



BEST PRACTICES FOR PLANNING CURRICULUM FOR YOUNG CHILDREN

# Creating Equitable Early Learning Environments

for

Young

Boys

of

Color

## Disrupting Disproportionate Outcomes

California Department of Education



Sacramento, 2022



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## Letter from the State Superintendent of Public Instruction

I am pleased to present *Creating Equitable Early Learning Environments for Young Boys of Color: Disrupting Disproportionate Outcomes*. This groundbreaking book provides an honest and comprehensive look at the inequitable experiences our youngest Boys of Color have in early learning programs including disproportionate rates of exclusionary discipline (e.g., pushouts, suspensions, and expulsions). This book highlights the critical need to disrupt these patterns and create strength-based and equity-oriented early childhood environments that support Boys of Color to thrive.

Early childhood educators are uniquely positioned to influence positive change for Boys of Color. This book provides teachers and program leaders with a helpful roadmap for improving racial equity through strengthening racial awareness, addressing implicit bias, and creating culturally responsive environments that are safe, affirming, and engaging for Boys of Color and their families.

To eliminate racial disparities, educators need to be actively working for racial justice on a daily basis. Developing race consciousness is personal and courageous work that requires passion, persistence, and dedication from every one of us. This book calls on educators to answer an essential question, "Do we have the *will* to educate Boys of Color to succeed?" Our answer must be a resounding YES.

Young Boys of Color are counting on us to care deeply, acknowledge their collective brilliance and promise, and commit ourselves to their educational success. The need is urgent. The time to get started is now.



Tony Thurmond  
State Superintendent

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## Executive Summary



Creating Equitable Early Learning Environments for Young Boys of Color: Disrupting Disproportionate Outcomes was developed in collaboration between the California Department of Education Early Education Division and the WestEd Center for Child and Family Studies. It is a groundbreaking resource for early childhood educators committed to improving race equity within their classrooms and programs and disrupting the exclusionary disciplinary practices—suspensions, expulsions, and pushouts—that disproportionately impact our youngest Boys of Color. Drawing on the most contemporary research, the authors discuss the rates of exclusionary disciplinary practices in early childhood and the underlying reasons for these patterns including different forms of oppression with a focus on structural racism and implicit bias.

This book introduces a wide range of practical strategies teachers and program leaders can use to create strengths-based, responsive early education environments that support our youngest Boys of Color to thrive. Topics addressed include building racial equity awareness, strategies to address implicit bias, responsive relationships with love at the center, culturally responsive practice, effective research-informed strategies for the classroom, and the importance of building reciprocal partnerships with families.

Vignettes and quotes reflecting the authentic voices of Boys of Color are woven throughout the book along with stories from early childhood teachers, administrators, and others working with Boys of Color and their families. Each chapter includes a summary of key ideas, reflection questions for teachers and program leaders, research highlights, action steps readers can take right away to strengthen the racial equity of their practice, and policy recommendations for programs and systems. The book also includes a facilitator guide for all who will be leading professional development about the topics in the book and many protocols and implementation activities that will help individuals deepen their understanding of the concepts in each chapter and consider how to implement the ideas in their practice.

## A Guide to Reading This Book

We include several features throughout the book to support readers engaging with the information presented. Several icons are used to help readers quickly identify specific content, key ideas, and invitations for reflection and dialogue throughout the book. The icons and what they represent are described as follows.



### Key Idea

Indicates the most important or central thought related to a specific topic or section of a chapter.



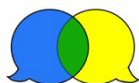
### Stop and Reflect

Invites readers to pause and think about an idea, feeling, strategy, or implication.



### Check Your Perspective

Asks readers to identify their own perspective and consider alternative ways of thinking about a topic or example presented in the text.



### Talk It Through

Encourages readers to share their reflections and/or reactions to the content with one or more colleagues or other thought partners.



### Administrators (Directors, Site Supervisors, Program Leaders)

Content and examples specifically geared towards administrators and program leaders serving Boys of Color.



## **Teachers and Providers**

As this book is written specifically for teachers and providers, all of the content is appropriate for them. However, we use this icon to distinguish reflection questions and actions steps for teachers at the end of each chapter.



## **Policy**

Content and examples emphasizing policy related to Boys of Color.



## **Promising Practice**

Content that describes strategies and practices that are identified in the research literature and/or reported among voices in field as effective, strength-based approaches that improve equity for Boys of Color.



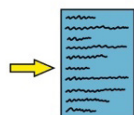
## **Consequence of Oppression**

Evidence in the form of research data and personal narratives that represent the negative impacts of structural, institutional, interpersonal, and personal forms of structural racism and oppression.



## **Research**

An important finding from a current research study.



## **Appendix**

Indicating that content can be found in the appendices at the end of the book.

**At the end of every chapter, we include:**

- “Takeaways” are short summaries of the main ideas for each chapter.
- “Shift Your Lens” Reflection Questions are for teachers and for program leaders/administrators. We include questions for individual reflection as well as group reflection questions for use in professional development and/or communities of practice. These questions will help readers deepen their understanding of the information in each chapter and think about how to apply what they are learning to influence their practice.
- “Be Brave” Action Steps for Equity are actions that individuals can take immediately to apply the ideas discussed in the book into their classrooms, programs, and schools. Suggestions are provided for teachers and program leaders.
- “Invest in Change” Policy Implications are aligned with the content in each chapter.
- “Make It Real” Implementation Activities are several protocols and exercises included in the appendices to provide opportunities for readers to deepen their understanding of the concepts and stories in each chapter, and to consider how to implement the ideas in practice. We encourage readers to identify partners or groups (e.g., communities of practice) they can work with over time to reflect upon, discuss, and make plans for action inspired by the information in this book.

## Introduction

### Vignette A

Omar, a bright-eyed four-year-old, arrives at his neighborhood's child care center with his father, Manuel. At the door of the classroom, Mr. K., Omar's teacher, sees them and with a big smile says "Omar! Big man, how are you? I am so happy to see you!" Omar is beaming and offers his fist for a fist bump with Mr. K. as he comes in. He turns to his father still grinning and says, "Ya te puedes ir, Papi, ¡yo estoy bien!" ("You can go now Daddy! I am good!").

### Vignette B

"I remember this teacher, Ms. Marissa. This was in pre-K. I really think she is the reason I want to study engineering! She always checked on me when I was sad. And she remembered things I said, and she would follow up with me—she cared. So, I think she really knew me well, and she knew how much I loved building with Legos. I remember that often, at center time or at free time, she would come and sit with me to build stuff while the other teacher was in another center. I remember that she often put my constructions on a shelf so that we could show it to my grandma at pickup. It made me feel extra special and that I was really good at building stuff!"

—Tyrone, tenth-grader

### Vignette C

"I like to dance. I like to dance. Dance! Dance! Dance!" Santiago moves to the beat of his own drum. All the years of sweet lullabies, songs, and movement shared with him by his mother explains why Santiago hums a tune with every hop and step. Santiago, a four-year-old boy, has deep family roots in Nicaragua and his strength, power, and resilience brings a bright smile to his provider, Ms. Flora, who has been caring for Santiago since he was three months old. Santiago has learned many songs, dances, and rhymes with Ms. Flora over the years, including many in Spanish. She explains, "I think when his father died, he began singing even more. At two years old he didn't understand where his father went, what happened; and I know music, song, and dance allows him to heal his hurt, his pain." Santiago and Ms. Flora laugh as they bang on the drum some more. "Can we do it again Ms. Flora?" Santiago asks. "Yes, yes, as long as you want Santi."

### Vignette D

"I have three biological sons—you have heard of that saying, 'Treating your students like they are your own?' That! There is no difference between the love I provide to my biological kids and the love I provide to my Kings, to my African American male students. And if there is any secret to how we are successful in our program, that is it, it's love."

—Jerome Gourdine, Director of African American Male Achievement, Office of Equity, Oakland Unified School District

The vignettes above illustrate four examples of the characteristics that define responsive, strength-based early childhood programs for our youngest Boys of Color. Mr. K.'s enthusiastic welcome does not stop at drop-off. Instead, Mr. K. sees every boy as having many strengths and he makes sure to have one-on-one time with each child on a regular basis. He is also regularly in contact with their families, sometimes meeting face-to-face and other times staying in contact through text messages. Tyrone's memory shows the importance of trusting relationships between young Boys of Color and the adults who teach and care for them: Even though Tyrone is in high school now, he still remembers how he felt loved, cared for, and welcome in his prekindergarten classroom. Ms. Marissa's attention to his interests and the genuine care she provided him created an essential and positive foundation for Tyrone's understanding of himself as a learner and his belief in his academic ability. Ms. Flora exemplifies an educator with empathy who acknowledges Santiago's life experiences while affirming his skillful use of music and movement to support his coping and resilience following the death of his father.

As Mr. Gourdine articulates, a commitment to loving all children is at the center of these examples. It is a pillar of responsive practices for Boys of Color in early childhood education. Love is central to this publication and a critical foundation of equitable education for Boys of Color. Although the ways we express love can take many forms in different cultural groups, families, and between individuals, in all instances, **a love-based responsive approach begins with an intentional commitment to believe in and acknowledge each child's strengths and brilliance, now and for their future.**



Unfortunately, many children, especially those from historically marginalized racial and ethnic communities, do not have access to early childhood programs where they experience caring and responsive relationships like the ones described in the vignettes above. In fact, the significant disparities in the way young children of color, especially Boys<sup>1</sup> of Color, are cared for and taught in early childhood and throughout elementary and secondary school is alarming. This is especially true for Black<sup>2</sup> and Latinx boys, and also for Native Hawaiian and other Pacific Islander, Native American, Native Alaskan, and particular subgroups of Asian American<sup>3</sup> children.

- 
- 1 In this publication, we refer to binary categories (men/women; boys/girls) that have traditionally organized society. There is increasing awareness of the significant diversity that exists in children's and adults' gender identities (Pastel et al. 2019). However, throughout this book gender is discussed in a binary (boy/girl) manner not to dismiss the reality of diverse gender identities, but instead, to acknowledge that the gender binary still structures how people perceive and treat young children, and as will be discussed throughout the book, young Boys of Color face specific forms of discrimination that reflect societal perceptions and biases related to their race and gender.
  - 2 In this book you will see that both the terms Black and African American are used. We chose to respect the identifier used by interviewees when including their voices in vignettes and quotations throughout the book. We also preserve the literal word choices when quoting research articles and professional publications. Otherwise, we use the term Black, as this is a more inclusive word that includes individuals born and raised in the United States and others who immigrated to the US from other countries.
  - 3 Asian Americans are a very diverse population group. The term "Asian" in official government statistics is a racial category based on the history of US migration and race relations. It encompasses immigrants from Asia and people of Asian descent born in the United States. Asians come from Chinese, Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Cambodian, Vietnamese, and Thai backgrounds, among many others. Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander has been distinguished as a different racial category in the national census since 2000 (see "[Reading Between the Data](#)" by Ahmad and Weller [2014]). We discuss this topic further in chapter two.

Despite young children of color entering early childhood programs and attending school with rich social-emotional, cognitive, and linguistic skills, data consistently shows outcome disparities<sup>4</sup> experienced by Boys of Color especially for Black and Latinx males (Cabrera 2013; Coll et al. 2009; Gardner-Neblett 2017; National Assessment of Educational Progress 2013). Specifically, students from Native Hawaiian, Pacific Islander, Native American, and Native Alaskan descent are held back or retained in grade level nearly twice the rate of White children (US Department of Education Office for Civil Rights 2016). Children of color, especially Black, Latinx, and Native American children, are also disproportionately placed in special education classrooms (Artiles 2011; Artiles, Klingner, and Tate 2006; Rueda et al. 2008; Ward 2010). Further, Black students and Native American students are



- 4 These outcome disparities have often been labeled the “achievement gap,” but this label has been critiqued as perpetuating a deficit view that blames children instead of critically examining the ways in which our education and care systems do not serve all children equally well. A more accurate way of talking about these outcome disparities was proposed by Gloria Ladson-Billings, who prefers the term “Educational Debt” to stress the historical patterns of inequitable funding and attention that children of color experience in our educational systems (2006). In this way, Ladson-Billings points out, we—providers, educational leaders, educators, schools—are all accountable and must ask ourselves, “What should we all be doing? What is my part in this?” (2006). Thus, it makes us reflect how we can serve our children of color—and especially our Boys of Color—better. For more on this topic, see the “[In Focus with Gloria Ladson-Billings](#)” video interview (National Equity Project 2012).

40 and 70 percent more likely to be identified as having a dis/ability<sup>5</sup> than their peers (Harper 2017). Research has also demonstrated that students of color with disabilities often experience under-identification for early intervention services and overrepresentation in specific special education categories, especially in the classification “emotional disturbance” (Artiles, Klingner, and Tate 2006; Rueda et al. 2008; Ward 2010). Artiles has shown that children of color who have been labeled with the same high-incidence special education dis/ability (e.g., learning disabilities, emotional disturbance, intellectual dis/ability, and speech and language impairment) are placed in more segregated and restrictive settings than their White peers with the same dis/ability (2011).

### *Disproportionate Use of Exclusionary Discipline*

Another troubling aspect of the disparities in educational experiences and outcomes is the disproportionate use of exclusionary discipline (e.g., pushouts, suspensions, expulsions, seclusion, and physical restraint) with Boys of Color beginning in the early childhood years (see table 1: Exclusionary Discipline in Early Childhood; Butler 2017; Wrightslaw 2017). Federal and state data has repeatedly shown that **Black and Latinx boys are significantly more likely to experience exclusionary discipline—where they are removed from their learning environments—in comparison to their White peers** (Gilliam 2005; Meek and Gilliam 2016; US Department of Education Office for Civil Rights 2014). And Boys of Color who have dis/abilities and/or are English language learners are even more vulnerable for exclusionary discipline (Harper 2017; US Department of Education Office for Civil Rights 2014).

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5 Some scholars and activists have chosen to write “dis/ability” instead of “disability” as a way to raise awareness that what we describe as “ability” or “disability” are socially constructed ideas based in societal views that are created by people and that change over time and in different cultural contexts. By saying that dis/ability is a socially constructed idea, this is not intended to suggest that differences in cognitive, social, or physical development do not exist (e.g., dyslexia, autism, dwarfism, etc.), but instead, to emphasize that the way these differences are perceived in a society can differ significantly over time and in different cultural contexts. For instance, a child in a wheelchair in a city that is adapted with ramps, elevators, and other assistive supports will not have their “abilities” limited by the environment in the same way they would if they were living in an environment without any of these supports. Or, a child who is identified as “nonverbal” might be highly verbal (and highly skilled) if offered, for instance, a computer system to communicate with others. These examples also reinforce that emphasizing the “lack of ability” does not allow us to acknowledge a child’s strengths and skills or the manner in which our perceptions of what counts as “ability/disability” is influenced by the cultural beliefs, values, and resources in our communities. To read more, see [History of Disability Studies in Education](#) (Hunter 2012).

**Table 1: Exclusionary Discipline in Early Childhood**

What do suspensions, expulsions, push-outs, seclusion, and physical restraint look like in an early learning program?

Exclusionary discipline looks different in early childhood settings than it does with older children. In fact, often, early childhood teachers and providers do not call their disciplinary practices “expulsions” or “suspensions” but, in practice, their disciplinary actions remove children from the classroom.

Disciplinary Practice	Description
<b>In-school suspension</b>	Sending the child out of the classroom, such as sending the child to the director’s office.
<b>Out-of-school suspension</b>	Calling the family and asking them to pick up their child because of behavioral issues (e.g., biting, hitting, etc.).
<b>Expulsion</b>	Telling a family that they need to find another center/program because their program is not a “good fit” for the child or because they “cannot provide adequate support” to their child.
<b>“Soft” expulsion</b> (sometimes referred to as push-outs)	Repeatedly asking a family to pick up their child early for behavioral issues, making them leave or miss work frequently.
<b>Seclusion</b>	The practice of placing a child in a room where they cannot exit as a reaction to perceived behavioral issues (i.e., door is blocked by staff, furniture, or equipment, or is locked) (Butler 2017).

Disciplinary Practice	Description
<b>Physical Restraint<sup>6</sup></b>	Physically restraining a child as a reaction to behaviors such as moving around too much, taking their shoes off, getting out of a chair, not doing their work, or other similar activities.



### *Stop and Reflect*

Take time to read through the various definitions in table 1 and then reflect on the following questions:

- **How familiar am I with the various forms of exclusionary discipline that take place in early childhood environments?**
- **How familiar am I with AB 752 (Rubio), a bill passed in the California Legislature prohibiting contracting agencies from expelling or unenrolling a child from a state preschool program because of a child's behavior unless the contracting agency they have pursued and documented reasonable steps?<sup>7</sup>**
- **Do my actions contribute to the process of "soft expulsion"?**

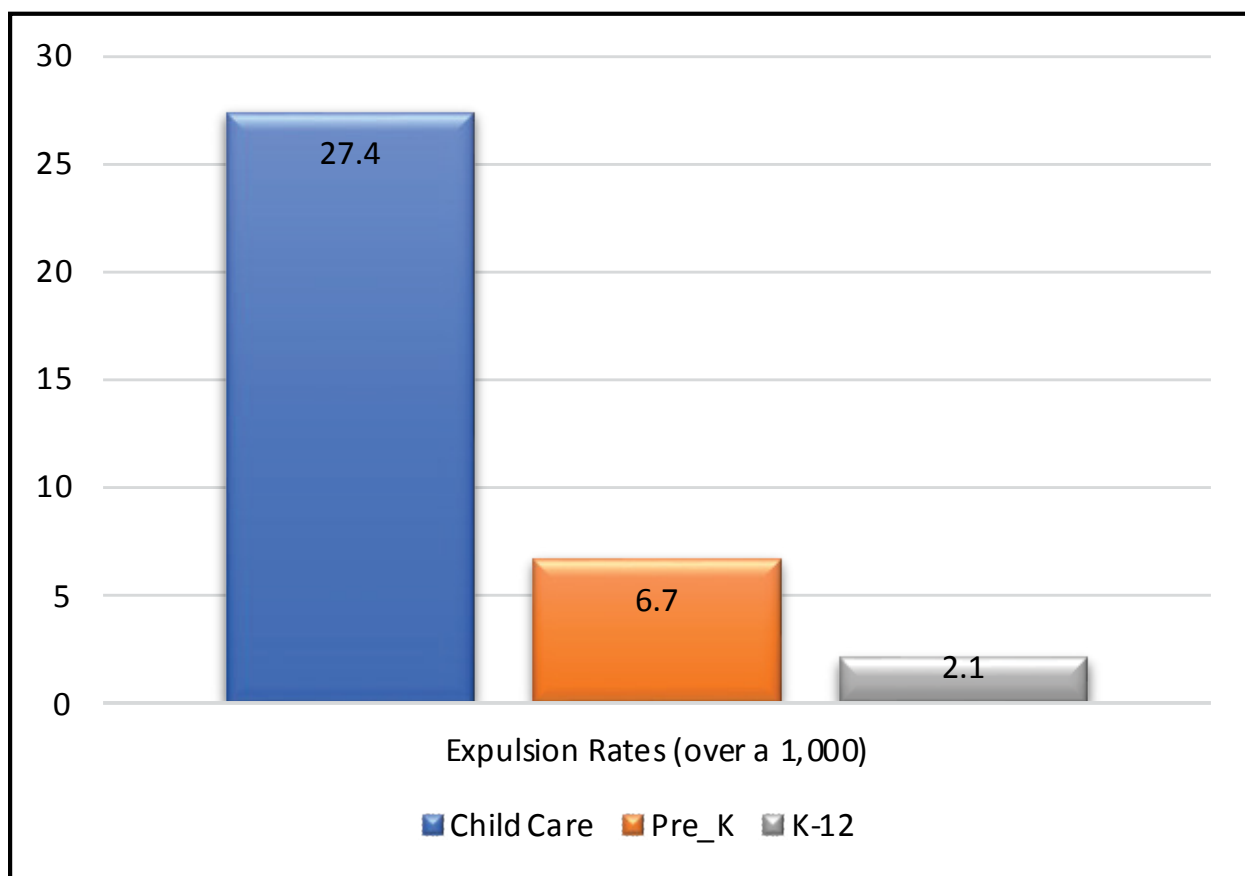
The disproportionate use of exclusionary discipline of historically marginalized

6 A new California law went into effect in January 2019, clarifying that students have "the right to be free from the use of seclusion and behavioral restraints of any form imposed as a means of coercion, discipline, convenience, or retaliation by staff" (*Education Code* Section 49005.2). This law sets further limitations for the use of seclusion and restraint to very exceptional situations where there is imminent danger for harm. For more information about this law, see [New Law Regarding the Use of Restraint and Seclusion for Students in California \(California Department of Education 2019a\)](#).

7 [AB 752 \(Rubio\)](#) Child care: state preschool programs: expulsion (approved on October 2017). Inspired by Head Start guidance, policies and regulations, this bill prohibits a contracting agency from expelling or unenrolling a child from a state preschool program because of a child's behavior unless the contracting agency has (a) expeditiously pursued and documented reasonable steps. More information on this bill and other state and federal legislation related to exclusionary discipline can be found in appendix EE.

children (e.g., Boys of Color and children with disabilities) is widespread and starts shockingly early. As shown in figure 1, infants and toddlers are expelled at rates more than three times higher than school-aged children (Gilliam 2005). Children in private and community child care programs are expelled at more than 13 times the rate of K-12 student (Gilliam 2005). A national review of the data suggests that for every 1,000 young children enrolled in child care, 27.4 were expelled versus 2.1 in K-12 schools (see figure 1) (Gilliam 2005).

*Figure 1. Expulsion Rates*



Source: (Gilliam 2005)

Hidden within these numbers are strong racial and gender biases that disproportionately and negatively impact young preschool Boys of Color, especially African American boys, who are much more likely to be suspended and expelled than their White counterparts (US Department of Education Office for Civil Rights 2016; see table 2).



*Table 2: Who Is More Likely to Be Suspended and Expelled in Early Childhood?*

Demographic Factor	Statistic
<b>Older</b>	Four-year-olds are 50% more likely than three-year-olds (Gilliam 2016)
<b>Black</b>	<p>Black preschoolers are 3.6 times as likely to be suspended as White preschoolers (US Department of Education Office for Civil Rights 2016)</p> <p>Black children represent 19% of preschoolers but 47% of suspensions (US Department of Education Office for Civil Rights 2016)</p>
<b>Boys</b>	Boys represent 54% of preschoolers but 78% of suspensions (US Department of Education Office for Civil Rights 2016)
<b>Dis/abilities</b>	<p>Federal data do not show preschool children with disabilities and English learners being suspended at disproportionate rates. Preschool children with disabilities (served by the Individuals with Disabilities and Education Act [IDEA]) represent 22% of preschool enrollment, 19% of the students suspended once, and 17% of the students suspended more than once (US Department of Education Office for Civil Rights 2014). English learners represent 12% of preschool children, 11% of students suspended once, and 9% of preschool students suspended more than once (US Department of Education Office for Civil Rights 2014).</p> <p>The pattern changes significantly for children in K–12 traditional public schools where Black students, boys, and students with disabilities are overrepresented in out-of-school suspensions (US Government Accountability Office 2018).</p>

Consider Melissa's experience with her son, Sultan, an Ethiopian-American child, who was "pushed out" of multiple child care centers in his first three years of age:

From age one to three years old, Sultan was in six different early care settings. He was regularly shamed and negatively labeled in front of other children in his child care settings. When Sultan was enrolled at one center at the age of three, there were multiple days a week when red cards were placed on the board with his name on it, indicating that he was having a "bad day," based on what the teachers described as hyperactivity. In response, he was often inappropriately isolated and excluded from group activities including play time and daily nap time. Specifically, Sultan was sent punitively to the bookroom for not cooperating with other children or for being too active.

He and the only other African-American boy in the child care program were the only two students who were ever sent to the bookroom to "calm down," especially during group activities. This sent a loud message as to who the "bad boys" were and what the bookroom represented. To the rest of the students it was a quiet and inviting room of learning, but for Sultan and the other African-American boy in the child care program, the bookroom became a place of punishment (Henneman 2014).

The response of the school to Melissa's protests against Sultan's "solitary confinement" were met with little empathy. Melissa explains: "'Well, from what I understand, what his capabilities are, it is obviously not going to work for him to stay here.' And they (center staff) were like, 'Well, yeah, you know, sometimes it just is not a good fit and I understand if you need to look elsewhere.' And I had paid [the child care tuition] up front, and I am like, 'Will you reimburse me?' And they were like, 'Yes! We will reimburse you.'"

"They wanted him gone," Melissa said.

It is clear from Melissa's story that the teachers at this center needed additional information about how to work effectively and lovingly with Sultan. He needed teachers who could build a caring and trusting relationship with him and his family—teachers who could understand that his behaviors were his best way to communicate how he was feeling inside and the specific types of support he needed from the adults around him. And Sultan's teachers needed support as well (e.g., professional development, reflective supervision, coaching and/or mental health consultation) so they would have professional skills and knowledge that could guide them to respond to Sultan in a responsive, caring, and effective manner.



No early childhood program should ever engage in the practices described in Sultan's story: rating children's behavior using colored cards, sending a child to another room for punishment, or publicly shaming a child for their behavior. These are extremely problematic practices that violate licensing requirements and the standards of our profession. Though some readers may assume that these types



of experiences are rare and/or unlikely to occur in centers rated “high-quality”<sup>8</sup> in QRIS systems and/or through NAEYC accreditation, national research and firsthand reports suggest otherwise. Tragically, young Boys of Color consistently face discrimination in all types of early childhood programs—programs rated high, medium, and low quality, and both private and public/subsidized programs. This is because the influence of implicit bias and racism are widespread. Until our professional development efforts, program evaluations, and quality improvement initiatives require an explicit look at implicit bias and equity audits, the field of early childhood will not realize just how common these discriminatory practices are and the urgent need to disrupt them from happening.

## *Other Factors*

In addition to race, age, and gender, recent studies have shown that there are other factors associated with an increased likelihood of young children being expelled, pushed out, or suspended in early childhood. Program factors including **teacher–children ratio** (the larger the group of children a teacher is responsible for, the more likely they are to engage in exclusionary discipline) or the **length of the day** (the longer the day a teacher cares for children, the more likely exclusionary discipline takes place) and personal factors (Gilliam 2008). For example, a teacher’s **lack of knowledge of child development, implicit racial bias**, and teachers with **higher levels of stress** are all factors associated with increased rates of using exclusionary disciplinary practices (Gilliam 2008).

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8 The concept of “high quality,” according to Keisha Nzewi (see [webinar: “Racial Justice, Equity, and the Role of Child Care, part 3](#), time: 1:03), is often loaded with racial, class, and cultural overtones (2020). Even if not explicit, dominant views on high quality are often rooted in early childhood programs and practices that are center-based, Euro-centric, and traditionally White and middle/upper-class. As a result, it is important to note that whenever the phrase “high quality” is used throughout this book, it is not referring to these culturally narrow ideas. Instead, the concept of high quality described in this book represents inclusive early childhood environments and experiences that value, respect, lift up, support, and love children, especially children of Color and more specifically, Boys of Color and their families. As described throughout the book, high-quality early childhood environments can take diverse forms; however, they are always culturally responsive, anti-racist, and strengths-based, and acknowledge as well as celebrate the brilliance of children of Color and honor parents’ and families’ beliefs and wishes for their children’s education as part of a reciprocal power-sharing partnership.



## Key Idea

What can we conclude from the data we have on exclusionary disciplinary practices in early learning programs?

Factors other than children's behaviors are behind the high rates of exclusionary practices in early childhood. Practitioners' and teachers' biases and the challenging working conditions of the early childhood field (where programs are often under-resourced) and the high stress levels of the workforce (exacerbated by the low levels of compensation they receive) are all factors at the root of the problem of exclusionary discipline. As Walter Gilliam, a nationally renowned researcher with expertise on this topic, reinforces, **"Preschool expulsion is NOT a child behavior. It is an adult decision"** (2016).

## Video Resources

See the following videos with Rosemarie Allen to learn more about exclusionary discipline in early childhood:

- [School Suspensions are an Adult Behavior](#) (12:23, 2016)
- [Preschool Suspensions and the Role of Implicit Bias](#) (3:03, 2015a)
- [Preschool Suspensions: Racial Inequities in Disciplinary Practices](#) (3:15, 2015b)



## Check Your Perspective

When Walter Gilliam says that preschool expulsion is not a child behavior but an adult decision, he means that suspension and rates are linked to adult and program factors that influence how adults react to children's behavior. Take a moment to think about the following questions:

- **How does stress in your job impact your interactions with young children?**
- **Can you recall a moment when stress reduced your ability to be calm and responsive with a child and instead, led you to be more reactive to a specific behavior?**
- **How could you have managed the interaction differently?**



Stress makes us all more reactive and more susceptible to act on biases and stereotypes, as we will see in chapter one. Reflecting on our stressors and biases is a first step in improving fairness in the way we treat children.



## *Lasting Consequences*

**Disciplinary actions that exclude children from educational environments have significant and lasting negative consequences for all children.**

- First, it is now well understood that participation in responsive, loving, high-quality early care and education programs has positive and lasting impacts for young children, especially for those experiencing early adversity including poverty, homelessness, community violence, or other sources of stress and trauma. Separating children from learning environments **prevents them from having the opportunities and experiencing the benefits afforded by high-quality early childhood education.**
- Additionally, expulsions, suspensions, and pushouts **interfere with the process of screening, identifying, and intervening to provide referrals and supports to children** at risk for or diagnosed with dis/abilities or other special needs including children who are impacted by trauma.

- Significantly, infants, toddlers, and preschoolers are developing their identities—**their understanding of who they are as individuals, what they are capable of, and how they fit into their families and the world around them.** They are also developing relationships with schools and making sense of how they fit in as learners and members of the educational community. By being **removed** from their caring and educational environments, adults are communicating to children that they are not welcome in educational environments, a message that has a devastating and **negative impact on children’s sense of themselves and their developing identities and their relationship with education and schooling.**
- Last, **exclusionary practices are stressful and can be traumatic experiences for young children.** As discussed later in this book, traumatic experiences are those that are perceived by the child as threatening and create intense feelings of helplessness, powerlessness, or terror for them. Exclusionary practices, especially when the teacher is reacting angrily or is punishing a child by isolating them, creates stress for a child and could easily lead them to feel unsafe and threatened. Consider, for instance, how frightened Sultan might have been when he was sent alone to a room without knowing or understanding how long he would be there. For children who are already experiencing trauma in their lives, these experiences can trigger their stress response systems and further harm their brain development and overall well-being.



## Consequence of Oppression

Young children who are expelled or suspended in early childhood are as much as 10 times more likely to drop out of high school, experience academic failure and grade retention, hold negative attitudes about school, and face incarceration than children who do not experience exclusionary discipline (Gilliam 2016; US Department of Health and Human Services and US Department of Education 2014).

## *Exclusionary Practices Are an Adult Decision: The Root Causes of Expulsion and Suspension*

The causes of the disparities in how we serve Boys of Color, starting in infancy and continuing throughout high school, are complex and involve aspects at the personal, program, and societal levels. Although implicit bias is the top factor, many educators have good intentions and yet they struggle to support Boys of Color to be successful in their classrooms (Hammond 2015). Many teachers and providers **have not been adequately prepared in higher education or in professional development** to work with children of color, specifically Boys of Color. All educators—including those who share the same racial and cultural background with Boys of Color *and* those who don't—may struggle to build trust and/or know how to authentically build caring relationships, maintain high expectations, and adapt their teaching practices to be culturally and linguistically responsive to their individual and shared needs. Additionally, teachers and providers often **lack the space, supports and/or training, and time to reflect on their practice** to identify how they might be causing harm and to consider adjustments they can make to more effectively work with the Boys of Color their classrooms. Despite these important variables, research has shown that implicit bias (see next section for definition) is the most important factor in explaining the racial and gender disparities in disciplinary actions (Gilliam et al. 2016).



## Implicit Bias

The most significant and influential factor impacting the over-disciplining of young Boys of Color is **implicit bias** (the unconscious attitudes and stereotypes that involuntarily—without our awareness—shape our responses to certain groups) (Hammond 2015). An example of implicit bias is seen in many people's quick unconscious assumptions that a young man with a hoodie is dangerous if he is African-American versus a "sports guy" if he is White. Becoming aware of these biases is a critical first step for all educators. As human beings we are prone to biases based on the stereotypes and generalizations that may have come from minimal, limited, and/or uniformed encounters with people from other racial and ethnic backgrounds.



### *Key Idea*

**We all have implicit bias. Implicit bias is directly related to how our brains are wired.**

Implicit bias operates without our conscious awareness or our intentional control. This is why it is different from explicit racism. The reason we engage in implicit bias has its roots in neuroscience and the need for our brains to process large amounts of incoming information by using a shortcut we know as stereotyping (Perry 2020). Even educators who are committed to teaching with a commitment to social justice have implicit bias based on their exposure to the dominant group's messages over a lifetime (Hammond 2015). **The question is not whether you have biases (we all do), but what can we do about it?** Chapters 1–4 describe many strategies teachers can use to address their biases.

## Unconscious Bias

Recent research has demonstrated that unconscious bias plays a significant role in early childhood educators' perceptions about children's behavior, with teachers more likely to assume Black boys' behavior is challenging and disruptive than the behavior of White boys or of African American or White girls (Gilliam et al. 2016; see also chapter two). Previous studies have also concluded that the gender of teachers plays a role, as many early childhood teachers are female and often struggle with the physicality of boys leading them to interpretations of developmentally appropriate behavior being perceived as problematic (Redding 2019). Interrupting our biases and discrimination in early childhood education is everyone's work and the process is continuous and long term. **We can deepen**



**our understandings and strengthen our practice, but we are never “done” with our need to listen, learn, and strive to be more equitable in our work with children and families.**

While biases are part of human nature, research is beginning to identify some promising practices that we can use to begin to interrupt biases and reduce the harm they are causing our young Boys of Color, a topic we discuss in depth in chapter one.



### *Key Idea*

While all of the principles, concepts, and strategies outlined in this book are reflective of high-quality practices in early childhood education and benefit all children, they are especially needed and beneficial for Boys of Color.

## *Shifting the Paradigm: Strength-Based Views That Highlight the Brilliance of Boys of Color*

Listening ... requires not only open eyes and ears, but open hearts and minds. We do not really see through our eyes or hear through our ears, but through our beliefs. ... It is not easy, but it is the only way to learn what it might feel like to be someone else and the only way to start the dialogue. (Delpit and Dowdy 2002, 139)

Too often unequal educational outcomes and the patterns of exclusionary discipline described above are blamed on children—their behavior or character—or their families, cultures, and/or communities (e.g., “This child has no manners,” “This family just doesn’t care about school. They don’t even give him books,” or “They just don’t know how to raise their children.”). These **deficit-based explanations are very harmful**. They not only wrongly label and stigmatize children and their families, they also fail to examine and hold accountable the inequitable educational systems that are responsible for these outcomes (Valencia 2012). By blaming children and their families, and perceiving them to be the root of these problems, we ignore our nation’s history of racially biased policies and practices that have discriminated against families of color in education, housing, employment, healthcare, and many other ways (Artiles, Dorn, and Bal 2016). These historical forms of discrimination have led to wide and persistent disparities in children’s opportunities to learn and negatively influenced their development, health, and ability to thrive and reach their optimal potential (Oakes 2005). Deficit



thinking also interrupts teachers and others from seeing children's strengths, family and community assets, and the promise and brilliance every child brings into early childhood settings. **In this book, we reject deficit thinking and join many who are calling for a paradigm shift.**

We emphasize a strength-based and equity-oriented approach to discussions of Boys of Color and their families. We suggest that educational institutions including early learning programs and their staff must consider their collective responsibilities for the outcome disparities Boys of Color experience. We do not ask how to "change" Boys of Color, but instead, how we can fix schools, programs, and practices to better serve them (Howard 2014).<sup>9</sup> We call on educators to build awareness of their implicit biases, cultural assumptions, values, and intentions. We invite everyone involved in the care and teaching of young Boys of Color to consider their own responsibility for creating responsive and caring classrooms that support them to grow, learn, and reach their potential, and doing so with the richness and care they deserve.



### Check Your Perspective

Brian L. Wright explains:

... beginning in preschool, teachers have been found to stigmatize Black boys with negative labels that are passed along from teacher to teacher at each grade level. The notorious "bad boy" and "troublemaker" labels lead to isolation and exclusion from classroom activities (Barbarin and Crawford 2006). As a consequence, Black boys are found to be guilty by association ... cumulative, negative experiences result in the notion that what little Black boys are made of are "problems," "deficits," and "pathologies" rather than "possibilities," "promise," and "potential." (2018, 18)

- When you talk about Black boys and other Boys of Color in your classroom, do you use language that communicates they are "problems" or "have promise and possibilities?"

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9 This is similar to how the field of Disability Studies in Education (DSE) has called for a shift away from a *medical-psychological model of disability* (i.e., one that defines the ability/disability as within our bodies and brains and emphasizes "fixing" the dis/ability or talking about what is "wrong" about the person) to a model that embraces *the social model of dis/ability* (i.e., that explains that the source of dis/ability as related to our societal attitudes, biases/forms of discrimination, and the environment) (Ware 2017).

## *Authentic Voices*

**We highlight the authentic voices of Boys of Color throughout the book.**

The examples and vignettes included throughout the book are all **true stories** representing authentic lived experiences of boys, youth, teachers, administrators, and families. The boys represent a range of ages; while some are very young children, others are older and their stories are reflections from their early childhood years. There are also authentic vignettes from discussions with early childhood teachers, administrators, and others working with Boys of Color and their families. We changed the names and locations to protect confidentiality. The range of stories represent family child care homes and early learning centers that rank in different levels of quality as the problems we highlight can be seen in many programs, even those rated with our current tools to be of high quality.



We are grateful for the generosity and kindness of all of the individuals who shared their experiences with us. Their firsthand stories provide opportunities for readers to increase their awareness, understanding, and empathy for their genuine lived experiences. The vignettes highlight the strengths, coping strategies, and brilliance and diversity of our youngest Boys of Color.

Although this publication includes information about African American, Latinx, Asian, and Native American boys in early childhood, **we emphasize the experiences of Black and Latinx boys** given that the data overwhelmingly suggest these two groups are the most likely to experience exclusionary discipline and disparities in health and educational outcomes. It is also important to note that although research is increasingly documenting the disproportional educational outcomes and discrimination faced by girls of color, the patterns of inequity are different in many ways than those experienced by Boys of Color and require separate attention (Morris 2015).

## Video Resource

Video of the [2018 Inclusion Collaborative Conference](#): Listen to personal stories about various topics discussed throughout this book from Jerome Gouridine (Director, Student Achievement, African American Male Achievement, Office of Equity, Oakland Unified School District) and Tre Germany, Devin Alexander, and Amin Zaid Robinson (Kings from Oakland Unified School District) (Inclusion Collaborative 2018).



## Consequence of Oppression

### *Missing Voices, Trust and Distrust*

In writing this book it was essential to include racially and ethnically diverse voices and contributions of young Boys of Color, male youth of color, and men of color. We contacted individuals, programs, families, and community agencies to describe the project and extend an invitation to participate. Although many people did accept this invitation—and their narratives, skills, and knowledge and critical contributions are integrated throughout the book—it is essential to acknowledge that several individuals, agencies, and groups declined. Some provided an explanation, while others spoke through their muted response or just silence and lack of response. Fear, distrust, and the consequences of historical oppression and structural racism were themes that we heard in the explanations for not participating, which are possible factors accounting for those who chose to not

respond. For those who chose to provide an explanation for their decision, they may have wondered, “Would the stories they shared be represented with integrity and honesty or ‘revised’ to be more comfortable, less distressing, and therefore, appropriated and untrue?” or, “Would the book perpetuate deficit narratives about their children, families, and communities or would they be described in their human complexity with an emphasis on strengths, assets, funds of knowledge, brilliance, and resilience despite the oppression and challenges they have individually and collectively faced?”

Trust is necessary for any change process. Individuals and communities with histories of institutional mistreatment—especially from educational institutions—often develop distrust. Relational distrust is often personal and arises when an individual or group does not believe that the decisions or actions of other individuals and groups of people are reliable or based on a shared set of values or principles (Schultz 2019). Structural distrust arises from hierarchical decision-making in which those in power make decisions for those in less powerful positions—when decisions are made *for* rather than *with* the community, undermining their agency and participation—and often ignore their dreams or demands (Schultz 2019). Educational reform initiatives designed to improve conditions for individuals, groups, and/or communities (e.g., Boys of Color) cannot succeed without acknowledging distrust.

It is necessary to “uncover, acknowledge, honestly name, and directly address the genesis and sources of the distrust because without doing so, the solutions will be fleeting. The persistence of distrust can impede positive change and reform” (Schultz 2019). Honest dialogues that “uncover, acknowledge, honestly name, and directly address” the historical sources of distrust and oppression—e.g., racism; slavery; genocide; colonialism; and disconnecting Indigenous Peoples from their histories, landscapes, languages, and social relations, and their own ways of thinking, feeling, and interacting with the world—are not yet happening across our society (Tuhiwai Smith 2012, 29). It is, therefore, understood why participation in a project funded and overseen by the government could be met with fear and concern. As Tuhiwai Smith explains, the history of oppression by government agencies has left many minoritized communities wanting to tell their own stories in their own ways:

A critical aspect of the struggle for self-determination has involved questions relating to our history as indigenous peoples and a critique of how we, as the Other, have been represented or excluded from various accounts. Every issue has been approached by indigenous peoples with a view to rewriting and rerighting our position in history. Indigenous peoples want to tell our own stories, write our own versions in our own ways, for our own purposes. (2012, 30)

The trust of individuals and communities whose experiences of trauma and oppression have created a deep-seated sense of distrust will need to be earned. In many cases, the injustices People of Color and Indigenous Peoples have faced in the US span centuries and continue to the current day. As a result, the process of building trust will necessarily be long-term and contingent on how effectively we individually and collectively address the root of the sources of distrust that exist.

This book examines the origins of mistrust, outlines the disparities that have led to mistrust, and provides strategies for rebuilding trust and for achieving equity. Thus, we hope this book is one step towards a much-needed healing process.

## *Audience*

**This publication is written for *all* educators: For educators who work with Boys of Color in early education programs *and* for educators who do not have any Boys of Color in their early childhood programs.** Currently, the number of non-White kindergarteners enrolled in classrooms is larger than the number of White students, a reflection of the changing demographics across the nation (Hussar and Bailey 2019). According to the National Center for Education Statistics, in 2019–2020, approximately 51.3 percent of the children in US public pre-K–12 are children of color and 46.9 percent are White (Krogstad 2019; Hussar and Bailey 2019). The number of White students is expected to continue to decline steadily—it is projected that by 2060, People of Color will make up 57 percent of the US population and the number of White students could decrease to be as low as 35 percent of the total student population (Howard and Rodriguez-Minkoff 2017; US Census Bureau 2012). Young Boys of Color are a significant percentage of the current population, and their presence in our early childhood programs and schools will be steadily increasing over the next several decades. Eliminating the disparities Boys of Color experience in their developmental, achievement, health, and life outcomes is urgent work for all educators. Solutions will require that everyone—those who work directly with Boys of Color and teachers who teach primarily White students—work intentionally and collectively towards sustainable solutions.

**This book is written for educators who work with Boys of Color in early childhood programs.** This includes teachers, family child care providers, teaching assistants, directors, and site supervisors. Mental-health practitioners, special education staff, speech language and occupational therapists, family engagement coordinators, community partners, and other interdisciplinary staff working with young children and their families will also find this book useful. As all staff working in early learning programs influence the learning and development of young children, bus drivers, classroom volunteers, and kitchen staff, in addition to parents, guardians, and family members, can benefit from learning about

the content, discussing it, and considering how to apply and adapt it for use in their unique and individual contexts. School and program administrators, higher education faculty, early childhood coaches, and infrastructure staff (e.g., policy council staff, child advocates, workforce development, etc.) can use the information, reflection questions, strategies, implementation activities, and policy implications in this book to guide their work and to bring change at every level of the system.

**This book is also written for educators who do not have any Boys of Color in their early childhood programs and may be wondering, “What if all the children I teach are White?” How does this information apply to me?**

This question assumes that if children are White, they might not need to learn about issues of race and racism because they are not directly related to their experiences. This assumption is inaccurate for several reasons:

1. There are many aspects of diversity and variations in access to privilege within any racial group, including for White children.
2. The question assumes that White children are not learning about race or racism in their everyday life, including learning about their own privilege by experiencing it. Many adults believe that children in the early childhood years are too young to notice race. However, decades of research contradict this assumption. We have ample evidence that children construct understandings of race and racism at very young ages (Clark 1963; Derman-Sparks and Ramsey 2011; Goodman 1952; Quintana and McKown 2008; Radke and Trager 1950; Van Ausdale and Feagin 2001). Infants notice racial cues, preschoolers develop concepts about race, and as young as two or three years of age, White children have been observed to reproduce the racial power dynamics of the larger society (e.g., excluding their peers of color, ignoring attempts of children of color to join their play, saying that a Black Barbie is ugly to the owner of the doll, or equating Whiteness to being American [“You don’t look like an American”]) (Derman-Sparks and Ramsey 2011, 48). Thus, children in early childhood programs are already learning powerful lessons about race, racism, privilege, and discrimination.
3. When White children and adults do not act against racism (when they stay silent and/or outside of the conversation), they are—whether intentionally or unintentionally—reproducing and perpetuating racial inequities in our society.
4. Lastly, the question does not acknowledge that being White is a racial and cultural social identity that children and adults need to understand, given their status in the dominant group.

For these reasons, it is essential that all early childhood teachers intentionally address injustice and embrace equity-focused teaching and leading practices as children are forming ideas about fairness and their own sense of identity within the larger world from birth (Boutte 2008). If we want to disrupt the status quo and truly create equitable early learning environments where all children—including Boys of Color—are able to learn and thrive to their potential, we need a paradigm shift in the way we nurture White children's early identity and social-emotional development (Derman-Sparks and Ramsey 2011). It is not enough to teach children—and especially White children—to embrace racial and cultural diversity. We must also “help them develop individual and group identities that recognize and resist the false notions of racial superiority and racial entitlement and realize how they would benefit from a society free of systemic and individual racism” (Derman-Sparks and Ramsey 2011, 3).

### **Some of the Topics Discussed in This Book May Generate Strong Emotions**

The topics we discuss including race, racism, oppression, privilege, and equity represent some of the most complicated and difficult issues to discuss in US society. Each reader will bring their unique lived experiences and levels of understanding in reading about these topics. The audience for this book is varied and broad, and our goal is to invite each individual to be more curious, reflective, informed, and aware of what is needed to educate very young Boys of Color.

Members of the **minoritized group**, who in this book might be identified as Boys of Color or marginalized or historically oppressed communities—e.g., People of Color, Indigenous communities and many members of the early childhood workforce—might find that the content of the book:

- Brings to memory the pain, anger, and sorrow experienced at a personal level or in one's family and/or community as a result of historical and modern forms of racism and oppression
- Acknowledges and affirms the wide range of skills, capacities, knowledge, creativity, brilliance, and forms of resistance, coping, and resilience that exist in themselves, their families, and communities

Members of the **dominant group**, who in this book might be identified as White or persons in positions of power and/or privilege might find that the content of the book:

- Asks them to examine their lives through a perspective of race which may be a new experience



- Challenges deep-seated beliefs about our society as a meritocracy and what it means to be privileged and to be afforded unearned privilege—or the advantages that White people receive simply because of their appearance (Singleton 2015); these ideas can disrupt people’s feelings of safety and security
- Invokes strong emotional responses such as discomfort, shame, and guilt

**If the topics discussed in this book are new for you:**

- Pay particular attention to your feelings and identify strategies for processing your emotions as you work through this book. Working through the various reflection questions and activities throughout the book will also help you process what is coming up for you.
- It might be helpful to read with a notebook handy so you can jot down questions and comments as you go.
- Join or invite others to read the book with you and take turns sharing your reactions to the content, as well as the feelings the topics evoke in you.

**If you have previously learned about topics discussed in this book you might:**

- Think about what information, stories, and strategies resonate with you given your knowledge and experience with these topics
- Re-examine and continue challenging your assumptions, beliefs, and behaviors in light of the ideas and information presented in this book
- Reflect on the concepts and ideas discussed, and consider which new strategies you can adopt to continue your learning journey

**We encourage each individual to pause and notice if and when they feel a trigger—a physiological sensation or feeling in their body, mind, and/or spirit.**

These reactions can become valuable windows into your personal values, beliefs, and worldviews, and as a result, offer opportunities for strengthening your self-awareness, which is the foundation of any transformative learning process. In the process of self-discovery, you might find it useful to remind yourself that deep learning requires taking risks and allowing yourself to be vulnerable. It might help to remind yourself why this is so important (what the goal of this work is and why it is so urgent) and to give yourself permission to engage in an authentic learning process. For example, according to Sensoy and DiAngelo, you might tell yourself (2017):

- Each of us has a culturally based worldview.



- Our perspectives are strongly based on our place in society—or where we stand in relation to others as members of the dominant group or more minoritized groups—as this influences what we see and understand about equality and inequality.
- We hold a common assumption that others share our worldview.
- We often assume that what we intend to communicate is what is received, yet this is far from the reality of what happens.
- Each of us is imperfect in learning to communicate sensitively and respectfully about race, diversity, culture, oppression, and equity.
- These topics evoke strong emotions in most people. Our defensive reactions can be important entry points into learning and gaining deeper self-knowledge.
- No one should feel guilty about who they are or what they know or believe to be true. However, each of us must take responsibility to expand our understanding of the way society is structured to privilege some individuals and marginalize and oppress others.
- Focus on understanding rather than agreement. Listening to others and striving to understand a new perspective or idea does not require that you agree with it. Focusing on understanding will help you build empathy and strengthen your awareness of the ways in which the social positions you hold (e.g., your race, class, gender, etc.) influences how you view and understand the world. This increased knowledge will help you learn, grow, and work towards making a positive difference.

**Consider what works best for you to process strong emotions and be prepared with a strategy that is authentic, accessible, and meaningful.** Some examples might include:

- Writing your feelings and thoughts in a journal
- Engaging in creative activities such as art, music, or dance
- Exercising or engaging in physical activities (walking, running, biking, etc.)
- Talking with a trusted, supportive colleague or friend, or spending time with animals/pets
- Talking with others (e.g., coach, professional development, participating in a community or practice)
- Engaging in yoga, mindfulness, meditation, or breathing exercises

- Participating in spiritual or faith-based rituals or communities
- Spending time outside
- Continuing to learn about how to support young Boys of Color
- Or [add your own idea here]

This is only a partial list of the diverse ways that individuals and groups can engage in self-care practices. **The most important thing is that you find a way to support your self-care so you can sustain your dedication to becoming a responsive, caring, and effective early childhood teacher for young Boys of Color.**

If you are in the dominant group, your privilege affords you the choice to walk away or disengage from this conversation if and when it feels difficult or personally uncomfortable. Yet, when members of the dominant group remain silent about issues of racism and oppression, they become bystanders to racial inequity and contribute to its outcomes (Singleton 2015). Individuals in minoritized groups have no choice as they experience racial injustice every day and do not have an option of “walking away.” This is why staying engaged is an important action for equity.

Although the topics in this book may be challenging and evoke strong emotions, **we invite readers to think of their reactions to the information as important entry points to transformative learning and deeper self-awareness rather than exit points that prevent their further engagement** (Sensoy and DiAngelo 2017, 17).



*Stop and Reflect*

How do you process strong emotions constructively?

Consider what works best for you to process strong emotions and be prepared with a strategy that is genuine, accessible, and helpful for you as you read, reflect upon, and discuss the content in this book.

## **Courageous Conversations**

We draw from Glenn Singleton and Curtis Linton’s well-established protocol to support constructive interracial dialogue and **Courageous Conversations about Race** to provide guidance to readers as you work your way through the material in this book (2005). Singleton and Linton developed the Courageous Conversation

structure in 1995 to support educators to examine why children of color were not experiencing success in school. Courageous Conversation invites critical dialogue about schooling so educators can strengthen their awareness and understanding of the impact of race and racism on children's opportunities to learn and their experiences in school including their educational outcomes. Courageous Conversations about race are focused on the following questions: Why do racial gaps exist? What is the origin of the racial gaps? What factors have allowed these gaps to persist for so many years? (Singleton 2015). Having Courageous Conversations is recommended as a strategy for addressing racism and improving learning and achievement for children of color.



### *Administrators*

**Are you an Administrator, Program Leader, or other professional who will facilitate conversations and professional learning opportunities about the content in this book?**

If so, we encourage you to review [appendix A](#): "Recommendations for Administrators, Program Leaders, and Others Facilitating Race Equity Conversations" to learn several tips for leading effective conversations.

### *The Four Agreements*

Singleton explains that specific norms and agreements are necessary to guide the discussions about race as traditional norms, rules, and guidelines often fall apart when the topic shifts to race (2015). The authors of Courageous Conversation found that four agreements help create an environment where constructive dialogue about race can take place and difficult topics can be explored despite participants' fears and discomfort. **The Four Agreements that create the conditions for Courageous Conversations** to take place include:

1. **Stay engaged.** A personal commitment to remain "morally, emotionally, intellectually, and relationally involved in the dialogue ... not to let your heart and mind 'check out of the conversation' even though it is a natural inclination for most educators not to want to talk about race."
2. **Speak your truth.** This means taking a risk to be honest about your thoughts, feelings, and opinions, instead of just saying what you perceive others want you to say. There are many reasons why people do not share honestly when discussing the topics of race and racism. Many White educators may be

fearful of offending people with “perceived biased or unsympathetic racial views and perspectives,” whereas educators of color may hold back given fears of expressing “intense anger and being misunderstood, ignored, or even punished by their White colleagues.” Not speaking your truth only reinforces mistrust, misunderstandings, and misconceptions.

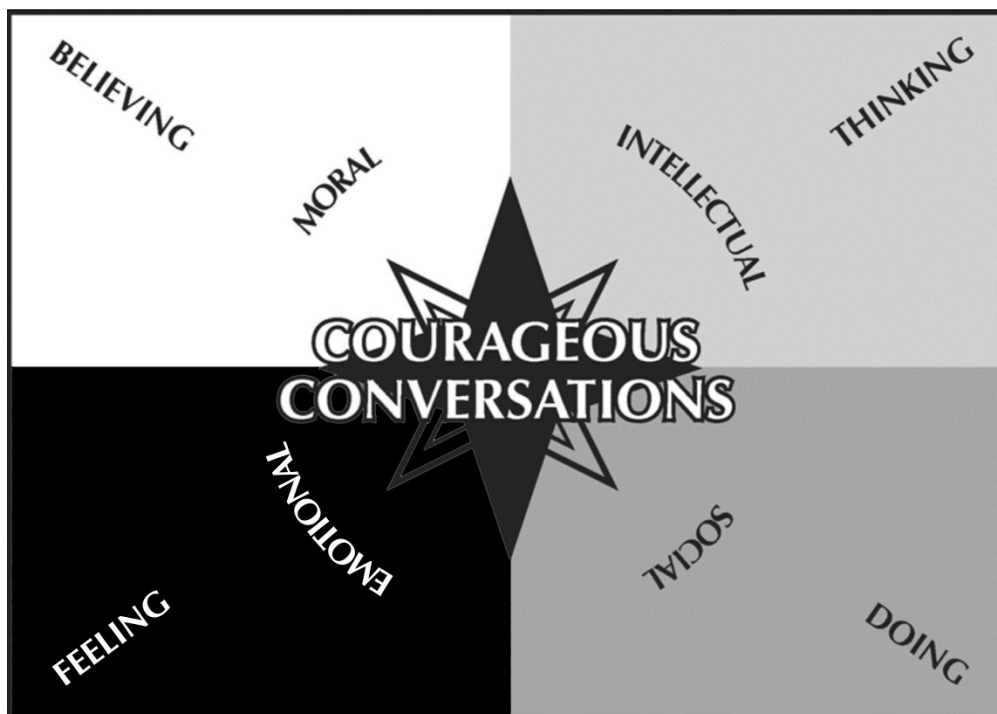
3. **Experience discomfort.** Conversations about race invoke strong emotions and discomfort. There is no “feel good” way to engage in authentic dialogues about race and racism. Participants need to be “personally responsible for pushing themselves into a real dialogue—the kind that will make them uncomfortable but also will lead to real growth.”
4. **Expect and accept nonclosure.** The final agreement reinforces for participants that they are not likely to reach a place of closure or full agreement in racial dialogue, racial understandings, or interracial interactions. There are no quick fixes or easy solutions given the “magnitude, complexity, and longevity of our racial struggle and strife.” The specific strategies, approaches, and practices that are promising will need to be continually revisited, revised, and replaced in response to ongoing dialogue and the changing conditions of individuals, programs, and communities.

Source: Singleton (2015, 71–75)

**We encourage readers to use the Courageous Conversation Four Agreements to structure and guide conversations that are inspired in response to the content in this book.**

We also spotlight the Courageous Conversation Compass as a tool that we believe teachers and others will find valuable to reference while reading this book (see figure 2: The Courageous Conversation Compass). Singleton (2015) created the compass as a personal tool that individuals can use to support their engagement in Courageous Conversations. It helps people to develop awareness of their own positions within a challenging conversation about race and racism. It also helps people expand their understanding of the diverse perspectives, lived experiences, and reactions that others have while participating in the same conversation.

**Figure 2. The Courageous Conversation Compass**



Source: Singleton (2015). Video: [Watch Glenn Singleton talk about how to use the Compass effectively](#) to begin a Courageous Conversation with the intent of moving forward in equity work.

### *Relating and Responding*

Singleton describes four common ways that individuals relate and respond to racial information and experiences: emotionally, intellectually, morally, and relationally (2015). These are the four points or directions of the Courageous Conversation compass (see figure 2):

- **Emotionally**, individuals respond through feelings when racial information or a racial event or issue impacts them at a **physiological** level. An emotional response is experienced as an internal sensation or emotion (e.g., anger, despair, sadness, joy, fear, or embarrassment).
- **Intellectually**, when individuals respond to racial information or a racial event or issue by personally disconnecting with the topic and focusing on searching for more information or data. An intellectual response is based in a cognitive or **thinking** approach and is primarily verbal.
- **Morally**, when people respond to racial information or a racial event or issue by relating it to a deep-seated **belief** they hold about the “rightness

or wrongness” of the specific issue. This approach may be felt at a gut or intuitive level and may be difficult to verbally articulate.

- **Relationally**, when individuals connect and respond to racial information and/or a racial event or issue by displaying certain behaviors and/or by taking specific **actions**.

Source: Singleton (2015)

Singleton explains, “In a sense, emotional responses are seated in the heart, intellectual responses are in the mind, moral responses in the soul, and relational responses in the hands and feet” (2015, 29).



## Stop and Reflect

### Getting Centered: Part 1

Adapted from Singleton for early childhood (2015, 146)

To begin to understand how to use the Courageous Conversation Compass as you read and discuss the information in this book, consider the following topics:

- Children separated from their families at the border
- Expulsion of children in preschool
- Infants and toddlers experiencing homelessness
- Stress and burnout in early childhood teachers and child care providers

As you reflect on these topics, acknowledge your immediate reactions and identify where you initially locate yourself on the compass for each phrase (refer to figure 2). If the phrase is not familiar to you, what reaction does this trigger for you? Then, after taking a longer period of time to reflect on your personal connections with each topic, notice if or where you travel on the compass.

Singleton explains that using the Courageous Conversation Compass can help individuals gain self-awareness about how they relate and react to racial information and racial issues and events while also expanding their understanding that others may position themselves very differently (2015). Singleton suggests:

When educators attempt to discuss race without considering all four positions and without recognizing the goal of getting centered on the

compass for any given racial issue, the result is typically unfavorable. By using the Courageous Conversation Compass, educators can transform predictable land mines of interracial dialogue about race into fertile grounds for understanding and healing. (2015, 147)

## *Goals of the Book*

- **Support teachers, program leaders, and others in the early childhood workforce to work more effectively with young Boys of Color**
  - We guide readers to consider how they perceive young Boys of Color
  - We support teachers, program leaders, and others to strengthen their understanding of structural racism and how bias and stereotypes influence their attitudes, beliefs, assumptions, and behaviors in their work with Boys of Color
  - We offer strategies teachers and others can use to address their biases and strengthen the equity of their early education programs
- **Use counter-storytelling to shift and expand the stories told about Boys of Color to include more authentic, holistic, diverse, and positive representations** (Solórzano and Yosso 2002). Counter-stories are narratives and stories from People of Color (in this case, Boys of Color) where they are positioned as the experts of their own experiences and lives. Counter-stories acknowledge that dominant views do not accurately represent the perspectives and experiences of minoritized groups including People of Color.
  - We use a strength-based approach and highlight the voices of Boys of Color throughout the book to emphasize their agency (sense of control over the stories told about them and their lives), the importance of their perspectives and lived experiences, and to spotlight their skills, knowledge, capacities, and promise.
- **Invite teachers, program leaders, and others in the early childhood workforce to begin or continue a lifelong journey of self-discovery and courageous equity work in learning how to work effectively with Boys of Color**
  - We emphasize that this is long-term work and requires a learning stance and a courageous willingness to learn about structural racism and its impact, and to continually reflect upon and improve one's practice and take actions to improve equity.

- **Learning will be most transformative for readers who connect the ideas and tools to discussions of real-life examples and dilemmas in your own practice.** These discussions can take place in formal professional development settings, communities of practice, or staff meetings, or shared in the context of more informal conversations with your colleagues.

We hope this book supports teachers, administrators, and others working in early childhood to develop **everyday race consciousness** about the relevance of race and racism in young children’s experiences in early childhood programs (Pollack 2008). To counteract racial inequality and racism on a daily basis, this book will help all early childhood educators to understand the importance of **continuously inquiring** about the following “big” questions about their practice:

- Am I seeing, understanding, and addressing the ways the world treats me and the young Boys of Color I work with as race group members?
- Am I seeing, understanding, and addressing communities and individual Boys of Color and their families in their full complexity?
- Am I seeing, understanding, and addressing the ways opportunities to learn or thrive are unequally distributed to young children from different racial groups?
- What actions are necessary to support young Boys of Color in such a world?

Source: Adapted from Pollack (2008, xiii)

## Book Layout

**We begin the book by introducing some content that is difficult**—honest and important information about oppression and racism. These topics are essential to understand for anyone who is serious about interrupting the disproportional outcomes and experiences for young Boys of Color.

**We then shift in chapters 2–4 to focus on equitable early childhood environments with love at the center.** We offer teachers and program leaders a wide range of practical strategies they can use to address the problems we address in the beginning of the book. We include reflection questions and implementation activities throughout the book that readers can use to understand how the content applies to their own teaching and leading practice and early learning environments.



**Our goal is to provide all readers with the knowledge, practical strategies, and tools they can begin using right away** to interrupt harmful beliefs and practices, and to take actions that make an immediate and positive difference for the Boys of Color in their classrooms, family child care homes, programs, and schools.

## *Introduction: Takeaways*

Young Boys of Color are excluded from early childhood classrooms at significantly higher rates than their White peers. There is high variability across different early childhood centers, but rates of exclusionary practices in early childhood are between 3 and 13 times higher than in K-12 (Gilliam 2005).

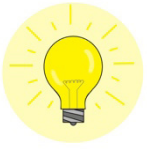
Exclusionary disciplinary practices harm children. Expulsion and suspension practices separate children from opportunities that are beneficial for their development and learning, and interfere with the process of screening, identifying, and intervening to provide referrals and supports to children with, or at risk for, disabilities.

Exclusionary disciplinary practices look different in early childhood programs than in K-12 schools.

Implicit bias is the most significant factor impacting the use of exclusionary discipline with young Boys of Color. We all have biases. The key is what do we do to address them.

Deficit thinking interrupts teachers and administrators from seeing children's strengths and family and community assets, and the promise and brilliance every child brings into early childhood settings.

We emphasize a strength-based and equity-oriented approach to discussions of Boys of Color and their families. We do not ask how to “change” Boys of Color but instead, how we can fix schools, programs, and practices to better serve them. This work is a lifelong journey, but one that is well worth the effort!



### Shift Your Lens

- What do I **think** about exclusionary discipline? What **feelings** come up for me when I think about exclusionary discipline? What deep-seated **beliefs** are leading me to feel this way?
- Try to recall a recent interaction with a young Boy of Color where they showed emotional dysregulation and distress. Try answering these questions as thoughtfully as you can:
  - Was I calm and self-regulated when I responded or was I stressed?
  - What possible needs was he trying to communicate to me?
  - What alternative ways could I have responded to him?

### Be Brave: Take Actions for Equity!

- Review [table 1: Exclusionary Discipline in Early Childhood](#), and then ask yourself, “Have I engaged in these forms of discipline? If so, have Boys of Color been more frequently disciplined and more harshly than other children in my class?” We will discuss the role of implicit bias, deficit thinking, and racial ideologies in the following chapter in more depth, but at this point, what is one thing you can do to raise your awareness about exclusionary discipline and its impact for the children in your care?



### Shift Your Lens

- What do I **think** about exclusionary discipline? What **feelings** come up for me when I think about exclusionary discipline? What deep-seated **beliefs** are leading me to feel this way?
- Many young children, especially those from historically marginalized groups, do not have access to caring and responsive early childhood programs. What am I doing to create a welcoming and supportive program for Boys of Color?

## Be Brave: Take Actions for Equity!

- How is our program supporting Boys of Color and their families? How can we strengthen and build upon these practices?
- What is one step I can take to create the conditions that will support teachers and other staff to participate in Courageous Conversations about exclusionary discipline?
- Do we have a clearly articulated process to prevent suspension and expulsion for the children in our program? If not, what is the first step I need to take to get started on this process? Who needs to be involved?



*Policy*

## Invest in Change: Policy Implications

### Superintendent of Public Instruction

- Partner with the Legislature to increase funding (state grants) to support compensation for early childhood educators (additional compensation for degree or certificate completion through tax credits or supplemental wages).
- Mandate lower teacher–student ratios in early childhood preschool programs.

### California Department of Education Early Education Division

- Update the California dashboard to include data from all of the CDCs to help identify areas of improvement to ensure accountability for a comprehensive, high-quality early childhood education system statewide.
- Ensure that all early childhood staff learn about the statistics on exclusionary discipline in early childhood and the disproportionate representation and negative consequences for Boys of Color.

## *Make It Real: Implementation Activities*

See appendices B-I for the following activities:

- [Whats in a Name?](#)
- [Cultural Artifact](#)
- [Racial Autobiography](#)
- [The Paseo or Circles of Identity](#)
- [Understanding Privelege: Part One](#)
- [Understanding Privelege: Part Two](#)
- [Intercultural Storytelling](#)



# CHAPTER ONE

AN OPEN  
CONVERSATION  
ABOUT  
OPPRESSION,  
RACE, RACISM,  
AND BIAS



## VIGNETTE

Miles was around three years old, in a new program for him. We had been there a few months. As a child, Miles had always been reserved and an observer, not really overactive. Typical three-year-old stuff, running and climbing, but I think the first few weeks he was trying to get to know the program in his way by sitting back and watching. Then he became comfortable and he became more himself, and he was touching and moving and feeling better about the classroom. One day Miles somehow wedged a chair between something and the door and locked the teachers out of the classroom. They asked Miles to let them in and he wasn't listening and wasn't going to let them in. Miles' disruption is not loud and overt. He's just, "I'm going to sit here and ignore you and cut you off." That can be a button-pusher for some people—that he doesn't reflect what he's feeling inside, but at the same time, he was three years old.

They gave me a call. They kept saying, "It's just not safe for Miles," and that this was not the right place for him. And they kept putting it back on him, they said he wasn't safe for other children, but I realized that this just wasn't a safe place for my kid. Instead of "What can we do to fix this? What are the relationships like? How do we talk to him about appropriate behavior?" they placed blame on him: "He shouldn't have done it." The director was talking about Miles not being safe and if this was the right place for him and that his behavior wasn't safe for everyone in the room. We left the program, we didn't stay there. We left that program because I felt it wasn't safe for him.

—Terry, African-American mother of Miles

This story illustrates a situation that is, sadly, too common in early childhood for young Boys of Color and their families. Miles' mother, Terry, raises important questions for early childhood educators to consider. Why was the focus of the conversation labeling Miles as "unsafe," and as "a problem"? Why was Miles not seen as a young, typically developing, three-year-old child who needed support from a responsive and caring adult who could help him manage his emotions and guide his behavior?

Young children like Miles are still developing social-emotional understanding and self-regulation skills. Becoming upset and not knowing how to control their emotions is a developmentally appropriate behavior for any three-year-old child. Terry's story highlights a common experience associated with exclusionary discipline practices in early childhood classrooms: a reactive approach that



results in blaming the child (and often the family) and perceiving them as “problematic” without considering how the teaching or early learning environment should be adapted to better meet the child’s social and emotional well-being and learning needs.

When teachers have stressful interactions like this teacher had with Miles, **self-reflection** can be a powerful tool to support them to **pause**, to **think** about what happened and how it made them **feel**—and then to consider what the child was communicating about how they are feeling and what they need. This type of reflection supports teachers and program leaders to be in a better position to consider actions they can take to communicate messages of **care, love, and support** to the child. Without reflection, an adult’s reactivity can lead to assumptions and biases influencing their interactions with children, as seen in this situation where an assumption that Miles was the problem was a conclusion that was likely influenced by his teacher’s implicit bias.

In this chapter we:

- Introduce the definitions of race and ethnicity, in addition to oppression and structural racism as central frameworks for understanding the daily experiences Boys of Color have with bias and discrimination.
- Describe the features of oppression and the cycle of oppression that leads to negative outcomes for many Boys of Color in educational settings.
- Describe how implicit bias influences educators’ behavior and the learning, development, and overall well-being of young Boys of Color.
- Discuss a mindful reflection tool and strategies teachers and program leaders can use to address their implicit bias in order to create more responsive early childhood learning contexts for Boys of Color.



## *Defining “Race”*

**Many people think about race as defined solely by physical attributes—**“including but not limited to skin and eye color, hair texture, and bone structures of people in the United States and elsewhere”—**but race is constructed physically, socially, legally, and historically** (see table 3: Defining Race)

(Singleton and Linton 2005, 50). Milner describes the many ways in which race is a concept that has been “constructed” by people to allow certain groups to benefit at the expense of others:

... the meanings, messages, results and consequences of race are developed and constructed by human beings, not by genetics or some predetermined set of scientific laws. Genetically and biologically, individuals are more the same than they are different. ... “There is no biologically sustainable reason for establishing ‘races’ as distinct subgroups within the human species.” ... According to Nakkula and Toshalis (2006), “Race is a concept created in the modern era as a way of drawing distinctions between people such that some might benefit at the expense of others.” (2017, 123)

The concept of “race” is not based in science and is not inherently “true.” Instead, race is a concept that is constructed (made up) in the following ways.

**Table 3: Defining Race**

How Race Is Defined	Description
<b>Race Is Physically Constructed</b>	<p>Judgments about race are based on skin color, eye color, hair texture, and bone structure. These judgments are sometimes inaccurate. That is, we can make mistakes in judging someone’s race by looking at their physical attributes.</p> <p>Additionally, physical constructions of race differ from one society to the next (Milner 2017). For instance, Brazilians are more likely to decide what race a person is based on their appearance whereas Americans are more likely to rely on heritage (e.g., “Where is your family from?”) (Chen, de Paula Couto, and Sacco 2017).</p>



How Race Is Defined	Description
<b>Race Is Socially Constructed</b>	Judgments about race are based on the values, preferences, and worldviews of a society or group of people living at a specific time in history. People in the society are socialized to agree with these meanings, which influence how they think about individuals and groups of people in that society and result in real consequences for people's lives (DiAngelo 2016, 355). The changing preferences for who counts as "White" in America (described in the next section) is a good example of how judgments about race shift as a society's preferences and worldviews change.
<b>Race Is Legally Constructed</b>	Judgments about race are based in the laws of a society. Landmark cases and legal policies—for example, the Naturalization Law of 1790, <i>Plessy v. Ferguson</i> in 1896, and the social and legal principle of the "one drop rule" (anyone known to have even "one drop" of African ancestry is Black) influence the definitions of race in US society. <sup>10,11</sup>
<b>Race Is Historically Constructed</b>	Judgments about race are based in realities about how people have been treated historically and how they have fared. For example, "In the US, a history of Jim Crow laws, slavery, and racial discrimination forces us to construct and think about race in particular ways" (Milner 2017, 3).



### Check Your Perspective

"The differences we see with our eyes, such as hair texture and eye color, are superficial and emerged as adaptations to geography; there really is no race under the skin" (DiAngelo 2016, 98).

10 First law in the US granting national citizenship, limiting naturalization to "immigrants who were free White persons of good character."

