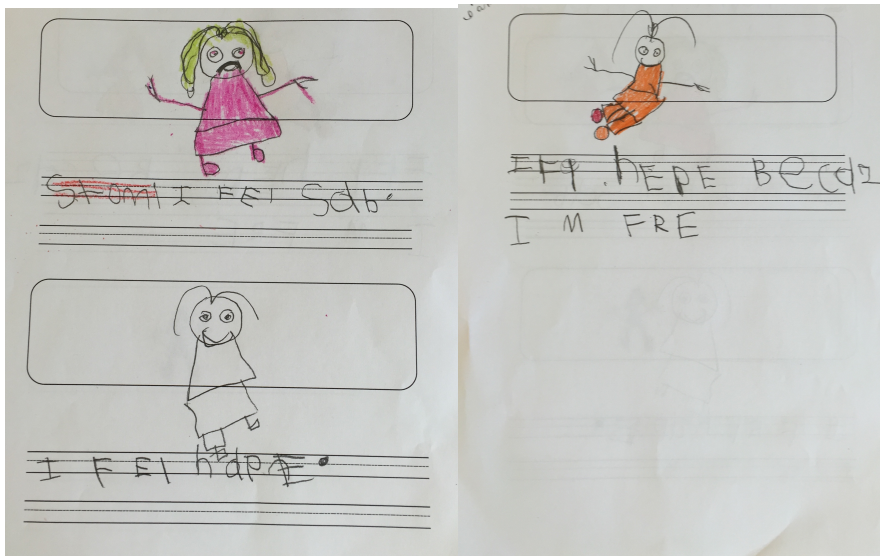
Figure 25. Kenya explained how Henry would feel during three portions of *Henry's Freedom Box* (Levine, 2007).
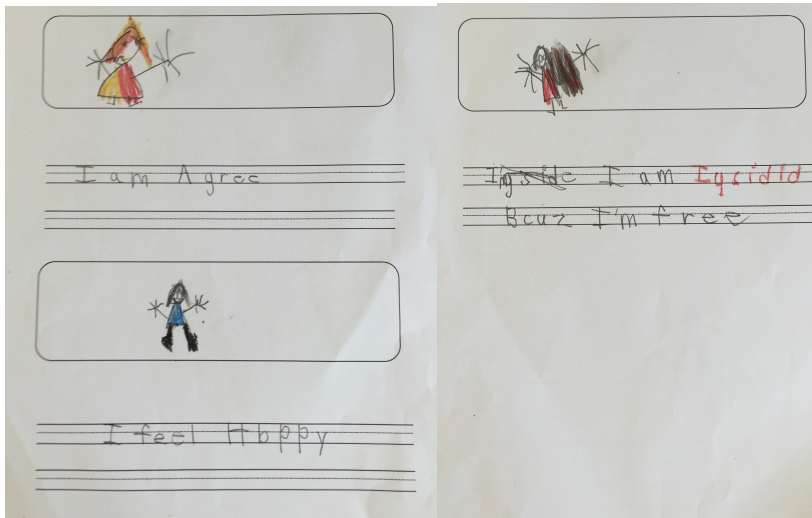
Figure 26. Gabby wrote how Henry would feel during three portions of *Henry's Freedom Box* (Levine, 2007).

