Culturally Relevant Teaching in a PDS: Talking about Race in a Early Childhood Setting

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Abstract: The United States, once characterized as a melting pot, is a mosaic composed of various cultures and races. The U.S. Census predicts that by the year 2060 the U.S. will be a plurality nation; meaning there will be no majority race. The nation's schools are where the mosaic of race can be seen in one place. Scholars have documented the impact race has on students and teachers alike. According to research, race impacts students' schooling, specifically student academic success, peer interaction and relationships, as well as student-teacher interactions. Whether we like it or not, race plays a significant role in education. This article depicts work that Michele, university teacher education and PDS liaison, and Ali, Kindergarten teacher, conduct as they engage in culturally relevant teaching. This article also seeks to add to the dearth in the literature that highlights the criticalness of engaging in culturally relevant work in an early childhood context as this specific area tends to be neglected in research and theory.

KEYWORDS: culturally relevant teaching, early childhood education, equity, professional development schools; school-university partnerships

NAPDS NINE ESSENTIALS ADDRESSED:

1. A comprehensive mission that is broader in its outreach and scope than the mission of any partner and that furthers the education profession and its responsibility to advance equity within schools and, by potential extension, the broader community;
2. A school–university culture committed to the preparation of future educators that embraces their active engagement in the school community;
3. Ongoing and reciprocal professional development for all participants guided by need;
4. A shared commitment to innovative and reflective practice by all participants;

Introduction

Each of us is born into a culture. We grow up in that culture and are socialized in that culture. We live, eat, and breathe that culture, often without even realizing how our cultural ways of being impact everything we do, what we believe, and our stereotypes and biases that often go unexamined. York reminds us, "Even though our culture may be invisible to us, it shapes the way we view the world, process information, learn, communicate, and interact with others" (2016, p. 77).

We teach what we believe. Effective teachers employ culturally relevant pedagogy in their classroom practices. Culturally relevant teachers understand that self-examination is essential for providing just, equitable learning experiences for all children regardless of their cultural, linguistic, racial, or sexual orientation (Souto-Manning, 2013). These teachers also understand the importance of getting to know their students, their students' families (biological and non-biological), and the many networks of support (Myers, 2013) that are operational in students' lives. In addition, these teachers are knowledgeable about the many ways to integrate curriculum seamlessly in a culturally relevant framework. Culturally relevant work seeks to deconstruct hegemonic ideologies and "re-member" (King and Swartz, 2015) history through the voices and experiences of minority individuals.

School-university partnerships provide a means for bridging theory and practice, and at the center of effective school-university partnerships is a commitment to long term collaboration, trusting relationships, and mutual involvement in the production and use of all research and funding opportunities (Tseng, Eastlon &, Supplee, 2017). The University of South Carolina (UofSC) Professional Development School (PDS) network consists of 21 active schools in five local districts and is one of the largest and longest-standing Professional Development Schools networks in the nation. The schools in our network provide spaces for our pre-service teachers as they work collaboratively with classroom teachers to sharpen their teaching skills and meet university course requirements. The classroom teachers support our pre-service teachers as they try novel ideas that align theoretical concepts learned in their university courses with opportunities to practice them in embedded experiences in PK-12 sites. The University of South Carolina and Meadowfield Elementary School (MES) have been in a partnership for thirty years. This is one of the longest partnerships in the network with thirty years of collaboration. Over that time, there have been several changes in personnel within the partnership, but what has remained constant is a high level of mutual trust and commitment to the work within the network.

One goal of this article is to describe the work that takes place in this PDS network in which Michele (author 1), university teacher educator and PDS liaison for MES, and Ali (author 2), kindergarten classroom teacher, deliberately engage in related to culturally relevant teaching. Another goal of this article is to address the dearth in the literature that speaks specifically to the importance of conducting culturally relevant work in an early childhood (specifically grades Pre-k through 3) context because this area tends to be under-researched and under-theorized (Volk, Harris, Glover, & Myers, 2016).

