OULUN
YLIOPISTO

Halonen Janni

Colorblind ideology in education

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While most white Americans believe race to be irrelevant in the present-day United States, severe racial disparities between groups suggest otherwise. Instead, most white Americans endorse a colorblind ideology which disavows the existence of systemic racism and is rooted in individualistic perceptions of equal opportunity.

This thesis employs a literature review analysis on the ways in which colorblind ideology appears in institutionalized education and the possible effects it has on equity at school. Due to the available research data, United States is being used as an example on how colorblind ideology permeates institutionalized education. Afterwards, the context of Finnish education will be examined and comparisons on how colorblind ideology appears in these two countries' education systems will be made.

Recent studies suggest that colorblind ideology is commonly endorsed by teachers in both countries. Furthermore, students seem to posit similar views, as the social atmosphere holds race as a taboo. Thus, the ideology may cause normalization of racial disparities and hide systemic racism that may be reproducing unequal conditions at school.

Keywords: colorblind ideology, racism, equity, education

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1 Introduction

"I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character."
(King, 1963)

The quote above is one of the most known quotes by Martin Luther King Jr. from his 'I Have a Dream' speech. It encompasses the antiracist idea of assessing people as individuals, by their personality traits, rather than by their racial characteristics. While at its core, this statement advocates for dismantling racist stereotypes and attitudes, the ideology behind it can be problematic at times and be misused with more malicious intents. One might initially think that not seeing the skin color of others is a morally good practice, but analysts such as Bonilla-Silva (2017) and Tawa, Ma & Katsumoto (2016) contest this idea and suggest that this kind of "colorblind" ideology may in fact pose problems on resisting racism. Typically, the endorsers of this ideology claim that humans are living in a post-racial society (Turner & Nilsen, 2014), which in turn obscures and even hides the unequal societal conditions caused by systemic racism that may pertain (Bonilla-Silva, 2017). As Carr (2016) notes; "Race matters, not because of some eugenics-fabricated, essentialized, genetic-based destiny, one that is meant to mark the cognitive, physical, and social capabilities of people based predominantly their skin color and phonotypical traits. Rather, race matters because of the lived experiences and historical realities that have placed racial identity at the center of how countries and peoples have been organized in relation to socially constructed racial hierarchies that have always placed the White race as the pinnacle." (p. 54).

Bonilla-Silva (2017) claims that race continues to affect every individual on a social level. Following this notion and the conclusions that many analysts in the field have about the harmful effects of colorblind ideology in general, the goal of this paper is to examine how colorblind ideology might appear in institutionalized education. Noting that, for example, in the United States colorblind ideology has been viewed as one of the most common ways to view race (Bonilla-Silva, 2017), it seems likely that it will be visible in the context of institutionalized education as well. Since analysts such as, Crenshaw (2019) showcase the harmful effects that this ideology may pose on resisting racism on a more general level, it is possible that similar effects could be found in schools, in the possible presence of this ideology. Therefore, this thesis

will also consider the possible consequences of colorblind thinking in educational settings in terms of equitable education.

Based on previous research, it seems that racism in institutionalized education may be connected to racial disparities. First, many studies show disparities between the academic achievements between the dominant and non-dominant racial groups at school. In the United States, the educational achievement gaps are especially persistent between white and non-white students (Assari, Mardani, Maleki, Boyce & Bazargan, 2021; Hanushek & Rivkin, 2009; Kuhfeld, Gershoff & Paschall, 2018). Furthermore, racism may be perpetuated through the contents of both the visible and the hidden curriculum. These curricula may set Eurocentric epistemology at the foreground and therefore, both assert it as the superior way of knowing and set pupils outside of the dominant and privileged racial group at a disadvantage (Andrews, 2019). Seen as the research suggests that racism and racial disparities in schools are evident, it may be important to inspect the relationship between these unjust conditions and colorblind ideology in schools. As education is strongly linked with wealth in later life, unequal educational conditions may also indirectly affect the possibilities for upwards social mobility (Bailey & Dynarski, 2011) and therefore affect non-white individuals disproportionately.

The aim of this thesis is to take part in the discussion revolving around racism in the educational field. While racism has been a relevant topic in the United States for a long time due to their long and painful history with apartheid, it is also present in discussions about Finland. In fact, some studies suggest that Finland is one of the most racist European countries when considering violence rates that were racially motivated (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2018). Nevertheless, some Finns claim that racism does not exist in Finland based on Finland never having had any colonies of its own (Rastas, 2012). Thus, it may be advantageous to examine the ways in which colorblind ideology might appear in Finnish education, considering the strong belief in Finnish exceptionalism (Rastas, 2012). Not to mention, many Finnish teachers do not feel that they are prepared to teach children outside of the non-dominant racial group (Talib, 2006). Therefore, this thesis will also attempt to connect reoccurring themes between the contexts of the United States and Finland. Knowledge from other contexts may not be directly applicable in another setting, but it can still offer ideas on how to create more equitable conditions for all in schools. However, these ideas should be adjusted and molded to fit the specific situation at hand. Furthermore, as colorblind ideology is not something that has been researched a lot in the context of Finland, one of the aims is to bring more attention to it and to work towards a more just education and society at large.

Considering the possibility that much of colorblind ideology may be motivated by good intentions and desire for equality, I consider this topic to be important in the field of education, seen as the effects of it can be harmful and perpetuate racism without teachers necessarily being aware of it. It is suspected that ideas over race start forming in childhood (Bonilla-Silva, 2014, as cited in Hagerman, 2015) and seen as children spend a lot of their time at school, the ideas that are being taught about race at school, both directly and indirectly, may have long-lasting effects for children's interracial interactions in and out of schools. This in turn may affect the general ideas about race and racism in the society at large. While children might be more likely to reproduce and rework the dominant racial ideologies around them, they are also capable of rejecting them, regardless of their parents' stances (Hagerman, 2015). Therefore, it may be desirable to contest oppressive ideologies through critical reflection at school.

Thus, the following two research questions will be examined in this thesis:

1.   Does colorblind ideology appear in education, and how?

2.   What are the consequences of colorblind ideology in education?

This thesis is a comprehensive literature review examining whether colorblind ideology can be found in educational settings as well. A comprehensive literature review is conducted by examining pre-existing academic and professional knowledge from diverse sources and by organizing this knowledge into conceptual frameworks and mind maps for a summary (Rowley & Slack, 2004). Thus, this thesis has been constructed by reviewing academic articles, books and relevant web-sources and by separating the data under relevant categories. Furthermore, it is of importance that the reliability of the sources is being assessed (Rowley & Slack, 2004). Therefore, the articles chosen for this thesis have been peer-reviewed, and the reliability of the publishers of the books and web sources has been assessed. Afterwards, the gathered results are analyzed within the context of the research question. While the reliability of the sources has been considered, there is still a general lack of research of colorblind ideology in education in contexts other than that of the United States, and when it has been done, it has often not been referred to as such.

