A Critical Content Analysis of Racial and Cultural Bias In Early Childhood Education Teacher Preparation Textbooks

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Abstract

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*Key words:* teacher education, early childhood education, critical race theory, critical content analysis, whiteness in teacher education
A Critical Content Analysis of Racial and Cultural Bias
In Early Childhood Education Teacher Preparation Textbooks

In April 2023, the governor of Alabama banned an early childhood education (ECE) teacher textbook that was published by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), a national non-profit organization that represents ECE educators, center directors, trainers, college educators, families, and policymakers. The governor demanded the state head of the Department of ECE disavow the text because of “woke concepts” such as language about "inclusion” and “structural racism” (Press, 2023). The disavowal and removal of this text is a blatant attack on culturally responsive educators and diverse children and families. Further, it demonstrates the field of education's continued allegiance to white supremacy and the exclusion, acculturation, and assimilation of “others”. Textbooks have long been utilized to indoctrinate students and reinforce the beliefs of those with power and influence. As a primary source of content in academic teaching and learning and a representation of the curriculum—both hidden and explicit (Morris, 2015)—textbooks offer a window into societal values and norms (Sulistiyo et al., 2020).

The values of Western early care and education rely on Eurocentric theories of child development and learning (e.g., Piaget, Montessori, Vygotsky, and others) to advocate what constitutes “best practices” when working with diverse children and families (Turner, 2022; Blaise & Ryan, 2019). The field’s adherence to white middle-class standards of care, education, and child development is widely unrefuted and deeply embedded in teacher education curriculum and textbooks (Goldstein, 2001; Skattebol, 2005). Through this lens, Children of Color and of low socio-economic status are consistently perceived through cultural, linguistic, and school-readiness deficits that propose they need to be “fixed” through early education (e.g., Copple &
Brendcamp, 2009). Contrastingly, the developmental patterns, values, and experiences of white, middle-class children are positioned as the norm (Anyon, 1981; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990; Kliebard, 2004).

The racialized class divide and normalization of whiteness in educational research and teacher education is reflected in education curriculum, standards, and textbooks (Gay 2003; King, 2014; Sabzalian, et al, 2021). These knowledge systems send messages to students about the social value of histories and perspectives enacted (or not) in curriculum (Wilkinson, 2014). In the K-12 setting, research has examined how hidden curriculum, perpetuated in teacher education programs, reproduces social inequities through the disparate behavior control (Morris, 2015), over policing (Homer & Fisher, 2020; Weisburst, 2019), disciplinary action (Annamma et al., 2019; Kozol, 2006) and high expulsion rates (Cheng, 2019; Heilbrun et al., 2018) of Children of Color.

The persistent dehumanization of Children and Families of Color in education settings illustrates the need for equity-oriented, abolitionist educators ready to teach racially, linguistically, culturally, and economically diverse learners. Further, the importance of a critical examination of messages of social power, privilege, silencing, and erasure within teacher preparation textbooks cannot be overstated. Racist, classist, and gendered biases (amongst others) have profound effects on the educational experience of the teacher workforce—helping shape the dispositions and practices that teachers carry into classroom with diverse learners (Uzum et al., 2017). The findings of our critical content analysis illustrate how the textbooks, used in an early childhood teacher education program, maintain white supremacy by reinforcing belief systems that stigmatize and marginalize the cultural ways of diverse children and families.

**Whiteness in Early Childhood Teacher Education**
With the rise of anti-critical race theory (Bissell, 2023), anti-Blackness (Love, 2016) and myriad other fear-based epistemologies, the need for a teacher workforce that is as racially, linguistically, culturally, and economically diverse as the children entering classrooms has become even more pressing (Lucas & Villegas, 2011; Nieto, 2017; Sleeter, 2011). Scholarship shows practices rooted in children’s cultural and communal ways of knowing and being are foundational to responsive, effective teaching (Turner et al., 2023; Gay, 2010; Gay & Kirkland, 2003; Paris & Alim, 2017). Yet, the majority of people becoming teachers self-identify as white, middle-class women (NCES, 2018). Further, they enter the classroom with little to no direct knowledge of the complex sociocultural, economic, racial contexts, histories, or cultural practices of young learners (Kinloch & Dixon, 2018; Milner & Lomotey, 2014).

This cultural dissonance between children, families, and teachers means teacher education programs are responsible for developing the critical consciousness and racial literacies (Sealy-Ruiz & Greene, 2015) of predominantly white women educators—preparing them to interrogate overarching structures of institutional inequities (Gere, et. al, 2009; Sleeter, 2012). This is especially difficult when teacher education researchers and faculty are also predominantly white women who have been educated through white-washed early childhood education practices in predominantly white institutions (Turner et al., 2023; Ladson-Billings, 2005).