While most of the students' thoughts were similar to their counterparts in Alicia's room, there was a difference. Instead of having a kindergartener mention being sad to be apart from his family once Henry was free, like a student had in Alicia's classroom, one of Lisa's kindergarteners discussed being happy because Henry could be with his friends, which ultimately addressed the same concept of having loved ones around. In this case, Donald (White male), a kindergartener in Lisa's room, wrote, "I'm angry because a slave got tookin'. I feel happy because the slave won't be sold. I feel happy because slave didn't get tookin' because he's at his friend's house" (field notes, 2016).
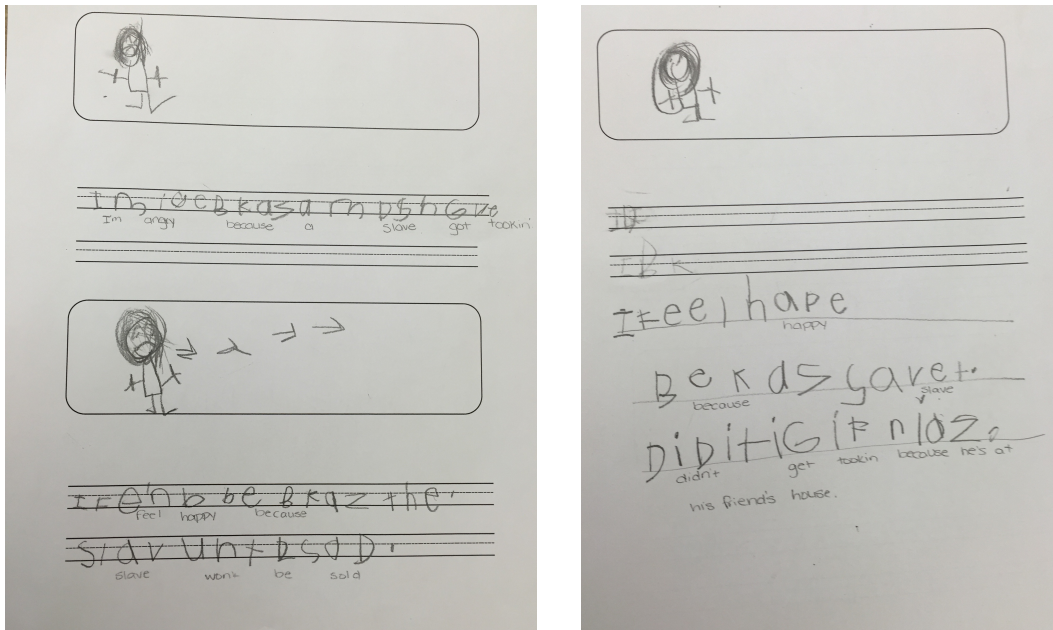
Figure 27. Donald wrote how Henry would feel during three portions of *Henry's Freedom Box* (Levine, 2007).

So while both students, one from Alicia's classroom and the other from Lisa's classroom, referenced family or friends, they wrote about opposite emotions due to one being without a family and the other being with his friends. In both instances, the students were interested in having loved ones around, regardless of whether or not they were family.

Although Lisa did not go into as much detail during Stage Three, Substage One: Ancient Africa, she did make sure to align with Alicia and teach the rest of the Stage Three's substages with deeper content. As a result, the students began to interact more like a family. For instance, when a student started to become frustrated while working on a writing task, another classmate comforted her and said, "it's okay" (field notes, 2016). On a different occasion, while the students were transitioning to a less structured activity, several students asked if they wanted to play together. Every child that asked to play the game was welcomed and no one was turned away (field notes, 2016). Like Donald's

assertion about Henry being with friends, the kindergarteners in Lisa's class began to treat each other as a more collective group, which was a noticeable departure from previous classes (field notes, 2016; teacher interview, 2016).

Black History Month Celebration with the Acknowledgement of Resistance.

Although it was optional, Lisa decided to have her students participate in the Black History Month celebration at Glendale. Lisa, like her fellow kindergarten colleague, Alicia, felt that it was important to continue to discuss African American history not just because the majority of students at Glendale were African American but also because it was part of the history of the United States (teacher interview, 2016). Since Lisa was still in Stage Three of the Exploring Race with Young Children framework when the program was presented, she decided to have her students' focus on historical inequities and the pushback against oppression (teacher interview, 2016). Lisa chose to have her students sing the song, "Follow the Drinking Gourd" (Parks, 1928). Lisa explained that not only did she select the song to show the enslaved Africans' resistance against slavery but also because it was "part of the context of their local community" with historical sites of the Underground Railroad acknowledged all around the downtown area of their city (teacher interview, 2016). Lisa was concerned that the students, who were primarily African American, did not know that their local community played a pivotal role in resisting slavery and thought the students should know about the risks people took to resist oppressive conditions (teacher interview, 2016). Similar to Alicia, Lisa's decision to address historical inequities and the fight against oppressive conditions was a significant departure from the rest of the Black History program performances where other teachers chose to have their students discuss the possibility of achieving whatever they set their minds on or emphasizing the sameness across groups.