Ali graciously opened her classroom doors to allow Michele to host the embedded culturally relevant pedagogy course for undergraduates enrolled in the elementary education professional program at UofSC. As a result, the undergraduate students in Michele's course have opportunities to engage in well-designed clinical experiences with guided practice in this authentic classroom setting. The undergraduates get weekly opportunities to work side by side

with Ali's kindergarteners as they learn and try out techniques and strategies for engaging young learners in culturally relevant ways and receive immediate feedback from Michele and Ali. The undergraduate students have opportunities to work with this exemplary teacher as Ali uses quality literature as a springboard for powerful Socratic seminars. While participating in the Socratic seminars, early childhood students discuss topics such as race, class, gender, family composition, and ableism, just to name a few.

Culturally relevant pedagogy creates an avenue to address biases, stereotypes, and prejudice while promoting the appreciation and celebration of one's own culture, as well as that of others. Carefully selected, quality literature serves as a great resource in culturally relevant classrooms. Because children's literature typically reflect societal attitudes about diversity, power relationships among different groups of people, and various social identities, it is important to present children with a wide range of quality literature that reflects them and their families as well as people who are different from them and their families (Derman-Sparks, 2010). Because there are limited amounts of multicultural books published yearly, it is important to choose books of high quality to include in classroom libraries. Derman-Sparks (2010) offers the following table guidelines for doing so.

Table 1: Guidelines for Selecting High-Quality Multicultural Books

• Check the illustrations.
• Check the storyline and relationship among characters.
• Look at the message about different lifestyles.
• Consider the Effects on Children's Self and Social Identities
• Look for Books About Children and Adults Engaging in Actions for Change
• Consider the Author's or Illustrator's Background and Perspective
• Watch for Loaded Words
• Look at the Copyright Date
• Assess the Appeal of the Story and Illustrations to Young Children

Our article opens with a description of the context in which the work took place. We then provide a review of the literature that supports the development and continued refinement of our work. We highlight the research that espouses the need for quality university-school partnerships (Henrik, Munoz, Cobb, 2016; Penuel, Allen, Coburn, & Farrel, 2015). We also share the literature on culturally relevant pedagogy, which directly impacts our work (Gay, 2010). We then invite the readers into Ali's classroom as she describes one Socratic Seminar that focused on race. We finally conclude with implications for the field of teacher preparation.

Context

Meadowfield Elementary is an urban 4k through 5th-grade school with approximately 750 students. In the school, 65 percent of the students are black, 21 percent are white, 8 percent are Latino/Hispanic, and 6 percent identify with two or more racial groups. Approximately fifty-four percent of the students identify as males, and forty-six percent identify as females. The faculty composition is slightly different, consisting of 89 percent females and 11 percent males. Of those, 67 percent are white, 25 percent are black, 2 percent are Latino/Hispanic, and 4 percent identify with two or more racial groups. The school has a 78 percent poverty index, 17 percent of the students identify as students with special needs, and 10 percent of the students require ESOL services.

Synthesis of the Literature

Our review of literature on school-university partnerships reveal that partnerships established with regards to long term collaboration, trusting relationships, and mutual involvement tend to be highly effective (Tseng, Eastlon &, Supplee, 2017). The literature also includes roadblocks to avoid when creating partnerships. One such roadblock is the one-sided relationships in which researchers come into school settings, conduct their research, and then leave. The researchers benefit but the school and teachers do not benefit overall. The literature also warns to avoid forming partnerships that are built on competing needs where the school wants a quick fix to a problem and the researchers want a site to use for long-term research goals. The partnership that currently exists between UofSC and MES is mutually beneficial to the elementary school and the university. The current partnership grew out of the principal, Ms. Lisa Davis' concern that her faculty, predominately white, middle-class women, needed to become more informed on ways to build culturally relevant, anti-racist curriculum that centered the needs of the ever-increasing diverse student body at the school. The other side of the partnership grew out of Michele's need for a site to host the undergraduate embedded culturally relevant courses as she worked alongside highly effective teachers engaged daily in culturally relevant, anti-racist pedagogy.