White teacher educators often enter the profession with years of understanding the world and their positionality through a white racial frame (Feagin, 2020). This frame carries into their practice with teacher candidates, which reflects in the pervasive whiteness in their pedagogy, andragogy, their roles as teacher educators, curricular decisions, and textbook selection (Jupp, et al., 2016; Tanner, 2022). Focusing on whiteness in an overwhelmingly white field of study, such as early childhood education, is problematic as it further detracts from the experiences and
histories of racially marginalized groups and individuals (Turner, et al, 2023; hooks, 1994; Vickery & Duncan, 2020). Therefore, within this analysis, we examine the endemic whiteness of ECE teacher education within the larger reality of structural racism (hooks, 1994; Vickery & Duncan, 2020).

The hidden curriculum of traditional schooling and teacher education programs is steeped in white, middle-class epistemologies. These epistemologies of ignorance (Shahid, 2015) protect and maintain white ways of being and knowing to perpetuate oppressive social systems. Vallance (1974) describes the covert and systematic nature of the hidden curriculum within American education as “the inculcation of values, political socialization, training in obedience and docility, the perpetuation of traditional class structure—functions that may be characterized generally as social control” (pg.5). We argue this hidden curriculum is pervasive within ECE and ECE teacher education programs—propagating a white supremacist agenda of social control that ultimately affects the educational experiences of racially, linguistically, culturally, and economically diverse children. A critical examination of the various ways marginalized groups are portrayed within textbooks meant to prepare the next generation of ECE educators is necessary to illuminate the divisive narratives that reproduce white supremacy and racial inequities.

**Theoretical Framework**

We ground this critical content analysis in critical race theory (CRT) to honor the counterstories of Communities of Color who are often misrepresented, marginalized, and erased within educational textbooks and curricula. CRT shows how historically separated discourses of race, gender, class, and other subordinated social locations intersect to impact the everyday lives
of Communities (Perez Huber et al., 2020)—shifting the focus from dominant narratives to examine race and racism in early education, the economy, and every social institution.

Yu et al. (2022) explain that people often associate the term \textit{racism} with acts of overt \textit{racism}, “which refers to the prejudices and hateful actions of individuals based on their presumption that their race is superior to that of another person”. However, this conceptualization limits racism to being seen as “occurring only if intentional harm is inflicted” (pg.578). Within our textbook analysis, we recognize that while the authors may not have intentionally or consciously propagated harmful racist notions, the effects on racially and culturally marginalized group members are the same—therefore rendering the intent of their work irrelevant. We use CRT to identify systemic racism in the descriptions of racialized people and its intersection with other forms of oppression (i.e., classism, sexism, homophobia, and other oppressive belief systems). Systemic racism involves the entrenchment of policies, practices, and curricula which results in the differential advantages and disadvantages of racialized groups. This form of racism is more subtle and powerful than individual acts of overt racism for the maintenance of racial inequities in modern Western societies (Yu et al., 2022).

Solórzano (1997) posited five tenets of Critical Race Theory in Education: (1) The endemic nature of race and racism and their intersectionality with other forms of subordination (Bell, 1992); (2) challenging normative ideologies such as objectivity, meritocracy, color-blindness, race neutrality, and equal opportunity that surround educational discourse; (3) the preference and authority of the experiential knowledge of People of Color; (4) the use of interdisciplinary perspectives to better understand racism, sexism, and classism; and (5) the ultimate commitment to social justice and the empowerment of Communities of Color.
Perez Huber et al. (2020) theorize how these tenets of critical race theory in education can be utilized with a critical content analysis to provide a framework for the examination of race, class, gender, and other social locations in literature depicting People of Color. They note how both frameworks focus on how discursive power operates within stories and they challenge narratives of dominant ideologies. Further, similar to the way CRT centers the historical, social, and political contexts in which education and socio-economic power exist, critical content analysis is concerned with the broader contexts and systems from which stories emerge. While Perez Huber and her colleagues’ (2020) work theorizes how this lens can be used with children’s literature, we adapted this framework to examine the way textbooks in ECE teacher education programs depict People of Color and other marginalized groups.

**Methodology**

Through the lens of critical race theory, we conducted a critical content analysis of three textbooks. Qualitative content analysis is a conceptual approach to examining the language used in texts to classify text into categories that represent similar meanings (Weber, 1990). A critical context analysis examines within, throughout, and beyond the text— in explicit communication or inferred communication—to understand “what a text is about, considering content from a particular theoretical perspective, such as sociohistorical, gender, cultural, or thematic studies” (Beach, et al., 2009; Downe-Wamboldt, 1992, p. 314). Through our analysis, we focused on “locating power in social practices by understanding, uncovering, and transforming conditions of inequality” (Beach, et al., 2009, p. 129).

**Overview of Textbooks**
The three textbooks we analyzed are used in the first semester foundational courses of an early childhood teacher education program in the United States Midwest. Each text is a required reading for foundational coursework required for an associate degree or credential in ECE. The first book is called, *Health, Safety and Nutrition for the Young Child* by Lynn R. Marotz (2020). The text is used in a course that discusses health, safety, and nutrition in early childhood settings, which includes topics of child abuse and neglect, governmental regulations, and sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS).