Like chapters four and five, chapter six again highlights the impact of teaching an interdisciplinary unit on race, not only on the students and the types of conversations that occurred, but also on how the teachers themselves chose to address a topic that is often contentious. By utilizing the Exploring Race with Young Children framework, Lisa was able to not only address race with her kindergarten students but also have a guide to help her navigate beginning and extending conversations on race while still adhering to state mandated standards. By feeling supported with the framework as well as her colleague, Lisa was not only willing, but also able, to begin to have these types of discussions with her students. While the conversations were not as in-depth as Alicia Johnson or Amy Bevo, they did, in their own merit, illustrate the importance of a teacher's willingness to take a risk and discuss topics such as race. By exhibiting a risk-taker disposition and providing some opportunities for students to discuss the content, three themes emerged from the student data. The three themes that emerged were (1) *the absence of race*, (2) *developing a strong sense of community*, and (3) *Black History Month celebration with the acknowledgement of resistance*.

Each of the three themes directly tied into the students' understanding and conversations during the interdisciplinary unit on race. The first theme, which was a significant departure from the other two classrooms, showed the importance of educators being not only willing to talk about race but also hold a deep understanding of the content, access to numerous resources, and aware of various instructional strategies needed in order to break down a complex topic like race for young children to understand. While the other two themes, developing a strong sense of community and Black History Month celebration with the acknowledgement of resistance, also appeared in previous chapters, the data from all three chapters point directly to the ways in which

educators, both preservice and in-service, are prepared to teach not only subject matter content but also discuss and embed information on topics like race to present a broader perspective of society and the differing impacts on various communities.

In the last and final chapter of this study, the three classrooms, Amy Bevo, Alicia Johnson, and Lisa Howe, are analyzed in order to present data that emerge across the three classrooms, the significance of the study for future work with early elementary students and race, as well as the implications for teacher education and professional development for teachers on addressing race with young children.

Chapter Seven: Discussion and Implications

This qualitative critical case study examined the experiences discussing race with early elementary students (Kindergarten - 1st grade) during their interdisciplinary unit on Social Studies and English Language Arts as well as how the children demonstrated their understandings of race. The two questions that framed the study were: How do young elementary students (K-1st grade) discuss race during interdisciplinary social studies and language arts lessons? What understandings of race do young elementary students (K-1st grade) demonstrate when engaged in racial projects? Chapters four through six each presented distinct themes that emerged from the data analysis of three classrooms - two kindergarten and one first grade at two school sites in different geographical locations.

The themes from the first location, a first grade classroom located in the southwestern region of the United States, and led by first-year teacher, Amy Bevo, were: (1) *identify similarities and differences in phenotype, (2) talk about slavery with resistance, (3) make historical connections across time periods, (4) engage in planned and impromptu conversations on the race, (5) seek confirmation of allies, and (6) develop a strong sense of community*. The themes from the second classroom, a kindergarten class located in the Northeast region of the United States and taught by veteran teacher Alicia Johnson, were: (1) *conversations on the inequitable treatment of communities of color*, (2) *exploring Afrocentricity in the primary years, (3) developing a strong sense of community, and (4) Black History Month celebration with the acknowledgement of resistance*. The last set of themes that emerged from veteran Lisa Howe's kindergarten classroom at the same school in the Northeast that Alicia Johnson taught at were: (1) *the absence of race*, (2) *developing a strong sense of community*, and (3) *Black History Month celebration with the acknowledgement of resistance*. While chapters four, five,

and six each contained their own set of themes, in this chapter, I will summarize the themes in their entirety to address the implications for talking about race with young children. I will also discuss the implications of holding professional development sessions for educators to help them learn how to address race with young children.

First, chapter seven will begin by examining which of themes cut across all three classrooms in order to dive into a deeper conversation about how to work with young children and address sensitive topics, such as race. Next, I examine how the second iteration of the Exploring Race with Young Children Framework could be utilized within teacher education and professional development in order to provide a guide for teachers to discuss race. Chapter Seven will then delve into the limitations of the study. Lastly, chapter seven will conclude with exploring the impact the study will have on the field of early childhood and elementary education.