We also reviewed the literature on culturally relevant pedagogy. Ladson-Billings (1994) maintains that culturally relevant pedagogy is an approach that is designed to empower students so that they are more equipped to critically examine educational content and process and to determine how it can be used to create a more democratic society. Culturally relevant teaching uses the cultural knowledge of the students and transcends the negative effects of the dominant culture. It empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically by using cultural referents to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes. The three tenets of Ladson-Billings' framework: academic success, sociopolitical consciousness, and cultural competence (2006) demand that we support students in these domains as we seek to create a more just world. Other scholars, namely Paris and Alim (2017) built on Ladson-Billings' work to help us conceptualize a new framework: *culturally sustaining pedagogy* (CSP). According to Paris and Alim, "CSP seeks to perpetuate and foster--to sustain--linguistic, literate, and cultural pluralism as part of schooling for positive social transformation" (pg. 1). Their work asks that we view students as whole and not broken and that those students thrive in schools in which diverse, heterogeneous practices are sustained and valued.

Unlike Ladson-Billings and Paris and Alim, Milner (2010) shifts the focus from students to the educators when addressing issues of cultural competence and sustainability. He posits that educators need to build cultural competence to effectively educate students, particularly students from urban areas. Milner identifies three principles that culturally competent educators must possess. When describing culturally competent educators, Milner (2010) purports that educators must build and sustain meaningful and authentic relationships with students, recognize the multiple layers of identity among their students and confront matters of race with them, and perceive teaching as a communal affair and work to create a culture of collaboration with colleagues. Educators, who employ culturally relevant practices in their rooms, view their students' cultures as assets to their students' individual successes. Ali uses her students' cultural ways of being in the world to build curriculum for and with them. She is a culturally competent teacher who develops and maintains meaningful, authentic relationships with her students; she recognizes the multiple layers of identity her students embody and is not afraid to engage in conversations about race. For Ali, teaching is a communal endeavor.

Many educators erroneously believe that discussions about equity issues, race, and racism should not be discussed in early childhood settings (birth to grade three). As a result, there is not voluminous research on culturally relevant pedagogy in early childhood settings. In this article, we explain how Ali, an early childhood teacher, uses quality literature to effectively facilitate conversations with her young learners regarding race as they engage in Socratic Seminars. In the section that follows, Ali describes her unit on race titled, It *Don't Matter If You're Black or White*, which was taken from Michael Jackson's hit song of the same title.

It Don't Matter If You're Black or White: Kindergarten Students Talk About Race

"You can't play with us because you are Black," says one little White boy to Nathan, a little Black boy. For the sake of anonymity, I will use pseudonyms instead of the students' actual names. Nathan breaks down in tears and both boys run to my table to tell me what happened. Before I can handle the situation, a white male colleague interjects, "Hey man, he can play with us. We don't do that in this classroom. That was back in the day, not anymore." When this incident occurred, it sparked the need to create a curriculum with my students to help them explore issues of race.

As we began the unit, my kindergarteners were seated in their usual spots on the rug in the front of the room. The UofSC undergraduates stood in the back of the room with notebooks in hand ready to capture notes. My kindergarteners know that they can speak freely without having to raise their hands because we have established this as the protocol when we engage in Socratic Seminars (Buehl 2016). A seminar is a formal group discussion led by a facilitator using questions based on a text the students study and analyze. Each seminar takes place on the large group, circular rug in the front of our room. Students sit in what's called a "seminar circle" with the teacher-researcher (me) sitting on the outside. During the seminar, students are asked to look at the speaker, take turns to speak, connect to the text, and agree or disagree with one another's responses. As the facilitator, my job is to ask questions, remind students of seminar procedures, and to redirect them when they lose focus. The first question for each seminar is done where we go around the circle and each child answers the question with one word. This is then followed by questions that ask them to expound on their responses. The goal is to probe a little more deeply into their thinking.

I began our discussion on the topic of race by asking, "What do you know about race?" I did not define the term *race* because I wanted to see how they would define the term. Given that I had just won in a foot race outside, I assumed they would use that experience and connect the question to the physical action of racing. I was surprised by the answers I received. Students responded by saying race referred to differences, something you can see, different people, being nice, and being kind. I then pulled out a chart that I made. On the chart, I drew circular smiley faces and shaded them four different skin tones. I then asked what they thought when they saw someone with each skin tone. Table 2 shows their responses for each color.

