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Cultivating Culturally Responsive Early Childhood Educators: An Examination of Practices, Perspectives, and Reform Efforts

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ABSTRACT

CULTIVATING CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATORS: AN EXAMINATION OF PRACTICES, PERSPECTIVES, AND REFORM EFFORTS

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This dissertation research reports on the development and implementation of a pre-pilot for early childhood preservice teachers based on seven specified learning modules on Culturally Responsive Anti-Bias Education (CRABE). In accordance with Pennsylvania's Regulations, Professional Learning Standards, and Quality Rating Improvement Systems (QRIS), the learning modules were designed to prepare preservice teachers to teach diverse populations of students. This research has high implications for higher education, which plays a role in supporting preservice teachers through coursework and field experience. The topics of the learning modules are Demographics: There's a Shift in Education, Preparing Preservice Teachers Through The Course Catalog, Introduction To Culturally Responsive Anti-Bias Education, Advancing Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in the Early Years, Anti-Bias Framework: The Four Core Goals of Anti-Bias Education, Getting to Know Students, Families, and Communities, Historical Context of Educating Black Children, Representations in Curriculum, Lessons, and Activities, Authentic Assessments: Observation, Documentation, Presentation and Reflection, Culturally Responsive Teacher Preparation Programs and Field Experiences, and Moving Beyond Awareness. Using a focus group of five early childhood education and education experts, the research seeks to answer the questions, how do experts in early childhood education explain the status of culturally responsive and sustaining education in pre-service teaching? How effective does one anticipate the Culturally Responsive Sustaining Education in Early Learning Modules

will be in encouraging pre-service teachers to engage in culturally responsive and sustaining education practices? This dissertation is available in open access at AURA (https://aura.antioch.edu) and OhioLINK ETD Center (https://etd.ohiolink.edu).

Keywords: culturally responsive anti-bias education, early childhood education, culturally sustaining education, teacher preparation

Dedication

This work and my life would not be possible without my parents, Bernard and Joy, who passed away early on in my life. My prayer is that I have made you proud and I am your dream fulfilled. To all my grandparents, Bernard and Bonnie (transitioned), Ralph and Shellie (transitioned), and Reverend Joseph and Joyelver. What a blessing it has been to have three amazing sets of grandparents. Additionally, this work is dedicated to my grand Aunt Marcella. Thank you all for watching over me and being with me throughout all the phases of the journey of my life.

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Acknowledgement

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Thank you to my family for continuous support and understanding during the research and writing process. I would like to thank my children, Danielle, Kevin, and Khalid, and soulmate, Carnell, for their care and kindness during the stressful moments. I appreciate the hugs, drawings, special notes, and messages of support. Love you Hassan, you bring me JOY.

Most importantly, thank you God for seeing me through! Ecclesiastes 9:11…

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Personal Connection

During a semester when the researcher was observing a student teacher, the researcher had the opportunity to observe a preschool/older toddler classroom consisting of about 20 children with mixed ages, mainly preschoolers, in a private suburban school with diverse learners. The veteran early educator was paired with a student teacher and two assistant teachers, all of whom were White. The program's atmosphere was inviting. The researcher visited the school and observed the classroom four times during the semester. The student teacher had an ideal placement to complete Student Teaching.

During one of the final observation visits, the researcher observed the class preparing for snack time. COVID-19 precautions were evident as the children used plastic dividers while having their snacks. However, the students engaged in typical preschool play, conversations, and laughter. While sitting near a two-year-old girl, who was of South Asian descent and whose family spoke English as a second language, the researcher saw her ask an assistant teacher for help with opening a container of food. The teacher looked at the food and began questioning her about it, while the other teachers joined in the discussion. They questioned the food's nature, whether it was a snack or lunch, and what the food was made of. As the researcher observed, the researcher wondered why they were standing around and discussing the food instead of having a conversation with her family about the food. A culturally responsive approach would be to get to know what the food is made of and whether it is a snack or lunch.

After snack time, the children cleaned up and transitioned into free play. The same young girl played on her own and sometimes within a group. At one point, she ran up to an assistant teacher with excitement, hugged her, and said something in her home language. The teacher did

not understand and simply said, "I don't know what you're saying. I don't know the language," before turning to another child. As the researcher observed, the researcher reflected on the culturally responsive approach. Should teachers walk away when they do not understand the language? Is this an opportunity to learn the home language by having a conversation with the parents? What should be the response when a child speaks in their home language?