11 Racial segregation laws upholding "separate but equal" segregation of public facilities.

Review the definition of race presented above, describing race as an idea created by people (through social norms, laws, and history) that has no scientific “truth.” What parts of this definition are familiar to you? What information is new or different than your current understanding?

### *Defining Ethnicity*

- A group of people who share a common history, language, culture, spiritual tradition, and/or ancestry
- Ethnic categories are generated from within communities to maintain a people’s sense of community and connection (versus racial categories that are imposed from the outside for purposes of ranking and hierarchy), especially if they are peoples in diaspora ... communities sometimes prefer to describe themselves using ethnic rather than racial designations (Sensoy and DiAngelo 2017, 134).<sup>12</sup>

### **Reflecting on the Words We Use to Refer to Racial or Ethnic Groups**

An essential step in addressing implicit bias and working to eliminate stereotypes is understanding the words used to refer to different racial and ethnic groups. Collective terms like “Latinx<sup>13</sup>” and “Asian American” represent a combination of diverse groups of people that vary widely in social categories of identity, including but not limited to race, ethnicity, cultural and linguistic backgrounds, and countries of origin. These collective labels hide the significant diversity of individuals and groups they identify. As a result, they can lead people to develop inaccurate assumptions that **essentialize** and stereotype—e.g., assuming cultural uniformity: “all Latinx like ... ” “all Asian families want .... ”—instead of developing firsthand knowledge of individual children and their families. Attributing any broad-based characteristics to children based on their race, ethnicity, or any other social category of identity reinforces bias and stereotyping, which negatively impact the ability to form trusting relationships with children and families.

Learning the meaning of terms that categorize people by race and ethnicity is essential for educators committed to addressing their biases and eliminating language that contributes to stereotyping others. Below we describe the definitions for commonly used terms. As you read this information, keep two key

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12 Diaspora: The dispersion (or movement over a wide area) of any people from their original homeland.

13 Throughout this book we use the term “Latinx” instead of Latino/Latina. Latinx is used as a gender-neutral term for anyone of Latin-American descent.

ideas in mind: (1) we need to ask each individual child or family about the words they use to identify themselves and (2) it is complicated.



### *Key Idea*

**We need to ask the individual child/family about the words they use to identify themselves.**

We cannot make assumptions about the social categories of identity that are genuine and claimed by a specific individual. The words people use to describe themselves are very personal and might change over time. Further, individuals may use different identity labels depending on the person or people they are speaking to, or the context of their interaction. For example: two families from the same country of origin may have different preferences, one identifies as “Cambodian” and the other wants to be described as “Southeast Asian.”

**It is complicated!** Race, ethnicity, and culture are complex, socially constructed, and dynamic categories that are used to label, categorize, and advantage/disadvantage individuals in our society. These labels do not accurately capture the significant diversity and complexity of individuals’ and families’ lives nor the dynamic and complicated nature of our identities. Consider, for example, the growing number of children and adults who are biracial. As a result, race and ethnicity categories are problematic and limiting.

## **African American and Black**

African American and Black includes individuals who have origins in any of the Black racial groups of Africa. Although some people self-identify with both of these terms and use them interchangeably, many people believe that “African American” is too restrictive to describe the current US population. The term “African American” is associated with people who share an ancestry from the African continent and a history on the American continent. As a result, many recent immigrants from Africa and the Caribbean believe the term “Black” is more inclusive of the collective experiences of the US population (Simms 2018). According to Simms, approximately 10 percent of the 46.8 million Black people in the US were born in another country (2018). Many of these individuals self-identify with their nation of origin in Africa (Nigeria, Egypt, Ethiopia, etc.), the Caribbean (Cuba, Haiti, Jamaica, etc.), or other area, reinforcing the need to ask individuals how they prefer to identify themselves.

## Latinx

The Latinx population has a wide range of diversity in its places of origin (e.g., the Caribbean, North America, Central America, and South America). For example, a recent report showed that about 46 percent of “Latinos” in the US are from places other than Mexico, including Puerto Rico, El Salvador, Cuba, Guatemala, Honduras, and others (Flores, López, and Radford 2017). Within each of these places of origin and ancestry, there is also a wide diversity of experiences, cultural traditions, races, and ethnicities (Baca Zinn and Wells 2005; Campos 2013). For instance:

- In Mexico alone, there is a wide variety of racial and ethnic groups including 25 million citizens (24 percent of the population) that self-identify as indigenous (Gonzalez-Barrera 2015).
- In the US, 34 percent of the Latino population defines themselves as multiethnic (of more than one ethnicity) or multiracial,<sup>14</sup> for instance, Afro Latinos who have both Black and Latino ancestry, or individuals who are of Native American and Mexican descent (Gonzalez-Barrera 2015).

### A Note on the Use of ‘Hispanic’

While “Latinx” and “Hispanic” are often used interchangeably, they have different meanings and histories. People will self-identify as one or the other, or use them interchangeably depending on their heritage, life experiences, and other identity factors (Campos 2013). The term “Hispanic” refers to those who are native or descendants of a Spanish-speaking country, including people from Spain or with Spanish-European ancestry.<sup>15</sup> By this definition, “Hispanic” does not include people with ancestry in Latin American countries with other colonization histories, who do not speak Spanish as their main language—for example, people with Portuguese or Brazilian ancestry, or people from Suriname or Guyana. In contrast, the term “Latinx” includes people born or with ancestry in any country in Latin America, including those that do not speak Spanish as their main language. This

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14 In many Latin American countries, people call themselves *mestizo* (which means *mixed* in Spanish) or *mulatto* (Gonzalez-Barrera 2015).

15 Note, however, that people born in Spain or who descend from people who lived there are referred to as “Spanish” or as “Spaniards.” Within Spain, there are also important cultural and linguistic variations, including Catalans and Basques. There are important disputes about identity within Spain—disputes that have long historical roots and that are still today causing social and political upheaval. This reinforces why it is important to always respectfully ask about a person’s preferred terminology.

is not the only significant difference between these two words: “Hispanic” is a term that many people dislike because it stresses an identity associated with the **colonizers** (Hispanic means someone from Hispania, that is, Spain) and it is a term created by the US government to sort people for the census and other bureaucratic purposes.

Many individuals who reject the term “Hispanic” prefer the term “Latinx” because it represents the diverse ethnicities among peoples who share Latin American roots. Campos explains:

Teachers and leadership teams alike might raise the question, “What difference does it make if I call my students Hispanic or Latino?” But for many students, their families and their communities, Latino is a positive and potent self-identifier that expresses a history and legacy (Vasquez 1999) and ethnic pride (Santiago-Rivera, Arredondo, and Gallardo-Cooper 2002) and the shared experiences of colonization and immigration (Torres 2007). (2013, 11)

Reflecting the various opinions that exist, a report found that among first-generation Latinx in the US, 62 percent say that they most often use their family's country of origin to describe themselves, such as Salvadorian, Panamanian, etc. (Taylor et al. 2012). The same study shows:

- **Some might prefer “Hispanic” over “Latinx”** When asked to choose between Hispanic and Latino, half said they had no preference for either term, but when a preference was expressed, “Hispanic” was preferred over “Latino.” Campos suggests that this preference might be marked by whether people live near the East Coast or the West Coast (where “Hispanic” is more often used), and indicates more direct ancestry to Spain, not Native Latin American peoples (2013).
- **Most Hispanics/Latinx do not perceive a shared common culture exists among US Hispanics/Latinx** Of the participants in this study, 69 percent said Hispanics/Latinos in the US have many different cultures, while 29 percent said they share a common culture.
- **Most Hispanics/Latinx do not believe they fit into the standard racial categories used by the US Census Bureau.** When it comes to race, 51 percent of Latinx identify their race as “some other race” or “Hispanic/Latinx,” 36 percent identify their race as White, and 3 percent say their race is Black.

Source: Taylor et al. (2012)

## Asian or Asian-American

**“Asian” or “Asian-American”** are terms that aim to include many diverse groups with different countries of origin, first languages, religions, and migration stories. In the US the term “Asian” is used in official government statistics as a racial category based on the history of US migration and race relations. It encompasses immigrants from Asia and people of Asian descent born in the United States. Asian countries of origin include:

- **South Asians**, including individuals from Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka
- **Southeast Asians**, comprising of people from Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Timor-Leste, and Vietnam
- **Southwest Asians**, including individuals from Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bahrain, Cyprus, Iran, Iraq, Israel, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Turkey, United Arab Emirates, and Yemen
- **East Asians**, including individuals from China (including Hong Kong), Japan, Mongolia, India, North Korea, South Korea, and Taiwan
- **Central Asians**, including individuals from Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan

People of Asian descent are the fastest-growing **major racial or ethnic group** population in the United States: **The US Asian population grew 72 percent between 2000 and 2015, from 11.9 million to 20.4 million (López, Ruiz, and Patten 2017).** As with other racial and ethnic groups, Asians as a population are multiethnic, multiracial, and multilingual, and very diverse across demographic factors. Asian Americans have highly varied economic experiences. A substantial share of Asian American subpopulations struggles with high poverty, but these realities are often masked by the high employment and incomes of other larger Asian American subpopulations.

Many individuals and groups who are described by the US government as “Asian” or “Asian American” may choose other terms to identify themselves and may even reject their association with either of these terms. Teachers can listen and learn from individual families how they prefer to identify themselves.

## **Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islanders**

Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islanders includes the 1.6 million people from Hawaii, Samoa, Guam, Fiji, Tonga, or the Marshall Islands living in the US and encompasses the people within the United States jurisdictions of Melanesia, Micronesia, and Polynesia. People of Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander descent have been distinguished as a different racial category in the national census since 2000.

## **American Indian and Alaska Native Tribes**

There are 573 federally recognized American Indian and Alaska Native tribes and villages in the US, each with their own culture, language, and history (Running Strong for American Indian Youth n.d.). Every tribe has unique traditions and distinct styles of housing, dress, and food. Federally recognized tribes vary in population and land base, but all are considered sovereign nations and hold a specific nation-to-nation relationship with the United States.

The California Tribal Court–State Court Forum notes the following about American Indian and tribal communities in California:

- There are approximately 110 federally recognized American Indian tribes, including several tribes with lands that cross state boundaries. There are also about 81 groups seeking federal recognition.
- California's tribes are everywhere throughout the state—in highly populated cities, in rural areas, close to the borders (and sometimes across the borders) of other states including Arizona, Oregon, and Nevada, in the mountains of northern and eastern California, in the high deserts of southern and southeastern California, on the coast, on the rivers, and around the lakes. Most Native Americans are not living on reservations.
- California has the highest Native American population in the country. According to the 2010 US Census, California represents 12 percent of the total Native American population (approximately 720,000 people).
- Over one-half of the state's Native American population is composed of individuals (and now their descendants) who were relocated to large urban areas as part of the federal government's termination policy.
- California's tribes are as small as five members and as large as 6,000 members.

Source: Adapted from California Tribal Court–State Court Forum (n.d.)



## What Do You Prefer to Be Called, “Native American,” “American Indian,” “Indian,” or ...? It Depends

As reinforced above, it is important to ask individuals how they prefer to identify themselves and not assume they are comfortable with one of the collective terms (e.g., Native Americans, Indian Americans, etc.). In many cases, children and families will want to be identified with the name of their tribe, as Courtney Tsotigh-Yarholar, Kiowa, describes:

I’ve been asked this question many times, dating back to grade school. The question is usually posed as, “do you prefer to X, Y, Z?” To which I am expected to choose from one and categorize who I am, further marginalizing myself, and possibly someone else. It’s always difficult to answer this question because “I” do not necessarily identify with any of these terms. **I refer to myself as Kiowa.** Depending on the setting it may be appropriate to refer more broadly to the term of “American Indians,” but it is also **important for non-Natives to refer to me by my tribe rather than one of the umbrella terms because it is respectful and accurate.** By doing this, it demonstrates a learning and understanding of who I am. “Indian country” isn’t one umbrella term; it is made up of many tribes. While Indian people may share some cultural similarities, each tribe is very distinctive. If this mindset were adopted, it would serve as a pivotal shift in our country and how we view Indian country. (Blackhorse 2016)

Using the term “Native Americans” incorrectly assumes homogenous group membership when, in fact, there are hundreds of tribes. Most people who express they are Indian, Native American, or Indigenous will follow this with an identification of their specific tribe, “I am Cree,” “I am Blackfoot,” “I am Pomo from ...,” or they begin by naming their tribe. Unless they do not know their exact heritage, they want to acknowledge the tribe or distinct culture they came from. At the same time, there must be an innate understanding that each person carries a unique relationship to the tribal community or tribal roots from which they came and, foremost, is their own unique person. All people want the respect of understanding who they genuinely are, not a stereotype of themselves because they happen to belong to a particular group. This is why we cannot assume their preferred identity markers. We have to ask.



## Key Idea

### Indigenous Peoples

The term “indigenous” is problematic in that it appears to collectivize many distinct populations whose experiences under imperialism have been vastly different. Other collective terms also in use refer to “First Peoples” or “Native Peoples,” “First Nations” or “People of the Land,” “Aboriginals,” or “Fourth World Peoples.” Some groups prefer the labels that connect us to Mother Earth, and to deeply significant spiritual relationships ... “Indigenous peoples” is a relatively recent term which emerged in the 1970s out of the struggles primarily of the American Indian Movement (AIM), and the Canadian Indian Brotherhood. It is a term that internationalizes the experiences, the issues, and the struggles of some of the world’s colonized peoples.

The final “s” in “peoples” has been argued for quite vigorously by indigenous activists because of the right of peoples to self-determination. It is also a way of recognizing that there are real differences between different indigenous peoples. The term has enabled the collective voices of colonized people to be expressed strategically in the international arena. It has also been an umbrella enabling communities and peoples to come together, transcending their own colonized contexts and experiences, in order to learn, share, plan, organize, and struggle collectively for self-determination on the global and local stages. Thus, the world’s indigenous populations belong to a network of peoples. They share experiences as peoples who have been subjected to the colonization of their lands and cultures, and the denial of their sovereignty, by a colonizing society that has come to dominate and determine the shape and quality of their lives, even after it has formally pulled out.

Source: Excerpt from Tuhiwai Smith (2012, 7)

### White

A socially constructed category of people whose ancestry is or is perceived to be from Europe (Sensoy and DiAngelo 2017). The US Census Bureau defines White Americans as people whose ancestors originated in Europe, the Middle East, or North Africa (2020). European Americans, the largest ethnic group of White Americans in the US, primarily descend from Germany, Ireland, and the United Kingdom, yet the vast majority of have ancestry from multiple countries (US Census Bureau 2019). The US government also defines “White” as having both



“not Hispanic or Latino” and “Hispanic or Latino” (Parker et al. 2015; US Census Bureau 2020). Although some non-European ethnic groups are classified as White by the US census (e.g., Arab Americans, Jewish Americans, and Hispanics/Latinos, many of these individuals do not self-identify and/or may not be perceived by others to be White (Parker et al. 2015). As described above, although there are no true actual biological races, being perceived as White has very real and comprehensive consequences for an individual’s life experiences and opportunities (Sensoy and DiAngelo 2017).



### *Key Idea*

**It is important to ask and not make assumptions.**

Words used to describe race and ethnicity might be of deep importance to the families you are working with and their sense of identity. For instance, some families might want to be identified as “American” only, or others might choose “Chicano” or “Native.” Asking families what their preferred way of defining themselves is and learning about the meaning they attach to these words prevents guesswork and is a respectful way to build a responsive relationship with the family, and a responsive and sustaining relationship with the child.



## *Stop and Reflect*

How much do you know about the vast diversity of individuals and their countries of origin included under umbrella terms such as “Latinx” or “Asian”?

How much do you know about the family values and everyday lives of the families of color in your classroom, program, or school? If not much, think about ways that you can learn more about them including the terms they use to talk about themselves.

In what ways can your classroom space, materials (e.g., books, songs, art), and teaching practice reflect the diversity of the children and families you are serving?

## *Understanding Oppression*

“Oppression is the term used to describe the different connected forces that create and sustain injustice in society. Examples of oppression include racism, classism, sexism, heterosexism, religious oppression, ableism, and ageism” (Adams and Bell 2016, 5).

## **Defining Oppression**

To oppress, is to “hold down—to press—and deny a social group full access to resources in a given society” (DiAngelo 2016, 61). Oppression is what happens when one group—the **dominant** (or sometimes called the “agent” group) has the power to enforce their prejudice and discrimination against another group, the **minoritized** (or the “target” group) throughout the society. Oppression describes a process of prejudice and discrimination that is at a societal level: *Prejudice + Discrimination + Power = Oppression* (DiAngelo 2016, 62). How is a minoritized group “held down” by the dominant group? Through policies, practices, traditions, norms, definitions, cultural stories, and explanations (for events and/or circumstances) that use a deficit perspective to represent the minoritized group and give power and benefits solely to the dominant group (DiAngelo 2016). Table 4 provides several important definitions for terms used when talking about oppression.

Table 4: Key Definitions

Term	Definition
<b>Dominant Group</b>	<p>The group at the top of the social hierarchy. In any relationship between groups that define each other (men/women, [nondisabled]/person with disability), the dominant group is the group that is valued more highly.<sup>16</sup> Dominant groups set the norms by which the minoritized group is judged. Dominant groups have greater access to the resources of society and benefit from the existence of the inequality. (Sensoy and DiAngelo 2017, 223)</p> <p><i>Example: Christian symbols, holidays, and rituals are integrated into public events and institutions across the US. Individuals who identify with Christianity are part of a dominant group who set norms in society (Bell 2016).</i></p>
<b>Prejudice</b>	<p>Pre-judgment about another person based on the social group to which that person belongs. Prejudice consists of <i>thoughts, feelings, assumptions, beliefs, stereotypes, attitudes, and generalizations</i>. Prejudice is based upon characteristics we <i>assume</i> others have due to their group memberships. ... All humans have prejudice; it is not possible to avoid. It is instantaneous and occurs at a subconscious level (without our awareness). ... Negative emotions stemming from prejudice [include] hatred, fear, disgust, resentment, discomfort, lack of interest. (DiAngelo 2016, 46–51)</p> <p><i>Examples include racism, sexism, ageism, classism.</i></p>

<sup>16</sup> In referring to people with disabilities, we have chosen to use language that focuses on their abilities rather than their disabilities. We use “nondisabled” instead of “able-bodied.”



Term	Definition
<b>Discrimination</b>	<p>Unfair <i>action</i> toward a social group and its members that is based upon prejudice about that group. Discrimination occurs at the individual level; all humans discriminate. Actions based in discrimination include violence, exclusion, ridicule/blame, avoidance, and segregation. (DiAngelo 2016, 52)</p> <p><i>Example: Assuming a child is not capable of learning something because of their race or because they have a dis/ability. Another example is reported by Wright, who states, "Black boys have the lowest chances of being in gifted education in the US, due mainly to under-referrals from teachers" (2018, 17).</i></p>
<b>Racism</b>	<p>A "pervasive system of advantage and disadvantage based on the socially constructed category of race" (Bell et al. 2016, 134). "The term 'racism' has been reserved to describe the mistreatment of members of racial and ethnic groups that have experienced a history of discrimination. <i>Prejudice, discrimination, and racism do not require intention</i>" (Pine and Hilliard 1990, 595).</p> <p><b>Aversive racism:</b> forms of racism which allow well-meaning White people to maintain a positive ("not racist") self-image while still perpetuating racism. Colorblind racism is a form of aversive racism ... this is the ideology that pretending that we do not notice race will end racism. ... this pretense denies racism and thus, holds it in place ... we <i>do</i> see the race of other people and that race has deep meaning for us. (DiAngelo 2016, 129–132)</p>

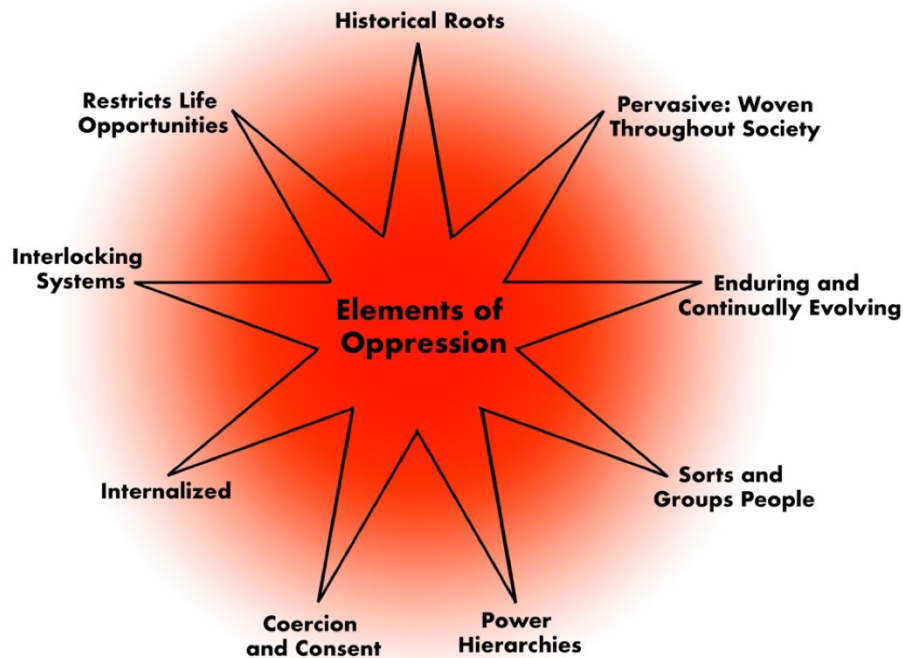
Term	Definition
<b>Colorism</b>	<p>[Colorism is] bias that favors light skin over dark skin linked to racial hierarchy. People of Color who consciously or unconsciously accept the color prejudices of the broader society (dominant group), and any people who use skin tone and ideals of European beauty to evaluate others, are employing colorism. Research has linked colorism to darker-skinned people receiving inferior education, lower salaries and marriage rates, and longer prison terms. (Knight 2013)</p> <p>“Colorism can be traced to slavery ... [and it] is a global phenomenon in every racial or ethnic group where there is skin tone variation, and occurs in Latin America, Asia, Africa, and the Arab world” (Bell et al. 2016, 145–146). White racism is the fundamental building block to colorism (Hunter 2005).</p>
<b>Privilege</b>	<p>[Privileges are] benefits based on social group membership that are available to some people and not others, and sometimes at the expense of others. Some privileges are material (such as access to adequate health care) while others are nonmaterial (such as the ability to experience oneself as normal and central in society). The concept of <i>privilege</i> reminds us that such benefits are not earned, but rather result from social advantage relative to others’ disadvantage. (Adams and Zúñiga 2016, 110)</p> <p><i>Examples: “White men can count on being perceived as professional and their expertise as legitimate; heterosexual couples, especially those who conform to norms of gender expression, can count on their relationships being seen as natural” (Adams and Zúñiga 2016, 111).</i></p>

## Elements of Oppression

To work against oppression and improve equity in education, we need to understand all of the elements of oppression and the way they weave together to maintain the oppressive systems in our society that result in systematic negative outcomes for minoritized groups including young Boys of Color (see figure 3: Elements of Oppression).



Figure 3. Elements of Oppression



Source: Adapted from Bell (2016, 5)

- **Oppression has deep historical roots.** Oppression has deep historical roots and its effects accumulate over time. For example, the wealth gap that exists today has historical roots in slavery, the genocide of Native American peoples, and the inequitable working conditions of many Asian and Latinx workers (Bell 2016, 6–7). Because of these historical roots, dismantling oppression requires efforts from everyone—including members of dominant and minoritized groups—and is ongoing, multigenerational, lifetime-term work.
- **Oppression is pervasive and woven throughout all of the institutions, policies, and practices of our society** (e.g., education, legislation, health care, justice, housing, media, law enforcement, etc.). Oppression impacts the ideas we value and communicate to explain and justify the inequalities that exist in our society. These ideas are woven throughout our institutions and within our communities, influencing the stories we tell, our myths, the definitions we create, and the explanations we give to explain our lived experiences and our histories. Just a few examples of the pervasive nature of oppression in our society include employment discrimination, under-resourced schools, inadequate health care, and housing discrimination.

- **Oppression is enduring and continually evolving.** Oppression has been continually present in our society, yet over time it changes into new forms in response to various challenges to dismantle it. For example, the Civil Rights Movement resulted in some success in eliminating segregation but the oppression of racism evolved, and in today's world, there are new forms of segregation and discrimination that are subtler but just as harmful—such as the exclusionary discipline that disproportionately impacts Boys of Color (Bell 2016, 14).
- **Oppression is based in sorting and grouping people into social categories of identity.** Different societies around the world sort and group people into categories based on their specific histories, geography, patterns of immigration, and different cultural and political conditions. In the US, the most common socially constructed categories used to sort and group people are based on race, class, gender, sexuality, age, language, religion, and ability. The group categories on which oppression is based—e.g., race—are not “real.” However, our beliefs, norms, and practices create perceptions that grouping people in these ways is necessary and natural. The consequences that result—treating people and distributing resources very differently based on group membership—are very “real.”
- **Oppression creates and maintains power hierarchies with dominant and minoritized groups.** Social groups are sorted into hierarchies with advantaged and disadvantaged groups. The dominant group—individuals at the top of the hierarchy—are given advantages, status, resources, access, and privilege that those lower on the hierarchy (minoritized groups) do not have. Those at the top of the hierarchy have the power and authority to control the institutions in society, to determine how resources are allocated, and to define what is “natural,” “normal,” “true,” and “good.”

In education, concepts of normal create boundaries in which some students fit and others are marginalized based solely on issues of race, language, and perceived ability ... thus, reflecting on quick assumptions of what “feels normal” is important to check on our own cultural biases so that we don't act on them. (Annamma et al. 2013, 1279)

- **Oppression is maintained through coercion and consent.** Different forms of oppression in society are maintained through the dual processes of coercion (e.g., laws and policies that require compliance and benefit the dominant group) and voluntary consent from advantaged and disadvantaged groups. Voluntary consent from individuals who are disadvantaged results from the pervasive nature of oppression that reinforces messages that the status quo is “natural and normal” and feelings of despair and hopelessness resulting from the historical and enduring nature of its impact (Bell 2016, 10).

- **Oppression is internalized.** In systems of oppression, messages are communicated to members of the dominant group that they are superior to members of minoritized groups and more deserving of the privileges—including the access to positions and resources—they enjoy in society. This process is labeled *internalized dominance*. We see this in major companies across the US where men hold the majority of all leadership positions, reinforced with biased beliefs that they are more competent than women. In contrast, minoritized group members have to continually hear and manage messages in society that communicate to them that they are inferior to the dominant group, an experience that can result in internalized oppression.<sup>17</sup> *Internalized oppression* describes the consequences of these messages as individuals begin to accept as “normal and natural” beliefs about their inferiority which influences their internal feelings (e.g., confidence, self-worth, etc.) and the actions they do or do not take in the world. The internalization of oppression is often subconscious, occurring unintentionally without people’s awareness (DiAngelo 2016, 76). In this way, the internalized messages of subordination through which a person learns to think, behave, and understand the world become ways to maintain and perpetuate oppression.

Oppression can also lead to internalized oppression among members of the same cultural group as the impact of stereotypes and misinformation affecting individuals can also impact a cultural group, deepening structural and systemic oppression as it becomes massively reproduced. An example of internalized oppression is seen with students of color coming to believe that they are not smart as a consequence of the bias and discrimination they experience at school. Through the processes of socialization and internalization, a deeply inequitable society comes to be accepted and reproduced by those who benefit in the dominant group as well as by those who suffer (Bell 2016, 11).

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17 An example of internalized oppression is “stereotype threat” (Steele 1997). Stereotype threat “describes the fear of confirming negative stereotypes about one’s racial, ethnic, gender, or cultural group” (Steele and Aronson 1995). The term was coined by Steele and Aronson, whose research showed that Black college students performed worse than White peers on standardized tests when told, before taking the tests, that their racial group tends to do poorly on such exams; when race was not emphasized, however, Black students performed similarly to White peers (1995). This concept is often misinterpreted to explain racial test score gaps as *solely* due to stereotype threat, ignoring group differences in access and opportunities to acquire test-related knowledge (Steele and Aronson 2004). Like microaggressions, stereotype threat exists because of racism in the broader society (Bell et al. 2016, 137).

- **Oppression is held in place by interlocking systems that overlap and reinforce one another.** Each form of oppression (racism, classism, ageism, etc.) has distinctive characteristics and specific histories that distinguish it from other forms of oppression. However, the different forms of oppression in society interact with one another as connected systems that overlap and reinforce each other. For example, although racism and sexuality are different systems of oppression, they also overlap and reinforce one another in ways that have impacts at structural/institutional and individual/interpersonal levels. For example, a Black male who identifies as gay would face the cumulative effects of oppression resulting from his membership in two minoritized groups based on his race and his sexuality (Bell 2016, 13).
- **We have a limited perspective and understanding of the world based on how we are positioned in society.** This is illustrated by the Birdcage Metaphor, which was created by Frye (1983) and adapted from DiAngelo (2016):
  - If you were standing close to a birdcage and pressing your face against it, you would see the bird closely but your awareness of the wires on the cage would be limited. Or, if you placed your hand on the wires, then put your hand between them and into the cage, your awareness of the wires would also be limited. Turning your face slightly so you could look closely at one of the wires of the cage, or turning your hand to feel one of the wires, would take away your ability to see or feel the other wires. If you remained looking at or touching just that one wire, you might wonder why the bird could not escape and fly away. This would be true if you continued walking around the cage to see the bird or feel the cage from different positions. As long as you continued pressing your face or hand against the cage and limited your senses to this close-up perspective, you might perceive that the bird had freedom to fly away. If you take a step back so you can see the entire birdcage, or felt the entire cage, you would notice the different wires and how they lock together in a pattern, which creates a strong barrier that holds the bird in place and places significant restrictions on its opportunities and freedom.
- The Birdcage Metaphor can help us understand why oppression is difficult for many people to see and recognize. Just as your understanding of the bird and its freedom (or lack thereof) would change based on where you stood in relation to the cage—and therefore,

how much of the cage you could see or touch—the same is true for the oppressive forces in society. We are socialized to focus on our own experiences, our personal intentions and individual actions when thinking about injustice (e.g., an individual from the dominant group advocating for the rights of a minoritized group). However, focusing on single events or the actions of specific people does not allow us to acknowledge the existence and significant impact of the broader, interlocking patterns of oppression that exist across our society.

- **Oppression restricts life opportunities.** Oppression creates barriers and leads to disadvantages and a restriction of life opportunities for everyone in society. Members of minoritized groups have their opportunities for self-determination, personal agency, and access to opportunities and resources unjustly constrained. They also endure stressors and trauma associated with prejudice and discrimination. These in turn can impact their personal aspirations and sense of possibility, all factors that restrict their life opportunities (Bell 2016). Oppression creates privileges for the dominant group that minoritized groups do not have access to or experience. Despite their privilege and many advantages, dominant group members are not exempt from the negative impacts of systems of oppression. It is a “social and moral price ... the cost of enjoying plenty while others starve is the inability to view our society as just and see ourselves as decent people ... [and an understanding that] the productive and creative contributions of people who are shut out of the system are lost to everyone” (Bell 2016, 15).



### Stop and Reflect

- Oppression can be difficult to recognize. Reflect, write, or discuss with someone else why this is the case.
- How might well-meaning adults unknowingly transmit bias to others?
- How might a teacher know when they are insensitive or unfair to a child's reality?
- How might the Birdcage Metaphor and understanding interlocking systems of oppression help you be more sensitive to the experiences of Boys of Color daily?
- What is the most useful question that you can ask yourself to confront your own biases?





## Check Your Perspective

- How does oppression shape who we are and how we experience the world?
- What is important to you about oppression and what do you still want to learn more about?
- In what ways can you make a difference in the lives of Boys of Color to support them to unlearn and/or resist internalized oppression?



## Cycle of Oppression

DiAngelo helps people understand the complex idea of oppression and its impact by thinking of it as a cycle (2016). Although the steps and impact of this cycle have been in motion continuously throughout history and continue today, there is not a specific sequence to the steps. Instead, they are all in constant motion, overlapping and reinforcing one another. The result of the cycle of oppression is the **systematic mistreatment of a minoritized group** (see figure 4: Cycle of Oppression).

Figure 4: Cycle of Oppression Leading to Systematic Mistreatment of Boys of Color



Source: Adapted from DiAngelo (2016, 83–91)

### Misinformation Is Generated

The process of oppression begins with *misinformation*, *misrepresentation*, and/or invisibility of a minoritized group and their authentic lived experiences. “The group’s history, interests, needs and perspectives—their voices—are minimized or absent” and the dominant culture does not represent any of the strengths or assets of the group (DiAngelo 2016, 84).

- **Generation of misinformation about young Boys of Color.** Consider how young Boys of Color are currently viewed by other children and teachers in our society. Research provides evidence that they are the targets of misinformation, misrepresentation, and invisibility: “conversations about Black males are often one-sided and paint a picture of Black males in perpetual crisis and exceptionally deficient” (Johnson and Philoxene, 2019, 78).



## Systematic Mistreatment of Targeted Group

Spreading misinformation about the minoritized group throughout society (e.g., stories in the news, media, online, etc.), begins a process of socializing the dominant group to see the minoritized group through a deficit perspective (“These parents don’t participate in school events because they don’t value education,” or, “Those children come from bad families and they are destined to become criminals.”). As these deficit stories continue to be shared and circulated, the misinformation they are based on becomes taken for granted as “truth” and further justifies the mistreatment of the minoritized group.

→ **Systematic mistreatment of young Boys of Color.** How is misinformation used to justify this treatment as acceptable?

The racial story lines that shape public perceptions of Black males present them as the ultimate menace to society—criminal from birth, ignorant, violent, and predatorily hypersexual ... the implications of this are evidenced by their experience with discipline ... and their testimonies about how they experience schooling and various forms of aggressive neglect in educational structures. (Givens and Nasir 2019, 4)

## Justification for Further Mistreatment

When misinformation and mistreatment of a minoritized group becomes integrated into the structures and institutions of society, and their access to resources, opportunities, and self-determination/agency to influence their lives in multiple sectors (education, housing, employment, health, etc.) is restricted long term (in many cases across generations), individuals within the group develop coping strategies and forms of resilience. Many strategies reflect the strengths, funds of knowledge, capacities, and creativity/ingenuity of the minoritized group. Other strategies represent rational efforts to cope with oppression and trauma but are also maladaptive and/or harmful to the individuals in the target group and others (e.g., community violence, substance abuse, child maltreatment). The dominant group then uses their position of power to further reinforce the deficit-oriented descriptions of the minoritized group and to strengthen the rationales they have constructed to justify their continued mistreatment. Thus, “the dominant group justifies the oppression of the minoritized group *based on the effects of having oppressed them*” (DiAngelo 2016, 87 [italics retained from original]).

→ **Justification for further mistreatment of young Boys of Color.** Consider how the historical and contemporary mistreatment of Boys and Men of Color has led to the need for their families and communities to focus on

their survival, developing coping skills and strategies to help them survive in a world that insists on misunderstanding and misrepresenting them in ways that is not only hurtful but can be dangerous and even life-threatening in many contexts (e.g., “The Talk” parents have with their Boys of Color about how to handle communication and interactions with police). Families and communities of color have many strengths, capacities, and creative coping skills they have developed and used for generations to respond to impacts of historical oppression. They also navigate the many harmful consequences long-term trauma leaves in its wake. Consider whether early childhood teachers, administrators, and other staff members focus only on the maladaptive behaviors that result from oppression and, specifically, racism for families and communities of color and especially young Boys of Color—without (a) understanding their roots [e.g., the impact of trauma on people and communities] or (b) also acknowledging the positive coping and survival skills and forms of strength and resilience families, communities, and the boys themselves have developed over time. If the answer is yes, then they are contributing to the cycle of oppression by feeding into the narratives that justify the further mistreatment of young Boys of Color. “We never actually look to the collective genius and the amazing things that are happening with Black children every day and Black families” (Givens and Nasir 2019, 108).

... the behaviors of Black boys are not the root of the problem. The root of the problem can only be located in structural practices that create the conditions in particular communities, and the perpetual lack of public interest in addressing rank inequality, especially when it comes to Black people. Yet Black children continue to be “adultified” in school settings—perceived as smaller versions of the terrifying, criminal, pathological adults they are expected to become (Ferguson 2001). They are barred from childhood and perceived to be more in need of harsh punishment, unwilling to learn, or simply ineducable altogether. (Givens and Nasir 2019, 6)

## **Institutions Perpetuate and Enforce**

In cycles of oppression, the prejudice of dominant group members becomes integrated into our institutions because of the power they have to control the structures and institutions in society. Thus, the prejudice and discrimination—the misinformation that sets the process of oppression in motion—is woven into laws, policies, practices, and norms in the significant institutions of our society, e.g., education, health care, criminal justice, and others.

→ **Early childhood centers and programs perpetuate and enforce misinformation about young Boys of Color.** Consider how early childhood

programs perpetuate this process of oppression being reproduced. How do teachers', administrators', and staff members' beliefs and behaviors contribute to maintaining this cycle of mistreatment for young Boys of Color? What policies and practices hold this mistreatment in place?

Black preschoolers are 3.6 times as likely to be suspended as White preschoolers; Black children represent 19 percent of preschoolers but 47 percent of suspensions (US Department of Education Office for Civil Rights 2016).

The trouble with Black boys is that too often they are assumed to be at risk because they are too aggressive, too loud, too violent, too dumb, too hard to control, too streetwise, and too focused on sports. Such assumptions and projections have the effect of fostering the very behaviors and attitudes we find problematic and objectionable. The trouble with Black boys is that too often they are placed in schools where their needs for nurturing, support, and loving discipline are not met. Instead, they are labeled, shunned, and treated in ways that create and reinforce an inevitable cycle of failure. (Noguera 2008, xxi)

## Internalized Dominance

As the dominant group is repeatedly being exposed to deficit descriptions of the minoritized group and justifications for the mistreatment they experience, the dominant group is being socialized at the same time to internalize assumptions about their own *superiority*. Even if this is never explicitly named, misinformation about the minoritized group leads to a process that elevates and affirms the dominant group as “better,” “normal,” “natural,” or “desirable.”

→ **Internalized dominance for adults and children who interact with young Boys of Color.** Consider how misinformation about young Boys of Color—whether intended or not—leads adults and children identified in the dominant group to receive messages about their cultural ways of knowing and being in the world (e.g., communication styles, interests, behavior, etc.) as defining what is normal and desirable in early childhood classrooms and programs. “Many Black boys frequently find themselves in classrooms with teachers who have limited to no understanding of their cultural ways of knowing, thinking, communicating, and being” (Givens and Nasir 2019, 120).

## Internalized Oppression

As the misinformation circulates and across society, the dominant group continually receives deficit messages about the minoritized group—“that there is something *wrong with* the minoritized group ... they are *not* normal, valuable, or worthy of consideration” (DiAngelo 2016, 85). Hearing and navigating these same messages can lead the minoritized group members to internalize the misinformation as truth, beginning a process that leads to feelings of shame, self-doubt, and deeply held beliefs about one’s inferiority.

- **Internalized oppression for young Boys of Color.** Consider how young Boys of Color respond to the way they are being treated and the misinformation circulating about them and being taken for granted as “truth.” How does it affect them?

The recurring narratives of Black damage continue to assault the humanity of Black people by naming them as the problem while concealing how racism continues to explicitly and implicitly structure our daily lives. Black boys are forced to think that they are the problem, and exceptionally so .... (Johnson and Philoxene 2019, 77)

## Society Accepts

After misinformation has been widely circulating throughout society, the cycle of oppression comes full circle and social acceptance of mistreating the group increases. People across society begin to accept:

the misinformation and mistreatment of the minoritized group because the dominant group has been socialized to see them as less valuable, if the minoritized group is considered at all. This misinformation is used to rationalize the lesser position. ... The misinformation becomes normalized and taken for granted, enabling it to continue to circulate and be reproduced through the society and, in turn, serve to justify the mistreatment of the minoritized group. (DiAngelo 2016, 84–85)

- **Social acceptance for young Boys of Color.** The process of perceiving Boys of Color through a deficit lens (e.g., “They are naturally more violent,” “They come from families and neighborhoods where education is not valued”) is now normalized, taken for granted, and used to justify their ongoing mistreatment, misunderstanding, and marginalization within educational and other contexts in society. This result inspired Du Bois’s 1903 text and famous question for Black males, “How does it feel to be a problem?” a set

of questioning that Howard expands by asking, “How does it affect one’s behavior? How does one develop coping strategies? How does it influence teacher behavior? How does it affect placement for special and gifted education? And perhaps most important, how does it influence one’s pursuit of academic success and social inclusion?” (2014, 37).

Understanding the cycle of oppression can help explain the historical and deep dynamics at play with the disproportional negative outcomes for young Boys of Color. Having knowledge about the forces that keep the cycle in motion will help educators identify how they are contributing to the cycle and changes they can make to interrupt it. Although both dominant and minoritized groups have a role in challenging oppression, the dominant group has the greatest responsibility to change the inequitable relationships (DiAngelo 2016).



### *Stop and Reflect*

Think of a minoritized group. Think about how the different steps in the Cycle of Oppression might relate to this minoritized group.

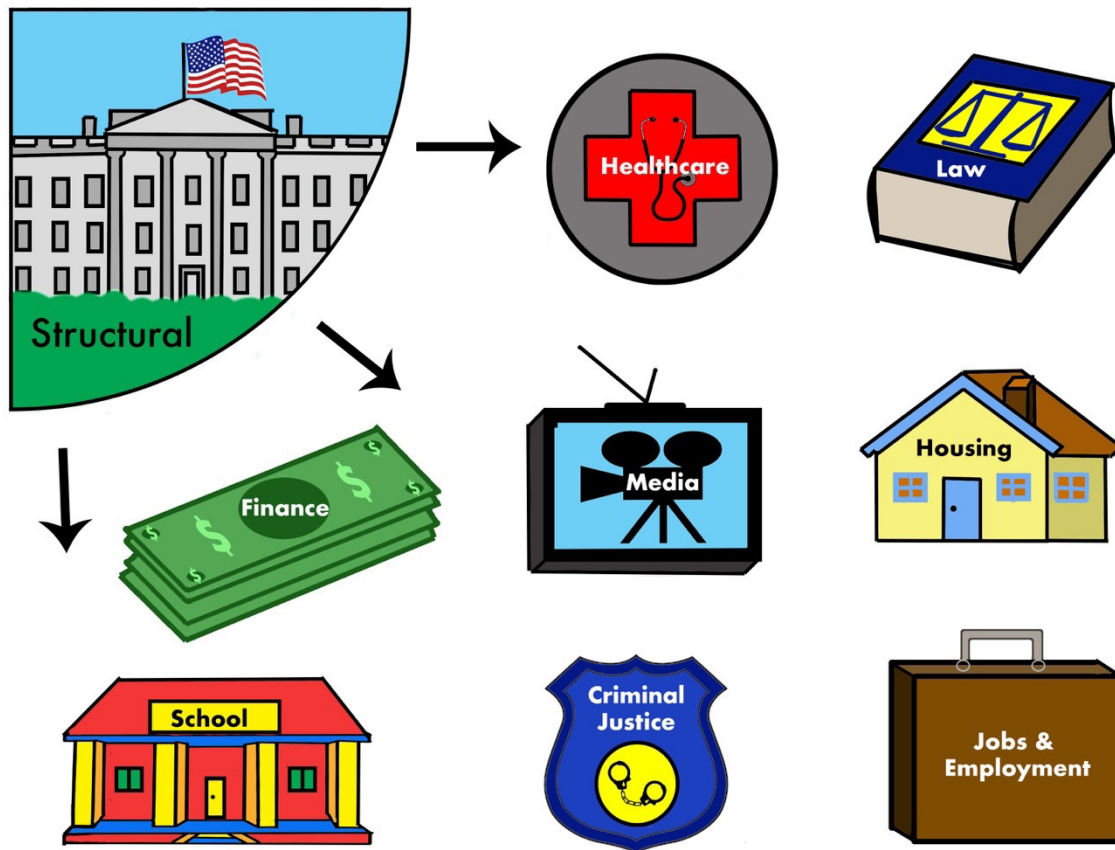
- How are you positioned in this cycle?
- How might your beliefs, actions, or lack thereof be contributing to the cycle of oppression for this group or working to disrupt it?

## **Structural Racism**

**A specific form of oppression experienced by young Boys of Color is structural racism**, sometimes called systemic racism or structural racialization, which is defined as systematic and disproportional marginalization of People of Color across institutions of our society. Individuals participating in these systems often do not see themselves as being racist or as participating in practices that are racist. They might even be actively working against racism. However, structural racism does not occur at the interpersonal level (one-on-one interactions). Instead, structural racism represents the phenomenon that organizations and social institutions systematically, historically, and unequivocally provide benefits to certain groups over others, resulting in racial inequalities in opportunities and experiences across many systems in our society.

**What are examples of these systems or societal structures?** As pictured below, examples include our systems of education, law/policies, finance/banking, employment/business, health care, housing, media, criminal justice, and organized religion (see figure 5: Structural Racism).

*Figure 5: Structural Racism: What Is Meant by Structural?*



Sometimes, structural racism might seem difficult to pinpoint, but many research studies and people's personal lived experiences demonstrate that **we do not live in a society that serves all individuals equally**. People of Color face significant structural barriers in housing, healthcare, employment, education, and within the criminal justice system that White individuals do not experience (see Alexander 2010; Bailey et al. 2017; Hanks, Solomon, and Weller 2017). Take for example data on housing: throughout history Black families have faced steep barriers that prevent them or limit their opportunities to become homeowners. Recently, during the Great Recession, banks systematically encouraged Black home buyers to take out bad loans that led many to lose their homes. More recently, studies have documented how People of Color interested in purchasing homes were shown fewer homes and apartments than interested White buyers (US Department



of Housing and Urban Development 2013). These systematic practices have consequences that are cumulative: In 2017, Black home ownership was 43 percent compared to 72 percent for Whites, which negatively impacts social mobility (the ability to move into a higher income group) for generations to come (Joint Center for Housing Studies of Harvard University 2018, 19).

**Generation after generation of racial/ethnic systemic discrimination has compounded these effects, making it harder for families of color to access services, wealth, social status, and political power.** A clear example of this is seen with tribal communities. Native American families have endured significant historical trauma (a cumulative emotional and psychological wounding, over lifespans and across generations, emanating from massive group trauma) as a result of the many forms of discrimination and oppression they have faced (e.g., genocide, colonialization, prohibition of Native languages and religious freedom, loss of land, governmental system and community, forced relocation, separation of children from their families that lasted well into the 1970s). The active eradication of their languages, cultural practices, power, and values has spanned centuries and has lasting tangible consequences. The loss of agency, limitation of opportunities, and historical trauma all contribute to the poor educational and health outcomes and high poverty rates that persist among many Native American families today.

Notably, there is a long history of discrimination against children of color in our educational system. During slavery, African Americans were not allowed to be formally educated, as slave owners feared that education would be a “breeding ground for revolution” (Cunningham and Osborn 1979, 21). And Native American children were forced to attend boarding schools after having been taken from their tribes to be “converted” into “civilized” children (Little 2018). More recently, immigrant and other children of color have been prevented from using their cultural and linguistic resources in educational settings as a result of standard-English-language-only policies and through academic assessments that are solely based on White upper-middle-class knowledge (Dobbins, McCreedy, and Rackas 2016; Little 2018; Valenzuela 1999). As already discussed, the history of racism also includes discrimination of ethnic minorities of European decent.

Structural racism also has a long history in the early childhood field (see Beatty [1995] and Michel [1999] for a comprehensive discussion). This is most clearly seen in the historical and continuing inequities in access and affordability of high-quality early childhood programs (Dobbins, McCreedy, and Rackas 2016). An example of this kind of awareness building and reflection is seen with the disproportionate number of families of color (and especially Black mothers and their young children) experiencing homelessness. Using a structural racism



perspective, we would reject assumptions that blame such parents as individually flawed (e.g., “They are lazy and do not work hard enough”) and instead, acknowledge the many forms of discrimination that may be factors influencing the family’s situation. We would understand that the larger social and political context did not provide them with equal opportunities to succeed and the cumulative impact of discriminatory experiences may have resulted in the experience of losing their home.<sup>18</sup>



### Key Idea

**Being knowledgeable about systemic racism does not mean that we define children’s and families’ identities through deficit, nor that we assume all children with a certain race or ethnicity experience similar hardships.**

Families of color and their children, as with all families, are not a homogenous group, and life experiences vary significantly among families who share the same race and ethnicity. Within educational equity conversations, the term “**within-group differences**” is used to explain that not all members of one group act the same way, believe the same things, or are the same. Each family has unique strengths, knowledge, experiences, and forms of cultural capital.

Listening and learning about each family’s values and experiences is key to having responsive early childhood programs.

### The Importance of Responsive Caregiving

Eva Marie Shivers articulates the importance of attending to this structural level of discrimination for young Boys of Color:

Even though responsive caregiving with boys and Boys of Color in particular seems like such an intimate topic, and of course we should talk to providers, this is also a much bigger conversation. The way that this [conversation] has sorted itself out, the weight falls very heavily on the shoulders of providers and administrators, but we need to really acknowledge the role the larger system plays. We need to recognize that the labels we use, as “African American,” as “women,” as somebody who

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18 See [\*Responsive Early Education for Young Children and Families Experiencing Homelessness\*](#), part of the Best Practices For Planning Curriculum for Young Children Series (California Department of Education 2019b).

is “White,” those labels, those social categories, have a lot to do with the way our society is structured. Who is privileged from those labels and who is not. Historically who are the people who the laws were really created to benefit? We know laws benefit some and explicitly keep out others. Where does your family history fall in that? That’s all a part of the story. (Shivers 2018, personal communication)

To understand the daily experiences Boys of Color and their families have with bias and discrimination, we need to pay attention to how our society systematically privileges some racial ethnic groups while discriminating against others, leaving them with long histories of disadvantage.



## *Examining Whiteness*

### **What is “Whiteness”?**

DiAngelo defines “Whiteness” as the following:

Racism is defined as a system of advantage based on race, Whiteness reflects the aspect of racism that socially elevates White people by affording them rights, access to resources, opportunities, and experiences (often invisible and taken for granted) that Peoples of Color do not have ... [A] central aspect of Whiteness is defining White people as the standard for being human—“Whites” are “just people”—our race is rarely if ever named. ... Whiteness remains invisible in all contexts except when we are specifically referring to People of Color, at which point an actress becomes a *Black* actress, and so on. (2016, 103, 148, 175).

The most foundational aspect of Whiteness is this positioning of White people and their experiences as the universal norm for humanity—the standard for what is “normal,” “good,” “healthy,” “intelligent,” or “successful” (DiAngelo 2016, 202; Sensoy and DiAngelo 2017).

### **The Definition of “White” Has Changed Significantly over Time**

As Whiteness is a socially defined idea, the people who are included in this category have changed significantly over time. Ethnic groups from Europe who today we identify as White were not included in the past. For example, at various times in US history, Italians, Greeks, Spaniards, Irish, Swedish, Finnish, Polish, and Russian people were not included as White Americans but they “became” White over time as they assimilated into the dominant culture of the US (DiAngelo 2016; Ignatiev 1995). Another example is with Middle Eastern and North African Americans who are currently identified as White by the US government yet, historically, people of Arab descent have been denied entry into the US because they were identified as non-White.



### *Key Idea*

**White Supremacy is not about individual people. It is the system of structural power that privileges, centralizes, and elevates White people as a group.**

When race scholars use the term White supremacy, we do not use it as popular culture does to refer to extreme hate groups. White supremacy does not refer to individual white people per se and their individual intentions, but to a political-economic social system of domination. This system is based on the historical and current accumulation of structural power that privileges, centralizes and elevates white people as a group. (DiAngelo 2016, 145–146).

Kenneth Jones and Tema Okun describe several **characteristics of White supremacy culture** that show up in our organizations, including our early learning programs and systems—these characteristics are damaging for many reasons:

These characteristics are damaging because they are used as norms and standards without being proactively named or chosen by the group. They are damaging because they promote White supremacy thinking. Because we all live in a White supremacy culture, these characteristics show up in the attitudes and behaviors of all of us—People of Color and White people. Therefore, these attitudes and behaviors can show up in any group or organization, whether it is white-led or predominantly White or People of color-led or predominantly People of Color. (2001)

See [appendix M](#) for a description of several characteristics of White Supremacy Culture and antidotes for disrupting them in our programs, organizations, schools, and systems.

## **White Privilege**

The advantages that White people experience (and often take for granted and are often unaware of) that are not accessible in the same contexts for People of Color—e.g., experiences with and outcomes related to health, education, employment, housing, criminal justice systems—is referred to as **White privilege** (DiAngelo 2016, 108). These privileges are at structural and institutional levels, not an individual level. “Whites need not hold consciously racist beliefs or intentions in order to benefit from being white” (DiAngelo 2016, 196).

Although an individual person may be “against” racism, they are still experiencing many benefits from the systems in our society that are structured to advantage White people. Singleton explains:

“For those who have not examined their lives through the lens of race, the mere suggestion that they are privileged might evoke strong emotions, particularly if they see themselves as hard-working or from challenged economic circumstances. It may be difficult to grasp the fact that White privilege has little to do with a person’s economic status. It refers to the advantages that White people receive simply by virtue of their appearance .... (2015, 189)

This is true even if individuals are identified with other social identities where they are in the minoritized group (e.g., class, gender, sexuality, ability, immigration status, etc.); if they are White, they have advantages in society that People of Color do not have. For example, an individual who is poor; or identifies as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or questioning (LGBTQ+); or has a dis/ability; or is undocumented, if White, will have privileges because of their Whiteness that all Peoples of Color will not have.



*Stop and Reflect*

Source: The following is an excerpt from McIntosh (1988).

**White privilege is like an invisible weightless knapsack of special provisions, maps, passports, codebooks, visas, clothes, tools, and blank checks.**

My schooling gave me no training in seeing myself as an oppressor, as an unfairly advantaged person, or as a participant in a damaged culture. I was taught to see myself as an individual whose moral state depended on her individual moral will ... Whites are taught to think of their lives as morally neutral, normative, and average, and also ideal, so that when we work to benefit others, this is seen as work that will allow “them” to be more like “us.”

I decided to try to work on myself at least by identifying some of the daily effects of White privilege in my life. I have chosen those conditions that I think in my case attach somewhat more to skin-color privilege than to class, religion, ethnic status, or geographic location, though of course all these other factors are intricately intertwined. As far as I can tell, my African American coworkers, friends, and acquaintances with whom I come into daily or frequent contact in this particular time, place and time of work cannot count on most of these conditions.



## Daily Effects of White Privilege

- I can, if I wish, arrange to be in the company of people of my race most of the time.
- If I should need to move, I can be pretty sure of renting or purchasing housing in an area which I can afford and in which I would want to live.
- I can be pretty sure that my neighbors in such a location will be neutral or pleasant to me.
- I can go shopping alone most of the time, pretty well assured that I will not be followed or harassed.
- I can turn on the television or open to the front page of the paper and see people of my race widely represented.
- When I am told about our national heritage or about “civilization,” I am shown that people of my color made it what it is.
- I can be sure that my children will be given curricular materials that testify to the existence of their race.
- Whether I use checks, credit cards, or cash, I can count on my skin color not to work against the appearance of financial reliability.

### *Reflection Questions*

- Do you personally experience any of these forms of White privilege? Which ones? Have you thought about them as privileges before?
- What other examples of White privilege can you think of to add to this list?

## White Fragility

Because Whiteness is the dominant group experience and many White people have not had to examine their lives through the lens of race, being asked to engage in building racial self-awareness and to strengthen their understanding of racism and oppression can be a very difficult process. Robin DiAngelo uses the term White Fragility to reflect “a state in which even a minimum amount of racial stress becomes intolerable, triggering a range of defensive moves for White individuals. These moves include the outward display of emotions such as anger, fear, and guilt, and behaviors such as argumentation, silence, and leaving the stress-inducing situation” (2011, 54).

As White educators are prompted to examine race and practice anti-racism, they need to be aware that White privilege counteracts

their engagement by offering the opportunity to walk away from this conversation on race at times when it gets tough or personally uncomfortable. People of color and indigenous people face racial injustice daily and simply cannot avoid dealing with racism. Consequently, it is perhaps the greater injustice toward their colleagues and friends of color when White people choose not to deal with racial issues. To willingly partake of White privilege and be a bystander to racial inequity is actually to participate in the perpetuation of racism ... anti-racism requires active challenges to institutionalized White racial power, presence, and privilege. There is no gray zone in anti-racist work. (Singleton 2015, 57)

These behaviors are the result of racial stress that result when familiar or comfortable worldviews are challenged (DiAngelo 2011). They can be expressions of White privilege and can function to maintain the status quo of inequitable racial relationships. It is important for everyone, especially White people, to be attentive to their own reactivity and emotional triggers, identify self-care and de-escalation strategies they can use to remain calm and self-regulated, and take care of themselves so they can remain engaged in these difficult and necessary conversations. Staying engaged is the first of the Four Agreements for participating in Courageous Conversations (Singleton 2015).





## *The Role of Implicit or Unconscious Bias*

Teachers with a proven record of success in working with males of color identified racism and stereotypes as being a central challenge facing this population. Daily encounters with racism remain a central element of the Black and Latino male experience. These encounters range from overt to subtle racialized encounters. The majority of such experiences are subtle in nature, being the derivative of unconscious bias that occurs in wider society and in schools. An awareness of common stereotypes encountered by these males is necessary for building environments that aggressively dispel myths and build environments of parity. (Wood and Harris 2016, 12)

Current research shows that implicit biases are at the root of many decisions that take place in early childhood programs and schools. Research demonstrates that young Boys of Color, **especially Black boys, are routinely perceived to be significantly older than they actually are and less innocent when compared to White boys of the same age** (Ferguson 2001; Gilliam et al. 2016; Goff et al. 2014; Okonofua and Eberhardt 2015). Because of these perceptions, teachers tend to be overly vigilant with Boys of Color and punish them at higher rates than other children. Such biases are hypothesized to be one of the most important factors explaining why expulsions, suspensions, and pushouts of Boys of Color are so much higher than the rates documented for their White peers (Adamu and Hogan 2015; Priest et al. 2018; Okonofua and Eberhardt 2015; US Department of Health and Human Services and US Department of Education 2014).



### **Key Idea**

#### **Implicit Bias**

[Implicit bias is] the largely unconscious and automatic prejudice that operates below conscious awareness and without intentional control. Implicit bias is absorbed from the messages surrounding us and results in acts of discrimination. Because implicit bias is below conscious awareness and often in conflict with what a person consciously believes, the person is unaware of the discrimination that results from it. (DiAngelo 2016, 59)

Implicit biases can be either positive or negative. **Everyone has implicit biases.**

- Implicit biases are unconscious and automatic

- They have important real-world effects on our own behaviors
- They might not align with our conscious beliefs
- **Implicit biases are malleable**, that is, with awareness and reflection, these biases can be “unlearned”

**Explicit Bias:** Conscious beliefs, perceptions, and attitudes held about a person or a group of people based on their race (racism), gender (sexism), income (classism), ability or dis/ability (ableism), religion, or another characteristic. Explicit bias can also be based on a combination of these identities (e.g., racism and sexism).

Source: Adapted from Wesley and Ellis (2017) and Staats et al. (2017)

## **Implicit Bias Plays a Role in All Human Behavior**

**People, of all races, ethnicities, genders, and cultures have biases.** Implicit biases are not made up by individual people. Everyone, even teachers and providers with the best of intentions, is socialized to learn certain unconscious attitudes and stereotypes from birth. These messages are communicated to us in many ways from conversations with friends and family, through jokes we hear, or in our consumption of various forms of media. These biases are solidly grounded in long histories of racism in societies all around the world. Examples abound in scientific studies and in stories we hear every day in the media or through conversations overheard in our families and communities:

- We see this when a toy gun is assumed to be a real gun when held by an African-American boy but not in the hand of a White child.
- Or when a tantrum from a male White toddler in a grocery store elicits sympathy from nearby adults (“Don’t worry, you will get through the terrible twos!”) who see the behavior as a typical developmental expression, whereas the same behavior displayed by a young Black or Brown toddler results in critical and personal judgments about the child (“out of control” and “badly behaved”) and their parent (“They’re unable to control their angry son.”).

Because implicit biases are not conscious to us, we are not aware of them until we receive training and/or learn how to reflect and build awareness about them. This is why **building self-awareness is the first step in learning to address implicit bias**. However, we cannot stop there. It is urgent, given the severe consequences that implicit biases are having on our Boys of Color, that we develop skills and practices to successfully **unlearn** them. This task does not rest on the shoulders of teachers alone. It is the responsibility of **all** of us—teachers, administrators,

policymakers, researchers, advocates, and others working with young children and their families—to learn about and acknowledge the racial inequities that exist in our society so we can work to build more equitable learning and caring environments for our youngest Boys of Color in early childhood programs.

Messages about boys and young men of color convey that they are unintelligent and criminals. To be clear, these messages are present in the minds of all educators, even those who self-identify as equity-minded and social justice oriented. While the degrees to which these messages are held may differ, all educators, even to a minimal degree, are influenced by these stereotypes. Negative views about boys and young men of color are sometimes proudly and consciously held; however, more often they are maintained unconsciously—through unconscious bias. (Wood and Harris 2016, 24)



### *Stop and Reflect*

Later in this chapter, we discuss strategies that teachers can use to reflect, become more self-aware, and address their own biases to strengthen their ability to be responsive, strength-based educators. An important part of this process is for teachers to become aware of the cultural values and beliefs that influence their teaching practices. Consider:

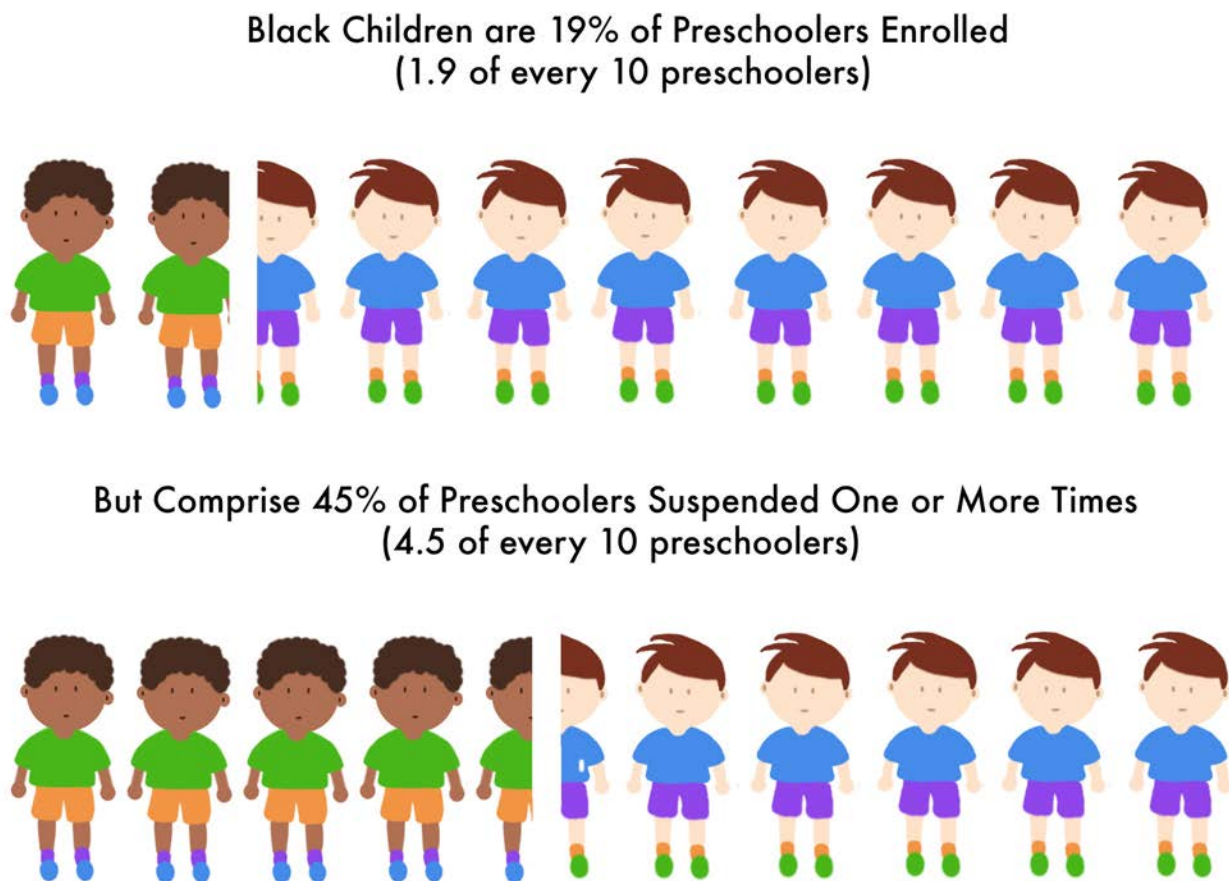
- What experiences in your childhood and family background influence your expectations and beliefs about “good” and “bad” behavior in children?
- What messages did you receive about race and racism growing up? Were these topics discussed openly or were you discouraged from talking about them?
- What experiences of racism have you been subjected to or witnessed? How do you think these experiences are similar or different from the experiences of the children and families you work with?

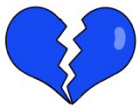
## **The Impact of Implicit Bias on Boys of Color**

Several program and personal factors have been associated with the high numbers of expulsions and suspensions in early childhood (e.g., lack of knowledge of child development, class size, length of the school day, teacher–student ratio, teacher stress). However, although these factors might *contribute* to exclusionary discipline, none of these variables can explain the disproportional distribution

of discipline by race. Stress, for instance, contributes to the overall number of expulsions and suspensions by influencing a teacher to be reactive and to escalate an emotionally charged situation instead of responding with emotionally regulated behavior. But stress cannot explain why Boys of Color are excluded from their educational environments at higher rates than any other children (see figure 6: Black Boys' Enrollment vs. Exclusionary Discipline). To add to this point, researchers have found that racialized discipline disparities occur across all income levels, suggesting that race is more of an influence than income in these patterns (Gilliam et al. 2016).

*Figure 6: Black Boys' Enrollment vs. Exclusionary Discipline*





## Consequence of Oppression

Research examining the number of boys who are suspended from public preschool programs finds

- while boys represent 54 percent of preschool enrollment, they represent 78 percent of preschool children receiving one or more out-of-school suspensions; and
- separating this data by race/ethnicity, Black boys represent 19 percent of male preschool enrollment but 45 percent of male preschool children receiving one or more out-of-school suspensions (US Department of Education Office for Civil Rights 2016, 3).



## Research

### Groundbreaking Study Examining Implicit Bias in Early Childhood

Walter Gilliam et al. explored whether implicit bias regarding sex (boy/girl) and race (Black/White) influences teachers' and administrators' perceptions of young children's behavior and, specifically, their interpretations of "challenging" behavior (2016). These researchers focused on implicit bias because previous work in K-12 repeatedly indicated that unconscious human biases are an important factor associated with teachers' use of exclusionary discipline (Gregory, Skiba, and Noguera 2010).

There were two main tasks in this study. In Task 1, participants were seated facing a laptop computer screen and told:<sup>19</sup>

Now you are ready to view a series of video clips lasting six minutes. We are interested in learning about how teachers detect challenging behavior in the classroom. Sometimes this involves seeing behavior before it becomes problematic. The video segments you are about to view are

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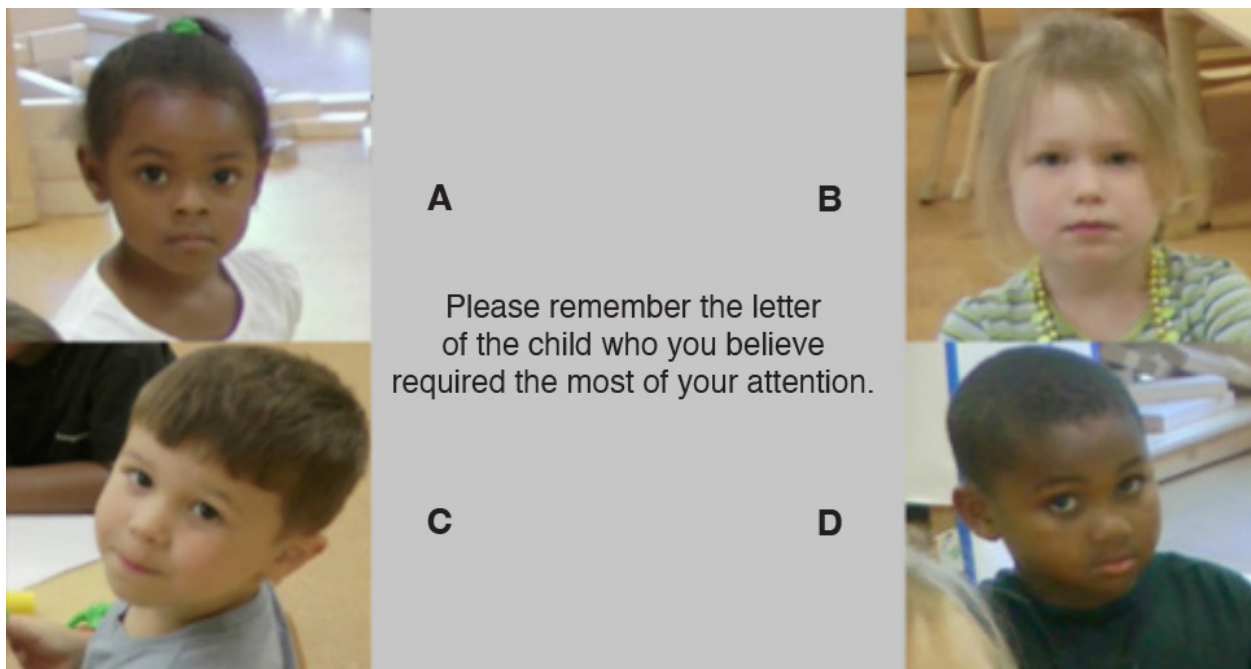
<sup>19</sup> In the study, 93 percent of the participants identified as females, 66.7 percent identified as White, 22 percent identified as Black, and 77 percent identified as non-Hispanic or Latinx. All participants worked in early childhood programs directly with children (as teachers, consultants, or administrators). Black teachers worked in zip codes with a median income much lower than the rest of the samples, and, on average, they had worked in the early childhood education field for 11 years.



of preschoolers engaging in various activities. Some clips may or may not contain challenging behaviors. Your job is to press the enter key on the keypad every time you see a behavior that could become a potential challenge. (Gilliam et al. 2016)

The participants also wore an eye-tracking device that measured where the teachers were looking at any moment. Although participants were instructed to press the Enter key every time they perceived a potential problem, **none of the videos contained challenging behavior**, and instead showed preschoolers engaging in traditional classroom activities such as playing with playdough or building blocks. Following the video clips, participants were shown a screen with photos of the four children in the video: a Black boy, a Black girl, a White boy, and a White girl. Each photo was assigned a letter (A–D) and participants were asked to select the letter of the child whom they felt required the most of their attention while viewing the six-minute video clip. Throughout the experiment the researchers were monitoring where the teachers were looking using an eye-tracking device.





In Task 2, researchers created a written vignette describing a preschool child with behavioral challenges in a preschool classroom. This was a fictional story, but the authors created several versions of the story using different stereotypical Black or White male and female names (Latoya, Emily, DeShawn, Jake). They also created one version of the story that included a brief paragraph detailing the child's home environment to provide context for the behavioral challenges and another that did not include any background information. Then, the researchers randomly assigned the participants in the study to read different versions of the vignette (e.g., one group read the story with a stereotypical White female name assigned that included background information; another group read a version of the story with a White male name assigned but without background information, etc.). Teachers were asked to read their version of the vignette, then:

- Rate the severity of the child's behavior from "not at all severe" to "very severe"
- Rate the degree to which they felt "nothing could be done to help that child," that is, their sense of hopelessness (what the researchers called the "severity" rating)
- Last, they were asked on a scale of 1 to 5 how likely it was that they would recommend suspension or expulsion, and if they recommended expulsion, for how long.

The results of the study clearly pointed in the direction of implicit biases. The tracking device data showed that:



- All teachers—White and Black—spent more time gazing at boys, and at Black boys in particular, expecting them to be the ones causing problems
- When teachers were asked explicitly which of the children required most of their attention, 42 percent indicated that the Black boy required the most attention, followed by the White boy (34 percent), the White girl (13 percent), and then the Black girl (10 percent)
- In contrast, participants overall rated White children's behavior as more severe than Black children's
- Black participants recommended expelling or suspending children more days than White participants

**Findings also suggested that implicit biases may differ depending on the race of the teacher.**

When teachers read a **version of the vignette that did not provide any family background information** as context for the child's behaviors, White teachers had lower expectations for the Black child. In contrast, Black teachers had very high standards for Black preschoolers and, based on their eye tracking, they paid more attention to Black Boys.