SUMMARIZING THE EMERGING THEMES

Although all three classroom teachers, (Amy Bevo, Alicia Johnson, and Lisa Howe), utilized the Exploring Race with Young Children Framework (first and second iterations) in order to hold open conversations about race during an interdisciplinary Social Studies and English language arts unit, the content—as well as the individual teachers' pedagogical knowledge—differed. Considering there were stark differences in the three early elementary classroom teachers' years of experience, preparation to hold discussions on topics such as race, as well as their ability to breakdown information for young children, the information presented to the kindergarten and first grade students was understandably different in each classroom. Additionally, the kindergarten and first grade students' responses also varied in each classroom due to the different ways in which teachers presented the information as well as the amount of the content that was introduced to them. Since the students responded in different ways depending on the

depth of the subject matter presented to them and the manner in which this information was broken down by each teacher, numerous and sometimes distinct themes emerged in each of the three early elementary classrooms. In fact, only one theme, i.e. *developing a strong sense of community,* appeared in every classroom.

Considering the extent of the differences in the three early elementary classrooms, all of the classrooms had the same theme, i.e. the idea of developing a strong sense of community, emerge in their findings. Additionally, all three teachers noted seeing a strong sense of togetherness emerge towards the end of the unit (teacher interview, 2016). While they each acknowledged that they had some students who already possessed a strong disposition towards supporting their peers, each teacher reflected on the fact that the majority of the students in their classroom were noticeably more supportive of each other without any prompting from an adult (teacher interview, 2016). Considering one of the goals of this study was to begin to help young children understand and appreciate racial similarities and differences, the data that emerged in each of the classrooms seems to suggest that by teaching with counter narratives, the young elementary students, who were exposed to communities of color and the history of (in)equity in the United States, actually began to form stronger bonds with their classmates.

Another reason why a stronger bond may have formed with their kindergarten or first grade classmates could be attributed to the curriculum of counter narratives that the teachers used to teach the interdisciplinary unit on race. Specifically, the Exploring Race with Young Children Framework's Stage One: Examining Similarities and Differences (existed in both the first and second iterations) as well as Stage Two: The "Everydayness" of Communities of Color (Holt, 1995) (existed in only the second iteration) highlighted cultural universals, which Alleman, Knighton, & Brophy (2007) define as:

domains of human experience that have existed in all cultures, past and present. They include activities related to meeting basic needs for food, clothing, and shelter, as well as family structures, government, communication, transportation, money or other forms of economic exchange, religion, occupations, recreation, and perhaps other factors as well (p. 168),

According to Alleman et al. (2007), cultural universals help children understand that while there are structures or activities within all cultures, the ways in which they are enacted may differ. Stage One and Stage Two of the framework helped young children understand both the similarities within the structures as well as identify and appreciate the differences between and across cultures. Although the kindergarten and first grade students were not necessarily exposed to the exact same books and activities, they did all participate in an either the first or second iteration of the framework, which highlighted cultural universals.

However, both iterations of the framework that the teachers used to hold conversations about race did more than solely focus on cultural universals. They also addressed the historical inequities that communities of color have faced throughout history. According to Tyson & Park (2008), as well as Picower (2008), teaching about and exploring historical inequities in social studies are necessary in discussing equity and fairness. The examination of cultural universals coupled with learning about communities of color's fight for equity, the young elementary-aged students were exposed to a more complex, yet accurate, depiction of the history of the United States than what typically occurred within the social studies program or textbooks (Brown & Brown, 2010; Heilig, Brown, & Brown, 2012; Loewen, 2007).

IMPLICATIONS

The purpose of this qualitative study was to not only gain a deeper understanding of the type of conversations young children held about race when given to the space to openly hold these types of discussions but also to analyze how the young elementary students demonstrate their thoughts about race. Once the data was viewed and examined, specific themes emerged in each of the kindergarten and first grade classrooms. After highlighting these themes and providing excerpts of conversations, artifacts, and quotes from interviews, there were three implications that came out of reviewing the findings. The three implications were: discussing race with young children, addressing race in early childhood teacher preparation programs, and addressing race in early childhood teacher professional development.

Discussing Race with Young Children

The kindergarten and first grade students were impacted by learning about counter-stories through the incorporation of children's literature, videos, and images detailing communities of color's experiences. The sharing of narratives from communities of color provided insight on topics often avoided during the elementary primary grades (K-2nd grade) (Hess, 2005; Philpott, Clabough, McConkey, & Turner, 2011). Since Critical Race Theory (CRT) was one of the theoretical frameworks utilized for this study, it centered the unit's focus on race and the lived experiences of communities of color. Subsequently, counter-stories, which are one of the tenets of CRT, were essential to the study and provided the necessary foundation for each of the three classroom sets of themes.