Table 2: Students' Reactions to Pictures of People with Different Skin Colors

Light brown	**Pink**	**Yellow**	**Dark brown**
Friends	Mom/dad	Good	Bad
Handsome because he is brown	Good/bad	He looks like me	Most robbers look like this
Holding a purse	Engineers	Engineers	Only robs people
Good/bad	Racecar		Ugly because he is dark
Firefighter	Drivers		You can't see their face
Police	Pretty because they are pink, and you can see their face		
Overall comments: Race is friends, mixed colors, mixed people, different people, colored people			

What stood out the most was their thoughts on the lightest skin tone and the darkest skin tone. For the lightest skin tone, the students commented that a person with that skin tone could be a good or bad person. They commented that the person was pretty because he/she was pink and that it was easier to see that person's face. For the darkest skin tone, the kindergarteners said that the person was automatically bad and ugly, citing the dark skin tone as the reason for the person's ugliness.

During the second week in this unit, I read to the kindergarteners on Monday through Thursday the book, *The Colors of Us* by Karen Katz. On Friday morning, we sat in our seminar circle to discuss the story as I facilitated the Socratic seminar. To begin this conversation, I asked the students to describe themselves using terminology they heard me read in the book. They used such terms as chocolate, peachy, and/or vanilla. They then went on to explain why they chose a particular color. Most explained that they chose a certain color because it represented their skin tone. When students were asked if they would change their skin tone, most

replied, "No." When asked why, they explained that their families liked it, or because they wouldn't look like their families anymore, or because God made them that way. Only one student said he would change from chocolate skin to peach because he wanted peach skin.

Students were asked what they thought when they saw someone with different skin tones. Their replies were mostly positive. They remarked that it was okay to be friends with that person. Students were also asked if they thought people are as different on the inside as they are on the outside, and to explain. There was mutual agreement among these young learners that people were the same on the inside and the outside and that they could all be friends regardless of their skin tone. Finally, students were asked why they thought the author, Karen Katz, wrote this book. They suggested it was written to talk about colors and to get others to understand the colors of different people. Students also mentioned that we should treat people kindly regardless of their color.

As a part of the unit, I also interviewed four of the students to collect more data. The interview lasts approximately 10 minutes. The other students were engaged in the writer's workshop when I conducted the interviews. For the sake of anonymity, I will use the pseudonyms (Lauren, Nathan, Daniel, and Barbara) instead of their actual names. The students were chosen at random and consisted of two girls and two boys. Lauren is white; Nathan, Daniel, and Barbara are black. Throughout the interview, Barbara and Deborah slowly began to lose interest and made fewer comments. They only answered questions directed towards them explicitly. Most of the interview was dominated by Lauren and Nathan and was more of a discussion between the two of them.

During the interviews, the students described their race based on the color of their skin. Barbara described herself as brown whereas Nathan and Daniel described themselves as Black. I asked the students what the difference was between Black skin and brown skin. Lauren stated, "They were kind of different because brown is a lighter color than Black." She went on to comment that people with brown skin were still considered Black people. Barbara introduced the topic of being friends with people of a different race and the other students all agreed that anyone could be friends. Barbara commented, "You can be friends with someone who has different skin than you." We then discussed what it meant to be brown skin, Black skin, or White skin. Nathan commented that being brown meant people were nice and could be friends with White skin people. He also noted they could all be a family because skin color didn't matter. We went on to discuss if being their skin color was hard or easy and why. Nathan said, "Being a little brown boy is easy because little brown boys are nice to little brown girls, but that doesn't mean you have to be friends with little brown girls." He went on to explain that brown boys could be nice to White boys and girls. We then discussed how people sometimes treat others because of their skin color. Nathan chimed in again and stated, "The whole class is my family. They play with me and share toys with me." Nathan doesn't believe that he is ever treated differently because of his skin color inside or outside of our classroom. I then asked the students whether all brown skin people are treated fairly or not. Both Lauren and Nathan agreed that they were not. Lauren explained that a long time ago Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was not treated right. She referenced the bombings of his home as well as his brother's by White people, just because they were Black. Neither Lauren nor Nathan believed that White people currently still behaved in this manner. They both made references to the past when discussing the mistreatment of Black people by White people. For instance, they spent several minutes discussing slavery and

Abraham Lincoln, who Lauren credited with freeing Black people. Nathan believes that slavery could return; however, he exclaimed that the military would fight because they fight for justice. We discussed families and if family members had to have the same skin color or not. Both children did not think families had to have the same skin color, but they could. The interview concluded when the students were ready to go back to the writing workshop.