The second book is called *Early Childhood Education Today* (Fourteenth Edition) by George Morrison (2018). The text is used for a first semester course called, *Foundations of Early Childhood*, which introduces aspiring ECE teacher candidates to the profession. According to the institutional course catalog, the course is meant to teach topics of “diversity, cultural responsiveness and anti-bias as it relates to early childhood education” and other topics. In the preface, Morrison explains that he integrates fourteen “critical” themes that are foundational to the field. Among these themes are, “The growing number of diverse children and families, including LGBTQ parents, military families, and grandparents, in America’s classrooms today and the implications of this demographic shift for your teaching and learning”. Morrison also addresses, “The effects of poverty on children and their families” to help teachers learn to educate all children and “close the achievement gaps that exist between children in poverty and their more economically advantaged peers”.

The final book examined in this critical analysis is *The Developing Person Through Childhood* (8th edition) by Kathleen Stassen Berger (2018). This book is used for two classes in the first year of studies—the first semester *Infant and Toddler* course and the second semester *Child Development* course. Both courses are meant to develop teachers’ competencies of
integrating strategies that support diversity, cultural responsiveness, and anti-bias perspectives.

In the introduction of the text, Berger reveals that the book and other textbooks she has written have been translated into Spanish, French, Italian, and Portuguese and are used in more than 700 institutions worldwide. There was also a note on the intentionality of the graphics used throughout the text, which proved meaningful to our examination. Berger noted, “Students learn a great deal from this book’s illustrations because Worth Publishers encourages authors to choose the photographs, tables and graphs and to write captions that extend the content”. With this understanding, we analyzed the photos, captions, and other graphics in addition to the text.

**Data Collection and Analysis**

Each textbook was examined cover to cover including the publishers’ introductions and contributors’ remarks. In this initial search, we focused our search to note biased language that discussed a specific racial or ethnic group and how they were depicted. Second, we used the appendix to conduct a keyword search of every mention of racialized words or phrases such as: poverty, African American, Black, Latino/a, Asian, urban and minority/ies. We also examined the tables of contents, noting the selection and distribution of themes. Finally, we examined the illustrations and related captions. Special attention was given to photos depicting People of Color.

Within this work, we leveraged our individual and collective positionalities. Author 1 is a Black woman teacher educator, former bilingual preschool teacher of Black and Brown children, and a mother. Author 2 also identifies as a Black woman, teacher educator, an ECE program administrator, and a grandmother. Through a series of conversations, we reflected on our cultural intuitions as Women of Color “to see in surface phenomena the meaning of deeper realities” through “an instant ‘sensing,’ a quick perception arrived at without conscious reasoning”
Initially, we planned to utilize a pre-existing rubric (i.e. Sadker & Sadker [2001] or Rosenberg, [1973]) to identify and categorize the biases. However, we found these rubrics did not adequately address our experiences while engaging with the texts. In response, we developed the following language and rubric as a unique metric to describe our findings in the teacher education textbooks.

**Results**

Throughout the analysis of the three core textbooks used in the ECE teacher education program, we found six distinct, yet interrelated forms of racial or cultural bias. First, we noticed an overarching theme of the *presumption of deficit*. This manifested in the way mainstream white, middle-class values and practices were normalized or portrayed as the ideal, while the practices of People of Color or people from low-income households were perceived as deficient. This is rooted in the white supremacist practice of comparing every racial and cultural group to the white, middle-class.

Second, we found the theme of *selective xenophobia*. We define *selective xenophobia* as the preference of a member of the social status quo to assume their ways of being are inherently and exclusively right or superior to others’. Further, this selective xenophobia shows disdain, devaluing, or hostility toward the cultural ways of “others”, unless they align with the cultural standard of whiteness. This was found throughout the text as authors used descriptive language to imply others’ cultural ways of being or parenting practices were based in ignorance or another inherent deficiency, unless they reflected white middle-class norms.

Drawing on CRT’s challenging of normative ideologies such as objectivity, meritocracy, color-blindness, race neutrality, and equal opportunity (Solórzano, 1997), the third theme we noticed was *the assumption of privilege*— that all groups have equitable access to goods and
resources and/or similar values as the white middle-class. Fourth, the analysis revealed the use of 
*coded language and invisible words* that promoted assumptions about what it means to be a 
member of an “othered” cultural group. For example, divisive, ambiguous language such as 
“urban” or “ethnic” was used as a blanket term for racially marginalized groups instead of being 
explicit about the populations they were referring to. Further, *invisible words* like “seemingly”, 
“perhaps”, and “maybe” were used to present disparaging conclusions about Communities of 
Color without citation of research.

Fifth, we found multiple examples of what we call *statistical violence*, which refers to the 
way the textbook authors distorted and weaponized statistics to paint deficit pictures of racialized 
groups and individuals. This was also evidenced in the way they used white, mainstream 
knowledge and values as the standard to which they compared all “other” cultural groups. The 
final form of race- and cultural bias we will discuss from the ECE teacher preparation textbooks 
is cultural shaming. We define *cultural shaming* as the act of presenting information—whether 
factual or constructed—in order to socially dishonor, disgrace, humiliate, or shame another 
person, group, belief system, or cultural way of being.