Much of the thesis will focus on the context of the United States and use it as an example of how colorblind ideology can operate in and out of institutionalized education, seen as most of the available research has been conducted there. At the end of the thesis, the focus will be shifted on whether this ideology can be found in the Finnish context as well. Thus, a specific

chapter has been dedicated for examining the Finnish context, considering the previously mentioned strong belief in Finnish exceptionalism, in order to examine the relationship between the overall denial of the existence of racism in Finland and how it is connected to racism in the educational setting.

In this thesis, I locate myself as a preservice teacher and as an antiracist activist. It should be noted that while I will attempt to remain critical to the best of my abilities, striving towards social justice is part of my objectives as a future educator. It is also important for the context to take into consideration that I identify myself as a white female with a Finnish nationality and therefore, myself, belong to the dominant racial group of the area I am positioned in. While it is essential to acknowledge my own background, as someone from the dominant racial group, my main goal is to be vocal about these issues to amplify the voices of the theorists and analysts in the field, so that education systems do not remain stagnant in ways that may take part in producing unequal results in the society.

2 Theoretical Framework

In the following subchapters, concepts relevant to this thesis will be explained. First, the term 'people of color' will be discussed, seen as there is debate about the usability and appropriateness of this term. Therefore, the use for this term in this context is being explained, while acknowledging its limits. The following subchapter will give some insight into the concept of racism and divide it into individual and systemic racism, as this division is important in the context of colorblind ideology. Lastly, colorblind ideology will be presented using Bonilla-Silva's (2017) four frames of colorblind racism as a guiding tool for understanding this complex ideology, as these frames adequately divide the main elements of colorblind ideology into four identifiable categories.

2.1 People of color

The term people of color will be used throughout this thesis, in order to refer to people who are not white, as an umbrella term (Nesbitt-Jonhston Writing Center, 2021). This term was chosen in the lack of a better term, as this thesis is focusing on a Western context and the research that is being reviewed is mostly from the United States and Finland where white supremacy is evident. Another reason for using this term is the fact that it is the most present term in the resources of the thesis used by writers such as Blaisdell (2016), Bowser (2017) and Rudnick (2019). It is important to acknowledge that this term is an umbrella term, and it includes many different racial groups with diverse experiences. It is also important to note that there is debate around the usage of this term, as the term 'colored' has historically negative connotations (Kalunta-Crumpton, 2020). Kalunta-Crumpton (2020) suggests that this term should no longer be used and offers some alternatives for academic use. These terms revolve around the ancestral region of origin of the individuals and groups referred to (Kalunta-Crumpton, 2020). Therefore, at times this kind of terms are not applicable in this thesis, seen as in this context oppression affects the everyday life of anyone who cannot claim white privilege, and so an umbrella term is required. However, the groups inside of the umbrella term should not be generalized but rather, the diversity within them should be acknowledged. Whenever distinctions between racial groups are relevant and specific to a certain racial group, more specific terms will be used. Therefore, the term 'people of color' is not to being used in a way that endorses white as the norm and acts as a way of 'othering' but rather, it is used in a context of critiquing the structures that enable a society where the distinction between white and non-white is continuously made.

2.2 Racism

Singh (2019) defines racism as a belief that hierarchically classifies groups of people based on their biological characteristics, such as the color of their skin. Often, especially in Western countries, white people are placed at the top of this hierarchy, which may leave other groups oppressed, so that white supremacy can grant privileges to the dominant racial group (Singh, 2019). Racism can appear in different forms, but in this thesis, a division between individual and systemic racism will be made, as it is relevant to the context.

It is important to note that according to the scientific consensus there are no separate biological human races (Alemanji, 2018; Bonilla-Silva, 2017; Hochman, 2021; Raff & Mulligan, 2021; Wagner, Yu, Ifekwunigwe, Harrell, Bamshad & Royal, 2016). However, race still exists as an evident social structure which affects the everyday lives of many individuals and groups (Bonilla-Silva, 2017). Therefore, as it is a concept that has created unequal living situations for different groups through racist ideologies, disregarding it altogether would work as a colorblind method. This in turn might be harmful in combatting the racist structures that are already in place.

While the next sub-chapters will include some examples of the ways in which racism works, it should be noted that not all racial groups experience racism in the same way (Wise, 2011, as cited in Carr, 2016). The way in which racism is experienced is connected to the specific contexts, however, these examples are still relevant in order to understand the bigger concepts and connections between colorblind ideology and racism.

Racism is a complex concept. However, it is typically categorized into two groups, which are individual and systemic. Individual racism mainly refers to acts of discrimination committed by an individual based on negative attitudes that one has toward a racial group (Unzueta & Lowery, 2008). This form of racism is often characterized by overtly racist forms of discrimination (Henkel, Dovidio & Gaertner, 2006). However, individual racism can also be seen as unconscious biases that affect the expressions and actions of the individual holding these views (Henkel et al., 2006; Bowser, 2017). Therefore, these people may be discriminating against members of other racial groups without acknowledging the harm in their actions.

Systemic racism is deeply rooted in the big structures and institutions of the society and often controlled by policies. Unzueta & Lowery (2006) describe institutional racism to be "propagated by institutional practices and policies that produce disparate outcomes for different racial

groups" (p. 1491). While things change and more overt racism may have become less visible, unequal outcomes remain, whether the societal structures that are producing them are doing so directly or indirectly (Grace & Nelson, 2018). Not to mention, many racial disparities are connected to social policies that were originally or still are grounded on oppression and white privilege (Blaisdell, 2016).

Before, overt racism could be observed in the United States in the form of social control that enforced racial segregation and prevented non-white people from political engagement in overt manners without hiding the racist intentions (Bonilla-Silva, 2017). Now, this social control can still be seen in ways in which different racial groups are being steered through different policies, without the policies directly referring to race. Racially non-dominant groups are still continuously being segregated in terms of public transportation, employment and housing in the United States (Blaisdell, 2016). For example, African Americans are being segregated through acts of discrimination when applying for loans or they are only shown apartments in specific neighborhoods (Bonilla-Silva, 2017). This steered racial segregation in turn results in people living in environments that have higher crime and poverty rates and do not grant access to equal resources and opportunities (Blaisdell, 2016). This is relevant to this thesis, not only because the lived realities of the students outside of the school cannot be separated from their everyday life at school, but also because in the United States, and many other countries, the racial segregation appears in schools, too (Araújo, 2016; Bonilla-Silva, 2017; Windle, 2021). Furthermore, often the schools in the United States that are not mostly white, get less funding and educational resources (Bonilla-Silva, 2017).

As opposed to before when African Americans were blatantly denied their participation in democracy due to their race, now many of these structures are being upheld and concealed by other methods. For example, due to the over criminalization of African Americans, many are stripped away their right to vote. This can be seen in the United States in the difference of conviction and imprisonment rates between African Americans and whites, as these rates appear disproportionate. African Americans are generally more likely to be incarcerated and receive more severe convictions for similar crimes than white people (Bonilla-Silva, 2017). While according to previous studies African Americans do not use or sell drugs more than white people, they are still much more likely to be arrested for it (Alexander, 2020). If anything, according to the evidence, white people may be even more likely to be involved in drug crime (Alexander, 2020). Thus, these conditions may be creating a criminal image of African Americans, when

the crime rates are being observed without much attention being paid to the context and structures working behind these numbers (Norris & Billings, 2016). Therefore, the conditions appear unjust and may be serving the interests of whites.