Personal Reflection

This visit prompted a conversation on culturally responsive teaching with the student teacher, emphasizing the importance of getting to know our students and their families' ethnic and cultural backgrounds. Reflecting on the researcher's role as a teacher educator in early childhood education, the researcher contemplated the current state of teacher preparation programs. Does the coursework adequately cover culturally responsive teaching in early childhood education? This reflection led the researcher to the problem that the researcher will address in this dissertation.

Research Questions

The research questions the dissertation will address are based on a series of seven learning modules developed to help prepare preservice teachers and in-services teachers to be culturally responsive anti-bias educators. The learning modules focus on culturally responsive anti-bias education coursework, field experience opportunities, and overall preparedness for diverse classrooms in the early years of education. The number of participants in the pilot of learning modules is 5 experts in the field of education and early childhood education. The participants will participate in lectures, discussions, activities, and reflections. The research questions seek to gain the perspective of early years preservice and in-service teachers, higher education instructors, professional learning instructors, and advocates on coursework and field

experience on culturally responsive anti-bias education and preparedness to educate diverse students.

Question 1: How do experts in early childhood education explain the status of culturally responsive and sustaining education in preservice teaching?

Question 2: How effective does one anticipate the Culturally Responsive Sustaining Education (CRSE) in Early Learning Modules will be in encouraging preservice teachers to engage in culturally responsive and sustaining education practices?

Purpose Statement

Preschool classrooms are growing in diversity and ethnicity. Demographics for preschool children ages 3 through 5, for 2020 enrollment rates, were higher for 3- to 4-year-olds who were of two or more races (47 percent) and White (43 percent) than for those who were Hispanic (33 percent). Additionally, the enrollment rates for 5-year-olds did not measurably differ across racial/ethnic groups ("Enrollment Rates of Young Children," 2022). The Bureau of Labor and Statistics reported that in 2022, 97.4 percent of educators in preschool and kindergarten are women. From that number, 75 percent are White, 17 percent Black, 14 percent Hispanic or Latino, and 4 percent Asian ("Employed Persons"…, 2023). In reviewing the demographics between students and teachers in early education, there is growth in the diversity of students, while there is a lack of growth in the diversity of teachers. Teacher educators have a responsibility to prepare preservice teachers for the diversity that exists within preschool classrooms.

NAEYC's Professional Standards and Competencies for Early Childhood Educators support higher education programs and teacher educators to meet professional standards and

competencies in early education ("NAEYC Higher Education Accreditation Standards", n.d.). The standards and competencies should be the core of the learning objectives of teacher preparation coursework. Standard 4 Developmentally, Culturally, and Linguistically Appropriate Teaching Practices, prepares teacher educators to

a) understand and demonstrate positive, caring, supportive relationships and interactions as the foundation for their work with young children. They (b) understand and use teaching skills are responsive to the learning trajectories of young children and to the needs of each child. Early childhood educators (c) use a broad repertoire of developmentally appropriate and culturally and linguistically relevant, anti-bias, and evidence-based teaching approaches reflect the principles of universal design for learning ("NAEYC Higher Education Accreditation Standards", n.d.).

Field Experience is an additional consideration when preparing teachers for diverse populations of students. In NAEYC's Higher Education Accreditation Standards (2021), they state that, "teacher prep programs ensure candidates have opportunities to observe and practice with diverse (e.g., cultural, linguistic, race/ ethnicity, socioeconomic status, ability) populations of young children" (Standard F.1.C, p. 31). Field experiences must be meaningful in the sense they provide preservice teachers with opportunities to work with diverse populations of students. Teacher educators can do this by working with a variety of non-traditional educational settings, agencies, or service-learning projects (Miller & Mikulec, 2013).

Teacher preparation programs have a responsibility to prepare preservice teachers for diverse populations of students. Culturally responsive anti-bias education coursework and field experience are the core of preparing preservice teachers for creating diverse learning environments. Teacher educators should recognize the effect their practices have on students.

Transitions from education preparation programs to classrooms espousing culturally responsive environments can be as natural as the work in which they have been engaging throughout their academic careers (Samuels et al., 2016).