**The Presumption of Deficit**

Because the American education system is designed for white, middle-class children by 
white theorists and policymakers, low-income children from diverse, non-white backgrounds are 
consistently deemed socially, academically, cognitively, and biologically unprepared (Cahan, 
1989; Copple & Bredekamp, 2009; Frankenberg, 2016). This presumption of deficit of Children 
of Color and children from low-income families was evident throughout the ECE teacher 
education textbooks.
One example of how Marotz presumed the deficit of children with low-income parents was found in *Health, Safety and Nutrition*. Marotz stated,

Children born into families who have limited education and financial resources seem to experience the highest rate of SIDS deaths [...]. Many of these mothers failed to obtain routine prenatal care or they engaged in unhealthy practices, such as smoking, drug abuse, or alcohol consumption, during and after their pregnancy. (pg.159)

This statement introduces the assumption that mothers of infants who died of SIDS are at fault for the death of their child because they may not have sought prenatal care, were impoverished and/or had low levels of formal education. It also assumes impoverished individuals with low levels of formal education produce children who are inherently “at-risk” or at a deficit from the start. While the text discusses the “failure” of the mothers, Marotz completely disregards any critique of larger inequitable social issues that may have rendered the mothers impoverished or without access to prenatal care. Instead, she leaves readers with the assumption that mothers of babies who die of SIDS were at fault in one way or another.

Another example was found in *Early Childhood Education Today* where Morrison states,

For black boys the gender gap relating to achievement is severe. As early as nine months of age, there are differences between black males and their white counterparts in cognitive and language development. By grade four, only 12 percent of black males in large city schools are proficient in reading. Public policy measures to counter the black male achievement gap should include such initiatives as working with parents and families
to eliminate chaotic home lives that lead to behavioral and social problems and providing health and social services to young parents and their children. (pg. 40)

In this statement, Morrison presumptuously looks to the Black boys’ “chaotic” homelife to explain white researchers’ interpretation that Black boys are cognitively and linguistically deficient compared to a white middle-class standard. Further, it disregards the linguistic capital (Yosso, 2005) of diverse children and their cultural ways of expression that cannot be measured or understood by cultural outsiders.

This presumption that Black boys are inherently behind white boys in language development due to some deficiency in their homelife is reminiscent of Hart and Risley's (1992) research on children’s language, that claimed children growing up in poverty hear 30 million fewer words than their more affluent counterparts by the age of three. Their sample included 42 families at four levels of income and education ranging from "welfare" to "professional class."

All the "welfare" families and 7 out of the 10 "working class" families in the Hart and Risley (1992) study were Black, while 9 out of 10 of the "professional" families were white. Their findings suggest that for children to be prepared for school, anyone from a non-white, low-SES background must imitate the way predominately white, middle-class people interact with their children. Subsequently, “vocabulary” has become a type of code word for the racial and class-based inequities of public schools (Kamenetz, 2018).

The persistent deficit perspective regarding Children of Color reflects how the American education system continually invalidates the cultural ways of being of children and families who do not ascribe to white, middle-class values (Cazden, 1988; Emdin, 2016; McMillion & Edwards, 2000; Royal & Gibson, 2017). Children of Color are expected to assimilate and compromise their culture to succeed within the education setting (Emdin, 2016; Kendi, 2019).
These persistent deficit perspectives lead to an interventionist early education to bring the development of impoverished Children of Color “closer to the developmental trajectory typical of children from educated, affluent families” (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009, p. 7). However, policymakers’ focus on “fixing” racially, ethnically, and linguistically diverse children often overlooks the inequitable systems that disenfranchise them in the first place (Blaise & Ryan, 2019; Brown & Barry, 2019; Delaney, et al., 2019; Delpit, 2006; Emdin, 2016; Ladson-Billings, 2006). This flawed assumption of white superiority and the deficit of “others” is the core of all other forms of bias we identified in the textbooks.

**Selective Xenophobia**

Closely related to the assimilationist agenda with the field of ECE is our conceptualization of selective xenophobia. We define *selective xenophobia* as the assumption of members of the status quo that their ways of being are inherently and exclusively right or superior, while disdaining, devaluing, or showing hostility toward the cultural ways of “others”. However, similar to the way critical race theory stresses that racial equity for People of Color will be advanced only when they converge with the interests, expectations, or ideologies of whites (Bell, 1980); selective xenophobia implies that “other” cultural norms or ways of being are inherently wrong *unless* they align with the standards of the white status quo. An example of this was found in Early Childhood Education Today as Morrison stated,

Research confirms that good parenting enhances academic achievement, whereas poor parenting often leads to poor academic achievement. A number of family variables impact children’s success in school including parent education, household income, parental incarceration, and family structure. A recent survey of parents, for example, noted that those with a high school diploma or less were five times more likely to use
spankings as a method of discipline than their counterparts with some college education or higher. African-American parents were also more likely than white or Hispanic parents to say they use spanking as a method of discipline. (pg. 434)

This statement suggests that “good parenting” is associated with higher parent education, higher household income, whether the parent has been incarcerated, and family structure. Further, in white-dominated fields—such as early education—these expectations of “good” or “best practices” default to standards of whiteness (Porter, 1993; Weems, 2004); and anything that does not align with the white middle-class binary definition of “good parenting” is considered “poor parenting”. Asserting that people with lower-level education spank their children and adding that Black parents among other groups are the most likely to spank their children leads to the assumption that Black parents are undereducated, which is why they may spank their children. This introduces the assumption that assimilation to the white, middle-class value of higher education will lead to “better” parenting and choices of discipline.