This over criminalization becomes worrying in the context of education, as it can begin at school through the so-called School-To-Prison pipeline, which connects students to the criminal justice system already during their childhood (Owens, 2017). It affects African American male students disparately, while pushing them out of schools (Grace & Nelson, 2018). In the United States, there are concerns that the law officials are involved in situations at school for issues that would have previously been dealt with within the school (Owens, 2017). This creates a worrying pattern that may be pushing for social control that affects African Americans' access to education.

While the unequal outcomes are often connected to oppressive social policies, they are viewed as the result of natural causes due to cultural inferiority (Blaisdell, 2016). Therefore, the blame of these racial disparities is shifted on the people coming from the 'ghettos'. In this way, the racist intentions are obscured through coded-language. Thus, many of these structural forms of racism also work together in maintaining the conditions of the oppressed groups (Tonry 2011).

2.3 Colorblind ideology

Colorblind ideology often presents itself as an anti-racist practice which ignores race and skin color completely, and instead focuses on the individual characteristics and merits of a person regardless of their racial status (Bonilla-Silva, 2017). It is one of the most dominant racial ideologies in Western countries (Hagerman, 2015). Many endorsing this ideology believe a good citizen is someone who does not see the color of the skin of others and therefore, also cannot engage in racial stereotyping practices (Choi, 2008). According to Bonilla-Silva (2017), most members of the dominant race endorse this ideology without observing the consequences critically, which results in helping maintain racist structures. On a first glance, this may seem like treating people in a morally just way. However, this ideology disavows the systemic racism that infiltrates many institutionalized domains, just as education and therefore, has major implications on the lives of many disadvantaged students (Ioanide, 2019). Colorblind ideology is constantly changing, along with the social and political climate (Turner & Nilsen, 2014), which also makes defining it more difficult.

Instead of talking about colorblind ideology, Bonilla-Silva (2017) refers to colorblind racism and splits it into four frames. These frames include "abstract liberalism, naturalization, cultural racism, and minimization of racism" (Bonilla-Silva, 2017, p. 54). Furthermore, these frames of thinking seem to be present in most white people in the United States, even when the level of experienced sympathy towards minorities differs (Bonilla-Silva, 2017). This suggests that colorblind ideology is shared by most white people in the United States, no matter whether they possess overtly racist views or not.

Abstract Liberalism. Colorblind ideology is commonly associated with liberal approaches, through the idea of equal opportunity (Choi, 2008). Abstract liberalism refers to the idea of individuality and equal opportunity, where people assume everyone to have the same resources (Bonilla-Silva, 2017). Therefore, equal opportunity is seen as the fairest practice, as the outcomes are seen as the direct result of the individual, based on how hard they worked (Bonilla-Silva, 2017). Colorblind ideology is commonly associated with the assumption that everyone, regardless of their race, has "the benefit of being seen as individuals, equally endowed with agency, opportunity, resources, and access to the levers of power of society." (Reynolds, 2019, p. 362), which acts to deny the existence of the privileges that the dominant racial group holds. Therefore, the idea of equal opportunity may appear fair to endorsers of colorblind ideology, as they do not acknowledge the already existing unjust conditions setting members of other racial groups back. This equal treatment combined with the pre-existing conditions are then often used to combat practices of equity (Bowser, 2017). While in theory, people endorsing colorblind ideology claim to treat everyone the same, studies suggest that they are more likely to keep more distance to members outside of their own group (Tawa et al., 2016). Even so, equal treatment hardly works in terms of equal outcomes when the context of the people is different due to privileges and disadvantages in the society.

Naturalization. Naturalization works to convince that the conditions of the society have been naturally produced and obscures any disparities having been produced by intention (Bonilla-Silva, 2017). "This ideology, which acquired cohesiveness and dominance in the late 1960's, explains contemporary racial inequality as the outcome of nonracial dynamics (Bonilla-Silva, 2017, p. 2) in contrast to explaining the inequalities by biological and racial features.

Cultural racism. On the other hand, cultural racism blames the cultures of different racial groups for any disparities that may exist (Bonilla-Silva, 2017). As many supporters of colorblind ideology believe that talking about race in itself is a discriminatory practice and therefore,

race often remains a topic that is not being discussed at all (Bonilla-Silva, 2017). This hinders the process of dismantling racial structures in the society, through the reluctance to discuss and the denying of discriminatory practices. Instead, the conditions of the individuals from the oppressed racial groups are being held solely responsible for their own situation, as their race is being taken away from the equation (Bonilla-Silva, 2017). Instead cultural background is being referred to (Bonilla-Silva, 2017). This may create harmful images, that would suggest that white people are just working harder and the people from oppressed groups are lazier, do not value education or possess more undesirable characteristic traits (Norris & Billings, 2016), as color-blind assumes that everyone in today's society has the same resources and opportunities (Reynolds, 2019). This may be exacerbated by race-neutral language that still indirectly refers to racial groups through references to culture and creates harmful stereotypes in concealment through what Norris & Billings (2016) refer to as "coded ways of talking about race" (p.94). As blatantly racist language began to be frowned upon, racism did not disappear, but rather the ways in which it was talked about evolved. Furthermore, this offers a way in which "whites can express resentment toward minorities; criticize their morality, values, and work ethic" (Bonilla-Silva, 2014, p. 4) without being called racists.

Minimization. Lastly, minimization works through obscuring the existence of racism and more specifically structural racism (Bonilla-Silva, 2017). Endorsers of the ideology claim that racism in the present-day society is only ever visible in overtly racist acts committed by individuals (Ioanide, 2019). By obscuring the practices that maintain structural racism and white supremacy, status quo can be upheld. Furthermore, by thinking this way they can distance themselves from racism, as long as they do not commit overtly racist actions themselves (Unzueta & Lowery, 2008). This idea is especially present when examining the work of Critical Race Theory (CRT) -analysts. CRT is an approach that was initially developed in the United States as a resistant response to the unjust and oppressive conditions in the society (Taylor, 2009). According to CRT, colorblind ideology works as a façade for holding onto privilege (Sleeter, 2017). While colorblind ideology recognizes racism in modern societies as an act committed by an individual, CRT addresses it as something that is part of society as a whole (Grace & Nelson, 2018).

On the other hand, Unzueta & Lowery (2008) suggest that the denying of institutional racism also works as a method to hold a positive self-image for the privileged. Denying the existence of white privilege and pinpointing racism to be the fault of a few individuals can protect the

egos of the members of the privileged group, since acknowledging conceptions of unearned privilege can threaten one's perception of themselves (Unzueta & Lowery, 2008).