When teachers read a **version of the vignette that did provide family background information** as context for the child's behaviors:

- White teachers rated the behaviors as more severe (more hopeless) when the vignette included a name that suggested a Black male child. The authors suggested this could be the result of the teachers' bias—i.e., perceptions that “nothing can be done,” a sense of hopelessness and less empathy in response to the behavior of Black boys.
- In contrast, Black teachers' severity ratings significantly decreased for Black children but increased for White children. That is, background information seemed to increase Black teachers' understanding and empathy for Black children while decreasing their understanding and empathy for White children.

Overall, providing family background information resulted in lowered severity ratings (more hopeful) when teacher and child were the same race but resulted in increased severity ratings (more hopeless) when their race did not match. This suggests that when teachers are of a different race than their students, and they are offered an explanation of the child's family background including stressors, this information might lead teachers to feel less empathy for the child as it creates more of a sense of hopelessness for them that the child's behavior problems will not improve.

These findings provided evidence that **early education staff were more inclined to observe Black children, and especially Black boys, when they were anticipating challenging behaviors.** These findings are important to consider given that no behavioral challenges were present in the videos. This suggested, in part, that preschool teachers may hold differential expectations of challenging behaviors based on the race of the child. Plus, teachers' biases about children's behavior are likely influenced by whether they are interacting with a child of the same or a different race.

**The researchers hypothesize that teachers' expectations that boys, and especially Black boys, would display challenging behavior is an indication of their implicit bias.** Importantly, these results showed that both gender *and* race mattered in explaining when teachers "saw" challenging behaviors. These findings are consistent with the literature documenting the disproportionate rates of disciplinary referrals and exclusionary practices experienced by Black boys in K-12 settings and studies documenting how teachers (as well as other adults in the lives of young children) perceive Black boys to be less innocent and to be older than they truly are (Goff et al. 2014).



### Stop and Reflect

Take a moment to think about what Gilliam et al. discovered in the research study: Preschool teachers expect more disruptive behaviors from Black children (even when no challenging behaviors are being displayed). Further, there seems to be less empathy when the teacher is of a different race than the child.

- What are your reactions to these findings?
- How does it make you feel?
- What are the implications for your own teaching practice?

### Negative, Biased Messages

Research regarding implicit bias illustrates the type of negative, biased messages that young Boys of Color receive about their identities and behavior on a regular basis. Jordan, a father of a young African-American boy, shared a story that illustrates this:

We were in this bilingual day care center and this caregiver, her name was Rosario, she calls to tell us that she is afraid of Jonathan—he was three

years old at the time—and she quoted him saying, “I’m going to shoot you!” But instead of seeing that as play, as a developmentally appropriate thing, and then being like, “You’re not going to shoot me, are you? That is not nice,” and being playful about it, instead she was bringing it to us as a legitimate concern! And we were like, “What?!” It really blew our minds.

We did not expect that from an adult who is caring for a three-year-old—an adult that has total control over this place, who could do anything to this child, and you’re afraid of him? So that was one early experience that we were like, “Oh s—, this was someone we hand-picked to take care of our son! So, we were really starting to feel and see the level of racism towards Black boys.

Receiving this kind of comment from a caregiver who has been entrusted to care of your beloved child can be shocking and extremely unsettling for parents. Many parents and family members report the stress associated with having to manage these types of comments and interactions on a daily basis with hopes that they do not negatively impact their young sons.

## **Exclusionary Discipline Practices**

Exclusionary discipline practices deprive children of valuable early learning experiences. When children are excluded from learning environments by being suspended or expelled, they miss essential educational opportunities and are at greater threat for disengagement from school. Implicit bias and more explicit racist behavior does not just show up in the moments when Boys of Color are excluded from early childhood programs. Families and children of color report having to manage and cope with frequent, sometimes daily, instances of bias and racism. Consider the memory of preschool that Ray, an African high school student has:

In preschool I had this one teacher, Ms. Dingle—she would always single me out. I remember this one time, I saw this piece of grass in my friend’s hair and I picked it out. The teacher, she put me on a red day (it means I’m doing bad, she didn’t want me to touch him) and gave a phone call home. She said something like, “I told you before it was your last warning.” My parents never addressed her. I got a spanking from my father for getting a red day and I wasn’t able to celebrate my birthday. She told everyone in class that my birthday was canceled even though she had no relation to me or my personal life, so that really affected me. I remember I was confused when she called me out because I thought I was doing the right thing, but I was punished for it. I didn’t really exchange words with my father. (Henneman 2014)

Stories like this one might seem isolated, as the practice of “red days” is unacceptable for any early childhood environment and a structure that reinforces bias and discrimination. Yet this is documented by Henneman and reflects, unfortunately, the lived experiences of many Boys of Color who describe the high frequency of these types of interactions and the negative toll it takes on their sense of self. For Ray, a junior in high school, being on a “red day” was a common occurrence, but he recalls being confused as to what he did to deserve being punished. Moments like the one he describes above suggest that often he was harshly disciplined for behaviors that did not warrant such a strong and negative reaction. Ray explained that he learned to feel like it was normal to be confused about why he was in trouble, why he had upset his teacher, and why he was never provided with explanations.<sup>20</sup> Wallace, an eighth-grader, discusses a similar feeling and highlights how it affected how he saw himself:

I was always looked at as the bad kid, there was always like a painted picture about me. I learned what to do. For instance, in preschool, a kid [who was White] took magnets from me; the teacher thought I took them from him and so I got disciplined. I learned that there were things that I, as an African American, couldn't do.



## Research

### **How do Children of Color feel about being labeled as having a dis/ability?**

Several research studies document how students of color labeled with dis/abilities understand these dis/ability labels and how they negotiate and potentially challenge these labels within school settings. What did they find? Children often felt hurt, insecure, worthless, unattractive, and emotionally threatened because of the stereotypes and stigmas attached to their dis/ability, race, or gender (Iqtadar, Hernández-Saca, and Ellison 2020). On certain occasions, they also internalized the dominant deficit narratives surrounding their many different identities. This internalization constrained their self-perceptions, leading them to feel unwanted, incompetent, and less desirable, and decreased their social activity (Iqtadar, Hernández-Saca, and Ellison 2020). It is important, however, that we understand these negative emotions and phenomena as social in nature, not individual and personal deficits (Iqtadar, Hernández-Saca, and Ellison 2020).

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<sup>20</sup> Ray's story is adapted from the work of Henneman (2014).

## Implicit Bias and Interpreting Coping Skills

Implicit biases can also show in the way that Boys of Color developmentally appropriate coping skills are interpreted. Consider for instance, what happened in kindergarten to Isaiah, a young African American child, as described by his father:

Isaiah got upset in kindergarten. He had a kid that kept prodding him, bullying him, and he was telling us about it every day. And we were telling him to use his words and remember that there are other adults there, you can always walk away. And he said, "Mom! I've been doing that and he's still bothering me!" And he got so upset one day he broke a pencil in class.

The teacher called me and told me Isaiah was destroying school property. So, I said, "What happened before he broke this pencil? Because it sounds like he wasn't just sitting there snapping pencils out of nowhere." I knew about the bullying situation. I knew I told the teacher about it, but I didn't know what was being done about the other kid. Was that kid around? What happened before he [bullied my son]? Was there a conversation before it happened? And there was. That kid was bothering my son again and Isaiah was trying to contain it and not hit him or be violent and all they saw was Isaiah breaking the pencil.





Similar to Terry's experience in the opening vignette of this chapter, this vignette shows an instance in which a child responded to a stressful situation in several developmentally appropriate ways (talking to his parents, talking to the teacher, becoming frustrated over an injustice) but he was automatically seen in a negative light. Accumulation of moments like these have direct negative consequences for children. First, children cannot form trusting attachment relationships with the adults in an early childhood program when the adults model mistrust of the child or when children feel unheard and unsafe with them. Second, children are building their sense of self and their identity as students in relation to formal schooling, and by repeatedly over-disciplining Boys of Color, the cumulative effects of such negative messages about their identity can result in young infants, toddlers, and preschoolers developing a sense that they do not belong in schools.

### *Microaggressions*

**Microaggressions** are the subtle, everyday verbal and nonverbal slights, snubs, or insults which communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative messages to People of Color based solely on their marginalized group membership (Hammond 2015, 47). Microaggressions, which include actions such as **microinsults** (demeaning a person's racial heritage or identity) and **microinvalidations** (negating the experiential reality, feelings, and status of a Person of Color) have negative health and mental health consequences for Boys of Color and their families. The fact that microaggressions are often difficult to identify puts the Person of Color in a difficult situation, as reacting to the aggression might lead others to judge them as oversensitive or to argue that what happened was not, in fact, a microaggression. As with implicit biases, individuals responsible for the microaggressions are usually unaware of the biases communicated through their language and behavior. Read, for instance, Luke's description of the microaggressions his African American toddler son constantly received in playgrounds and play centers:

When I would take [my son] to this play and learning center for toddlers, he would be crawling around, and we would consistently get the reactions from White moms or from Asian moms, especially if they had daughters: All of the kids were crawling around trying to grab stuff, but the parents would react if my son would get anywhere close to their child. Instead of saying, "Oh, this is an opportunity to negotiate, share, and navigate," they would be in a protection status. They said things like, "Can you watch your child?" Watch him for what? To protect your child? It would annoy us to no end when we would go to these play centers.

It happened in the park too, constantly! Parents would say "Ohhhh, you need to be careful you might poke her eye," but they would say this only to

our kid. And, of course, we would respond in a friendly way—it wasn't every single person, but it was rare for it to not happen once or twice in a one-hour visit. It's real subtle too. Parents that are snatching their kids away like, "Watch out this Black kid is coming," I would just be hyperaware and these folks are reacting as best as they can. And it's Berkeley, so people are trying their hardest not to be racist, you know? It's not like today's climate where folks are just out with it, but that was the baby racism phenomenon and it wasn't just in one place, it happens anywhere you take your baby.

This story above highlights the frequency of microaggressions many young Boys of Color endure not only in schools, but also in parks and early childhood centers.

### *Traumatic Experiences*

**Implicit bias, microaggressions, and other instances of racism are unfortunately frequent in the lives of young Boys of Color and can be traumatic experiences.** Experiences of trauma, especially at a young age, can disrupt brain development and interfere with every aspect of development and learning for young Boys of Color (Nicholson, Perez, and Kurtz 2019). The most important protective factor Boys of Color can have to help them cope and build resilience in the face of these experiences is a consistent, caring, and responsive adult who can buffer the stress they encounter—as a consequence of the bias and discrimination that result from structural racism in our society—and reassure them that they are loved unconditionally.



#### **Key Idea**

#### **Defining Trauma**

**"Trauma"** is defined as an actual or perceived danger, which undermines a child's sense of physical or emotional safety, or poses a threat to the safety of the child's parents or caregivers, overwhelming their coping ability and affecting their functioning and development (Nicholson, Perez, and Kurtz 2019).

Traumatic experiences, whether real or perceived, are threatening and create intense feelings of helplessness, powerlessness, or terror, and, in the absence of protective supports from an adult caregiver, can have lasting and devastating effects on a child's physical, mental, and spiritual health (La Greca et al. 2008; Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration [SAMHSA] 2014).



## Video Resource

See the Harvard University Center on the Developing Child [Toxic Stress page and "Toxic Stress Derails Healthy Development" video](#) (2011).

### *If We Are All Biased, What Can We Do About It?*

If implicit biases are so widespread and unconscious, what can we do to address them? Researchers working to determine effective interventions to reduce teachers' racial biases have identified some promising practices. However, it is important to note that this area of research is still emerging and many more studies will need to be completed before the education field has a robust set of promising practices. With these limitations in mind, we report on the findings from recent research suggesting that implicit biases may be reduced through interventions designed to either **address biases directly** or to **increase teachers' empathy for children** (Devine et al. 2012; Hammond 2015). Researchers are thinking about implicit biases as though they are "habits of mind" that can be changed through intentional efforts to bring awareness to the undesirable habit and then implementing strategies to address these target behaviors (Isapa-Landa 2018). Based on the research to date, the most effective practices that support educators to "unlearn" their implicit biases, especially in relation to exclusionary discipline, include the following Promising Practices.



### Promising Practices

#### *Individuating (Getting to Know Students Better as Individuals)*

When teachers take time to get to know the children in their classrooms better as individuals, and they learn specific details and information about that child as a unique human being (e.g., likes, dislikes, temperament preferences, family and community relationships, etc.), they are more able to interrupt behavior influenced by implicit racial bias. It will come as no surprise that stronger teacher-student relationships are a critical foundation for interrupting the negative cycles of harmful stereotyping and bias. Researchers suggest that a teacher's focus on a child's race may become less salient in light of their knowledge of the child's other qualities (Isapa-Landa 2018). This, they hypothesize, might account for reducing the impact on racial disparities in discipline (e.g., because of racial associations between Blackness and deviance, reducing the salience of a child's Blackness could disrupt teachers' reactive behaviors that lead to harsh discipline) (Isapa-

Landa 2018, 386). On the other hand, individuating also means seeing that the experience of race as a source of cultural identity, pride, and strength might be really important for some children. Similarly, reducing attention to race does not mean that “race doesn’t matter” or that we “don’t see race” because that negates an important element of children’s society identity and the very real experiences of racism.

### *Perspective-Taking and Building Empathy*

Defining “perspective-taking” as “intentional efforts to imagine another person’s perspective” is also emerging as a promising practice to reduce the effects of implicit racial bias on social interactions (Ispa-Landa 2018). Perspective-taking is the result of a cognitive process, whereas empathy (the ability to feel what someone else feels) is an emotional reaction. These two processes are associated, as perspective-taking influences an individual’s capacity for empathy where they have the ability and motivation to imagine an experience through another person’s perspective.

Increasing teachers’ empathy for their students is therefore hypothesized to be one way in which the impact of implicit racial biases can be reduced in social interactions with children. These outcomes have been documented in research studies in other disciplines. For example, in one study, nurses were asked to view photographs of White and Black patients and told to provide patients with the best care (Drwecki et al. 2011; Ispa-Landa 2018). The nurses recommended significantly higher doses of pain medication for the White patients. It was presumed that their pro-White, anti-Black racial implicit bias led them to feel more empathy for the White patients. However, when the nurses were asked to “imagine how patients’ pain affected their lives,” a perspective-taking intervention, the pain treatment bias was reduced by 55 percent (Drwecki et al. 2011; Ispa-Landa 2018). **Perspective-taking can increase empathy which in turn may weaken the automatic expressions of implicit bias.** However, Ispa-Landa provides an important note of caution:

Perspective-taking without individuation may do little to mitigate the effects of racial bias on decision-making. Widespread cultural narratives link Blackness with deviance and Whiteness with innocence. Educators with strong anti-Black and pro-White racial biases who strive to imagine students’ perspectives may be prone to imagine Black students’ motives as deviant and White students’ motives as innocent. Thus, individuation—getting to know children better as individuals—may be necessary to reduce the effects of racial bias and support teachers to build empathy with their students of color. (2018, 387)

## *Conversing with Others Who Have Significantly Different Life Experiences*

Participation in collaborative conversations with others whose life experiences—personal or professional—are significantly different is an essential strategy for helping people become aware of their assumptions, beliefs, and biases. Listening to others tell stories about their daily experiences, and how they think and feel about different interactions and events in their lives, expands our understanding of different perspectives. Collaborative dialogue, where individuals are invited to share stories of their lived experiences with others, is especially effective for increasing sensitivity and empathy for others and their experiences of marginalization and discrimination. By hearing stories from others who are significantly different from ourselves, we can learn about the topics and perspectives we are not equipped to understand and insufficiently or improperly sensitive to (e.g., White teachers hearing from their colleagues of color about the experiences of racism and microaggressions they experience regularly). In this way, dialogue leads us to build self-awareness and surface our unconscious biases. And once we know about our biases, we can actively work to stop them.



### **Key Idea**

#### **The Challenge of Confirmation Bias**

**Confirmation bias is the human tendency for our desires to influence our beliefs.** When people would like a certain idea or concept to be true, they end up believing it to be true because we are all influenced by our wishful thinking. We tend to listen to data that confirms our prior beliefs and to disregard data that does not conform to what we already believe. This phenomenon leads us to stop gathering information when the evidence we gather initially confirms the views or prejudices we would like to be true.

What happens when new information confirms what we already believe to be true?

- Our prior beliefs are strengthened.

In contrast, what happens when we are confronted with data that is not aligned with our beliefs or even contradicts our beliefs?

- People tend to respond to new or conflicting information by ignoring it, criticizing it as not credible, or discrediting it altogether.



We know from research on confirmation bias that the farther away new data is to our current belief, the less likely we are to change our belief.

### What is the most effective way to change people's beliefs?

- **Fear can be effective when you want people not to do something** (e.g., data or stories describing negative consequences resulting from some action—fear of lung cancer leads some people not to smoke).
- **Hope is a better motivator for inspiring action.** This is especially true if the new data or stories are able to elicit emotion in people (e.g., hope for a new leader often inspires people to vote).

### How does this apply to our work with young Boys of Color?

- Confirmation bias makes it difficult for all of us to challenge our current beliefs, including our explicit and implicit biases (O'Connor and Weatherall 2019; Tversky and Kahneman 1974; Vedantam 2019).
- To inspire educators to take actions to disrupt inequitable practices that harm young Boys of Color, **emphasizing hope for the future and creating emotional connections to the Boys and their lives is the most effective approach** (Howard 2014; Ginwright 2016).

Chapters two through four focus on hope. We reframe the conversation to emphasize equity, education with love at the center, and a wide range of strategies educators can use to strengthen understanding and build empathy for our youngest Boys of Color.



### *Stop and Reflect*

Go back to [Miles' story](#) at the beginning of this chapter. Imagine how different the experience would have been if the teacher would have known Miles better. Think about:

- How could Miles's teacher have developed more understanding of Miles' temperament, strengths, likes, dislikes, and needs?
- What strategies could the teacher have used to learn about Miles' perspectives?
- How would the experience have been different if the teacher had been more aware of their own emotional triggers (see below)?



### *Promising Practices*

**Becoming aware of our unconscious biases and disrupting our patterns of reacting based on stereotypes requires intention, self-reflection, and time.** The following strategies, based on the work of Hammond, can help teachers in this process (2015):

**Begin with an intention to address and “unlearn” your biases.** The first necessary step to reduce or to interrupt implicit biases is to have the intention to do so. A critical realization to change implicit biases is that no one can force these changes on others. Individuals need to be internally motivated to learn and change because the work takes courage and requires a long-term effort. The self-awareness you develop by engaging in this work might feel uncomfortable as you become more aware of your own biases over time. Despite the discomfort, the only way anyone is able to address and unlearn their implicit biases is if they are willing to experience discomfort as a necessary part of the learning process. When the process becomes especially challenging, it is important that teachers use self-care practices to manage the emotions that emerge and allow themselves to refresh and recharge so they can maintain the energy needed to continue along



their learning journey. It helps to remind yourself why this work is so important: Your efforts will contribute to increasing the ability for our youngest Boys of Color to learn and develop to their potential and to feel cared for and supported in the way that every child deserves.

**Engage in self-reflection to build self-awareness:** Self-reflection is a continuous process of taking time to think about the way one feels during the day, the intensity of these emotions, and the way these feelings might be impacting how we react to others, how we perceive them, and how we treat them. One key factor associated with increased early childhood education expulsions and suspensions is teacher stress (Gilliam et al. 2016). When we are stressed or when we do not practice self-awareness and self-reflection, we might react to children's behaviors (e.g., hitting, biting, running away, etc.) in strong ways that reinforce our implicit racial biases. Reactive responses do not allow us to consider that *all children's behavior is a form of communication*.

Through their behavior, children are continually sharing with teachers what they are thinking and feeling and what they need. Teachers who learn to remain calm and respond to children using a caring and responsive tone communicate to the child that they are visible, what they think and how they feel matters, and the teacher will work with them to have their needs met. This type of response calms a child and the adult guides the child back to a self-regulated state. In contrast, when teachers respond to children with an emotionally charged reaction (e.g., anger or by ignoring them) the child's stress response system is further triggered, which leads children to express even more stress-related behaviors (Nicholson, Perez, and Kurtz 2019). An illustration of this sequence was seen with Miles when his teacher *reacted* angrily when he was upset and left him alone in the classroom. This behavior only escalated the situation. Self-reflection can help teachers develop the self-awareness they need to interrupt their reactivity during stressful interactions like this so they can maintain their own emotional regulation and provide the responsive and caring presence children like Miles need.

**Discover your own cultural frameworks.** The way we see the world, the values we have, and the things that feel stressful or threatening to us are very closely related to our cultural frameworks—that is, to the ways we learned from the time we were born to perceive the world around us. It is often easier to see how “culture” influences others than to understand and acknowledge our own culture, especially if we participate in dominant cultural practices. Importantly, when we talk about culture, we do not mean race/ethnicity or country of origin, but instead we are talking about ways of doing things (practices), values, and attitudes that inform our worldviews. For instance, norms about respecting personal space or not touching others might seem normal to some educators, whereas these norms

might clash with the cultural practices of some children and families who might show affection in more physical ways and would consider the lack of touching or closeness as being cold or off-putting (Choi 2017). An important step towards becoming a responsive teacher for Boys of Color is for teachers to understand their own cultural preferences and the values and beliefs that inform their assumptions about the world. This work begins by understanding the different levels within the meaning of “culture.”



## Key Idea

### What Do We Mean by Culture?

Culture is a broad concept that refers to deep-rooted customs, values, beliefs, languages, social norms, and practices shared among a group of people that are transmitted across generations. Culture is not a static category. Instead, it is a dynamic concept that encompasses racial and ethnic identity, class, language, economic status, gender, family roles, rituals, communication styles, emotional expression, social interactions, and learned behaviors, among other areas; and, even without our conscious awareness, culture influences how we think, believe, and behave, which affects how we teach and learn (California Department of Education 2016, 20; Gay 2010, 8–9; Hill, McBride-Murry, and Anderson 2005, 23; and Milner 2017, 3).

**Culture is not just what “others” do or have** (Rogoff 2003). All our values and behaviors are shaped by our own perspectives influenced by the cultures we participate in.

**Cultural ideas, values, and practices change over time.** People from the same social groups but different generations share some values, but also differ in important ways as cultural values evolve. This is easily seen if we compare our values and practices with the values and practices of our parents, older relatives, or elders.

**There is not “One best way” of doing things.**

Understanding different cultural practices and perspectives doesn’t involve deciding which are “right” and “wrong” (which doesn’t mean that all ways are fine). Instead, learning from others does not require that we give up our own cultural beliefs and values. However, it is essential that we learn about diverse cultural perspectives and challenge any beliefs



we have that our own way is the “right” way. Being a culturally responsive teacher requires that teachers suspend their own assumptions to gain greater understanding of the multiple ways of doing things. (Rogoff 2003, 12)

## Iceberg Model of Culture

Edward T. Hall introduced the Iceberg Model of Culture, explaining that there are layers to culture that must be understood and that too often we focus only on the surface elements of culture that we can more easily understand and identify (1976). The model describes two levels of culture:

- **Surface Culture (observable):** Elements of culture that are easily seen, identified, and accessed. Surface culture is what people often think of when they consider the concept of culture. These include food, dress, music, art, crafts, dance, literature, language, celebrations, games, religion, and more.
- **Deep and Unconscious Culture (not observable, below the water line):** These represent a culture’s core values, attitudes, preferences, and ways of interpreting experiences. Different cultural groups can share a core value (respect, love of family) but the way these values are interpreted and acted upon can be very diverse. Learned beliefs differ about what is good, right, desirable, and acceptable and what is perceived as bad, wrong, undesirable, and unacceptable. Aspects of deep and unconscious culture impact how individuals interpret concepts of time, personal space, cleanliness, humor, the meaning of facial expressions, body language, eye contact, and touching, and perspectives and concepts of leadership, modesty, marriage and family, child-rearing, attitudes towards elders, kinship, gender, class, decision-making and problem-solving, and many more factors.

Source: Hall (1976)

## How an Afrocentric Preschool Curriculum Might Address the Different Levels of Culture

**Surface Culture (observable):** Pictures of Africans and African Americans, African or African American music, traditional foods, a map of the continent, games like mancala, celebrations of important events such as Kwanzaa and Juneteenth, and images of people such as Martin Luther King Jr. Aspects of surface culture reflect the deeper and less visible layers of culture.

... while it is important to incorporate these elements into Black children’s learning environments, to make learning more meaningful and relevant,

and to increase active engagement, [teachers] must go beneath the surface. The surface curriculum is a good place to start in changing curriculum in visual ways ... however, [teachers] need an increased knowledge of the other two levels of culture ... (Ren-ETTA Sullivan 2016)

**Deep and Unconscious Culture (not observable, below the water line):** Ren-ETTA Sullivan recommends that going beyond surface culture to learn about deep and unconscious levels of children's and families' cultures in their classroom begins with building self-awareness and knowledge of the teacher's own culture at these three levels (2016). It is only with this knowledge that they can begin to understand how culture impacts children's learning preferences and experiences in their classroom. Ren-ETTA Sullivan explains:

What [teachers] need to do is to increase your ability to recognize the elements of each level within your own culture and the impact they have on **your** teaching and learning preferences. This will make it easier for you to understand the role and importance of cultural elements in other cultures and the ways in which children's cultures impact their learning preferences. (2016)

Faye, a pre-K teacher in a summer intervention program specifically designed for African American boys entering kindergarten, added: "You have to be open and be willing to learn. You have to be open to learn about things because one way is not the **only** way. There are other ways."

## Figure 7: Dimensions of Families and Culture

The California Department of Education identifies dimensions of culture in its 2016 publication, *Family Partnerships and Culture*:

**Family structure.** The people who are defined to be "family" by the members, their duties, roles and authority, how they are organized, and the processes by which they carry out their functions.

**Definitions of "childhood."** Beliefs about and definitions of what a child is and what it means to be a child.

**Socialization goals.** The behavior, skills, beliefs, values, and attitudes adults want children to acquire and to exhibit by the time they become adults.

**Child-rearing practices.** The attitudes that govern child care and the strategies used to socialize children.

**Gender roles.** The duties, responsibilities, and behaviors that are attributed to individuals primarily on the basis of whether they are male or female.

**Identity.** Self-concept, gender identity, the importance of skin color, beliefs, attitudes about self, groups that individuals see themselves as a part of, and with whom they affiliate and have allegiance and loyalty. This can include the family's history and national origin that affect identity.

**Individualism.** A dimension spanning individualistic to collectivist orientation. It is defined by the extent to which one focuses on self apart from the group, acting and thinking on one's own without deferring to the group. An embrace of the right to be different or to be oneself in contrast to considering group social expectations and gaining support that comes from a sense of group belongingness. At the collectivist end is interdependency, by which family members support each other automatically and provide help without question.

**Spirituality.** Belief in existence of a nonmaterial world in relation to the child, the family, and the culture. A stance toward life that gives credence to and assigns importance to this nonmaterial world; belief in a higher power or spirit that has a positive influence over what happens in the world.

**Emotional expression.** This refers to the range of feelings that members are allowed to express in the family context.

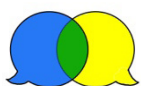
**Social class.** Societies and cultural groups often arrange their members in some order from high to low power and prestige based on certain factors that may differ from culture to culture. These factors often include wealth, education, birth lines, occupational status, role, and age.

**Celebrations.** The noting or marking of events of spiritual, social, political, or economic significance. Special foods, artistic expressions, music, and rituals are often associated with celebrations.

**Friendship circles.** Involvement in a network of close friends and acquaintances.

**Civic engagement.** Community life; participation in political, social, or community decision-making; devoting self to activities that improve the lives of others or increase community well-being.

Source: California Department of Education (2016, 31–32)



## **Make Your Cultural Assumptions Visible**

Source: Adapted from Hammond (2015, 57)

Choose a few of the questions below to reflect upon by yourself. Then, take turns sharing your answers with a partner. After your conversation, ask yourself: “Did I make any discoveries about myself? Did I learn something I didn’t know previously about my partner?”

### **Questions to Surface Your Cultural Assumptions**

- How did your family identify ethnically or racially?
- Where did you live—urban, suburban, or rural community?
- What is the story of your family in America? Has your family been here for generations, a few decades, or just a few years?
- How would you describe your family’s economic status—middle class, upper class, working class, or low income? What did that mean in terms of quality of life?
- Were you the first in your family to attend college? If not, who did—your parents, grandparents, or great-grandparents?
- What family folklore or stories did you regularly hear growing up? What messages did they communicate about core values?
- What are some of your family traditions—holidays, foods, or rituals?
- Who were the heroes celebrated in your family and/or community? Why? Who were the antiheroes? Who were the “bad guys”?
- Review primary messages from your upbringing: What did your parents, neighbors, and other authority figures tell you “respect” looked like? “Disrespect”?
- How were you trained to respond to different emotional displays—crying, anger, happiness?
- What physical, social, or cultural attributes were praised in your community? Which ones were you taught to avoid?
- How were you expected to interact with authority figures? Was authority of teachers and other elders assumed or did it have to be earned?

- As a child, did you call adults by their first name?
- What got you shunned or shamed in your family?
- What earned you praise as a child?
- Were you allowed to question, or talk back to, adults? Was it OK to call adults by their first name?
- What's your family/community's relationship with time?
- What image comes to mind when you think about a young child learning? Is the child silent and listening or active and talkative? Is the child sitting, standing, moving? What learning behaviors do you think all students should demonstrate? What do you think influenced you to associate learning with these images and beliefs?
- Can you describe a time when your family experienced a hardship or struggle and persevered?

## *Cultural Capital*

**Cultural capital** refers to knowledge, skills, behaviors, and attitudes that people acquire as they are part of their different cultural communities. Six forms of cultural capital, described by Yosso as “community cultural wealth,” reflect some of the many talents, strengths, and experiences that People of Color bring into educational environments (2005). Understanding the different forms of cultural capital that Boys of Color bring into your classroom will help you use a strength-based approach in your interactions with them:

- **Aspirational capital** is the “hopes and dreams” children and families have despite their experiences of persistent education inequities.
- **Linguistic capital** refers to the various language and communication skills (including storytelling) children bring with them, including students who are learning to speak more than one language or more than one variety of English.
- **Familial capital** refers to the social networks of children and their families within their extended families and across their communities.
- **Social capital** represents the valuable resources generated by the social connections and networks that children and their families have access to.
- **Navigational capital** refers to children's skills and abilities to navigate “social institutions,” including educational spaces and their ability to cope when they experience unsupportive or hostile environments.



- **Resistance capital** refers to the knowledge and skills developed by communities of color in their ongoing work to fight for equal rights and freedom. It is seen among children, parents, families, and within and across communities.







## Stop and Reflect

**Think about how you are supporting Boys of Color and their families to share their different forms of cultural capital in your classroom or program.**

**Aspirational capital:** The “hopes and dreams” children have. Questions to consider:

- How am I supporting young Boys of Color in my classroom feel a sense of hope and dream about their education and future?
- What assumptions do I have about their dreams and aspirations?

**Linguistic capital:** The various language and communication skills children bring with them. Consider:

- How am I supporting the language and communication strengths of my Boys of Color?

**Familial capital:** The extended family and community social networks children have. Questions to consider:

- How am I recognizing and supporting my Boys of Color to draw on the wisdom, values, and stories from their families and home communities?
- How can I create an environment that honors and invites families to participate and engage as partners in their child’s education?

**Social capital:** The valued resources that are generated by the social connections and networks that children and families have access to. Questions to consider:

- How can I support Boys of Color to develop relationships with peers and others who can provide emotional and other forms of support to ensure their educational success?
- How can I engage with individuals and community-based organizations to provide supports and resources to the Boys of Color in my classroom?

**Navigational capital:** Children’s skills and abilities to navigate “social institutions,” including educational spaces. Questions to consider are:

- How can I help Boys of Color navigate this school or program?

- In what ways is my classroom and/or this school or program unsupportive or hostile to Boys of Color? How are Boys of Color coping despite these conditions?

**Resistance capital:** The knowledge and skills communities of color have developed in their ongoing work to fight for equal rights and freedom. Questions to consider are:

- How am I supporting Boys of Color to bridge the two environments between their home or community and my classroom?
- What opportunities am I providing Boys of Color in my classroom to learn the skills they will need to be full participants in a diverse and democratic society (e.g., making choices, sharing their perspectives, considering different points of view, etc.)?

### **What forms of capital do you see Banh displaying in the following vignette?**

Banh sensed that his teacher, Ms. Tamara, did not really like him. Banh said, “She is mad at me but I will be good today.” Banh really wants Ms. Tamara to like him and is trying to figure out how to get her attention in all sorts of ways.

Banh, a four-year-old Vietnamese boy, thrives as an independent learner and seems empowered to figure things out on his own. Many days Banh is content to build somewhat complex structures in the loose parts/creative area in his small child care program. One day during small group time, Banh looked around and waited for his turn when Ms. Tamara would write down words about his drawing. He sat confused because he did not know a lot of English but her words were not adequately describing the pictures, letters, shapes, and colors he crafted into his drawing.

Ms. Tamara’s face, with her big eyes and frown, let him know that she could not understand him. She looked away and kept writing on the paper that included his name. “That is not what my picture says,” Banh said repeatedly in Vietnamese, his native language. Banh tried a few times to help his mom communicate with the teacher that he loves blocks and that he was trying to be a “good boy,” but Ms. Tamara and his mom merely exchanged a few hellos and Ms. Tamara gave his mom the work in Banh’s cubby.



## Promising Practices

**Identify your emotional triggers.** It is essential that teachers learn to identify their emotional triggers—those things that push their emotional buttons and result in strong emotional reactions that can frighten and harm children in their care. Ideally, you want to identify the specific behaviors or environmental conditions that cause strong emotional responses in you. Once you have discovered them, you will be better equipped to learn to use strategies to help you effectively manage your emotions (see [appendix J](#): A Tool to Help You Identify Your Personal Triggers That Influence Your Teaching Practice).

Identifying emotional triggers can help teachers build self-awareness of the specific behaviors that evoke strong emotional reactions in them and learn why this is the case.



## Research

### Vulnerable Decision Points

When teachers lack knowledge and skills about how best to manage student behavior, the effects of implicit and explicit racial bias may be especially pronounced, especially when they are at **vulnerable decision points** as when they are particularly stressed or tired. Research shows that racial biases play a more significant role in actions that take place under pressure or uncertainty about how best to respond.

Teachers' beliefs about **why** problem behavior occurs relate to how they respond to it, and many teachers locate the source of problem behavior within the child. Because of implicit and explicit racial biases, this is especially true if the child is from a historically stigmatized racial group. Viewing the source of the problem as internal to the child obstructs teachers from examining how their actions can contribute to problems. (Isapa-Landa 2018, 386)



## **Deep Breathing to De-escalate a Triggering Response**

**Ten seconds of deep breathing will allow your brain to calm down enough to allow you to take a more responsive, and nonreactive, approach in your interactions with children.** After taking some deep breaths, teachers are better equipped to ask themselves, “What is this child communicating to me about how they feel and what they need? How can I help them feel visible, listened to, safe, and cared for?”

Creating a pause through breathing and self-awareness, teachers can take a moment to imagine the situation through the child’s perspective and, in doing so, build empathy for that child. This can be a powerful way of interrupting the reactivity and biases that prevent teachers from building trusting, caring, and responsive relationships with the Boys of Color in their care.

## **Mindful Reflection: A Tool Teachers Can Use to Identify and Interrupt their Reactivity Rooted in Implicit Bias**

Barbara Dray and Debora Wisneski developed a “**mindful reflection**” tool that guides teachers to look inward and engage in deep reflection in order to identify their personal assumptions, biases, and deficit views, replacing them with practices that are more responsive and equitable (2011). The motivation for this process is to support teachers to strengthen their sensitivity in working with a diverse student population, especially with children and families whose backgrounds are unfamiliar to the teacher (Harry and Klingner 2006).

Dray and Wisneski draw on the concept of **mindfulness**—the ability to be conscious about things we typically do automatically or unconsciously including our communication with others—as a process that can support teachers to interrupt their deficit-based beliefs, behaviors, and inequitable practices (2011, 30). Mindful reflection as a process supports teachers to move away from reactivity and to identify the attributions—or meanings they are automatically associating with the behavior of others (implicit biases). The authors explain the goal of mindful reflection is to move away from “automatic-pilot or mindless responses that are based on a person’s own cultural frames of reference. Automatic pilot is the process in which a person is not conscious or aware of [their] responses to others” (Dray and Wisneski 2011, 30). One way that teachers can learn to shift away from reactive—automatic pilot—thinking and behavior is to develop awareness about the attributions they ascribe to others.

**How does mindful reflection work?** Dray and Wisneski describe a process with six steps that teachers can use learn about their assumptions, beliefs, biases, and behaviors, and to use this information to interrupt inequitable teaching practices and become more attuned and responsive to the diverse children in their programs (see table 5: Using Mindful Reflection to Address Implicit Racial Bias). The tool that follows will ask you to think of a child whose behavior is problematic for you in some way. This tool is designed to crack the surface of your underlying assumptions, attributions, and value judgments—factors that are influencing how you interact with and respond to children in your care. But it is also designed so that you can come back and repeat this exercise at any point along your learning journey, and so readers who come in with greater experience addressing racism and using culturally responsive practices can still continually challenge themselves to uncover and unlearn their biases and harmful assumptions.



**Table 5: Using Mindful Reflection to Address Implicit Racial Bias**

Source: Adapted from Dray and Wisneski (2011) and Hammond (2015)

Step	Mindful Reflection
<b>Step 1</b>	<p><b>Identify the attributions you have about the child.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Think about a Boy of Color in your classroom whose behavior is problematic for you in some way. Think about a specific interaction you had with this child. Ask yourself the following questions:</li><li>▪ Have I already interpreted the child's behavior?</li><li>▪ Am I making assumptions about why this child behaves the way they do?</li><li>▪ Have I already passed judgment on whether the behavior was good or bad? Stop and describe what they said or did that led you to this judgment.</li><li>▪ What specifically leads you to believe that the behavior was wrong or desirable?</li><li>▪ What about this child is leading to your interpretation?</li></ul>



Step	Mindful Reflection
Step 2	<p><b>Write out and reflect on your feelings and thoughts when you work with this child. Consider the potential for misinterpretations resulting from deficit thinking, prejudice, and overgeneralizations.</b></p> <p>Now, take time to write freely and describe what you can recall about the specific interaction with this child. What happened? What was the child doing or saying? How did you respond? Read through your written reflection and ask yourself:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ What attributes am I assigning to this child?</li> <li>▪ How does this child make me feel?</li> <li>▪ What are my worries or fears? How might they impact my ability to support this child?</li> <li>▪ What are my assumptions—why do I find the child’s behavior problematic?</li> </ul> <p>Answering these questions will help you acknowledge whether you are using deficit thinking in the attributions you are associating with the child. The only way you will be able to discover any biases you have and use this knowledge to help you improve your practice is if you are willing to be honest. What you discover about yourself may be difficult and lead you to experience some uncomfortable feelings. This is normal and a necessary part of transformative learning for teachers committed to becoming more equitable in their teaching practice.</p> <p>It is important that you not turn away from the process when you feel discomfort. If you do, take a break. Engage in self-care that is calming for you until you can resume the process.</p>

Step	Mindful Reflection
<b>Step 3</b>	<p><b>Consider alternative explanations by reviewing your documentation and reflections.</b></p> <p>The next part of the process supports you to more deeply examine the ways in which you are perceiving Boys of Color and communicating with them, and then to rethink your initial interpretations. To do this, review your answers to the questions in Step 2 describing your interaction with the child. Reflect on the reasons this child may be doing what you observe them doing in your classroom. Consider how this child's behavior and choices are similar to or different from other children's behavior and choices in your classroom. Ask yourself:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ What are my expectations for the situation?</li> <li>▪ How is this child meeting or not meeting my expectations?</li> <li>▪ In what ways is this child's behavior interfering with learning?</li> </ul>

Step	Mindful Reflection
<b>Step 4</b>	<p><b>Check your assumptions.</b></p> <p>Share your reflections with a colleague, parents, or community members. For example, you might identify a colleague or friend you can share your reflections with. Invite them to ask you probing questions and provide their honest reactions to your ideas and share their own perspectives. You might also consider identifying someone with expertise in race equity to share your reflections with. Perhaps a professional who provides training or coaching on diversity, and ideally race and ethnicity, or a colleague or adults from the local community who share the same race and ethnicity as the young Boys of Color in your classroom.</p> <p>Meet with parents to learn more about their expectations and observed behaviors in the home. It is important to learn from the child's parents and family members about how they perceive their child's behavior and norms they hold and value in their family. After listening and learning from these conversations, teachers can ask themselves:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ What are some alternative explanations or interpretations of the child's behavior that I had not considered previously?</li> <li>▪ Are there any external or personal factors that could be influencing the child's behavior?</li> <li>▪ How does the child's family respond to and interact with their child when they display this behavior with them?</li> <li>▪ Am I operating from a different set of values or norms?</li> <li>▪ How can I reach a middle ground?</li> </ul>

Step	Mindful Reflection
<b>Step 5</b>	<p><b>Make a plan.</b></p> <p>Ask yourself the following questions:</p> <p>How can I change or respond differently to this child?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ What can I do to reduce my own fears and anxieties prior to engaging with a child who makes me feel this way? If I am not able to prepare in advance, what can I do now to be attuned and responsive to this boy so he feels safe, acknowledged, and supported in my care?</li> <li>▪ What additional resources do I need to implement this change?</li> <li>▪ What is one thing I can do daily to affirm this boy?</li> <li>▪ What is one thing I can commit to <i>not</i> doing anymore because it was a reaction that served to make me more comfortable, rather than to support this child?</li> </ul> <p>After you consider alternative explanations and develop a different interpretation of a situation, you will be able to change your behavior. You should develop a plan for making a change (e.g., a change in the way you communicate with this child, a change in your classroom environment, etc.) and commit to trying it out. Make a change and observe what happens as a result. Reflect on your reactions and feelings, as well as the child's response.</p>

Step	Mindful Reflection
Step 6	<p><b>Continuously revisit this process to reassess your attributions and your progress in being responsive to the child.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Notice when you are overgeneralizing, attributing behavior within a deficit perspective, or behaving in prejudiced ways toward certain children, especially Boys of Color.</li> <li>▪ Remember that this process is a continuous one, so revisit the steps periodically to continue your growth and understanding of children.</li> </ul> <p>Learning to identify the attributions you associate with others, especially young Boys of Color, is long-term work. You will need to continuously reflect on your relationships with children and honestly assess whether you are creating attuned, supportive, and caring relationships with every child. All teachers need to think about mindful reflection as a process that is ongoing. Remain committed to revisiting each step as needed. This will allow you to continue strengthening your ability to support all Boys of Color to be successful in your classroom.</p>

**Practice emotional self-management.** Once teachers develop self-awareness using reflective practices including tools like those described above, they are engaging in the transformative journey of learning to become a more equitable teacher for the children in their classrooms. Going through these processes to build self-awareness takes courage and commitment. As this chapter highlights, implicit biases cannot be changed with one-day trainings or by deciding “not to be biased.” It takes a long time to learn to stop the automatic, spontaneous associations our brains make. Early educators must be committed to self-work that includes building self-awareness of their own unconscious biases and then committing to **practice, practice, practice** their emotional self-management so they can reduce the impact of their biases in their work with children and families. This is especially important for all of the Boys of Color who need adults who understand the urgency and responsibility they have to maintain an unwavering persistence in this hard and essential work.

**For more resources on reducing implicit bias, see:**

- The Kirwan Institute [Implicit Bias Module Series](#)
- The [CRT Learning Community Culturally Responsive Teaching page](#)
- *Culturally Responsive Teaching and the Brain: Promoting Authentic Engagement and Rigor Among Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Students*, by Zaretta Hammond

## *Chapter One: Takeaways*

**We all have implicit biases.** These attitudes and perceptions are not based in objective observable behavior, but instead, on racial stereotypes and long histories of structural racism.

**People of Color face significant structural barriers based in structural racism** in all of the major structures of our society including but not limited to housing, healthcare, employment, education, and within the criminal justice system.

**Being knowledgeable about systemic racism does not mean that we define children's and families' identities through deficit**, nor that we assume that all children with a certain race or ethnicity experience similar hardships.

**Implicit bias is the root cause of the disproportional use of expulsion and suspension for Boys of Color.** Race and gender both play a role in the way early educators perceive children's behavior, with Boys of Color unfairly seen as older, less innocent, and intentionally trying to be difficult, even when there is no observable behavior to justify these conclusions.

**Frequent experiences of bias and racism experienced by young Boys of Color can be traumatic.** Experiences of trauma, especially at a young age, can disrupt brain development and interfere with every aspect of development and learning for young Boys of Color. A consistent, caring, and responsive adult who can buffer their stress and reassure them that they are loved unconditionally is the most important protective factor.

**Building self-awareness is the first step for teachers in learning to address implicit bias.**

Research on how to best interrupt implicit bias is still being conducted. What is known so far is that **implicit biases are best reduced through interventions designed to either address biases directly or to increase teachers' empathy for children.** Some ways to do so include:



- Individuating (getting to know children better as individuals);
- Perspective-taking and building empathy (trying to put yourself in the child's shoes and imagining an experience from their perspective); and
- Intentionally becoming aware of our unconscious biases and interrupting our mind's automatic association with stereotypes through self-reflection, making our cultural assumptions visible, and raising awareness of our emotional triggers.

This chapter introduced several strategies teachers can use to address their implicit bias and strengthen their ability to be responsive and attuned to young Boys of Color:

- Reflect upon and discuss the various reflection questions offered throughout the book
- Identify the social categories of identity by identifying what you would put on your personal set of "Cultural Glasses" and making your cultural assumptions visible by using Hammond's questions to guide your reflection and/or dialogue with others (2015)
- Learn to identify your emotional triggers
- Use Six Sources of Cultural Capital to identify the various strengths and funds of knowledge Boys of Color and their families bring into your classroom (Yosso 2005)
- Use mindful reflection to surface and interrupt implicit racial bias



"What goes into young boys ultimately determines what comes out. With a good foundation and education Boys of Color can become very successful."

—Amin'Zaid Robinson, nineteen years old



## Teachers/Providers

*Shift Your Lens.*

- What do I **think** about the cycle of oppression? What **feelings** come up for me when I think about oppression? What deep-seated **beliefs** are leading me to feel this way?
- What do I **think** about the concept of privilege? What **feelings** come up for me when I think about privilege? What deep-seated **beliefs** are leading me to feel this way?

*Be Brave: Take Actions for Equity!*

- Try out the tool for mindful reflection to increase awareness of your biases and how they impact your interactions with a Boy of Color in your class.



## Administrators/Program Leaders

*Shift your lens.*

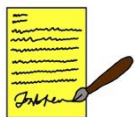
- What do I **think** about the definition of race? What **feelings** come up for me when I think about race? What deep-seated **beliefs** are leading me to feel this way?
- What do I **think** about using the Four Agreements\* as norms for interaction and dialogue when I facilitate Courageous Conversations with my staff? What **feelings** come up for me when I think about the Four Agreements? What deep-seated **beliefs** are leading me to feel this way? What would I add or change about the Four Agreements and why?

\* Reminder: The Four Agreements are defined in the [Introduction](#) and listed in [appendix K](#).

*Be brave: Take Actions for Equity!*

- Create space and time to introduce and use mindful reflection with the teachers in your program.

- After reading the summary of Gilliam’s study on implicit bias in this chapter, identify one implication for your program and follow through with an action step (e.g., open a dialogue with your staff about the findings of the study and talk about how, as a program, you can begin to build awareness of the way young Boys of Color are being treated in the program).



## Policy

### *Invest in Change: Policy Implications*

#### **District Superintendents and School Boards**

- Use political positioning to create anti-racist campaigns that start from the top down. The campaign can include ideas or goals to keep anti-racist practices and policies visible in all classrooms, offices, and meetings, and with families (i.e., the United Against Hate campaign that many cities adopted).

### *Make It Real: Implementation Activities*

See appendices K–O for these activities.

- [Four Agreements of Courageous Conversation](#)
- [Reflecting on “The Trouble with Black Boys” Quote](#)
- [Characteristics of White Supremacy Culture and Antidotes](#)
- [Becoming Aware of Our Implicit and Unconscious Biases](#)
- [Chapter One Courageous Conversation Compass Activity](#)

# CHAPTER TWO

FOUNDATIONS FOR  
AN EQUITABLE AND  
RESPONSIVE EARLY  
EDUCATION FOR  
BOYS OF COLOR



## VIGNETTE

"I have never encountered any children in any group who are not geniuses. There is no mystery on how to teach them. The first thing you do is treat them like human beings and the second thing you do is love them."

—Dr. Asa G. Hilliard III

It is summertime and Anton is getting ready for kindergarten. "I can read. I can count. I know how to be nice," Anton always says to his mother as she gets ready to walk out of the house—an environment that Anton refers to as his "other house" because he does not call his family child care a "school." Anton just knows his teacher looks like him, eats many of the same foods as him, and shares in the same ceremonies that he and his family do to celebrate, appreciate, and respect their Native American culture. As he draws an oval shape on paper, he repeats over and over again that he is drawing the big eye of the eagle and that he believes he will eventually become a big eagle one day. "I am going to go up in the sky and fly higher than any bird. I am!" His provider, Winnie, looks at him and by listening to him without comment, nonverbally signals that she agrees. She admits that Anton probably believes he will fly like an eagle because she has always allowed him to read about, sing about, and explore birds—eagles in particular—because this is what he likes to learn about. Anton continues drawing his ovals with a huge smile on his face.

—Modoc Tribal Family Child Care Program

As the first quote from the celebrated African-American professor Dr. Hilliard so powerfully summarizes, **love** is the core element of responsive, strength-based, equitable education practices. We see an example with Anton, a Boy of Color who feels a sense of love in his family child care program. He feels welcome and safe. He sees himself and his life experiences and cultural practices reflected in his child care provider and throughout his family child care environment. Winnie, his care teacher, sees his strengths and believes in his inherent goodness and genius. She communicates her confidence that his hopes and dreams—in this instance, to become a "big eagle who goes up in the sky and flies higher than any bird"—can be achieved. Through songs, books, and verbal and nonverbal communication, she supports his interests and continually sends messages that reinforce to Anton that what he thinks and feels matters to her. Anton is visible, listened to, and authentically cared for by Winnie, and his family child care feels to him like an extension of his family home and community.



Anton's experience, a responsive early education environment with love at the center, is what every Boy of Color deserves. Given the diversity of Boys of Color, what it means to develop relationships with love at the center will differ depending on the individual child and the diverse cultural context of his family and community. Despite this diversity, there are several foundations that all early childhood teachers can implement in their classrooms to create responsive learning environments for Boys of Color with love at the center. In this chapter we:

- Define equitable early childhood environments where all children, including Boys of Color, can thrive
- Describe the different aspects involved in working to improve racial equity in early childhood programs and schools
- Introduce love as a critical foundation for responsive and equitable early education for Boys of Color
- Explain the need to change the conversation about Boys of Color and "challenging behaviors"
- Describe what it means to "love" our early childhood teachers and why this matters





## *What Is an Equity Approach in Early Childhood Education?*

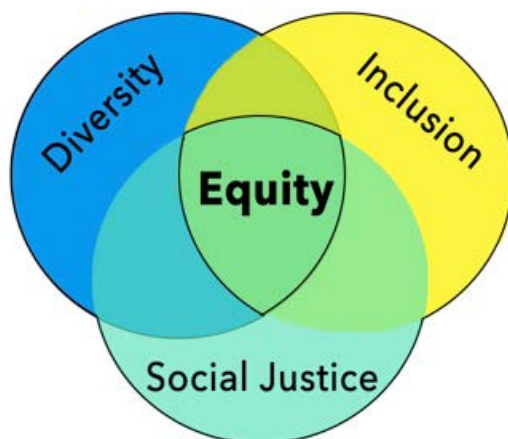
**All Boys of Color deserve an equitable education system.** Equitable early childhood education builds on our field's traditional emphasis on **diversity** (e.g., commitments to strengthen culturally and linguistically responsive practice) and **inclusion** (e.g., striving for full participation and belonging for all children) to explicitly address power differences and oppression (a **social justice** approach). Equity describes something deeper and more complex than the traditional focus on diversity and inclusion in our field. Equity requires an active and intentional focus on **disrupting** inequitable policies, practices, distribution of resources, and disproportionate outcomes for children, families, communities, and the workforce serving them.



### **Key Idea**

**Equity = Diversity + Inclusion + Social Justice**

## **Diversity, Inclusion, Social Justice & Equity: *How are they Related?***



**When we talk about creating equitable early childhood classrooms, schools, and systems for Boys of Color, this begins with a value for diversity and inclusion and then expands to include a focus on power and oppression.**

**Diversity:** A diversity approach to early childhood emphasizes developmentally, culturally, and linguistically responsive practice; being responsive to diverse ways of knowing, communicating, and being in relationship together; and a respect for diverse cultural beliefs and values and community contexts.

**Inclusion:** Inclusion encompasses diversity and extends beyond it. Inclusive early childhood environments emphasize authentic and empowered participation for all children and families where each individual experiences a true sense of belonging within the classroom and program or school. This requires planning from the very beginning to adapt early childhood environments to be responsive to diverse children and their specific strengths, interests, vulnerabilities, and needs for support and guidance so they can learn and achieve successfully to their potential. Inclusion takes an important step toward equity.

**Social Justice:** A social justice approach adds a focus on the analysis of power, privilege, oppression, and bias—historically and in our current time at different levels: individual/interpersonal and institutional/structural. The goal of social justice education is to disrupt inequitable policies and practices and the unfair distribution of resources that have historically and presently created predictable and inequitable outcomes for marginalized individuals and groups.

**Working for an equitable educational system requires everyone to act.** Revising policies, practices, and resource distribution so individuals, groups, communities, and programs with the greatest needs and most impacted by oppression receive the highest level of support and access to resources and experiences so they have the opportunity to learn to their potential (see [appendix P](#) to see more information on the differences between a Diversity Approach and a Social Justice approach to education).

### *Creating Equitable Early Childhood Programs That Effectively Serve Young Boys of Color and Their Families*

Equity—fairness in ensuring that all children can achieve their individual full potential as engaged learners and valued members of society. Advancing equity requires considering whether differences in outcomes can be traced to discrimination against or marginalization of individuals because of their social identities. Equity is not the same as equality. Equal treatment, laid upon unequal starting points, is inequitable. Ultimately, equity is an essential component of equality. Attempting to achieve equality of opportunity, however, without consideration of historic and present inequities is ineffective, unjust, and unfair. (NAEYC 2018, 4)

Creating equitable early learning environments where Boys of Color receive the support and guidance they need to thrive requires change in our current policies and practices. Next, we describe the different elements that are involved in working towards more equitable early childhood classrooms and programs for our youngest Boys of Color. It is only when educators understand these different elements of equity and begin to work on incorporating them into their practice that we will see progress in disrupting the disproportionate negative outcomes experienced by young Boys of Color.



### Stop and Reflect

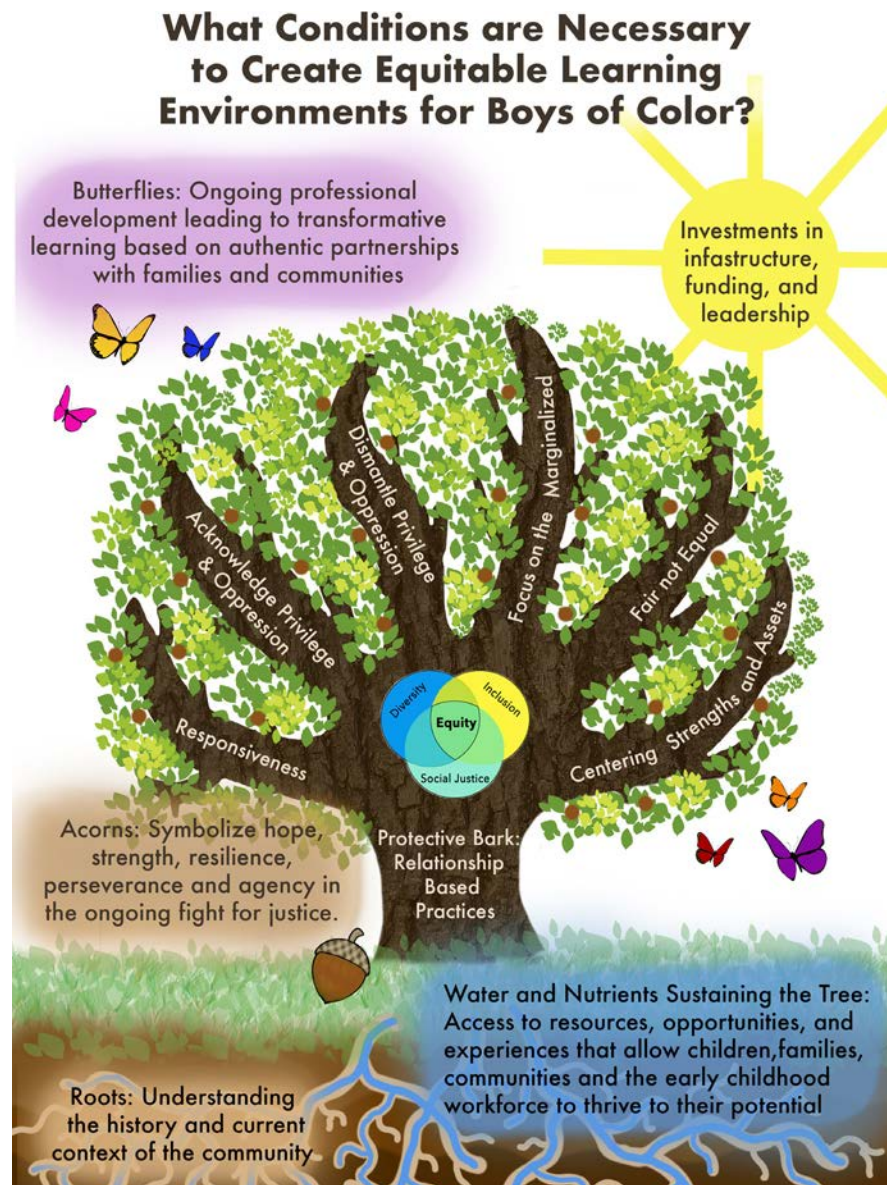
- When you hear the word “equity,” what does it mean to you?



## The Symbolic Oak Tree

We use an oak tree to represent the different elements that are involved in working towards more equitable early childhood classrooms and programs for our youngest Boys of Color (Nicholson et al. 2020). Oak trees are beloved in California and throughout the world, and their symbolism is powerful. Oak trees, oak leaves, and acorns symbolize humble beginnings, patience, faith, strength, power, morale (confidence and enthusiasm of an individual/group), endurance, resistance, longevity, and knowledge. Figure 7 shows what is required to create equitable early learning environments that disrupt disproportionate outcomes and support the success of all Boys of Color.

*Figure 7: Creating Equitable Early Learning Environments for Boys of Color*



## **What conditions are necessary to create equitable learning environments for Boys of Color?**

- The oak tree's trunk is where diversity, inclusion, and social justice intersect to form equity.
- The oak tree branches symbolize:
  - Responsiveness
  - Acknowledge privilege and oppression
  - Dismantle privilege and oppression
  - Focus on the marginalized
  - Fair not equal
  - Centering strengths and assets
- The protective bark symbolizes relationship-based practices.
- Acorns symbolize hope, strength, resilience, perseverance, and agency in the ongoing fight for justice.
- Roots symbolize understanding the history and current context of the community.
- Water and nutrients sustaining the tree symbolize access to resources, opportunities, and experiences that allow children, families, communities, and the early childhood workforce to thrive to their potential.
- The sun symbolizes investments in infrastructure, funding, and leadership.
- Butterflies symbolize ongoing professional development, leading to transformative learning based on authentic partnerships with families and communities.

The core foundation of this work is to strive for equitable opportunities and outcomes for Boys of Color in early childhood classrooms and programs (represented in the graphic as the trunk of the tree). Mutually respectful, trusting, and responsive relationships are the foundation of equitable classrooms and programs for Boys of Color (the bark).

## Building Strong, Positive Relationships

To build strong and positive relationships with Boys of Color and their families, teachers and program leaders develop specific skills and dispositions in their practice including:

- strengthening their self-awareness;
- listening attentively and practicing humility;
- using inquiry and reflection to continuously improve their practice;
- tuning in to their bodies (knowing their body's stress responses) and using methods to remain self-regulated (e.g., breathing);
- showing curiosity about, seeking to understand, and building empathy for Boys of Color; and
- collaborating with others (colleagues, cross-disciplinary staff) and creating partnerships with families and community agencies so they can learn about the boys as individuals and have adequate resources, support, and opportunities to engage them as learners.

**With mutually respectful, trusting, and attuned relationships as a foundation, creating equitable early childhood classrooms and programs for Boys of Color also requires:**

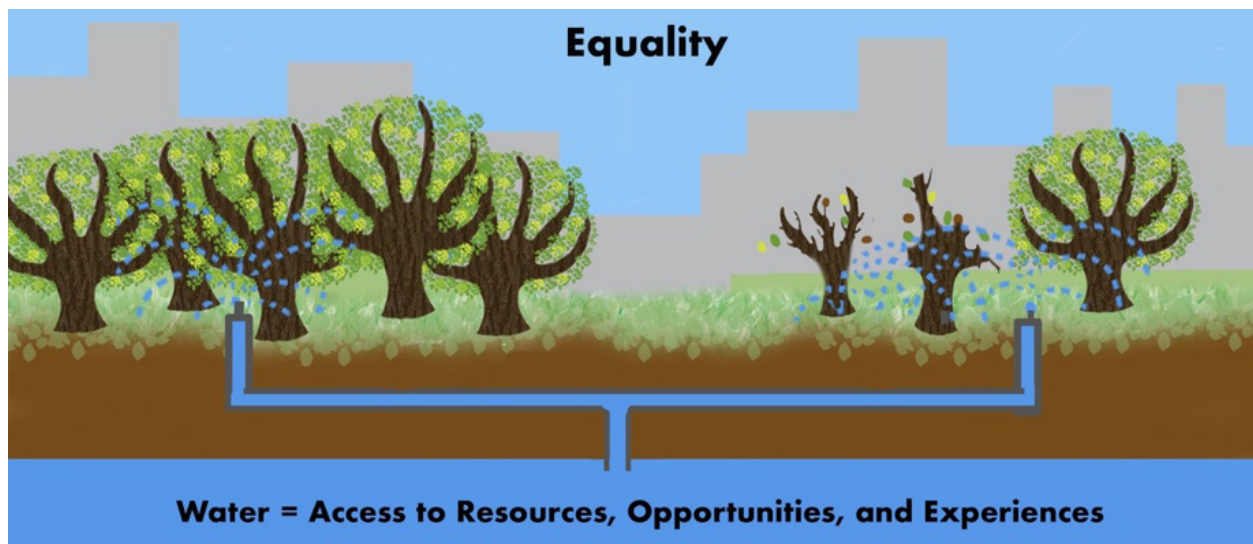
- **Responsiveness to the individual, cultural, and family backgrounds for Boys of Color.** Specifically, curriculum, instruction, arrangement of the environment, assessment, and communication is planned and implemented to be culturally, linguistically, and contextually responsive to Boys of Color and their backgrounds. Their specific gifts, talents, and interests are acknowledged, cultivated, and utilized in the classroom and program. Their identities and cultural ways of being are supported to create environments where they can experience a sense of belonging and affirmation.
- **Acknowledging systems of privilege and oppression that negatively impact the educational opportunities and experiences of Boys of Color.** Honestly acknowledging and naming historical and current systems of privilege and oppression that impact Boys of Color—their access to and experiences within—early childhood programs and systems. This means that educators understand and acknowledge that the playing field has been and remains unequal for Boys of Color and that policies and practices in early childhood programs and at larger structural levels create barriers that prevent them from having equal opportunities and positive educational experiences.



- **Dismantling systems of privilege and oppression that negatively impact the educational opportunities and experiences of Boys of Color.** Actively engaging in changing systems that have historically discriminated and presently discriminate against Boys of Color and prevent them from learning and achieving to their potential. Examples include eliminating inequitable policies and practices, removing barriers that inhibit Boys of Color from learning and making progress in classrooms and schools, disrupting deficit thinking and deficit narratives about Boys of Color and their families, shifting the allocation of funding and other resources to address the needs of Boys of Color, and improving collaboration between teachers, leaders, families, and community agencies.
- **Intentionally focusing on marginalized voices.** Recognizing the uneven playing field, equity shines a light on traditionally marginalized individuals and groups. This means that educators take time to think about Boys of Color as individuals and as a historically marginalized group in order to consider what needs to change so they have genuine opportunities for their voices, perspectives, and wishes to be included in educational decisions that significantly impact them (e.g., the curriculum, policies, and practices at the classroom and program level; embracing parent or family leadership; hiring staff that reflect the community).
- **Understanding that “fair” is not the same as “equal” because of historical oppression.** Equitable education requires that resources and support are differentiated because of historical inequities. That is, Boys of Color will receive a greater level of support and more resources than other children so they have the opportunity to develop, learn, and achieve their potential in a system that has historically discriminated against them. Although the allocation of resources and support is adjusted, expectations are not—teachers having similarly high expectations for the learning and achievement of all children, including Boys of Color, is central to an equitable early learning program.

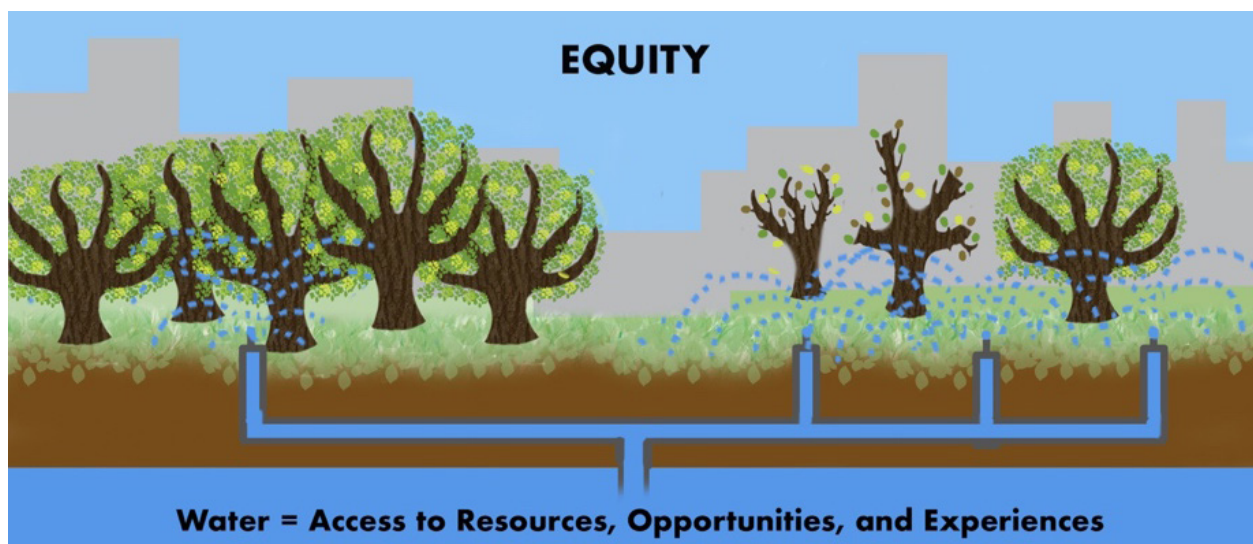
## Equality versus Equity

**Equality:** Everyone is treated the same and receives the same allocation of resources and support despite the diversity of needs.



In this example, the two parks receive the same amount of water even though the needs and conditions are different.

**Equity:** The allocation of resources and support are different for different individuals or groups and based on their level of need and the historical differences in what they have had access to.



In this example, the two parks receive a different amount of water because the needs and conditions are not the same.

**Think about how this applies to education if water symbolizes access to resources, opportunities, and experiences for young Boys of Color.** What is fair? What will change the current conditions so all Boys of Color can learn and achieve to their potential?

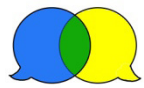
- **Centering on strengths and assets.** Deficit thinking (words or terms used, stories told, beliefs held) about Boys of Color and their families (based on misinformation, partial information, and/or misrepresentation) is disrupted and shut down. Intentionally reframes the focus to center attention on the strengths, creativity, sources of coping and resilience, brilliant capacities, and potential of Boys of Color. Uses a strength-based appreciative approach in communication with families about their children. Invites counter-stories—stories from Boys of Color, their families, and others in their community who know them and love them—to make visible information and perspectives that have traditionally been missing, invisible, and/or inaccurate in the stories told about them. Acknowledges educational progress and accomplishments for Boys of Color and celebrates them publicly.
- **Investing in infrastructure, funding for program sustainability, and leadership.** Creating equitable early childhood classrooms and programs requires ongoing investments in infrastructure (e.g., safe and early childhood-friendly facilities, access to community resources like mental health consultation), sustainable funding sources (whether parent/family fees or state and federal funding streams), and adequate leadership/administration to manage the programs and support the hiring and development of staff (represented as the Sun in the oak tree metaphor).
- **Investment in professional learning opportunities to support continuous improvement for teachers, program leaders, and other staff.** Creating equitable early childhood programs requires an ongoing investment and commitment to professional learning that supports continuous improvement and transformative learning opportunities (e.g., training, technical assistance, coaching, communities of practice, higher education coursework, etc.). In the oak tree metaphor, this element is represented by the butterflies. The butterfly wings reflect different colors and patterns to represent the diversity of learners—each with their own backgrounds, interests, strengths, learning edges, and experiences with privilege and oppression—that impacts their lifelong learning journey by improving educators' ability to teach and care for Boys of Color in more equitable ways. The butterfly also represents the metamorphosis that happens when educators learn about race, racism, and oppression, and become more consciously aware of their beliefs and behaviors that harm Boys of Color and take actions to interrupt their unconscious biases.

- **Understanding the history and current context of the community.** Creating equitable early childhood classrooms and programs also requires that teachers and program leaders learn about the communities where Boys of Color and their families are living. Learning about sources of strength, pride, and resilience within the community, as well as the vulnerabilities, challenges, and sources of trauma and oppression (historical and current) is invaluable information for teachers and program leaders to have as larger context for understanding the environments where Boys of Color spend time when not in the early childhood program. It is important for teachers and program leaders to be aware that some of the children in their care—including Boys of Color—may be experiencing homelessness or for other reasons (foster care, parental divorce, etc.) may live in more than one community or move frequently. This information will strengthen educators' ability to teach and care for Boys of Color and their families in culturally responsive and trauma-sensitive ways (represented by the roots in the oak tree metaphor).
- **Individual and collective hope.** Creating equitable early childhood classrooms and programs must be driven by an individual and collective sense of hope that conditions for Boys of Color can and *will* be changed for the better over time. Along with hope, the characteristics of strength, resilience, perseverance, and determination/agency are to disrupt educational inequity and to create opportunities for all Boys of Color to have the early childhood experiences they deserve. We use acorns to represent potential for change, new growth, and imagining possibilities for the future for our youngest Boys of Color—*mighty oaks from little acorns grow*. Looking at a small acorn, it can be hard to imagine how it could grow into a large and stable oak tree—equitable early childhood education for all children including Boys of Color—that could live for hundreds of years. An acorn's growth is impacted by the conditions of the soil and other factors in its environment. An acorn needs nutrient-rich soil, sunlight, and rainfall to thrive and grow a taproot that pushes deep into the ground to secure it for sustained growth. Seedling trees are exposed to many dangers, such as fires, insects, wildlife, and humans. Despite the different factors that threaten their viability and life, many saplings live on and grow into small oak trees within five years that flower and produce their own acorns, completing and regenerating a cycle of growth and transformation,<sup>21</sup> a process that reinforces and strengthens our individual and collective hope that we can work together to disrupt the educational inequities holding back our brilliant Boys of Color.

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21 Five years in this metaphor reflects the time period often associated with early childhood (birth–five years) and, as described below, the length of time that research suggests is needed for organizational change to take place (i.e., the time needed for initiatives and/or reform efforts to become successfully infused throughout a school, program, agency, or institution).





## Talk It Through

With one or more partners, consider the different elements presented in figure 9 involved in working towards more equitable early childhood classrooms and programs for our youngest Boys of Color.