After two weeks of reading anti-bias, culturally relevant children's literature, and discussing race, I brought the students back to the whole group carpet, and I created another chart to determine what the students learned about race. Once again, the chart was divided into the same skin colors as before. Table 3 shows the students' responses.

Table 3: Students' Reactions to Pictures of People with Different Skin Colors After Activities

Light brown	**Pink**	**Yellow**	**Dark brown**
That's me	It's me	Me	Good/bad
Firefighter	Hire people	Officer	Nice
Teacher	Doctors	Nasear	Author/illustrator
Doctor	Regular people	Baker	Friend
Both good and bad	Police officers	Both good and bad	Student
Friends	Not always good	Mom/dad	
Darker	Girls/boys	Boy/girl	

After two weeks of reading anti-racist, culturally relevant literature and openly discussing issues regrading race, I found the students' perceptions of the darkest colored shifted. They were more affirmative when they no longer saw it simply as bad and ugly. Based on their conversations during interviews, seminars, and daily interactions, I believe the children's perceptions of race did make slight changes. Students began to see the darkest skin person as equal to the lightest skin person. Students also began to connect race to other topics. For example, as we worked on family composition, students suggested not all family members have the same skin tone. Through this study, it became clear the students did not reference nor connect with current situations with race, such as Black Lives Matter, the recent killing of George Floyd, ot other incidents in this current context, yet they often brought up discrimination in schools and referenced Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. By the end of the unit, the students had mostly positive self-images and positive thoughts regarding other races.

It Does Matter If You're Black or White: Undergraduates Write About Race

As a part of my PDS liaison work, I teach a three-hour, embedded culturally relevant pedagogy course at Meadowfield Elementary School. This course is the first course that our students take in their professional program during the fall of their junior year. We intentionally offer this course as it is intended to lay the foundation for all of the other courses in the program. When creating the course, I built on the work of Gorski' (1999) to develop a three-part framework. The framework focuses on the introspection of self, introspection of teaching, and introspection of society. Through this framework, we spend the first eight weeks engaged in self-introspection. We discuss social class, ethnicity, gender, language, race, religion, sexuality, ability, family structure, etc. This is critical in helping the undergraduates see themselves as cultural beings and how the identities they occupy either privilege or oppress them. This is important because as Souto-Manning avers, "The ways we make sense of our identities affect our students' learning experiences" (2013, p.12). The next five weeks of the course are dedicated to introspection of teaching with the goal of teaching the undergraduates how to create a student-centered curriculum to make learning more engaging, relevant, and interactive (Nieto and Bode, 2018). The final week of the course is dedicated to introspection of society. During which we closely examine the current social context in society and create action steps and advocacy plans to address those social problems individually or as part of a group. The goal is for the undergraduates to expand their learning beyond the walls of the classroom and to take on a local or national social justice issue that they would like to address.

During each class session, I follow the same four-part structure: lecture, classroom visit to Ali's room, group discussion and activity, and then a discussion of the implications for them as future educators. Throughout the semester, I work closely with Ali to ensure that my students have ample opportunities to align the theoretical knowledge they gain from my lectures with the practical application of those theories as they observe Ali teaching her kindergarteners. My undergraduate students (Tall teachers) are paired one on one with Ali's students (Small teacher) to work with them for approximately one hour each week across the span of the semester. The tall teachers and small teachers find space to work together in Ali's room or in my classroom onsite at MES. In the section that follows, I will describe an assignment that my undergraduates worked on as we observed in Ali's room during the two weeks when Ali and her students focused on race as an identity factor.