As the endorsers of this ideology believe that institutionalized racism no longer exists and everyone is already equal, it is common for endorsers to claim that race is simply irrelevant in the present-day society (Turner & Nilsen, 2014). Endorses of this ideology may use successful people from non-dominant racial groups as an example for this argument (Turner & Nilsen, 2014). For example, in the United States, the existence of present-day racism has often been obscured by the fact that Barack Obama was able to become the president of the United States. (Alexander, 2020). It then downplays the lived experiences of individuals facing racism in their everyday life caused by unjust structures in the society (Tawa et al., 2016). Bonilla-Silva (2017) argues that since all societies have been racialized for hundreds of years, no person can be unaffected by social ideologies of race. However, the ways in which people are affected vary greatly. Therefore, claiming not to see the race of others means ignoring the effects that race as a social construct poses on people and the inequalities that it causes in the society (Bonilla-Silva, 2017).

Seen as people could not be blatantly oppressed due to their race, colorblind ideology was abused in order to find new ways to oppress the same groups through other means, such as criminalization (Alexander, 2020). Once overt racism became socially unacceptable, racism moved to work in a less overt manner (Bonilla-Silva, 2017). This can be seen through more subtle discriminatory practices, like intentional neighborhood segregation, steering non-white people towards more inferior job positions and unfair practices at bank and schools without it directly being tracked back into race (Bonilla-Silva, 2017). For example, policies that indirectly affect the same groups through criminalization worked as a cover for oppression, as the reason for their disadvantaged situation could instead be pinned on their individual position as a criminal. On a surface level, this seems like an equal practice as then the treatment of criminals is the same no matter what their race. However, this is often merely used as a new label and a cover through which further oppression can be maintained, as felons will be forced into disadvantaged positions in terms of employment, education, housing and political perhaps for the rest of their lives (Alexander, 2020). While these are examples specific to the context of the United States, they reveal the ways in which colorblind ideology can work undercover to maintain unequal conditions in a society and maintain the privilege of the dominant group, if these structures are not being confronted.

3 Colorblindness in education

Colorblind ideology is rooted in a belief that today's society is post-racial, and therefore, endorses claim to not see the skin color of the people around them (Bonilla-Silva, 2017). Instead they claim to assess people based on their individual behaviour and personality traits (Bonilla-Silva, 2017). This view obscures any systemic racism that may be inflicting oppressive conditions on individuals and groups that are not part of the dominant racial group (Turner & Nilsen, 2014). Seen as colorblind ideology has been identified as one of the most common racial ideologies in Western countries (Hagerman, 2015), it seems logical that it may also be found in an educational context. Analysts in the field have considered this ideology to be harmful in dismantling racist structures due to the disavowal of systemic racism (e.g. Bonilla-Silva, 2017; Tawa et al., 2016). Thus, the goal of this chapter is to examine the ways in which colorblind ideology permeates education and the consequences that the presence of this ideology may cause in terms of social justice at school.

3.1 Teachers

One of the issues perpetuating colorblind induced racism in education may be the ill-preparedness of teachers. While the student population in the United States has been growing more diverse in terms of racial and ethnic diversity, the teacher population remains mostly white (Institute of Education Sciences, 2020; National Center for Education Statistics, 2017). The homogenous teacher population may not be fully aware of the realities of children outside of the dominant group, which may become problematic as they may not be able to provide culturally responsive teaching (Picower & Marshall, 2017, as cited in Rudnick, 2019).

One underlying issue that may be contributing to this under representation of non-white teachers in the United States, might be produced by the test score gaps between white and non-white people taking part in teacher licensure tests that are setting standards for prospective teachers (Nettles, Scatton & Steinberg, 2011). These achievement gaps that are visible both in comprehensive school and afterwards, are reproducing the same conditions, as the teacher force remains mostly white (Nettles et al., 2011). In the United States, state certification policies are set to influence the knowledge that is seen as important by prospective teacher candidates. This knowledge that is being seen as central, is often Eurocentric and may therefore discourage members of outgroups from pursuing careers in education (Sleeter, 2017). Not acknowledging

the Eurocentric values of teacher education programs endorses whiteness and obscures the privileges that white people hold (Sleeter, 2017).

A more diverse teacher faculty in a school can have long-lasting positive effects on children, as it both encourages interracial interactions and may result in higher achievements at school (Brown & Pierson, 2021), which is why it would be beneficial for schools to aim for hiring more people from different racial groups. Furthermore, according to Sleeter (2017) the diversity of the teacher education programs seems to influence the curriculum and to what extent curriculum content with diversity is being included in the program. Therefore, considering the division of teacher demographics, many of the programs may end up serving white interests, which was found to be a theme of concern in non-white teacher students, as they felt that the content that was taught was irrelevant for teaching their own communities (Sleeter, 2017).

While teacher education programs in the United States vow to promote social justice, the white majority of teachers still lack in providing culturally responsive education (Sleeter, 2017). Not to mention, coursework regarding racial, ethnical and cultural diversity is often assigned in a couple of separate courses, which might indirectly signal that these aspects are not to be included in teaching holistically but rather as separate entities (Sleeter, 2017). Teachers have also felt that their professors in teacher education only acknowledge racism on a surface level and that they do not want to engage in the topic on a deeper level (Rudnick, 2019). While the topic is being discussed, it is done in a more theoretical manner that enables the participants to be disconnected from feelings and detached from personal connections (Rudnick, 2019).

Rudnick (2019) found that teachers in the United States often grew up being encouraged to be silent about race and racism both at home and in school, since talking about these topics was feared as coming across racist. Furthermore, the formal education that the participants of the study received, seemed to guide the participants into thinking that racism had already been abolished, and that the racism that they might witness in everyday life is just an individual act committed by a racist person (Rudnick, 2019). These attitudes are clearly aligned with color-blind ideology. Choi (2008) received a similar reception from pre-service teachers when discussing race in an education class, as students believed acknowledging the race of the children in classrooms as a stereotyping practice. This upbringing and the social environment over 'not seeing color' leads many teachers to believe that they are being 'good people' and educators by avoiding talking about race altogether (Ioanide, 2019; Reynolds, 2019). This in turn unintentionally perpetuates the racist structures deeply embedded in formal education, as they are going

unnoticed, while they complicate the lives of many children not belonging in the dominant racial group (Rudnick, 2019).

On another note, racism is a topic that may bring up many uncomfortable feelings, such as fear, and therefore, many teachers want to avoid the topic at school altogether in the fear of saying the wrong thing (Rudnick, 2019). Therefore, colorblind ideology often acts as a means of self-protection for the teacher (Reynolds, 2019). However, emotions cannot be completely separated from a classroom (Wang, Hu, Zhang, Cui & Cui, 2020). Some teachers feel that they must be extremely careful on how to word their ideas over race during their teacher education programs, as they are afraid of their words being misinterpreted, even when their intentions are not ill (Rudnick, 2019). On the other hand, people of color may feel that the dominant group is expecting them to represent their races in a classroom and that the responsibility on educating white people about race is pushed on them, while they are simultaneously denying their experiences with systemic racism (Rudnick, 2019; Sleeter, 2017). The complexity of the issue as a topic and the social atmosphere around it may then lead to the topic being avoided, which perpetuates the position of colorblind ideology at schools.