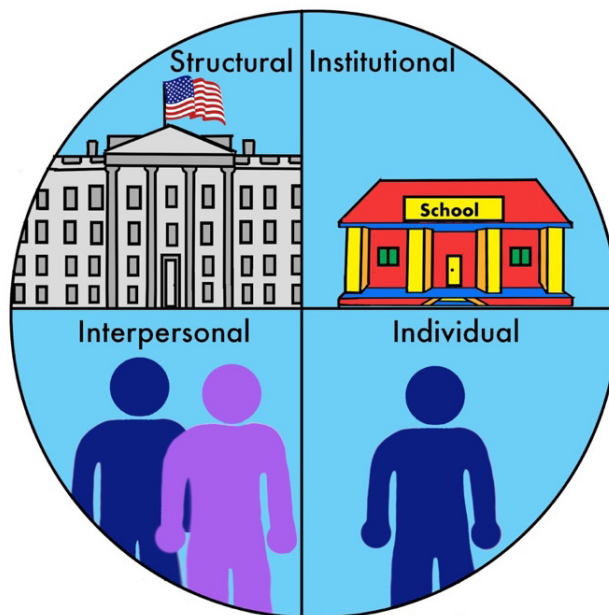
- Share with one another how this picture and the different elements compare to your understanding of equity. Is there anything you would change or add to this picture?
- What are you already doing that is focused on equity? Specifically, what are you doing now in your classroom or program that is part of this description of an equitable early learning environment?





## Key Idea

Figure 8. Working for Race Equity at Different Levels



To improve outcomes for Boys of Color, changes need to be made at many levels in society (see Figure 8). **Most people reading this book will be focused on making changes at the micro level—at individual and interpersonal levels.** Creating equitable educational systems for Boys of Color will also require changes at institutional and structural levels. Having this understanding reinforces the hard work involved, the need for everyone’s participation, and the challenging nature of addressing racism in our educational systems (Sensoy and DiAngelo 2017; Center for the Study of Social Policy 2018a).

“Racism at the personal/interpersonal level is an individual phenomenon that reflects prejudice or bias”; therefore, **working for race equity at individual and interpersonal levels is an ongoing personal process** that involves building awareness of our own beliefs, assumptions, and implicit biases, and taking individual actions to disrupt them” (Bell et al. 2016, 134–135). Examples might include:

- **Individual level:** A teacher discovering that she responds to the same behavior—crying or clinging—differently when interacting with a young White infant versus a Black infant. With greater awareness, she works to disrupt this behavior and ensure that she is responding in a caring and attuned manner



to all of the children in her care. With video of her caregiving practice, she is able to critically reflect on her progress and areas in need of improvement with the support of a coach.

- **Interpersonal level:** A White supervisor of a child care program begins to intentionally track who speaks up in staff meetings and notices that when the providers of color attempt to share their ideas, they are often interrupted or not given an opportunity to share their perspectives before the White staff members talk over them. With this awareness, the supervisor opens an honest dialogue with her staff about this pattern and reinforces her belief that all staff members should feel included and genuinely contribute to the conversations. She introduces the use of a protocol that creates a structure for all of the staff to share their ideas and contribute to the conversations and decision-making more equitably.

Racism at the institutional/structural level is reflected in the policies, laws, rules, norms, and customs embedded in organizations, agencies, and the structures of society (e.g., health care, housing, laws, educational system, etc.). Working at this level requires a **group/collective process that is ongoing and extends over generations in society**. Examples might include:

- **Institutional/program level:** Changing eligibility policies to increase access to subsidized child care and preschool programs for undocumented families of color; changing hiring practices to prioritize hiring teachers and staff who reflect the racial/ethnic diversity of the community the program serves; acknowledging and addressing the ways that program policies, procedures, staffing, and culture create barriers to parent engagement (e.g., embracing parent leadership).
- **Structural level:** Creating integrated systems of care that coordinate services for families using “no wrong door” approaches to connecting families with the comprehensive services they need for housing, child care, food, employment, etc.; revising state and federal education funding formulas that unfairly benefit wealthier (and Whiter) communities at the expense of poorer (Brown and Black) communities.

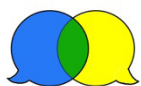
## Reflection Questions

- What makes us avoid or block conversations about race?
- What is one thing you would suggest to help someone, including yourself, enter and stay committed in a conversation about race and oppression?

## *Responsive Relationships with Love at the Center*

Love, love, love our children. Love them enough to challenge them and not expect them to conform to giving less than they are fully capable of. Love them to reward them for their accomplishments—no matter how small. Love them to ask what they feel is needed for them to accomplish their dreams (be humble and don't assume you know). Love them to call home and do home visits to express your respect for their origins and show interest in their lives. Love them to understand that our structural racist system is broken, having caused a social reality that negatively impacts families of color. Love them to know you are not the savior of their reality because assuming so is a blatant disrespect to their potential and self-worth. Love them to fight for their education—and tell them so in order for them to find an ally they can trust. Love them because you may be the only one that ever shows or tells them so. (Wood and Harris 2016, 30)

The most important foundation in responsive early education for Boys of Color is a consistent, caring, and responsive relationship with a caregiver who **attunes** to the child. Attunement is seen when an adult focuses so intently in communication with a child that the child comes to believe that what they think and feel matters; they “feel felt” by the adult (Levine and Kline 2007). Attuned communication begins in infancy (see figure 9: Serve and Return Interactions) and is characterized by positive emotional exchanges between children and adults. With an attuned relationship, trust forms and feelings of safety are increased for the child, which can positively influence their ability to engage in the learning process. The adult's interest in the child validates the child's presence and helps them to feel a sense of belonging, safety, and protection. If an adult caregiver is curious about the child's thoughts, then the child, in turn, will come to value the adult's thoughts and feelings. Through attuned relationships, early educators can learn about individual boys' strengths, interests, developmental milestones, and areas in need of support or intervention.



### **Talk It Through**

Think of a relationship when you were growing up that made you feel loved, either with a family member or, if you attended an early childhood program, with an early childhood teacher or provider. How did this caregiver show love to you? What behaviors, words, and/or attitudes do you recall?

Share your notes with a partner(s) and compare the various ways that people expressed, interpreted, and perceived love.

*Figure 9: Serve and Return Interactions*



The experience of attunement begins in infancy through what is described as a **serve and return relationship**. Serve-and-return interactions are the back-and-forth exchanges that shape neural circuits in the brain (Harvard University Center on the Developing Child 2018). For example, an adult's response with a loving look or a "*What do you need?*" gesture to a baby's cooing or vocalization supports children to learn to regulate their emotions and behaviors—children express their wants and needs through the serve and learn how their caregivers respond to them through the return. The manner in which caregivers respond to children in these serve-and-return interactions differs depending on families' and communities' diverse cultural beliefs, distinct cultural routines, and the circumstances of families' daily lives. Positive serve-and-return exchanges support young children to develop security and trust in relationships as children learn that their needs matter (Harvard University Center on the Developing Child 2018; Cozolino 2012; Siegel 2007; Siegel 2012). These emotionally attuned interactions between young children and their caregivers lead to the development of healthy and secure attachments, which in turn support healthy brain development (Schoore 2000).

See the Harvard University Center on the Developing Child [Serve and Return page](#) and "[Serve and Return Interaction Shapes Brain Circuitry](#)" video on this topic (2021).

## Attuned Interactions

**Attuned interactions are the foundation for building self-esteem and a strong sense of self for all children, including Boys of Color.** Boys of Color learn through their primary attachment relationships with their parents and other adult caregivers whether the world is a safe place where they will be protected, their needs will be taken care of, and their emotions and behaviors will be understood and supported in a responsive manner. In these early interactions, Boys of Color are beginning to construct knowledge in response to such questions as: Am I lovable? Am I safe? If I have a need, will someone notice? The way adults relate to young Boys of Color—starting in utero—profoundly impacts how they begin to understand and interpret answers to these questions and start to understand how to relate to other people and the world around them.

**Boys of Color are born ready to learn, form relationships, and solve problems.** Educators support this inborn desire to learn and explore by intentionally getting to know each individual child and being available to respond to his verbal and non-verbal cues promptly and consistently. For example, this might mean that every baby's glance, coo, or nonverbal gesture is responded to with physical assistance, a smile, physical touch, or other appropriate action to meet a baby's needs.

Brain research tells us that babies are wired as social beings and are looking for ways to connect with others. Babies and toddlers need guidance through conversation, modeling, and positive redirection to understand themselves and others. By accepting, acknowledging, and respecting the ways young Boys of Color express their feelings and emotions, they can learn to feel secure and develop positive self-identity, confidence, and self-worth.

Teachers express love to Boys of Color by tuning in to their perspectives and showing genuine interest and wonder in who they are, and excitement and awe in imagining who they can become.



### Promising Practices

**Teachers who build responsive relationships with Boys of Color based on love learn to distinguish the challenges they face as a result of structural racism** in society from overt experiences of racism to subtle, but equally harmful, microaggressions. Early frightening experiences can overwhelm Boys of Color and disrupt their brain growth and emotional development. The loving protection

of a responsive and attuned relationship with a parent or teacher significantly and effectively buffers the stress and trauma young Boys of Color experience. It also protects them from long-term harm by supporting them as they develop coping skills and resilience. Keeping love at the center of relationships with Boys of Color also means understanding the impact of stress and trauma on their developing brains and bodies. Attuning to their emotional states, verbalizations, and/or nonverbal expressions and behaviors—especially complex and puzzling behaviors—with interest, curiosity, empathy, and a desire to understand and provide support is the hallmark of a relationship with love at the center.

**Building and earning trust from Boys of Color and their families.** Children are motivated to learn, develop healthy relationships, and a strong sense of self when they can develop authentic relationships built on reciprocity, trust, honesty, respect, and a sensitivity to who they are as diverse individuals. Authentic relationships with love at the center go beyond attitudes towards children (e.g., “I love working with children!” or “I care for all the children in my classroom”) to include a willingness to invest time and energy to get to know each child as an individual. Hammond offers an important insight in this direction: “At the core of positive relationships is trust. Caring is the way that we generate trust that builds relationships. We have to not only care about students in a general sense but also actively care for them in a physical and emotional sense” (2015, 73). Ama, a child care provider born in Nigeria with more than 12 years of early childhood teaching experience in the US, describes one important way she builds trust with young Boys of Color, by knowing about their families and integrating that knowledge into her interactions with them:

I tell my children that they are part of a broader family, and that I am part of it too. The more I know about their families, the better that is. If a child is yelling or something, I tell them, “You have grandmothers, right? Is that how you talk to her?” And they listen because you are connecting what you are saying with the important people in their family and you are saying it with love, because you care, you know? Sometimes there are children who don’t have ... you can be that important person for them, that cares for them. And you can let them know this is a place for them, and this is what I expect from you, and this is what I see your brilliant future can have.

Ama shows care to the children in many ways and draws from the community-based values of families in Nigeria, where respect for elders and interconnectivity are at the core of children’s lives. Ama makes a concerted effort to build relationships with the families, and many of the mothers at her center have become teachers or assistants within her program. She is also explicit in telling



the Boys of Color in her care that they are all part of a community and stresses bidirectional respect in ways of communicating that are aligned with the values of the families at her center. Ama's approach, demanding respectful behaviors and at the same time showing care and support, is a teaching style that has been found to be effective with many Boys of Color (Delpit 2013; Hammond 2015). Building relationships, emphasizing the boys' place of belonging, intentionally linking with the boys' families and community cultural values, and being demanding and kind are all ways that Ama creates a responsive early education environment for Boys of Color with love at the center. It is a love that builds and earns trust among the boys and their families.



Boys of Color are learning through their primary attachment relationships with their parents and other adult caregivers, regardless whether the world is a safe place where they will be protected, their needs will be taken care of, and their emotions and behaviors will be understood and supported in a responsive manner.

When you are interacting with Boys of Color, remember that your words and actions are communicating to them answers to the following questions: Am I lovable? Am I safe? If I have a need, will someone notice?



**Asking families, “How is love expressed in your family?”** As part of the process of building relationships and earning trust, teachers can ask the boys and their families what love and loving relationships look like to them, through their lived experiences, in the context of their families and communities. Expressions of love and care vary greatly depending on the individual and the family and community cultural context. Personal preferences along with aspects of identity (race/ethnicity, gender, age, religious affiliation, etc.) and cultural social norms influence the way we show and receive love. Danilo, a Filipino father of a young boy, shared the following when asked about how love was shown to him when he was a young child:

I remember being raised by multiple people. I remember being loved but not interacted with. I don’t know if it was generational as well as cultural, but love was not a lot about hugs, it was about knowing that you were taken care of. As a young boy, my grandmother, as a matriarch, her attentiveness showed by just keeping an eye on me but not by interacting. I did things on my own. My mother was the more affectionate in terms of hugs, but not a lot. She was, and still is, super strong and, as the next to the eldest, she is super responsible, on top of all things for the family. She was hyper, super attentive to the littlest details about me, my clothes, what I did, eating regularly, etc. I remember the routines, the care, the attentiveness—I felt loved.

Danilo’s story reflects many ways love was expressed in the family context—through the caring actions of his mother and grandmother to ensure he had food, clothing, and routines. And love for Danilo’s family was communicated as an intense attentiveness and attunement to him by “keeping an eye on him” down to the “littlest details.” These forms of love, as Danilo understands, are different than the dominant cultural norms for expressing (e.g., hugs, kisses, adults playing with children). Memories of the attentiveness of his mother and the sacrifices she made to make sure he finished school are what Danilo remembers as most loving.

Another African American parent, Rocio, described how important it is for teachers, children, and families to understand the different ways love is expressed. With this understanding, teachers can provide love to children in ways they are familiar with and that are developmentally and culturally responsive to their needs. Rocio explains what happened when her son, Mario, did not have a kindergarten teacher who understood how he and his family expressed love in their home:

Mario was so happy in kindergarten. He said that the teachers there were so loving. Actually, so, so loving that he wanted to hug the teachers. That’s how he felt. But they were just like, “No, we don’t do that here.” So, he thought for about six months, “The teachers, they don’t love me. They

don't want to hug me," because he was so used to the way we express love and affection here.

Teachers can take opportunities to observe and to listen to children when they talk about their families and, specifically, about the ways they feel and express authentic love. The many different ways of showing authentic care and love discussed by the boys can be highlighted and affirmed. Teachers can also ask parents if they are willing to share their thoughts on this topic. Many families would feel respected if teachers took the time to ask and then listen to their answers. These practices communicate to the boys and their family members that who they are matters, and their family and cultural beliefs and routines are valued and respected in the classroom community. Teachers can also use this new knowledge to align their communication and expressions of love to be familiar and supportive for each individual boy in their classroom, which is a responsive practice that will strengthen trusting relationships between Boys of Color and their teachers.



### **Stop and Reflect**

In what ways (e.g., words, actions, attitudes, etc.) do you communicate love to Boys of Color?

How much of these messages of love are based on your own understanding and beliefs about love, and how much have you learned from individual children and families their preferred ways of expressing care and love?

Traditionally, for many cultures, boys are socialized to believe that they should display aggressiveness, independence, and limited emotional expression, and that they should be in control. What messages did you receive growing up about "male-ness" and emotional expression?

Do you express affection and care differently depending on gender?

### *Communicating Authentic Care to Boys of Color*

As we have seen, authentic expressions of love and care vary from person to person. Based on an extensive review of the literature, as well as hundreds of interviews with effective teachers of Latinx and Black boys, Luke Wood and Frank Harris III identified many practices that communicate "authentic care" to Boys of Color (Wood and Harris 2016; Wood 2017). Among the most important are having

teachers who are genuinely invested in the boys' success (and communicate this to them and others often) and having an unconditional acceptance that translates into Boys of Color knowing that their teachers "have their backs" and will maintain unwavering support regardless of the arc of their learning journeys (Wood and Harris 2016; Wood 2017).



## Promising Practices

**Who they are, and their success, matters.** While this suggestion might seem a common-sense "good-teaching" practice, in reality, data on disciplinary exclusionary practices and research on implicit bias and stereotyping of Boys of Color makes this recommendation not only necessary, but critical. Teachers need to communicate to Boys of Color that who they are matters and that as teachers they are 100 percent invested in the boys' learning and success.

**Unconditional acceptance—like they are your own.** Making a concerted effort to demonstrate an unconditional commitment to Boys of Color is similarly fundamental to building trust and authentic caring relationships. Luke Wood explains: "Love your neighbor as yourself and love their children as your children. Teach them with love, discipline them with love, build personal relationships with love, as if they were your own" (2019, 152). This does not mean that teachers should apply the same cultural values and practices they use in their own families with their students without being attentive to the children's individuality, family, and cultural backgrounds. Instead, in talking about loving young Boys of Color as if they were "your own," Wood refers to the **unconditional respect, acceptance, support, and love** that a parent or a caregiver gives to their child. Educators treat Boys of Color as "their own" through their attunement, attentive listening, and messages of unconditional acceptance and support. Keej, a four-year-old boy, feels a sense of authentic care at his preschool, where teacher Betty provides him with messages that show investment in Keej and genuine interest in his life experiences:

Keej is really excited when he arrives at his preschool. Keej puts his backpack in his cubby and scans the classroom searching for Betty, his favorite teacher. When he finds her, he runs fast towards her, almost bumping into the table where she is sitting, and says, "My grandpa is coming!!!" Betty, who met Keej's grandpa during a previous trip, knows how important this visit is to Keej, so she doesn't mind the running and bumping against things.

Betty places the materials she was holding on the table and looks at Keej, smiling. Betty says, "Oh, that is wonderful! I remember how much fun you had last winter when he came and you went to the zoo together. Do you think you'll go again?" Keej is beaming and nods excitedly. For the rest of the day, at different times, Keej talks to Betty, making plans for the things he wants to show his grandfather in his classroom.

Betty offers Keej important signs of authentic care through attuning and listening to him, by directing her body towards him, smiling, showing full attention, stopping herself from what she was doing, and connecting Keej's news to what she knows about him. Other ways teachers communicate authentic care to young Boys of Color include mindfully checking in with them if they look worried or sad, and by teaching new skills instead of stigmatizing or punishing them when they have emotional or behavioral breakdowns.



### Talk It Through

Expressing unconditional acceptance and treating Boys of Color like your own does not mean that you interact with them in all the same ways as you do with your own children or family members. It does mean that you have the same commitment to their educational success, happiness, and overall well-being as you would with your own children.

Talk with one or more partners about what “unconditional acceptance” and treating Boys of Color “like your own” would look like in your classroom.

### Example of Authentic Care

The “Little Duckies” are all sitting down in round tables. There is a lot of happy chatter in this multilingual classroom as the children talk about what they want to draw. The group has been together for a couple of weeks in this summer program for children about to enter transitional kindergarten. The teacher asks them to draw a picture showing their wish for a teacher they can have when they start school. Sarai, a teacher assistant, is positioned near Arturo, a four-year-old Latinx boy who has developmental and speech delays.

Sarai listens to Arturo’s words as he draws and expands on them. “Ee-cher!” he says. She smiles and asks, “Yes, your teacher, is he smiling?” “Miling!” he responds. The conversation continues for a bit like this, with both Arturo and Sarai attentive to each other and to the drawing.

When it is time to finish and clean up, Arturo becomes upset. He pushes the papers and the crayons to the floor and begins crying loudly. When Sarai approaches, he pushes her too. Sarai kneels to his level, places her hands gently on top of his arms, and in a calm voice says, “Hey? Arturo? [she waits until he looks up] Are you upset? [he nods] I understand that, I am sorry that you feel like that, but we don’t hit or throw things. Do you need a hug?” Arturo pauses, then nods. Sarai gives him a hug and after a bit, they clean up together and join the rest of the group.

Throughout their interaction, Sarai is communicating authentic care to Arturo. She shows enjoyment when they are interacting. When Arturo becomes dysregulated and pushes her, she interprets the interaction within the same care and love she showed before, this time, by modeling a calm behavior, stating the expectations clearly, and showing empathy and responsiveness to his needs. This is especially important for young Boys of Color with disabilities like Arturo, who need teachers to respond in an attuned and reassuring way during their moments of behavioral and emotional dysregulation. Adults’ implicit biases often lead them to perceive young Boys of Color as older, bigger, and less innocent than they are. This pattern is even more pronounced for children with behavioral cues that are interpreted as problematic and associated with dis/abilities and/or special needs. Boys of Color at risk for, or diagnosed with, dis/abilities deserve teachers to provide them with authentic care and love like every other child in the classroom.



## *Changing the Conversation About “Challenging Behaviors”*

Throughout this book we intentionally do not use the expression “challenging behaviors” for several reasons:

- **Defining what is and what is not a challenging behavior is subjective.** That is, it depends on the values, beliefs, and interpretation of the adult, and, as outlined in chapter one, interpretations are often strongly influenced by implicit racial biases.
- The phrase “challenging behavior” is **not a neutral description of a child’s behavior**, but instead, it is **an evaluation or judgment**. A frequent consequence of labeling behavior with such terms is that the evaluative language is reactive—which often leads to exclusionary discipline preventing the teacher from engaging in a reflective process to explore what the child is communicating and what specific types of support they need from their adult caregiver. All behaviors are a form of communication and it is important early childhood teachers pause and attempt to identify what children are signaling from their different behaviors. Additionally, many behaviors labeled “challenging”—e.g., hitting, yelling, running around, or having a tantrum—are developmentally appropriate behaviors for young children. Their brains and bodies are still developing the cognitive and social-emotional ability to communicate with self-regulation and control.
- And in some cases, behaviors described as “challenging” are a result of **children’s stress response systems being activated as a result of trauma reminders or trauma triggers**. More than one-third (35 percent) of children age five and under in the United States have experienced one type of serious trauma and children of color, especially Black children, are disproportionately represented (Bethell et al. 2017). Children who are impacted by trauma have elevated levels of stress that affect their brain development, emotional regulation, and well-being. The “challenging” behaviors they display are their brain’s automatic response to their perception of danger in the environment. The fight, flight, freeze (challenging) behaviors are not under the child’s control. Instead, they are automatic survival reactions triggered in the most primitive part of their brain. And, these behaviors are the young vulnerable child’s best attempt to keep themselves safe. Therefore, talking about these behaviors as challenging is misleading, as this word implies intention on the part of the child; however, a child experiencing a trauma reminder never chooses their body’s automatic stress response. Children with experiences of trauma need teachers who can remain emotionally attuned to them to help them return to a place of calm and feeling of safety. Framing their behavior



using the label “challenging” could prevent teachers from using a reflective and inquiry-based approach and focusing on how they can meet the emotional needs of the child. For instance, imagine the following scenario:

Ms. Martin has already started a story-time activity at her preschool class when Darius arrives with his father. He is ushered in, given a quick goodbye before his father leaves. Ms. Martin feels frustrated because Darius is often late. She signals him to join the circle and to sit, but Darius does not seem to want to and moves to the block area to play. Ms. Martin is worried that this will distract the other children and feels annoyed at the interruption. Using a stern voice, she says, “Darius, I have told you to come and join us, this is a first warning.” Darius responds with a loud “No!” and begins throwing blocks to the floor. Ms. Martin stops her reading, approaches Darius and firmly tells him, “You are being naughty, this is enough!” and without a pause, she grabs his hand to walk him to the circle. Darius throws himself to the floor and starts kicking and crying.



### **Stop and Reflect**

In this scenario, Ms. Martin reacted to Darius’s behavior with frustration and has attempted to make him join the group without pausing to understand why he was acting the way he was that morning. Imagine if, instead of labeling his behavior as “challenging,” Ms. Norris paused, took a deep breath, and considered the following reflective questions:

- Am I calm and self-regulated or do I feel stressed?
- What is Darius trying to communicate this morning through his behavior about how he feels and what he needs?
- How can I support him and help him feel safe in our classroom?

How would you react to Darius’s behavior if you were his teacher? Would you be reactive or stay calm and regulated? If you think you would be reactive, how could you pause and try to learn what he is communicating about how he feels and what he needs?

By taking a reflective stance, Ms. Norris might have considered that arriving late and not having time to transition from a rushed commute with his father to a circle time discussion in class might be difficult for any child his age, and that maybe giving him time to join the group would be more responsive to his needs. By

taking this reflective approach, Ms. Norris might also have strengthened her own self-awareness by identifying that lateness and interruptions activate her personal stress response system. Knowing about these personal triggers, she could make sure to complete 10 seconds of deep breathing to clear her mind when a child arrives late and she notices the activation of stress chemicals in her body. Taking 10 seconds to check in with herself could prevent her from taking her own stress out on children like Darius.

She might also have realized that she could start a conversation with Darius at another time—when they are both calm and self-regulated—about how to transition into the classroom on mornings when he and his father arrive late. During this conversation she could learn how things are for him before coming to school. In doing so, maybe she would have learned that Darius’s family was forced to move from an apartment to a homeless shelter the previous week and since then morning routines have been hard for them. This information could help Ms. Norris plan for different ways she could support Darius during this difficult time (e.g., making sure to have some snacks in case he hadn’t eaten breakfast, allowing him a mat to rest on in case it was difficult to sleep at the shelter). This information might also suggest to Ms. Norris that Darius is likely going through a lot of stress in his life, and that her angry reaction could be further triggering his stress response system.

The above example illustrates how changing the language we use to define behavior can help to shift our perspectives and teaching approach from reactive to responsive. Understanding what might be going on for a child (e.g., moving into a shelter, etc.) helps teachers understand the rationale for this shift in language. Additional reasons why changing the conversation about challenging behaviors is important include (a) the possibility that a child’s behaviors might indicate that they might be at risk for or diagnosed with a dis/ability, and (b) the significant role of implicit racial bias leading to the misattribution of behavior (e.g., assuming that young children are older than they are, or perceiving developmentally responsive and typical behaviors as aggressive or intentionally harmful), and the deficit-based perspective this label emphasizes which may prevent teachers from observing and noticing children’s strengths and assets.



## Key Idea

### Using Person-First Language<sup>22</sup>

The 2004 Reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) made it a requirement that educational agencies and personnel use **person-first language** when referring to children and students with identified IDEA special education dis/ability categories. However, dis/ability studies by education scholars and the dis/ability community, specifically the autism community, have preferred **identity-first language**. **As with all aspects of identity, it is important that teachers not make assumptions and, instead, ask each family what language they prefer.**

**Person-First Language** would place the “person first” as opposed to their dis/ability or dis/ability diagnosis in referring to and interacting with children. Examples of person-first language include:

- Children with disabilities
- Jose has a cognitive dis/ability
- Daniel has autism (or a diagnosis of ...)
- Eddie is experiencing homelessness

Katie Adams, a preschool administrator in a subsidized program in Oakland, describes how teachers in her center used data collection to reframe their perceptions of children’s challenging behaviors. They discovered that the challenging behavior was their own:

So, when we talk about challenging behaviors, we’re usually so focused on the three-year-olds. But now, in this program, we’re really trying to flip the script where we’re focused on the adult. We ask: “What is it in our own behavior that we’re doing that is triggering a child?” And we have gotten incredible feedback from our teachers because we’re honestly just going in there and observing and tracking how much positive praise the teachers are giving compared to the negative comments and to whom. And then we are showing them the data (which documents many more

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22 For additional reading about Person-First Language versus Identity-First Language see the following resources: “[I Am Disabled: On Identity First Versus People-First Language](#)” by Leibowitz and [To Ensure Inclusion, Freedom, and Respect for All, It’s Time to Embrace People First Language](#) by Snow (Leibowitz 2015; Snow 2016).

critical comments directed at the children than positive feedback). And the teachers are saying, “Oh my gosh I didn’t even realize I was doing that.” And just having that information, it has quickly changed their practice. Not someone else telling them an opinion about them but just taking real data. And it has truly changed in some of those classrooms the way we engage with kids.

We want all Boys of Color to interpret their teachers’ actions as a sign of love, especially when their behavior has to be redirected or interrupted immediately for safety reasons. If teachers have built trusting, attuned relationships with love at the center, children will be more open to having support and guidance during times when they are managing big emotions and their behavior is dysregulated. It is “disciplining with love,” not discipline with a goal of punishment (Wood 2019).



## *Loving the Teacher*

A caring, love-based stance must also be extended to early childhood teachers. We must take care of our teachers so they have the emotional energy and capacity to care for others including our Boys of Color. Several structural, personal, and job-related stressors can challenge early childhood educators' well-being and make the possibilities of self-reflection and relationship building truly challenging.

First, while rewarding in many ways, early childhood education is a very demanding job. Providing responsive learning experiences for infants, toddlers, and preschoolers is physically, emotionally, and cognitively demanding under the best of circumstances. **Despite the intense workplace demands early childhood teachers face on a daily basis, they do not receive the compensation, benefits, professional development, and supports they need** (Lieberman 2018). Unfortunately, most teachers and child care providers continue to earn poverty-level wages, substantially lower than those of kindergarten and elementary school teachers and elementary school principals (Whitebook, Phillips, and Howes 2014; Whitebook et al. 2018). In fact, 58 percent of child care workers in California are on one or more public assistance programs, such as the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, to help them pay for food and housing (Whitebook, Phillips, and Howes 2014; Interlandi 2018; US Department of Health and Human Services and US Department of Education 2016).

In California, housing costs have significantly increased, adding to the financial pressures that many teachers experience. Additionally, the early childhood workforce reports a high level of mental health challenges, especially depression and anxiety, and many have histories of trauma (Whitebook and Ryan 2011). As a result, the early childhood workforce caring for our youngest children experience significant stress on a daily basis due to their own family's food insecurity, housing instability, lack of healthcare and economic hardship (Whitebook et al. 2018). These hardships are also a reality for early childhood administrators and program leaders.

Given the current situation where so many teachers struggle on a daily basis to have enough resources to meet their most basic needs including food and shelter, it can be difficult to focus on building responsive, attuned relationships with children and families, even for the most committed of educators. Consider, for instance, Rosa's situation:



Rosa is a Family Child Care provider working in Santa Clara County. In the past year, she has been forced to move out of three different homes where she was caring for children due to sudden rent increases. For months, these moves left her with no children to care for, and thus, with no income. She has been taking courses at a community college trying to fulfill requirements to qualify as a family child care program in a network coordinated by a local resource and referral agency. She now has four children in her program, but this is not enough to cover her bills. She says, “This is all very stressful, I am trying to be back on my feet but at the moment I don’t have enough children enrolled to cover costs. I am still trying to recuperate from the three moves and the crying spell I went through. It is really tough.”

Even though Rosa has been taking early childhood classes at a community college, she acknowledges that economic insecurity is impeding her ability to focus on her job, an understandable outcome as stress has very real physical, emotional, and cognitive consequences.

**Adding to their cumulative stress, early childhood teachers and program leaders are working with an increasing number of young children and families who are impacted by trauma and toxic stress** (Nicholson, Perez, and Kurtz 2019; Sorrels 2015). Working with children and families who are trauma-impacted—e.g., as a result of structural racism, deportation, community violence, sexual abuse, opioid addiction, or other substance abuse, homelessness, natural disasters, and many other factors—takes a professional and personal toll on the lives of educators, putting them at risk for burnout, compassion fatigue, and secondary trauma (Perry 2014). Even the most committed and skilled professionals may struggle to be loving and responsive if their own stress response systems are continually triggered as they worry about paying their bills, supporting the children and families in their care, and managing all of the additional pressures currently being placed on the early childhood workforce (e.g., pressure to complete higher education degrees; participate in quality rating and improvement systems; and improve the quality of their programs through coaching, training, technical assistance, and program evaluation from external raters).





## Key Idea

### **Burnout, Compassion Fatigue, and Secondary Trauma**

**Burnout** is a reaction to job stress that causes physical, emotional, and mental exhaustion combined with doubts about one's competence and value. Burnout can develop when individuals do not have self-care practices or supports to buffer their stress. Warning signs of burnout include feelings of negativity, feeling a lack of control, a loss of purpose or energy, an increased detachment from relationships and/or feeling estranged from others, feeling unappreciated, having difficulty sleeping, difficulty concentrating, continually feeling preoccupied, feeling trapped, and difficulty separating personal life and work life (Gottlieb, Hennessy, and Squires 2004).

**Compassion Fatigue.** Burnout that is not addressed may turn into compassion fatigue. With prolonged stress and a lack of self-care activities in educators' lives to reduce their stress, adults can begin to suffer from compassion fatigue symptoms (O'Brien and Haaga 2015). Compassion fatigue results when adults become overwhelmed by the suffering and pain of those they are caring for (Figley 2002; van Dernoot Lipsky and Burk 2009; Ray et al. 2013). Individuals with high levels of empathy for others' pain or traumatic experiences are most at risk for compassion fatigue (Adams, Boscarino, and Figley 2006; Figley 2002).

**Secondary Trauma** refers to the effects of being exposed to another person's reaction to their traumatic experience. This type of stress can result from working with children or families who experience traumatic symptoms. When teachers are working with others on a daily basis who have experienced trauma and display trauma triggers and behaviors, it is difficult not to absorb into your own mind and body the traumatic stress and the intensive feelings they are displaying in their communication with you. When teachers attune to another human being, they can easily be affected by the others' internal emotional state even when they are not directly experiencing any trauma. Over time, hundreds or thousands of these experiences can profoundly affect us and put us at risk for several negative outcomes.

Source: Adapted from Nicholson, Kurtz, and Perez (2019, 194–197)

Without implementing self-care practices, teachers' stress can not only impact their own health and well-being, teachers' stress can also have negative consequences for the children and families in their care. Ayodele, a Family Child

Care provider, has developed a keen awareness of the importance of providers' need to attend to their own self-care: "One thing I have learned through the years is that we need to show up for ourselves. We usually show up for the children, for the district, for the families, but all of that will be compromised if we don't show up for ourselves. And by that I mean your self-care. When you are healthy, when you are calm, then you have something to give."



## **Stop and Reflect**

Teachers and program leaders can engage in reflection about sources of stress in their lives and how these stressors might be affecting their health and behavior. Ask yourself:

- What sources of stress do I experience in my life right now?
- Do I feel I am able to separate work from my personal or family life?

Additionally, teachers and program leaders can learn to detect warning signs that communicate to them that their stress levels are increasing to an unhealthy level (e.g., they notice they are less patient, more irritable and easily reactive, or more critical of self and others). Using journaling, coaching, or talking with a friend or loved one, they can examine how their levels of stress are showing up in their mind and body (e.g., headaches, irritability, muscular tension, etc.).

Reflect on whether you perceive any of the following warning signs of burnout in yourself:

- Feelings of negativity
- Feeling a lack of control
- A loss of purpose or energy
- An increased detachment from relationships and/or feeling estranged from others
- Feeling unappreciated
- Having difficulty sleeping
- Having difficulty concentrating and feeling continuously preoccupied
- Feeling trapped

If the answer is yes, it is important to include self-care practices in your daily life (see next section).



## *Self-Care Strategies for Educators*

What is defined as “self-care” varies from person to person, but fundamentally, self-care activities are those that help us self-regulate emotional, mental, physical, and social needs. **Self-care** includes both reflecting and checking-in on one’s internal emotional state and assessing personal needs, as well as planning a course of action that will help reduce stress and improve well-being. Nicholson, Perez, and Kurtz describe two types of self-care, personal self-care and professional self-care:

- **Personal self-care** refers to strategies that will help early childhood teachers take better care of themselves (e.g., relationships with family and friends, having enough sleep, exercising).
- **Professional self-care** includes having the support of peers or a mentor, access to professional development, scheduling and organizing reflective practice opportunities, and other resources that create a healthy working environment. Professional self-care is helpful for reducing the risk of burn-out. (2019)

The first step on the road to self-care for teachers and program leaders is to identify and **acknowledge the main sources of stress that impact them** personally and professionally (van Dernoot Lipsky and Burk 2009). Only after these stressors have become visibly named can they begin to work on ways to manage and reduce the negative impact of this stress on their well-being and daily work with children, families, and staff. Without developing self-awareness about their stress reactions and learning how to de-escalate their triggers (remain calm when they feel stressed) through self-care, teachers and program leaders may struggle to be patient, responsive, and loving to the young Boys of Color in their care.

Burnout can be avoided if teachers and program leaders **learn to recognize the warning signs** and if they **actively plan for, and are supported to, engage in self-care practices**. Workplace conditions—workload, poor supervision, negative work environment, poor benefits or pay, difficulty with co-workers, or excessive work demands—with a lack of social support have a cumulative effective and slowly develop into burnout over time (Gottlieb, Hennessy, and Squires 2004; Maltzman 2011). Burnout impacts individuals physically, emotionally, spiritually, and/or mentally, and results in emotional exhaustion and reduced feelings of personal effectiveness and accomplishment (Gottlieb, Hennessy, and Squires 2004). When teachers and program leaders reduce their stress with self-care routines, they can restore their energy and prevent burnout from developing. They have more reserves to pull from for building loving and responsive relationships, maintaining a calm and regulated state, seeking to understand the meaning of children's behavior, and using sensitive strategies that heal and protect children rather than worsen their stress and trauma.

**Make it a habit.** It is important to find self-care practices that are realistic and can be sustained through the ups and downs of our work days. For instance, Tasneem, a Head Start teacher, explained that she used prayer as a moment of pause that helped her keep balance. In addition, she shared:

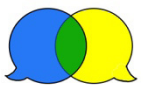
Regardless of how the year has gone, for me as a Muslim, when Ramadan comes, that is such an important time. My prayers, my intentions, the blessings, the fasting, the good deeds, and the trouble all comes together. Whatever that year has been, when that month comes, I am guaranteed that I will be alright. It's like a time of reflection, it is such a time of spiritual work that it carries me through all of it.

For Ayodele, the family child care provider we met earlier, many years of self-reflection and emotional self-awareness have led her to realize that, for her, self-care practices can be integrated in her everyday practice with children. She says:

You know, self-care can be something as simple as a hike in nature. And, of course, we need to care for our physical self, tune to it, as much as for our emotional self. We need to eat healthy, for instance—we continue believing that you don't have time to sit down and eat well because you are with the kids. But that is not true. It doesn't require extra time to do self-care, that is time that is already there but you are giving to others. But you can't take care of others if you don't take care of yourself. That is your self-care. You can sit down with the kids and eat well. I also exercise. I have children that come in really early so I go to bed at 9:30 p.m., I wake up at 4:30 a.m., and I work out at 5 a.m. and then I come in and get ready for work.

The first children arrive at 7. Some are still eating breakfast, many are not yet awake. We are all getting ready still, I might be putting my things together, so we do a calm start, we use quiet calm voices. I tell them, "You are now entering my home and here we start the day using indoor voices." And they get it. I often use calming music. So that we start the day with a tune. We put music on, children always find their space in that music. So again, this is not adding extra stuff. Things that are good to regulate children are also good for us as teachers, right? So, starting the day with a calming environment as we get ready for the day is good for all of us.

Ayodele highlights several practices of self-care that keep her feeling whole and healthy, from being aware of her body's basic needs (food, sleep) to getting up early to exercise, and then making sure to set a calm tone in the morning when her children arrive. Importantly, because she has understood that a healthy, self-regulated adult will benefit children's development, she has made changes in her practice to incorporate calming and well-being routines. In doing so, she makes these practices a routine that is sustainable and that benefits both herself and the children.



### **Talk It Through**

With one or more partners, talk about the forms of self-care you have in your life:

- The forms of personal self-care I have access to and/or practice include ...
- The forms of professional self-care I have access to at my job include ...
- I wish I had the following forms of self-care available to me ...



- The barriers that prevent me from engaging in self-care include ...
- When I engage in self-care, I feel ...

Though there are many different ways to consider one's needs, **"self-care is not just a nice thing to do, it is a critically important professional responsibility of all in the early childhood profession"** (Nicholson, Perez, and Kurtz 2019, 197). The mental and physical health of teachers have a direct effect on the quality of care and education they are able to provide to the children. High levels of stress and poor work conditions are linked to an increased influence of implicit bias and use of exclusionary discipline practices. Thus, attending to the needs and well-being of teachers is a necessary condition for responsive practices for Boys of Color that fulfill the promise of equity and quality in early childhood education programs.



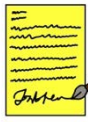
## Administrators

### Teachers Need Regular Reflection Time

Teachers need regular time to reflect on their practice with other teachers and/or with their supervisors or a coach. This can be supported through the implementation of minimum days, staff development days, or protected time during staff meetings, ideally once a week but a minimum of once or twice a month. This time can be used to support reflective conversations, case management, coaching, planning and preparation, and/or communities of practice.

The time and space for reflection needs to be supported through policies and program practices, and time and space need to be put aside for this to happen on a regular basis. This includes reflection time for individuals, reflection with interdisciplinary teams, program level reflection as a staff, and reflection time with families. Opportunities should be offered for educators to participate in guided reflection, self-reflection, and reflecting together as partners or in groups to draw on multiple perspectives, increase collaboration, and continue strengthening awareness of how best to serve Boys of Color.





## Policy

Significant efforts continue at a policy level to improve working conditions for the early childhood workforce. This systems-level work is essential for significantly reducing the stress teachers face on a daily basis due to the lack of compensation they receive and the severe lack of resources in our field. It is also fundamental, however, to increase awareness about the importance of self-care practices for teachers. Ayodele's quote captures a key truth about self-care: Without reflecting on our emotional well-being and taking steps to care for ourselves, our ability to teach and to care for others will be compromised. One of the most important ways we can practice "loving our teachers" is to advocate their right to have time to reflect on their practice with colleagues and to work in organizations and systems that support them to engage in self-care practices on a regular basis. If we want our youngest Boys of Color to feel authentic care, unconditional love, and acceptance from their teachers, their teachers need to experience the same conditions from the organizations and systems that employ them. **Relationships with love at the center must extend to our teachers too.**



## Key Idea

### Self-care Strategies are Unique to Every Individual

What one person considers a form of self-care may not be refreshing, re-energizing or healing for another person. For example, going for a 5-mile walk may be regulating and restorative for one person, going to the beach and sitting and watching the waves for another, while another may find a warm cup of tea and taking some breaths is restorative. We each need to discover our own self-care strategies that are accessible given our personal life situations and genuinely meaningful.

### Examples of Self-Care Strategies

- Eating or sleeping well
- Physical activity
- Awareness signs of stress in your body
- Practicing time management

- Spending quality time with family and friends you enjoy being with
- Attending self-help activities (e.g., counseling, life coach, spiritual groups, health or healing events)
- Practicing deep breathing for relaxation
- Engaging in activities that are meaningful and restorative to you
- Taking small relaxing or energizing breaks
- Asking for support from others
- Participating in a support group
- Being involved in activities that are fun or creative to you

Sources: Nicholson, Perez, and Kurtz (2019); Nicholson et al. (2020)



## Policy

**Teachers' and program leaders' success in meeting the needs of Boys of Color and families is significantly influenced by the level of care and support they experience from their supervisors and the climate of their work environments.** Self-care is not effective if teachers or other staff members are working within classrooms or programs that are unhealthy or trauma inducing, or environments that put them at risk for burnout or more serious negative mental and physical health outcomes. To be truly effective in supporting Boys of Color and their families, self-care needs to become intentionally integrated into the policies and practices within early childhood programs and schools. Staff in every role should be encouraged to engage in ongoing self-care and program leaders need to create structures that support and make self-care accessible. The field of early childhood education needs to do the same—intentionally embracing self-care, trauma-informed practice, and wellness as important elements of large-scale efforts to create early childhood systems that are trauma-informed, healing, and wellness oriented.

What does this look like? Trauma Transformed describes a continuum for programs, from stress inducing to stress reducing (2019). Self-care practices are not supported in stress-inducing centers and schools, and the workplace environment creates stress and harm. However, in a stress-reducing center or school, the workplace culture values self-care and integrates it into the environment to buffer stress for staff and support their health and healing. To

ensure that self-care is practiced throughout a teaching staff, early childhood programs, schools, and systems need to become trauma-informed, focused on building resilience, and healing oriented (Nicholson et al. 2020).



Trauma Transforms lists three types of programs or schools, starting with the most trauma inducing and finishing with the most trauma reducing, and includes traits associated with each one.

### Trauma-Organized

- Reactive
- Reliving/Retelling
- Avoiding/Numbing
- Fragmented
- Us vs. Them
- Inequity
- Authoritarian Leadership

**Trauma-organized programs and schools have several characteristics.** The people working within them or impacted by their services do not feel an inherent sense of safety. Relationships are lacking trust or frequently disrupted before trust can be built. Information, communication, and work feels fragmented, people and systems or processes are overwhelmed, leadership and the climate is fear driven, and rules are rigid—i.e., they leave no room for local variation or equity—and as a result, people do not feel a sense of agency to influence the conditions that impact them, leading to feelings of numbness and hopelessness.

### **Trauma-Informed**

- Understanding of the Nature and Impact of Trauma and Recovery
- Shared Language
- Recognizing Sociocultural Trauma and Structural Oppression

**Trauma-informed and resilience-focused programs and schools** are environments where there is an understanding of the impact of stress and trauma and its effects on children, families, employees, communities, and systems, and the staff share a common language to talk about trauma. The staff acts on this knowledge by changing practices and policies to actively work to resist re-traumatizing people and address the impacts of trauma. The importance of self-care is understood and acknowledged but may not be intentionally integrated into and supported by the organization or institution; instead, it is perceived to be an individual endeavor to be pursued outside of work.

Examples include:

- Access to trainings on the neurobiology of stress and trauma and self-care for teachers, program leaders, and families to create a shared understanding with vocabulary for discussing the impact of stress and trauma on young children, as well as emphasizing strengths, creativity, and resilience
- Educators consistently pay close attention to their own needs, recognizing that physical, social, psychological, financial, educational, or other needs have importance both personally and professionally when working with Boys of Color

### **Healing Organization**

- Reflective
- Making Meaning Out of the Past

- Growth and Prevention-Oriented
- Collaborative
- Equity and Accountability
- Relational Leadership

**Healing-oriented programs and schools** move past being trauma-informed and focus on becoming healing environments. A healing environment is collaborative and promotes authenticity. There are intentional spaces included to create time to pause and reflect on, make meaning of, and learn from difficult experiences. There is a value for human connection, taking care of oneself, taking care of others, celebrating successes, and striving collaboratively across the agency, program, or system to create a culture of wellness. There is an explicit focus on learning, growth, and optimism. Individuals work together to contribute towards a greater good. Joy, creativity, and innovation are valued and supported. An ethic of care for others and collaboration are encouraged and supported in the workplace. In this context, self-care is intentionally integrated into policies and practices for the entire organization or system, and the expectations are not only that individuals in every role are encouraged to engage in ongoing self-care, but also that the structures of the program provide supports and opportunities to make self-care accessible.

Examples include:

- Space and ongoing access to mental health consultation, reflective supervision, coaching, mindfulness/yoga/meditation practices, employee assistance program, sufficient lunch breaks, and off-site professional learning opportunities
- Educators have regular, ongoing opportunities to check in and express their needs in a supportive environment where their needs are followed up with actions to address them.

## Reflection Questions

- Where would your program fall across this continuum? What aspects of your program or school are stress or trauma inducing, trauma informed, or healing oriented?
- Given where your program falls on the continuum, how does the overall climate and support (or lack thereof) for self-care impact you and the others on the staff? How do they impact the children and families you serve?

Source: Adapted from Trauma Transformed (2019)

## *Chapter Two: Takeaways*

**Our goal is to create equitable early childhood environments that support Boys of Color to succeed and learn to their potential.** Equity requires an active and intentional focus on disrupting inequitable policies, practices, and distribution of resources.

**Love is the core element of a strengths-based, responsive early education.**

Love looks different for different children and families, but at its core, love is communicated by teachers who develop consistent, caring, attuned, and responsive relationships with young children and have a commitment to identify each child's strengths and brilliance.

**Attunement is seen when an adult focuses so intently in communication with a child that the child comes to believe that what they think and feel matters,** they “feel felt” by the adult (Levine and Kline 2007). Attuned communication begins in infancy—with serve and return interactions—and is characterized by positive emotional exchanges between children and adults.

**Emotionally attuned interactions between young children and their caregivers are beneficial for many reasons,** including:

- Developing healthy and secure attachments, which in turn support healthy brain development (Schoore 2000)
- Building self-esteem and a strong sense of self for Boys of Color
- Creating an increased sense of trust and feelings of safety for young boys which positively influences their ability to engage in the learning process
- Understanding each boy's strengths, interests, developmental milestones, and areas that need support or intervention
- Understanding the societal challenges Boys of Color face
- Buffering the negative impacts Boys of Color experience in response to the ongoing stress and trauma they face

**Teachers express love to Boys of Color by tuning in to their perspectives and showing genuine interest, curiosity, and wonder in who they are, and excitement and awe in imagining who they can become.**

- The expression of love changes from person to person. Talking to families and listening to children about how love is expressed in their households is an important way to increase cultural awareness and use this new knowledge to align communication and expressions of love to be familiar and supportive



for each individual boy; it is a responsive practice that strengthens trusting relationships between Boys of Color and their teachers.

- Effective educators are genuinely invested in the boys' success and communicate this to them and others often.
- No more use of the term "challenging behavior" to define what a child does. This wording is not an objective description of a child's behavior. It is a subjective and negative judgement that runs against a reflective, empathic approach. Using this wording will often place the blame on the child's character and limit the educator's ability to see what aspects of their teaching, their program, or of the child's life might be in play.

**We need to extend the love-based stance to educators too.** We do this by:

- Acknowledging that the structural, personal, and job-related stressors can challenge early childhood educators' well-being and make the possibility of self-reflection and of relationship building truly challenging
- Learning about burnout, compassion fatigue, and secondary traumatic stress
- Supporting teachers' self-care practices and shifting our programs and schools to become trauma-informed and healing oriented



## Teachers/Providers

### *Shift Your Lens*

- What does it mean to shift from equality to equity when teaching and caring for Boys of Color?
- How do I communicate authentic care to the Boys of Color in my classroom—messages that reinforce I am committed to their success and well-being?
- What do I **think** about self-care? What **feelings** come up for me when I think about self-care? What deep-seated **beliefs** are leading me to feel this way?
- Do I engage in self-care so I am refreshed and self-regulated for my interactions with Boys of Color and their families?

### *Be Brave: Take Actions for Equity!*

- What are the different ways I am already communicating love to Boys of Color? How can I strengthen and build on these practices?

- Do I use the phrase “challenging behavior”? If so, how can I use different language that suggests more empathy for a young child?
- What is one step that I can take to increase my self-care and reduce my daily stress?



## **Administrators/Program Leaders**

### *Shift Your Lens*

- Is the topic of self-care brought up in our program or school?
- Do I think of self-care as an individual experience or do I (and the other program leaders) integrate it throughout the program so it is supported and accessible for all staff?
- Is our program trauma informed? Or healing oriented? How can I begin to move our program in these directions?
- Do I engage in self-care so I am refreshed and self-regulated for my interactions with teachers, families, and other staff?

### *Be Brave: Take Actions for Equity!*

- What are the different ways our program is already communicating love to Boys of Color? How can we strengthen and build on these practices?
- What is one step I can take to support teachers at my program to show greater love to Boys of Color?
- What is one change I can make to support teachers' self-care and create a more supportive environment for our staff? What is one way I can engage in self-care so I am refreshed and have the energy I need to be effective at work?



## Policy

### *Invest in Change: Policy Implications*

#### **District Superintendents and School Boards**

- Prioritize funding for professional development on trauma and trauma-informed practices for all staff, programs, and schools

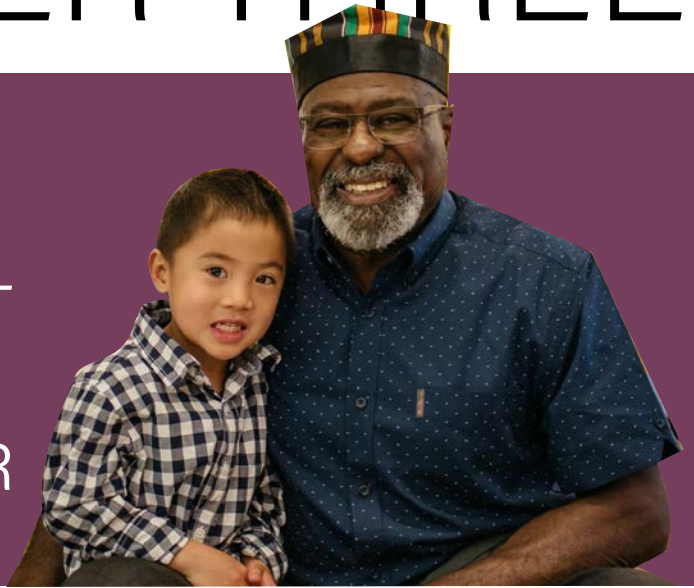
### *Make It Real: Implementation Activities*

See appendices R–W for these activities.

- [Constructivist Listening](#)
- [Got Passion?](#)
- [Got Passion? Worksheet](#)
- [Getting Centered: Part Two](#)
- [Getting Centered: Part Two Worksheet](#)
- [Chapter Two Courageous Conversation Compass Activity](#)

# CHAPTER THREE

RESPONSIVE  
INSTRUCTIONAL  
PRACTICES FOR  
BOYS OF COLOR



## VIGNETTE

Excerpts from conversations with three Latinx boys—Alejandro, Salvador, and Tristan, all four-and-a-half years old—enrolled in transitional kindergarten:

**Are you excited about kindergarten?**

All: Yes!

**What do you think you'll do in kindergarten?**

Salvador: Speak Spanish!

**Do you know what people are saying when they speak Spanish?**

Salvador: Yes! When people tell me to do something in Spanish I know what they are saying.

**Are you around people that speak a lot of Spanish?**

Salvador: Sometimes. In Oakley there are not a lot of people that speak Spanish so sometimes I speak English too.

**How does your teacher make you feel?**

Tristan: Good. Happy.

**What kinds of things do you do with your teacher?**

Tristan: I help my teacher. I help teacher color, play Play-Doh, play kitchen. Ride bikes.

**You ride bikes with your teacher?**

Tristan: Yes. (Another boy says "No.") When he rides bikes he crashes into me.

**He crashes into you? (Laughter) Is there anything that happens at school that you don't like?**

All: No.

**All** teachers can effectively educate males of color; however, to be successful, they must educate them **as** males of color. What does that mean? It means that these students have unique histories, cultures, identities, and experiences that must be leveraged as assets to improve their educational success. Devoid of this context, educators will struggle to produce equitable outcomes. (Wood and Harris 2016, 25; emphasis added)

There is no cookie-cutter formula or list of unified instructional strategies that we recommend all teachers use with the Boys of Color in their classrooms. Each child, classroom, school/program, and community is unique, and effective teachers engage in a continual process of dynamically adapting their curriculum and instruction to meet the emerging interests and needs of individual children in alignment with the cultural norms of their unique educational contexts. With this limitation in mind, we describe a range of instructional practices that communicate love, respect, and authentic care to Boys of Color, practices that will help create learning environments that challenge and motivate young Boys of Color to feel cognitively engaged and emotionally supported. In this chapter we:

- Discuss the importance of culturally responsive practice as a foundation for working with Boys of Color
- Introduce a range of practices that communicate love, respect, and genuine care to Boys of Color including suggestions for arranging environments to support their learning preferences
- Acknowledge the external stressors and pressures that Boys of Color face in their families and communities, and the importance of implementing trauma-informed practices including early childhood mental health consultation—an emerging and promising prevention and intervention strategy
- Provide guidance for directors and program administrators including the need to develop transparent behavior plans for children who struggle with self-regulation and engaging with families and parents about classroom and school policies
- Describe realistic timelines for program leaders and administrators as they work towards program and/or organizational change

### *Culturally Responsive Teaching*

Data from US Dept. of Education inform us that over 80 percent of classroom teachers are White, middle class, and monolingual [US Department of Education 2012] ... it is likely that many, if not most, teachers in today's schools, although well-intentioned, may be quite unaware of the cultural knowledge, practices and dispositions that their students bring from their homes and communities. ... Given the current demographic shift, teachers need to acquire an understanding of different types of cultural knowledge. (Howard and Rodriguez-Minkoff 2017, 8, 10)



Taking a culturally responsive strengths-based approach focuses on what African American boys know, understand, and can do as opposed to what they cannot do or what they do not know and understand. ... [The approach] seeks to learn about the strengths, gifts, and talents of Black boys, and the best practices to leverage these strengths and assets towards school success. (Wright 2018, 20)

In addition to building trusting and authentically caring relationships with love at the center, culturally responsive teaching should be the foundation of every teacher's instructional toolbox when working with Boys of Color (Wood and Harris 2016). According to Hammond, culturally responsive teachers:

- Create trusting responsive and caring relationships with children in order to create a safe space for learning
- Recognize children's culturally informed approaches to learning and meaning making, and plan their curriculum, instruction, and environments to be responsive to and align with this cultural knowledge
- Use children's culturally informed approaches to learning and meaning making to provide individualized supports connecting children's current skills, knowledge, and interests with new concepts and content, and to motivate them to take risks to learn new skills (2015)



Culturally responsive teachers think intentionally about how to create classrooms that communicate messages of inclusiveness. They understand the impact of structural racism on young Boys of Color and their families, and they are committed to equity for all children in their care, especially children of color and others who have been historically disadvantaged by our education and other systems. As summarized by a director of a summer enrichment program for African American boys we interviewed: “I think a lot of teachers need to widen their lens on what’s acceptable and appropriate.”

Culturally responsive practice is not a pre-packaged curriculum or a set of principles, ideas, or predetermined practices. Culturally responsive practice is a disposition, a state of being, and a mindset centered on fundamental beliefs—about teaching, learning, culture, diversity, children, their families, and their communities—that permeates teachers’ decision-making and professional practice (Howard and Rodriguez-Minkoff 2017). Culturally responsive practice promotes the idea that children of color bring with them a “rich, complex, and robust set of cultural practices, experiences, and knowledge that are essential for learning and understanding” (Howard and Rodriguez-Minkoff 2017, 4), assets that teachers can and should build upon in classrooms so children experience education as inclusive, meaningful, and reflective of their familiar ways of knowing and being in the world (Howard and Rodriguez-Minkoff 2017, 4).

The roots of Culturally Responsive Practice stem from scholarship on effective Black educators who were committed to Black students and their communities. ... These educators considered it their responsibility and moral obligation to help students find success. ... They [developed] authentic and genuine relationships with students and their communities ... they saw the genius of students of color. (Warren-Grice 2017, 2, 8)

## **Supporting the Diverse Ways of Knowing and Learning Observed with Boys of Color**

Culturally responsive teachers need to become aware of the many different ways young children learn. Understanding a wide range of children’s learning preferences will help teachers plan environments that support all children to be engaged learners.



### Key Idea

## Creating early learning environments that engage and honor children's diverse learning preferences is best supported by:

- First and foremost, **getting to know each child as an individual** in addition to their family and community;
- Learning from the decades of research completed by **scholars of color and researchers investigating cultural practices and routines, ways of being, and learning across diverse communities**. These scholars have contributed greatly to what we know about culturally responsive education and the need to expand upon the dominant practices in schools—primarily based in White, middle-class cultural norms and values—in order to create more inclusive, engaging, and authentic learning environments for children from nondominant families and communities. We highlight some key findings from this work in tables 6 and 7.

**Although some research on culturally responsive practice associates specific racial/ethnic groups with certain preferred learning practices** (e.g., “African American culture values competition,” or “All Native Americans show respect in conversation by avoiding eye contact”), **we have intentionally chosen not to do so in this document**. As previously discussed, the human brain tends to stereotype and it takes intention and effort to resist and undo these natural tendencies. As a result, we do not describe specific characteristics as associated with certain racial/ethnic groups, as this both creates and reinforces stereotypes and also does not authentically acknowledge the significant differences that exist within racial, ethnic, and cultural groups, as well as individual differences. Instead, we pull from the rich body of culturally responsive scholarship to describe a wide range of learning preferences and cultural possibilities that teachers should become familiar with in order to support the diverse Boys of Color in their classrooms. With knowledge of children's diverse ways of knowing and learning, teachers will be better able to create culturally responsive and engaging early learning environments.

### *As you read through table 6 below, consider:*

- How can I expand my teaching methods to better meet the range of needs of the diverse Boys of Color I care for and teach?

**Table 6: Young Children's Diverse Ways of Knowing and Learning**

Cultural Values: Diverse Ways of Knowing and Learning	What Does This Look Like in an Early Learning Program?
<b>Bodily/Kinesthetic:</b> A rhythmic, movement-oriented approach to life that includes physical action and expression. Dislike of extended periods of being still or sedentary or confining body movements to a small physical space. "Speaking" with hands, arms, and the rest of the body is common.	An environment filled with movement, active engagement with materials, and time to spend touching and handling items in the classroom. Limiting time requiring children to sit still and listen to talking or doing paper-based work at desks, tables, or on the rug.
<b>Collaborative:</b> A preference to collaborate and work in groups. High value placed on group effort toward a common or communal interest.	When children can interact with others and peer teaching and peer learning is supported. When they can explain things to each other in their own language or dialect, not the teacher's language, and provide each other with real-life experiences and examples that help the content make sense.
<b>Competitive:</b> A value for competition involving challenging, testing, and pushing oneself to better performance. This could look like collaborative teams competing against one another.	Opportunities for children to work together in partners or groups to compete against others (who can jump higher, run faster, throw farther, build the tallest tower with blocks, clean up fastest, etc.) In trying to increase collaboration, our schools may have gone too far and restricted competition.

Cultural Values: Diverse Ways of Knowing and Learning	What Does This Look Like in an Early Learning Program?
<p><b>Creativity and Self-expression:</b> A value for creativity, uniqueness, “flavor,” and style. Every individual is entitled to their own opinions including children; individuals should not speak for someone else. Encouraging individuality and self-expression in everything from music, dance, art, and sports to talking, walking, dressing, and feeling.</p>	<p>Environments that do not require cookie-cutter rote responses, copying, filling in worksheets, or having everyone do the same thing at the same time. Instead, environments that invite children to embellish, elaborate, and take ideas, materials, and activities and add their own unique touch.</p>
<p><b>Experiential/Tactile:</b> Learning by experiencing, touching, doing, and personalizing. Learning sticks because you did it, you manipulated it, or it was connected to an event.</p>	<p>See bodily/kinesthetic above.</p>
<p><b>Harmony/Meaning is Derived from the Whole:</b> Understanding how people, the environment, and the universe are interdependently connected. Viewing things holistically, not in separate pieces. Seeing all aspects of life as integrated and inseparable.</p>	<p>Providing opportunities for children to contribute to the well-being of the plant world, the animal world, and the human world. Taking care of something living (a seed, a class pet, or an elderly neighbor across from the school) allows children to locate themselves in their families, communities, and the natural world while supporting their healthy social-emotional development.</p>

Cultural Values: Diverse Ways of Knowing and Learning	What Does This Look Like in an Early Learning Program?
<p><b>Interpersonal/Relationship-Based:</b> Social interactions are a crucial part of the socialization and learning process, and relationships are key in all interactions. People-oriented. Value for people over objects.</p>	<p>Learning better from individuals they know and who know them. They may ask questions wanting to know if their teachers have pets, where they live, whether they go to church, what they like to eat, etc. Providing answers to these questions helps children learn more about the person who is teaching them. They want to see their teachers in other contexts (e.g., grocery store, sports events, etc.) and they want teachers to see them in other contexts as well.</p>
<p><b>Interdependence/Communal:</b> Building strong social connections and bonds with extended family networks and to others in one's ethnic group or community. High level of respect for parents and/or elders.</p>	<p>See collaborative and interpersonal/relationship-based above. Create many opportunities for family members, friends, and community members to be welcomed into the classroom. Understanding that concepts of family may include immediate family, extended family, community members, tribal members, and/or elders.</p>
<p><b>Interdependence/Spirituality:</b> Many have a strong belief that a power greater than humankind exists. Spirituality does not always mean being connected to an organized religion.</p>	<p>See harmony above.</p>



Cultural Values: Diverse Ways of Knowing and Learning	What Does This Look Like in an Early Learning Program?
<p><b>Mental-Physical Challenge:</b> Appreciation for a challenge and endurance; problem-solving and strength-building in overcoming obstacles and barriers to success.</p>	<p>Opportunities for children to figure things out, explore, discover, develop hypotheses about what will happen if ... , ponder, and have full and authentic answers to their “why” questions. This is supported in environments when children have time, space, and materials to follow their own interests, seek answers to their own questions, and engage in physical activity.</p>
<p><b>Realism:</b> Preference for authentic communication and a straightforward direct manner (“keeping it real”) and paying attention to details.</p>	<p>Need to develop authentic relationships which can only be established over time. Asking authentic questions where adults want to hear children’s answers or ideas (versus questions that are rhetorical or where adults already know the answer).</p>
<p><b>Indirect communication:</b> Preference for an intentional lack of directness in conversation. A communication preference used to preserve harmony in relationships between people.</p>	<p>Instead of saying something directly to express an idea or feeling, communication by acting out the information through facial expressions, tone of voice, and/or gestures.</p>

Cultural Values: Diverse Ways of Knowing and Learning	What Does This Look Like in an Early Learning Program?
<p><b>Social Environment/Context:</b> A lot of meaning, communication, and understanding comes from nonverbal cues. Gestures, body language, eye contact, nonverbal expression, and the use of silence communicate important information (and often more than the words in a conversation).</p>	<p>Environment that includes visual representation of information (e.g., visual schedules, photographs, picture books, charts, graphs, posters, etc.).</p> <p>Understanding that a lapse of time between the asking and answering of a question may imply that the question is worth thinking about. Children might be taught that it is disrespectful to answer too quickly or interrupt someone else.</p>
<p><b>Verbal:</b> High value placed on charismatic, stylistic use of language and playing with language in very expressive ways. Could also reflect a value for memorizing (e.g., poems, sayings etc.) and storytelling.</p>	<p>Classrooms that support and intentionally include books and activities with wordplay and imaginary language. Time for children to talk with others and/or share or perform stories, poems, lyrics, or other forms of culturally meaningful language. Use of language full of analogy and exaggeration.</p>
<p><b>Verve/Stimulus Variety:</b> Preference for an active, synergetic environment filled with simultaneous talk and multiple activities, so one is attuned to several stimuli rather than a quiet, routine, or bland environment.</p>	<p>Environments that allow time for children to be making different choices based on their individual interests at the same time (e.g., free play or choice time) when children can experience a dynamic environment with talk and multiple forms of engaged activity.</p>

Cultural Values: Diverse Ways of Knowing and Learning	What Does This Look Like in an Early Learning Program?
<p><b>Observing and Participating in Cultural Routines:</b> In contrast to learning through direct instruction, preference for learning by observing adults and peers engaging in daily cultural routines and then participating in those same routines.</p>	<p>Inviting children to participate in and have responsibility for daily routines in the classroom. The children participate along with adults. Examples include setting the table for meals, sweeping the floor, or taking care of classroom pets.</p>

Sources: CHiXapkaid et al. (n.d.); Ren-Etta Sullivan (2016); Rogoff (2003); Rogoff et al. (2016)



Table 7 shows how an early childhood teacher might use knowledge of different cultural ways of knowing and learning to work responsively with the Boys of Color in the classroom. As you read through these examples, remember that all teachers should begin by considering what they know about an individual child first.

**Table 7: Working Responsively with Young Boys of Color**

If a Young Boy of Color:	A Teacher Might Try the Following Strategy:
<p>Avoids talking about himself or having attention focused solely on him, he may not want to reveal what he knows or may be embarrassed to be singled out for attention or for his accomplishments</p>	<p>Acknowledge the strengths and talents of more than one child at a time. Whenever bringing attention to the skills, knowledge, or accomplishments of students, explain that all children will be featured.</p>
<p>Stands closer to you than other children (tends to keep less personal space) and/or avoids eye contact with you</p>	<p>Consider that he may be standing close to you and desiring more physical touch because this is what he is used to at home and with the people he loves. For boys who desire physical touch, a gentle pat on the back (or upper arm), a light hug, and a warm smile can be reassuring.</p> <p>Understand that some boys may look down during your conversations with them because for some people it is a sign of disrespect to look at adults or individuals in positions of power directly in the eye. As a result, never force him to look at you when you talk to him. When he is developmentally ready, you can open a discussion about how eye contact in the US's dominant culture is a polite expression that communicates the person is listening to and has an interest in what someone else is saying.</p>

If a Young Boy of Color:	A Teacher Might Try the Following Strategy:
Seeks more attention from you than other children	When you can, give him the attention he desires. When you cannot, explain in a caring and attuned manner what you need to attend to and when you will have time to provide him with full, undivided attention.
Seems content (and prefers) working in groups	Support interactive and collaborative learning opportunities with peers and adults as often as possible.
Seems to have many responsibilities at home (at a younger age than expected in the dominant culture); he may have self-imposed chores to do because he wants to help his family; he may feel a sense of urgency to contribute to the family's support	Acknowledge these characteristics as significant strengths, and instead of expressing concern about the chores and responsibilities he takes on at an early age, consider ways to draw on his assets (hard work, persistence, commitment to family) within the classroom.
Arrives with an older sibling, comrade, or neighbor to a classroom or school event or a conference	Convey a welcoming attitude and your appreciation to the boy and family member for their presence and participation. Understand the important role of extended family members in his life. Extend a sincere invitation to meet his parent(s) at a time and location that is more convenient for them.

Source: Adapted from Campos for early childhood (2013, 99–100)

## Code-Switching

To be an effective culturally responsive teacher is to understand that many Boys of Color must learn how to navigate or “code-switch” between two or more cultures—the culture of their home and community and the culture of the early education program or school. In table 8, Campos describes an example of



what this might look like for a young kindergarten boy named Omar who lives in a middle-class neighborhood (2013). Omar's country of origin is Honduras. His grandparents migrated to the United States in 1979 and his parents and grandparents are Spanish speakers. Consider what Omar navigates on a daily basis to bridge his two worlds: home and school.

*Table 8: Omar Code-Switching Between Home and School*

Omar at Home	Omar at School
He speaks Spanish to his parents, relatives, and friends.	He switches to English. In all of his interactions in the classroom, he speaks English. In some informal situations (with his closest friends on the playground for instance) he speaks Spanish.
He eats traditional Honduran dishes.  His mother wants him to eat as much as he wants whenever he wants.	He is learning to eat traditional American dishes for breakfast and lunch.  He is learning healthy eating habits and to practice portion control. Some children have told him he is fat.
He has learned that he should look down when elders are speaking from an authoritative perspective.  He has learned that he should be collaborative in social situations.	He is learning to look authority figures in the eye.  He is learning to be direct in his social interactions and that competition is good.
He has learned that he can be affectionate with familiar persons.	He is learning to keep a personal space and boundaries with familiar persons (teachers, students, and other school personnel). He is learning to be conscientious about propriety (conforming to conventionally accepted standards of behavior).
He has learned to be hopeful about his achievements.	He is learning that he alone is responsible for his achievements.

Source: Campos (2013, 136)



Most Latino parents want their boys to retain their culture and native language. But they also want them to know how to succeed in this country, which means they have to learn how to navigate the dominant culture by making proper use of its rules, values, and language [Knight et al. 2010]. ... to coexist effectively in two cultures, many Latino boys develop flexible coping behaviors that enable them to manage the switch between the two. ... They do not develop this competence easily or on their own. They often have to draw on all of their resources for emotional support, such as from family members and friends. (Campos 2013, 135–137)

Tribal communities are incredibly diverse, and this diversity is reflected in traditional beliefs and practices related to children and their development. It is important to keep in mind that although specific beliefs and practices vary among tribal communities, there are commonalities shared among many tribal groups. Foremost is a belief in the sacredness of children and the centrality of their health to the health of the community. In many Native communities, children grow up surrounded by strong extended kin networks. They participate in traditional ceremonies from birth to adolescence that provide a sense of belonging and identity within their families, communities, and culture, and teach traditional knowledge for living a good life. They learn their tribal languages and stories and the wisdom imbedded within. They also learn how to navigate the two worlds—tribal and mainstream—in which they live. (CHiXapkaid et al., n.d.)

Although this experience of code-switching and learning to create a bicultural identity that blends their home culture with what is expected of them in the dominant culture at school can be stressful, **the ability of Boys of Color to navigate different cultural contexts is a significant strength that teachers should understand, acknowledge, and support in the classroom.** Educators can emphasize with children and families that building children's capacity for functioning in the dominant culture is an important responsibility of early childhood programs but equally essential is honoring and respecting children's home culture.



*Stop and Reflect*

- Did you have to engage in code-switching as a child? What was the experience like for you? What skills and capacities did you develop as a result?

- To your knowledge, do the Boys of Color in your class have to engage in code-switching? What skills and capacities do you see the boys developing from this experience?

When asked, “What do you wish for your grandson?” a Cochiti Pueblo grandfather of a first-year Head Start student replied, “I understand that English, science, math, and so forth are important for my grandson. I know he will learn those things. But my main concern is that he won’t learn our language and the Pueblo ways of life. To me, those are more important because it will teach him what it means to be Cochiti and to be a human being in a complex modern world. If he has a strong Cochiti foundation, then he will learn with confidence anything he puts his mind to. He can leave Cochiti and see the world, earn a degree, acquire a profession, and always come back knowing he is Cochiti and what that requires.” (Romero 2003)

An important message we want to communicate is that Boys of Color **do not have to choose between their home cultural identity and the expectations for who they need to be at school**. Further, because early childhood teachers want to help children develop a positive first association with school/education, it is essential that Boys of Color develop feelings that they are acknowledged for who they authentically are and feel welcomed wholeheartedly in their early learning program. **Incorporating aspects of the boys’ lives into the classroom environment** will communicate messages of acknowledgement, respect, and welcome.