During chapters four, five, and six, an in-depth look at school curricula and its intent were taken into consideration in order to highlight the significance of the subject

matter content that was selected and taught to younger generations. According to Apple (2004):

> …the knowledge that now gets into schools is already a choice from a much larger universe of possible social knowledge and principles. It is a form of cultural capital that comes from somewhere, that often reflects the perspectives and beliefs of powerful segments of our social collectivity. In its very production and dissemination as a public and economic commodity—as books, films, materials, and so forth—it is repeatedly filtered through ideological and economic commitments. Social and economic values, hence, are already embedded in the design of the institutions we work in, in the "formal corpus of school knowledge" we preserve in our curricula, in our modes of teaching, and in our principles, standards, and forms of evaluation. Since these values now work through us, often unconsciously, the issue is not how to stand above the choice. Rather, it is in what values I must ultimately choose. (pp. 7-8)

Since school curricula are not neutral and contain political and social stances, the values instilled within the curriculum are passed onto children who are recipients of this knowledge. Because the Exploring Race with Young Children Framework disrupted the traditional curriculum, which highlights a Western European perspective and often omits or ignores communities of color, with the addition of counter-stories, the kindergarten and first grade students in this study were subjected to a more nuanced viewpoint of events throughout the history of the United States.

By choosing to infuse the curriculum with this framework, each of the teachers in the study made a value-based judgment as to what information should be provided as part

of the curriculum and why. In the Foreword of *White Teacher (*Paley, 1989), James Comer and Alvin Poussaint wrote, "Where in the rearing of children do we ever help them learn to appreciate and respect both differences in themselves and others? Without this emphasis we cannot expect to have a peaceful, stable, and thriving heterogeneous society" (p. viii). The teachers' value-based judgment, which was largely couched under the umbrella of social justice, addressed Comer and Poussaint's question by deciding to provide a broader scope of history than traditionally given to young elementary students.

For this particular study, the teachers' as well as the study's goal was two-fold: addressing historical narratives of inequity in hopes of moving towards equity as well as positively impacting children to create a more equitable future where racial and ethnic differences are not only tolerated but accepted. While this study and its findings focused primarily on the young elementary-aged participants, it was also essential to examine the teachers' thoughts as they implemented the framework and led various activities on exploring race because they were ultimately the ones responsible for implementing the content and ensuring students learned the information.

Addressing Race in Early Childhood Teacher Preparation Programs

This study examined how children in kindergarten and first grade understood race and the types of discussions they engaged in when exposed to counter-narratives. However, in order for the study to exist, the teachers had to first be willing to engage in conversations about race with their students. While each teacher's willingness to address race was examined in a subsection of chapters four, five, and six, it is important to also note the responsibility teacher education programs have in preparing pre-service teachers to critically reflect upon topics regarding race as well as hold these types of discussions in their classrooms and not simply hope teachers will do so on their own. Considering the majority of teachers in the United States are White (National Center for Educational

Statistics, 2013b) while the majority of students in public schools are students of color (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2013a), it is even more imperative to discuss race in order to avoid and/or dismantle possible miscommunication or stereotypical or biased thoughts about different racial/ethnic groups.

During chapter one of this study, there was an in-depth look into the field of early childhood and its acknowledgment of the need to address race with young children. Prior to the 21st century, few published studies within the field of early childhood addressed race. Even when a released statement from the National Council of Teaching English's Early Childhood Education Assembly stated the importance of addressing race early, the early childhood field, as a whole, had yet to truly embrace discussing race with young children. Perhaps one of the reasons early childhood educators have been reluctant to discuss race is that the preparation of early childhood educators avoided having these types of conversations and consequently sent teachers into the profession who are either unable or unwilling to discuss race.

Since the early childhood/early elementary field has typically avoided conversations about race by citing rationales such as the childhood innocence myth, which assumed that children were not able to comprehend such complex and sensitive topics like race (Berstein, 2011; Montgomery, 2009), the persuasiveness of a White Eurocentric perspective spread throughout the field. According to Haddix (2016), due to the sole focus on White pre-service teachers and the lack of studies featuring pre-service teachers of color, an assumption that what works for "White, monolingual, female teachers is universal" (p.37). This "overwhelming presence of Whiteness" (Sleeter, 2001, p. 94) within teacher education has made it more difficult to not only hear perspectives of other communities of color but also challenge racial structural inequities within education.