Hachfeld, Hahn, Schroeder. Anders & Kunter (2015) noted that teachers who endorsed colorblind ideology also seemed more reluctant to teach classes that were not homogenous. This can be worrying, as teachers' motivation and teaching enthusiasm can reportedly affect students learning environment. A teacher that is perceived as enthusiastic by the students, can lessen class-related boredom, which in turn might affect the learning process (Wang et al., 2020). Furthermore, a high level of perceived teacher enthusiasm correlates positively with student engagement, intrinsic goal orientation and academic self-efficacy (Zhang, 2013). If the previous research in the field is taken into consideration, it is entirely possible that more diverse classes are at a disadvantage, if they perceive the teacher's reluctance on teaching them. While the correlation between adopting colorblind ideology and reluctance on teaching diverse classes does not equal causation, this connection should be taken into consideration.

Even though teachers with colorblind ideology seem to generally be opposed to racial discrimination, in comparison to teaching styles that focus on embracing the differences in students and their cultural backgrounds, they seem to posit more prejudicial views (Hachfeld, Hahn, Schroeder, Anders, Stanat & Kunter, 2011). Even when teachers deny racism at school, unequal treatment towards non-white students was visible in the United States. Especially African American male students are affected by this, as teachers tend to have lower expectations of

them (Hucks, 2011). Teachers are also more likely to discipline non-white students more severely (Gregory, Skiba & Noguera, 2010).

Not unlike black people being more likely to be incarcerated, black males in American schools are disparately suspended and expelled from schools (Grace & Nelson, 2018). Black males at schools were more likely to be disciplined in elementary schools than their peers (Rocque & Paternoster, 2011). This serves to enforce an image of black men not following rules and having behavioral problems (Rocque & Paternoster, 2011). Furthermore, students of color may generally get called out and scolded for behavior that is deemed unacceptable at school, while their white peers are not (Blaisdell, 2016). This could exacerbate the disparate educational outcomes between racial groups, as teachers' lower expectations are also related to the interactions between the teacher and the students (Grace & Nelson, 2018). As evidence suggests, these expectations are further in connection with the support that students receive. It is then entirely possible that teachers offer much less support to students outside of the dominant racial group, as they may posit racist views of the capability of these students and conclude that further support would go to waste. Indeed, it seems that students with lower educational outcomes often feel lonelier and feel that their teachers do not care for them, whereas higher performing students are more likely to feel supported by their teachers (Grace & Nelson, 2018). Especially black males seem to feel that their teachers do not have high expectations of them due to teachers having stereotypical beliefs about them because of their skin color (Grace & Nelson, 2018). This seems to result in worse educational outcomes and day to day experiences at school (Grace & Nelson, 2018). Instead of considering the unequal resources and lack of support that students of color get, the cause behind the disparities is still often being blamed on genetic or cultural inferiority (Nieto & Bode, 2012, as cited in Blaisdell 2016).

3.2 Pedagogy

Colorblind ideology seems to be correlated with including less inclusive teaching practices in one's teaching plans (Aragón, Dovidio & Graham, 2017; Hachfeld et al., 2015), which in turn may maintain an environment where Eurocentric practices are endorsed to an extent where they may appear superior. The endorsement of egalitarianism in teaching may result in not considering the unique context and cultural background of students in lesson planning (Hachfeld et al., 2011), which ignores the context of the children that do not belong in the dominant racial group of the society (Hachfeld et al., 2015).

While the intentions behind colorblind ideology may often be good willed and stemming from equal practices, disavowing the lived experiences of students dealing with racism can lead to feelings of not belonging (Aragón et. al, 2017). As teachers hold on to beliefs of equality, they might believe that it would be wrong to treat children in a classroom differently (Choi, 2008). This belief, however, becomes a barrier for equitable practices at school and does not take into account that the so-called equal practices cannot be truly equal for everyone when the structures at the school are already setting the pre-conditions for other students as unfair.

Teachers with colorblind ideology are also bound to deny the ways in which oppression is still affecting the classroom, as "educators who use these teaching tactics essentially pretend that the histories of race, gender, sexuality, class, and other inequalities have no bearing on their subject, disciplinary training, methodologies, and classroom dynamics" (Ioanide, 2019, p. 330). Furthermore, evidence suggests that these teaching methods are not affective in teaching about racism (Reynolds, 2019), and they may in fact amplify discriminatory biases (Ioanide, 2019).

3.3 Institutionalized racism

On a larger scale, colorblind ideology disavows the systemic structures in place that grant privilege to the dominant group. In education, colorblindness acts through teaching students that these structures are non-existent, which in turn would mean that the opportunities and resources they receive are the same as for the dominant group (Ioanide, 2019). In this equation, if students of color fail to succeed, the blame can only be placed on the individuals themselves. Then in turn, looking at the data that shows disparities between the dominant and outside group, one may be led to think that people of color do not value education as much. Recognizing the ways in which systemic structures in education exacerbate racial disparities would help teachers understand the struggles their students may be facing every day through racial hierarchy. Many educators are unaware of the role they may have in perpetuating these patterns, as this silent obscuring of the issues only strengthens them (Blaisdell, 2016). Furthermore, the silence around the subject may result in teachers not being aware or denying the privileges and disadvantages that the staff and the pupils in the school community may have and the way in which these power structures operate (Grace & Nelson, 2018). This may also mean that since the mostly white teacher force may not understand the struggles some students are facing at school, they might not be able to provide sufficient support for students outside of the dominant racial groups.

Systemic structures outside of school that cause racial disparities affect the students and school as well. This can be seen in the form of racial segregation (Blaisdell, 2016). In the United States, students are not only segregated in different schools but also segregated within schools. This can be seen as African American students receiving education from less experienced teachers (Clotfelter, Ladd & Vigdor, 2005), or through racialized tracking that divides white students in different classes from students of other racial groups (Tyson, 2011, as cited in Blaisdell, 2016). Standardized testing is used as a tool for this segregation, and it contributes to colorblind ideology at schools (Blaisdell, 2016). As the test and the grading for it are the same for everyone, using it to track students is a seemingly equal practice. However, these scores do not take into consideration the already existing racial disparities that are caused by racist structures. Therefore, a disproportionate number of non-white students have no access to the more experienced teachers, the same curriculum and educational resources (Blaisdell, 2016; Tyson, 2011, as cited in Blaisdell 2016).