Ali shared the encounter that happened on the playground with me. She informed me that she needed to do a unit with her kindergarteners on race. It was not in my immediate plans to focus on race with my undergraduates at the time, but when Ali mentioned the incident, I made the necessary adjustments to my original plans. During the lecture, I polled my undergraduates to determine how many believed that race was a biological or a social construct? Not surprisingly, a resounding eighty-five percent believed that race was biological. I shared with them that race was indeed socially constructed (Kendi, 2019) and greatly impacts every aspect of our lives. I told them that we would spend the next few class sessions learning more about race as a social construct and racism as a form of oppression. Sensoy and DiAngelo assert, "Very few Whites believe that structural racism is real or have the humility to engage with peoples of Color about it openly and thoughtfully (2017, p.149). This was important to consider because I was the lone Black professor among twenty-one undergraduates who identified as White. My students and I spent two weeks uncovering the structural nature of oppression

through racism, and we focused on white supremacy. I read aloud high-quality children's literature to them. Some of the books included, *The Skin You Live In* by Michael Tyler, *Let's Talk About Race,* by Julius Lester, *The Color of Us,* by Karen Katz, and *Black is Brown is Tan* by Arnold Adoff. While learning these important concepts, my students and I also spent time in Ali's class as her five-year-olds grappled with important issues regarding race and racism. My students were also given the assignment to capture notes when observing in Ali's room, reflect on their notes, and then write a paper detailing the implication this has for them as prospective teachers. I will share a few excerpts from some of my students that capture the overall patterns evidenced in many of their final projects.

Invisibility of Racism

An analysis of my students' assignments revealed that they believed that racism can be invisible. They mentioned that racism is embedded in the fabric of society and often is not noticeable unless it involves blatant direct violent acts perpetrated by one individual or group on another individual with less power. My students posited that all individuals have biases and prejudices. They felt that through honest, self-introspection one must explicitly examine his or her biases and prejudices and work to outgrow them in order to promote a more just and equitable classroom. They also hold the opinion that racism cannot only be associated with violent individual acts committed against persons of Color; it must also be seen as the systematic structures that are in place that oppress certain groups of people while at the same time privileging others. One student wrote,

> By socializing people to believe that racism only occurs through big explicit acts of hate or violence, society is telling peoples of Color that they are of lesser value than a White person. Children grow up learning that racism can only be violent and are taught to accept the negative portrayals of their race within society. Because these portrayals are not seen as racist, people may feel less inclined to call them out on the harm they are doing to peoples of Color and society as a whole. In my future classroom, I think it will be important for me to be conscious of the messages I portray to my students. It will be important for me to not subtlety reinforce prejudices and stereotypes through my words and actions.

From this comment, the student takes the position that he or she must first be cognizant of how his or her words and actions have the potential of promoting unintentional messages. Becoming critically conscious (Gay, 2010) and continuously engaging in self-examination is a useful practice for culturally responsive teachers to employ. Another student wrote,

> An interesting concept that was specifically discussed was that of colorblind racism, where society is encouraged to pretend like they don't notice race/racial differences, and that everyone is equal. However well-intentioned this method may be, it denies the existence of racism overall and therefore makes it nearly impossible to discuss or spread awareness about.

This student's comment sheds light on the concept of colorblindness and how that often prevents people from actually being able to address racism in constructive ways. If one pretends something does not exist, one can never fully address it in a way that matters.

The Harm of Racism

Racism is harmful and can exert negative effects on the self-concepts, health, and well-being of those who are targeted. Racism affords unfair advantages in many facets of one's life. My students understood the negative effects that racism causes. One student wrote,

> To eliminate the negative effects of racism, people need to understand the harm it causes by recognizing all people have prejudices, therefore, contributing to racism. In the classroom, teachers can put the effort into recognizing their own prejudices and biases before allowing them to affect the learning experiences of the students.

This student also stresses the importance of examining one's biases and not allowing those biases to negatively affect the learning experiences of the students in one's class.

Racism Cannot Exist Without Power.