Trying to disrupt the notion of Whiteness in order to infuse more perspectives and hold critical conversations on race is no easy task. According to Peggy McIntosh (1998), "many, perhaps most…White students in the U.S. think that racism doesn't affect them because they are not people of color; they do not see 'whiteness' as a racial identity" (p. 15). Since the majority of pre-service teachers are White (U.S. Department of Education, 2013), teacher education is faced with first deconstructing Whiteness in order to help students understand that they, too, also have a racial identity (Souto-Manning & Cheruvu, 2016). Although much has been written on deconstructing Whiteness in education (Crowley & Smith, 2015; Doucet & Adair, 2013; Gordon, 2005; Howard, 2006; Johnson, 2002; Lensmire, 2012; Lensmire, 2010; Leonardo, 2009; Levine-Rasky, 2000; Paley, 1989; Picower, 2009; Pollock, 2009; Pollock, Deckman, Mira, & Shalaby, 2010; Sleeter, 1993, 2008; Solomon, Portelli, Daniel, & Campbell, 2005; Tatum, 1994; Ullucci, 2011), the very basis of recognizing and identifying one's own racial identity has to be addressed in teacher education before attempting to talk about communities of color.

This important aspect has to be included when revising teacher education to explicitly address race because educators must first be able to identify their own biases and stereotypical beliefs before hoping to change them. Then, the hope is for pre-service teachers to begin to not only understand but also appreciate the funds of knowledge (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzales, 1992) their students bring into the classroom and utilize this information to help them learn the academic content. While the notion of culturally relevant (Ladson-Billings, 1995), culturally responsive (Gay, 2000), and culturally sustaining pedagogy (Paris, 2012) are not new, there has yet to be a general consensus within the practitioner-based education field on the part race plays in one's culture and its subsequent impact on their experiences. Without explicitly naming race, it is difficult to teach pre-service teachers to create lessons that are relevant to all students.

As this study showed, it is imperative for early childhood educators to be able to craft lessons to address race that are relevant to their students and require the pedagogical and content skills to be taught to them in order to do so.

Addressing Race in Early Childhood Teacher Professional Development.

In addition to preparing pre-service teachers to hold conversations about sensitive topics, such as race, there is a need to also conduct professional development for educators who are already teaching. Professional development is a loosely used term that can stem from a one-time workshop to weekly or monthly meetings. Buysse, Winton, & Rous (2009) called for professional development to include "three intersecting components" (p. 238), which addressed the who, the what, and the how for the training. For the purposes of this study and its recommendations, early childhood/elementary educators would be considered "the *who*" (Buysse at al., 2009) of the professional development on addressing race with young children. The *what* (Buysse at al., 2009), or subject, of the professional development would be helping teachers learn how to address race with young children. The *how* (Buysse at al., 2009) of the professional development would be to provide activities around understanding their own biases and stereotypical beliefs, which was mentioned earlier in this chapter, learning about the racial make-up of their students and how their specific community is impacted by race, and finally provide a plethora of ways educators can hold these types of activities, one of which could be utilizing the Exploring Race with Young Children framework to help guide teachers on how to address the impact race has on communities of color. It is the *how*, or pedagogical knowledge combined with the content knowledge, that must be addressed in order for teachers to effectively discuss race with young children. In chapters four, five, and six, the three classroom teachers displayed various ways they sought to break down the complex information on understanding race in order for their students to be able to

comprehend the material. By holding professional development sessions focusing on how teachers can effectively break down and present complex topics through a variety of instructional strategies, early childhood educators would be equipped with content knowledge but also with numerous ways to teach the information to their students.