Blaisdell (2016) notes that children who were tracked through standardized reading tests and had lower performance scores were mostly students of color. While this tracking might have enabled the school staff to become aware of the existing achievement gaps and provide them with extra support, it seems that this segregation did not help these students in the end. The students were given lower level of reading material, but not offered enough challenges in order to improve. Therefore, the practices seemed equitable on the surface, but resulted in segregating classrooms and limiting the access that especially students of color had to the curriculum. Furthermore, these tests did not track the improvement of the children but rather only tracked whether the student passes the 'standard' or not. While even these test scores can be helpful for formative assessment, problems occur when the students' scores are used in order to label them 'deficient' and therefore, incapable of reaching the higher levels (Blaisdell, 2016). As some teachers still hold stereotypical notions of students of color being intellectually inferior and are not giving enough support for those students. The fault of these scores were also placed on the students themselves and the unequal structures affecting these students were not considered (Blaisdell, 2016). In a colorblind setting this condition is viewed as the result of white superiority. The situation is viewed as the natural cause of white students being more academically inclined and thus, white supremacy is maintained at schools (Tyson, 2011, as cited in Blaisdell, 2016). It is also problematic, when practice that may be exacerbating disparities are set in a district or nationwide curriculum (Blaisdell, 2016). This means that individual teachers have

less freedom to cater to their students' needs in the classroom in situations that are clearly not decreasing the achievement gaps between the children.

Furthermore, the systemic racism can also be seen in the contents being taught. As Reynolds (2019) suggests, educators with colorblind ideologies in the United States are likely to misrepresent American history by leaving out parts that may be uncomfortable. This may distort the way students see the history and how it has affected today. Therefore, making connections between the history of oppression and the systemic structures maintaining oppression today becomes more difficult and these structures are being normalized (Reynolds, 2019). Often history books that are being used in education are also built around white people (Singh, 2019). Furthermore, the information that children learn about race and the history of racism is delivered from a 'white savior' point of view (Hagerman, 2015).

While the official curriculum dictates the content that is considered important knowledge for everyone in the society and thus often transmits Eurocentric values, the hidden curriculum at schools indirectly signals what is valued. Through both official and hidden curriculum, non-white culture is often invalidated (Blaisdell, 2016). The hidden curriculum dictates the social rules in school. This includes the way in which students are expected to behave, talk or even walk (Blaisdell, 2016). Often these rules are centered on Eurocentric cultural practices and that of black or brown students might get deemed as unacceptable by the school staff (Blaisdell, 2016). While non-white students often get scolded for behaving in a way that challenges the dominant white cultural norms, their white peers are more likely to get away with it (Blaisdell, 2016).

As colorblind ideology claims systemic racism to be a thing of the past, the advantage gaps are being explained by reasons related to the individuals themselves. Teachers with such views will conclude that instead the members of the groups are not working hard enough or point the blame on the environment in which the individuals have grown up in (Ullucci, 2011). This blind belief in meritocracy without assessing the contexts of the individuals within the school results in victim blaming and the responsibility is shifted on the victim themselves. Furthermore, schools with students that are mostly non-white, are seen as inferior spaces and the complex policies and lack of opportunities that are provided in the schools are not being acknowledged (Ullucci, 2011). Then, it is easier to use the space and the surrounding culture as the cause for these disparities. Thus, placing the blame on the victim, the school environment or the home environment work to normalize racial disparities in education (Blaisdell, 2016). Furthermore, to

enhance the colorblind approach and obscure the structural inequalities, the students are being labeled with negative terms that address them as the root of the issue (Blaisdell, 2016).

3.4 Students

Just as most of the teachers, Hagerman (2015) found that many children in her research believed that race no longer mattered in the United States and was limited to the times of slavery. The children seemed to also be uncomfortable with talking about race in general and could not come up with any examples of modern-day racism. However, just acknowledging the race of a person, seemed like a racist activity to most of the children. Even when children claim to not see the skin color of other people, they still seemed to exclude children from other racial groups based on internalized stereotypical ideas. The children also engaged in victim blaming as a way to explain the existing disparities between racial groups. They would also exchange comments filled with racial stereotypes that depicted inferiority in terms of intelligence and appearance but mostly only around their peers, as doing this in the public was not seen as acceptable. In front of parents and other authority figures, racist observations are still being produced through coded-language, where race is not directly mentioned but is implied to be part of the discussion through other means of interpretation. However, it is important to note that children who did not grow up in an environment filled with colorblind ideology responded differently (Hagerman, 2015). As a lot of the colorblind ideology might be forwarded to children from parents (Hagerman, 2015), schools should be places that offer children space to be critical on the common ideologies and reflect on their own and their parents' ideas. Especially since many children grow up in environments that offer limited opportunities for interracial interactions (Hagerman, 2015).

Generally, it seems that children are curious about race but mostly ask questions related to it from each other, when adults are not around (Hagerman, 2015). This could be connected to the prevailing colorblind ideology that avoids race-talk altogether. If the social environment does not allow children to mention race, it is not surprising that children are afraid to pose their questions when adults are around.

4 Finnish context

The term for colorblind ideology was coined in the United States, but the ideology can be found outside of it, too. While considering the aspects in which colorblind ideology works in education, it is important to note that this will also have different implications in different contexts. Therefore, the historical context should not be separated from the education system or even a specific school that is being observed. While drawing information and trends from other contexts can be helpful, the information is not directly applicable to every situation. As majority of the research in this area has been conducted in the United States, and the historical context of Finland and the United States differs greatly when observing racial oppression, it is important to consider the non-central position Finland had during European colonialism and the idea of "Finnish exceptionalism" (Rastas, 2012), which exacerbates the denial of racism in Finland (Alemanji & Mafi, 2018).

Despite the denial of racism in Finland, due to the increased migration, overt racism has also become a more visible issue (Juva & Holm, 2017). Finland is used to having quite a homogenous population, so compared to other European countries, migration is generally quite a new phenomenon in Finland (Juva & Holm, 2017). With the diversification of the population, the number of suspected ethnic and nationality-based hate crimes rose, as well (Zacheus, Kalalahti, Varjo, Saarinen, Jahnukainen, Mäkelä & Kivirauma, 2019). While racism at schools is not an area that has been researched extensively in Finland, pupils with immigrant backgrounds seem to experience more harassment than Finnish pupils with no immigrant background (Zacheus et al., 2019). Much of this harassment is revolved around stereotypes, name-calling and racist comments (Zacheus et al., 2019). Despite the evidence of racism in Finland, institutions downplay the significance of the problems and therefore, not much transformation is seen (Alemanji & Mafi, 2018).

The Finnish national core curriculum endorses multicultural education as something that is aimed at all pupils and not just for the minority groups (Zillacus 2017). However, the curriculum is also being criticized for not being multicultural in practice (Sinkkonen & Kyttälä, 2014) and for presenting Eurocentric views and lifestyles as superior (Zacheus et al., 2019). Considering that the Finnish educational system is often characterized as endorsing equity, the reality can differ dramatically as students may not be receiving these equitable practices at school (Hummelstedt, Sahlström & Zilliacus, 2021).