Another example of selective xenophobia was found in The Developing Person. Under a photo of a mother in Hong Kong lying down with her eyes closed next to her child, the caption reads:

Is She Awake? This 36 year old mother in Hong Kong put her 7 month old baby on her back, protecting her from SIDS as the Chinese have done for centuries. However, the soft pillow and comforter are hazards. Will she carry the baby to a safe place before she falls asleep? (pg. 139)

This caption shows Berger’s preferences for white American sleeping norms, which say infants should only sleep on their back in their own cribs with nothing else in the crib. Berger shows
selective xenophobia by pointing out that Chinese mothers have had this practice “for centuries.” However, rather than focusing on the tenderness of this moment, Berger’s selective xenophobia questioned the competency of this mother and her choice to lay with her child in a bed with pillows—thus putting her child in danger, according to standards of white American research (Pacheco, 2023; Key Moments, n.d.). Although American standards of “best practices” have changed over the years, selective xenophobia assumes the authority to approve of and/or disapprove of aspects of the Chinese woman’s parenting practice. Despite the constant push for Individuals of Color to assimilate into white, middle-class understanding of “good parenting”, the underlying message throughout these textbooks suggests the parenting of People of Color will never be “good” or acceptable because they will never be white.

Assumption of Privilege

The third theme that emerged in our analysis of the textbooks was the assumption of privilege. This assumption was evidenced in the text through various statements that were written with the faulty supposition that because we live in a just society, everyone has equal access to goods and resources. Scholars in CRT and critical whiteness studies have worked to identify and interrogate the various manifestations of white privilege. MacIntosh (1990) reflected that, “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 which will allow ‘them’ to be more like ‘us’” (pg. 31).

The notion that white, middle-class lives are normative and ideal leads to the marginalization and erasure of any experience of reality that does not align with these beliefs or value systems. For example, in Early Childhood Education Today, Morrison commented on a photo of two children eating fresh fruit. The caption read:
“Apples or Blueberries? During early childhood, boys and girls love having a choice, so it is the adults’ task to offer good options. Which book before bed? Which colored shirt before school? Which healthy snack before going out to play? (pg. 226)

This statement assumes that all caregivers have access to fresh fruits and vegetables, copious children’s books, and clothing options. This assumption disregards the food deserts and scarcity that many impoverished communities face daily. It assumes that all families should value the written word in children's books over other forms of narrative telling, or that all have multiple options of clean clothing for school.

Stating “it is the adults’ task to offer good options” suggests that there are “good” and “bad” options, and that if caregivers do not offer “good options” they are not fulfilling their duty within the caregiving relationship. Statements like these come from a place of privilege of never having experienced poverty, scarcity, or even laundry day. Further, it assumes that it’s within everyone’s cultural way of parenting or value system to offer choices in the first place. In many households, caregivers provide one meal option for both children and adults or lay out one outfit for the next day. Although everyone is fed and clothed, the textbook statement suggests if there are not a variety of “good” options, the caregiver has failed.

Another example of this assumption of privilege was found in Health, Safety and Nutrition where it states,

Parents may also not understand that health problems can have negative consequences on children’s development and learning potential or they may not know where to go for appropriate diagnosis and treatment. Some families fail to see the need for routine health care when a child appears to be healthy. Others simply cannot afford preventive care.
However, cost must not discourage families from obtaining needed medical attention. In the United States, every state currently makes low-cost health insurance available to income-eligible children. (pg. 48)

This statement questions parents’ capacity to value or understand issues of their children’s health and well-being. It also suggests that parents should value, trust, and seek out Western medicine even when their children are healthy. It does not consider that it is a privilege to feel comfortable taking one’s child to a medical professional or to live in a country where medical practices align with one’s cultural values or norms. Further, the statement reveals the assumption that there is equitable access to health care options, the caregiver has effective transportation to these healthcare options, they can take off work to take the child to an appointment, and they have a safe place for other siblings to stay during that appointment. Instead, the statement suggests that parents are remiss or ignorant in the care of their children.

**Coded Language and Invisible Words**

Perhaps one of the most insidious ways the textbooks propagated racist and classist biases was through the use of coded language laden with subliminal messages. Guptu and Vridee (2017) discuss how terms like *race* are not neutral within our Western social-political context. Instead, *race* and other racialized terms hold weighty connotations “in discursive systems and practices” which radiate into “broad political dispositions and social structures”. As coded language, “‘race’ is an unstable signifier which enables those structures and dispositions to apparently acquire meaning rather than denoting anything firmly in itself” (p.1748).