### *Promising Practices*

Source: Adapted from Campos (2013)

**To incorporate aspects of the Boys’ lives into the classroom, try one of the following strategies.**

Invite the boys and their family members to **share information about their ancestors and countries of origin**. Talk with the children about similarities and differences between the different cultures and ethnic groups represented in your program. (Note: These questions must be approached with deep sensitivity and respect. If children and their families are undocumented or refugees fleeing conditions of war and violence or other forms of unrest, these questions may not be appropriate.)

Invite parents and family members to tell you about the **values they believe in and impart to their children**. Understand where there are similarities and differences between what you learn from the families and the values the boys are learning in your classroom.

Tell stories and read books throughout the year of the **contributions of famous individuals from the racial/ethnic groups of the Boys of Color** in your classroom as planned curriculum activities for all children to learn and enjoy.

Incorporate **culturally diverse pictures and stories** that represent Boys of Color and reflect their lives and interests to support their learning and engagement.

Embed Black cultural perspectives and approaches into the curriculum ... learn about Black history, Black culture, and the Black Experience both in the United States and in Africa. Black people have a history and experience on earth that spans thousands and thousands of years. ... programs should not limit their knowledge of Black people to the last four hundred years of their experience in the United States alone. (Ren-Etta Sullivan 2016, 30–31)

Teachers can also support Boys of Color to know and be **proud of their family and community histories** and the strengths of those histories. Sadiq, an African American graduate student reflecting on his early childhood experiences, describes how important it was for him to learn about African history:

It's all about identity. Being at Claremont Mouhamed School, my school was a Black Muslim school. Me being Black and Muslim, there was identity being there. And with Ms. Calvin, there were people who looked like you. Then I went to Mama Ya, she put it in perspective and taught us our history, where we come from and what we've been through. Influential African Americans and Africa Diaspora all throughout the world and history.

It's very important and keeps you grounded. You know who you are and you're not constantly searching for people down the street. You're reminded how great you can be and how far you can go and how far your people have come. So that is very phenomenal in the lives of African Americans.

A lot of us don't know our history. A lot of us didn't know the traditions or how far we came. We were taught about George Washington or people who really didn't have an investment in who we were. We were just in the background but when you see people like Benjamin Banner, Fredrick

Douglass, if you see people who were around that time that had an impact, that's very important and something I was able to witness and learn at a very young age when some people don't learn this till college.

I understood the power of knowing a historical figure [Mansa Musa] and that's when it really kicked in for me. I still have this book at home. It was someone I identified with. It was a Black man who accomplished a lot and was well known and loved and had a lot of knowledge. It made me feel like I wanted to be king one day. It made feel like something I personally connected to. Even though I knew I wouldn't be royalty, but it was something I was capable of. It was my Black superhero at the time because I didn't see any Black superheroes.

### *Encourage Home Languages and Language Varieties*

**Culturally responsive teachers encourage and support children and families to speak their home languages and language varieties.** They continually communicate the important message that speaking two or more languages, and maintaining their home language, is a valuable asset. If you do not know the child's home language, ask the children and their families to teach you some phrases. Allowing them to teach the teacher sends a message to them about how much their home culture and language are valued. Creating opportunities for children to be exposed to and to appreciate different languages, especially the languages spoken by their peers, is also a powerful way to celebrate multilingualism and the linguistic competencies that children bring with them to school.

Cultivating an environment that encourages multilingualism greatly improves the ability of many students to reach their potential. And there are many students who can benefit, according to the California Department of Education and its Data Reporting Office:

- English learners constitute 20 percent of the total students enrolled in California public schools;
- over 40 percent of students in California public schools speak a language other than English at home;
- the majority (at least 70 percent) of English learners are young children; and
- Spanish is by far the most commonly spoken non-English language spoken at home in the state, with more than 80 percent of English learners speaking Spanish (2020).

Even though the capacity of young children to learn more than one language and the benefits of bilingualism are well known and well researched, most young dual language learners (also known as DLLs) do not receive educational supports that foster their emerging bilingualism (Espinosa 2015). One myth about bilingualism is that it can cause delays or confusion. This misperception persists because the language skills of bilingual/multilingual children are often assessed only in one language (most frequently English), which does not take into account their full repertoire of skills across languages. For example, the size of a bilingual child's vocabulary may appear smaller than that of a monolingual English-speaking child if you only compare their vocabularies in English, but once the bilingual child's total vocabulary across languages are accounted for, it is comparable, if not more advanced (Hoff et al. 2012). Parents of children with disabilities or children perceived to have struggles in the school setting are especially advised to speak only English to their children, but studies show that bilingual children with disabilities do just as well as monolingual children with comparable disabilities and can reap the same benefits from bilingualism as children without disabilities (Kohnert 2013).

**It is important for Boys of Color to be supported to speak and to celebrate the varieties of English that are spoken in their families and communities.**

Unlike more commonly recognized distinctions between nationalized languages like Spanish and English, varieties within English<sup>23</sup> like African American English,<sup>24</sup> Chicano English, among others, are often not recognized as unique linguistic systems that are every bit as complete, complex, and valid as mainstream American English, which is the variety privileged in school settings (Wolfram and Schilling 2016). Double negatives, for example, are very common across languages in the world and in many varieties of English, yet it is considered "ungrammatical" in mainstream American English. As a result of this lack of understanding, children who do not speak mainstream American English are often thought of as simply speaking "bad English." The responsibility then falls on the child to "speak better," rather than the teacher and/or the school to offer systematic supports to honor the child's linguistic competencies, and to offer scaffolding and instruction to help the child acquire the English language variety

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23 We intentionally use the term "varieties of English" over "dialects" because dialects are commonly misunderstood as mere derivatives of "proper languages" and that results in a diminished view of these languages. Most educators are unaware that dialects like African American English or Chicano English among others are complete linguistic systems on par with mainstream American English. As a result, a bilingual teaching approach is also effective for children who are bidialectal.

24 PBS has [a good resource about African American English](#) created for teachers and students by John Baugh (2005).





privileged in school. Teachers can do so by explicitly recognizing and celebrating the different “Englishes” that are spoken across communities, for example, by including children’s literature that features African American English.<sup>25</sup> They can also adopt teaching methods that highlight mainstream American English as a different variety of English rather than the “correct” version, for example, by providing opportunities for children to practice code-switching between the different English varieties in their repertoire as any dual language learner might do between two languages.<sup>26</sup>

Jonathan Ross of Alaska Native Heritage Center, adds: “The language is your world view. The way I see the world (when speaking in my native language) ... is so different from thinking in English. Every single sound of the language has a meaning to it, and unless you can understand those meanings, it is really hard to put that world view together” (US Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Head Start 2012, 9).

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25 For a list of children’s books that have African American English representation, check out [the list made by the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign](#) (2010). *Honey Baby Sugar Child*, by Alice Faye Duncan, is another good example for young children (2005).

26 “[DYSA African American English \(or Ebonics\) in the Classroom](#),” part of the *Do You Speak American?* documentary, provides an example of this kind of respectful use of code-switching as a teaching strategy (McGarritty 2012).



It is important for early childhood teachers to realize the significant variation that exists for English language proficiency among young dual language learners. Teachers will observe that some children are bilingual, some will speak limited or no English, some will speak English well, and others will struggle to learn the English language. Table 10 demonstrates this point for teachers, describing the differences in English proficiency found among Latinx boys in one grade level.

**Table 9: English Proficiency Diversity Among Young Children**

Students and Their Family's Language Background			
<b>Mayo</b>  His parents speak only Spanish, and he speaks only Spanish	<b>Fito</b>  His mother prefers to speak Spanish, and he prefers to speak English	<b>Jeffrey</b>  His parents are fluent in Spanish and English, and he prefers to speak English	<b>Jacob</b>  His parents speak only English, and he speaks only English
<b>James</b>  His mother is fluent in Spanish and English, and he is fluent in both languages	<b>Rene</b>  His parents are not fluent in Spanish or English and speak a dialect, and he speaks only English	<b>Beto</b>  His grandparents speak only Spanish, and he speaks only English	<b>Jayden</b>  His aunt speaks only English, and he demonstrates the same preference
<b>Roland</b>  His foster parents speak only English, and he is fluent in English and Spanish	<b>Chuy</b>  His parents are not fluent in Spanish or English and speak an indigenous dialect from Oaxaca, and so does he	<b>Evan</b>  His parents are fluent in Spanish and English, and he speaks only English	<b>Joe</b>  His mother prefers to speak Spanish and so does he

Source: Campos (2013, 90)

As table 9 reflects and we emphasize throughout this book, there is so much diversity among Boys of Color and their families. Working for equity in early childhood requires a commitment to not make assumptions based on social categories of identity (e.g., race, ethnicity, language) but instead, to get to know each child and family individually and to ask about their personal preferences.



## Key Idea

### Teachers Who Share a Child's Race and Ethnicity

Whenever possible, it is ideal for Boys of Color to have teachers who share their race and ethnicity. Marcus Pain, a parent reflecting on his two African American sons' early care experiences, explains how important this was for his family:

What was missing [from our son's provider] was her ability to culturally check our child without being verbally abusive or not listening to him, and being low on resources on how to intervene. I'm talking about having experience knowing how to have an intervention. Our lesson was that our child needed a Black person. The next person we hired was a Black guy from Cuba. We learned about what we need for our Black boys. **They need people to take care of them that can be assertive and firm and caring and not scared of them.** That was a basic thing that we didn't realize that would actually trump professional experience.

Dr. Eva Marie Shivers describes how she and her research team are observing that when children and teachers are ethnically matched, the teachers are making more of an effort to develop strong attachments with young children whose behavior is perceived by educators as challenging.

When children first come into child care programs, they form relationships with their teachers. Let's say there is that difficult or challenging child. **When they are ethnically matched, that teacher works just a little bit harder to form that secure attachment relationship.** When they are not ethnically matched, they are not as likely to form that secure attachment relationship but that's only for the children who the teachers' rate as a challenging child. The children who are labeled "easy child," the ethnic match didn't matter. The secure attachments were formed, but for the children who are labeled difficult, when there is a match ethnically, they are more likely to form a secure attachment relationship. So, what's going on there? Is it about understanding the family? About seeing yourself

in this child? Do you see your own children in this child? We don't know what it is but it's something with who the teacher is; he or she is responding differently. There is so much that we don't know. We are only on the verge of understanding what might be going on (Shivers 2018, personal communication).



## Research

### What Does Research Say About the Benefits of Children Assigned to Teachers Who Share Their Race and/or Ethnicity?

The research examining the positive educational experiences of students of color in K–12 classrooms with teachers of the same race and/or ethnicity concluded:

- Black and Latinx students are **significantly** less likely to be perceived as fighting, being disruptive, or being argumentative when they are in a classroom with a teacher who shares their race and/or ethnicity.
- Black and Latinx students are also more likely to receive more favorable ratings of their academic ability when they are in a classroom with a teacher that shares their race and/or ethnicity.
- Black teachers play a critical role in creating culturally responsive classroom environments for Black students. Assignment to a Black teacher is linked with improved achievement for Black students, with the largest effects for children in elementary school.
- Black students are also more likely to benefit from assignment to Black teacher in terms of a reduced risk of exclusionary discipline, an increased likelihood of being assigned to a gifted and talented program, improved attendance, and a decreased risk of dropping out of school.
- Evidence from kindergarten and early in the school year demonstrates how assignment to a same-race teacher leads to improved teacher perception of students' classroom behavior and academic ability.

Source: Redding (2019)

## Adjust the Communication Approach

As a culturally responsive teacher, you may need to **adjust and individualize your communication approach** to culturally align with the communication style that individuals are familiar with in their homes and communities. Faye, a pre-K teacher for African American boys, describes how she uses culturally aligned communication with the students in her class (part of Faye's stance as a warm demander):

A lot of time my tone changes, so, the way I'm talking. My normal talk and then "STOP!" and that change and they're like, "Oh, OK, got it." The change in tone. My voice gets stern and I'm very relaxed most of the time, "We're going to do this and this," and then something goes wrong and "Stop! I need you not to touch him anymore!" My voice is very hardcore. When I talk with them one-on-one, I don't have an "asking voice"—it's a command, this is what I need you to do, "I need you to sit down," I have a telling voice. I know a lot of teachers, (mimicking a weak voice) "OK, can we just do this?" [The African American boys] don't respond to that and most Boys of Color are, for the most part, headed by women. It's matriarchal. Even if there is a man in the house, most discipline, most teaching, everything comes from the mom. And they kind of go with that and change the way they go because they pick up on your tone. They pick up on my face changing. **I'm firm but not in an asking kind of way.** There's a difference in the way people talk and you can tell, and I can say I wouldn't listen to some teachers either because you're not reaching me, you're just, "OK, well if you want to sit down, then go ahead and sit." No! **"Sit down!"** I think the way your tone is and your looks and everything goes into how they react.

## Acknowledge Religious Practices and Spiritual Beliefs

Culturally responsive teachers **acknowledge children's religious practices and spiritual beliefs** as a unique and powerful element fostering individual identity and connection to their family and community. Mama Taneisha, a licensed family child care provider for 22 years who works with Boys of Color, shares why this is an important instructional practice:

We are born as spiritual people. One of the ways teachers can tap into the strengths and potential for Boys of Color is to help them discover their birth story.

When I notice behavior that is challenging, I let the child know: “I see you.” One of the ways we can do this is to lift up their birth story, asking them to discover “How did you get your names and what does your name mean?”<sup>27</sup> We have to be able to gain insights about who they really are by daily conversation and observation so that we can empower their strengths and nurture each boy’s natural brilliance and spiritual maturity. One father shared with me his son’s birth story and I learned this boy was unable to breathe on his own for the first 45 seconds of his life. These stories help me understand a lot more about who these children are, the connections they have to their families and how they operate in the world. When inappropriate behavior shows up, I ask them, “Is this who your ancestors created you to be? Who are you? You were born to live up to your name!” Our boys demonstrate spiritual maturity.

When I was ill, it was the boys who held my hand, asked me how I was doing. We have spiritual conversations without it being specific to any religious practice: “How do you say your prayer? Where do you burn candles in your home?” Because we know boys (all children) love to move and be outside, I build their physical and spiritual strength by spending a lot of time outside even though we are in a dense, urban environment. We climb trees. We climb walls. We challenge our bodies and increase our confidence. We walk through our neighborhood and these children know they have a community wrapped around them that see them and shows up for all of them. Not just the ones who walk the straight line.

*Building from Culturally Responsive Practice: Additional Instructional Practices That Communicate Love, Respect, and Genuine Care*

**The strategies described below are supportive for *all* children. Yet, too often, they are not practiced with *all* children.** Our challenge is to ensure Boys of Color are supported in classrooms with **all** of these strategies.

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27 It is important that teachers are sensitive to the diversity of family constellations and not assume that all Boys of Color and their families will know about the boys’ birth stories or feel comfortable sharing them if they do. There are many situations (e.g., adoption, foster care, surrogacy, conception through rape, refugees and/or unaccompanied minors who have fled their home country and many more) that may prevent a boy and his family from being able to discuss a birth story or not being retraumatized doing so.





**Refer to Boys of Color by name and know how to pronounce their names correctly.**

An essential relationship-building block for an attuned respectful relationship is to know the child's full name, to use it (or the name the boy himself or his family requests that you use) and to pronounce it correctly. As names are central to children's identities, greeting them every day with a warm and welcoming tone and then addressing them by name is a simple and very important way of conveying your respect to the boy and his family. If you do not know how to pronounce a boy's name, ask their family—they will be happy to teach you—then practice until you have them memorized and can pronounce children's names as best you can or as close as possible to the correct pronunciation. Guillermo, Akikta, Darnell, Mario, and Quang will roll right off your tongue!

**Show that you are curious and interested in each boy and learning about his life and family.**

Show authentic interest in your Boys of Color, their families, and their communities. Get to know as much as you can about them as individuals. Find out about their lives! Create opportunities where you are inviting boys to tell you about themselves: what they love to do, what they care about, what scares



or upsets them, how they cope with their stressors, how they spend time at home with their families, who lives with them, if they have any pets, and how they feel about coming to your classroom. When you ask the boys questions, **genuinely take time to listen to their responses**. Communicate through your body language and tone of voice that you are authentically interested in learning anything and everything they want to share with you. As you are learning about each boy and his family, remember to consider the different forms of capital they bring into your classroom (see [Cultural Capital](#) in chapter one). It is through getting to know each boy as an individual that you will create a trusting, attuned, and responsive relationship with them.

LaShawn, a toddler teacher working in a Bay Area faith-based child care center program for parents in recovery with young children, describes how spending time to get to know one of the young Boys of Color in her care, Tyrone, transformed their relationship together as she shifted from judging him to instead, building empathy, understanding, and appreciation for him:

In a meeting with her coach, toddler teacher LaShawn admitted that she was getting frustrated with one of the young boys in her primary care group. “Maybe he needs to be with a different teacher. He is always causing problems.” The coach asked some questions about Tyrone. “What does he like to play with? What makes him happy? When is he most relaxed?” LaShawn realized that she couldn’t really answer. Her interactions with Tyrone seemed to happen only when he was having difficulties.

LaShawn was reminded by her coach that spending time with Tyrone when she wasn’t frustrated by his behavior might provide her with ideas and insights for working with him. They brainstormed ways to deepen the relationship by having him spend more time with LaShawn from the moment he arrived. She thought of ways to focus her attention and comments on the behaviors and actions that she was hoping to see and planned on using deep breathing to stay calm during times Tyrone was more challenging for her.

When the coach returned two weeks later, she was greeted by LaShawn and a beaming Tyrone. “Look who is my best helper!” LaShawn said. “We are having so much fun together.” Later, when the coach was able to talk with LaShawn, she reported that taking more time with Tyrone and looking for the things that he enjoyed really changed the way they interacted. “When I got to know him, he and I didn’t seem to get into struggles anymore. He really has been my helper. And the other children are enjoying our time together as well.

Teacher Amy and Ms. Stacie use other strategies to get to know the Boys of Color in their classrooms:

Teacher Amy smiles as Troy's mother shares photos on her phone of Troy's one-year-old birthday celebration with his large extended family. In this conversation, Troy's mother also shares new foods and songs that he is learning and enjoys with his extended family. In turn, teacher Amy asks a few questions to clarify and understand more about the importance and meaning of these events, foods, and interactions for Troy and his family.

Ms. Stacie invites every family to bring in a current photo of their toddler every few months and she routinely places these prominently on a bulletin board with captions written by the family members. These photos have stimulated many lively conversations between families as well as between families and teachers as they enjoy learning more about all the children.

### **Boys of Color are brilliant, creative, and curious about their worlds.**

How can teachers support their development of higher order thinking and the oral and written expression of their ideas? Jerome Gourdine, Director of African American Male Achievement at the Oakland Unified School District, offers several recommendations for teachers and shares practical strategies for teachers to build on the brilliance of Boys of Color:

- Operate on a belief system that Boys of Color are innately brilliant and possess the necessary skills to master every developmentally appropriate task as part of your planned curriculum.
- Dedicate planned time for focused one-on-one interactions with Boys of Color to observe, listen, and be curious about what these boys can and want to do every week. Spend less time focusing on what Boys of Color cannot yet do or do not want to do.
- In your curiosity to understand and learn more about the minds of the Boys of Color in your care, find different ways to ask them questions and opportunities for them to express their thinking through audio or video recordings, writing, drawing, acting, singing, and moving. You will learn how they express themselves in the world. Document these expressions inside and outside the classroom.

- Ask yourself “How?” questions when you consider the materials, curriculum, room arrangement, and activities you would like to share with Boys of Color. For example, “How can I share [blank] so Boys of Color will enjoy and be motivated to learn more about [blank]?” How can I provide as many ways for each Boy of Color to be successful learning more about [blank]?
- In your role as a teacher, think of yourself as a guide who provides Boys of Color a significant level of autonomy and ownership of their learning process. Encourage them to explore materials independently and create their own meaning through dialogue, play including exploration with loose parts and other hands-on materials, and various forms of creative expression (art, dance, music, etc.).

### **Look for many opportunities to make connections in your classroom with the boys’ lives.**

Of course, it goes without saying that you need to make sure you know which information the boys and their families are comfortable having you share with other adults and children in the classroom, and which stories they prefer you keep confidential. It is helpful if teachers **make this a reciprocal process and share aspects of your own life with the boys**. A pre-K teacher for African American boys adds:

You gotta sit down and talk with them. When they are on the rug, you are too. You’re not always in that chair. Gotta get on their level. You gotta be able to play and laugh with them. Even when I taught older kids, I would get out there and play tetherball. That’s the bonds that they build. It’s the playtime for the little ones where they build that trust. It’s you getting down with them at their level.

### **Use the information you gather about the Boys of Color in your classroom to acknowledge and reinforce the diversity present in all Boys of Color.**

Teachers should model for children how to disrupt harmful stereotypes where sweeping generalizations are made about individuals based on their racial or ethnic group membership—e.g., all Latinxs are Mexican, all African Americans are good athletes (see the “Myth of the Model Minority” that follows). Stereotypes are harmful and prevent teachers from seeing the complexity, diversity, and individuality that each Boy of Color brings into their classroom. This is true even when stereotypes appear to be positive in attribution as seen with the stereotype of the model minority.

Sadiq, an African American graduate student reflecting on his early childhood experiences, concurs: "I feel like the most important thing for a Black boy is to let him know his place in the world. We're always going to be in a stereotype everywhere we go. So, it's important to spin this in a positive matter. Being a great athlete isn't a bad thing. But saying you're only good as an athlete is a problem."

Ho et al. describe the **"Myth of the Model Minority"**:

Asian Americans are a diverse group comprised of multiple national origins, immigrant experiences, languages, and cultural socioeconomic and familial backgrounds. Asian Americans include people of Asian descent, such as Asian Indians, Cambodians, Chinese, Filipinos, Hmong, Japanese, Koreans, Laotians, Pakistanis, Thais, and Vietnamese. Asian American students are often perceived as the "model minority" as being academically high achieving, particularly in mathematics and science. This stereotype, however, often hides the diverse barriers that many Asian American students encounter, including immigration and refugee status, limited English proficiency, poverty, and other sociocultural experiences of ethnic subgroups that do not fare as well academically. The model minority myth may also pose social and emotional problems (such as anxiety and depression) for many Asian American students. Because studies typically lack disaggregated data, the variability in academic achievement within Asian American subgroups and its related factors are often [not reported], and the overall academic success of one Asian subgroup may overshadow and obscure the academic struggles of others. (2013, 50)

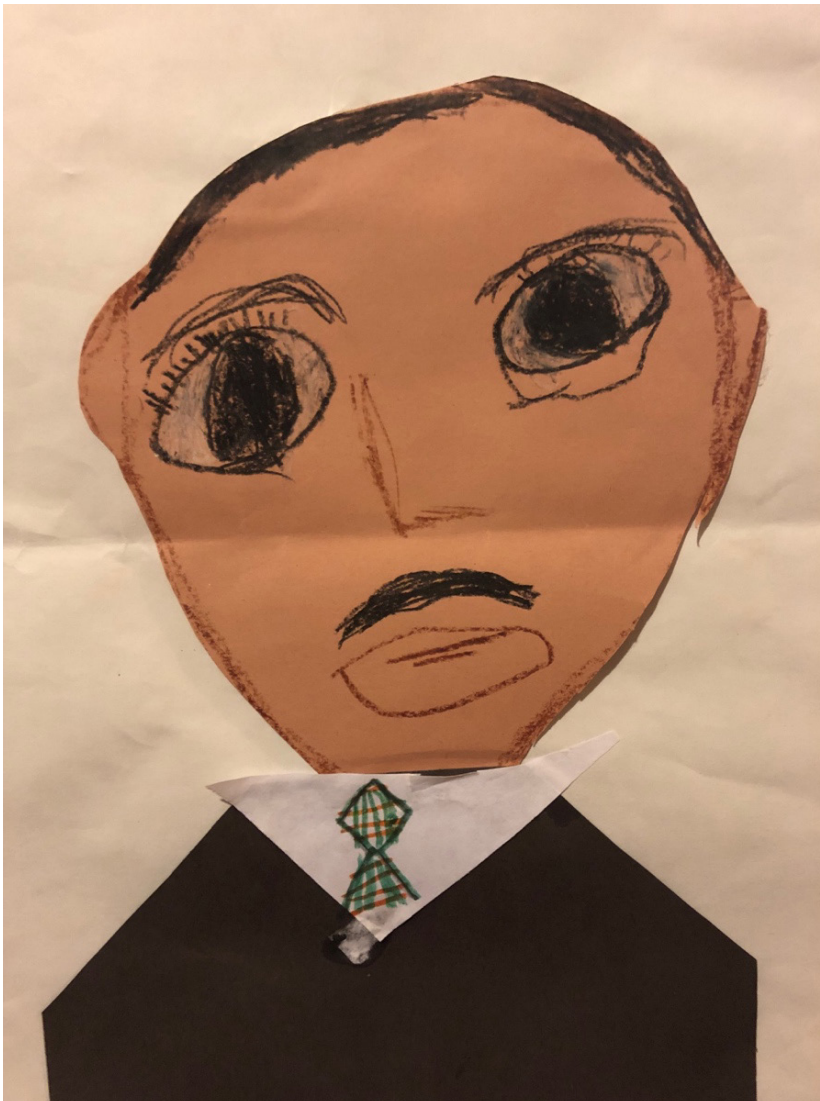
In all of your communication with Boys of Color and their families, **reinforce messages that each of them is unique and has many strengths and skills that you see and value**. Most importantly, be genuine! Young children can easily perceive when teachers and other adults are not authentic in their efforts to get to know them.

### **Communicate validating messages.**

Communicate positive messages to every young Boy of Color in your class that acknowledge their strengths and capabilities and their important role as valued students in your classroom community. These messages can be shared through verbal affirmations ("Thank you for sharing your blocks with Evan. You are a good friend," or, "Wow, you really had to work hard on that one. That was a smart way to solve the problem.") or through nonverbal cues (a warm smile, light hug, or pat on the shoulder). Use your observations of each child to find positive things to say about them ("I see how interested you are in that book. It's wonderful to see

you so engaged in reading! What is the book about?"). If they are not in class for any reason, tell them that you noticed and you are glad they have returned ("We missed you when you were absent yesterday. We are so glad you are back here learning with all of us!").

Share these validating messages through one-on-one interactions and during group time discussions when their peers also hear these messages. Work consistently to engage in this practice. Boys of Color who may be perceived as difficult to like will depend on you to engage in this practice. They **need** to have reassurance that you have an unwavering belief in their inherent goodness, that you want them to succeed, and—despite your struggles together—you see and acknowledge their strengths and capacities. By offering positive, strength-based, loving expressions, teachers increase the chances that every Boy of Color feels a sense of belonging, love, authentic care, and safety in their classrooms. Make sure to share these validating messages in your communication with families too!



"I wanted to show  
that MLK Jr. helped a  
lot of people."

—Micah,  
seven years old



## Should Teachers Praise Boys of Color?

Current research concludes that teachers should not praise children for their ability but instead focus on their effort—these studies are associated with a popular concept known as Growth Mindset, identified by Carol Dweck: “... we can praise wisely, not praising intelligence or talent. That has failed. Don’t do that anymore. But praising the process that kids engage in: their effort, their strategies, their focus, their perseverance, their improvement. This ‘process praise’ creates kids who are hardy and resilient” (2014).

Luke Wood, a distinguished professor of education and expert on issues facing Black boys and men in education, suggests that growth mindset is “not wrong, but incomplete” when applied to the education of boys and men of color (2017). **Wood recommends that teachers affirm both Boys of Color ability and their effort** (2017). Why? Because Black boys and men do not receive messages that affirm their intelligence. Wood explains:

I have worked with students at all levels of education. And, even among my most esteemed masters and doctoral students, I find they have rarely (if ever) been told they have ability, that they are smart, they are brilliant. In fact, these messages are so foreign to them that they often receive them as disingenuous because they have never been told before that they are worthwhile, remarkable, and capable. This is shameful. (2017)

Wood’s research demonstrates that validation of ability (messages that affirm the skills, knowledge, and capabilities of boys and men of color) is one of the strongest predictors of success for men of color. Wood concludes, “**we must question, incessantly, the scholarship and frameworks that have been perpetuated as foundational**” (2017). As with the concept of Growth Mindset, many assumed “best practices” may be well-intentioned, but not relevant and reflective of the unique lived experiences of Boys of Color.



## **Create scripted stories for boys who have not experienced positive early childhood learning outside their homes.**

Scripted stories can be empowering for children especially if teachers invest the time to provide photos, images, and words that reflect the interests, needs, and cultural values of the individual child and their family. In turn, boys can form new positive connections to a “school” experience, laying the foundation for later potentially positive associations with school and education. Consider the following authentic example.

### *A New Story for Darnell*

In a state preschool setting, a coach was using videotape to capture interactions between children and teachers. While their focus was on catching the teachers at their best, there was an interaction in the background that caught the attention of the coach. One of the children who had been identified as having “challenging behavior” was being talked to in a harsh manner. The coach knew that the teachers were quite tired of the time and attention this child took from them, and they had asked the coach for ideas.

The coach showed the video to Vivian, the teacher who was speaking harshly and invited her to consider how the information was being received by the boy, Darnell. Vivian initially focused on what Darnell had been doing and why she needed to talk with him. The coach listened empathetically, and then wondered if Vivian thought that Darnell heard the teacher’s words. In watching again, Vivian focused on her tone and shared that she sounded just like her mother in that interaction! Reflecting on that, Vivian realized that Darnell was not really absorbing the information during that time. In fact, he had started complaining to his family that he did not like school.

The teachers decided to make a scripted story about Darnell and how he was working on some of his challenges. They talked with him about it, took pictures, put together a book using slide deck presentation software, and then read it to him to help reinforce the strategies he was using to be successful. It was such a hit that they made one for him to take home and share with his family.

The story helped him remember the strategies and he no longer complained about going to school. His teachers were much more conscious about their tone during interactions with him and found that when they reminded him that they could come up with something to do when he was sad or angry, he was very receptive.

## **Darnell's Days at School (A Scripted Story)**

- I love to play with my friends at school.
- I am strong. I can ride the bike.
- I am very happy when my friends play with me!
- I feel sad and angry when my friends don't play with me.
- My teachers are helping me learn what to do when I feel this way.
- When I feel sad or mad, I can sit down and draw a picture.
- After I draw the picture, I feel better inside.
- When I am upset, I can also ask my teacher for help. My teacher helps me feel better and learn that when I have a problem, I can find a solution.
- Sometimes it is hard for me to wait and take turns.
- My teacher helps me find a solution. I can wait and know that I am going to have a turn.
- I can sing my favorite song while I am waiting.
- I waited. Now it is my turn and I am so happy!
- I like to help my teachers and friends at school.
- I am proud of all that I am learning!

—Made with love for Darnell by his teachers

### **Set high expectations.**

Set high expectations for every Boy of Color. This means you genuinely believe that every Boy of Color in your classroom is capable of learning, developing, and achieving to their absolute potential. This is true for children who are struggling developmentally or with social-emotional issues, children who are perceived to be “behind” their peers in content knowledge or skills, and children who—using a deficit perspective—would be described to be “at risk.” Teachers should wholeheartedly believe and communicate that failure is not an option for any child in their classroom (Ren-Etta Sullivan 2016). Boys of Color need to hear these beliefs communicated to them frequently. These same messages should also be shared with their families. Faye, a pre-K teacher in a summer intervention program specifically designed for African American boys entering kindergarten, shares:

I'm like, "No! You're **way too smart** to let this go!" I try to reinforce how smart they are. I have a very high bar, which is hard [to meet], but a lot of times the kids will reach for that bar and they keep going. Do I expect that they will all obtain it? Of course not, because they are not all there, but the bar is set high for all of them and I accept them for where they are.

I have expectations of my own kids and I don't accept failure. If you try and you don't succeed, that's not failure. Because you tried. As a mom and a teacher, you must try, you cannot sit there and do nothing. So, trying **is** success. There may be small successes. I'm always thinking on how I can make things better for them, and if this was my kid, would I want or allow them to do this? Some kids will try and go back and forth—why do we have to do this? As a parent I would never allow you to go back and forth with me like that so I won't allow it in my classroom. I will stop and explain it to them, but I won't banter back and forth with them no matter what.

There are many aspects to setting high expectations with young Boys of Color. First, **expectations should be clearly communicated**. Boys should not be confused about the expectations for their participation, collaboration, and behavior in your classroom. Be explicit in explaining the purpose of each activity or behavior required and the benefits that can result from their participation. If there is a change in your expectations, clearly communicate it and provide your rationale for making the change.

Strike a balance between an insistence on excellence and authentic care, an approach described as a "**Warm Demander**" (Kleinfeld 1972). The concept of a warm demander was initially developed and determined to be an effective approach for Native Alaskan and American Indian children from small rural villages attending urban schools in Alaska. It has more recently been used successfully with African American and Latinx students (Hammond 2015). As warm demanders, teachers use their caring relationship with a child to insist on their engagement and persistence in their personal learning process (Hammond 2015). Warm demanders create opportunities for Boys of Color to experience many "small wins," acknowledging to them and others that they are making continuous progress. Mekhi, a four-and-a-half-year-old attending family child care in Oakland, California, says, "Every day I go to Mama Stacie for school and I am learning to be a great reader. Did you know I know all my ABCs and I can count all the way to 100? Mama Stacie always says I have to be able to read to succeed."

As scholar Lisa Delpit explains, **warm demanders expect a great deal of their students, convince them of their own brilliance, and help them to reach their potential in a disciplined and structured environment** (2013). The combination

of personal warmth, support, and high expectations has been repeatedly demonstrated to be an effective combination in educational environments for Boys of Color.



An essential element for holding high expectations and being authentically caring is knowing how to **provide effective feedback**. Effective feedback supports children's learning and improvement when: (a) teachers use a **caring, supportive, and encouraging tone**; a tone that does not leave Boys of Color feeling a sense of shame and self-doubt; (b) it is **actionable and specific**; information that clearly describes *how* Boys of Color can improve by providing information on a specific behavior, idea or response that a child should change or adapt along with the rationale for doing; and (c) is **time sensitive**; provided right away to support the child's understanding.

### **Support children's agency/decision-making.**

Because many Boys of Color experience high levels of stress and some endure trauma, it is important that they have opportunities to feel a sense of agency and control to support their coping and healing and strengthen their resilience. Share power with Boys of Color. Allow them to make choices throughout the day and use their questions, discoveries, and interests to inform the curriculum.

## *How Can Teachers Support Boys of Color to Thrive in Early Childhood Classrooms?*

Award-winning author Brian L. Wright reinforces the importance of agency, physical activity interaction, and complex thinking for all young children, but especially for young Boys of Color. The research overwhelmingly demonstrates that Black boys' experiences in early childhood classrooms are dominated with three approaches: (1) adultification, where adults see Black boys as older and less innocent than their White peers; (2) boot camp, where the teacher acts like a drill sergeant; or (3) factory, where the teacher conducts activities like a manager (Wright 2018). Within these approaches, teachers tell children "what to do and think," praise is given for rote responses, emphasis is placed on obedience, and threats and punishment are given to anyone (frequently to Black boys) who deviates from the rules or teacher's directions (Wright 2018). Further, Black boys are often in early childhood environments where the curriculum is not culturally aligned with their familiar ways of knowing and learning (Wright 2018).

Although Wright focuses on Black boys, the learning conditions they describe and the recommendations they make for teachers are relevant for all Boys of Color. Wright encourages teachers to create opportunities for Boys of Color to:

- **Direct their own learning. Be physically active and interact with their peers.** "Like all young children, Black boys are intrinsically curious about the world, with a desire to figure out how the world works .... Many children, and Black boys are no exception, enjoy self-directed and physically active learning in social groups with their peers" (Wright 2018, 54).
- **Learn about the topics that interest them and topics they find relevant to their lives and daily experiences.**

Children of all ages, races, and abilities are more likely to exert their fullest attention and mental energy toward investigating and finding solutions to problems or achieving goals and outcomes that matter most to them .... Black boys are no exception ... [they] frequently complain about what is presented (or not presented) in the curriculum, viewing it as uninteresting or irrelevant to their interests and lived experiences. The voices, feelings, and perspectives of Black boys often are not respected and valued by their teachers or classmates. (Wright 2018, 55, 70)

- **Engage in higher-order thinking and complex problem solving.**

The project approach encourages children to contemplate and propose projects (and subsequent goals) based on topics or subjects of interest to one or more children, often working cooperatively in small and large



groups ... projects develop, evolve, and emerge in response to children's interests as well as compelling questions they encounter and unforeseen problems they feel compelled to pursue .... The more opportunity Black boys have to engage in higher-order thinking, the more likely they will become confident problem solvers and producers of culture and knowledge. (Wright 2018, 102)

### *Why Should Children Have Some Power and Control?*

Author Debra Ren-Etta Sullivan recommends that teachers of Black boys learn to share some level of power and control with them to optimally support their learning (2016). Ren-Etta Sullivan explains:

Why? Why should children have some power and control? To me, the answer is simple: because it's *their* education and they should have opportunities to take some responsibility for it. Black children *want* some ownership over their education; they *want* to participate. Teachers want students to have ownership, responsibility, and participation when it comes to learning. Yet we often want children to develop skills and abilities without our being intentional about how and when we give them opportunities to do so. (2016)

### **Share power and control with Black boys in early learning programs by:**

Reminding yourself daily that making children be still and quiet does not mean they are learning. Too much quiet means that young minds are not being "exercised" enough, not stretching and growing.

- Letting them talk to each other because *it is good for them*.
- Encouraging activity and spending more time observing and listening.
- Asking them what they think about what you are teaching them.

Source: Ren-Etta Sullivan (2016, 94)

Lastly, Ren-Etta Sullivan adds, "Let [Boys of Color] solve problems ... provide opportunities for [them] to debate, discuss, debunk, defend, figure out, work through, prove, and explain much of what they are learning" (2016, 31).

### **Encourage even the youngest Boys of Color to think critically and creatively.**

They are capable! Ask thoughtful questions in your daily discussions. Show



curiosity and interest in what they are thinking and encourage them to think deeply and share their genius with you:

- Why do you think we are learning about this?
- Why is this important to you?
- Does this (story, idea, experience) remind you of anything in your family or neighborhood? Or is it different from what you are familiar with?
- Do you have any questions about what we are talking about or what you are learning?

### *What Are Meaningful Conversations with Boys of Color?*

Teachers should ask them about their interests and what *they want to learn* and then build on their interests and their ideas. This may require stepping away from a standard curriculum in order to engage the boys in meaningful work. According to Sykes, instruction should be active and hands on (2018, personal communication). Limit rote questions with “right answers.” Instead, encourage Boys of Color to ask questions, explain their thinking, and use their phenomenal imaginations.

Take time to understand their thinking processes. **Use “wait-time”** to provide them with an opportunity to formulate their thoughts and to connect their ideas together. **Using open-ended questioning and probing** will encourage Boys of Color to think more in depth and articulate their ideas in more detail: “Tell me why you think that?” “Can you share an example?” “What else can you add?” “Why do you think that was the case?” Give the boys lots of affirmation and positive messages that their ideas are valued and valid. Build conversations and class curriculum from the boys’ own ideas and their knowledge from previous experiences. Make authentic connections to their families and communities. Listen to children for their genius!

When I ask grown-ups about their vision for the children who will be leaders in 2030, I get a list of characteristics, skills, abilities, and approaches that are considered vital for leadership. My follow-up question is, “At what age do we expect children to learn and apply these leadership traits?” Often, we appear to be describing future leaders who do all the things we don’t allow in many of our early learning environments. I think part of the challenge is remembering that education is not just about passing a test. It’s about growing a person. ... **If Black children are to become the leaders we want them to be, we must let them do those things that nurture leadership skills and abilities. We must cultivate their genius.** (Ren-Etta Sullivan 2016, 73)

## **Give Boys of Color responsibilities in your classroom (Campos 2013).**

Identify ways that Boys of Color can contribute and be helpful in your classroom. Actively recruit them to help with developmentally appropriate tasks and include them in daily routines in ways that allow them to offer help to the group. Examples might include help set the table for snack, communicate messages to others, make and post signs, or take a special delivery to the school office. When you ask them to do these helping jobs, explain why you trust them with these responsibilities (“Would you like to take this paper to the office with a friend? You know how to walk quietly through the halls and make sure the secretary receives it.”). The key is to communicate that you have confidence in their leadership and capabilities.

### *How Can Teachers Demonstrate Love and Interest for Boys of Color and Their Families?*

Jerome Gourdine, Director of African American Male Achievement at the Oakland Unified School District, offers several recommendations for teachers:

- Be intentional and strive to discover the different individuals in the boys’ lives who have their best interest and care deeply about them. This might be a boy’s parents and family members but it may also be their coach, family advocate, or social worker. When possible, develop relationships with them and establish ongoing communication and attentive listening to what they share about the boys.
- Always do “extra” for Boys of Color—for example, provide numerous opportunities for the boys’ interests to be expanded. Expose them to new and different experiences like dance, movement, and art and bring community activities into your classroom/program.
- Nurture and expand the boys’ stories. Create narratives about each boy and their family, highlighting their strengths and gifts. When planning and facilitating family engagement activities, ask yourself, “How does each family see themselves in this activity and how is their story affirmed through this event?”
- Invite feedback from boys’ parents/family members and follow-up so adjustments and improvements are made. This will help families recognize the value of their input.
- Brainstorm how to bring together more “WEsources,” i.e., community members, advocates, allies, or coworkers that can lend ideas, materials, time when resources are limited, and are usually associated with money.

## Use emergent listening with Boys of Color and allow them to be the narrators of their own experiences.

We invite teachers to engage in what Davies defines as “emergent listening” (2014). To Davies, true listening or emergent listening is about being open to being affected by what we hear, rather than simply responding (2014). Efrain, an African American middle school male, reflecting back on his early childhood experiences, offers ideas to his former teachers based on this notion: “The teachers need to ask questions instead of just assuming. There is no such thing as a dumb question. Before you discipline a child, you should ask them what they were doing *before* you jump to conclusions.”



This type of listening requires adults to trust children as capable of narrating their own experiences. Teachers need to create many opportunities for Boys of Color to communicate their perspectives, concerns, desires, solutions, and understandings of who they are and what they experience in the world around them through gestures, play, artwork, verbalizations, and children’s “hundred languages” (Edwards, Gandini, and Forman 2011).

Teachers who authentically listen remain *open to what children say*—they do not try to silence, edit, or limit children’s authentic voices and stories no matter how difficult the content might be or how much it challenges their (the adult’s)

own perspectives. Instead, they attune carefully to children and remain open to being *affected*. What does this mean? When Boys of Color are narrators of their own experiences, teachers listen to the full range of their thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. “Being heard” and acknowledged in this manner is an important way of communicating to Boys of Color that they are respected and valued.

### *Messages About Masculinity*

As teachers observe and listen to their Boys of Color, they will learn a lot about the gender messages the students are learning and making sense of. They boys are forming their own ideas of what it means to “be a boy” in their families, schools, and communities. Often, boys hear messages all around them that suggest that to “be a boy” means that they have to be strong at all times and not show any signs of weakness, compete against and aim to dominate others, and hide their desire or need for help. Many boys also hear messages that certain ideas, interests, and preferences are feminine (e.g., ballet, painting, playing with dolls, the color pink) and others are masculine, and they should “stay in their gender lane.”

Traditional masculine gender norms such as stoicism, competition, dominance, and aggression send many messages to Boys of Color about how to manage the stressors and impacts they face from racism and unconscious racial bias—as in, “Be tough,” or “Don’t show you’re hurt” (Pappas 2019).

A lot of research evidence describes the negative impact the messages of traditional masculinity send to boys and men, including the [\*APA Guidelines for Psychological Practice with Boys and Men\*](#) (American Psychological Association, Boys and Men Guidelines Group 2018). While teachers need to honor family and community values that may reinforce messages aligned with the social norms associated with traditional masculinity, they can also work within their programs to communicate messages about what it means to be a boy that emphasize a more inclusive and healthier range of acceptable possibilities.

### **Give Boys of Color many opportunities to talk and interact with peers and adults.**

Refrain from being the person in your classroom who does most of the talking. Instead, provide many opportunities for the Boys of Color in your classroom to talk so they can share their ideas and learn from one another. Encourage a culture of inquiry and curiosity—where children are invited to ask questions and teachers do not have all the answers so the teachers and children are exploring content and learning together (Ren-Etta Sullivan 2016).





"This image represents happiness in a student. A feeling of contentment."

—Amin'Zaid Robinson, nineteen years old

### **Arrange environments to support the learning preferences for young Boys of Color** (Wood and Harris 2016).

Although Boys of Color have individualized needs, interests, and strengths, many share certain learning preferences that teachers can plan for in the environment. Many Boys of Color thrive in environments that **let them move**.

Many Boys of Color need opportunities for movement throughout the day. They thrive when they can participate in big body play, competitive games with rules, hands-on projects, expressive arts, and child-initiated play, especially outdoor play. Children who live with high levels of stress need opportunities to engage in large motor activities that allow them to release the additional energy in their bodies that results from the activation of stress chemicals. The early learning program may be their only opportunity to run, climb, jump, stretch, swing, ride a tricycle, or otherwise engage in big body play and energy release. These opportunities support children's physical development and also reduce the chances of long-lasting impact resulting from the stress chemicals released

after a triggering event. Faye, a pre-K teacher in a summer intervention program specifically designed for African American boys entering kindergarten confirms: “Most of our young boys, or African American boys, or boys period, are movers. They’re squirrely.”

### *What Is “Big Body Play”?*

Carlson explains:

Rolling, running, climbing, chasing, pushing, banging, tagging, falling, tumbling, rough-and-tumble, rowdy, roughhousing, horseplay, play-fighting. These are just some of the names that adults give to the boisterous, large motor, very physical activity that young children naturally seem to crave. All are forms of big body play—a play style that gives children the opportunities they need for optimum development across all domains from physical to cognitive and language to social and emotional. (2011, 5)

### *Why Do So Many Teachers and Programs Limit or Ban Big Body Play?*

The appropriateness and developmental benefit of big body play is often questioned by teachers and administrators. This is usually due to one or more of the following fears:

- **Fear of fighting.** There is a misconception that children’s rough-and-tumble big body play is a form of fighting. This is not true. Although adults often struggle to understand the difference between rough-and-tumble play and fighting, children know. When children are engaged in big body play, teachers will see signs that they are happy and enjoying the play: smiles, laughter, children choosing to join the play, and repeatedly and eagerly returning for more.

30 years of research have shown us that rough-and-tumble play is distinctly different from real fighting. The difference lies in children’s intentions and in the context of their play. In rough-and-tumble play, children’s interactions are not intended to harm their playmates. Instead, their mutual goal is to extend the play for as long as possible ... by contrast, in real fighting children use aggressive acts to coerce, to force their playmates to acquiesce to their desires. The context of the interaction is control. (Carlson 2019, 19)



- **Fear of escalation and injury.** Adults' most significant fear is for children's safety. They worry that children's big body play—even if children are enjoying it and nobody is getting hurt—will escalate and turn into fighting if allowed to continue. What does research say? Children's big body play leads to fighting and aggressive play less than 1 percent of the time and when this happens is often the result of one child misinterpreting the social cues (e.g., facial expression, tone of voice, body language, etc.) of another (Paquette et al. 2003; Smith, Smees, and Pellegrini 2004).
- **Fear that children will not be able to calm down.** Adults also fear that once children are engaged in big body play, they will not be able to calm down. Yet, just the opposite happens. Children who are able to engage in loud and active play are more capable of calm and focused attention afterwards than children who lack these opportunities.
- **Fear of parents' reactions.** Most teachers are also concerned about parents' reactions to their children's participation in big body play. Send a letter to families that explains big body play and its many benefits.

### *How Can Big Body Play Be Included in Early Childhood Programs in a Safe and Manageable Way?*

Big body play will be most successful when simple, clear rules are co-created by adults and children to guide where the type of play can take place and what children can and cannot do. Carlson provides an example of one early childhood program where adults and children created rules for rough and tumble play wrestling:

1. No hitting.
2. No pinching.
3. Hands below the neck and above the waist.
4. STOP as soon as the other person says or signals STOP.
5. No rough play while standing—kneeling only.
6. Rough play is optional—stop and leave when you want (2011, 64).

These rules were written on a poster board and placed near the designated rough-and-tumble play area in the classroom.

## *Teachers, Administrators, and Families Need Information About Big Body Play*

To understand and effectively guide big body play, most teachers and administrators would benefit from professional development that emphasizes what big body play is, why it is beneficial, and how adults can monitor it to ensure children's safety.

Additionally, parents, and family members need to receive information about the benefits of big body play and how it is monitored and supported in the classroom. The program policy on big body play should be included in the family handbook.





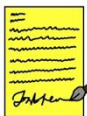


## Stop and Reflect

- How am I honoring Boys of Color preferences for active, competitive, or big body play?
- How often do I provide opportunities for Boys of Color to create and follow their own rules for play?

Often, fathers or other men are play partners for young Boys of Color and they engage in a vigorous, physical type of whole body play with their children. Consider how to reach out and ask fathers and father figures in the Boys' lives to learn about how they play with the Boys and any ideas they have for creating opportunities for big body play in the early childhood education program.

Many programs have policies that do not allow children to engage in this type of play. Make a case for it. Talk about myths and research about it (e.g., does not lead to injury, etc.). Provide examples of what it can look like in programs ("Here is what some programs do").



## Policy

### **Many Programs Have Policies That Do Not Allow Children to Engage in Big Body Play**

This needs to be challenged. Staff meetings and family engagement events can be times to talk about the myths and research related to this type of play (e.g., it does not lead to injury and does provide children with many developmental benefits). Big body play can be an important part of a larger strategy for preventing suspensions and expulsions, and supporting engagement and learning for Boys of Color in early childhood environments. In many cases this will require changing policies within programs. Additionally, opening discussions with Community Care licensing about safety standards is a necessary part of allowing big body play in early childhood programs. Program leaders need to know that they will not be written up as out of compliance if they support children's active play.

#### *Include Sensory-Tactile Learning*

Create many opportunities for Boys of Color to engage their senses when learning. Allow them to use hands-on materials and manipulatives instead of requiring them to listen to teachers talking about information. Hands-on activities that involve movement is the strategy most recommended by teachers identified as effective in their work with Boys of Color.

#### *Include Activities That Allow Children to Communicate Their Fears and Express Their Anger and Big Feelings in Constructive Ways*

Pretend play, expressive arts (drawing, painting), sensory play (water, sand, clay, etc.), active play, and storybooks help them see aspects of their life experiences acknowledged. They also learn through the characters how to cope and solve problems.





"I made my self-portrait after I learned about Frida Kahlo.  
I feel inspired about the sports and the Warriors."

—Micah, nine years old

### **Destigmatize the development of self-regulation.**

Early educators need to communicate to all children that learning to regulate their emotions and behavior is a long-term process that even adults are still working on! When Boys of Color hear teachers acknowledging their progress and successes with self-regulation and that every day provides new opportunities to keep learning and practicing these hard skills, they are less likely to define themselves as 'bad' when they have difficulty regulating their emotions or behavior.

Exemplar teachers strongly recommend that other teachers remember that they are teaching children ... who will make mistakes. And, like any other child who makes a mistake, [Boys of Color] are worthy of forgiveness in the form of a fresh start. As such, when Boys of Color engage in actions that do not conform to teachers' standards, teachers should be willing to provide them with the same type of fresh start that they would for other students ... as one teacher describes, "I tell my students that each day is a new day ... each day is a new opportunity to do better." (Wood and Harris 2016, 77)

## **Acknowledge the external stressors and pressures that Boys of Color face in their families and communities.**

It is important that teachers learn about the range of daily racialized experiences Boys of Color endure, ranging from overt racism to more subtle acts of microaggression to the enduring impacts of historical trauma (see below). Of course, it is critical that teachers interrupt any instances in which a Boy of Color is being harmed because of his race or ethnicity—for example, hurtful comments or behaviors towards the boy because of his skin color, culture, or language (Campos 2013). It is also essential that teachers working with Boys of Color learn about the impact of stress and trauma on children's developing brains and bodies, and that they commit to creating trauma-informed classroom environments.

### *Many Boys of Color Live in Families and Communities Impacted by Historical Trauma*

Lived experiences influence today's young Boys of Color—these include African Americans' history of slavery; Southeast Asian (Cambodian, Hmong, Laotian, Vietnamese) refugees' experience with war, oppression, and genocide; Latinxs' experience of immigration trauma and racism; and Native Americans' legacy of mass trauma. Learning about these histories to better understand both the historical experiences of trauma *and* the strength, coping ability, and resilience of the different racial and ethnic groups for Boys of Color in your classroom is an important way that teachers can build empathy with and become a more responsive teacher for Boys of Color and their families.

CHiXapkaid et al. describe the impact on Native children:

To understand the education of Native children is to understand their history, the influence of legislation, and literature addressing issues affecting the quality of education. The historical circumstances explain how the devastating consequences of colonial systems continue to influence the education of Native people. As we walk back through times before colonization, we see strong complex societies that fostered living/ learning in ways that truly celebrated each individual's gifts which were in turn, shared with the group at the appropriate times. These ways of being are integral to strengthening tribal languages and cultures ... it is important to ground the current successes and challenges in the context from which they have emerged. Native children have survived mass genocide in the name of civilization. Followed by the boarding school era, where children were removed and placed in residential schools often far from their homes. Then, public schools continued to emphasize a one size



fits all, Eurocentric paradigm which ignores the diversity of worldviews and ways of knowing. (n.d., 2)

Campos further describes the Latinx experience:

Latino boys worry about the well-being of their immigrant parents, grandparents, family members, and friends, but when they are immigrants themselves they may confront a wide range of adjustment challenges [personally]. ... Latinos bear the brunt of the negative attitudes toward undocumented persons. The message of not being welcomed is clear. Measures like English-only laws, increased numbers of border patrols, increased raids by Immigration and Customs Enforcement, random checks for valid ID, and so forth are intended to discourage all illegal immigrants from coming to and staying in the United States, but in many ways such measures give the impression that Latino culture and values and the Spanish language are ill favored. These kinds of measures can make Latino boys feel awful about who they are. (2013, 140–142).

Lastly, Buenavista adds: “Asian Americans have often been perceived as perpetual outsiders to a dominant White society regardless of the historical and contemporary narratives of their migration, settlement, and continued presence in the United States” (2013, 104).

**Historical and cultural trauma** is a personal or historical event or prolonged experience that continues to have an impact over several generations. Cultural trauma is an attack on the fabric of a society, affecting the essence of the community and its members leading some to feel a pervasive sense of hopelessness (e.g., racism, prejudice, discrimination, poverty, and health disparities that persist in many ethnic minority communities). Historical and cultural forms of trauma are multigenerational/intergenerational involving a collective and cumulative emotional wounding that persists unresolved and over time becomes internalized and passed from one generation to the next. Examples include slavery; racism; removal from one’s homeland; massacres, genocides, or ethnocides; cultural, racial, and immigrant oppression; and forced placement.

### *Trauma-Informed Practice*

**Trauma-Informed Practice (TIP) recognizes that a child’s history of trauma impacts their development, learning, emotions, and behavior.** Organizations that are trauma-informed use strength-based and relationship-based approaches that emphasize the importance of doing no further harm (not further traumatizing) when interacting and caring for a child with a history of trauma. The goal of

trauma-informed programs is to buffer (reduce) a child's stress by creating an environment that reinforces the child's feelings of safety, predictability, and personal control. When teachers use a trauma-informed approach, their goal is to disrupt the pattern of negative outcomes for children who have experienced trauma in their young lives.

All children who have experienced trauma need supportive and responsive caregivers who **attune** to them and help them feel safe—that is, when the child comes to believe that what they think and feel matters and “feels felt” by the adult (Levine and Kline 2007). The adult's attentiveness and interest in the child helps the child develop a sense of belonging and supports feelings of safety and protection. In the example below, teacher Miriam attunes to Jomar, sending messages to him that what he thinks and feels matters:

Jomar, a three-year-old Filipino boy enrolled in a community preschool program, was a really anxious child with a lot of big worries. Miriam, his teacher, came up with an idea to validate and honor his worries and have him express them, but also to help him let them go. She invited Jomar to draw a picture of his worry or she told him that she could write it down on a piece of paper for him. Usually, Jomar would take a crayon and draw scribbles all over the paper. Then, Miriam would encourage him to physically crumple up the paper or rip it up and then give it to her and she would say, “I’m gonna hold your worry for you. I’m gonna take that on for you.” Then they would throw the worry away in the garbage or do something else with it. Sometimes Miriam would keep part of his worry and then he would throw the rest of it away. This process really helped him.

Attuning to the child's perspective begins by taking time to mindfully focus on the child, showing genuine interest in understanding the emotional state or behavior being communicated. Attunement is characterized by careful observation of children and responding to children's behavior by asking, **“What is this child communicating to me about how he or she feels and what he or she needs to feel safe?”** Attunement is supported when teachers focus on children's emotional state—what they say or express nonverbally through their play, art, gestures, and behavior—without judging or reacting to it but, instead, showing interest, curiosity, empathy, and a desire to understand, connect, and provide support. When teachers attune to a child, they carefully observe, pay attention to, and make sense of the messages children convey.

Sometimes children communicate their worries and fears through complex and puzzling behavior; other times, the stories they share about what happened

to them and how they feel about it are conveyed through appropriate and nondisruptive behavior. For example, a teacher might observe a young child quietly playing out a scene in which a child is running away from his burning house. While attuning to this child, the teacher pays careful attention to the child's play and what it means. The teacher wonders, *"What is he communicating to me through this play about how he feels and what he needs from me? How can I help him feel safe and supported?"* The teacher might provide an encouraging smile, a reassuring gesture, or a quiet reminder to the child that he is safe and his teacher will take care of him while he is at school. Attuned teachers respond to children's range of feelings and behaviors by remaining inquisitive, caring, calm, and supportive. This response helps children calm their stress response system, develop trust by making them feel safe, and better engage in the learning process.



### Key Idea

## Teaching with an Understanding of Trauma

Many adults believe that a child cannot experience trauma because they are too young to perceive what is going on around them. The opposite is true. A young child is the most vulnerable to trauma and at risk to experiencing the adverse side effects trauma can cause. When faced with a single acute trauma or ongoing chronic or multiple traumatic events, the child is at higher risk to be impacted socially, physically, and emotionally in their current environments and in later years.

The younger the child, the more likely internal feelings develop of utter helplessness and powerlessness. Young children have very few options when experiencing a trauma to mitigate a traumatic event and release the stress from their body. When a traumatic event happens, there is a large release of stress hormones throughout the body and brain. Unlike an adult who can seek out external resources to talk, process, heal, and release the stress, a child is simply unable to do so. They often play out or act out their behavior in an attempt to process what has occurred in the past. As a teacher, what you may observe is complex or puzzling behavior that does not make sense. You might observe that a child may hurt others, cause parent complaints, disrupt learning, push your emotional buttons, and trigger in teachers a feeling of incompetence. This behavior often leads to poor outcomes for these most vulnerable children.

**When teachers use an understanding of trauma to inform their practice, they strive to disrupt the pattern of negative outcomes for children who have experienced trauma in their young lives.** A trauma lens begins with a



commitment from teachers and caregivers to acknowledge the existence of trauma and traumatic stress in many children's lives, and a desire to strengthen their understanding of trauma's impact on children's development and ability to learn. Developing a trauma lens means that teachers strive to understand the children they are working with, including the stories they are communicating through their behavior and the underlying reasons why they are behaving the way they do.



**Using an understanding of trauma to inform their work with young children, teachers have the following commitments in their teaching practice,** according to Nicholson, Perez, and Kurtz:

- They work hard to create a relationship and connection, so the child is able to relearn that adults can be safe, attuned, and supportive.

- They seek to understand the meaning of a specific behavior in a specific moment for an individual child.
- They look for patterns of behavior for an individual child including individual triggers that activate children's stress response systems.
- They understand that what they perceive as "challenging behavior" is the child attempting to regain control as they carry with them previous experiences that left them feeling helpless and/or powerless. The child is sharing a story of what has happened to them and how they feel about it. They want the adults to listen to this story and respond with empathy and a desire to help them feel safe.
- They strive to create an environment that communicates to the child a feeling of safety and predictability.
- They engage in self-care so they may have enough restored energy and internal resources to support these most vulnerable children, rebuild the children's sense of safety, support the children's healing, and create experiences that allow the children to build resilience. (2019)

### *Trauma's Effect on Children's Relationships with Others*

**Children's experiences of trauma make it very difficult for them to develop trust in their relationships with others.** This is why it is so important for teachers to be trauma-informed. Understanding trauma and its impact on young children's brains and behavior will allow teachers to have understanding, empathy, and patience with young children who struggle to build trusting relationships. Over time, children will learn to trust caregivers who communicate to them continually that the adults will make sure they are safe, protected, and that all of their basic needs will be taken care of while they are in the early childhood program. This trust can lead to healing and well-being in the child.

### **Strengthen children's ability to build resilience and coping.**

Help Boys of Color from the earliest ages to regularly hear important messages about life that are honest and reinforce the value of perseverance in the face of adversity. Hearing the balance of life's promises and pitfalls can help Boys of Color feel less isolated and reinforce messages that life's stressors will be buffered by their coping skills and the many strengths and capacities they each have. One teacher created a poster with the following bullet points to reinforce these messages:

- Everyone is equal.
- Everyone is important.

- Everyone is capable.
- Everyone deserves respect.
- Everyone is special.
- Everyone has talents.
- People are similar.
- People are different.
- Some qualities stay the same.
- Some qualities change.
- Some things in life are fair.
- Some things in life are unfair.
- Some things in life are easy.
- Some things in life are hard.
- Many different people live among us.
- People work together.
- People have different points of view.
- We can learn from people we know.
- Sometimes you have to lead.
- Sometimes you have to follow. (Campos 2013, 183)

### **Provide individualized supports.**

It is important to individualize supports for Boys of Color so they can learn and develop to their full potential. Finding the right level and type of support for each child to be able to fully participate in the classroom is critical. Some supports will be strategies teachers can implement themselves. Faye, a pre-K teacher in a summer intervention program specifically designed to prepare African American boys for kindergarten, uses a variety of individualized supports to help them successfully participate throughout the day. One strategy she finds particularly effective is moving the boys to sit physically closer to her during circle time. When asked why this is helpful, she explains:

I have one that ... he is one of those kids that is very bright and smart and rationalizes why he does things. But he wants attention all the time. So, I pull him right next to me. I don't allow him to miss instruction. He's right



here. I know a lot of teachers will send them out [of the classroom]. But that doesn't help with the learning. He totally misses everything.

When you send them away from the group, then you just told them, "I don't care what you do right now but leave me." [Also,] sometimes that's what they want to do because [they think the work is] too hard: "I don't want to make this letter right now because I can't." So you sending them away, that gives them their out and my bar is too high for that. I'm not letting you skip out on your learning because you think it's too hard. You have to keep practicing because that's what school is about. It's not about being perfect. It's about practicing over and over until we get it. Pulling them closer to me is positive because you're not allowing them to give up on themselves and you're not sending them out.

They get social attention from you but in a positive way. They aren't sent out of the group, they are just brought a little closer to you. I can give them praise and say, "Hey, that was an excellent letter you just drew right there. See what happens when you focus?" Pulling them close to you kinda pulls them away from their distraction so they can focus, and it also gives you that chance to give them that one-on-one attention and praise that most of the time they want and desire. **A lot of teachers send them away, [but] sometimes you have to bring them closer to you.**

### *Outside Professionals*

Some children will require support from outside professionals to address their individual needs. Qualifying for special education services can provide children with access to many forms of specialized support. However, it is important to note that Boys of Color are both **overrepresented in some dis/ability categories** (e.g., "emotionally disturbed") and **under-identified for early intervention** (Morgan et al. 2014). Sometimes when children qualify for services, parents and teachers still need to advocate delivery of the services. In the following vignette, Debbie describes her experience with Rocco, her African American son diagnosed with autism, on the first day of kindergarten at a public elementary school. Rocco qualified for specialized services; however, neither his teacher nor the school were prepared to support him when he arrived:

I show up on the first day of school and, other than the aide that was sent there to help Rocco from the special education director, nobody knew Rocco was autistic. The teacher wasn't expecting him. Nothing was prepared. Nobody had read the IEP.

Every day, I got a phone call or email from the teacher telling me how Rocco—how she just didn't know how to deal with him. This is the thing with transitioning kids from preschool to kindergarten. They need time to transition. They need time to get used to the environment. So, of course, he's not staying in one place, or he needs special focused attention, or he needs tools. She's not used to that. Her classroom is not built for that. Which is not her fault. He has a special need. But the classroom wasn't built—no one was expecting him, so no one had built anything around his special need. No one had bothered to look at the IEP. So I call an IEP meeting. At this point, by this time, it's not even 10 days into school. I'm calling down to the school district. Something's happening. The teacher is frustrated. She's upset, she's emotional. She's crying. The teacher is crying to me, "I don't know how to do this."

Boys of Color and their families need to have access to developmental screening and early intervention services in their early childhood years. Without individualized resources and supports, children like Rocco will struggle to participate successfully in early learning programs and will remain vulnerable to becoming additional data points in the pattern of suspension, expulsion, and push-outs in early childhood for young Boys of Color. The most effective method for identifying and providing individualized supports for young Boys of Color is a **multidisciplinary team** approach. Multidisciplinary teams can comprise mental health consultants, speech and language pathologists, occupational therapists, health providers, early intervention specialists, and others who work collaboratively to provide integrated, coordinated, and individualized supports for young children and their families.

Alison Bryant, program administrator for a large early childhood agency, described how her staff uses a multidisciplinary approach to best meet the needs of their Boys of Color. Through the story of young Marcus, we see how Alison uses her leadership role to strongly advocate the **value of both individualizing and integrating multidisciplinary supports** for young children:

Marcus was four years old when he and his mom entered our doors. Marcus is bright and full of energy, and although we noticed that he needed a lot more time to run and be outside, he was not referred for special services. He was experiencing multiple stressors associated with very complex and challenging issues. In the meantime, we were scratching our heads trying to figure out what to do to meet his needs. His teachers' attitudes were, "Ohhhhhhhh here he comes ... he is not absent today!" I reminded the staff that our agency promotes an individualized plan for every child so when Marcus came to us and we quickly became

aware of his behavior challenges, we asked ourselves, “How can we best channel his energy in ways that are safe and allow him to remain in our program?”

Before approaching Marcus’ mom about referrals to on-site intervention supports, we focused on developing a trusting relationship with his mother so she could feel comfortable partnering with us to help him get what he needed. Individualizing a plan for Marcus meant he didn’t have to follow the printed program schedule and that an aide would ensure he could go outside when he wished. Our holistic approach—allowing Marcus to do whatever he wants (with the support of a shadow aide)—raised so many concerns for the staff who were concerned about following the schedule, the need for additional time and efforts for the benefit of one child, and the message it sent to other children. I pushed our entire team to lead from the heart and offer every support, available [with the help of] partnering agencies, for Marcus and his family.

We reached consensus that Marcus needed **love** from the moment he walked in the door, expressed by greetings, hugs, and allowing him to just be himself. Not just that, but also allowing each of us to re-examine what individualization meant, especially in response to their comments about Marcus needing to “conform” to the rules of the program. I said, **“We need to conform to what he needs and this is what he needs.”** His (therapeutic) child action plan needed to work for him so the way we typically did things had to shift to get everyone on board. Instead of asking staff to fill out more paperwork and sit in meetings, we jotted notes throughout the day to document what was working and not working. In addition to offering him multiple choices throughout the day, Marcus’ social-emotional skills were strengthened by the use of Teaching Pyramid approaches, environmental changes, individualizing his curriculum, and increasing sensorial inputs daily. Our multidisciplinary team—including several staff members who supported not just him, but his mother too—made a difference one baby step at a time. Over time, Marcus eased into more of the group routines and demonstrated this by allowing health checks and participating in outdoor play with his peers.



"This is me as a superman version."

—Micah, seven years old

## *Universal Design for Learning*

Many of the strategies described throughout this chapter reflect the learning principles of Universal Design for Learning (UDL), an approach that emphasizes the importance of designing curricula and learning environments *from the beginning* to acknowledge that **all** children learn in different ways, all children have their own strengths and preferences, and early childhood environments should support their diverse ways of being and learning. Teachers and programs leaders can learn more about UDL below.

### **UDL Principles**

UDL is "a framework to improve and optimize teaching and learning for all people based on scientific insights into how humans learn" (CAST 2021). UDL has three principles, and when designing teaching and learning environments, a UDL curriculum would include:

1. Multiple means of **Engagement** in order to motivate learners: The **Why** of Learning
2. Multiple means of **Representation** of information and content: The **What** of Learning

3. Multiple means of **Action and Expression** in order to allow each student's individuality to drive learning for learners: The **How** of learning (CAST 2021)

The UDL Guidelines provide concrete suggestions that can be applied to any discipline or domain to ensure that all learners can access and participate in meaningful, challenging learning opportunities (CAST 2021).

For more information about UDL and CAST, visit the [CAST About Us website](#) and watch the ["UDL At A Glance" video](#) (CAST 2010).

### *Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation*

**Early childhood mental health consultation (ECMHC) is emerging as a promising intervention and prevention strategy that can enhance teachers' reflective capacity and lead to fewer suspensions and expulsions of young children** (Hepburn et al. 2013). ECMHC typically begins when support services are requested by child care center/program directors or staff when they have behavioral or social-emotional concerns for individual children or classroomwide behavioral management challenges. In addition to providing teacher training on various behavioral and social-emotional topics, mental health consultations generally have two main areas of focus: (1) improving teachers' skills in classroomwide behavior management and (2) providing direct consultative support to the teacher in addressing the behaviors they perceive to be challenging for the children who prompted the request for services. Kadija Johnston, one of the foremost experts on ECMHC, explains that many teachers request direct mental health consultation services for the child; however, ECMHC is not primarily focused on the behavior of the child, but instead, on the relationship between the child and the adult. Johnston explains:

Our focus [is] what is the adult bringing to the relationship? What attitudes? What biases? ECMHC brings the unconscious to consciousness. So it is very focused on the adult. It is important that we do not fall into the danger zone of considering that mental health consultation is "Let's fix those broken boys"—that is not it. There is a lot of racism affecting Boys of Color and our focus is on how can we help the adults be aware and interrupt those biases. (Johnston 2018, personal communication).

#### **Early childhood mental health consultation services include:**

- Support to respond effectively to all children, with a focus on young children with disabilities, behaviors that teachers perceive as challenging, and other special needs.



- Assistance through individual site consultations, provision of resources, formulation of training plans, referrals, and other methods that address the unique needs of programs and providers.
- Aid to providers in developing the skills and tools needed to be successful as they support the development and early learning of all children, including observing environments, facilitating the development of action plans, and supporting site implementation of those plans.
- The development of strategies for addressing prevalent child mental health concerns, including internalizing problems such as appearing withdrawn, and externalizing problems, such as exhibiting seemingly aggressive or dysregulated behaviors.
- If a child exhibits persistent and serious problematic behaviors, support with the pursuit and documentation of reasonable steps to maintain the child's safe participation in the program (Johnston 2018, personal communication).





## Research

### **Research evidence suggests that ECMHC is a promising practice for reducing suspensions and expulsions in early childhood programs.**

The first study, conducted in 2005 by Walter S. Gilliam, found that teachers who reported having an ongoing relationship with a classroom-based or on-site mental health provider were approximately half as likely to report expelling a preschooler in comparison to teachers who did not have this form of support.

A more recent study found that **teachers' perceptions and ratings of children's externalizing and problem behaviors** (e.g., hyperactivity, restlessness, aggression, destruction of property) **decreased when they received ECMHC** (Gilliam et al. 2016). These results are significant because teachers' perceptions of children's behavior as challenging is associated with the use of exclusionary discipline (suspension and expulsion). Building from Gilliam's groundbreaking work, Shivers completed one of the largest evaluation studies of mental health consultation in the country. They not only examined the effectiveness of ECMHC but also determined which children were benefiting, and if there were any racial disparities in the outcomes given the greater likelihood for Boys of Color to be suspended and expelled. The outcomes were compelling, as Shivers explains:

We found for the teachers, regardless of their ethnicity, when they received mental health consultations, the racial gaps were closed. We started off with racial gaps in the beginning of our study, but they were definitely closed by 12 months. We were like, "OK, something is happening here." Of course, our team went back to the mental health consultants and asked, "Were you in there talking about race? Because look at the results we found." And the consultants, primarily a White female workforce, said, "No, we weren't talking about race with the teachers." A few were because that's where they happened to be but that's not a part of the consultation model to talk about race.