A final concept that was an event in the students' responses was the notion that racism cannot exist without power. They understood that there were clear dynamics of power in play in a racialized system. They also mentioned certain groups (white, wealthy, heterosexual, able-bodied males) were usually given privileges that others were not afforded. The students mentioned that those who are in power often exert that power and authority over others. One student shared,

> Racism could not exist without power, that is why it is not just the effects of individualized acts. One singular person does not have enough power to be considered a dominant group. Racism is combining prejudice with power, everybody has prejudices so reducing racism to an individual act is simply incorrect. It is when combined with the power historically given to Whites in America that racism comes alive.

My undergraduates, unlike Ali's kindergarteners, assert that it does matter if you are Black or White. My students understood the social, historical, and ideological concepts associated with race and racism. Ali's students were too young to articulate issues of race and racism beyond that of skin tone, acceptability, and fairness. Both groups did; however, echo that there was no place for racism in a just, equitable society. For instance, one of Ali's students commented, "People are the same on the inside and we could all be friends no matter what color we are." My students went a little deeper and mentioned the importance of self-introspection. They knew this was necessary to ensure that their practices are equitable and just for all students. One student shared,

> I never viewed myself as a racist because I had friends of all races and was even considered the minority race at my high school. However, what I did not realize was the higher structures in play that oppressed other races. Even if I was not acting on those discriminations, I still had the privileges the higher structure gave

me, thus putting African-Americans and other minorities at a disadvantage. As a teacher, I hope to seek out these inequalities that are put in place and find a way to remove them from my classroom.

Implications

This paper shared two examples of efforts to discuss race with Kindergarteners and undergraduate teacher candidates in the context of a school-university partnership. There are multiple implications related to this work. It becomes even more innumerable when the partnership provides opportunities for teachers in preparation to have first-hand embedded clinical experiences in which they experience the bridge from theory to practice related to the use of culturally relevant pedagogies. I am only going to briefly highlight a few of the most salient implications in this section.

Early childhood students can engage in critical discussions. Ali knows that it is important to engage her kindergarteners in culturally relevant pedagogy because even at this early age, children are cognizant of differences in language, race, gender, and physical abilities. At the age of two, children begin to describe themselves and other people by physical characteristics such as skin color. By ages three and four, children begin to develop positive and negative associations with the color of their skin. Five and 6-year-old children begin to identify stereotypes and use insults such as name-calling 80% of the time during a disagreement (Tatum, 2003).

Culturally relevant teachers do not ignore the ethnic identities of his/her students. Culturally relevant teachers understand the importance of truly seeing the cultural and social diversity that exists among his/her students and capitalizes on those aspects to re-center the curriculum (Baines et. al., 2018). A teacher's beliefs are evidenced in his/her daily practices. The beliefs about children serve as the undercurrent for the intentional moves that a teacher makes when he/she plans engagements, arranges the classroom, and selects resources.

A culturally relevant teacher includes aspects of his/her culture and aspects of the students' cultures in the classroom. In order to do this, the teacher builds sustainable relationships with students. Relationship-building begins on day one when the students first enter the room. The teacher designs specific classroom engagements to learn more about the students and for them to learn more about him/her.

Culturally responsive teachers foster safe spaces for students to engage in dialogues about inequities. Children are bombarded each day with messages regarding race, gender, ethnicity, and/or language through media outlets, social media platforms, and friends, family, and nonfamily members. A culturally responsive teacher fosters safe spaces where children can dialogue about inequities and take on the role of activists in their school and communities. These teachers use high-quality literature as a springboard to help children engage in critical conversations. They are not afraid to address the difficult histories and topics that so many others shy away from day in and day out.

Conclusion

The University of South Carolina and Meadowfield Elementary have a long and strong partnership. The current work being done within the partnership of UofSC and MES is beneficial

for both partners. The school has an onsite liaison who provides onsite, continuous professional development, teaches courses, develops curriculum, and offers feedback for the faculty and staff on culturally relevant pedagogical strategies and techniques. In return, the administration provides the liaison/ teacher educator a space to offer the undergraduate and graduate courses in which students are immersed in classrooms where they experience authentic alignment between theory and practice and get immediate feedback. Building effective school-university partnerships takes time, but the benefits are immeasurable.

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