Similarly, in their critical discourse analysis of language use in professional standards, Yu et al. (2022) use the term *ambiguous language* to describe “words or phrases that have
multiple meanings or those that lack conciseness and clarity. It can also include words or phrases that are dependent upon or sensitive to context”. They argue that pervasive “ambiguous language can function in problematic and racially coded ways. Ambiguity of this sort is particularly pernicious because it is so pervasive” (p. 585). We draw on these understanding of how language is racialized and weaponized to enact coded yet harmful messages about People of Color. These messages are particularly harmful because they often remain unnoticed, especially by white community members because they benefit from the inherent racial hierarchy (Neville et al., 2016).

An example of racialized coded language was found in Health, Safety and Nutrition where Marotz wrote,

Children today live in a world where daily exposure to violence is not uncommon. The incidence of crime, substance abuse, gang activity, and access to guns tends to be greater in neighborhoods where poverty exists and can result in unhealthy urban environments where children’s personal safety is at risk.

Associating poverty, gun violence, and crime with “urban environments” reaffirms assumptions that urban environments are unhealthy and reifies deficit perceptions of the children and families in urban communities. “Urban” is a loaded word that often brings connotations of poverty-stricken Black and Brown communities in contrast to suburban and rural areas which are deemed more safe—white (Donnell, 2010; Jacobs, 2015; Milner, & Lomotey, 2014; Weiner, 2006; White et al., 2017). It is laden with deficit perspectives that plague the vast majority of research on children and families in these communities.
Further, Marotz does not take into account that conditions of poverty, possession of guns, or substance abuse are not unique to urban spaces. Marotz’s statement feeds on negative media propaganda that over-reports on drugs and violence within racialized urban communities without taking into consideration larger social systems that work against Communities of Color to keep them in racially segregated neighborhoods. It ignores the social history of the war on drugs where the federal government intentionally pushed drugs into urban Communities of Color to criminalize and further disenfranchise the residents. Nor does it discuss the rampant use of drugs in suburban white neighborhoods (Gaston, 2019). Instead, Marotz chose to feed into narratives of urban communities as spaces of social decay, violence, disadvantage, and cultural poverty.

An example of invisible words was found in The Developing Person in a section discussing the connection between obesity and low SES. Berger states, “low-income children may live with grandmothers who know firsthand the dangers of inadequate body fat, so they promote eating patterns that, in other times and places, protected against starvation (pg. 224)”. This statement suggests, low-income children—often associated with Black and Brown children—may live with their grandmothers.

The invisible word, may, reveals their statement is not based on evidence, rather the assumption that low-income children come from single parent families who must live in impoverished multi-generational homes to survive. Further, there is no mention of a grandfather which suggests there is a single mother living with her single mother. Second, the text suggests that because a low-income child may live with a grandmother, the grandmother is not only ignorant of various types of nutrition, but she has continually lived in poverty and therefore desires to protect her grandchild against starvation. These messages feed narratives of cultural poverty and disadvantage.
Statistical Violence

Scholars of Color have long critiqued the way white researchers misrepresent the experiences and perspectives of Communities of Color through comparative quantitative data and culturally incongruent research methods (Collins & Blige, 2016; Davis, 2018; Few, et al., 2003). The cultural wealth and experiences of Communities of Color are often defined in terms of their difference from whiteness (Few, et al., 2003). Consequently, there remains a deeply rooted mistrust of white researchers within Communities of Color and their ability (or desire) to share the narratives of People of Color appropriately and accurately.

Our conceptualization of statistical violence refers to the way statistical information gathered through quantitative methods is distorted, misrepresented, and weaponized against diverse communities. Most often, statistical violence is enacted to uphold white supremacist notions of the superiority of whiteness and enforce the “otheredness” or inferiority of cultural groups and individuals who do not align with mainstream white beliefs, values, or norms.

One example of statistical violence was found in Early Childhood Education Today where Morrison states,

In the United States, more than five million, or one in fourteen, children have had at least one parent incarcerated at one time or another. An estimated 1.7 million children have a parent currently in prison. African American children and children living in poverty are more likely than their peers to experience parental incarceration. Children with an incarcerated parent are two to three times more likely to engage in delinquent behavior. (pg. 507)
Not only does Morrison’s language criminalize Black and impoverished youth as likely “delinquents”, but by stating that 1.7 million children have parents in prison and only discussing Black and impoverished children draws away from the fact that there are hundreds of thousands of white, non-Black children, and middle/upper-class children who have incarcerated parents as well. Further, it fails to acknowledge the gross inequities and systemic racism embedded within the American justice system that inordinately criminalizes and penalizes Black community members (Rastogi et al., 2011).

Another example of statistical violence from Early Childhood Education Today states,

There is a lot of discussion today about the education achievement gap. The achievement gap is the difference between what certain groups of children know and are able to do as opposed to what other social and ethnic groups of children know and are able to do. The achievement gap is wide between white children and black and Latino children. (pg. 236)

Morrison gives the example of the 18-point gap between 4th-grade white and Hispanic students in 2015 and the 32-point gap between white and Black 8th-grade students’ average test scores. Culturally incongruent measures of assessment, such as standardized tests, designed by whiteness for white, middle-class children will always reflect the illusion of white superiority.