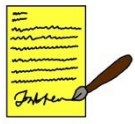
So, what happened? What shifted? **We think that when teachers work with a mental health consultant, things slow down. They have time to reflect on themselves and on their practices.** Teachers develop a relationship with a mental health consultant where they can ask the questions or say the things that they might not say to anyone else. They can say, "When that kid is absent, oh my gosh, my day is so easy." They can say those kinds of things. It's a trusting relationship. The mental health

consultant uses a consultative stance, a little bit of listening and asking questions. As they develop their relationship, the consultant can take the position, “I’ll push you to your edge and I’ll wonder with you. I notice when it comes to that family you have strong feelings about and ask you, where does that come from? I will help you notice that this child gets disciplined from the same staff differently than these children do, what is it about this kid? He did the same thing as his peer. Why did he get punished?”

The consultants speak not in an accusatory way, but because they are developing this relationship, they can kind of point these things out and the teacher will be like “I don’t know, what is that about?” We spent years trying to examine what happens in that relationship with teacher and the consultant, with the administrators and consultants. What is the shift that allows them to work differently with a child who is African American or Latino? It seems to come down to this professional development that is more reflective, asking teachers to ask themselves, “Who am I?” because I can’t understand the children and families unless I know who I am. (Shivers 2018, personal communication)

**Expanding the use of supports like ECMHC is important** as policies that simply prohibit or significantly limit the use of exclusionary discipline without providing supports that help teachers and administrators learn to effectively address the roots of the problem—teachers’ implicit biases and the complex reasons including trauma that influence children’s behavior—are unlikely to lead to more equitable educational outcomes for Boys of Color. Many school districts are finding that simply banning suspensions and expulsions can have significant unintended negative consequences:

Some school districts have recently revised discipline codes to reduce suspension rates ... but these efforts ... which reduce the incidence of suspension without addressing the underlying behavioral challenges—have unfortunately been linked with increased school chaos and disorder in some instances. ... Isolating students from school is unlikely to correct [the] behavior and is likely to hamper student-teacher relationships and school bonding. Ultimately, this loss of instruction time may push students further away from schools, leading to irreversibly negative consequences. (Hwang 2018, 370–372)



## Policy

**California has a new law, AB 2698 (Rubio 2018), that promotes the use of early childhood mental health consultants in early childhood preschools and child care and development programs that receive state funding.** ECMHC programs are available in communities throughout the state of California.<sup>28</sup>

For an expanded discussion of federal and state legislation addressing suspension and expulsion in early childhood, see [appendix EE](#).

**The following figure provides everyday ways educators can communicate love, respect, and genuine care to Boys of Color** (see figure 10). While not a comprehensive list of all of the strategies suggested in this book, we summarize several of the main ideas discussed in this chapter. The overlapping hands are a reminder that teachers, children, and families should always be working together in partnership as the foundation of an equitable early childhood program is trusting, respectful, and responsive relationships.

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28 In California, infant mental health specialists and transdisciplinary mental health practitioners are endorsed to facilitate reflective practice with children and families, and reflective practice facilitators provide reflective practice to other professionals with shared goals of increasing personal insights and understanding of others. For more information, visit the [California Center for Infant-Family and Early Childhood Mental Health at WestEd's Center for Prevention and Early Intervention](#). Mindfulness practices are another approach for supporting the development of self-awareness in adults.



Figure 10. *I Communicate Love, Respect, and Genuine Care to Boys of Color when I ...*



- Show curiosity and interest in each boy and his life and family
- Communicate that “Who they are” and their success matters
- Provide unconditional acceptance
- Change the conversation about “challenging behaviors”
- Use culturally responsive practice
- Support the use of boys’ home languages and dialects
- Pronounce their names correctly
- Communicate validating messages often
- Set high expectations and become a warm demander
- Support boys to direct their own learning
- Encourage critical thinking and creativity
- Support boys to have responsibilities in the classroom
- Build empathy and imagine an experience through a boy’s perspective

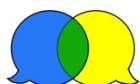


- Create stories about each boy that highlight his strengths and skills
- Provide many opportunities for boys to talk and interact with peers and adults
- Let them move!
- Destigmatize the development of self-regulation
- Support “do-overs”
- Provide individualized supports
- Teach social-emotional skills
- Use early childhood mental health consultation as needed

### *How to Get Started*

#### **With so many responsive instructional practices to support Boys of Color, how should teachers get started?**

We have described many responsive instructional practices that researchers and teachers have found to be effective in their work with Boys of Color. And the information presented is by no means a comprehensive discussion of this topic. Teachers will find some of these to be familiar and others will be entirely new strategies to add to their teaching practice. With all of this information, readers might feel overwhelmed and not know where to begin, or worry that the problems are too big and complex and they are not sure if their efforts can ever make a meaningful difference. These feelings and concerns are understandable! Drawing on Hammond’s wise advice, we recommend that teachers **take bite-sized action** (2015). Choose one or two strategies to begin working on. Do not try to take on too much all at once. Becoming a responsive teacher for Boys of Color is long-term work. The most important commitment teachers can make is to continually reflect, learn, and improve their practice. One step at a time.



#### **Talk It Through**

Working with one or more partners, talk about the different instructional practices described throughout this chapter and review figure 11. Then, share one or two “bite-sized actions” you are inspired to begin working on right away to become a more responsive and equitable educator for Boys of Color.



## Promising Practices in California

What can we learn from early childhood programs in California working to eliminate the use of suspensions and expulsions for Boys of Color? We asked several programs throughout the state, and two themes emerged.

First, **use positive behavioral interventions and supports (PBIS) and social and emotional learning (SEL)**, including but not limited to the Center on the Social and Emotional Foundations for Early Learning (CSEFEL) Pyramid Model, for supporting social-emotional competence for infants and young children.<sup>29</sup>

We use a PBIS program that includes implementation of the CA-CSEFEL Teaching Pyramid. We have monthly leadership meetings and monthly Saturday trainings for teachers where the CSEFEL strategies are explained and they set goals for implementation in their classrooms. The trainings are followed up with video coaching that focuses on the teachers' goals. Our children are learning social-emotional skills including the use of "solution kits" to solve conflicts and strategies they can use to calm themselves when they are upset. Our results to date have been excellent.—Rocio Garcia, director of a state-subsidized preschool on the campus of South West Park Elementary School in Tracy, California

Second, **teachers cannot work in silos. Create responsive programs to support boys of color and their families.**

Teachers cannot support and heal children on their own. Teachers' success in meeting the needs of Boys of Color and their families is deeply influenced by the level of racial equity awareness, support, and trauma-sensitivity of the programs, organizations, and systems they are working within. As a result, the North Star we all need to strive for is to integrate knowledge of the information in this book—e.g., on disproportionate statistics for exclusionary discipline, strategies to address

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29 The Center on the Social and Emotional Foundations for Early Learning (CSEFEL) is focused on promoting the social-emotional development and school readiness of young children birth to age five. CSEFEL is a national resource center funded by the Office of Head Start and Child Care Bureau for disseminating research and evidence-based practices to early childhood programs across the country. Extensive user-friendly training materials, videos, and print resources are available to help early care and health and education providers implement the Pyramid Model for Supporting Social Emotional Competence in Infants and Young Children. These are found at [the CSEFEL website](#) and from the [California MAP to Inclusion and Belonging website](#).

implicit bias, responsive practices that are effective with Boys of Color—across every level of the early childhood field. Our collective goal must be to create workplace cultures, policies, services, and daily practices that improve race equity for children, families, and the early childhood workforce.



To create equitable early childhood programs across the field of early childhood, we need to have courageous conversations that go beyond discussions of diversity and bias to include the topics of oppression, structural racism, and racial equity. Unfortunately, other than anti-bias education, many existing educational reform initiatives in early childhood and K-12 education (social-emotional learning, restorative justice, trauma-informed practice) only acknowledge race as an identity category; while some talk about bias, they do not explicitly address oppression, privilege, or racism (Derman-Sparks and Olsen Edwards 2019). These are critical omissions. The inequitable and racialized outcomes for young Boys of Color will not improve unless we have courageous and honest conversations about cycles of oppression and structural racism.

### **Social-Emotional Learning (SEL)**

Social-emotional learning approaches emphasize children's skills and ability to understand and manage their emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions. The Collaborative for Academic for Social Emotional Learning (CASEL) defined social-emotional learning more than two decades ago and describes competencies in five categories: Self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making (2020).

### **Restorative Justice/Restorative Processes**

Restorative justice—initially used in the criminal justice system—inspired the use of restorative practices in educational settings (Mirsky 2011). Instead of focusing on punitive discipline and punishment, restorative justice focuses on repairing relationships by giving voice to someone who is harmed and opportunities for those who cause harm to take personal responsibility and accountability for their actions (McCluskey et al. 2008; Mansfield, Rainbolt, and Fowler 2018, 6). Restorative practices support children and adults to build empathy, understanding, and interest in others; to honestly talk about the authentic feelings—including anger, fear, and humiliation—that result from their interactions with others; to listen to different perspectives; and to emphasize fairness and mutual respect in the resolution of conflicts. All restorative practices emphasize interpersonal connection, structured and fair interactions, and the inclusion of every child's voice.

Research in schools using restorative practices suggests that children feel valued in their school setting, teacher-student relationships are positively affected—an outcome that is seen for students of diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds, and the use of exclusionary discipline is significantly reduced (Gregory et al. 2014; Mansfield, Rainbolt, and Fowler 2018). Unfortunately, **most restorative practices do not explicitly address oppression, structural racism, or racial equity**—an important gap in the restorative justice approaches currently being used in schools.

### **Trauma-Informed Practices (TIP)**

TIP acknowledges the existence and prevalence of many different types of trauma in young children's lives. Teachers learn about the neurobiology of stress and trauma and their impact on young children's development, ability to learn, emotions, and behavior, as well as the way stress and trauma influences adults' teaching and caring practices and well-being. TIP approaches draw on brain



science to inform strategies for building relationships with trauma-impacted individuals, arranging environments to reduce triggering of the stress response system, and to support children and adults to build reflective practices and strengthen their self-regulation and social-emotional competence. TIP for adults emphasizes the importance of self-care to replenish energy and sustain their ability to work with the extra demands of children and families with trauma histories. TIP practices support children and adults to increase their capacity for coping with stress/trauma and to build protective factors that strengthen resilience and healing. **Very few discussions of TIP include an explicit focus on oppression, structural racism, and racial equity.** "... interventions such as Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports [e.g., CASEL, CSEFEL] and restorative justice do not necessarily eliminate racial disproportionalities in suspension ..." (Anderson, Ritter, and Zamarro 2019).

Social-emotional learning, restorative justice, and trauma-informed practices are valuable tools in an equity toolkit. However, **eliminating racial inequities in early childhood classrooms requires an explicit and intentional focus on oppression, structural racism, and racial equity.**

### *Guidance for Early Childhood Administrators and Program Leaders*

Directors and administrators have essential roles to play in creating a climate that communicates respect, authentic care, and high expectations for Boys of Color throughout the school or program. We list several recommendations for leaders that describe essential practices for creating responsive, respectful early learning environments for young Boys of Color and their families.



#### **Administrators (Directors, Site Supervisors, Program Leaders)**

##### **Strategies for Early Childhood Administrators and Program Leaders**

###### **Articulate your program/school value for teaching over punishment.**

Emphasize to staff the need to show compassion, empathy, and authentic care to every child, especially young Boys of Color. Talk about how the school values **teaching social-emotional skills—when children have self-regulation breakdowns versus punishment.** Also, reinforce the message to children and families that staff understand that learning to control their emotions and behavior is challenging for children and requires long-term practice with guidance and support from adult caregivers.



Emphasizing to staff and children that every day provides new opportunities to learn and practice self-regulation and social-emotional skills can prevent shame from developing in young children who struggle with their behavior and disrupt patterns of punitive reactions among staff. Talking about these values on a regular basis and integrating them into the culture, policies, and practices of the early learning program is an important responsibility of leaders.

**Talk about professionalism with staff.** Early childhood educators have many resources, tools, and teaching strategies available that can be used with Boys of Color who require extra support with their behavior to prevent the use of punishment and expulsion. Directors can reinforce with teachers and staff the importance of being informed as professionals about research-based practices and the need to draw upon a wide range of skills, knowledge, and resources when working with the Boys of Color and their families. Directors can communicate to teachers that having strong emotions (e.g., anger, frustration, sadness) is OK and understandable; however, it is their professional responsibility not to *react* to these emotions. Instead, they can encourage teachers to use reflection and intentional strategies to manage their personal emotions so they can remain emotionally available and caring for the young Boys of Color in their care.

**Develop a transparent articulated process for children who continually struggle with self-regulation.** Program directors need to work with staff to develop a clear process for providing extra support to Boys of Color who struggle with self-regulation. The process should be clearly described to staff and families and consistently used throughout the program. All plans should include reflective processes that support teachers and staff to address their implicit bias, analysis of the learning environment to identify potential triggers and adaptations that can be made to support an individual child's learning and developmental needs, and intentional teaching and scaffolding of social-emotional skills. Teachers should be provided with processes and supports for in-the-moment interventions for Boys of Color in the classroom as well as longer term plans for prevention and intervention.

Program leaders should identify community resources, especially early childhood mental health consultation services, and support teachers to have access to them as needed. Further, directors should ensure that teachers are provided with time to engage in reflective dialogue with their supervisor and/or colleagues and time to plan for responsive changes to their curriculum, instruction, and the environment to support individual Boys of Color who have specific behavioral and emotional needs. Finally, directors must ensure that many prevention, promotion, and intervention strategies have been implemented before any child is considered for removal from the program. If after extensive efforts it is determined to be

in the best interests of a Boy of Color to leave an early childhood program, the director must work with the teacher and family to identify a new early learning environment that can offer the student more resources and support, not leave the family to have no choice but enrolling in a lower-quality placement. A thoughtful transition plan should be created for the boy and his family and support offered to them throughout their transition process.

**Engage with families and parents up front about policies.** Program leaders should communicate openly and transparently with families about their program policies and values (“We are not a center that relies on suspension and expulsion. We have a process that we engage in that emphasizes compassion and teaching.”). They should engage parents and families in the process of teaching social-emotional skills at home with their children. Program leaders can look for opportunities to highlight “teachable moments” for families by using a collective community teaching and learning process and not singling out a particular family (e.g., sharing stories in a newsletter sent home to families describing examples of the types of skills the children are working on in class that families can emphasize at home).



## *Planning for Program and Organizational Change: Steps to Implementation*

Shifting early childhood programs, schools, and organizations to be more equitable is a long-term continual process that starts with leadership and requires commitment from teachers, administrators, staff, and families. Making progress takes persistence, as substantive organizational change can be a long and slow process. Different programs have their own needs and goals and will progress through organizational change at different rates (Morrison, Blood, and Thorsborne 2005). **Research suggests the implementation process for organizational change takes about five years** (Mansfield, Rainbolt, and Fowler 2018).

It is recommended that each program create short-, medium-, and long-term milestones that they can use to track their progress—**indicators of change**—in moving towards their long-term goals. It is important to acknowledge and celebrate progress in the long-term journey to becoming a more racially conscious and equitable early childhood program. Having specific indicators of change to keep in mind along the way will help program leaders and teachers identify what “works”—what they are doing well and should keep doing or do more of—as well as areas they need to lean into and improve. The following table outlines a realistic time frame with associated indicators of change that programs and/or schools can use when planning for substantive organizational change in their policies and practices.

**Table 10: Realistic Time Frame and Indicators of Progress to Expect in an Organizational Change Process**

<b>Time Frame</b>	<b>Indicators of Change</b>
<b>12–18 months</b>	Gaining commitment. Changing the dialogue. Creating pockets in the program or organization for trying out new practices. Expanding the options teachers and staff use for managing children’s behavior.
<b>12–24 months</b>	Altering dialogue and program/school processes. Aligning new policies and procedures. Increased skill development. Expanding program/school/community commitment.
<b>24–36 months</b>	Embedding new practices at all levels of the program/school. Altering the operating framework for the program. Reviewing policies and procedures. Creative solutions continue to emerge.
<b>4–5 years</b>	Establishing best practices for program/school. Behavior changes are embedded throughout the program. Cultural change across program/school community.

Sources: Adapted from Morrison, Blood, and Thorsborne (2005) and Mansfield, Rainbolt, and Fowler (2018, 16)

### **Stages of Implementation**

For any ambitious educational reform initiative to lead to substantive and lasting sustainable change, it is essential that the reforms not be forced upon the staff in a top-down approach. Instead, it is essential that the program leaders spend time in the beginning of the process, typically 12–18 months, establishing “buy-in” through open dialogue with staff to bring their voices into the process and create opportunities for their ideas to inform every element of the process. Mansfield, Rainbolt, and Fowler describe the process for shifting a school from punitive discipline to restorative practices by breaking the implementation process down into five distinct stages to help program/school leaders manage the change process; this process is very relevant for early childhood programs striving to reduce exclusionary discipline practices (2018).

### *Stage 1: Gaining Commitment (“Capturing Hearts and Minds”)*

A critical stage where leaders do the groundwork of establishing the program/school's readiness for change and then advocating change. There are many strategies that leaders can use to accomplish this, and the place to start is where “the energy exists,” according to Morrison, Blood, and Thorsborne; however, the use of data—e.g., suspension and expulsion rates for Boys of Color—is the most persuasive (2005, 345). After compelling statistics or data are shared with all staff and families and a need for change is established, planning begins, not as a top-down decision but as a collaborative process that **must** involve all key program/school stakeholders (e.g., teachers, administrators, auxiliary staff, families). The foundations for change are created most effectively when people see this as an opportunity to think together about defining the kind of program or school they want to have and how they desire to be in relationship with children, families, the surrounding community, and with one another.

### *Stage 2: Developing a Shared Vision (“Knowing Where We Are Going and Why”)*

Program/school leaders support staff to define a clear vision and short-, medium-, and long-term goals that represent their “North Star”—what they are trying to accomplish together, the hope and change they are striving to achieve (“We want all children to ... ” “We want all Boys of Color to ... ”). An essential part of this process is working together to create a statement that explains why these changes are important for the children, families, program, and community. This document also provides everyone with shared language to use in talking about their goals for race equity in the early childhood program. Realistic, measurable indicators of progress are developed that align with the goals so the program/school can track their progress and celebrate their small wins along the way. Indicators of progress can be defined in different ways:

- **Data indicator of progress:** “We will reduce suspensions by 30 percent over the next six months.”
- **Policy indicator of progress:** “We will adjust our discipline policies and introduce a tiered approach that includes prevention, promotion, and targeted intervention strategies for supporting children (e.g., social-emotional learning, trauma-informed approaches, comprehensive behavior support plans, use of mental health consultants, reflective processes for teachers, and continuous professional learning that addresses equity and oppression.”



- **Staff development indicator of progress:** “We will increase support for teachers struggling with complex behaviors by providing three trainings on race equity, trauma-informed practice, and the CSEFEL Teaching Pyramid with ongoing support through a community of practice.”
- **Everyday practice indicator of progress:** “We will increase the use of mental health consultation, reflective supervision, and mindfulness activities for children and adults.”

### *Stage 3: Developing Responsive and Effective Practices (“Changing How We Do Things Around Here”)*

This involves a focused effort to develop a range of responses teachers and others can take when they experience the behaviors that previously led to the use of suspensions and expulsions in the program. A set of standard practices (that are culturally responsive and aligned with anti-racism, restorative practices, a trauma-informed approach, and CSEFEL Pyramid strategies) should be developed. All staff members need to receive professional development and ongoing support (e.g., training, technical assistance, coaching, or communities of practice) to learn about these practices. They also need time and spaces where they can talk about the process and experiences they have implementing these changes in the company of their colleagues, with a coach, or in the context of a reflective dialogue with their supervisor. At this stage, the program leader/administrator’s public commitment, modeling, enthusiastic support, and investment in staff development is critical for successful implementation of any new policies and practices (Mansfield, Rainbolt, and Fowler 2018). Program leaders should find ways to bring in external expertise and acknowledge and draw upon the skills, knowledge, and leadership of the teachers, staff members, and families within the program/school.

### *Stage 4: Developing a Whole Program/School Approach (“Putting It All Together”)*

This stage includes realignment of the program/school policies with the new practices addressing racial equity and discipline. Program leaders will want to prevent them from becoming “just another add-on” instead of comprehensive, substantive, and sustained changes that impact every aspect of the program (Mansfield, Rainbolt, and Fowler 2018).

## *Stage 5: Professional Relationships (“Walking the Talk with Each Other”)*

For program leaders, this is where staff “words and actions need to be in step” and gets to the heart of parallel process (Mansfield, Rainbolt, and Fowler 2018, 19). The professional working environment for teachers and staff needs to reflect the same values, commitments, and changes everyone is striving to use with children and their families. Teachers and staff should be in environments that promote open, honest, transparent, and fair communication, and respectful professional relationships. Reflective processes (self and group dialogue and reflection, reflective supervision, mental health consultation) can help teachers and staff feel supported as they take risks to challenge and expand their beliefs about race, racism, and equity, and try out new practices. As change efforts often have implementation dips, “change is difficult and teachers’ confidence levels may decrease initially as they try new strategies,” it is important for administrators to respond with positive feedback and continual reassurance (Zimmerman 2006; Mansfield, Rainbolt, and Fowler 2018, 19). Additionally, restorative trauma-informed processes should be used for managing staff concerns and grievances, interpersonal conflicts (between staff, staff and supervisor, staff and families), and for performance evaluation in order to support staff to experience these processes first-hand.



### **Stop and Reflect**

#### Program Leaders

- Do any of your current professional development opportunities for teachers and other staff include an anti-bias/social justice approach where the topics of oppression, structural racism, and racial equity are addressed?
- How would talking about race and bias (but not oppression, structural racism, and racial equity) change the conversation with your staff about working with Boys of Color?
- How will you support staff “buy-in” with any changes you want to make to improve racial equity in your program?

## *Going Beyond Individual Early Childhood Programs: It Is About Systems, Too*

To effectively disrupt the negative outcomes of our young Boys of Color, we need to engage organizations and stakeholders at every level of the early childhood field: higher education, infrastructure agencies, policymakers, researchers, and child advocates. Educators working in every aspect of the system need to learn about the topics and the responsive practices discussed throughout this book, as the outcomes we desire for our Boys of Color will be achieved only when knowledge of structural racism, bias, culturally responsive ways of understanding children's development, and responsive practices with love at the center that are individualized to meet the unique needs of our diverse Boys of Color (e.g., dual language learners, boys with disabilities, boys who are trauma-impacted, etc.) are valued and integrated across the entire early learning system in California and nationally. Teacher education, coaching, and all professional development programs need to include information on these topics.

Everyone working directly with or on behalf of young Boys of Color in early childhood has a responsibility to help create racially equitable early learning environments that are genuine places of safety, love, healing, and learning for Boys of Color. One example of a community with a diverse group of individuals and agencies working collaboratively to achieve this goal is the Boys of Color Early Years Health and Education Workgroup in Oakland (see below).





## Policy

### **Oakland's Starting Smart and Strong Initiative: The Boys of Color Early Years Health and Education Workgroup**

The Oakland Starting Smart and Strong Initiative (OSSS), a 10-year initiative funded by the David and Lucile Packard Foundation, brings together public and private supporters to create a strong early learning network for testing and developing solutions to complex problems in the field of early childhood education and collectively acting to create lasting change. Oakland is one of three Starting Smart and Strong Initiative communities in California.

In 2017, OSSS funded an equity analysis of early years health and education outcomes for Oakland children, which found grave disparities by race and gender with the most negative outcomes experienced among Boys of Color. The analysis grew out of concern among early childhood leaders that efforts to ensure all Oakland children were ready for kindergarten could not succeed without understanding which children were most underserved. OSSS wanted to approach solutions with an equity focus and account for the particular life circumstances and demographic characteristics of different groups of children and their families, then allocate resources in ways that would address and interrupt disparities in opportunities and outcomes for children in Oakland, especially Boys of Color.

The Boys of Color Early Years Health and Education Workgroup, a table of early health and education providers, practitioners, and advocates from city, county, and community-based agencies, was formed soon after the equity analysis was released. The Boys of Color Workgroup's mission is to identify, recommend, and support the development of effective practices, programs, and policies for those working with young Boys of Color. The workgroup has explored the strategies that address the unique assets, opportunities, and needs of Boys of Color and their families.

In 2018, the workgroup published [\*Call to Action: Recommendations for Common, Equity-Focused Health and Education Indicators for Young Children in Oakland\*](#), asking public systems leaders and others who touch the lives of young children to hold themselves accountable for a common set of early childhood indicators for health and education (Oakland Starting Smart and Strong and Urban Strategies Council 2018). *Call to Action* describes a common set of indicators for young children in Oakland, including those showing the greatest disparities for Boys of Color (Oakland Starting Smart and Strong and Urban Strategies Council 2018, 3). Another resource is the [\*OSSS Promising Practices Portfolio\*](#), which



highlights strategies for supporting Boys of Color and their families for improved early years outcomes (2019).

### *Chapter Three: Takeaways*

**Implementing culturally responsive practice is a foundational strategy for equity** as it allows Boys of Color to have their familiar ways of knowing and being in the world supported in the classroom.

**Teachers should continually communicate that speaking two or more languages or varieties of English, and maintaining their home language, is a valuable asset.** Varieties of English (e.g., African American Vernacular English, Chicano English, among others) are unique linguistic systems that are every bit as complete and valid as the variety spoken in school settings, mainstream American English.

**Teachers can use a wide range of instructional practices to communicate love, respect, and genuine care to Boys of Color.** Although these are good for all children, too often, they are not practiced with Boys of Color. Teachers have to ensure they are—getting to know each boy and learning about his ideas and interests, acknowledging the stressors experienced daily resulting from racism, and supporting agency and creativity.

**Boys of Color need to regularly hear messages about life that are honest and reinforce the value of perseverance in the face of adversity.** This will help them feel less isolated and reinforce messages that life's stressors will be buffered by their coping skills and the many strengths and capacities they each have.

**Early childhood mental health consultation (ECMHC) is emerging as a promising intervention and prevention strategy** that can enhance teachers' reflective capacity and lead to fewer suspensions and expulsions of young children.

**Becoming a responsive teacher for Boys of Color is long-term work.** The most important commitment teachers can make is to continually reflect, learn, and improve their practice.

**Teachers cannot support and heal children in silos on their own.** Their success in meeting the needs of Boys of Color is deeply influenced by the level of racial equity awareness, support, and trauma sensitivity of the programs/organizations and systems they are working within. Directors and administrators have essential roles to play in creating a climate that communicates respect and authentic care throughout the school/program.



**Shifting early childhood programs to be more equitable for Boys of Color requires commitment from teachers, administrators, staff, and families.**

Making progress can be a long and slow process. Research suggests the implementation process for organizational change takes about five years.



**Teachers/Providers**

*Shift Your Lens*

- What do I **think** about culturally responsive practice? What **feelings** come up for me when I think about culturally responsive practice? What deep-seated **beliefs** are leading me to feel this way?
- Review the different cultural ways of knowing and learning listed in [table 7](#). How many do you support in your classroom? How can you expand your teaching practice to include more variety?
- Learn about big body play and the benefits it provides children. Consider how you can create opportunities to support big body play inside or outside your classroom.

*Be Brave: Take Actions for Equity!*

- Choose one or two strategies from this chapter to begin working on your “bite-size” action steps. Make a commitment to continually reflect, learn, and improve your practice. One step at a time. Do not try to change everything at once. This is long-term work.
- Participate with your program leader and others at your site to create a clear and transparent process for providing extra support to Boys of Color who struggle with self-regulation. Make sure that you are communicating in ways that destigmatize the process of developing self-regulation to the boys and acknowledge their progress, no matter how small.



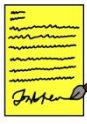
## Administrators/Program Leaders

### *Shift Your Lens*

- Learn about culturally responsive practices and reflect on how your program curricula, toys and materials, arrangement of the environment, and communication with children and families could be improved to support the cultural ways of knowing for the diverse Boys of Color in your program.
- Review [appendix A](#) with recommendations for program leaders to facilitate effective dialogues with staff about the topics in this book. What skills do you already have to support this process? What are areas of learning and growth for you?
- How do you build mutually respectful trusting relationships with Boys of Color and their families? With your teachers and staff of color? What are your strengths? Areas in need of improvement and additional learning?

### *Be Brave: Take Actions for Equity!*

- Develop a clear and transparent process for providing extra support to Boys of Color who struggle with self-regulation. The process should be clearly described to staff and families and consistently used throughout the program. Include processes and supports for in-the-moment interventions for Boys of Color in the classroom as well as longer-term plans for prevention and intervention.
- Identify community resources, especially early childhood mental health consultation services, and support teachers to have access to them as needed.
- Ensure that teachers are provided with regular time to engage in reflective dialogue to talk about the content in this book and consider how they can better support Boys of Color.
- Work with your staff to create short-, medium-, and long-term milestones to track your program's progress—indicators of change—in moving towards your long-term goals of becoming a more racially conscious and equitable early childhood program.



## Policy

### *Invest in Change: Policy Implications*

#### **Superintendent of Public Instruction**

- Create an early childhood education workgroup consisting of multistakeholders to address a myriad of issues (i.e., implicit bias, equity, racism, dashboard indicators) in early childhood education
- Allocate grant funding for districts to trauma-informed pilots and mental health consultants

#### **California Department of Education Early Education Division**

- Create a comprehensive early warning system using readily available school data to identify programs who show early signs of having difficulties and are using exclusionary practices with Boys of Color

#### **District Superintendents and School Boards**

- Partner with community-based organizations (i.e., immigrant serving, diversity focused, etc.) to strengthen cultural competence policies within early childhood education programs
- Prioritize funding for family engagement/equity and inclusion programs and specialists

### *Make It Real: Implementation Activities*

See appendices X–Z for these activities.

- [Equity Perspectives: Creating Space for Making Meaning on Equity Issues](#)
- [Discussing an NAEYC Quote with \*The Four “A”s Protocol\*](#)
- [Chapter Three Courageous Conversation Compass Activity](#)

# CHAPTER FOUR

## PARTNERING WITH FAMILIES OF BOYS OF COLOR



## VIGNETTE

Monica and Nadia, two friends whose sons are in the same preschool program, each describe their experiences raising a Boy of Color.

"I was really having a hard time as a mom," Monica said. "My son, Mateo, suffers from anxiety and depression, and he is five. And so for a mom, I mean, trying to understand that your child has extra needs that need to be met was hard. I felt helpless, you know?"

"He was having a hard time separating. And he would still have accidents, you know, even though he knows how to use the bathroom. And so when they [the preschool staff] talk to me about it, they talk to me about it in respect to behaviors. And they proposed the playgroup with a therapist, and there were other children too and I thought that would be a great idea for him to do that. Because they were already learning about meditation, the teachers were teaching them meditation, and so in the therapy group, that's what they were working on too. So he was like, 'Yeah, I really want to do that, I really want to do more meditation.'

"And the teachers, you know they come from a place of they really love my son. You can tell it like their heart is in the right place. And they even say, 'Are you OK with what we're saying to you? Have we said anything to offend you?' And I'm like, 'No, but thank you for asking me.' I'm the type of person I'll tell you if you offend me kind of thing, but I really appreciated that it just came from a place where they really care about him and checking in with me to see how I feel about it.

"Mateo does not identify as biracial even though he knows I am Mexican and his father is African American. He tells me, 'I'm Black, Mommy, and I am a boy.'" Monica chuckles a bit as she catches up with Nadia just outside their sons' preschool program. Over the last few months, these two single mothers have become "fast friends" by virtue of their common experiences with raising Boys of Color.

Nadia adds, "It's funny no one has ever asked Amari 'what' he is but I guess I should talk with him about it. We're Arabian American and I guess we are so comfortable here [at the preschool] and there is so much attention paid to who each child is, and where they come from, I realize that the real world might not be as kind to him. We're lucky we have teachers [of color] here too, so the teachers 'get it' and they know how important allowing children to learn about who they are is and to have open conversations."



Monica, shaking her head, agrees: “I don’t know what I would’ve done without [this preschool program], especially my relationships with the teachers and director who provide resources and support for my son!”

Nadia adds, “I know exactly what you mean and I knew I would have support for Amari based on the way [this program] supported Yusef, my older son, during the two years he was here. I still refer to the handouts from those social and emotional support parent workshops. Every time I see Ms. Burton, the program director, I just hug her because she was with us at every step, especially at the beginning, when I was unsure I could go down the road of therapeutic services like that special playgroup for Yusef and now Amari. I could always count on her to check on me every so often to see how I was feeling about everything.”

Quality early childhood programs support teachers and program leaders to build respectful and strength-based partnerships with families. Consistent, caring, and responsive relationships among teachers, administrators, and families are an essential foundation for responsive early education for young Boys of Color and their families. Having a respectful and strength-based family partnership with their preschool teacher and director allowed Nadia and Monica—two parents of young Boys of Color—to build trust and open communication about the strengths and needs of their sons, to access valuable resources and mental health services for their sons, and to feel a sense of belonging in a school community where they experienced a genuine sense of authentic care and love for their sons and themselves. Trust was built through the respect, honesty, reciprocal partnership, and genuine listening that the teachers and director extended to both mothers, exemplified in the teacher’s intentional choice to check in with Monica to make sure she felt comfortable discussing a potentially sensitive topic—Mateo’s participation in a therapeutic playgroup as a specialized support to help with his anxiety at school.

### *Relationships Are Essential*

Decades of research and practice have demonstrated that strong, positive, responsive relationships between families, communities, and teachers, like Monica and Nadia have with their sons’ preschool, is essential for the healthy development and educational success of all children (Brooks-Gunn and Markman 2005; Henderson and Mapp 2002). The role of families in high-quality early learning is emphasized in many resources used by early childhood teachers in California (see the following section, Resources Emphasizing

Family Engagement). In addition, a culturally responsive approach to family communication and engagement is also included in the *California Early Childhood Educator Competencies* (California Department of Education 2019c).

## Resources Emphasizing Family Engagement

- [\*Family Engagement Framework: A Tool for California School Districts\*](#), a California Department of Education publication
- California Department of Education [Resources for Parents and Families](#) page
- [\*Family Partnerships and Culture\*](#), a California Department of Education publication and part of the Best Practices for Planning Curriculum for Young Children Series; this publication promotes understanding of children's cultural or multicultural experiences at home and helps teachers use those experiences as building blocks for teaching and learning in early education settings



- [Head Start Parent, Family, and Community Engagement Framework](#), second edition; a US Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Office of Head Start, National Center on Parent, Family, and Community Engagement publication; the Head Start Early Childhood Learning and Knowledge Center [Family Engagement page](#) is another resource for more information about the *Parent, Family, and Community Engagement Framework*

## Where Educators Struggle

Even though most teachers would agree that establishing positive relationships between early childhood programs and families is important, in practice, many educators struggle to establish effective relationships with parents and families, especially with families of color. Research documents that families of color too often experience microaggressions, cultural erasure (where their cultural values and strengths are dismissed or ignored), and bias (Baquedano-López, Alexander, and Hernandez 2013; Cooper 2009; Dow 2016; Valencia 2012). As we saw in chapter two, strong relationships are developed from earning trust and establishing mutual respect and care between educators and family members, foundations that are disrupted by the negative impact of racial bias in teachers' beliefs and behaviors (Hammond 2015). This chapter describes the key foundations for creating culturally responsive, strength-based relationships between educators and families of color with authentic care and love at the center. To do so, this chapter will:

- Describe the limitations of the traditional approaches to parent education that have positioned families of color through deficit and led to distrust with educational institutions. We share data and reflection questions to dispel common stereotypes and myths about families of color
- Introduce a strength-based framework for family engagement
- Describe effective strategies for building respectful, responsive, and reciprocal relationships between families of color and early childhood teachers and staff including an emphasis on the importance of involving fathers

## *The Problems with Traditional Parent Engagement Approaches*

Traditional approaches to family relationships in education—e.g., “parent education” or “parent involvement” models—are problematic for a number of reasons. First, these models often position experts’ professional knowledge over parents’ and families’ lived experience knowledge and cultural practices. Consequently, teachers are generally encouraged to provide families with



“experts’ recommendations” and “best practices” that outline how they should support their children’s education and development (e.g., reading every night, introducing new vocabulary while eating dinner, etc.). Though providing resources and child development research is one aspect of partnering with families and many express appreciation for this information, this approach does not establish a true reciprocal relationship as families, in this model of parent engagement, are not asked what they want to know or need to learn, nor are they offered the opportunity and encouragement to share their own substantial knowledge, suggestions, and effective practices for working with their children. As we described in chapter two, a feeling of care and trust that one’s individual, family, and community cultural perspectives and values are understood and acknowledged is necessary for true authentic relationships to form. The unidirectional stance of this traditional approach to parent engagement (“expert” to parent) positions parents and families’ skills, knowledge, and forms of cultural capital either as less important or as invisible to teachers, making authentic relationships impossible to develop.

Second, unsurprisingly, this model of parent engagement has often led teachers to reinforce **deficit-based stereotypes** about families of color, especially for children living in economically disadvantaged and/or immigrant households (Delgado-Gaitan 2001; Fine 1993; Noguera 2001). Table 11 lists several common deficit-based myths about families of color and provides data and some initial reflection questions to support teachers in their journey to interrupt racial bias and stereotyping of families.



**Table 11: Common Myths About Families of Color**

Common Deficit-Based Myths About Families of Color	Debunking the Myth	Check Your Perspective
<p><b>Myth:</b> “Mexican Americans do not value education” (Valencia and Black 2002)</p>	<p>This deficit-based view of Mexican American and Latinx families has been circulated for years. Research provides significant evidence to dispel this myth:</p> <p>“Latinos in the United States place a premium on the value of education. For instance, nearly nine in ten say a college education is extremely or very important, compared with eight in ten of the overall population” (Jones and Mosher 2013).</p> <p>According to research based on interviews with families from Latin America, families demonstrate their value for the importance education in ways that are not typically understood or seen by educators; for instance, through <i>consejos</i> (advice, moral stories about the value of hard work) (Calabrese Barton et al. 2004; Olivos 2006; Valencia and Black 2002)</p>	<p>To truly learn about Latinx families’ values, meet with them, ask questions, and listen attentively to what they say in response. When meeting with families, you can ask: <i>What are your hopes for your son? What could he accomplish here in our program that would make you feel joy? What is an aspect of your son’s education that you would like for us to work on together with you?</i></p> <p>Consider: Are there times and days of the week that work best for the Latinx families in your program to participate? What means of communication and in what language works best for them?</p>



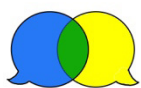
Common Deficit-Based Myths About Families of Color	Debunking the Myth	Check Your Perspective
<p><b>Myth:</b> “Asian mothers only care about grades; they make their kids very successful.”</p>	<p>The myth of the “tiger mother,” which was defined as Asian parents “who are highly controlling and authoritarian, denying their children free time, play dates, and extracurricular activities in order to drive them to high levels of success at any cost, unlike the softer and more forgiving Western parenting style” is parallel to the myth of the “model minority” described in chapter three, projecting Asian American students as always academically successful and successful in math and science (Juang 2013, 2). Both myths, as in any stereotype, are harmful even when seen as “positive” (Juang 2013).</p> <p>There is a vast variation of parenting practices and cultures within the many Asian and Pacific Islander communities, and “tiger parenting” is actually infrequent and linked to a small group of middle-upper class families (Juang, Qin, and Park 2013). Such myths also ignore the struggles and experiences of discrimination that many families and children from Asian, Asian American, and Pacific Islander communities endure (Shafer 2016; Shafer 2017).</p>	<p>Are you familiar with the vast variations in country of origin, class, and immigration status that Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) families represent?</p> <p>Are your perspectives of AAPI children and families based on your first-hand personal relationships and knowledge? How might media and social stereotypes influence your thinking?</p> <p>If you have any recently immigrated AAPI families in your program: Are you familiar with any of the details of their immigration experience including some of the reasons the families emigrated to the US?</p>

Common Deficit-Based Myths About Families of Color	Debunking the Myth	Check Your Perspective
<p><b>Myth:</b> “These hard-to-reach parents don’t seem to care about their children’s education” (Mapp and Hong 2010)</p>	<p>Karen Mapp and Soo Hong report that they often hear teachers’ concerns about “hard-to-reach” parents in their workshops on family–school partnerships (2010). When they ask participants in their workshops who they mean by “hard-to-reach parents,” they found consistent responses: recently immigrated parents, families of color, parents whose first language is not English, parents in poverty, and families with less formal education (Mapp and Hong 2010). The authors challenge the notions that these families are “hard to reach” or uncaring by describing programs that are successful in “reaching” these groups of parents by taking a parent-centric, strength-based, and relational approach (Mapp and Hong 2010). They point out that, usually, the way teachers reach out to parents does not take into consideration the actual lived experiences of these families, their constraints, or their values (Mapp and Hong 2010).</p>	<p>Is your program “hard to reach” in any way for these families? For instance, are drop-offs and pick-ups moments where families can talk with you? If a family does not speak English well, are there other means of communication or interpreter support available to them?</p> <p>Have you gathered information about preferred means of communication (e.g., text messages, email, phone calls, letters) and times of the day or week that work best for families?</p> <p>Are you familiar with the communities your families are part of?</p> <p>Have you explicitly welcomed families to share their thoughts with you and invited them to talk with you if questions arise?</p>

Common Deficit-Based Myths About Families of Color	Debunking the Myth	Check Your Perspective
<p><b>Myth:</b> “We really need to find someone to set a good example for these mothers, to be a role model in caring for their children” (Villenas 2001)</p>	<p>When educators assume what families know or do not know about education, it breaks trust and interrupts communication.</p> <p>A common deficit-based approach coming from well-intentioned educators is to assume that immigrant families or those who are poor or have low levels of education need “parenting classes” to learn how to “properly” support their children. This approach assumes that these parents, usually mothers, have poor child-rearing practices without acknowledging their strengths, knowledge, and skills.</p>	<p>As you build trusting relationships with families, ask what they already know and do to support their children’s education and development.</p> <p>Ask families what they want their children to learn in school and what skills they value and want to teach their children at home.</p>

Common Deficit-Based Myths About Families of Color	Debunking the Myth	Check Your Perspective
<p><b>Myth:</b> “Black fathers are absent from their kids’ lives, no wonder they have problems”</p>	<p>Jones and Mosher found that Black fathers were as involved as White dads across most activities measured and had more involvement on some of the measures (2013). Even when Black dads did not live in the same household as their children, Black fathers did as much or even more than White and Latinx dads (Jones and Mosher 2013). For instance, more than half of Black fathers not living with their children reported that they talked to their children about their day several times a week or more, a higher percentage than what was reported among White or Latinx dads (Jones and Mosher 2013).</p>	<p>Are your perspectives of African American fathers based on your first-hand personal relationships and knowledge, or from media and social stereotypes influencing your thinking?</p> <p>Talk to Black fathers to learn about the important people in their son’s life (e.g., family members, church leaders, respected members of the community, friends, etc.).</p>

As seen in the table above, the majority of these myths are based on racial/ethnic stereotypes, reflecting simplistic and deficit-based views of families of color that position parents and family members as lacking in skills and knowledge, assumptions that ignore their wealth of strengths, capacities, and diverse forms of cultural capital. In order to create early childhood experiences that are equitable for all children, educators must raise their awareness about the existence of these harmful stereotypes and work intentionally to dismantle them in themselves and in their programs (see the following Debunking Myths: Useful Resources section).



- Are there families you find it easier to talk to and others that feel less comfortable getting to know? If so, what cultural, racial, gender, or other factors might be influencing your comfort or discomfort?
- Are any of the myths described above familiar to you?
- How can you disrupt these myths and the stereotypes they are built upon and, instead, build strengths-based authentic relationships with all of the families you serve?



### *Debunking Myths: Useful Resources*

Researchers have demonstrated that parents, often mothers of color, actively work to support their children's education and development in many ways that are invisible to educators—from more academically oriented activities, such as going to the library or taking classes at community college, to less traditional approaches, such as advocating for their children with disabilities or discussing with other parents which programs or schools better serve children of color (see, for instance, Cooper 2007; Dominguez-Pareto 2014; Dow 2016; López 2001;



Villenas 2001). In a study by Calabrese Barton et al., the authors interviewed a mother, Celia, who worked as a cleaning woman and cleaned the home of a principal at a private school (2004). Celia explained to the researchers how she “carefully noted the kind of homework, projects, and other school-related artifacts the principal’s children brought home from school and she used this “data” to ask questions of this principal, and to offer suggestions and to question her own son’s teacher” (Calabrese Barton et al. 2004, 9). Though Celia actively worked to better understand academic knowledge through her contacts, this form of engagement is not a practice that is typically considered when talking about parental engagement. This study and others provide significant evidence that many parents provide positive modeling and values, and use historically accumulated and culturally developed bodies of knowledge and skills to support their children but are falsely assumed not to value their children’s education or know how to provide adequate support.

## **Resources**

### **On the myth of Latinx families’ not valuing education**

- [\*America’s Hispanic Children: Gaining Ground, Looking Forward\*](#), by David Murphey, Lina Guzman, and Alicia Torres (2014)

### **On the myth of the Asian “tiger mom” and “model minority”**

- [\*Reading Between the Data: The Incomplete Story of Asian Americans, Native Hawaiians, and Pacific Islanders\*](#), by Farah Z. Ahmad and Christian E. Weller (2014)
- [\*The Other Achievement Gap: The Lessons We Can Learn from Asian American Success\*](#), by Leah Shafer (2017)
- [\*Beyond Stereotype: Breaking the Grip of the “Model Minority” Caricature to See Students as Individuals\*](#), by Leah Shafer (2016)

### **On deficit views of the Black family**

- [\*“The Black Family: Re-Imagining Family Support and Engagement”\*](#) by Iheoma U. Iruka (2013)
- [\*“The Danger of a Single Story”\*](#), a TED Talk on the dangers of seeing the world only through our own cultural lens, by Nigerian author Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie (2009)



## On the myth of the absent Black father

- [“Fathers’ Involvement with Their Children: United States, 2006–2010,”](#) by Jo Jones and William D. Mosher (2013)

### *A Strength-Based Approach to Building Relationships with Families*

In response to the limitations of deficit-based views of families, new models have been proposed that are strength-based and promote a reciprocal partnership model between teachers and families. One of these models, The Dual Capacity-Building Framework (also known as DCBF), was adopted by the US Department of Education in 2013 (Mapp and Kuttner 2013). In contrast with past models, the Dual Capacity-Building Framework rejects deficit descriptions of families and, instead, emphasizes the need to build the capacity of educators and programs in addition to families. Importantly, cultivating and sustaining relationships of trust and respect between practitioners, families, and community members is one of the central elements of this model. These relationships are built through face-to-face, one-on-one opportunities to share experiences, questions, and ideas in ways that support authentic and meaningful engagement. This model emphasizes the importance and need for teachers to learn about the beliefs and values of family and community members; understanding that creates a foundation for building trusting respectful relationships with families.



## **Dual Capacity-Building Framework**

### *The Challenge*

#### **Ineffective Family–School Partnerships**

- Lack of opportunities for school/program staff to build the capacity for partnerships
- Lack of opportunities for families to build the capacity for partnerships

### *Opportunity Conditions*

#### **Process Conditions**

- Linked to learning
- Relational
- Development vs. Service orientation
- Collaborative
- Interactive

#### **Organizational Conditions**

- Systemic: across the organization
- Integrated: embedded in all programs
- Sustained: with resources and infrastructure

### *Policy and Program Goals*

To build and enhance the capacity of staff/families in the “4 C” areas:

- Capabilities (skills and knowledge)
- Connections (networks)
- Cognition (beliefs, values)
- Confidence (self-efficacy)

## *Family and Staff Capacity Outcomes*

### **Effective Family–School Partnerships Supporting Student Achievement and School Improvement**

School and program staff who can:

- Honor and recognize families' funds of knowledge
- Connect family engagement to student learning
- Create welcoming, inviting cultures

Families who can negotiate multiple roles:

- Supporters
- Encouragers
- Monitors
- Advocates
- Decision makers
- Collaborators

Source: Mapp and Kuttner (2013)

### **An Example of the Dual Capacity-Building Framework in Action**

**First 5 Santa Clara County** is working to build capacity for home–school partnerships in a systemic, sustained way at the county level using the Dual Capacity-Building Framework as a guide. Parents are taking part in the program, **Abriendo Puertas (Opening Doors)**. Developed by the L.A.-based nonprofit Families in Schools, Abriendo Puertas is an evidence-based parent empowerment program, where parents learn to be strong advocates and partners with their child's teacher. The ten-week course, taught by local parents, is developed from the foundational belief in parents as the child's first teacher. The interactive nature of the workshops that include roleplaying support parents to practice having one-on-one conversations with a teacher or voicing concerns to district staff. The course aims to change the way parents see themselves, building their confidence in their own abilities to support learning and advocate in the school system for their children. Parents who graduate from Abriendo Puertas report feeling significantly more capable across an array of areas including helping their children learn, being involved in school, and feeling connected to their community. (Mapp and Kuttner 2013)



## Resources

- [\*Partners in Education: A Dual Capacity-Building Framework for Family-School Partnerships\*](#), by Karen L. Mapp and Paul J. Kuttner, provides further information about this framework and three cases of current efforts that bring the principles of the Dual Capacity-Building Framework to life, including more information on the progress in Santa Clara County (2013)
- "[Linking Family Engagement to Learning: Karen Mapp's '8 for 8'](#)" a short video by author Karen Mapp describing the Dual Capacity-Building Framework (Harvard Graduate School of Education 2014)

Other institutions and organizations have also stressed need for a paradigm shift in family-school relationships. For instance, in "[The Black Family: Re-Imagining Family Support and Engagement](#)," by Iheoma U. Iruka, the National Black Child Institute recommends:

Programs and schools will need to focus on expanding the traditional, one-way, directional approach of "family engagement" to a more authentic bi-directional approach that sees families as valuable to the process of educating children, both because of their fundamental importance and because their meaningful engagement matters in achieving current measures of accountability and success. Leaders and educators will also need to ensure that their practices are culturally relevant, reflective of families' race and ethnicity as well as their economic and social conditions. (Iruka 2013, 23)



### Stop and Reflect

- How comfortable are you interacting with families?
- What, if any, barriers prevent you from building relationships with the families of Boys of Color in your classroom or program?
- What does partnership mean to you?

## *A Strengths-Based Approach and Family Engagement*

Using a strengths-based approach leads teachers to start any conversation about family engagement with the understanding that families are already committed to and engaged with their children's well-being, development, and learning. Although parents' forms of engagement may not always be "seen" by educators and they may be different from the forms of parent participation and engagement acknowledged and valued in schools, they are equally important and deserve to become visible and valued. Take for instance Carmela:

Carmela's son has a severe developmental delay and at the doctor's they put her in contact with the Regional Center for services.<sup>30</sup> Carmela sells tamales while Pedro, her son who is three years old, is in a child care center. Carmela has also started attending meetings at a nearby Family Resource Center that offers workshops in Spanish and provides child care for participating adults. For Carmela, attending these meetings is really special, as she is learning about the law and about how to advocate her son's rights.

Carmela's attendance at the Regional Center meetings might not be defined as a form of parental engagement by many educators because Carmela is not participating on the school campus, nor is it directly related to what Pedro does at his child care center. However, learning how to advocate her son's rights is a very valuable experience for Carmela that she believes will have a positive impact on his life in the future.



### **Promising Practices**

#### *Creating Responsive, Strength-Based Relationships with Families*

Developing positive, strength-based relationships with the parents and families of Boys of Color is most likely to happen when there is a trusting relationship and teachers listen to, and learn from, families about the experiences they face raising their young sons. There are many ways teachers can build responsive, strength-

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30 Regional Centers are California's first stop for any parent who suspects their child to have a developmental dis/ability. Regional Centers are nonprofit private corporations that have been contracted by the Department of Developmental Services (DDS) to provide and/or coordinate services and supports for individuals with developmental disabilities.

based relationships with the families of Boys of Color in their classrooms. Most important is to express genuine interest in getting to know families and partnering with them to support their young boys.

Asking families about the goals and dreams they have for their boys, any concerns they have, the forms of support they would like their boys to receive, and what they want their sons to learn while attending the early childhood program is an important start. Additionally, understanding the unique challenges and stressors parents and families of Boys of Color experience on a regular basis—e.g., implicit bias and structural racism—is essential. Yet, acknowledging these challenges should never translate into defining families through deficit. Instead, responsive family engagement begins with a passionate belief that all families raising Boys of Color have a wealth of strengths, skills, capacities, and funds of knowledge to be acknowledged, valued, and made visible within the early childhood classroom.

**Emphasizing and paying attention to each family’s strengths will help teachers build positive, trusting, and responsive relationships.** As with the boys themselves, respect, love, and authentic care should be the basis of all communication and relationship-building efforts with the boys’ families.



At the core of any efforts to build responsive partnerships with families of Boys of Color **is a focus on building authentic, trust-based relationships with parents** (Hammond 2015). In chapter two, we discussed the foundations of responsive, strength-based relationships between teachers and Boys of Color, and the same principles are applicable for building relationships with parents and families. **It is especially critical that fathers are encouraged and supported to participate in early learning programs and systems.** Fathers must be integrated into the fabric of the classrooms, but in order to do this, staff need to learn about the barriers that prevent fathers of color from having access to early childhood programs and feeling welcome, valued, and included. Consider these suggestions:

- Ask fathers of Boys of Color how they want to be involved in their child's program/classroom and then follow their lead to include them inside and outside the program in as many ways as possible.
- Relationships are key. Pay attention to fathers' verbal and nonverbal language (and your own) when considering ways to invite their participation.

A best practice example of policies and practices that center fathers and their full participation and engagement with Boys of Color in early childhood programs is seen with the Alameda County Fathers Corps (ACFC) program (see below).

### *The Importance of Involving Fathers: Alameda County Fathers Corps*

The [Alameda County Fathers Corps \(ACFC\)](#), a collaborative effort of First 5 Alameda County, Alameda County's Health Care Services Agency, and Social Services Agency. The ACFC identified [seven father-friendly principles](#) to support programs and agencies with becoming more intentional and effective with their support and engagement of fathers and father figures (2014). The ACFC works to ensure that all social and family support systems and programs are father friendly through its systems-change and capacity-building efforts.

## **How Relationships Affect Discipline**

As Eva Shivers clearly describes, relationships with families are not only important in and of themselves, they have direct impacts on the discipline disparities for Boys of Color:

What we know from our work with the families is, when you understand the family and have a relationship with the family, the child will just thrive. Walter Gilliam said something recently that I agree with, "A center does not expel children, they expel families." And when a program is invested in a family and they like that family and they value that family, they are less



likely to expel that child. ... In culturally responsive care giving with boys, we have to wrap in the family (Shivers 2018, personal communication).

In line with the strengths-based, reflective, and culturally responsive approach emphasized throughout this book, successful family partnerships need educators who reject deficit-based views of diverse families. Thus, partnering with boys and their families of color should start with the following premise:

**All families, no matter what their income, race, education, language, or culture, want their children to do well in school—and make important contributions to their children learning** (adapted from Henderson et al. 2007, 115).

Early childhood education programs should make intentional efforts to reach out, welcome, and build relationships with families of color. These efforts should be based on a “systemic and sustained commitment that occurs across time, spans many settings, and requires shared responsibility from all parties” (National Black Child Development Institute 2019).





## Recommendations

The following recommendations are key to building trusting responsive relationships with parents and family members of Boys of Color.

### **Extend self-reflection to include perspectives on and relationships with families.**

To address unconscious bias, teachers need to begin by considering the perspectives they have about parents and families of Boys of Color, given the history of blaming parents and families for the inequities in outcomes for Boys of Color (Wood and Harris 2016). As we have discussed throughout this book, identifying and then addressing one's biases—whether conscious or unconscious—is essential for all educators as these influence every aspect of communication with families.



#### *Check Your Perspective*

Consider going back to the [mindful reflection tool](#) developed by Dray and Wisneski (see chapter one) and, using the same steps to guide you, reflect on your perspectives about families. Also, review the strategies described in chapter one to address your implicit bias.

### **Strive for cultural competency and practice cultural humility.**

Cultural competency is defined as “the ability to relate and communicate effectively with people of a different culture, economic background, or language” (Henderson et al. 2007, 121). In that way, it refers more to a process of shifting attitudes than just an accumulation of cultural knowledge. Gaining cultural competency includes broadening awareness and understanding of different cultural practices and values and, additionally, increasing awareness of our own cultural practices and values and their impact in teaching and caregiving practice. Learning to understand families’ negative experiences of racism and discrimination, and attuning to possible trauma histories, is an element of cultural competency.

Educators have to consider the life and sociopolitical barriers that many families experience daily. For example, for families without legal documentation, school forms and home visits could feel very uncomfortable and unsafe, as these practices must be seen as ways in which their circumstances could be discovered

and made public, putting them and their children in danger. **Cultural humility refers** to the “ability to maintain an interpersonal stance that is other-oriented (or open to the other) in relation to aspects of cultural identity that are most important to the [person]” (Hook et al. 2013, 2). Cultural humility then, refers to an attitude of openness to other ways of thinking and doing, based on reflection and introspection. Cultural humility would lead teachers towards understanding that the meaning of “engagement” might look different for each family.

### *NCBDI Parent Empowerment Program*

Developed by the National Black Child Development Institute (NBCDI), the Family Empowerment Program builds the capacity of parents and caregivers as leaders and advocates of their families. Throughout this 12-week program, families are equipped with the knowledge, tools, and skills needed to foster their children’s learning and development while effectively advocating them from birth. The program was designed to guide and coach parents and caregivers through a strengths-based lens that honors rich cultural and linguistic strengths of families of color. See [appendix DD](#) for a more complete description of the program.

### **Always use a strengths-based approach.**

A strength-based approach is essential in the way teachers work with Boys of Color *and* their families. Assume good intentions with families. Acknowledge that every family arrives in early childhood programs with a wealth of skills, knowledge, and resources (see [Cultural Capital](#) in chapter one). Getting to know families through home visits, short calls, or social events allows educators to gain rich knowledge about families and their many strengths.

### *Planning a Home Visit*

To learn about families’ ways of supporting their children and about their funds of knowledge consider doing a **home visit** at the beginning of the year if the family feels comfortable with it. Make sure that it is clear that this visit is just to get to know each other, introduce yourself, and learn about all the things their son likes and does and their hopes and dreams for their child so that you can be a better teacher. Framing a visit in this way might help lower anxieties of parents that have been judged or have had negative experiences in schools.

Entering their home requires a vulnerability and exposure on the part of the family. And, it can be really important for the child to have a teacher in their home to bear witness to their lives and experiences. In doing so, educators communicate to the child that they are there as a partner and ally to support them and their family,

a foundation for building trust. If or when appropriate, educators may need to identify supports for families after learning of needs they have.

Teachers can also offer to meet somewhere other than the home (nearby park, coffee shop, library, etc.) if the parents are hesitant to have you come to their home but would like to meet somewhere other than the school.

## **Listen.**

Truly and authentically listen and learn from parents and family members. Acknowledging them for their genuine knowledge, strengths, and capacities is a building block for developing trusting relationships.



*Key Idea*

## **Trust Begins with Listening**

Zaretta Hammond suggests four characteristics that establish the conditions for true listening:

1. Give one's full attention to the speaker and to what is being said
2. Understand the feeling behind the words and be sensitive to the emotions being expressed
3. Suspend judgment and listen with compassion
4. Honor the speaker's cultural way of communication (2015, 77-78)

In partnering with families of color, it is important that educators listen with empathy to families' personal experiences of previous bias and racism in education, their fears, and their suggestions. Remember that when families share these experiences with you, they are reaching out and demonstrating trust. Be mindful to not negate their experience (e.g., "Oh I am sure she didn't mean it in that way!") but instead, focus on their emotions and perceptions (e.g., "That must have been hard, I am sorry that you were treated in that way. It's very unfair."). Attend to their concerns. For instance, if one of their worries is wanting their son to be proud of who he is, plan with them different ways that your classroom can promote this goal (e.g., you might make sure that there are visual representations of Boys of Color that show their brilliance; bring books and stories that showcase varied characters of color that do not reproduce victimized or deficit-based views of children).

## *Listen and Be Receptive*

It is important that educators do this listening from a place of inquiry versus from a traditional parent education or expertizing model, that is, truly listening to build a relationship and **not** to assess or to give advice or fix problems. To do so, ask families what they need, what they think is working, and what they want to change, and find ways to support them to have the resources to do so. Learn about the family's life, what works for them, and what does not work. For instance, for single parents with more than one child, coming to a meeting at the program might be difficult if the other children are not explicitly welcome to participate.

### **Communicate positive messages to families about their boys that reinforce your high expectations.**

Continually communicate positive messages to families about their sons that reinforce the boys' strengths, your steadfast belief in their promising futures, and your high expectations for their learning and abilities. Often, communication with families focuses on negative behaviors of the child and on things that need "fixing." This approach will undermine efforts to build trust and positive relationships with families. A director of a program for African American pre-K boys adds: "[Be] able to say they did really good today or if they didn't, to say, 'They struggled today but we pulled it together.' No one wants to hear bad stuff about their children all the time, so you want to make sure you're giving positive feedback every day."

### **Have regular and open communication with families.**

Ongoing communication with families is essential. Educators must make every effort to communicate with families on a regular basis, both listening and sharing information about boys' strengths and progress in addition to concerns and questions. Make sure that families understand your classroom/program philosophy and make your expectations for their children very clear. Let families ask questions and make suggestions in response to what you share. A preschool director serving Boys of Color notes what has helped them: "Communicating what the expectations of the program are, especially with the parents, and letting them know what our program is all about. Getting out the word early, 'This is what your child will learn while they are enrolled in our program.'"

Establish a method of communication that is accessible and most convenient for families (at drop-off/pick-up, telephone call, text message). Develop strategies for communicating with families who speak a language other than English and families who have specific circumstances that prevent them from communicating



with the methods you suggest (e.g., families experiencing homelessness). Ask the families how they would like to stay in communication with you. Often, they will have suggestions to recommend that will work best for them. Do not require families to be physically present on campus or in a program if that is not possible for them; find alternative formats for facilitating communication.

### **Assume good intentions.**

Understand that families own histories and lived experiences may lead them to struggle to trust that educators will support and educate their boys equitably. Meet this resistance or lack of engagement with empathy, patience, and persistence. Understand that it may take additional time to build trust. “For a population of [children] who often feel invisible and unimportant, time investment can serve as a true indicator of authentic care” (Wood and Harris 2016, 41).





## **Share power with families.**

Family engagement is an integral part of a teacher's job and should not be a checklist item or something they say they do not have time or bandwidth for. There is a well-known adage that "families are the experts on their own children." While most educators agree with this statement in theory, in practice, families' knowledge and expertise is rarely asked for and integrated into classrooms and schools on a regular basis. In fact, it is common that families hear more about what they can do to improve a child's learning and development before ever being asked to talk about what they are already doing to support their child at home.

There are many ways to shift these patterns and begin to share power with families in a more equitable partnership. Providing authentic, accessible ways they can participate and engage with your classroom/program and regularly asking families for their perspectives, ideas, and feedback about their child's experience are two essential ways to start. Teachers can also create opportunities for families to develop peer-peer relationships so they can learn from one another and build community together (transforming an "expertizing" model where they only learn from the teacher). Another idea is to create a Parent Ambassador program where parents work on teams together and reach out to families who do not feel comfortable in the school/program to increase their feelings of belonging and making them feel welcome. Bianca, a biracial mom (Afro Latina) of two African American kindergarten-aged boys shares how valuable it was when her son's teacher connected her with another parent in the classroom:

What was really helpful, this one parent pulled me in like sista girl type of thing. She made an extra effort with me and pulled me in. She worked there and had kids there too and had experience at that school. We started a convo and she's the one, "If you need anything let me know." I appreciated that. I knew I'd be leaning on her because she had raised kids and her youngest son was my son's age, so I was going to be in contact with her either way. That helped.

## **Learn about community resources.**

To support the parents and families in their classrooms/schools, it is important for teachers to know about the community resources and assets that may provide valuable resources for families. Identify and make a list of the community services that families may find helpful to know about (e.g., libraries, parks, where they can go for immigration help or if they are experiencing homelessness or food insecurity, social services, etc.). Referrals made to community services should ideally be available in a linguistically and culturally responsive format, or,

when not possible, interpreters should be available for families to support their communication.

We have described a few of the many practices that teachers can use to create welcoming, inclusive, and responsive environments for parents and families of Boys of Color. What is most important is that teachers use a strength-based approach that assumes each boy and his family has many assets, knowledge, and forms of cultural capital that teachers can acknowledge and incorporate into their early childhood classrooms. Doing so will support teachers to build trusting and collaborative partnerships with families.



## Chapter Four: Takeaways

**Strong, positive, responsive relationships between families, communities, and teachers are essential for the healthy development and educational success of all children**, including Boys of Color, but many educators struggle to create reciprocal, strengths-based, and authentic relationships with families.

**Traditional models of family-school relationship followed a deficit view** in which teachers were seen as the only experts and families were given little opportunities to authentically share their views and shape the programs.

**It is still common among education professionals to draw on deficit-based stereotypes of families, especially of those families with other racial/ethnic backgrounds than their own.** These myths are experienced as microaggressions and impede building authentic relationships with families.

**To create early childhood experiences that are equitable for all children, educators must raise their awareness about the existence of these harmful stereotypes** and work intentionally to dismantle them in themselves and in their programs.

**Building reciprocal, strength-based partnerships with the families of Boys of Color is fundamental.** Learn about families' everyday lives, their schedules, their needs, and their hopes for their children. Make sure to have rich, full pictures of the families that are not based on cultural assumptions and bias.



### Teachers/Providers

#### *Shift Your Lens*

- Ask yourself, how often do I truly and authentically listen to and learn from the parents and family members of Boys of Color? Is this a consistent part of my practice that happens regularly? If not, what barriers prevent me from doing so?
- What do I **think** about the idea of sharing power with families? What **feelings** come up for me when I think about sharing power with families? What deep-seated **beliefs** are leading me to feel this way?

### *Be Brave: Take Actions for Equity!*

- Communicate a positive message to each family in your classroom about their Boy of Color that reinforces your high expectations and beliefs in their success. Acknowledge at least one of their strengths in the message.
- Consider how fathers are invited to be involved in your classroom. Review the Alameda County Father Corps seven father-friendly principles. Identify at least one way to become more intentional and effective in supporting and engaging fathers and father figures for Boys of Color in your classroom.



### **Administrators/Program Leaders**

#### *Shift Your Lens*

- List the families at your center. Can you think of three strengths that each family brings to the program? If there are families on your list that you have no specific information about, make sure to create a plan to get to know them better.
- How are the family members of Boys of Color supported to participate and engage with our program? Do we regularly ask families of Boys of Color for their perspectives, ideas, and feedback about their child's experience? What are the barriers to their engagement and how am I working on removing them?
- How often and in what ways do I communicate positive messages to families about their Boys of Color that reinforce our program's high expectations for them and our commitment to their success?

### *Be Brave: Take Actions for Equity!*

- List the different ways in which your program communicates and interacts with families. Mark which of these formats involve (a) educators giving information to parents or families about their child's development and education, (b) families sharing their knowledge about their child with you, and (c) a bit of both. If you notice that your list tends to be one direction (teachers giving information to parents or families), what can you change to create a more balanced and authentic relationship based in partnership?



- Consider how fathers are invited to be involved in your program. Review the Alameda County Father Corps seven father-friendly principles. Identify specific policies and practices to revise so the entire program can become more intentional and effective in supporting and engaging fathers and father figures for Boys of Color in your classroom.



## Policy

### *Invest in Change: Policy Implications*

#### **California Department of Education Early Education Division**

- Update the California dashboard to include data about parent/family engagement including a data point on father involvement.

#### **California Department of Social Services (Child Care Licensing)**

- Include a segment in licensing orientations on how to talk to families about race and equity and how these issues may show up in early childhood programs.
- Create partnerships with organizations who do race and equity training and incorporate a segment of training into the licensing orientations. Offer resources to programs on race equity training.

#### **District Superintendents and School Boards**

- Promote school curriculum that reflects cultural identities and histories by partnering with families.
- Promote and implement family partnering activities such as book clubs and home visits, encourage welcoming forums for courageous conversations about race, share oral histories, and do neighborhood walks and similar activities.

### **Make It Real: Implementation Activities**

See appendices AA and BB for these activities.

- [Using an Equity Lens to Examine Your Program's Parent/Family Handbook](#)
- [Chapter Four Courageous Conversation Compass Activity](#)



## Conclusion

“Out of the mountain of despair, a stone of hope.”

“The function of education is to teach one to think intensively and to think critically. Intelligence plus character—that is the goal of true education.”

—Martin Luther King Jr.

I have come to realize more and more that what is truly essential for cultural and linguistic responsiveness is love. I have been in enough classrooms (over 2,000) and talked with enough educators (hundreds) to see that oftentimes the missing ingredient for many underserved students is love. ... The love I am talking about is beyond your ordinary love. It is more love. It is when you are loving in the best way that you can, and yet the situation, the students, the parents, your staff, a colleague, or the institution says to you, “But I need more.” This “more” is defined as outrageous love, which is cultural and linguistic responsiveness.

For those of you in the classroom, you have a student right now who is looking at you, pleading for more love. For those of you in leadership positions, there is a staff member or a colleague who is begging you to love him or her outrageously. For those of you who cook, clean, answer phones, yard supervise, drive the bus ... there is something that you need to do which is calling on you to stretch your love. ... Fred Rogers of the renowned Mister Rogers’ Neighborhood television show [said], “Love isn’t a state of perfect caring. It is an active noun like ‘struggle.’ To love someone is to strive to accept that person exactly the way he or she is, right here and now” (Rogers 2003). (Hollie 2018, 199–200)

Young Boys of Color unfortunately experience inequitable education including but not limited to exclusionary discipline—where they are removed from their learning environments through suspension and expulsion—at alarmingly high numbers. Patterns of inequity in early childhood result from a complex array of factors including structural racism, teacher and administrator bias, and characteristics of the early childhood environment. Experiencing educational environments that are unwelcoming and at times exclusionary and traumatic can have devastating negative consequences for young Boys of Color that impact their health, education, and well-being. Throughout this book, we advocate a paradigm shift for

our youngest Boys of Color that disrupts these negative outcomes. We emphasize the importance and urgency for teachers, administrators, and all early childhood staff to actively focus their practice on equity, learn about oppression, privilege, and racism, and continuously work on disrupting harmful and inequitable practices while also building responsive and attuned relationships with Boys of Color and their families. These are the foundations for equitable early learning programs that have love, respect, genuine care, and high expectations at the center.

Early childhood teachers have an important role in the lives of young Boys of Color and their families. They can make a profound difference for the boys and their families by creating environments that are strength-based (acknowledging their capacities and promise from their earliest caregiving experiences), culturally responsive, and sensitive to their unique stressors and complex needs. By striving to understand the individual strengths and vulnerabilities of each boy and his family, early childhood teachers can support Boys of Color from their earliest ages to feel love and a sense of belonging; these are foundations to support their healthy learning and development.

This book outlines a range of strategies that teachers can use to create responsive early learning environments to support infants, toddlers, preschoolers, and early elementary-aged children. Teachers and all early childhood staff must take actionable steps to address their bias and create welcoming, inclusive, and trauma-sensitive environments that support all Boys of Color to thrive from their earliest years. It is our shared responsibility to disrupt the harmful experiences many of our youngest Boys of Color are experiencing in early childhood programs and to ensure that each child has opportunities to dream, build relationships, create, connect, belong, heal, take risks, love, and be loved in our care. We owe our Boys of Color nothing less.

### *We Need Individual and Collective Action from Everyone*

Working for equity, empowerment, and the success of each Boy of Color is hard, long-term work requiring individual and collective effort. This book needs to be part of a larger spectrum of professional learning resources provided to early childhood teachers and program leaders. Transformative change will require ongoing training, technical assistance, and coaching for teachers, leaders, families, and infrastructure staff.

Building equitable early childhood classrooms and programs requires a systematic approach that involves changes in policies, norms, and practices across all levels of the different systems serving our youngest Boys of Color.

This includes state and federal agencies, higher education, quality rating and improvement systems, professional development and coaching services, early intervention, special education, and child welfare, among others. Teachers and program administrators cannot disrupt systems of oppression with historical roots and interlocking connections by themselves. **Reaching our North Star—equitable early childhood programs for all children including Boys of Color and their families—requires individual and collective action from everyone.**

### *Jamari, David, and Tui*

We close with the voices of three brilliant Boys of Color. Boys who represent our future. Boys who want to be seen and heard. Boys who share connections to our histories of despair and represent stones of our hope. Boys who deserve more—our collective commitment to engage in the struggle for equity and justice until we have early childhood programs and schools that respect every child for exactly who they are right here and right now, and educators who shower Boy of Colors with outrageous love.

“I just want to play at school. I like my friends and to be outside. I like my teacher and to play ball with her. This is fun to me and I like to read books too.”

—Jamari, four years old, African American,  
attending a large family child care program

I looked up and realized my teacher knew I was in trouble. She called my name and I knew I was safe. She stopped everything to be sure I was OK.