Importance of Study

How are teachers supposed to learn the codes and norms of a community different from their own? Too often teachers rely on the distortions of the larger society to explain a new cultural setting to them (Ladson-Billings, 2001). As our country continues to grow as a rich, diverse multicultural nation, it is imperative early childhood teacher educators prepare future teachers to embrace this diversity and provide experiences affirm that all students, families, and communities (Gunn et al., 2020).

A few teacher education programs prepare teachers to be effective in urban classrooms serving diverse groups of students (Ladson-Billings, 2001). Coursework and field experience should focus on raising self-awareness, reflection, disseminating biases, families, and communities. Teacher educators rarely have the opportunity to explore their own beliefs and attitudes and understand how their teacher education program aligns with effective multicultural teaching and learning (Assaf et al., 2010). With an effective CRT and multicultural education teacher program, culturally relevant teachers understand learning is facilitated when we capitalize on learners' prior knowledge. Rather than seeing students' culture as an impediment to learning, it becomes the vehicle through which they can acquire the official knowledge and skills of the school curriculum (Ladson-Billings, 2001).

Researcher Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations

The researcher was under the assumption that all participants in the learning modules, focus groups, and surveys were early childhood professionals in related education fields. The

researcher assumed that all participants were reflective, open, and honest in their feedback on the learning modules and focus groups.

Definitions of Terms

Glossary of Terms from Anti-Bias Education for Young Children & Ourselves Second Edition (Derman-Sparks & Edwards, 2020).

Anti-Bias: An approach to education that explicitly works to end all forms of bias and discrimination.

Bias: Any attitude, belief, or feeling that justifies or results in unfair treatment of a person or a group of people because of their identity.

Culturally Responsive Teaching: An educator's ability to reflect and draw on students' linguistic and cultural strengths and become responsive to the learning characteristics of diverse racial, ethnic, and social class groups (Gay, 2010).

Culture: A set of shared beliefs, values, expectations, rules or patterns of behavior, goals, and practices characterizes a group such as family, community, institution, or organization. The characteristic features of everyday existence (how people live their lives) are shared by people in a place or time.

Developmentally appropriate practice (DAP): Adult-child interactions, materials, teaching methods, and learning experiences that promote young children's optimal learning and development. DAP takes into account what is individually appropriate for each child. This includes children's development and learning at different ages and each child's social and cultural context.

Dual language learners: Children who are developing knowledge and fluency in their home language while also developing skills in a second (or third) language.

Equity (equitable)/equality: Equity provides the conditions for and supports children and adults' needs to be successful. These take into consideration individual capacities, needs created by a person's current social conditions, and historic and current inequities connected to the individual's social identities. Equity is judged on the actual outcomes of the provided conditions and supports, not on their intent. The concept of equity goes beyond equality, which implies treating everyone the same, providing the same conditions and resources to all individuals- despite their differing needs and capacities.

Inclusion: The practice of including children with disabilities in all learning, social, and educational programs alongside their peers without disabilities while providing specialized support and accommodations for each child's success. More broadly, inclusion seeks to ensure equitable participation of all historically marginalized children.

Visibility: When children see themselves and their families reflected in their early childhood setting, they feel affirmed and that they belong (Derman-Sparks & Edwards, 2020).

Chapter Summary

Chapter 1, takes the personal connection of the researcher and begins to explore the research question: How do experts in early childhood education explain the status of culturally responsive and sustaining education in pre-service teaching? How effective does one anticipate the Culturally Responsive Sustaining Education in Early Learning Modules will be in encouraging pre-service teachers to engage in culturally responsive and sustaining education practices?

The development of the seven learning modules, give guidance to higher education teacher preparation programs in supporting and preparing preservice preschool teachers to teach diverse groups of young learners.

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

The understanding of the importance of the first five years of life in shaping a child's overall developmental trajectory, and on the effectiveness of ECE as an intervention for young children, has grown over the years (Gómez, 2015, p.7). The benefits of early education are vast. Very young children can benefit from early education, early education can have a significant influence on later development, and the early years of education can ameliorate a host of academic and social problems, including diversity, equity, and inclusion (*The Wiley Handbook of Early Childhood Care and Education*, 2019, p.7). The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), Advancing Equity in Early Childhood Education Position Statement states, all children have the right to equitable learning opportunities that enables them to achieve their full potential as engaged learners and valued members of society. Thus, all early childhood educators have a professional obligation to advance equity (NAEYC, 2021, p. x).