Since the in-service educators may or may not have ever received training on how to hold conversations about sensitive topics, it is imperative to also include these educators in an attempt to help all early childhood/ early elementary educators infuse race into their curriculum. This type of professional development could focus solely on the topic of race or it could be intertwined with subject matter. For instance, according to Brinson (2012) early childhood educators

> …need to hone their interpersonal skills, increase their knowledge about different cultures, and facilitate learning activities that compliment children from diverse populations. These efforts can be supported by incorporating culturally-specific literature that is reflective of all children and their families into daily reading practices. (p. 30)

Citing Bishop (1992) who discussed the need for literature to serve as both a window (or learning about other cultures), and a mirror, (the reflection of the child's culture), Brinson (2012) argued that early childhood educators needed to expose young children to positive images associated with their culture, which also includes their racial make-up. This type of embedding of race into the subject matter may help early childhood/early elementary educators to better understand the rationale behind explicitly addressing race in the classroom. Once again, the three classroom teachers in the study, Alicia Johnson, Lisa Howe, and Amy Bevo, all utilized diverse children's literature to

communicate the experiences of communities of color. By presenting a more diverse set of children's literature, the kindergarten and first students were able to see themselves reflected in the readings as well as learn about other communities of color. So, due to the use of the framework and the foundation of the interdisciplinary unit, which focused on sharing counter-narratives to discuss race and its impact on communities of color, the teachers adhered to Bishop (1992) and Brinson's (2012) call for more relevant and diverse literature and training for educators on how to embed it into their classrooms.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

There are three limitations to this critical case study exploring how young elementary students (K-1st grade) discuss race within an interdisciplinary unit on race. The three limitations are the school participant demographics, importance of addressing race at all levels, and expanding the Exploring Race with Young Children framework to be more inclusive of various communities of color. Each limitation listed above is examined and recommendations are made to improve future related studies.

School Participant Demographics

The participants in this study were kindergarteners, first graders, and their classroom teachers. While the school sites differed geographically, with one school located in the southwestern region of the United States and the other in the northeast region, the schools were similar in their designation as a traditional "urban" public school. This designation meant that the schools were located in an urban city; the majority of the students' racial demographics aligned with communities of color; and the majority of students met the requirements for free and reduced lunch (which is an indicator of the students' familial socio-economic status). While this interdisciplinary study examining race and its impact was important to conduct with students of color,

there is arguably a greater need for White, suburban students to receive the same type of instruction (Brown & German, 2016; Anderson, 2015). Young elementary White students also need to be exposed to the historical inequities that communities of color faced, and still face, in order to move beyond their own perspective and begin to see the world through another set of eyes. By exposing not just students of color but also White students to this type of curriculum, the hope is that students will begin to develop a stronger racial empathy that could help students relate to individuals who are different racial backgrounds than themselves.

Addressing Race in Schools

Due to researcher limitations of time and resources, this study solely focused on the students within three early elementary classrooms. To further expand this study, there could be more insight into not only how classroom teachers take up addressing race in schools, but also how school administration, school district's central offices, and the local and state communities also support—or resist—holding these types of conversations. Depending upon the level, i.e. classroom, school, school district, local community, state community, the factors that go into addressing race change and need to be provided in order to systemically dismantle the traditional curriculum that omits or ignores communities of color's impact and influence. If the notion is for every educator to be able to hold these types of discussions with students, then the structures of the school system need to be in place to support educators in doing so (See Figure 28 below).
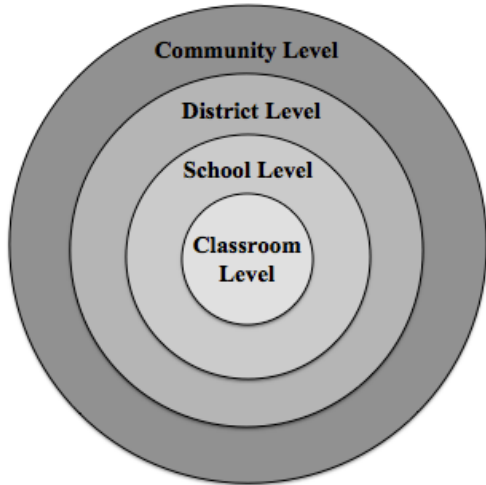
Figure 28. The concentric circles represent all of the levels (from the classroom to the community) that need to be involved when addressing race.

Once the structure is in place to support educators in having open conversations addressing race along with the necessary training for educators, then, and only then, could it be expected to implement addressing race with young children frameworks throughout and across school systems.

Expand the Exploring Race with Young Children framework (second iteration).

The last limitation of the study was that while the study did provide counter narratives, the majority of the stories focused on the African American experience. In order to make the framework more inclusive of other communities of color, Stage Three: Examining History with Inequities must branch out to other racial groups and follow the similar path as critical race theory. For example, Stage Three could have possible additional sections involving Asian American or Latina/o American experiences. This means that Substage One: Ancient Africa and Substage Two: Transatlantic Slave Trade would be revised to address the historical background of the various racial groups. This

way, teachers could make sure they were addressing all of the communities across the United States in an attempt to acknowledge and not omit the information.