I have so many stories of times when my teachers made sure I was OK and this allowed me to learn and grow. I appreciate everything my school has done for me and I hope others appreciate it too because this does not happen everywhere.

—David, fourth-grader, Filipino

I want teachers to know that our families care about education from the young ones to when we go off to college and beyond. We are not here to fight you, be rude, and play around. This is serious for us. Our family, our community depends on us to do well. I don't get it when teachers don't want to help us. I am smart. I am talented and I will succeed. I will make sure those around me do the same.

—Tui, high school senior, Tongan



Tre Germany, Devin Alexander, Amin Robinson



## Appendix A

### *Recommendations for Administrators, Program Leaders, and Others Facilitating Race Equity Conversations*

Program leaders and others—anyone using the content in this book to open conversations and professional learning opportunities for teachers and staff—need to establish and model norms and group agreements that support productive dialogue and transformative learning. Specifically, agreements that create environments where participants listen respectfully; speak truthfully from their own experience; identify stereotypes, assumptions, and misinformation about different groups; and engage in critical reflection as individuals and in dialogue with others in ways that support them to acknowledge systems of oppression and their positionality in these systems, and to make positive changes in their beliefs and behavior (Bell, Goodman, and Ouellett 2016, 75).

Teachers and staff participants will arrive with widely varying prior lived experiences and degrees of knowledge about the topics highlighted throughout this book. Facilitators should assume that all participants have internalized messages of oppression from the dominant culture and misinformation about a range of social issues, and most people have had few, if any, opportunities to think critically about their social identities and systemic inequalities and to have honest dialogue with others whose lived realities and perspectives are significantly different than their own (Bell, Goodman, and Ouellett 2016, 76). For these reasons, it is essential that facilitators and participants anticipate and intentionally plan for the personal and interpersonal dynamics that can arise when people with very different perspectives express their deeply held beliefs—often in ways that evoke strong emotions—in conversations with one another. Facilitators can set the stage for these conversations by asking everyone to participate with **critical humility**—where everyone is encouraged to be curious and ask questions to deepen their understanding of different perspectives and experiences, instead of responding with advocating their own viewpoint, remembering that everyone is in a process of learning together (Bell, Goodman, and Ouellett 2016, 76).

All groups should begin by **creating norms and group agreements** (sometimes referred to as ground rules) together that describe how the group is committing to engage with one another as they discuss and learn about the topics of race, racism, oppression, and equity. The recommended strategy is for facilitators to lead a conversation with the teachers and staff, inviting them to create their own list of group agreements. This will support the process of their “buy in” and accountability, and ensure that the agreements are authentic or culturally



responsive for the specific group of participants. If time is limited, facilitators can introduce a predetermined list of group agreements and invite participants to provide feedback for the list by suggesting additions or revisions. Facilitators should reinforce to the group that this is a set of **“living” agreements** that the group is responsible for upholding together, and a dynamic document that the group will revisit over time and adjust as needed (removing some items, adding new agreements as they emerge from the group’s discussions and interactions together). Facilitators can encourage the group to help in calling attention to violations of their agreed-upon norms.

Establishing group agreements will help acknowledge and manage the fears, anxiety, hope, and excitement participants bring into these professional learning experiences, a range of feelings that facilitators can acknowledge honestly. Facilitators can share honestly, “You may feel a range of conflicting feelings: anxious, judgmental, curious, defensive, excited, or hopeful, and you should not be surprised if these different feelings come up for you.” Facilitators can also share that they too have feelings such as uncertainty, anxiety, or joy in their own learning journeys, noting that education about these topics **“involves a lifelong journey with surprises, twists, and turns.”** (Adams 2016, 45).

### **Arao and Clemens’ “Brave” and “Safe” Spaces**

We strongly recommend that facilitators introduce Brian Arao and Kristi Clemens’ concept of a **“Brave” versus a “Safe” space** (2013). Arao and Clemens recommend that honest discussions about issues of diversity and social justice (e.g., oppression, racism, Whiteness, etc.) require bravery and courage as participants (who represent both dominant and minoritized group members) are asked to take risks, participate authentically and fully, and share their honest living truths, agreements that are in conflict with the operating norms of “safe space” (2013). They explain:

For agent (dominant) group members, facing evidence of the existence of their unearned privilege, reflecting on how and to what degree they have colluded with or participated in oppressive acts, hearing the stories of pain and struggle from target group members, and fielding direct challenges to their worldview from their peers can elicit a range of negative emotions, such as fear, sorrow, and anger. Such emotions can feed a sense of guilt and hopelessness. Choosing to engage in such activity in the first place, much less stay engaged, is not a low-risk decision and, therefore, is inconsistent with the definition of safety as being free of discomfort or difficulty.

Members of the target (minoritized) group are even more disserved by well-intentioned efforts to create safety. Target group members may, in fact, react with incredulity to the very notion of safety, for history and experience has demonstrated clearly to them that to name their oppression, and the perpetrators thereof, is a profoundly unsafe activity, particularly if they are impassioned. ... They are aware that an authentic expression of the pain they experience as a result of oppression is likely to result in their dismissal and condemnation as hypersensitive or unduly aggressive. ... This dilemma looms large for target group members in any social-justice-related learning activity; reflecting on and sharing their direct experiences with oppression, and listening to dominant group members do the same, will likely result in heightened pain, discomfort, and resentment. These feelings alone are inconsistent with the definition of safety and exacerbated by ground rules that discourage them from being genuinely voiced lest they clash with agent group members' expectations for the dialogue. (Arao and Clemens 2013, 139–140)

Inspired by Boostrom's idea, "Learning necessarily involves not merely risk, but the pain of giving up a former condition in favour of a new way of seeing things," Arao and Clemens encourage facilitators to work with groups to establish agreements or ground rules for working together that seek to create brave spaces rather than safe spaces for group learning (Boostrom 1998, 399). An important first step is to encourage participants to work together on defining brave space (What does "safe" mean to you? What does "brave" mean to you? What is the difference between a safe learning space and a brave learning space? Why is this important?).

Arao and Clemens identify common agreements that reinforce safety and comfort—and, therefore, restrict participant engagement and learning—and they offer alternatives that, instead, emphasize bravery (2013).

*Define what "respect" means and looks like.*

Many groups suggest that an important agreement is "respect" and "being respectful to others," yet they might have very different ideas about what this concept means and what it looks like in the context of interactions with others. As a result, if or when this comes up as a group agreement or norm, Arao and Clemens encourage facilitators to ask the group to answer the following question: *How does someone demonstrate respect for you?* (2013). Participants' different answers to this question will reveal their diverse understandings that are often based in different ethnic and cultural backgrounds and/or diverse lived experiences.

*Shift from “agree to disagree” to “controversy with civility.”*

“Agreeing to disagree” allows individuals to “retreat from conflict in an attempt to avoid discomfort and the potential for damaged relationships,” but it can significantly constrain learning opportunities for everyone and act to “reinforce systems of oppression by providing an opportunity for agent (dominant) group members to exercise their privilege to opt out of a conversation that makes them uncomfortable” (Arao and Clemens 2013, 143). An alternative, “controversy with civility,” invites courage and supports the continuation of challenging dialogue rather than stopping or avoiding it. This agreement considers conflict as a natural outcome in a diverse group, not something to avoid. Instead, it invites conversations about the roots of peoples’ different beliefs and perspectives.

*Shift from “don’t take things personally” to  
“own your intentions and your impact.”*

According to Arao and Clemens, a rule to “not take things personally”

... shifts responsibility for any emotional impact of what a participant says or shares to the emotionally affected people. Those affected are now expected to hide their feelings and process them internally; the rules may even imply to these participants that their feelings are because of some failing on their part. According to the rules, the affected parties are only permitted to react outwardly in a manner that does not imply negative judgment of the participant who has caused the impact, lest this person be shamed into silence. The affected people are in this way doubly affected—first by the event that triggered their emotions and then again by the responsibility for managing them. (2013, 145)

Replacing this agreement with one that asks participants to **“own your intentions and your impact”** reinforces that both intention and impact matter in relationships and communication. It honestly names that what we intend may not be aligned with how our words or actions were received. Acknowledging this gap inspires us to engage in critical reflection to build our self-awareness and attuned listening to others so we can be responsible for our impact and make changes as we receive feedback about harm we cause (whether intentional or not).

*Shift from “challenge by choice” to “developing self-awareness about when and how you choose to participate and why.”*

Arao and Clemens explain and add suggestions:

“Challenge by choice” encourages participants to determine for themselves if and to what degree they will engage in a dialogue or learning activity and asks the facilitator, “I think something is missing here but not sure what,” and this choice will be honored by facilitators and other participants. The principle of challenge by choice highlights what we view as an important truth in social justice education. Though a given activity or discussion question may provide a challenging opportunity for participant learning, much of that learning may be internal. Students may not externalize evidence of the degree to which they are engaged, but this does not mean they are not wrestling with difficult questions or critically examining how privilege moves in their lives and the lives of others. Further, we recognize this kind of engagement cannot be forced. We believe it is important to do more than simply affirm it by establishing “challenge by choice” as a ground rule. We believe it is also necessary to actively encourage participants to be aware of what factors influence their decisions about whether to challenge themselves on a given issue. We see this awareness as being particularly important for agent group members. ... We encourage participants to be especially attentive to the degree to which their agent group memberships inform their decision about whether and how deeply to engage in a challenging activity or dialogue. Specifically, we suggest they consider how their daily lives are affected if they choose not to challenge themselves, and by contrast, how target group members’ daily lives are affected by the same decision. (2013, 146–147)

*Define the difference between “personal attacks” and “challenging an idea or belief.”*

Arao and Clemens also encourage facilitators to engage participants in conversations about the differences between “a personal attack on an individual and a challenge to an individual’s idea or belief or statement that simply makes an individual feel uncomfortable” (2013, 148). This can help participants understand that when someone disagrees with their ideas or a belief they have, it may create discomfort to learn about a different perspective but discomfort should not be misinterpreted as a personal attack intended to cause harm. This allows the facilitator and group to explore the roots of why an individual felt “attacked,” often “a sense of threat to the privileges of one’s agent group membership” (Arao and Clemens 2013, 149).

We have found that reframing ground rules to establish brave space ... has helped us to better prepare participants to interact authentically with one another in challenging dialogues. Moreover, as compared to the idea of safe space, brave space is more congruent with our understanding of power, privilege, and oppression, and the challenges inherent in dialogue about these issues in socioculturally diverse groups. (Arao and Clemens 2013, 149)

## Group Agreements

Below we present an example set of group agreements by D'Aunno et al., inspired by Singleton and Linton's book *Courageous Conversations About Race: A Field Guide for Achieving Equity in Schools* (2005).

### *Ground Rules for Continuing Courageous Conversations*<sup>31</sup>

Source: D'Aunno et al. (2017, 3-4)

**Read aloud:** Courageous conversations are dialogues in which participants commit to engage each other with honesty, open-mindedness, and vulnerability; to listen deeply to better understand each other's perspective; and to "sustain the conversation when it gets uncomfortable or diverted."<sup>32</sup> The goal of Ground Rules for *Continuing Courageous Conversations* is to be able to have a conversation about race without excessive fear of being labeled racist, biased, or bigoted, to avoid blaming or being blamed, and to avoid discounting or invalidating the experiences and feelings of others.

To that end, we agree to follow these ground rules:

### Stay Engaged

- Give yourself permission to focus fully on the conversation topic or exercise at hand.
- Please silence your cell phone.
- Share a story, state your opinion, ask a question—risk and grow!

31 In addition to Singleton and Linton's work, D'Aunno et al. also attribute this work to *Race: The Power of an Illusion* Learning Exchange (a workshop facilitated by Pat Penning and Ashley Hopkins in Des Moines, Iowa, on August 23, 2016) and [www.culturesconnecting.com](http://www.culturesconnecting.com).

32 Singleton (2015).



## Speak Your Truth

- Value everyone's thoughts.
- Start by assuming good intentions.
- Speak from your own experience and use "I" statements, as in "I think ...," "I feel ...," "I believe ...," or "I want ..."<sup>33</sup>
- It is important that we create a safe environment where everyone is free to speak openly.
- Keep in mind that people are in different places in this work. In order for us to grow, people need to be able to share thoughts in a way that is comfortable for them.
- Be aware of nonverbal communication.
- Before speaking, think about what you want others to know. How can they best hear you?
- Mistakes are part of success. Do not be overly cautious about being politically correct—this is a learning process.
- Disagree respectfully.

## Listen for Understanding

- Listen without thinking about how you are going to respond.
- Try to understand where another person is coming from as best you can.
- Be careful not to compare your experiences with another person's. This often invalidates or minimizes a person's experiences.
- If someone is pointing out how what you said left them feeling, try not to explain or rationalize what you said or why you said it. Sometimes positive intent is not enough. Sometimes it is necessary to just say, "I didn't realize what I said was inappropriate or hurt you in that way. I'm sorry," etc.
- Be comfortable with being uncomfortable.

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33 "I" statements allow the speaker to express their feelings without blaming someone or inferring the intent of someone else. The formula for an "I" statement or message is: "I feel ... [describe feeling] when ... [describe action] happens because ... [explain]."

## **Honor Confidentiality**

- What is shared here stays here. Also, do not share real names, sites, etc. in conversations.

## **Expect and Accept Nonclosure**

- Engaging in race conversations is ongoing work that does not necessarily leave a person walking away feeling everything turned out the way they hoped. Accept that much of this is about changing yourself, not others.

## **Responsibility to Each Other and to the Courageous Conversation Process**

- Group members will encourage each other to follow the ground rules.

## **Additional Ground Rules Agreed to by the Group (recommended)**

- Participants are invited to propose additional ground rules for courageous conversations. The group may wish to discuss before deciding whether they agree to abide by additional ground rules. If so, the additional ground rules should be written for everyone to see.

## **Managing Emotions**

Adams and Bell describe an important gap in Courageous Conversations that is important to acknowledge: "White participants may be cautious because they are afraid of offending People of Color; People of Color may be cautious because they don't feel safe enough to trust White facilitators and/or participants" (2016, 168).

Facilitators will undoubtedly need to manage a range of emotions from participants. They can explain that it is important to pay attention to feelings because they can prevent and shut down learning or facilitate it. It can be helpful for facilitators to remind participants that feelings are not inherently right or wrong but, instead, just feelings. The goal is to help participants learn to acknowledge their feelings on the road to learning their behavior based in both conscious choices and unconscious actions that result from their socialization (Adams and Bell 2016).

Facilitators need to monitor the group and make sure that the focus does not end up exclusively on the feelings of White participants. The balance is to

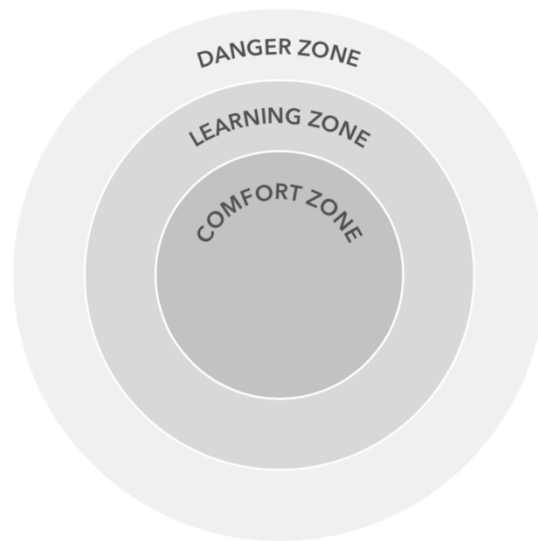
... acknowledge the pain of racism while keeping the focus on developing consciousness and action to address racism. People of Color have experienced racism and the emotions of its injustice, and they are more likely to need acknowledgement of their experiences of racism, to gain knowledge about how it functions, and to learn about actions that can be taken to challenge racism. (Adams and Bell 2016, 168)

Facilitators may want to introduce the concepts of “**comfort zone, learning zone, and danger zone**,” reinforcing that everyone in the group has topics that they are more comfortable with and others that are more challenging for them; using these terms can help them communicate moments when they find themselves feeling overwhelmed, challenged, or stuck (Adams 2016, 45; Pastel et al. 2019).

### *Stepping Outside Your Comfort Zone*

Source: Excerpt from Pastel et al. (2019, 14)

The Comfort Zone model, which has been used in adventure education for many years, can help us address fear, discomfort, and the risks of uncovering our own biases and to think about where we should be aiming as we go through this work. The model shown here is one of many variations on a concept introduced by Luckner and Nadler in their 1997 book, *Processing the Experience: Strategies to Enhance and Generalize Learning*. They proposed the idea that most of us spend our days engaged in activities and interactions that are relatively comfortable for us, but that deep learning and introspection doesn't happen much in this space. To truly learn and grow, we must venture to the edge of our **comfort zones** into what is shown here as the **learning zone**. In this zone, we are inherently uncomfortable—engaging in new and unfamiliar experiences, interactions, and thought practices. We find ourselves less skilled and less competent than we are if we stay where we're comfortable. In the learning zone we stumble, struggle, grapple, fail, flail, and fall, but we are learning quickly as we do so. Beyond the learning zone, as we get increasingly less comfortable with our circumstances, is the **danger zone**. In this space, we tend to stop learning because our fears, discomfort, and anxiety are strong enough that we panic rather than focus on learning.



We want you to aim for the learning zone while you read this book and engage in this transformative work. If you find you are sitting in the comfort zone, not feeling challenged or uncomfortable at all, we encourage you to dig deeper. ... On the other hand, if you start to feel overwhelmed, confused, defensive, dismissive, or otherwise disengaged with what you're reading, we suggest that you slow down. You may have reached your danger zone, in which we enter into a mindset of self-preservation similar to when we are in physical danger. In this case, though, it is our mind seeking to protect us from information that is threatening the beliefs we rely on for a stable worldview and sense of self.

... [The topics in this book] will be mentally exhausting and might elicit strong emotional responses. Take time to digest the information you're learning. Talk with a friend who is doing this work too. We will provide many contextual examples, but we encourage you to seek out even more stories and narratives that illustrate the concepts you're having trouble grasping. If you read something that conflicts with your life experience or worldview, look for a blog, book, or video by someone for whom it might ring true. Practice imagining experiences you have never had and extending empathy beyond the things you understand through personal experience. Implement actions steps one at a time. Go at the pace that works for you. When you experience the kind of extreme discomfort that gets in the way of learning, back up to where you are comfortable again and reflect on what it was that pushed you over the line into the danger zone. What are the underlying beliefs that were challenged? How can you reenter the work carefully, so as to stay in the learning zone?

Most importantly, get in the habit of noticing which zone you are in at any given point in your gender justice journey. Pay attention to your body and your physical responses to new ideas. When you get too comfortable, remember to push yourself. When you get too close to the danger zone, remember to slow down. Luckner and Nadler called this process *edgework*, where we consciously bring ourselves to the edges of what we are comfortable with but turn back before we panic—producing the deepest learning we can achieve. (Pastel et al. 2019, 14)

## Facilitation Principles

Setting an example is crucial for facilitating Courageous Conversations, according to Bell, Goodman, and Oullette:

As facilitators, we want to intentionally model effective communication skills and respect for differences. We also want to encourage ways of interacting that are inclusive, respectful, honest, and courageous, and support people to challenge injustice in our relationships and in the institutional systems of which we are a part. (2016, 55)

Program leaders and others who will be facilitating conversations about race equity will be managing complicated group dynamics and guiding participants through self-reflection, conversations, and activities to support their learning process. Although all facilitation moves are most effective when they are responsive to the needs of the specific group and the situation and context, the following excerpt from Bell, Goodman, and Oullette includes **strategies are important foundations for facilitating conversations with equity-oriented content**:

- **Seek understanding before responding.** It is important to make sure that individuals feel heard and to make sure you understand what they are saying accurately before you respond. Immediately reacting to them is what creates defensiveness and shuts down further conversation. To avoid this, facilitators can follow three steps: **Reflect, Question, and then Add**. To paraphrase or repeat back in your own words what you heard someone say can be powerful. It allows individuals to know that they are heard, ensures that the facilitator accurately understands what participants are saying, and provides an opportunity for participants to clarify statements that may not convey their intention: *"It sounds like you think that ..."* or *"Let me be clear, you believe that ..."* Next, ask questions to further clarify their perspective, such as: *"What led you to believe that ...?"*, *"Can you tell more about why you think that?"*, or *"Can you explain what you mean by that?"* Then, once individuals feel heard and [you] have a greater understanding of their perspective, the facilitator can



decide on a response ... to add information or correct misinformation, open it up to the [group] for other thoughts, build on the comment to move onto new topics, or simply thank them for sharing their views.

- **Get distance and gain perspective.** Facilitating a challenging conversation can leave facilitators focusing on the details and losing track of the big picture. When this happens, it can be helpful to step back to gain perspective. Heifetz describes this as “getting on the balcony,” and it allows us to look at the larger patterns and dynamics in the group or to consider the underlying issues that represent what is not being said out loud but is what people’s words and actions are communicating (1998). Sometimes it helps to create a break so the facilitator can reflect on the dynamics of the participants, consider the verbal and nonverbal participation patterns, do some deep breathing, or talk with a co-facilitator or colleague before re-engaging the group.
- **Share observations nonjudgmentally.** Facilitators can state what they notice related to group dynamics using neutral and nonjudgmental comments. This is one way to surface issues (e.g., underlying feelings or assumptions being made) and allow for them to be discussed in an open and honest way, which can support more effective learning. Facilitators can model and teach participants to share their personal observations of the group dynamics in respectful ways. For example, *“When Susan shared her powerful story, no one responded. I’m wondering how people are feeling?”* Or, *“I’ve noticed that when I ask people to share an example of how they’ve experienced privilege, several people shared stories of how they’ve been marginalized. I’m wondering if it seems harder to think about one’s privilege?”* (Bell, Goodman, and Oullette 2016, 71–72)

### *Examples of Facilitator Responses That Encourage Critical Reflection, Respectful Interaction, and Transformative Learning*

#### **Support Risk Taking**

- “Thank you for sharing that,” or “I appreciate your willingness to raise that issue.”

#### **Ensure Equitable Participation**

- “Before we hear from you again, [name here], I’d like to know if some of the people who have not spoken up would like to say something.”
- “[Name of person], it looks like you have been trying to get into this discussion. What would you like to say?”

- “Let’s do a quick pass around the circle. Each person shares a short sentence that describes your reaction to this activity. Choose to pass if you wish.”

### **Disrupting Disrespectful Behavior**

- “We may not all agree, but we need to be able to disagree respectfully. We need to express our disagreement in ways that are consistent with our discussion guidelines.”
- “Instead of challenging his story and analysis, is there a question you could ask that might help you understand why he experienced the situation as racially biased?”
- “We agreed there would be no name calling. How else could you express your ideas without making it a personal attack?”
- Instead of negating what they said, let’s first look at what was new information for you.”

### **Affirming Behaviors That are Positively Contributing**

- “I know it was difficult to share that, but I appreciate your honesty.”
- “When you asked that question, it really opened up the discussion in interesting ways. Thank you for raising that.”
- “I know it’s uncomfortable to look at our biases. I respect people’s willingness to do this hard work.”

### **Asking Questions**

- “Can you say how you came to this perspective?”

### **Working with Silence**

- “I’m not sure what this silence means. Can anyone say what you are thinking or feeling right now?”
- “Let’s just sit with this silence and give all of us time to sort out our feelings. When someone feels ready to answer one of the processing questions, please do.”

### **Responding to an Emotional Exchange**

- “Why don’t we each take a few minutes to jot down what we are feeling right now. Then we can talk with a partner before we come back to the whole group.”

- “This topic clearly generates strong feelings.”

Adams adds:

Remarks that may seem **offensive or insulting** should be taken (at least the first time they are expressed) as honest statements that need to be explored respectfully, perhaps by asking what evidence the remarks are based on, or whether there are other ways to frame them. [Facilitators] can remind participants that none of us are responsible for what we have learned or the ways we have been socialized, but once we become conscious of privilege and disadvantage, and the misinformation or stereotypes we hold about each other, we are responsible for maintaining and acting on our new levels of awareness. These commitments place us on perpetual “learning edges” and we become accountable for not falling back into old habits” (2016, 45)

## Post Facilitation Practices

### *Evaluations*

It is important that facilitators gather feedback from participants about their experiences and reactions to the various discussions and activities they are led through. This will allow facilitators to learn what worked, what they can change or improve on in the future, and why. Having simple evaluations prepared for the participants or staff to fill out after each discussion is recommended. The questions should ask about participants’ understanding of three items:

1. The **content** introduced/discussed
  - “How well do you understand X?”
  - “What questions do you have about X?”
  - “What would you like to learn more about?”
  - “What activities have been the most effective in helping you learn about X?”
2. The **norms** for interaction and interpersonal dynamics
  - “How comfortable do you feel participating?”

### 3. Feedback on the facilitator's ability to create a "brave space"

- "Was the dialogue honest and respectful?"
- "When emotions were strong, did the facilitator know how to keep everyone engaged and supported?"
- "Were you able to engage with others in a way that support your learning?"
- "After this conversation, I have a new understanding of X"

When reviewing evaluations, it is important to remain objective and use the information as an opportunity for professional development and growth; to gain awareness of one's strengths and challenges in guiding race equity work. Talking about race, oppression, and privilege evokes strong emotions for everyone, and it is likely that participants will use the evaluation as a place to process their strong feelings. Their biases will also influence how they perceive, react to, and evaluate facilitators (Bell et al. 2016). Remember:

... an all-too-human tendency can be to skim over participant evaluations and zero in on any negative comments to the exclusion of everything else. However, it is important to reflect on and integrate the full scope of feedback. One strategy for doing this is to find time ... [to sit down with another administrator or colleague] and take note of the general themes of what the evaluators say went well and suggestions they made for changes or improvements. ... **Identifying what is going well so that you can continue those practices is as important as focusing on what needs improvement.** (Bell et al. 2016, 70)

### *Self-Reflection and Processing with Others*

It is important for facilitators to engage in ongoing self-assessment. A number of strategies can support facilitators' critical reflection and growth. Many find **personal reflection** or keeping a **journal** helpful for processing their thoughts and feelings. Ask yourself, "How did the conversations or training go? What worked well? What will I do differently? What did I learn? What will I change?" Document the range of feelings that came up for you in response to a particular discussion or activity and what you think is at the root of these emotions ("Why am I feeling this way?" "What did this topic bring up for me about my own life experiences that led me to feel X?").

Another strategy that many facilitators use is to **process their thoughts and feelings with another person**: a colleague, support group, mentor, friend, therapist, or family member. Developing an ongoing relationship with a trusted person is really helpful for reflection, review, and improvement (Bell et al. 2016). It is essential that all names of participants are kept strictly confidential during these conversations.

### *Continue to Educate Yourself*

You can never learn it all! Continue to educate yourself by participating in trainings, support or inquiry groups, and/or communities of practice.

### **Implementation Activity: Incorporating a Racial Equity Lens When Facilitating Dialogues<sup>34</sup>**

Source: Excerpt from D'Aunno et al. (2017, 51–52)

**Time:** 50 minutes

**Learning Objective:** To increase awareness of how racial dynamics can impact our work as dialogue facilitators and learn how to work together more equitably as a team

#### **Setup:**

- Materials needed: Pens, pencils, or markers; five blank pieces of paper
- Need a volunteer to keep track of time and let the group know when to move on to the next scenario

**Preparation Note:** Write the following scenarios on the five blank pieces of paper, one scenario per sheet of paper (it helps to write these scenarios beforehand). Post the scenarios around the room:

- The White facilitator seems to lead most of the time; the Person of Color who is co-facilitating ends up taking notes.
- The White organizer checks in with the White facilitator about how things are going.
- One or two People of Color in a circle of 10 are asked to speak for their whole group.

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34 D'Aunno et al. attribute the exercise to Everyday Democracy.



- People of Color do most of the storytelling. Whites listen a lot, but they are not willing or encouraged to share stories on race on a deeper, more personal level; instead, they are more likely to talk about gender, economic status, sexual orientation, etc.
- A person in the group made a racist comment. The group members were upset. One African American leader left the group.

**Exercise:** (30 minutes)

In this exercise, we will form groups and rotate through scenarios about group dynamics. Read through the following directions before splitting into groups.

1. Form groups of three to four people.
2. Each small group will take turns visiting each scenario and talking about each of them. You will have five minutes per scenario to brainstorm and write down ideas on the piece of paper of how you might address the scenario. Here are some questions to think about:
  - What could have been done to help the group avoid the situation?
  - What reflection could have been made, or question asked, to help the group reflect on their dynamics?
3. After each five-minute brainstorm, rotate the groups. (Need one volunteer to keep track of time and let all groups know when they need to switch.)
4. At the next scenario, the group reads and discusses the ideas left behind by the previous group then adds new ideas.
5. After the groups have rotated through all of the scenarios, return to the larger group with the sheets of paper.

**Share:** (10 minutes)

Have a volunteer from each group read all of the ideas on the paper for the last scenario they worked on to the larger group.

**Discuss:** (10 minutes)

As a larger group, discuss the following questions:

- What ideas seemed particularly interesting to you?
- How can you keep these ideas alive while working on projects and actions?
- Do you have any ideas to add that are not yet recorded?

## Appendix B

### *What's in a Name*



Source: Adapted from School Reform Initiative

#### **Purpose**

To come to know one another differently; to build community

#### **Time**

15–30 minutes

#### **Process**

Participants write their entire name on a piece of paper. Then, they write the story of their name below, including such details as any history or meaning associated with their name, who they might have been named after, if they have ever been embarrassed by their name, any changes in their name over time, any nicknames they might be known by, etc., trying to get down the “whole” story. (10 minutes)

Form pairs. In turn, each partner in the pair shares their story without being interrupted while the other listens. (2–3 minutes per person)

Optional: Once everyone has had a chance to tell their story, you might choose to have them introduce one another by sharing both their partner’s name and one thing they found interesting. (15–30 minutes depending on the size of the group)

Note: You might find it interesting or helpful to share the story of your own name as an introduction. Or you might share this short piece by Sandra Cisneros from *The House on Mango Street* (1991).

## **“My Name”**

In English my name means hope. In Spanish it means too many letters. It means sadness, it means waiting. It is like the number nine. A muddy color. It is the Mexican records my father plays on Sunday mornings when he is shaving, songs like sobbing.

It was my great-grandmother’s name and now it is mine. She was a horse woman too, born like me in the Chinese year of the horse—which is supposed to be bad luck if you’re born female—but I think this is a Chinese lie because the Chinese, like the Mexicans, don’t like their women strong.

My great-grandmother. I would’ve liked to have known her, a wild horse of a woman, so wild she wouldn’t marry. Until my great-grandfather threw a sack over her head and carried her off. Just like that, as if she were a fancy chandelier. That’s the way he did it. And the story goes she never forgave him. She looked out the window her whole life, the way so many women sit their sadness on an elbow. I wonder if she made the best with what she got or was she sorry because she couldn’t be all things she wanted to be. Esperanza. I have inherited her name, but I don’t want to inherit her place by the window.

At school they say my name funny as if the syllables were made out of tin and hurt the roof of your mouth. But in Spanish my name is made out of a softer something, like silver, not quite as thick as sister’s name—Magdalena—which is uglier than mine. Magdalena who at least can come home and become Nenny. But I am always Esperanza.

I would like to baptize myself under a new name, a name more like the real me, the one nobody sees. Esperanza as Lisandra or Maritza or Zeze the X. Yes. Something like Zeze the X will do.

## **Note**

Protocols are most powerful and effective when used within an ongoing professional learning community and facilitated by a skilled facilitator. To learn more about professional learning communities and seminars for facilitation, please visit the [School Reform Initiative website](#).

## Appendix C

### *Cultural Artifact*

#### **Purpose**

- To facilitate personal and cultural self-awareness.
- To give adults the tools to look beyond stereotypes.

Select an artifact that tells a story about your cultural background that you can share with others. This artifact can be a picture, an object, or an image from a magazine, book, or the internet. We want to learn something about you and your background.

Be prepared to talk about your artifact with others including why you selected it, what it means to you, and how it represents your culture. You should also be prepared to take questions others have about your artifact.

After the partner sharing, the group could be guided to reflect and respond to the following question: How did this activity help you learn about or increase your awareness of yourself? Of others?

## Appendix D

### *Racial Autobiography*

#### **Work on Your Own Personal Racial Autobiographies<sup>35</sup>**

Source: Excerpt from D'Aunno et al. (2017, 18)



To develop your racial consciousness, it is important to turn inward and take time to explore your own personal racial autobiography. Reflect on the following questions. You may also want to write out a few of your memories in a journal, draw or sketch what comes up for you, or have a conversation with a friend or family member as you are exploring your personal racial autobiography:

- At what age and under what circumstances do you remember becoming aware of your own race? *Note: Be sure to focus on your experience of your own race, as well as others' race.*
- What were your feelings about this discovery?
- What were your thoughts?
- What, if any, actions did you take in response to this discovery?

You might choose to keep your autobiography private. Or, you might be invited to share your racial autobiography with others as part of a professional development activity or within a community of practice. If autobiographies are shared, we recommend using one of the following protocols: The Constructivist Listening Dyad (see [appendix R](#)) or, for groups larger than dyads, the same norms and process can be followed as described in the Constructivist Listening Dyad with each participant having the same amount of time to share what they want about their autobiography to others in the group while others attentively listen to them.

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35 D'Aunno et al. attribute the work to Singleton (2015, 62–64, 79–81, 84–95).



## Appendix E

### *The Paseo or Circles of Identity*

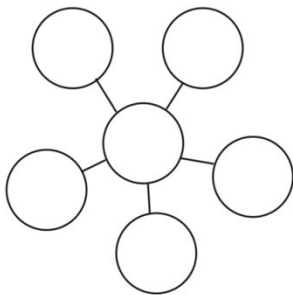
Source: Adapted from School Reform Initiative

#### **Purpose**

When a group would like to examine issues of identity, diversity, beliefs, and values, and would like to begin making connections between who they are and how that shapes their decisions and behaviors, the Paseo can be a tool for initiating the dialogue.<sup>36</sup> It is essentially a two-step process, which begins with individual reflection and then moves into personal storytelling. This is a flexible process, in that the theme of the questions and prompts can be tailored to meet the objectives of the group.

#### **Process**

1. Each participant makes or draws a web of circles, roughly resembling the diagram of a molecule. (The facilitator may chart one as a model, with each participant creating their own on a journal page or notepad.) The basic design looks something like this:



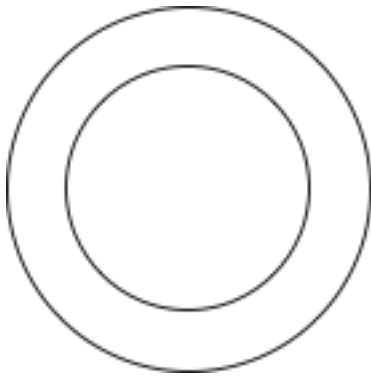
2. Within this diagram, each group member should write their name in the center circle. Each additional circle should contain a word or phrase that captures some element of their identity—those terms or descriptors that have

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<sup>36</sup> We have been told that The Paseo is a process that has been used in Mexico and the Southwest United States as a way of getting acquainted quickly. Traditionally, males and females of the community would line up in concentric circles, facing one another, and would make “un paseo,” or pass by one another, holding eye contact and having brief opportunities to make connections.

most helped shape who the person is and how they interact in the world. Some groups will move right into this; others will prefer to have the facilitator model what is intended. For example, one circle might contain the word “woman,” another the word “Black,” another the phrase “grew up in Deep South,” and so on. As an additional step, participants may be asked to include words or phrases that other people use to identify them. This may be done in a different color, or in pencil rather than in ink.

3. The entire group now moves to stand in a large open area, forming two concentric circles, in preparation for the dialogue portion of this process. Some group members will prefer to take their notepads with them. An even number of people is necessary, since the dialogue takes place in pairs. The outer circle faces inward while the inner circle faces outward. The circles should look something like this:



The facilitator will now begin to ask the group to think about and respond to a series of questions. Important instructions to provide before the questioning starts are:

- Once the question has been stated, everyone will be allowed one minute to think about their own response to the question. This is intended to ensure that each person is fully listening to their partner during the dialogue process, without being distracted by a desire to plan a response when their turn to speak begins.
- At the end of the one-minute thinking time, the facilitator will announce the beginning of the round of dialogue. Each person will take turns responding, **without interruption**, to the question or prompt, with two minutes allotted for each. *If the speaker does not take two minutes, the full time should be allowed, being comfortable with the silence.* The facilitator will call time at the two-minute point, when the pairs should make sure the second partner gets a chance to speak for a full two minutes, without interruption.

- At the end of the second partner's time, the facilitator will ask the group members to thank their current partner and say goodbye. Either the inner or the outer circle will be asked to shift to the left or right. (Groups may want to shift one to three persons to the right or left to mix the partners more quickly.) Participants should take a moment to greet their new partners.
  - The next round of dialogue will begin, with a new question, and with the one-minute thinking time. The process continues through each round of questions or prompts.
4. Debrief the process. It is important not to shortchange this step. One way to begin the debrief is to ask the group to take a few minutes to do a quick-write on what they saw, heard, and felt during this process. After the quick-write, do a round-robin sharing (30 seconds or less) of what each participant observed. They should provide "just the facts" without inference, interpretation, or judgment. Proceed from there to a more open debrief discussion. Possibly close the debrief with reflection time on one of the following prompts:
- What will you do differently as a result of engaging in this dialogue?
  - How will you process the emotions that surfaced for you as a result of this dialogue?
  - How might you adapt and use this activity?

### *Suggested Questions or Prompts for Step 3*

Order of questions should be carefully considered. Since the prompts focus on personal experiences, the emotions initially tied to those experiences are likely to resurface. It is generally a good idea to vary the depth of the questioning, and to never start with the deepest possible questions.

- With which descriptors do you identify most strongly? Why is that?
- With which descriptors do others identify you most strongly? How do you feel about that?
- Describe a time when one of the elements of your identity definitely worked to your advantage, either in your educational experience or in other areas of your life.
- Describe a time when one of the elements of your identity appeared to hold you back, either in your educational experience or in other areas of your life.

- Talk about a time when your perceptions of a student's/child's identity caused you to do something that held them back.
- Talk about a time when your perceptions of a student's/child's identity caused you to do something that moved them forward.
- Talk about a time your identity heightened your awareness of an inequity.
- Talk about a time your identity diminished, lessened, or obscured your awareness of an inequity.

### **Some Ideas to Consider**

- Before starting the questioning, decide if you want to include an instruction that people should choose to share either the most significant memory that comes to mind, or a memory that, though perhaps less significant, they feel more comfortable sharing. (Some participants have expressed a preference for hearing this instruction; others have said that they did that kind of internal editing themselves quite naturally.)
- Participants should not pass!
- Decide if you want to include any instructions regarding the demeanor of the listener, for example, whether or not clarifying questions are OK; whether or not the listener should provide affirmative sounds, body language, and other cues, or should listen as simply a mirror—devoid of reaction. Your intent, and your knowledge of the group, will guide this.
- Be very aware of the emotional and physical energy level of the group. Because each round takes about six minutes, we recommend using three to five questions. Some people may need a chair stationed within the circle that does not move.
- Decide the amount of rotation you will use. For some purposes, you may want to have people stay with the same partner for a pair of questions. Sometimes it may make sense to move more than one person to the right, or to move both the inner and outer circle at the same time in different directions.

### **Note**

Protocols are most powerful and effective when used within an ongoing professional learning community and facilitated by a skilled facilitator. To learn more about professional learning communities and seminars for facilitation, please visit the [School Reform Initiative website](#).

## Appendix F

### *Understanding Privilege: Part One*

Source: D'Aunno et al. (2017, 27–28)

#### **Time**

30 minutes

#### **Learning Objective**

To understand personal privilege and how it can be used to confront racism

**Read aloud:** Privilege is a key element in perpetuating oppressive systems. According to Webster's Dictionary, "privilege" is "a right, favor, or immunity, granted to one individual or group and withheld from another." We are going to spend some time examining the privileges we hold.

#### **Part 1: Understanding Privilege Exercise**

(Five minutes)

On your own, read through the following privilege statements. If you identify with one of the privileges listed, make a check mark.

The leader of my country is also a person of my racial group. (Race)

When going shopping, I can easily find clothes that fit my size and shape. (Size)

In public, I can kiss and hold hands with the person I am dating without fear of name-calling or violence. (Sexuality)

When I go shopping, I can be fairly certain that sales or security people will not follow me. (Race/Appearance)

Most of the religious and cultural holidays celebrated by my family are recognized with days off from work or school. (Religion/Culture)

When someone is trying to describe me, they do not mention my race. (Race)

When I am angry or emotional, people do not dismiss my opinions as symptoms of "that time of the month." (Gender)



When expressing my opinion, I am not automatically assumed to be a spokesperson of my race. (Race)

I can easily buy greeting cards that represent my relationship with my significant others. (Sexuality)

I can easily find hair products and people who know how to style my hair. (Race)

In my family, it is seen as normal to obtain a college degree. (Class)

If I am going out to dinner with friends, I do not worry if the building will be accessible to me. (Ability)

I can be certain that when I attend an event there will be people of my race there. (Race)

People do not make assumptions about my work ethic or intelligence based on the size of my body. (Size)

When I strongly state my opinion, people see it as assertive rather than aggressive. (Race/Gender)

When I am with others of my race, people do not think that we are segregating ourselves. (Race)

I can feel comfortable speaking about my culture without feeling that I will be judged. I can usually afford (without much hardship) to do the things that my friends want to do for entertainment. (Class)

When filling out forms for school or work, I easily identify with the box that I have to check. (Gender/Race)

I can choose the style of dress that I feel comfortable in and most reflects my identity, and I know that I will not be stared at in public. (Gender/Appearance)

If pulled over by a police officer, I can be sure that I have not been singled out because of my race. (Race)

My professionalism is never questioned because of my age. (Age)

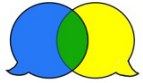
I do not worry about walking alone at night. (Gender/Race)

People do not make assumptions about my intelligence based on my style of speech. (Race)

When attending class or other events, I do not have to worry about having an interpreter present to understand or to participate. (Ability/Language)

People assume I was admitted to school or hired based upon my credentials, rather than my race or gender. (Race/Gender)

As a child, I could use the “flesh-colored” crayons to color my family and have it match our skin color. (Race)



### **Talk It Through**

(10 minutes)

- How does it feel to have or not have certain privileges?
- Did you become aware of any privileges you had not previously considered?

## Appendix G

### *Understanding Privilege: Part Two*

Source: D'Aunno et al. (2017, 29)

Watch a short video of Joy DeGruy describing a racist encounter in a supermarket and how DeGruy's sister-in-law used their privilege to intervene.

The video, "[Cracking the Codes: Joy DeGruy "A Trip to the Grocery Store"](#)" is a clip from *Cracking the Codes: The System of Racial Inequity*, and a transcript of the video is available in [appendix H](#) (World Trust 2011).

### **Discussion Questions**

- What are your thoughts watching that video? How did it make you feel?
- How did the sister-in-law use their privilege in the situation?
- What if DeGruy was the one who questioned the cashier—how could you support DeGruy in that situation?
- Have you had experiences where someone with privilege supported you? Have you used your privilege to support others?

## Appendix H

### *Understanding Privilege: Part Two Video Transcript*

The following transcript is from the video, "[Cracking the Codes: Joy DeGruy 'A Trip to the Grocery Store'](#)" a clip from *Cracking the Codes: The System of Racial Inequity* (World Trust 2011). Discussion questions about the video are available in [appendix G](#).

#### **Transcript**

Joy DeGruy: "My sister-in-law, who's half-Black half-White, but looks White: blue eyes, Whiter than most White folks, very White. She and I, you know, we kind of grew up together. We raised our children together so they're first cousins and you know, it's wonderful, very, very, multicultural family. So we're going into Safeway one day and Kathleen, my sister-in-law, is in front of me. And she's, you know, writing a check for her groceries. Now, my daughter, who at the time was ten years old, was standing with me, and I was directly behind her, you know, getting ready to get my groceries.

"So Kathleen comes up, and the checker, who's a strawberry blonde, freckled, very delightful, warm, you know, the checker, this young woman is talking to Kathleen. 'Hey, how you doing? Isn't it a nice day today?' They're just chatting up, and she says 'Yes.' So Kathy writes her check and she steps off to the side with her groceries 'cause she's waiting for me. Of course, again, Kathleen looks White right? So I come up. No conversation, she looks up at me, absolutely no just little chatter and I, I write my check.

"My daughter, however, is ten, notices immediately the difference in how she responds to me. So I write my check, and she goes, 'I'm gonna need two pieces of ID.' At which point, my daughter looks at me and she gets very, very embarrassed, and tears are kind of coming up in her eyes, like, 'Mommy, you're not gonna, you're not gonna let her do this? Why is she doing this to us?' Right? So I'm trying to figure out what I should do 'cause behind me are two elderly White women. Right? Now, I'm thinking, OK, so then I become the angry Black woman, right? And they're gonna be—and I just, I'm just trying to second-guess all the drama. So then, I, I just give her the two pieces of ID.

"You know, some things you just got to choose your battles, right? And then it gets worse. She pulls out the bad-check book right? So, this is the book that shows the people who've written bad checks. So she starts

searching for my license in the bad checks at which point, it's just out of control now. Just as I'm standing there trying to decide what to do, and this is really deeply humiliating and now my daughter is in full blown emotionally upset, who's ten. My sister-in-law walks back over and she steps in, and she says, 'Excuse me, why are you doing this?' And the checker goes, 'What do you—what do you mean?' She goes, 'Why are you taking her through all of these changes? Why are you doing that?' She goes, 'Well, um, this is our policy.' She goes, 'No, it's not your policy because you didn't do that with me.' 'Oh well, I know you, you've been here.' She goes, 'No, no, she's been here for years, I've only lived here for three months.'

"And so at this point, two White elderly ladies go, 'Ugh! I can't believe what this checker has done with this woman, it is totally unacceptable!' At which point, the manager walks over. So the manager walks over and says, 'Is there a problem here?' And then my sister-in-law responds. She goes, 'Yes, there is a problem here. Here's what happened.' So you see, she used her White privilege and even though Kathleen is half-Black and half-White she recognizes what that means; and she made the statement. She pointed out the injustice and she, as a result of that one act, influenced everyone in that space. But what would've happened? I can't know for certain, had the Black woman said, 'This is unfair, why are you doing this to me?' would it have had the same impact? But Kathleen knew that she walked through the world differently than I did and she used her White privilege to educate and make right a situation that was wrong. That's what you can do, every single day."

## Appendix I

### *Intercultural Storytelling*

Source: Tanaka (2007)

Divide into partners or small groups. Take turns answering each of the questions, one after the other, where one participant shares and others listen without any cross-talk. Continue through the sequence of questions in order. Come back together into a large group and debrief the process. What did they learn about themselves going through this process? What did they learn about their colleagues?

- Describe how your family or ancestors came to the United States and moved across and within it.
- Describe a time when you, someone in your family, or your ancestors experienced privilege.
- Describe a time when you, someone in your family, or your ancestors experienced oppression.
- Imagine a perfect world where the kind of oppression you just described does not exist. What does it look like?
- What is one thing you can do tomorrow to move towards that perfect world?



## Appendix J

### *Identifying Triggers in Your Teaching Practice*

Source: Adapted from Oakland Starting Smart and Strong Resilient Oakland Community and Kids (ROCK) Initiative (n.d.)

**Please read each item and answer honestly. Rate each item from 1–5.**

#### **Key**

1: Does not bother me at all.



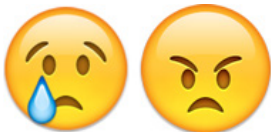
2: Makes me feel a little uncomfortable.



3: Makes me feel stressed.



4: This upsets me.



5: I am going to explode!



Please indicate your level of agreement with each of the following statements.

<b>I am triggered ...</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
By loud noises.	1	2	3	4	5
When I have to wait for something.	1	2	3	4	5
When my daily routine is changed.	1	2	3	4	5
When someone whines.	1	2	3	4	5
When other people are talking near me.	1	2	3	4	5
When I do not understand what someone is saying to me.	1	2	3	4	5
When someone starts to talk with me unexpectedly.	1	2	3	4	5
When someone asks me for help.	1	2	3	4	5
When a colleague gives me feedback or constructive criticism.	1	2	3	4	5
When I am exhausted.	1	2	3	4	5
When someone tells me to correct a mistake.	1	2	3	4	5
When someone disagrees with me.	1	2	3	4	5
Arriving to work on time.	1	2	3	4	5
Working with a coach.	1	2	3	4	5
When someone points out a mistake I made.	1	2	3	4	5
Talking with families.	1	2	3	4	5
Being observed.	1	2	3	4	5

I am triggered ...	1	2	3	4	5
When I see students are having a conflict.	1	2	3	4	5
When I disagree with a colleague or supervisor.	1	2	3	4	5
By deadlines or time pressures.	1	2	3	4	5
When I have to do something new or different.	1	2	3	4	5
When others touch me (i.e., handshake, pat on the back).	1	2	3	4	5
When I do not understand a certain idea or concept.	1	2	3	4	5
By teasing from others.	1	2	3	4	5
When I do not finish something on time.	1	2	3	4	5
Asking for help.	1	2	3	4	5
When I am confused about a task or activity.	1	2	3	4	5
When I have to follow specific instructions.	1	2	3	4	5
By violence in the school community.	1	2	3	4	5
When my supervisor gives me feedback.	1	2	3	4	5
When my students are hungry.	1	2	3	4	5
By fears of deportation for my students and their families.	1	2	3	4	5
When my students are homeless or housing insecure.	1	2	3	4	5
Being rated by an evaluator.	1	2	3	4	5

I am triggered ...	1	2	3	4	5
When language barriers prevent me from communicating with students' families.	1	2	3	4	5
Not having time to reflect and talk with my colleagues about my teaching practice.	1	2	3	4	5
Working with a mental health consultant.	1	2	3	4	5
When my supervisor gives me constructive criticism.	1	2	3	4	5
When I feel different than everyone around me (e.g., race, gender, language spoken, diet, dis/ability).	1	2	3	4	5
Not having adequate staff coverage.	1	2	3	4	5
When someone does not think I am smart.	1	2	3	4	5
When someone makes fun of my abilities.	1	2	3	4	5
When I am reminded of my special education label or diagnosis.	1	2	3	4	5
When someone changes a meeting time without notice.	1	2	3	4	5
When someone does not keep their promises or the group's agreements.	1	2	3	4	5
Other:	1	2	3	4	5
Other:	1	2	3	4	5
Other:	1	2	3	4	5

Now that you have finished rating these items, **identify your biggest triggers.** These are items that you scored a 5 (or perhaps a 4). Be as specific as you can.

For example, if certain noises make you want to “explode,” describe the specific noise that makes you feel this way and why you think that is. Then, reflect on the following questions in relation to each of these triggers:

- What are your beliefs about this behavior (e.g., your cultural values and beliefs associated with this behavior)?
- How does it make you feel? Where in your body do you feel the reaction?
- How do you typically respond to this behavior? Do you pause and wait until you can regulate and think through solutions? Do you consider the behavior as a way the child communicates? Do you consider how your response can increase or decrease the stress responses of the child?

It is helpful to write your answers to these questions so you can reflect on your answers and strengthen your self-awareness. For example:

Behavior	The top five behaviors that trigger you in the classroom	Your beliefs about this behavior	How the behavior makes you feel	How you typically respond to the behavior
Yelling	1	I learned in my family that children should be seen and not heard. Yelling is unacceptable.	Angry	Stern, loud, lecture to them how disrespectful they are.  Remove child that is yelling.  Threatening to call parents.

Source: Nicholson, Perez, and Kurtz (2019)

Engaging in this process can help teachers to build self-awareness of the specific behaviors that trigger strong emotional reactions in them and why this is the case. With this knowledge, teachers can use their increased self-awareness to develop strategies for self-care and for adjusting the environment to reduce their exposure to triggers, allowing them to be more attuned, self-regulated, and responsive in their work with young children, including Boys of Color.

## Appendix K

### *Four Agreements of Courageous Conversation*

Sources: Singleton and Linton (2005, 58–65); Singleton (2015, 77–78)

#### **Time Required**

45 minutes

#### **Materials Required**

Four Agreements of Courageous Conversation document

1. Share with the group the meaning and rationale for each of the Four Agreements of Courageous Conversation:
  - **Stay engaged:** Staying engaged means “remaining morally, emotionally, intellectually, and socially involved in the dialogue” (Singleton and Linton 2005, 59).
  - **Experience discomfort:** This norm acknowledges that discomfort is inevitable, especially in dialogue about race, and that participants make a commitment to bring issues in the open. It is not talking about these issues to create divisiveness. The divisiveness already exists in the society and in our centers, programs, and schools. It is through dialogue, even when uncomfortable, that healing and change begin.
  - **Speak your truth:** This means being open about thoughts and feelings and not just saying what you think others want to hear.
  - **Expect and accept nonclosure:** This agreement asks participants to “hang out in uncertainty” and not rush to quick solutions, especially in relation to racial understanding, which requires ongoing dialogue (Singleton and Linton 2005, 58–65).
2. Divide into small groups and discuss the Four Agreements using the following prompts:
  - During a conversation about race, has anyone ever experienced *disengagement* from the conversation? How did it impact the dialogue?
  - Has anyone ever felt *discomfort* during a conversation on race? If so, did you work through the discomfort successfully, or was it left unresolved?



- Which emotions prevent you from *speaking your truth* during interracial conversations about race? Which conditions can make it safer for you to deal with your racial fears and speak your truth?
  - Why is it necessary to *expect and accept nonclosure* when dealing with race?
3. Have each participant complete and sign the Four Agreements of Courageous Conversation document. Discuss with the group how having committed to these agreements will impact the staff's dialogue about children and especially Boys of Color in your program, center, agency, or school.

### **Four Agreements of Courageous Conversation Document**

I agree to ...

- Stay engaged.
- Experience discomfort.
- Speak my truth.
- Expect and accept nonclosure.

My signature below indicates my commitment to engage, sustain, and deepen interracial dialogue about race.

[Educator adds signature here]

## Appendix L

### Reflecting on “The Trouble with Black Boys” Quote



Adapted from *The Making Meaning Protocol* (Baron n.d.) and School Reform Initiative

### Getting Started

Read the following quote from Pedro Noguera's book *The Trouble with Black Boys: ... And Other Reflections on Race, Equity, and the Future of Public Education* in silence (2008). Participants can make brief notes about aspects of it that they particularly notice.

The trouble with Black boys is that too often they are assumed to be at risk because they are too aggressive, too loud, too violent, too dumb, too hard to control, too streetwise, and too focused on sports. Such assumptions and projections have the effect of fostering the very behaviors and attitudes we find problematic and objectionable. The trouble with Black boys is that most never have a chance to be thought of as potentially smart and talented or to demonstrate talents in science, music, or literature. The trouble with Black boys is that too often they are placed in schools where their needs for nurturing, support, and loving discipline are not met. Instead, they are labeled, shunned, and treated in ways that create and reinforce an inevitable cycle of failure. (Noguera 2008, xxii)

Working with a partner or in a small group, respond to the following questions in the sequence presented below:

- **What do you see or notice?** Individuals respond with **descriptive** statements (e.g., “I noticed the word ‘trouble’ came up several times.”). Comments should not be judgements or evaluations (“I liked/disliked ...”).
- **What questions does this quote raise for you?** Individuals state any questions they have in response to reading the quote.
- **What is significant about this quote?** Individuals, based on their reading of the quote, construct their own meaning about the insights, problems, or issues that the quote raises for them.

- **How does this influence your work as teachers and educators?**

Individuals share a takeaway or implication for their practice.

### **Note**

Protocols are most powerful and effective when used within an ongoing professional learning community and facilitated by a skilled facilitator. To learn more about professional learning communities and seminars for facilitation, please visit the [School Reform Initiative website](#).

## Appendix M

### *Characteristics of White Supremacy Culture and Antidotes to Disrupt Them*

Source: Jones and Okun (2001)

#### **Perfectionism**

- Little appreciation expressed among people for the work that others are doing; appreciation that is expressed usually directed to those who get most of the credit anyway
- More common is to point out either how the person or work is inadequate or even more common, to talk to others about the inadequacies of a person or their work without ever talking directly to them
- Mistakes are seen as personal, i.e., they reflect badly on the person making them as opposed to being seen for what they are—mistakes
- Making a mistake is confused with being a mistake, doing wrong with being wrong
- Little time, energy, or money put into reflection or identifying lessons learned that can improve practice; in other words, little or no learning from mistakes
- Tendency to identify what is wrong; little ability to identify, name, and appreciate what is right
- Often internally felt; in other words, the perfectionist fails to appreciate their own good work, more often pointing out their faults or “failures,” focusing on inadequacies and mistakes rather than learning from them; the person works with a harsh and constant inner critic

#### *Antidotes to Disrupt Perfectionism*

- Develop a culture of appreciation, where the organization takes time to make sure that people’s work and efforts are appreciated
- Develop a learning organization, where it is expected that everyone will make mistakes and those mistakes offer opportunities for learning
- Create an environment where people can recognize that mistakes sometimes lead to positive results
- Separate the person from the mistake

- When offering feedback, always speak to the things that went well before offering criticism
- Ask people to offer specific suggestions for how to do things differently when offering criticism
- Realize that being your own worst critic does not actually improve the work, often contributes to low morale among the group, and does not help you or the group to realize the benefit of learning from mistakes

## **A Sense of Urgency**

- Continued sense of urgency that makes it difficult to take time to be inclusive, encourage democratic and/or thoughtful decision-making, to think long-term, to consider consequences
- Frequently results in sacrificing potential allies for quick or highly visible results; for example, sacrificing interests of communities of color in order to win victories for White people (seen as default or norm community)
- Reinforced by funding proposals which promise too much work for too little money and by funders who expect too much for too little

### *Antidotes to Disrupt a Sense of Urgency*

- Realistic workplans
- Leadership that understands that things take longer than anyone expects
- Discuss and plan for what it means to set goals of inclusivity and diversity, particularly in terms of time
- Learn from past experience how long things take
- Write realistic funding proposals with realistic time frames
- Be clear about how you will make good decisions in an atmosphere of urgency
- Realize that rushing decisions takes more time in the long run because inevitably people who did not get a chance to voice their thoughts and feelings will at best resent and at worst undermine the decision because they were left unheard

## Defensiveness

- The organizational structure is set up and much energy spent trying to prevent abuse and protect power as it exists, rather than facilitating the best out of each person, or to clarify who has power and how they are expected to use it
- Because of either/or thinking (see below), criticism of those with power is viewed as threatening and inappropriate (or rude)
- People respond to new or challenging ideas with defensiveness, making it very difficult to raise these ideas
- A lot of energy in the organization is spent trying to make sure that people's feelings are not getting hurt or working around defensive people
- White people spend energy defending against charges of racism instead of examining how racism might actually be happening
- The defensiveness of people in power creates an oppressive culture

### *Antidotes to Disrupt Defensiveness*

- Understand that structure cannot in and of itself facilitate or prevent abuse
- Understand the link between defensiveness and fear (of losing power, losing face, losing comfort, losing privilege)
- Work on your own defensiveness
- Name defensiveness as a problem when it is one
- Give people credit for being able to handle more than you think
- Discuss the ways in which defensiveness or resistance to new ideas gets in the way of the mission

## Valuing Quantity over Quality

- All resources of organization are directed toward producing measurable goals
- Things that can be measured are more highly valued than things that cannot; for example, numbers of people attending a meeting, newsletter circulation, money spent are valued more than quality of relationships, democratic decision-making, ability to constructively deal with conflict
- Little or no value attached to process; if it cannot be measured, it has no value
- Discomfort with emotion and feelings



- No understanding that when there is a conflict between content (the agenda of the meeting) and process (people's need to be heard or engaged), process will prevail (for example, you may get through the agenda, but if you have not paid attention to people's need to be heard, the decisions made at the meeting are undermined and/or disregarded)

### *Antidotes to Disrupt Valuing Quantity over Quality*

- Include process or quality goals in your planning
- Make sure your organization has a values statement that expresses the ways in which you want to do your work
- Make sure this is a living document and that people are using it in their day-to-day work
- Look for ways to measure process goals (for example, if you have a goal of inclusivity, think about ways you can measure whether or not you have achieved that goal)
- Learn to recognize those times when you need to get off the agenda to address people's underlying concerns

### **Worship of the Written Word**

- If it is not in a memo, it does not exist
- The organization does not account for or value other ways in which information gets shared
- Those with strong documentation and writing skills are more highly valued, even in organizations where ability to relate to others is key to the mission

### *Antidotes to Disrupt Worship of the Written Word*

- Take the time to analyze how people inside and outside the organization get and share information
- Figure out which things need to be written down and come up with alternative ways to document what is happening
- Work to recognize the contributions and skills that every person brings to the organization (for example, the ability to build relationships with those who are important to the organization's mission)
- Make sure anything written can be clearly understood (avoid academic language, buzzwords, etc.)

## **Belief in Only One Right Way**

- The belief there is one right way to do things and once people are introduced to the right way, they will “see the light” and adopt it
- When they do not adapt or change, then something is wrong with them—the other, those not changing—not with us (those who know the right way)
- Similar to the missionary who does not see value in the culture of other communities, sees value only in their beliefs about what is good

### *Antidotes to Disrupt Belief in Only One Right Way*

- Accept that there are many ways to get to the same goal
- Once the group has decided which way will be taken, honor that decision and see what you and the organization will learn from taking that way, even and especially if it is not the way you would have chosen
- Work on developing the ability to notice when people do things differently and how those different ways might improve your approach
- Look for the tendency for a group or a person to keep pushing the same point over and over out of a belief that there is only one right way, and then name it
- When working with communities from a different culture than yours or your organization’s, be clear that you have some learning to do about the communities’ ways of doing
- Never assume that you or your organization knows what is best for the community in isolation from meaningful relationships with that community

## **Paternalism**

- Decision-making is clear to those with power and unclear to those without it
- Those with power think they are capable of making decisions for and in the interests of those without power
- Those with power often do not think it is important or necessary to understand the viewpoint or experience of those for whom they are making decisions
- Those without power understand they do not have it and understand who does
- Those without power do not really know how decisions get made and who makes what decisions, and yet they are completely familiar with the impact of those decisions on them

### *Antidotes to Disrupt Paternalism*

- Make sure that everyone knows and understands who makes what decisions in the organization
- Make sure everyone knows and understands their level of responsibility and authority in the organization
- Include people in the decision-making process who are affected by decisions

### **Either/Or Thinking**

- Things are either/or: good or bad, right or wrong, with us or against us
- Closely linked to perfectionism in making it difficult to learn from mistakes or accommodate conflict
- No sense that things can be both/and
- Results in trying to simplify complex things, for example, believing that poverty is simply a result of lack of education
- Creates conflict and increases sense of urgency, as people feel they have to make decisions to do either this or that, with no time or encouragement to consider alternatives, particularly those which may require more time or resources
- Often used by those with a clear agenda or goal to push those who are still thinking or reflecting to make a choice between “a” or “b” without acknowledging a need for time and creativity to come up with more options

### *Antidotes to Disrupt Either/Or Thinking*

- Notice when people use either/or language and push to come up with more than two alternatives
- Notice when people are simplifying complex issues, particularly when the stakes seem high or an urgent decision needs to be made; slow it down and encourage people to do a deeper analysis
- When people are faced with an urgent decision, take a break and give people some breathing room to think creatively
- Avoid making decisions under extreme pressure

## **Power Hoarding**

- Little, if any, value around sharing power
- Power seen as limited—only so much to go around
- Those with power feel threatened when anyone suggests changes in how things should be done in the organization, and they feel suggestions for change are a reflection on their leadership
- Those with power do not see themselves as hoarding power or as feeling threatened
- Those with power assume they have the best interests of the organization at heart and assume those wanting change are ill-informed (stupid), emotional, or inexperienced

### *Antidotes to Disrupt Power Hoarding*

- Include power sharing in your organization's values statement
- Discuss what good leadership looks like and make sure people understand that a good leader develops the power and skills of others
- Understand that change is inevitable and challenges to your leadership can be healthy and productive
- Make sure the organization is focused on the mission

## **Fear of Open Conflict**

- People in power are scared of expressed conflict and try to ignore or run from it
- When someone raises an issue that causes discomfort, the response is to blame the person for raising the issue rather than looking at the issue that is actually causing the problem
- Emphasis on being polite
- Equating the raising of difficult issues with being impolite, rude, or out of line

### *Antidotes to Disrupt Fear of Open Conflict*

- Role-play ways to handle conflict before conflict happens
- Distinguish between being polite and raising hard issues

- Do not require those who raise hard issues to raise them in “acceptable” ways, especially if you are using the ways in which issues are raised as an excuse not to address those once a conflict is resolved—take the opportunity to revisit it and see how it might have been handled differently

## **Individualism**

- Little experience or comfort working as part of a team
- People in the organization believe they are responsible for solving problems alone
- Accountability, if any, goes up and down, not sideways to peers or to those the organization is set up to serve
- Desire for individual recognition and credit
- Leads to isolation
- Competition more highly valued than cooperation, and where cooperation is valued, little time or resources devoted to developing skills in how to cooperate
- Creates a lack of accountability; the organization values those who can get things done on their own without needing supervision or guidance

### *Antidotes to Disrupt Individualism*

- Include teamwork as an important value in your values statement
- Make sure the organization is working towards shared goals and people understand how working together will improve performance
- Evaluate people’s ability to work in a team as well as their ability to get the job done
- Make sure that credit is given to all those who participate in an effort, not just the leaders or most public person
- Make people accountable as a group rather than as individuals
- Create a culture where people bring problems to the group
- Use staff meetings as a place to solve problems, not just a place to report activities

## **Belief That I Am the Only One Who Can Do This Right**

- Connected to individualism, the belief that if something is going to get done right, I have to do it
- Little or no ability to delegate work to others

### *Antidotes to Disrupt Belief That I Am the Only One Who Can Do This Right*

- Evaluate people based on their ability to delegate to others
- Evaluate people based on their ability to work as part of a team to accomplish shared goals

## **Belief That Progress Is Bigger and More**

- Observed in how we define success ("success" is always bigger, more)
- Progress is an organization that expands (adds staff, adds projects) or develops the ability to serve more people (regardless of how well they are serving them)
- Gives no value, not even negative value, to its cost, for example, increased accountability to funders as the budget grows, or ways in which those we serve may be exploited, excluded, or underserved as we focus on how many we are serving (instead of quality of service or values created by the ways in which we serve)

### *Antidotes to Disrupt Belief That Progress Is Bigger and More*

- Create "Seventh-Generation Thinking" by asking how the actions of the group now will affect people seven generations from now
- Make sure that any cost/benefit analysis includes all the costs, not just the financial ones, for example, the cost in morale, credibility, or use of resources
- Include process goals in your planning; for example, make sure that your goals speak to how you want to do your work, not just what you want to do
- Ask those you work with and for to evaluate your performance



## **Belief in Objectivity**

- The belief that there is such a thing as being objective or neutral
- The belief that emotions are inherently destructive and irrational and should not play a role in decision-making or group process
- Invalidating people who show emotion
- Requiring people to think in a linear (logical) fashion and ignoring or invalidating those who think in other ways
- Impatience with any thinking that does not appear “logical”

### *Antidotes to Disrupt Belief in Objectivity*

- Realize that everybody has a worldview and that everybody’s worldview affects the way they understand things
- Realize this means you too—push yourself to sit with discomfort when people are expressing themselves in ways that are not familiar to you
- Assume everybody has a valid point and your job is to understand what that point is

## **Claiming a Right to Comfort**

- The belief that those with power have a right to emotional and psychological comfort (another aspect of valuing logic more than emotion)
- Scapegoating those who cause discomfort
- Equating individual acts of unfairness against White people with systemic racism which daily targets People of Color

### *Antidotes to Disrupt Claiming a Right to Comfort*

- Understand that discomfort is at the root of all growth and learning; welcome it as much as you can
- Deepen your political analysis of racism and oppression so you have a strong understanding of how your personal experience and feelings fit into a larger picture
- Do not take everything personally

## Reflection Questions

- Which of these characteristics are at play in my life? In the life of our early learning program, school, organization, or community?
- How do they stand in the way of racial justice?
- What can I or we do to shift belief(s) and behavior(s) to ones that support racial justice?

## Appendix N

### *Becoming Aware of Our Implicit and Unconscious Biases*

Source: D'Aunno et al. (2017, 39–40)

#### **Time**

30 minutes

#### **Learning Objective**

To become aware of our implicit biases and discuss the impact on our experience of difference

#### **Materials Needed**

“Badges” cut out of colored paper in different colors, shapes, and sizes. There should be similarities among the badges but the badges should not be identical. For example, there might be three green badges in three different shapes: circle, triangle, and hexagon; three yellow badges in three other shapes; and three red badges in the same shapes but in different sizes (big, medium, small).

#### **Exercise**

Each participant will receive a badge (from the variety of shapes, colors, and sizes) and hold it in plain sight of others. Participants will then be asked to form groups without talking. No instructions are given on what criteria they are to use to form the groups. After the larger group forms into groups, ask them to break up and form new groups. This should be repeated four times. After the exercise ends, form back into a larger group.

#### **Discuss**

- How did you form your groups?
- Did anyone form a group based on diversity, including different shapes, colors, and sizes?
- If not, why do you think that is?

## Read Aloud

With this activity, participants normally will form groups based on shapes, colors, or sizes and rarely look beyond the badges. Participants do not generally form diverse groups with different shapes, colors, and sizes represented. This demonstrates how we are often comfortable categorizing others instead of forming diverse groups.

## Discuss

- How is this exercise relevant to your workplace, school, or neighborhood?
- What do we miss when we categorize by visible differences?
- How can you recognize, support, and value diverse perspectives and experiences?

## Read Aloud

Unlike explicit bias (which reflects the attitudes or beliefs that one endorses at a conscious level), implicit bias is the bias in judgment and/or behavior that results from subtle cognitive processes (e.g., implicit attitudes and implicit stereotypes) that often operate at a level below conscious awareness and without intentional control.

## Note

Facilitators can observe the groupings over time and specifically focus on nonverbal cues to see if individuals choose to group with others based on particular social categories (e.g., gender, race, ethnicity, age, etc.). Facilitators can use the debrief to reflect on their observations of individuals' and the group's behavior and note anything that does not align with the hopes, desires, and goals previously discussed in the group—not in a blaming fashion, but to increase awareness of learning edges.

## Extension Activity

Watch "[The Danger of a Single Story](#)" (18:34), a TED Talk by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie (2009).

### *Description*

“Our lives, our cultures, are composed of many overlapping stories. Novelist Chimamanda Adichie tells the story of how she found her authentic cultural voice—and warns that if we hear only a single story about another person or country, we risk a critical misunderstanding” (Adichie 2009).

### *Discuss Together*

- What is your reaction to the idea of a “single story”? How does this apply to implicit or unconscious bias?
- How does the idea apply to your life?

## Appendix O

### *Chapter One Courageous Conversation Compass Activity*

Using the [Courageous Conversation Compass](#), consider the following topics:

- Boys represent 54 percent of preschool enrollment and 78 percent of children who are suspended
- Black children represent 19 percent of preschoolers but 47 percent of suspensions
- Race is a concept that has been constructed to allow certain groups to benefit at the expense of others
- An important part of building self-awareness is learning to identify emotional triggers

As you reflect on these topics, acknowledge your immediate reactions and identify where you initially locate yourself on the compass for each phrase. Take turns listening to a partner or small group of colleagues talk about their immediate reactions and locations on the compass. After listening to others share and engaging in further reflection, notice if you change your position on the compass for any of the topics. Talk about where you moved and what inspired you to do so.



## Appendix P

### *Different Approaches: Diversity vs. Social Justice*

Diversity Approach	Social Justice Approach
Emphasizes social, cultural, and other differences and commonalities among social identity groups based on the ethnic, racial, religious, gender, class, or other "social categories."	Focuses attention on the ways in which social group differences of race and ethnicity, national origins, language, religion, gender, sexuality, class, dis/ability, and age interact with systems of domination and subordination to privilege or disadvantage different social groups members relative to each other.
Goals include appreciation of differences among and within groups in society.	Goals include awareness and understanding of oppression, acknowledgement of one's role in that system (as a privileged or disadvantaged social group member), and a commitment to develop the skills, resources, and coalitions needed to create lasting change.