Finnish schools are permeated with visible racial discrimination (Jauhola & Vehviläinen, 2015). Even though many teachers are aware of this, denying racism is typical in Finnish schools and the society in a bigger level (Alemanji, 2016 as cited in Alemanji & Mafi, 2018). Teachers revealed that pupils in their classes had extremely racist views towards black people, and strongly believed that they are intellectually inferior. Generally, racism was noted to be quite observable in schools (Mansikka & Holm, 2011). Not to mention, Finnish school staff have been reported to been discriminating pupils at school based on their racial group. This has been observed in forms of negative stereotypes and prejudicial attitudes towards the students and their families. For example, teachers may make racist remarks about pupils and their parents in teacher lounge (Juva & Holm, 2017).

Many teachers do not have high expectations of people of color, and therefore may be investing less time and resources for these pupils at school (Jauhola & Vehviläinen, 2015). Furthermore, Finnish teachers may be engaging in teaching methods and activities at school that enforce othering students that do not fit into the common notion of a white Finn. This can happen through grouping "Finnish" students and "the others" during class activities (Hummelstedt et al., 2021). This also becomes a race issue, as Lappalainen (2009) concluded that Finnishness has strongly been associated with white skin color already from pre-school. Even if the issues are not being talked about, people who are not white, may be excluded from being perceived as Finnish, no matter what their background or nationality. Not only does the activity segregate pupils and limit interracial interactions, but it also excludes the people who are not perceived as 'normal Finns'. Furthermore, all the people not being included in this group, are simply being categorized in one big group, no matter what they're background is. And even when this kind of categorization is happening, teachers seem to not be aware of the implications of these actions, but instead result to colorblind ideology in denying racism (Lappalainen, 2009).

Colorblind ideology can be found in Finnish teachers as well. Mansikka & Holm (2011), noted that in a Swedish speaking school, most teachers did not consider it important to adjust their teaching style to students with different backgrounds. While in this study, the conversation was not limited to race, the colorblind pedagogical aspects apply, as the teachers are not able to provide culturally responsive teaching. Surprisingly, many teachers had a positive outlook towards multicultural education, however they did not seem to engage with it in a practical level. Rather they believed that pupils from other backgrounds should adjust to the teaching style of

the teacher, as they do not change their teaching style for other children either. When discussing race, most Finnish teachers in this study showed clear signs of colorblind ideology, as they argued that skin color does not matter, but rather the personality of the individual. Therefore, they believed that as a tolerate practice they should treat these students the same way as any other people in the class, regardless of their skin color (Mansikka & Holm, 2011).

Furthermore, Finnish teachers, similarly to American teachers, obscure the idea of structural racism existing at school, but rather pinpoint issues of racism to be the fault of individual people and situations (Alemanji & Mafi, 2018; Juva & Holm, 2017). Even when teachers mention 'Finnish' and 'immigrant' pupils to have disputes, teachers deny the situation being involved with racism but rather conclude that it is connected to the individuals (Juva & Holm, 2017). As mentioned before, this narrative sets the individuals at blame and does not acknowledge the possible prejudicial attitudes that may be causing conflicts in the classroom. Not to mention, it is troubling that reportedly many Finnish teachers do not interfere when they witness racism. Even while it may be happening in their class, they might downplay the severity of it and fail to respond to these situations (Zacheus et al., 2019). Generally, racism at school is often held as a taboo, even though children experiencing it may end up facing exclusion (Zacheus et al., 2019). This denial of racism hinders the process of dismantling oppressive structures in education (Alemanji & Mafi, 2018). Instead, the Finnish education system remains in a colorblind bubble, where it boasts itself as one of the most qualified education systems revolved around social justice and continues to ignore the racist structures within (Alemanji & Mafi, 2018).

Rather a coded language is also being employed in Finland to refer to race. This is often done by referring to culture and nationality instead (Alemanji & Mafi, 2018; Hummelstedt et al., 2021). In order to mask racist intentions, "the word 'immigrant' is today used (both in the media and in public discourse) as a new racial category in Finland – a synonym for Black (non-White/non-European descendant)" (Alemanji & Mafi, 2018, p. 189). This is done regardless of the fact, that some immigrants may in fact be of white European descent (Alemanji & Mafi, 2018).

5 Discussion

The first goal of this thesis was to examine whether colorblind ideology could also be found in institutionalized education. Based on this thesis, it seems to be visible in education systems in the United States and Finland in various contexts. The thesis also focused on how this it appeared in schools and the possible consequences of it. The ideology could be found present in both the staff and the students of schools, demonstrated through beliefs in a post-racial society and the disavowal of systemic racism. This in turn may be hindering dismantling racist structures, that are contributing to racial disparities in the society.

Many teachers seem to posit a colorblind view and include it in their teaching (Aragón et al., 2017). Addressing the race of pupils or talking about race at school was seen as a racist practice by preservice teachers (Choi, 2008). Therefore, many avoid the topic at schools altogether (Rudnick, 2019). It is also common for teachers to deny the existence of systemic racism (Rudnick, 2019). Therefore, failing to see the systemic and institutionalized structures of racism hinders dismantling those same systems that are maintaining the status quo. It is possible that many teachers are not aware of the negative consequences that this ideology poses in terms of social justice. Thus, investing more time and resources into preparing preservice teachers on how to teach a diverse class in inclusive ways would be beneficial if unequitable structures in education are to be challenged. Teachers should commit to learning about multicultural and antiracist education more than in theory, so that they can feel more at ease in a diverse classroom, since teachers seem to feel that teacher education is only engaging in these topics in a superficial manner (Rudnick, 2019). Furthermore, learning about the ways in which structural racism works in and out of school can help teachers work against the racial disparities that are at play in the classroom, as the teachers are often responsible for the extent in which students have access to resources and the curriculum (Blaisdell, 2016). Learning about anti-racist pedagogy should not be addressed as a separate content area but rather included in teaching practices holistically. All in all, the teacher force in the United States is predominantly white and seemingly unprepared to offer culturally responsive teaching (Picower et al., 2017 as cited in Rudnick, 2019). Therefore, diversifying the teacher force through equitable practices may be desirable. Perhaps additional support for prospective teachers preparing for the licensure exams and similar tests should be invested in.

Furthermore, many pre-service teachers seem to hold onto the belief that teachers are merely supposed to learn teaching skills, that help in transmitting the curriculum set and objective knowledge to the children, and so the act of teaching is being depoliticized (Choi, 2008). This may be a challenge in resisting colorblind ideology. However, teaching and school are always political, as they guide the knowledge and values that are being held important in the society through different policies and curriculum contents. Thus, pre-service education should provide teachers with opportunities for meaningful dialogue about racism and the way it permeates education.

Delivering the already Eurocentric curriculum in a colorblind setting may end up naturalizing white supremacy. Educational policies should work towards education which is able to provide students with more inclusive content. Therefore, constructing the curriculum that dictates what is being perceived as important knowledge in the society in a manner that resists white superiority is essential. Providing educational content that endorses a colorblind view can be harmful. For example, if history lessons are taught in a colorblind setting, children may not be offered opportunities to make connections between the history and its present-day effects. This may in turn further transmit colorblind views to children. Challenging Eurocentric views that silently oppress non-white groups should be done by diversifying the voices that are heard. The content that is taught and shared in the class should be thoroughly analyzed and carefully chosen to be more representative.