When asked what the teachers planned to do with the study for next year, Alicia Johnson directly addressed the lack of the framework's inclusiveness when she stated, "The goal is to branch out into other cultures to compare and contrast their own culture, African culture and cultures of others" (teacher interview, 2016). While the framework did not specifically state this information for the teachers, at least one of the teachers in the study, i.e. Alicia Johnson, recognized the necessity of expanding to examine the impact race had on various communities of color.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Context Matters

As discussed in chapter two, few studies in the field of early childhood/early elementary directly address race. When the topic is addressed, race is typically used as a catalyst to help children relate to the content in hopes to increase their academic skills (Labadie, Wetzel, & Rogers, 2012; Floyd & Herbet, 2010; Wood & Jocuis, 2013). For instance, Labadie et al. (2012) utilized the concept of race to help drive discussions about race as a vehicle to explore students' literacy understandings. Floyd & Herbert (2010) also used race as a way to help an African American kindergartener better connect to children's literature. In each of the studies listed, the focus of the article was to help the students obtain a specific academic skill. However, this study aimed to do the exact opposite. While this qualitative critical case study addressed academic content for kindergarten and first grade students considering the unit took place during the academic school day, the study focused on the kindergarten and first grade students' understanding of race rather than solely meeting an academic standard or skill. This departure from

utilizing race as a vehicle for academic content to centering race as a central component of the content, was pivotal to this study. The hope is that more early childhood studies will examine the young students' thoughts on complex topics such as race.

Longitudinal Studies

The second recommendation for future research is to continue to follow the kindergarten and first grade students in order to determine whether there were any long-lasting impacts from participating in the unit. Given that racial and ethnic beliefs are difficult to alter after a child is nine or ten years old,[29] it would be interesting to provide a follow-up study in the subsequent years to see if exposure to this unit during the primary grades (PK-3rd grade) had a lasting impact or if the impact of the unit fades over time if not consistently addressed.

A Call for More Interdisciplinary Work

While early childhood and early elementary educators teach all of subject matter content, there is still a lag in creating interdisciplinary units to address multiple content areas at once. This last recommendation calls for a more vested effort in locating the overlap of the content areas in order to teach the skills within a context and not in isolation of one another. By providing more interdisciplinary units, the hope is that students will begin to see the interconnectedness of the content and establish a deeper understanding of it. For the purposes of this study, creating more interdisciplinary units on race could potentially help young students understand the pervasiveness of race throughout society and provide a rationale of why there is a need to dismantle inequitable structures in order to combat inequities.

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[29] http://www.socialstudies.org/positions/elementary

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, while there remains much to be said about young elementary students' understandings of race, this study and its data indicate what could occur when teachers overcome the fear of talking about race and hold explicit conversations about race and inequities with their students. In addition to examining the students' understandings, the classroom teachers were also impacted by their students' responses. During the final teacher interviews (2016), Amy Bevo, Alicia Johnson, and Lisa Howe all commented on how surprised they were that their students were able to not only comprehend complex topics, like race, but also their willingness to try to understand it. By allowing the students to openly engage in having these types of conversations in the classroom, the teachers were able to challenge incorrect notions or assumptions as well as clarify information. After seeing the outcomes from this small snowball sampling, I am encouraged about the potential for future studies to analyze not only young elementary students' understanding of race, but also the lasting impact an interdisciplinary unit on race has on them. I am hopeful, and cautiously optimistic, that the field of early childhood will not only begin to embrace holding conversations about sensitive and complex topics like race but also set the foundation for the rest of the PK-12 education field on how to address race within the curriculum in order to make it relevant for all students. Ultimately, the hope is for the younger generation to live in a diverse pluralistic society that not only understands but also appreciates the similarities and differences of others.

Appendix A.

List of Semi-Structured Interview Questions for Participants

1. What are some things you think are fair?

2. What are some things you think are unfair?

3. What made you think of (whatever they name)?

4. If you could change [whatever they name], what would you do?

5. Who do you think could change things? Why?

6. Why do you think [whatever they name] was treated that way?

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