Diversity Approach	Social Justice Approach
<p>Does not emphasize issues of inequality as fundamental to the ways that diversity is experienced.</p> <p>Unlikely to address ways in which social group differences have been used historically and in the present day to rationalize and justify the damage done by inequality and injustice within the larger society.</p> <p>Unlikely to discuss ways in which privileges and disadvantages are situated within a larger context of systemic inequality and oppression.</p> <p>Often remains silent on biases, daily microaggressions, discrimination, and systemic disadvantages people from marginalized groups encounter.</p>	<p>Distinct from diversity approach because of the emphasis upon unequal social structures, supremacist ideologies, and oppressive policies and practices which members of dominant social groups—whether knowingly or unconsciously—perpetuate their own social and cultural privilege to the disadvantage of marginalized or subordinated social groups.</p> <p>Draws upon the construct of oppression to analyze the ways in which societies fall short of social justice.</p> <p>Aimed at reaching the most marginalized and under-resourced populations first (in contrast to the objective of reaching only greater quantities of people).</p>
<p><b>A diversity approach emphasizes developmentally, culturally, and linguistically responsive practice.</b></p>	<p><b>A social justice approach emphasizes developmentally, culturally, and linguistically responsive practice; full and engaged participation; and an analysis of power, privilege, oppression, and bias on individual, institutional, and structural/cultural levels.</b></p>

## Appendix Q

### *Questions to Inform Reflection or Evaluation Using an Equity Lens*

Source: National Equity Project (2014, 28–32)

- Who is defining the problem? How am I defining the problem?
- What is the specific disparity or inequity we are seeking to eliminate? How is this connected to other things?
- Who are the people affected by the current inequity being discussed? How are they being included in the discussion?
- How do we understand the reasons for the inequity we see? What do we understand as the forces perpetuating the disparity we are working to address?
- What barriers are in the way of achieving an equitable outcome?
- What is the goal of our efforts? What will equity or racial equity in our outcome look like? How will we know we have made progress? When do we expect to see results? What is our timeframe?
- What are the potential unintended consequences of our proposed solutions or actions? Do the proposed solutions ignore or worsen existing disparities for the group we are focusing on?
- Who has power here? What is power based on?
- How are relationships and power differentials affecting the truth and stories that are being told?
- How are different people locating themselves in conversation about this inequity?
- How are oppression, internalized oppression, and transferred oppression playing out right here, right now (in this program, center, school, or community of practice)? What will I do about it?
- How safe is it here for different people to share their truth?
- Does the truth telling connect to shared goals and commitments for action to bring about positive change?
- How is leadership constructed here? What forms does it take? Who is missing? What can we do to make room for different forms of leadership to be part of this process?

- How can I strengthen my ability to be a teacher and leader for equity starting with who I am and what I bring because of who I am?
- How is our current system of education and care designed to produce these results or inequities?
- What is the vision we are working towards?
- What skills and knowledge are required of people to achieve this vision?
- Does the will for change exist here? Where?
- What incentives are in place for people to change? To improve their practice?
- What resources are available to support change?
- What action can I take to make a difference here?

## Appendix R

### *Constructivist Listening*

Source: Adapted from Becerra and Weissglass (2004)

Constructivist listening is an effective strategy for engaging in conversations that are both intellectually demanding and emotionally challenging. It is distinct from most forms of listening in that its purpose is for the benefit of the speaker, not the listener.

Constructivist listening protocols ask that you give full attention to another person to hold space for them to:

- Reflect
- Release emotion
- Construct new meaning about whatever challenges they face

The purpose is to allow new and clearer ways of thinking and acting to emerge. In constructivist listening processes, we put aside our own needs and agendas to offer the gift of deep listening to another human being, and the results can be profound. According to Becerra and Weissglass, “These processes assist in the construction or reconstruction of the meaning of distressful experiences as well as in the recovery from the physiological and emotional tension they produce” (2004).

Distress and hurt contribute to unintelligent and uncaring behaviors and decision-making. Constructivist listening allows for the safe release and processing of thoughts and feelings, no matter how painful or repressed. Since most adults have been conditioned to temper or repress their feelings in the workplace, many of us are reluctant or even scared to express our feelings or show vulnerability. These protocols provide a safe, formal structure that both allows and encourages self-expression and emotional release.

## Constructivist Listening Structures

Structure	Number of Participants	Basic Premise
Dyad	2	Each talker responds to a prompt with equal time given.
Support Group	3–6	Each talker responds to a prompt with equal time given.
Personal Experience Panel	3–5	Panelists are given equal time to respond to a prompt with a larger group listening.

## Constructivist Listening Guidelines

- **Equal time.** Each person is given equal time to talk and to listen. Everyone deserves attention.
- **No interruption.** The listener does not paraphrase or interpret the talker's thoughts or feelings, analyze, give advice, or break in with a personal story.
- **Confidentiality.** The listener does not talk about what the talker has said to anyone else, or even bring it up to the talker afterwards. One needs to be assured of confidentiality in order to be authentic.
- **No criticism.** The talker does not criticize or complain about the listener or about mutual colleagues during their time to talk. Those challenges can be addressed in a different structure, based in dialogue. One cannot listen well when they are feeling attacked or defensive.
- **Undivided attention.** Do not eat, drink, or glance at your cell phone or email. Remove any other distractions.

The practice of constructivist listening acknowledges that our feelings at any given moment do not necessarily represent our rational thinking (or even our own feelings) five minutes later. By offering a safe, confidential space for release and reflection, constructivist listening allows us the gift of space and time to heal so that we continue to grow as powerful leaders.



The simple act of sharing our story with another person, be it a colleague or a stranger, creates an opportunity for relationship. While the constructivist listening guidelines stipulate confidentiality, the act of listening and being listened to encourages trust, caring, and authenticity.

Constructivist listening strengthens the ability to address challenges by offering insight into another person's unique lens and experience. It is particularly powerful in creating alliances across racial or other social difference, which form the basis for a thriving community.

## **Process**

Each person will have two minutes or more to respond to a prompt.

### *Prompts*

- When is the last time you remembered being fully listened too? How did it feel?
- Growing up, what was your experience as a learner? What felt supportive? What interfered with your learning?
- How did race, class, or gender impact your experience as a learner in school?
- When you hear, "Love at the center of the curriculum," what does it mean to you? Why do we need to talk about love for Boys of Color?

## **Reflection Questions Following the Activity**

- What came up for you using this structure? What came up for you reflecting on the prompts?
- What worked for you? What was difficult for you?
- What purpose do you think it might serve?
- When could it be used?

## Appendix S

### *Got Passion?*

Source: Singleton (2015, 31–33)

### **Time Required**

45 minutes

### **Materials Required**

Copy of “Got Passion?” worksheet (see [appendix T](#))

1. Describe passion as it relates to equity work: “Holding onto a deep-seated, unyielding belief that every child has the right to a high-quality education that supports them to learn, achieve, and thrive to their potential and every child has the inherent ability to be successful if they are provided with the necessary opportunities and supports.” We all need to consider: Is equity my passion? And specifically, equity for Boys of Color? Our attitudes and response to this question matters.
2. Work in partners or small groups. Hand out copies of the “Got Passion?” worksheet to everyone.
3. Ask each individual to write their response to the first prompt, “What is an activity that is not work related that I am truly passionate about?” Ask participants to share with the larger group what their passions are. The facilitator records responses on 8.5-by-11-inch pieces of paper and posts them around the room to create a visual of the various passions in the community.
4. Each individual responds to the second prompt: “What would I feel and you see as I engage in the activity that I am passionate about?” Briefly share responses in the small groups.
5. Each individual responds to the third prompt, “What are my personal definitions of ‘equity’ and ‘anti-racism’?” Briefly share responses in the small groups.
6. As a large group, collectively define “equity” and “anti-racism.” Make sure participants address both terms.

7. Each individual responds to the following prompts:
  - When I am engaging in equity and anti-racism work, what do I feel and what do you see?
  - What qualities and characteristics are exhibited by leaders of a center, program, agency, or school who are engaging in equity and anti-racism work?
  - In what ways do I personally exhibit these qualities and characteristics of equity and anti-racism leadership?
8. Participants discuss in their small groups what they have determined about their personal passion for equity and anti-racism in their work in the center, program, agency, or school.
9. The larger group shares reflections from small-group discussions.

## Appendix T

### *Got Passion? Worksheet*

Source: Singleton (2015, 33)

#### **My Passion**

What is an activity that is not work related that I am truly passionate about?

#### **Looks and Feels Like**

What would I feel and you see as I engage in the activity that I am passionate about?

#### **Equity/Anti-Racism**

What are my personal definitions of “equity” and ‘anti-racism”?

#### **Leadership**

When I am engaging in equity and anti-racism work, what do I feel and what do you see?

What qualities and characteristics are exhibited by leaders of a center, program, agency, or school who are engaging in equity and anti-racism work?

In what ways do I personally exhibit these qualities and characteristics of equity and anti-racism leadership?

## Appendix U

### *Getting Centered: Part Two*

Source: Adapted for early childhood from Singleton (2015, 160–162)

#### **Time Required**

45 minutes

#### **Materials required**

Getting Centered: Part Two worksheet (see [appendix V](#))

1. Pass out the Getting Centered: Part Two worksheet to all participants.
2. Each participant reflects upon and describes (in writing or by speaking) their basic opinion in the following topics relevant to early childhood:
  - Children separated from their families at the border
  - Expulsion of children in preschool
  - Infants and toddlers experiencing homelessness
  - Stress and burnout in early childhood teachers and child care providers
3. Participants identify where on the Courageous Conversation Compass their four opinions from the previous step are located. Have them write on the Compass on the worksheet or share where each of their opinions is located.
4. Invite the participants to mingle with one another and listen to at least three others whose opinions on these subjects are located at different points on the Compass. For example, a person who has an intellectual opinion about the expulsion of children in preschool should talk to three others who have relational, emotional, and moral opinions about or reactions to this topic.
  - Note: There should be no discussion or debate after hearing another person's opinion—this is meant only as an exercise in listening to different points of view.
5. Bring the group back together and reflect on the experience. Could you find people whose opinions were positioned differently on the Compass? Was it difficult just to listen to the multiple perspectives without commenting?
6. Each person personally reflects on the differing opinions for each of the five topics.

## **Appendix V**

### *Getting Centered: Part Two Worksheet*

#### **Children Separated from Their Parents at the Border**

My personal reflection:

My personal location on the Compass:

Multiple perspectives from others:

#### **Expulsion of Children in Preschool**

My personal reflection:

My personal location on the Compass:

Multiple perspectives from others:

#### **Infants and Toddlers Experiencing Homelessness**

My personal reflection:

My personal location on the Compass:

Multiple perspectives from others:

#### **Stress and Burnout in Early Childhood Teachers and Child Care Providers**

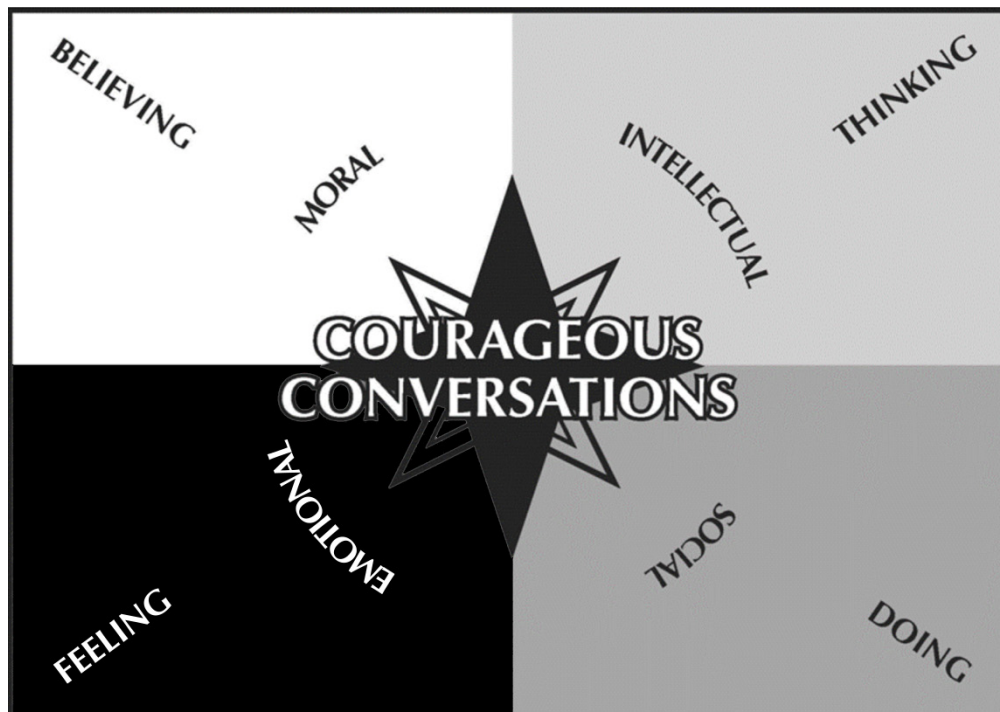
My personal reflection:

My personal location on the Compass:

Multiple perspectives from others:



## *Courageous Conversation Compass*



Source: Singleton (2015)

## Appendix W

### *Chapter Two Courageous Conversation Compass Activity*

Using the [Courageous Conversation Compass](#), consider the following topics:

- Responsive Relationships with Love at the Center
- Challenging Behavior
- Loving the Teacher

As you reflect on these topics, acknowledge your immediate reactions and identify where you initially locate yourself on the Compass for each phrase. Take turns listening to a partner or small group of colleagues talk about their immediate reactions and locations on the Compass. After listening to others share and engaging in further reflection, notice if you change your position on the Compass for any of the topics. Talk about where you moved and what inspired you to do so.

## Appendix X

### *Equity Perspectives: Creating Space for Making Meaning on Equity Issues*



Source: Adapted for early childhood from Becerra and Weissglass (2004) and School Reform Initiative

Below are a set of perspectives or assumptions that have important implications for early childhood programs, centers, schools, and communities. These perspectives provide the opportunity to dialogue and build shared meaning on the beliefs, values, and assumptions that generally are not discussed in our early childhood programs, agencies, schools, or other public spaces but need to be in order to make progress on disrupting bias and creating more equitable outcomes for young Boys of Color.

**Note:** It is very helpful to **use constructivist listening** dyads as a structure to help support a discussion of the equity perspectives.

1. No one is born prejudiced. All forms of bias, from extreme bigotry to unaware cultural bias, are acquired, actually imposed, on young children.
2. We are all one species. All humans are very much alike.
3. In many societies, many of the assumptions, values, and practices of people and institutions of the dominant culture serve to disadvantage children and families from the nondominant culture.
4. Individual prejudice and institutionalized biases are harmful for all individuals (from the dominant and minoritized groups) and to the society as a whole.
5. Systematic mistreatment (such as racism, prejudice against people with disabilities, classism, or sexism) is more than the sum of individual prejudices and involves institutional and systemic forms of oppression.
6. Individuals and groups internalize and transfer the consequences of the oppression and systematic mistreatment they experience. They often act harmfully toward themselves and each other. This process must be identified, interrupted, and eliminated.

7. Early childhood educators play a critical role in supporting young children to cope and build resilience to help them respond to the impact of societal bias and discrimination. Educators and educational institutions also serve to perpetuate the inequalities and prejudices in society.
8. Race, class, perceived ability, and gender bias are serious issues facing American society and education. Unfortunately, they are issues that are usually not discussed, especially in early childhood. Talking about them is necessary, not to lay blame, but to figure out better ways of educating our children, especially Children of Color.
9. Lack of acceptance and support are barriers that limit leadership development for People of Color in the early childhood field.
10. To make progress on these very complex problems, it will be necessary to improve alliances between educators from different ethnic and racial groups, between males and females, between those with dis/abilities and those without, and between people of different class backgrounds.
11. Discussing and gaining new understandings about the existence and effects of bias and discrimination will usually be accompanied by strong emotions.
12. Changing attitudes and actions will be facilitated if we are listened to attentively and allowed to release our emotions as we attempt to make sense of our experiences and the experiences of others.

## Note

Protocols are most powerful and effective when used within an ongoing professional learning community and facilitated by a skilled facilitator. To learn more about professional learning communities and seminars for facilitation, please visit the [School Reform Initiative website](#).

## Appendix Y

### *Discussing an NAEYC Quote with The Four “A”s Protocol*



Source: Adapted from Gray (2005)

#### **Purpose**

To explore a text deeply in light of one’s own values and intentions; the four ‘A’s are:

1. Assumptions
2. Agree
3. Argue
4. Aspire (or act)

#### **Roles**

Facilitator/timekeeper (who also participates); participants

#### **Time**

45 minutes

#### **Process**

1. The group reviews the NAEYC quote (see below; also [in the beginning of chapter two](#)), highlighting it and writing notes in the margin or on sticky notes in answer to the following four questions (you can also add your own “A”s).
  - What **assumptions** do the authors of this statement hold?
  - What do you **agree** with in this quote?
  - What do you want to **argue** with in this quote?
  - What parts of the quote do you want to **aspire** to (or **act** upon)?

Equity—fairness in ensuring that all children can achieve their individual full potential as engaged learners and valued members of society. Advancing equity requires considering whether differences in outcomes can be traced to discrimination against or marginalization of individuals because of their social identities. Equity is not the same as equality. Equal treatment, laid upon unequal starting points, is inequitable. Ultimately, equity is an essential component of equality. Attempting to achieve equality of opportunity, however, without consideration of historic and present inequities is ineffective, unjust, and unfair. (NAEYC 2018, 4)

2. In a round, have each person identify one assumption in the quote, pointing to the specific word(s) as they explain the assumption made by the authors.
3. Either continue in rounds or facilitate a conversation in which the group talks about the quote in light of each of the remaining “A”s, taking them one at a time. What do people want to agree with, argue with, and aspire to (or act upon) from this quote? Try to move seamlessly from one “A” to the next, giving each “A” enough time for full exploration.
4. End the session with an open discussion framed around the following question: What does this mean for our work with young children? Specifically, our work with young Boys of Color?

## Note

Protocols are most powerful and effective when used within an ongoing professional learning community and facilitated by a skilled facilitator. To learn more about professional learning communities and seminars for facilitation, please visit the [School Reform Initiative website](#).



## Appendix Z

### *Chapter Three Courageous Conversation Compass Activity*

Using the [Courageous Conversation Compass](#), consider the following statements:

- Culturally responsive teachers encourage and support children and families to speak their home languages and dialects.
- Warm demanders expect a great deal of their students, convince them of their own brilliance, and help them reach their potential in a disciplined and structured environment.
- Boys of Color need opportunities for movement throughout the day. They thrive when they can participate in hands-on projects, expressive arts, and child-initiated play, especially outdoor play.
- Early childhood mental health consultation is a promising prevention and intervention strategy.

As you reflect on these statements, acknowledge your immediate reactions and identify where you initially locate yourself on the Compass for each phrase. Take turns listening to a partner or small group of colleagues talk about their immediate reactions and locations on the compass. After listening to others share and engaging in further reflection, notice if you change your position on the Compass for any of the topics. Talk about where you moved and what inspired you to do so.

## Appendix AA

### *Using an Equity Lens to Examine Your Program's Parent/Family Handbook*



Source: Adapted from Buchovecky (2004)

#### **Time**

45 minutes

#### **Materials**

Copy of parent handbook for all participants.

#### **1. Getting Started**

- The facilitator reminds the group of the norms. Participants are encouraged to review the handbook.

#### **2. Describing: What you see? (10 minutes)**

- The facilitator asks: "What do you see?"
- During this period the group gathers as much information as possible from reviewing the handbook.
- Group members describe what they see in handbook, avoiding judgments about quality or interpretations. It is helpful to identify where the observation is being made—e.g., "On page one in the second column, third row, ..."
- If judgments or interpretations do arise, the facilitator should ask the person to describe the evidence on which they are based.
- It may be useful to list the group's observations on chart paper. If interpretations come up, they can be listed in another column for later discussion during Step 3.

3. **Interpreting:** What does this suggest? (10 minutes)

- The facilitator asks: “Considering what we observed, what does this suggest about our assumptions, values, and beliefs about:
  - Our image of the child
  - Relationships with children and families
  - Communication
  - The role of parents and families in children’s education
  - Discipline
- Zoom in and consider young Boys of Color and their families—“What do our observations suggest about our individual and our program, school, or agency’s commitment to serve them?”
- During this period, the group tries to make sense of what the handbooks say and why they believe this to be so. The group should try to find as many different interpretations as possible and evaluate them against the evidence provided for a specific interpretation.
- From the evidence (observations) gathered in Step 2, try to infer:
  - What messages are we communicating to families?
  - Do these messages align with our mission and values? Why? Why not?
  - What is missing that we do not see but want to communicate?
  - What are our strengths?
  - Areas of weakness?
- As you listen to each other’s interpretations, ask questions that help you better understand each other’s perspectives.

4. **Implications:** How does what was learned impact our program and individual practice? (10 minutes)
  - Based on the group's observations and interpretations, discuss any implications for individuals and for the program administrators. In particular, consider the following questions:
    - What steps could be taken next?
    - What strategies might be most effective?
    - What else would you like to see happen? What needs to be in place for this change to happen?
5. **Reflecting** on the process of reviewing the program handbook (10 minutes)
  - What questions about teaching, leadership, and/or family engagement did looking at the program family handbook raise for you?
  - Did questions of equity arise?
  - How can you pursue these questions further?
6. **Debrief** the process (5 minutes)
  - How well did the process work?
  - What about the process helped you to see and learn interesting or surprising things?
  - What could be improved?

## Note

Protocols are most powerful and effective when used within an ongoing professional learning community and facilitated by a skilled facilitator. To learn more about professional learning communities and seminars for facilitation, please visit the [School Reform Initiative website](#).

## Appendix BB

### *Chapter Four Courageous Conversation Compass Activity*

Using the [Courageous Conversation Compass](#), consider the following statements:

- Building trusting relationships with families begins with listening.
- All families, no matter what their income, race, education, language, or culture, want their children to do well in school.
- Educators need to reject deficit views of parents and families that reinforce stereotypes, especially for families of color.

As you reflect on these statements, acknowledge your immediate reactions and identify where you initially locate yourself on the Compass for each phrase. Take turns listening to a partner or small group of colleagues talk about their immediate reactions and locations on the Compass. After listening to others share and engaging in further reflection, notice if you change your position on the Compass for any of the topics. Talk about where you moved and what inspired you to do so.

## Appendix CC

### *Coffee Talk with an Equity Focus*



Source: Adapted from Henley, Taylor, and Parrish (2013) and School Reform Initiative

#### **Purpose**

The purpose of Coffee Talk is to provide a lightly facilitated way for participants to enlarge their thinking by reading brief passages of text from this book, writing reflectively about their responses, and talking with others. It works well with small and large groups and is particularly well suited for use with equity and social justice topics.

#### **Roles**

Facilitator/timekeeper (who also participates); participants

#### **Time**

Approximately 50–75 minutes

#### **Materials**

Five-to-six short excerpts selected from the book (one paragraph or less)

#### **Process**

##### *Step 1*

Facilitator presents brief text excerpts. (5–7 minutes)



## *Step 2*

Participants read and make notes about the selected parts of the book—facilitators provide reading time (15–20 minutes) for participants to work on this step. They can respond to any or all of the prompts below or simply free write about the readings and their responses to them:

- What was comforting or comfortable?
- What did you find challenging or confusing?
- What are you wondering about or what questions do you have?
- What do you most want to remember?

It is OK if participants do not have time to read and write reflections about all five of the excerpts. The goal here is about enlarging their perspectives through reading and conversation and not about covering material.

## *Step 3*

Participants share their thinking or have some talk in groups of three or four. Participants leave their seats with readings and written reflections in hand. They gather or stand together as they mingle and make sense of the readings. After five to seven minutes, participants might be invited to change groups or change topics and then continue for another five to seven minutes. There might be a third round of changing partners before debriefing as time or interest allow. (15–20 mins)

## *Step 4*

Debrief protocol in whole group. What worked well? What challenged us? What might we do differently next time? How can you apply what you thought about, wrote about, or learned in conversation to your work? (5–7 minutes)

## **Note**

Protocols are most powerful and effective when used within an ongoing professional learning community and facilitated by a skilled facilitator. To learn more about professional learning communities and seminars for facilitation, please visit the [School Reform Initiative website](#).

## Appendix DD

### *National Black Child Development Institute (NBCDI) Family Empowerment Program*



Sources: In order, excerpts from: National Black Child Development Institute (2020b), Black Child Development Institute: Denver Affiliate (2020), and National Black Child Development Institute (2020a)

### **Mission**

For more than 50 years, the National Black Child Development Institute (NBCDI) has been at the forefront of engaging leaders, policymakers, professionals, and parents around critical and timely issues that directly impact Black children and their families. We are a trusted partner in developing and delivering strengths-based, culturally relevant, evidence-based, and trauma-informed resources that respond to the unique strengths and needs of Black children around issues including early childhood education, health and wellness, literacy, and family engagement. NBCDI, the National Affiliate Network, and our members advocate and inform policies at the federal, state, and local levels to ensure standards, regulations, and resource allocations support equitable systems for Black children and families. With the support of our Affiliate network in communities across the country, we are committed to our mission “to improve and advance the quality of life for Black children and families through education and advocacy.” (National Black Child Development Institute 2020a)

## Family Empowerment Program

Developed by the National Black Child Development Institute (NBCDI), the Family Empowerment Program (FEP) builds the capacity of parents and caregivers as leaders and advocates of their families. Throughout this twelve-week program, families are equipped with the knowledge, tools, and skills needed to foster their children's learning and development while effectively advocating for them from birth. The program was designed to guide and coach parents and caregivers through a strengths-based lens that honors rich cultural and linguistic strengths of families of color. (Black Child Development Institute: Denver Affiliate 2020)

NBCDI's first parenting program, the Parent Empowerment Program (PEP), was developed and launched over two decades ago. To make the program more responsive to the needs of the entire family, NBCDI collaborated with families and experts in the field of family and community engagement to inform and enhance this curriculum.

*NBCDI's Family Empowerment Program is:*

- **Culturally Relevant and Responsive:** Infuses the social-cultural context of families' lived experiences.
- **Trauma-Informed:** Takes a holistic approach to building the capacity of families by educating families on brain development, toxic stress, Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs), and the importance of building resiliency and developing protective factors in children and their families.
- **Evidence-Based:** Aligned with current research and best practices and evaluated by Child Trends, the nation's leading nonprofit research organization.
- **Developmentally Appropriate:** Fosters children's learning and development while honoring their individual strengths, needs, and culture.
- **Action-Oriented:** Promotes active family engagement by connecting families with local resources that strengthen their capacity to succeed. (National Black Child Development Institute 2020a)

## Appendix EE

### *Federal and State Legislation Related to Disrupting Suspensions and Expulsions in Early Childhood Programs*

#### **Eliminating Early Childhood Exclusionary Practices in California: Policies and Regulations**

After analyzing the 2016 National Survey of Children's Health, the Center for American Progress calculated that approximately 250 preschoolers are being suspended or expelled every day (Malik 2017). The Center for American Progress estimated that 50,000 preschoolers were suspended at least once in that single year and another 17,000 preschoolers were estimated to have been expelled in that same year (Malik 2017). Suspensions, expulsions, and pushouts are harmful to children and families, exacerbating the negative educational and life outcomes for the affected children and families. Boys of Color, especially Black preschoolers, are 3.6 times as likely to receive one or more out-of-school suspensions as White preschool children (US Department of Education Office for Civil Rights 2016). As described throughout this book, research shows that this disproportionality is more related to contextual and teacher factors (e.g., stress, implicit bias, lack of support, etc.) than to the behavior of children.

These alarming facts and numbers have not gone unnoticed. In recent years, federal and state legislation has been passed with aims to prevent, severely limit, and work towards eventually eliminate suspensions, expulsions, and pushouts of young children in early learning settings. For example, a joint statement between the US Department of Health and Human Services and the US Department of Education was published with guidelines and recommendations for states and programs to follow (2014). Within California, state preschools and child care and development programs, Early Head Start and Head Start programs, and K-12 Public Schools have policies in place to limit or completely ban early childhood suspensions and expulsions.

#### **Federal-Level Policies Addressing Suspension and Expulsion**

Several federal-level policies are relevant for California practitioners. First, discrimination based on race, color, or country of origin is prohibited under the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment and Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. In addition, the Individuals with Disabilities in Education Improvement Act (IDEA) also discusses the use of positive behavior interventions and support (PBIS) when data shows disparities in suspensions and expulsions

for students with disabilities, and further provides that federal funding can be used to support PBIS implementation for all students.<sup>37</sup>

In 2014, the US Department of Health and Human Services and the US Department of Education published a joint policy statement in response to the alarming racial and gender disparities in early childhood education discipline. This document provided five important recommendations for programs to reduce and eliminate exclusionary discipline and to ensure the well-being of all children. The joint statement is one of three resources listed below:

- [\*Policy Statement on Expulsion and Suspension Policies in Early Childhood Settings\*](#) from the US Department of Health and Human Services and the US Department of Education on expulsion and suspension policies in early childhood settings (2014). This document provides key recommendations for programs and for states.
- [\*Caring for Our Children Basics: Health and Safety Foundations for Early Care and Education\*](#) from the US Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families (2015). Developed in 2015, these guidelines include a section titled, Preventing Expulsions, Suspensions, and Other Limitations in Services, for all early care and education programs administered by the Administration for Children and Families (ACF).
- Policies developed by Early Head Start and Head Start to limit suspensions and ban expulsions completely:
  - Head Start Guidance: [\*Caring for Our Children Basics: Preventing Expulsions, Suspensions, and Other Limitations in Services\*](#) from the US Department of Health and Human Services, Head Start Early Childhood Learning and Knowledge Center (2019).
  - Additionally, see [\*Head Start Policy and Regulations: 1302.17 Suspension and expulsion\*](#) from the from the US Department of Health and Human Services, Head Start Early Childhood Learning and Knowledge Center for policies and regulations on suspension and expulsion (n.d.).

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37 Find more information and resources about positive behavior interventions and support at the Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports [Classroom PBIS page](#) (2021).

## *Five Important Recommendations on Expulsion and Suspension Policies in Early Childhood Settings*

Source: Adapted from US Department of Health and Human Services and the US Department of Education (2014)

### **Develop and Clearly Communicate Preventive Guidance and Discipline Practices**

- Programs should develop developmentally appropriate social–emotional and behavioral health promotion practices **and** discipline and intervention procedures. These practices and procedures should detail specific guidance on what the teachers and programs will do if a child shows dysregulated behaviors (e.g., specific teacher or program responses, communication with families, mental health consultation, etc.).
- If a child is suspected of having a developmental delay, dis/ability, or mental health issue, these guidelines recommend referring caregivers to resources for mental health or dis/ability assessment and intervention, including local schools for information on IDEA part B (services for children from age three to twenty-one) or C (services for children from birth to age three) programs.
- Preventive and discipline practices and procedures should be clearly communicated to all staff, families, and community partners. Communication with children, staff, or families about these practices and procedures should never use language that mimics the language used in the criminal justice system (e.g., probation plans, “Three bites and you are out.”).
- The behavior expectations and the consequences for disrupting these expectations should be developmentally appropriate and consistent. Children from birth to age five are still developing social–emotional and behavioral regulation.
- Pay attention to ensure that discipline practices are implemented without bias or discrimination.



## **Develop and Clearly Communicate Expulsion and Suspension Policies**

According to the US Department of Health and Human Services and US Department of Education:

Early childhood programs are strongly encouraged to establish policies that eliminate or severely limit expulsion, suspension, or other exclusionary discipline; these exclusionary measures should be used only as a last resort in extraordinary circumstances where there is a determination of a serious safety threat that cannot otherwise be reduced or eliminated by provision of reasonable modifications. In such extraordinary case, the program should assist the child and family in accessing services and in alternative placement through, for example, community-based child care resource and referral agencies. (2014, 6)

The extraordinary circumstances where programs can consider exclusionary measures include:

- Documented evidence that all possible interventions and supports recommended by qualified professionals, such as an early mental health consultant, have been followed.
- Families, teacher programs, and other service providers involved in the education of the child unanimously agree that another setting is more appropriate for the child's well-being.
- The old and the new program, together with families, should develop a transition plan that makes it seamless for the child.
- If a child has a dis/ability, include additional safeguard and nondiscriminatory requirements that apply.
- Attention should be given that the new program where the child will be welcome is inclusive and promotes the child's learning and developing in a natural environment.
- The program transitioning the child should undergo a self-evaluation and identify systemic reforms and professional development actions they can take to prevent the need for such transitions in the future.
- Parents/caregivers should be encouraged to inform the child's primary health care provider so that they can coordinate support for the family and health and developmental evaluations if needed.

## **Access Technical Assistance and Workforce Development to Prevent Expulsion and Suspension**

- Support professional development and growth: Programs should aim to support skill and knowledge growth in their workforce. High-quality programs have teachers, providers, and support staff that have a strong skillset and a solid child development foundation. Programs should strive to build their workforce's capacity in several areas: (1) promoting children's social-emotional and behavioral health and appropriately addressing children's dysregulated behavior; (2) employing self-reflective strategies and cultural awareness training to prevent and correct all implicit and explicit biases; (3) forming strong, supportive, and nurturing relationships with children and strong relationships with families; (4) conducting ongoing developmental monitoring, universal developmental and behavioral screenings at recommended ages, etc.
- Facilitate access to additional support. Programs should make sure that teachers, providers, and staff support have access to additional support from specialists (e.g., mental health consultants, special educators, etc.).
- Promote teachers' well-being. Early childhood programs should also promote teacher and staff wellness and ensure that teachers work reasonable hours with breaks. Having relationships with community-based health supports can help offer teachers additional social services including health supports.

## **Set Goals for Improvement and Analyze Data to Assess Progress**

Programs should:

- Set goals to optimally support children's social, emotional, and behavioral development (e.g., provide professional development on implicit bias to all staff in one year, adopt a positive behavior intervention and support framework such as the Teaching Pyramid in one year, etc.).
- Monitor data to assess progress (e.g., percentage of teachers with regular access to a mental health consultant, number of suspensions or expulsions broken down by race, gender, dis/ability, and teacher, etc.).
- Modify their practices and investment, as needed, to reach their goals.

## Access Free Resources to Develop and Scale Best Practices

Programs should strive to be informed and access the many free resources online that can assist in preventing and ultimately eliminating suspensions and expulsions and other exclusionary practices. The [Resources section](#) at the end of this book is a great place to start.

## Administration for Children and Families

In 2015, the US Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families published [Caring for Our Children Basics: Health and Safety Foundations for Early Care and Education](#), a set of guidelines and recommendations for the minimum health and safety standards. These recommendations are not a federal requirement but are considered the minimum standards that all programs administered by the ACF should follow. A team of scholars and experts worked together to create a list of recommendations related to such topics as staffing, nutrition and food service, play areas, and many others. This document provides recommendations for preventing suspensions and expulsions—some key points include:

- Programs should have a comprehensive discipline policy that includes developmentally appropriate social-emotional and behavioral health promotion practices, as well as discipline and intervention procedures that provide specific guidance on what caregivers or teachers and programs should do to prevent and respond to behaviors they perceive as challenging.
- Programs should ensure all caregivers or teachers have access to pre- and in-service training on such practices and procedures.
- Practices and procedures should be clearly communicated to all staff, families, and community partners, and implemented consistently, without bias or discrimination. Preventive and discipline practices should be used as learning opportunities to guide children's appropriate behavioral development.
- Programs should establish policies that eliminate or severely limit expulsion, suspension, or other exclusionary discipline (including limiting services); these exclusionary measures should be used only in extraordinary circumstances where there are serious safety concerns that cannot otherwise be reduced or eliminated by the provision of reasonable modifications. (US Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families 2015)

## **Office of Head Start: Policy and Regulations—1302.17 Suspension and Expulsion**

Head Start went beyond the recommendations listed in the *Caring for Our Children Basics* report and included specific required policies to limit and, eventually, eliminate all forms of exclusionary practices. Specifically, in their policy and regulations, the Office of Head Start strongly **limits the use and extent of suspensions (which should always be temporary in nature)** and places important process regulations before and after a program determines that a temporary suspension is necessary. **Head Start prohibits the use of expulsions in its programs**, saying, “A program cannot expel or unenroll a child from Head Start because of a child’s behavior. When a child exhibits persistent and serious challenging behaviors, a program must explore all possible steps and document all steps taken to address such problems and facilitate the child’s safe participation in the program” (US Department of Health and Human Services, Head Start Early Childhood Learning and Knowledge Center n.d.). The following subsection details these two regulations:

### *Head Start Policies on the Use of Suspension and Expulsion*

#### **Head Start Limitations on the Use of Suspension**

A temporary suspension must be used only as a last resort in extraordinary circumstances where there is a serious safety threat that cannot be reduced or eliminated by the provision of reasonable modifications.

Before a program determines whether a temporary suspension is necessary, a program must engage with a mental health consultant, collaborate with the parents, and utilize appropriate community resources—such as behavior coaches, psychologists, other appropriate specialists, or other resources—as needed, to determine that no other reasonable option is appropriate.

If a temporary suspension is deemed necessary, a program must help the child return to full participation in all program activities as quickly as possible while ensuring child safety by

- continuing to engage with the parents and a mental health consultant, and continuing to utilize appropriate community resources;
- developing a written plan to document the action and supports needed;
- providing services that include home visits; and
- determining whether a referral to a local agency responsible for implementing IDEA is appropriate.

## Head Start Prohibition on the Use of Expulsion

A program cannot expel or unenroll a child from Head Start because of a child's behavior.

When a child exhibits persistent and serious challenging behaviors, a program must explore all possible steps and document all steps taken to address such problems and facilitate the child's safe participation in the program. Minimum steps must include:

- engaging a mental health consultant;
- considering the appropriateness of providing appropriate services and supports under section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act to ensure that the child who satisfies the definition of disability in 29 U.S.C. §705(9)(b) of the Rehabilitation Act is not excluded from the program on the basis of disability;
- consulting with the parents and the child's teacher; and
- if the child has an individualized family service plan (IFSP) or individualized education program (IEP), the program must consult with the agency responsible for the IFSP or IEP to ensure the child receives the needed support services; or,
- if the child does not have an IFSP or IEP, the program must collaborate, with parental consent, with the local agency responsible for implementing IDEA to determine the child's eligibility for services.
- If, after a program has explored all possible steps and documented all steps taken as described above, a program, in consultation with the parents, the child's teacher, the agency responsible for implementing IDEA (if applicable), and the mental health consultant, determines that the child's continued enrollment presents a continued serious safety threat to the child or other enrolled children and determines the program is not the most appropriate placement for the child, the program must work with such entities to directly facilitate the transition of the child to a more appropriate placement.

Source: US Department of Health and Human Services, Head Start Early Childhood Learning and Knowledge Center (n.d.). [Head Start Policy and Regulations: 1302.17 Suspension and expulsion](#) links to the full Head Start Policy and Regulations document.

Although the Trump administration rolled back some of the protections for Children of Color, national organizations' recommendations and state policies have continued to work towards putting regulations and supports in motion that reduce or completely stop early childhood suspensions and expulsions.<sup>38</sup> The next section discusses key state-level policies and regulations.

### *California State Policies Addressing Suspension and Expulsion in Early Childhood*

In addition to the federal policies and recommendations, California has made important efforts to curtail early childhood suspensions and expulsions (see table 12). While no unifying policy affects all children from birth to third grade, there are different policies and regulations that address children in state preschools and subsidized child care and children in K–3 public schools. The following table summarizes these efforts, and the next section provides further detail related to each policy.

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38 [Trump Administration's School Safety Report Met with Harsh Criticism in California](#), by David Washburn of *EdSource*, is one example of the former administration rolling back some of the protections for Children of Color (2018).



**Table 12: California Policies Addressing Suspensions and Expulsions in Early Childhood**

Program	Bill Name	What does it do?
<b>State preschool programs and general child care and development programs</b>	AB 2698 (Rubio) California state preschool programs: general child care and development programs: mental health consultation services: adjustment factors (October 2018)	This law promotes the use of early childhood mental health consultants in early childhood preschools and child care and development programs that receive state funding. This law increases the state reimbursement rate per children receiving subsidized tuition. Reimbursement for the early childhood mental health consultation is provided if the program participates in an early childhood mental health consultation service (a) with a licensed and experienced professional as specified by the Department of Education; (b) with a consistent schedule and timeframe as to build partnership between staff and families in a timely and effective manner; and (c) the consultation service uses a relationship-based model.

Program	Bill Name	What does it do?
<b>State preschool programs</b>	AB 752 (Rubio) Child care: state preschool programs: expulsion (October 2017)	This bill prohibits a contracting agency from expelling or unenrolling a child from a state preschool program because of a child's behavior unless the contracting agency has (a) expeditiously pursued and documented reasonable steps to maintain the child's safe participation in the program <b>and</b> , (b) determined, in consultation with specified parties, that the child's continued enrollment would present a continued serious safety threat to the child or other enrolled children, <b>and</b> (c) referred the parents or legal guardians to other potentially appropriate placements, the local child care resource and referral agency, or any other referral service available in the local community.
<b>K-12 Public Schools</b>	AB 420 Pupil discipline and expulsions: Willful defiance (2014, 2018) <sup>39</sup>	Bans expulsion/suspension for willful defiance in grade levels K-3 (this ban was extended indefinitely by the state's budget agreement of June 2018). This law also bans recommendations for expulsions from K-12 based on willful defiance.

39 Since 2015, it is illegal in California to suspend children in grade levels K-3 for behavior that is unruly but not dangerous (see [AB 420 Pupil discipline: suspensions and expulsions: willful defiance; Today's Law As Amended](#)). There is a renewed push to expand this ban through K-12, as well as to provide funding for alternatives to these exclusionary practices (see [Renewed Push Underway to Expand California's Ban on Some Suspensions](#) [Washburn 2019]).

## California State Preschool Programs

### *AB 2698 (Rubio)*

AB 2698 (Rubio) California state preschool programs: general child care and development programs: mental health consultation services: adjustment factors. See the full text of AB 2698 (Rubio) at its [California Legislative Information page](#).

Early childhood mental health consultation has a positive impact in reducing preschool expulsions and improving positive social-emotional outcomes for children, and, with the intent of encouraging the use of these services in California, Governor Jerry Brown signed AB 2698 (Rubio) in October 2018, which provides a new funding mechanism for mental health consultation services in state preschools and general child care and development programs. In contrast with previous bills and regulations, this legislation complements the bans and limitations of exclusionary practices with a monetarily funded and research-based strategy to support teachers and programs in reaching the goal of more inclusive, responsive practices.

This bill rewards programs that have an early childhood mental health consultant in the classroom by increasing the state reimbursement rate for children receiving subsidized tuition by 5 percent (for specific rates for different groups of children/programs, read the full text of AB 2698 [Rubio] at its [California Legislative Information page](#)). Several different supports can qualify as an early childhood mental health consultant [as seen in chapter three](#). The cost of this early childhood mental health consultation is reimbursed if:

- a. the early childhood mental health consultation service is provided on a schedule of sufficient and consistent frequency to ensure that a mental health consultant is available to partner with staff and families in a timely and effective manner, as determined by the department;
- b. the early childhood mental health consultation service is supervised and provided by a licensed marriage and family therapist, a licensed clinical social worker, a licensed professional clinical counselor, a licensed psychologist, a licensed child and adolescent psychiatrist, or others as determined by the department (the supervisor shall have at least three years of experience working with children from birth to five years of age, shall be adequately insured, shall have held their respective license for a minimum of two years, and shall be in full compliance with all continuing education requirements applicable to their profession); and

- c. the early childhood mental health consultation service uses a relationship-based model emphasizing strengthening relationships among early childhood education providers, parents, children, and representatives of community systems and resources, and integrates reflective practice into the onsite consultation model.

### *AB 752 (Rubio)*

AB 752 (Rubio) Child care: state preschool programs: expulsion (approved October 2017). For the full text of AB 752 (Rubio), see its [California Legislative Information page](#).

Inspired by Head Start guidance, policies, and regulations, this bill prohibits a contracting agency from **expelling or unenrolling** a child from a state preschool program because of a child's behavior unless the contracting agency has (a) expeditiously pursued and documented **reasonable steps** to maintain the child's safe participation in the program **and** (b) determined in consultation with the family and other professionals working with the child that the child's continued enrollment would present a continued serious safety threat to the child or other enrolled children, **and** (c) has referred the parents or legal guardians to other potentially appropriate placements, the local child care resource and referral agency, or any other referral service available in the local community.

#### **Reasonable steps include, among others:**

- talking to parents;
- contacting those in charge of the IEP if there is one, to consider, if appropriate, completing a universal screening of the child, including, but not limited to, screening the child's social and emotional development;
- referring the child's parents or legal guardians to community resources; and
- implementing behavior supports within the program before referring the child's parents or legal guardians to the local agency responsible for implementing the federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (20 U.S.C. Sec. 1400 et seq.).

A contracting agency has up to 180 days to complete the process described above. Also, see the California Department of Education Early Education Division [Management Bulletin 18-06 expanding on this policy](#) (2018).

**AB 420**

**AB 420 Pupil discipline and expulsions: Willful defiance.** For the full text of AB 420, see its [California Legislative Information page](#).

This bill amends Section 48900 of the *Education Code* relating to pupil discipline. As a result of this legislation, children enrolled in kindergarten through third grade cannot be suspended or recommended for expulsion from school due to “willful defiance” (defined as “disrupting school activities or otherwise **willfully** defying the valid authority of school staff”). Children in grade levels 4–12 cannot be recommended for expulsion due to willful defiance.

## Glossary

**ableism.** According to the Center for Disability Rights:

Ableism is a set of beliefs or practices that devalue and discriminate against people with physical, intellectual, or psychiatric disabilities and often rests on the assumption that disabled people need to be “fixed” in one form or the other. Ableism is intertwined in our culture, due to many limiting beliefs about what disability does or does not mean, how [nondisabled] people learn to treat people with disabilities and how we are often not included at the table for key decisions. (n.d.)

**attune, attuned, attunement.** Attunement is seen when an adult focuses so intently in communication with a child that the child comes to believe that what they think and feel matters; they “feel felt” by the adult (Levine and Kline 2007). Attuned communication—which begins in infancy—is characterized by positive emotional exchanges between children and adults. With an attuned relationship, trust forms and feelings of safety are increased for the child, which can positively influence their ability to engage in the learning process. The adult’s interest in the child validates their presence and helps them feel a sense of belonging, safety, and protection. If an adult caregiver is curious about the child’s thoughts, then the child, in turn, will come to value their own thoughts and feelings as well.

**bias.** Attitudes in favor or against one person or group of people (e.g., based on race/ethnicity, gender presentation, or others) that are based on unexamined stereotypes and overtly generalized assumptions. Biases can be negative (e.g., women are not good at math) or positive (e.g., Chinese children are math geniuses) but are always problematic because they define a person or a group based on generalized simplistic assumptions, not facts. See also: *implicit bias*.

**colonize, colonization.** A process by which a central system of power dominates the surrounding land and its component. To send a group of settlers to (a place) and establish political control over it (over the indigenous people of an area). Colonization is often linked to tens of millions of people from Western European states spreading all over the world during the fifteenth through twentieth centuries.



**cultural capital.** Knowledge, skills, behaviors, and attitudes that people acquire as they are part of their different cultural communities. Tara J. Yosso describes six forms of cultural capital that she describes as “*community cultural wealth*” that reflect some of the many talents, strengths, and experiences that People of Color bring into educational environments (2005). For instance, Yosso describes “aspirational capital” as the “hopes and dreams” students have (2005). Other highlights of Yosso’s work on cultural capital include:

- African American and Latino students and their families continue to have high educational aspirations despite their experience of persistent education inequities
- “Linguistic capital” is defined as the various language and communication skills students bring with them, which includes children who are learning to speak more than one language or who help their families by translating for them
- Emphasis of the role of storytelling as a form of capital, particularly for students of color
- “Navigational capital” refers to students’ skills and abilities to navigate “social institutions,” including educational spaces; navigational capital supports students managing confrontations with unsupportive or hostile environments (2005)

Other forms of cultural capital are discussed in [chapter one](#).

**culturally responsive practice.** “... a pedagogy that empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically by using cultural referents to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes” (Ladson-Billings 1995, 382). Culturally responsive practice is defined by three key elements:

1. In culturally responsive practice, students must experience academic success, which requires teachers who have high expectations for their students and provide them with the resources and supports to succeed.
2. Students must develop and/or maintain cultural competence. Teachers do not “assume” that a student’s culture is based on their race/ethnicity, but instead, develop relationships with children to learn about their interests as well as families’ values and everyday experiences. To draw on children’s cultures in daily early childhood practice, teachers could learn about the songs and stories families are sharing with their children and use them in the classroom, or they could invite families or relevant members of the community to share their skills and knowledge.

3. Students must “develop a critical consciousness through which they challenge the status quo of the current order” (Ladson-Billings 1995, 161). This reflects that an essential goal of education is to prepare students for an active citizenship that is informed. In practice, this translates to educators and children who are critically engaged with the issues that are happening in their communities and in the world at large. An example of this in early childhood could be when a preschool class notices people throwing garbage in the grass while taking a neighborhood walk and responding by making signs that ask everyone to keep the park clean. Or when a preschool teacher sees several families struggling with deportation, they begin sharing stories in class about migration and the strengths of immigrant families.

**deficit thinking or deficit beliefs.** Beliefs that blame a child, their family, culture, or community for a child’s poor academic performance or other negative outcomes without considering the role of institutional and structural forms of oppression (e.g., historical trauma, poverty, inequities in school financing) that placed the family at a disadvantage. Examples of these beliefs are, for instance, thinking that families experiencing poverty do not have enough motivation to support their children, or that Latinx parents do not care about education, or that children cannot thrive without two parents.

**discrimination.** The unjust treatment of a person or group based on biases and preconceived assumptions about that person or group. Discrimination can be person to person or it can be at the social and institutional level.

**disproportionality.** Overrepresentation and underrepresentation of children from nondominant racial/ethnic groups in a specific demographic, condition, service, dis/ability, or classification. While the issue is complex, research has shown that, for instance, African American children are consistently overrepresented in special education and Asian American students tend to be underrepresented (Skiba et al. 2016).

**dominant group.** According to Sensoy and DiAngelo:

The group at the top of the social hierarchy. In any relationship between groups that define each other (men/women, [nondisabled]/person with dis/ability), the dominant group is the group that is valued more highly. Dominant groups set the norms by which the minoritized group is judged. Dominant groups have greater access to the resources in society and benefit from the existence of the inequality. (2017, 223).

**essentialize, essentialism.** A theory of culture that defines a social, ethnic, or cultural group according to a fixed set of attributes or characteristics. Essentialism assumes that all members of a group can be defined by the set of attributes and that the defining attributes do not vary within the group.

**implicit bias.** Unconscious attitudes or stereotypes that affect our understanding, actions, and decisions. These are activated involuntarily and without awareness and can be either positive or negative. Importantly, everyone has implicit biases but racial/ethnic biases need to be brought to consciousness in order to limit their negative influence on educators' behaviors. Examples of implicit bias can be interpreting a child grabbing a toy from another child as a common occurrence between toddlers if the child is White ("This child is still developing self-regulation") or as "challenging behavior" if the child is Black ("I can't control him, he is really aggressive"). Implicit biases have important real-world effects on our own behaviors, as can be seen by research demonstrating how biases relate to the disproportionate rates of expulsions and suspensions for Boys of Color. It is key to remember that these attitudes and perceptions are not based on objective observable child behaviors, but instead, they are influenced by racial stereotypes. Last, implicit biases are malleable, that is, with awareness and reflection, these biases can be "unlearned."

**inclusive education.** An education practice that ensures:

The full and active participation of children with disabilities or delays in community activities, services, and programs designed for typically developing children, including child care. If support, accommodations, or modifications are needed to ensure full, active participation, they are provided appropriately. The participation results in an authentic sense of belonging for the child and family. (California Department of Education 2021, 8)

**institutional oppression.** The systematic mistreatment of people within a social identity group (racial or ethnic group, gender, income, etc.), supported and enforced by the society and its institutions, solely based on the person's membership in the social identity group. Seen with laws, customs, and practices that systematically reflect and produce inequities based on individuals' membership in targeted social identity groups (e.g., laws banning LGBTQ+ families from the social institution of marriage). The institution is oppressive whether or not the individuals maintaining the specific practices have oppressive intentions because the laws, customs, and practices have negative consequences on the target group. Institutional oppression creates barriers across entire systems that prevent people from accessing opportunities and resources and/or limit them based solely on their social identity group membership.

**internalized dominance.** According to Bell:

The phenomenon that occurs among White people when they believe and/or act on assumptions that White people are superior to or more capable, intelligent, or entitled than People of Color. It occurs when members of the dominant White group take their group's socially advantaged status as normal and deserved, rather than recognizing how it has been given through racialized systems of inequality. Internalized dominance may be unconscious or conscious. A White person who insists that anyone who works hard can get ahead, without acknowledging the barriers of racism, is consciously or unconsciously expressing internalized dominance. Whites who assume that European music and art are superior to other forms are enacting internalized dominance. (2016, 137)

**internalized oppression.** Members of minoritized or marginalized groups believing in and acting out (often unconsciously) the constant messages circulating in their culture that their culture and/or social identity group are inferior to whichever group is dominant and that the minoritized group is deserving of their lower position (Adams and Bell 2016). Internalized oppression negatively affects the perceptions Children of Color have of their own self-worth and abilities as well as that of their communities and families.

**intersectionality.** Defined by Bell:

Race and racism intersect with other social identities and forms of oppression, and position individuals and groups differently in the system of racism by virtue of gender, class, sexuality, ability, and other social markers. ... Intersectionality operates on both individual and institutional/systemic levels. For example, a woman of color who is poor and disabled experiences racism differently than an upper-class, [nondisabled], heterosexual man of color. At the systemic level, racism and classism are deeply intertwined and interlocking systems that sustain inequalities in such institutions as schooling, housing, and the criminal justice systems. (2016, 139)

The experience of oppression that Black boys in the US have is different in nature than that of Black girls or of Latinx boys, or of that of a Black boy with a dis/ability. While some elements might be shared, others are very particular to specific combinations of types of discrimination.

**microaggressions.** The subtle, everyday verbal and nonverbal slights, snubs, or insults that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative messages to People of Color based solely on their marginalized group membership (Hammond 2015, 47). Microaggressions, which include actions such as *microinsults* (demeaning a person's racial heritage or identity) and *microinvalidations* (negating the experiential reality, feelings, and status of a Person of Color) have negative health and mental health consequences for Boys of Color and their families. The fact that they are often difficult to pin down puts the Person of Color in a difficult situation, as reacting to the aggression might lead others to judge them as oversensitive or to argue that what happened was not, in fact, a microaggression. As with implicit biases, individuals responsible for the microaggressions are usually unaware of the biases communicated through their language and behavior.

A **microinvalidation** is a comment or action that excludes, nullifies, or negates a person's experiences, thoughts, or feelings based on their membership in a marginalized group. Their impact is to make people feel invisible. They are particularly harmful forms of microaggressions because their targets are shamed and made to think that they are paranoid or oversensitive when they react negatively to the microinvalidation (Pastel et al. 2019).

**minoritized.** Defined by DiAngelo as:

A social group that is devalued in society. The devaluing encompasses how the group is represented, what degree of access to resources is granted, and how the unequal access is rationalized. The term minoritized (rather than minority) is used to indicate that the group's lower position is a function of active socially constructed dynamics, rather than its numbers in society. (2016, 61)

**oppression.** Defined by Sensoy and DiAngelo as:

The prejudice and discrimination of one social group against another, backed by institutional power. Oppression occurs when one group is able to enforce its prejudice and discrimination throughout society because it controls institutions. Oppression occurs at the group or macro level, and goes well beyond individuals. Sexism, racism, classism, ableism, and heterosexism are specific forms of oppression. (2017, 61)

**People of Color.** "Refers collectively to all of the socially constructed racial groups who are not perceived and categorized as White and do not have access to the social, cultural, institutional, psychological, and material advantages of Whiteness" (DiAngelo 2016, 101).

**prejudice.** “Learned prejudgment about members of social groups to which we don’t belong. Prejudice is based on limited knowledge or experience with the group. Simplistic judgments and assumptions are made and projected onto everyone from that group” (Sensoy and DiAngelo 2017, 51).

**race.** The concept of “race” is not based in science and is not inherently “true.” Instead, race a concept that is constructed (made up) physically, socially, legally, and historically. Milner writes:

[The] meanings, messages, results, and consequences of race are developed and constructed by human beings, not by genetics or some predetermined set of scientific laws ... there is no biologically sustainable reason for establishing “races” as distinct subgroups within the human species. ... Race is a concept created in the modern era as a way of drawing distinctions between people such that some might benefit at the expense of others. (2017, 123)

**racism.** “A pervasive system of advantage and disadvantage based on the socially constructed category of race” (Bell et al. 2016, 134).

**socially constructed.** “Meaning that is not inherently true, but agreed upon by society. Once society agrees to this meaning, it becomes real in its consequences for people’s lives” (DiAngelo 2016, 32).

**socialization.** Defined by Adams and Zúñiga as:

The lifelong process by which we inherit and replicate the dominant norms and frameworks of our society and learn to accept them as “common sense.” We learn to think of social identity categories as essential and natural, and of social hierarchies as inevitable. Our socializations processes rarely point out that our norms perpetuate a worldview based upon the maintenance of advantage for some, relative to disadvantage for others. (2016, 105–106)

**strength-based approach.** A strength-based approach assumes that all children and families have resources, personal characteristics, and relationships that can be mobilized to enhance their learning, development, and well-being, no matter how many risk factors or challenges they face (Center for the Study of Social Policy 2018b; Pastel et al. 2019).



**structural racism.** Sometimes called systemic racism or structural racialization; refers to the systematic and disproportional marginalization of People of Color across institutions of our society (e.g., schooling, housing, health, justice systems, etc.). Individuals participating in these systems (for instance, teachers, administrators, advocates, lawyers, clerks, to list a few) often do not see themselves as being racist or as participating in practices that are racist. They might even be actively working against racism. However, structural racism does not occur at the personal level (one-on-one interactions) but in the way in which organizations and social institutions systematically, historically, and unequivocally provide benefits to certain groups over others resulting in racial inequalities related to opportunities for education, wealth, health, employment, housing, and overall well-being. Awareness and reflection about the effect of structural racism is essential in order to address bias, especially deficit beliefs that blame individuals for circumstances that are a consequence of historical and political conditions of inequity in the US.

**trauma.** Among young children, it is defined as an actual or perceived danger, which undermines a child's sense of physical or emotional safety or poses a threat to the safety of the child's parents or caregivers, overwhelming their coping ability and affecting their functioning and development (Nicholson, Perez, and Kurtz 2019). Traumatic experiences, whether real or perceived, are threatening and create intense feelings of helplessness, powerlessness, or terror, and in the absence of protective supports from an adult caregiver, can have lasting and devastating effects on a child's physical, mental, and spiritual health (La Greca et al. 2008; Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration [SAMHSA] 2014).

**trauma-informed practices.** At its foundation, trauma-informed practice (TIP) recognizes that a child's history of trauma impacts their development, learning, emotions, and behavior. TIP is not a specific theory but, instead, an integration of various strengths-based and relationship-based approaches and theories that all aim to do no further harm—i.e., not to re-traumatize a child—and to guide a child toward health and healing (Nicholson, Perez, and Kurtz 2019).

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## Resources

### *National and State Organizations and Web Pages*

#### **BUILD Initiative**

[BUILD Initiative web page](#)

The BUILD Initiative partners with state leaders working in early learning, family support and engagement, special needs and early intervention and health, mental health, and nutrition.

To assist educators interested in resources that address key areas of early childhood and diversity, BUILD offers a [Toolkit](#) through an interactive database to support early childhood quality and increase emphasis on cultural and linguistic diversity.

The BUILD Initiative publication [\*Fifty State Chart Book: Dimensions of Diversity and the Young-Child Population\*](#) helps us understand the status of young children in the US and by state. The Chart Book can help leaders identify inequities by race and income and create strategies to address these disparities.

#### **National Seed Project**

[National Seed Project web page](#)

The National Seed Project is a peer-led professional development program that implements methodology of personal reflections, testimony, listening to others' voices, and learning experientially and collectively. Educators seeking to expand their competencies in equity and diversity will find its blog, events, and papers to equip us to connect our lives to one another and to society at large by acknowledging systems of oppression, power, and privilege.

[Peggy McIntosh's White Privilege Papers](#), on how White privilege shows up throughout society including early childhood systems and programs, is a valuable section of the National Seed Project website.



## **Center on the Social and Emotional Foundations for Early Learning**

[Center on the Social and Emotional Foundations for Early Learning web page](#)

The Center on the Social and Emotional Foundations for Early Learning (CSEFEL) focuses on promoting the social-emotional development and school readiness of young children from birth to age five. This website offers resources such as videos, events, family tools, and chat sessions.

The Resources: Practical Strategies for Teachers/Caregivers page offers strategies for caregivers/teachers including downloadable hands-on materials for children to use, book lists, and much more.

## **The Kirwan Institute**

[The Kirwan Institute web page](#)

The Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity at The Ohio State University invests in efforts that support equity and inclusion by connecting individuals, organizations, and communities through research, engagement, and communication.

Educators are connected directly with [free online implicit bias training](#). This training module is tailored for K-12 and might be useful for interested individuals who want to increase their knowledge and understanding of racial disparity and implicit bias to apply in their early childhood programs.

## **Center for Inclusive Child Care**

[Center for Inclusive Child Care Resource Library](#)

The Center for Inclusive Child Care (CICC) is a centralized, comprehensive resource network supporting inclusive care for children in community settings. Educators working with infants and toddlers will find this resource helpful. CICC also offers access to a monthly podcast, an expansive resource library with pages of links to specific documents, best practices, and other resources related to early childhood expulsion. The Resource Library page allows the user to filter topics by type, keywords, and language.

## National Black Child Development Institute

[National Black Child Development Institute \(NBCDI\) web page](#)

NBCDI supports and works primarily with Black children (from birth through age eight) and their families through coalition building with community-based organizations, foundations, corporations, school systems, elected officials, government, child care, Head Start, and many other public and private partnerships.

Two NBCDI works are great resources:

The 2013 publication [\*Being Black Is Not a Risk Factor: A Strength-Based Look at the State of the Black Child\*](#)

The 2018 publication [\*Delivering on the Promise of Effective Early Childhood Education\*](#); NBCDI published this short document with recommendations at all levels including trauma-informed practices, culturally relevant pedagogies, etc., which is relevant for teachers and other stakeholders.

## Office of Head Start

[Head Start Early Childhood Learning and Knowledge Center web page](#)

The Resources for Programs, Schools, and Staff page offers 17 direct links to resources that offer support for superintendents, program directors, principals, teachers, providers, and other staff to prevent and eliminate expulsions and suspensions in early childhood settings.

Educators will want to refer to [\*Supporting the School Readiness and Success of Young African American Boys Project: Reflections on a Culturally Responsive Strength-Based Approach\*](#) from the Office of Head Start National Center for Cultural and Linguistic Responsiveness (OHS NCCLR). This resource is for those seeking an opportunity to reflect on their work and their program's policies. Questions and reflective activities are posed that can prompt self-assessment. Other Head Start resources include:

- [Head Start Policy and Regulations: Suspensions and Expulsions](#)
- [Preventing and Reducing Suspensions and Expulsions in Early Care and Education Settings](#)

## American Indian College Fund ECE Programs

[American Indian College Fund web page](#)

The American Indian College Fund has a series of Early Childhood Education Programs to support culturally responsive early childhood education for Native American children, including:

- [For the Wisdom of the Children: Strengthening the Teacher of Color Pipeline](#), a project with the support of a grant from the W. K. Kellogg Foundation that offers educators culturally based training and preservice training at tribal colleges and universities (TCUs) and promotes early childhood STEM opportunities grounded in Indigenous approaches for Native American children and their families
- [Restorative Teachings Early Childhood Education Initiative](#)
- [Ké' Early Childhood Education Family Engagement Initiative](#), also supported by the W. K. Kellogg Foundation, this program is run through different tribal colleges; the page offers links to each of these initiatives, a video on family engagement, and access to the report [Tribal College and University Childhood Education Initiatives: Strengthening Systems of Care and Learning with Native Communities from Birth to Career](#)

## Yale University Child Study Center

[Yale University Child Study Center: What We Do web page](#)

The Yale Child Study Center improves the mental health of children and families, advances understanding of their psychological and developmental needs, and treats and prevents childhood mental illness through the integration of research, clinical practice, and professional training.

The 2016 research study brief "[Do Early Educators' Implicit Biases Regarding Sex and Race Relate to Behavior Expectations and Recommendations of Preschool Expulsions and Suspensions?](#)" examines early educators' implicit biases regarding sex and race as it relates to behavior expectations and recommendations of preschool expulsions and suspensions.

## **Child Care Aware**

[Child Care Aware web page](#)

Child Care Aware of America worked with the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation to author a new report titled, [Unequal Access: Barriers to Early Childhood Education for Boys of Color](#). Educators can learn lessons from the field as well as explore recommendations to increase early education access and quality for Boys of Color.

## **National Research Center on Hispanic Children and Families**

[National Research Center on Hispanic Children and Families web page](#)

The National Research Center on Hispanic Children and Families issued the report “[The Development and Early Home Experiences of Young Latino Boys](#)” in 2017 as a response to the Obama administration’s My Brother’s Keeper Initiative. My Brother’s Keeper (MBK) is a call-to-action initiative focused on improving the life conditions of Boys of Color, including Latinx boys.

## **SAMHSA CoE for IECMHC: Working with Tribal Communities**

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) Center of Excellence for Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation (CoE for IECMHC): [Working with Tribal Communities page](#)

The Working with Tribal Communities page discusses infant and early childhood mental health consultation within a culturally responsive approach to serve tribal communities, and also includes useful resources and links.

## *Research, Reports, and Fact Sheets*

## **National Association for the Education of Young Children**

National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) [Anti Bias Page](#)

NAEYC has compiled some key information, resources, and self-reflective exercises for teachers as they think about anti-bias education in their everyday work as educators.

In addition to creating the joint statement [\*Standing Together Against Suspension and Expulsion in Early Childhood\*](#), NAEYC provides resources for teachers, administrators, policymakers, states, and districts that offer data, toolkits, models, and templates to help change policies and practices.

The position statement "[\*Advancing Equity and Diversity in Early Childhood Education\*](#)" is another resource for educators.

## **US Department of Health and Human Services and US Department of Education**

Joint statement: [\*Policy Statement on Expulsion and Suspension Policies in Early Childhood Settings\*](#)

This policy statement is to support families, early childhood programs, and states by providing recommendations from the US Departments of Health and Human Services and Education for preventing and severely limiting expulsion and suspension practices in early childhood settings.

Educators can turn to this resource for these "guiding principles" to improve school climates and discipline:

- Create positive climates and focus on prevention;
- Develop clear, appropriate, and consistent expectations and consequences to address disruptive student behaviors; and
- Ensure fairness, equity, and continuous improvement.

The US Department of Health and Human Services also includes Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation (IECMHC) as a recommended strategy that tribal programs can use to build the resilience of young children. Through the use of a holistic, culturally sensitive, and collaborative approach, IECMHC brings together everyone within a child's circle—family, extended family, teachers, tribal elders, and providers—to develop strategies that support the child. Educators will find tools that help states, tribes, and communities use IECMHC to promote the mental health and school readiness of young children.

## *Best Practice Documents*

### **Preventing Suspension and Expulsion in Early Childhood Settings: A Program Leader's Guide to Supporting All Children's Success**

Created by the SRI Institute; [Preventing Suspension and Expulsion in Early Childhood Settings page](#)

This guide is primarily written for early education program leaders in center-based settings who implement policies and procedures and promote practices. However, all early childhood professionals interested in learning more about strategies for eliminating suspension and expulsion in early childhood settings can benefit from using the guide.

### **Black Minds Matter Promising Practices**

Created by Education Trust – West; [Black Minds Matter Promising Practices page](#)

Per the Education Trust – West page:

Education Trust – West published *Black Minds Matter* in October 2015 as a rallying point for engagement and action to the educational challenges and successes of Black children and youth. This resource page mirrors the Black Minds Matter report and outlines promising programs across the state from early childhood to TK-12 through postsecondary education.

### **Promise of Place: Building Beloved Communities for Black Men and Boys**

Created by Campaign for Black Male Achievement (CBMA); [Promise of Place page](#)

This report documents city-level contributions and initiatives that aim to advance positive opportunities and outcomes for Black men and boys including building beloved communities.

### **The Promise of Early Childhood Development in Indian Country**

Created by Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis; [The Promise of Early Childhood Development in Indian Country page](#)



This article allows educators to explore the linkages between intergenerational historical trauma and early childhood development (ECD). It then turns to the role of ECD programs, especially those that incorporate Native language and culture, in helping mitigate the impact of historical trauma, and highlights examples of programs showing positive effects for young children and families. The article concludes with strategies that can support the effectiveness of ECD initiatives.

## **ZERO TO THREE Documents**

- [Preventing Expulsion from Preschool and Child Care](#) helps educators support young children's social-emotional development with resources and videos.
- [Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation: Policies and Practices to Foster the Social-Emotional Development of Young Children](#) provides an overview of what we know about early childhood mental health consultation (ECMHC), current issues in the field, and possible future directions.

## *Media*

### **National Public Radio**

[Bias Isn't Just A Police Problem, It's A Preschool Problem](#), by Cory Turner, is a short recorded broadcast discussion on Walter Gilliam's work at the Yale Child Study Center. Educators can listen or read the transcript to understand the impact of implicit bias on teacher expectations and perceptions of African American boys.

### **Black Minds Matter**

Professor Luke Wood offers educators a free online course, [Black Minds Matter](#), which addresses the experiences and realities of Black boys and men in education. The course draws parallels between the Black Lives Matter movement and the ways that Black minds are engaged in the classroom. The course balances a discussion of issues facing Black male students and offers research-based strategies for improving their success.

### **Short Films**

Michael Gonchar's *New York Times* article "[26 Mini-Films for Exploring Race, Bias and Identity with Students](#)" lists short films that can be used for professional development.

## *Additional Resources*

### ***Continuing Courageous Conversations: Toolkit***

By Lisa D'Aunno, Michelle Heinz, Erin Kramer, and Sandy Lint (2017); [Continuing Courageous Conversations: Toolkit PDF](#)

A resource to accompany *Courageous Conversations About Race: A Field Guide for Achieving Equity in Schools* by Singleton and Linton (2005). The document was developed to build organizational capacity to engage in ongoing “courageous conversations” about the intersections of race, equity, and child welfare. It provides a variety of activities to use in professional development to support educators to increase their racial consciousness, as well as a list of resources on diversity and race equity.

### **Out Talk with Dr. Kevin Nadal**

Professor, author, psychologist, and activist Kevin Nadal elaborates on **microaggressions and Asian Americans** in [Out Talk](#), a web series dedicated to these topics with accessible video links. Nadal has focused on issues related to microaggressions, especially as they affect Asian Americans and LGBTQ+ people.

### **Center for Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation**

California MAP to Inclusion and Belonging includes information regarding the [Center for Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation](#).

### **Contact California PBIS Coordinators**

Established by the Office of Special Education Programs at the US Department of Education, the Technical Assistance (TA) Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) is charged with providing schools capacity-building information and technical assistance for identifying, adapting, and sustaining effective schoolwide disciplinary practices. The [PBIS State Coordinators page](#) includes contact information for California’s PBIS coordinators and facilitators and its designated TA Center partner.

### **Center of Excellence for Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation (IECMHC)**

Among the resources available on through the [IECMHC web page](#) is the IECMHC Toolbox, which is rich in resources, including documents, definitions, and videos.

## US Department of Education Office of Civil Rights

The Office of Civil Rights [News Room](#) publishes the most updated data on equity and disproportionality in schools. The most recent reports include data on preschools, such as [2013-2014 Civil Rights Data Collection. A First Look: Key Data Highlights on Equity and Opportunity Gaps in Our Nation's Public Schools](#).

### Pyramid Equity Project

Described in its own words:

The Pyramid Equity Project will develop and disseminate an effective approach for the prevention of suspension, expulsion, and discipline disparities in early learning programs. Specifically, the Pyramid Equity Project will develop tools, materials, and procedures to explicitly address implicit bias, implement culturally responsive practices, and use data systems to understand potential discipline equity issues.

Read [Addressing Preschool Suspension and Expulsion: The Pyramid Equity Project](#) and find more information at the California CSEFEL Teaching Pyramid [Resources and Background Materials page](#).

### The National Center for Pyramid Model Innovations

The National Center for Pyramid Model Innovations (NCPMI) describes its goals:

... to assist states and programs in their implementation of sustainable systems for the implementation of the Pyramid Model for Supporting Social Emotional Competence in Infants and Young Children (Pyramid Model) within early intervention and early education programs with a focus on promoting the social, emotional, and behavioral outcomes of young children birth to five, reducing the use of inappropriate discipline practices, promoting family engagement, using data for decision-making, integrating early childhood and infant mental health consultation and fostering inclusion.

Find more resources at the [NCPMI web page](#).

### US Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs: IDEAs That Work

The IDEAs That Work [Disproportionality and Equity page](#) has links to resources and free online webinars on disproportionality and special education, including information on equity and the special education federal law IDEA, as well as resources for families.