This depiction of an “achievement gap” pathologizes Children of Color and their communities for supposedly underachieving in a white educational institution without interrogation of systemic and structural issues. These systems include the cultural mismatch between education institutions, predominantly white teachers, and the cultural ways of Communities of Color (Foster, 1996; Irvine, 2003; Lee, 2004); the overwhelming whiteness of curriculum (Banks, 2004; Gay, 2004); the differential value and distribution of certain types of
knowledge (Anyon, 1981); culturally incongruent pedagogical practices (Apple, 1990; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Popkewitz, 1998; Sleeter, 2001); or the education debt, that siphons communal resources away from low-income, Communities of Color (Ladson-Billings, 2006). Morrison’s choice to disregard systemic racism and inequitable schooling practices perpetuates a false narrative of white superiority.

**Cultural and Social Shaming**

The final form of race- and class-based bias we will discuss from the early childhood teacher preparation textbooks is cultural shaming. We define *cultural shaming* as the act of presenting information, whether factual or constructed, in order to socially dishonor, disgrace, humiliate, or shame a person, group, belief system, or cultural way of being. Like other forms of bias examined in this article, cultural shaming is rooted in the assimilationist belief that whiteness is the norm and the ideal.

In *The Developing Person*, Berger depicted a photo of a non-white man holding a newborn child. Under the photo, the caption reads, “Ignore this dad’s tattoo and earring…and the newborn’s head wet with amniotic fluid.” (pg. 127). Instructing the reader to “ignore” the man’s tattoos and piercing suggests there is something shameful or socially unacceptable about a father with body art, tenderly embracing his newborn. We compare this to another photo and caption in the same textbook, that depicts a European white man with tattoos fastening a child's shoe. Instead of suggesting that the reader ignore his tattoos, the caption reads “This 37-year-old father in Stockholm, Sweden, uses his strong tattooed arm to buckle his daughter’s sandals— caregiving as millions of contemporary men do” (pg. 20). This blatant double standard suggests that body art on a Person of Color is shameful or something to be overlooked, while when on a European, white father the tattoos are associated with the man’s strength or masculinity.
Another example of cultural shaming in *The Developing Person* was found under the topic of multiple births. Under a photo of Nadya Suleman, Berger wrote the caption:

Perfectly Legal—Nadya Suleman was a medical miracle when her eight newborns all survived thanks to the expert care in a Los Angeles hospital. Soon thereafter, however, considerable controversy began. She was dubbed “Octomom” because—even though already a single mother of six children, including twins—she still opted to undergo in vitro fertilization, which resulted in implantation of her octuplets.

While Suleman’s story is a popular illustration of multiple births, the inclusion of the “controversy” around her motherhood was seemingly added as a source of social shame. The inference is that a “single mother of six children” should not have chosen to undergo in vitro fertilization to have more babies. The societal shaming of having multiple children (or any children) without a husband is reminiscent of oppressive belief systems that challenge women’s reproductive rights and suggest women should identify and/or find their worth in a male partner. Further, the caption title of “Perfectly Legal” suggests there was some social ill caused by Suleman’s choice to have a large family.

**Discussion**

Each of the biases we found in ECE teacher preparation textbooks is rooted in notions of the superiority and normalcy of mainstream white, middle-class values. While each is unique and distinct, these biases—presumption of deficit, selective xenophobia, assumption of privilege, coded language/invisible words, statistical violence, and cultural shaming— are intersectional and may manifest within the same passage of text. This critical content analysis revealed that teacher educators must develop a practice of critiquing textbooks through a critical lens to
recognize the ways racial, cultural, economic, and other forms of oppression intersect within teacher education curricular materials. Teacher educators must develop their own racial literacy (Sealy-Ruiz & Greene, 2015) and critical consciousness toward dismantling white supremacy in teacher education. This requires reflecting upon their own biases, the assumptions they bring into the classroom, and the influence on teacher candidates’ learning experiences. We offer the following recommendations from our own practices to guide other teacher educators in developing their cultural literacy and cultivating transformative, critical pedagogues. We encourage teacher educators to 1) engage in critical reflection toward unlearning whiteness; 2) offer diverse perspectives in their instructional material; and 3) empower teacher candidates to critique the curricular material provided.