While studies describing colorblind ideology in Finnish education can be found, it is rarely referred to as such nor are there studies explicitly focusing on it in this context. Therefore, more research specifying in how colorblind ideology operates in the Finnish education system and what kind of consequences it has, may be beneficial for the future of the education system that experiences a lot of racism. Many teachers lack the confidence and knowledge on how to provide culturally responsive teaching (Sleeter, 2017). As the demographics are growing more diverse, bringing forward issues within the persisting and widely common colorblind ideology may be worth pursuing. Furthermore, the overall denying of the existence of racism in Finland is worrying, as the evidence suggests otherwise (Alemanji & Mafi, 2018). Therefore, racism in schools should be generally researched more and it should be discussed both in teacher education but also with the pupils in schools. As Alemanji & Mafi (2018) note, students in Finland see racism as a taboo, as is done in colorblind ideology. Therefore, creating a safe environment in which students and the staff of the school are able to discuss race and racism, is important.

5.1 Alternatives for countering colorblind ideology

As Reynolds (2019) points out, schools should work as environments for discriminatory inter-vention, as they have been previously working as places that maintain colorblind ideology and are thus part of forming the racial views students have. There may not be one right way to engage in anti-racist pedagogy but bringing forth awareness is a good start. However, merely addressing racism from a theoretical aspect should not be the end goal. Rather racism should be addressed both in preservice teacher education but also in comprehensive schools. A mere theoretical frame of knowledge over racism does not seem to be enough for any real changes to happen in the educational setting, as handling this information from a theoretical aspect only enables a setting where teachers and pupils can distance themselves from the issues (Rudnick, 2019). Creating a space for discussions and open reflection may help pupils realize both how they are involved with racism, whether that is voluntarily or not, and how racism works on a structural level.

Furthermore, the ways in which racism is being hidden and masked behind different policies should be talked about. Encouraging race talk will be an important aspect in learning to know about the lived realities of different groups of people. It is important that the facilitator for these kinds of conversations knows how to create a safe environment. The use of strategic empathy may help in preventing students from shutting down and possibly resisting the knowledge they are encountering, seen as often telling others what not to do in a negatively perceived manner may only work to reinforce already learned behaviors (Ioanide, 2019). At the same time, all students should feel safe, which means that discrimination during these conversations should not be allowed.

Furthermore, encouraging classrooms to steer towards being race-gender-sexuality conscious may be a valid option in working towards dismantling unequal conditions at school (Ioanide, 2019). While colorblind teaching methods will avoid the topic of race and ignore the systemic oppression, intersectionality practices work to acknowledge the issues that affect the everyday lives of disadvantaged groups and assess them critically (Ioanide, 2019). Some writers argue that race cannot be completely divided from other aspects like gender and sexuality, but rather the larger context should be taken into consideration (Ioanide, 2019). Therefore, acknowledging the intersectionality that comes with privilege is beneficial in viewing the topic of oppression in and out of school. Not to mention, students can take the information they learned in school and use it outside of school in a larger social scale, too.

Ioanide (2019) points out that teaching about racism in an emotionally distant and purely factual way may result in students with harmful views to resist this knowledge if it does not align with their pre-existing views. Instead, it may be useful to implement practices that deal with racism through emotions. These practices will encourage students to critically reflect on the issues and the way in which they are part of these large social issues. Such conversations will likely raise uncomfortable feelings in students, but it may reduce both implicit and explicit forms of racism (Ioanide, 2019). Thus, it seems to be beneficial to instead acknowledge the uncomfortable feelings that come with the subject matter, rather than letting them work as a barrier towards talks about race (Lund & Carr, 2015, as cited in Carr, 2016). As Carr (2016) notes; if improved social justice is desired, difficult discussions are required.

While there are different approaches that seem desirable in trying to challenge the existing power structures, there is no one easy and right way to provide anti-racist pedagogy, as "Achieving transformative education requires time, resources, good will, organic as well as structured organization, and openness to commencing on an important, yet often difficult and discomforting process" (Carr, 2016, p. 67). However, in the light of previous research, it seems that the central point of it should be placed on addressing how the continuous silence over racism further exacerbates the already existing inequalities between racial groups (Carr, 2016).

As an end note, it is important to address that the goal of this thesis is not to claim that endorsers of colorblind ideology are 'racists' or to attack the educational field. Rather, the goal is to bring attention to issues that may not be visible to the members of the dominant racial group, so that they are offered with opportunities to reflect on how racism works in the society at large, through institutions and internalized beliefs about different racial groups, and how this is linked to the history. Therefore, critical reflection on the ways in which everyday life at school may be reproducing racist structures, should be encouraged.

"By uncovering the connection between race and space – the way space hides deficit perspectives based on race – teachers can start to make the invisible redlines visible. They can then start to look for ways to erase them or to not draw them in the first place. They can then engage in resistant spacing, where the distribution of resources explicitly counters imbedded white supremacy." (Blaisdell, 2016, p. 268).

Considering the first research question, this thesis was able to provide evidence that colorblind ideology is also visible in education. Connections between reoccurring themes of colorblind ideology were found both in schools in the United States and Finland. The sources used in this

thesis can be considered rather reliable, as they are generally up-to-date and peer-reviewed. However, it is important to keep in mind that the ways in which colorblind ideology works in one context, might differ in another context. Therefore, it is important not to make too many generalizations based on these results. Furthermore, racial groups and even individuals within these groups may be affected by this ideology in different ways. However, this thesis was able to roughly demonstrate the ways in which the ideology may work and what challenges it may pose in terms of social justice. Even then, keeping in mind the complexity of systemic racial structures, there may be plenty more layers affecting the relationship between colorblind ideology and racism at schools that were not considered in this thesis. Therefore, the way in which colorblind ideology at school is being portrayed in this thesis should not be viewed as complete. Thus, the information found in this thesis may prove itself useful but should not be directly applied to another context. Furthermore, I believe that I was able to observe this issue from an objective standpoint, while including any relevant results in the thesis. However, it is still important to acknowledge my standpoint as an antiracist activist, as this may nevertheless affect the analysis of the results through unconscious biases.

Therefore, more research is needed to explore the ways in which colorblind ideology operates in institutionalized education in different contexts. It could be useful to gather more information about the ways in which people of color perceive colorblind ideology and what kind of challenges it may present in their everyday lives, seen as most of the research focuses on the views of white teachers and students. Furthermore, research of colorblind ideology in general is needed in Finland, as at this time it is very scarce and rarely referred to as such.

In conclusion, racism is a complex ideology that seems to permeate every part of society. It is instilled in the institutional and social structures so deeply, that people might not even always be aware of it. Colorblind ideology appears to only enhance the normalization of the racial disparities caused by these structures. While education systems on their own may not be able to dismantle racist structures, they can provide a beginning for the process, as the youth are going to be part of political decision making in the future.

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