**Commit to Unlearning Whiteness**

As schooling experiences continue to spirit murder (Love, 2019) young Children of Color, it is crucial that teacher candidates are prepared to be disruptors of oppressive educational practices and policies. Yet, many teacher educators struggle with their own whiteness (Martell, 2015, Tanner, 2022; Thandeka, 1999), which hinders them from effectively guiding teacher candidates in their journey to critical consciousness (Turner et al., 2023; Schmidt & Kenreich, 2015). Nonetheless, teacher educators committed to liberatory, culturally responsive early education must strive to increase their own self-efficacy in implementing culturally informed teacher education and shaping the equity-based thinking and critical epistemological views of teacher candidates (Gere et al., 2009; Gist, 2011). This can be done through incorporating multicultural literary texts, continual interrogation of attitudes toward race and racism, and explicitly engaging with race consciousness (Gere, et al. 2009).
In previous work, Turner et al. (2023) found that for white teacher educators, this process of unlearning is an “uncomfortable exercise of ‘stumbling forward’”. Critical consciousness is not a destination, rather it is a constant reflective practice that requires “reflecting on the interplay of biases with the socio-political, economic, and racial beliefs that they and their teacher candidates bring into educational spaces”. While this often starts on an individual level, some value doing this reflective work in community with other teacher educators. However, we stress that it is not the responsibility of Faculty of Color, who may already struggle with racial battle fatigue (Croom, 2017), to facilitate this work for their white colleagues.

**Offer Multiple Perspectives**

Textbooks that perpetuate white-centric assumptions, while marginalizing the perspectives and lived experiences of racially, linguistically, culturally, or economically marginalized groups should be disavowed and replaced whenever possible. However, we realize every institution may not have the funding available to replace problematic texts or there may not be critical textbooks available in various content areas. To navigate this tension in our own practices, we supplement our textbook readings with articles, podcasts, and videos that present the diverse perspectives of critical theorists, researchers, and community members. Platforms such as YouTube, TikTok, and Open Educational Resources (OER), that provide free materials for users to access and share, offer us content on which we built critical conversations balancing the monolithic views presented in the textbooks. Still, like any other instructional material, it is important to vet the content for harmful messages.

This practice of offering critical counternarratives aligns with Solórzano’s (1997) conceptualization of critical race theory in education that advocates the use of interdisciplinary perspectives to better understand social oppressions and the preference of the experiential
knowledge of People of Color. The counternarratives of critical scholars and community members represented in the supplementary materials offer a powerful means for presenting the voices of marginalized communities and dismantling oppressive mindsets (Delgado, 1989; Miller et al., 2020).

**Empower Teacher Candidates to Critique their Curricular Material**

Finally, Howard (2003) reminds us that teachers must be taught how to recognize and address their own biases by engaging in critical reflection and the examination of their own sociocultural identity, biases, and prejudices. Accordingly, we engage our students in critical conversations and reflective assignments to develop their critical consciousness and reflective practice. The goal is to empower students to first recognize their positionality, assumptions, and biases they bring to the readings; and then practice stepping outside of their own cultural standpoint to imagine what messages another might receive from the same text--- highlighting that their perceptions may differ from other’s.

We also discuss the influence of the authors’ or researchers’ racialized identity and positionality (Drame & Irby, 2015). We model for our students how to search out the positionality of authors by asking: Does this person identify as a member of the cultural group they are discussing? Whose perspective is being presented and how? Does the text suggest through omission, commission, overemphasis, or erasure that any group is superior, more capable, or more important (Rosenberg, 1973)? Practicing critical questioning and open conversations around race, culture, and social power enables teacher candidates to grapple with their assumptions, privilege, and racial identities to become critical consumers of instructional materials. Further, it empowers them with a critical skill set toward choosing diverse, inclusive, and anti-oppressive materials for their own future classrooms.
Conclusion

It should be noted that the purpose of this paper is not to criticize the textbooks under study. Instead, we challenge teacher educators to be mindful of their instructional materials and offer counter-knowledge that challenge white-centric ideologies (King, 1991). The implications of these biases being presented unchecked within the textbooks and curriculum material of preservice early childhood teachers is detrimental to the experiences of teacher candidates and future young learners. How can we trust the education of our racially, culturally, linguistically, and economically diverse children to teachers who have been indoctrinated to understand these youth as inherently broken, deficient, and inferior?

As the teacher candidate pool remains overwhelmingly white women (NCES, 2018), it is likely they have been taught in primarily white institutions through a white-centric lens. Through the apprenticeship of observation (Borg, 2004), and the oversight of uncritical teacher educators, the legacy of whiteness in education will continue perpetuating traumatic schooling practices and epistemic violence against educators and children of diverse communities. For this, it is crucial that teacher educators model critical practices while engaging teacher candidates in discussions that shape their equity-based thinking toward advancing liberatory educational praxis (Turner et al, 2023; Gere et al., 2009).

Teacher education programs that wish to develop critical and transformative educators (King, 1991) must work to develop the racial literacies of their students. Sealey-Ruiz and Greene (2015) remind us that,

When preservice teachers are allowed to remain uninformed [or misinformed] about the cultures of their future students, and the role of race and racism is not discussed
constructively in preservice courses, teacher education programs become complicit in producing another generation of teachers who will fail to recognize how stereotypes fuel their “understanding” of students of color [...] (p.57)

Developing racial literacies requires skills and practices that empower teachers and students to engage in questions of race, culture, and representation (Sealey-Ruiz & Greene, 2015). As textbooks and other instructional materials are a primary way that (mis)information is propagated within teacher education programs, we challenge teacher educators to eschew complacency in the status quo toward dismantling white supremacy in teacher preparation programs.
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