The National Association for Educating Young Children (NAEYC) developed Advancing Equity in Early Childhood Education (2019) recommendations for those responsible for facilitating teacher educator preparation programs. A vital recommendation is to prepare current and prospective early childhood educators to provide equitable learning opportunities for all children. Each section of this literature review examines the need for cultivating anti-bias culturally responsive teachers in the early years of education and the benefits to preservice teachers. These topics are also the topics utilized in the learning modules created as part of the dissertation. These topics will ensure that prospective educators understand the historical and systemic issues that have created structural inequities in society, including in early childhood

education. In addition, ensure preparation and field experiences provide opportunities to work effectively with diverse populations (NAEYC, 2019).

Demographics: There's A Shift in Education

The changing demographics can be challenging for some early childhood professionals who have been accustomed to primarily teaching White children (Iruka et al., 2020, p. 28). The challenge for many teachers is the children in their classrooms represent many races, ethnicities, cultures, religions, and languages to name a few (Sullivan, 2016, p. 2). The Bureau of Labor and Statistics reported in 2022, 97.4 percent of educators in preschool and kindergarten are women. From that number 75 percent are White, 17 percent Black, 14 percent Hispanic or Latino, and 4 percent Asian (*Employed Persons by Detailed Occupation, Sex, Race, and Hispanic or Latino Ethnicity: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics*, 2023). Demographics for preschool children ages 3-5, for 2020 enrollment rates were higher for 3- to 4-year-olds who were of Two or more races (47 percent) and White (43 percent) than for those who were Hispanic (33 percent). Additionally, the enrollment rates for 5-year-olds did not measurably differ across racial/ethnic groups (*Enrollment Rates of Young Children*, 2022).

Women in particular have the most influence on young children, because women (across all races and ethnicities) comprise four out of every five primary teachers. These numbers show the magnitude of White female teachers' educational influence. (Iruka et al., 2020, p. 42). Can the lack of diversity amongst teachers create a sense of supremacy? How does this imbalance impact children's learning? As early educators, we recognize the pathway to school and life success starts in the first few years of life. Our role is to ensure all children are at the starting line at the same time with the same resources and opportunities (Iruka et al., 2020, p. 39) and as such

we must work to change the hearts of White teachers (Iruka et al., 2020, p. 42) who view students of color from a bias and/or deficit model (Marco Learning, 2018,).

Preparing Preservice Teachers Through the Course Catalog

Pennsylvania Code 3270.36 (5) minimum requirements for an Assistant Group Supervisor (Teacher) in early childhood education, a high school diploma or a general education development certificate and two years of experience with children (*55 Pa. Code § 3270.36. Assistant Group Supervisor Qualifications and Responsibilities*, 2022). There are multiple pathways to becoming a teacher in early childhood education. This research is focused on entering with at minimum an associate degree in early childhood education.

Professional education provides student teachers basic teaching knowledge, but developing the awareness needed to build trusting relationships when working with children whose, cultures, religions, and socioeconomic status differ from their own is more complex process teacher preparation programs neglect (Gillanders & Procopio, 2019, p. 5). As our country continues to grow as a rich, diverse multicultural nation, it is imperative early childhood teacher educators prepare future teachers to embrace this diversity and provide experiences that affirm all students, families, and communities (Gunn et al., 2020). Resultantly, Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT) coursework and experiences would benefit our future early childhood educators; academically known as preservice teachers. A few teacher education programs prepare teachers to be effective in urban classrooms serving diverse groups of students (Ladson-Billings, 2001).

Culturally responsive teacher educators and researchers attempt to identify the best possible approaches, strategies, techniques, and tools to facilitate preservice teachers developing their culturally responsive pedagogy (Gunn et al., 2020). Many teacher preparation programs

attempt to infuse multicultural perspectives by simply adding one or two courses in multicultural education and/or requiring teacher candidates to complete assignments that explore surface level differences in culture and languages such as sampling different "cultural" foods or learning to say hello in several languages (Assaf et al, 2010).

Teacher educators rarely have the opportunity to explore their own beliefs and attitudes and understand how their teacher education program aligns with effective multicultural teaching and learning (Assaf et al., 2010). With an effective CRT and multicultural education teacher program, culturally relevant teachers understand learning is facilitated when we capitalize on learners' prior knowledge. Rather than seeing students' culture as an impediment to learning, it becomes the vehicle through which they can acquire the official knowledge and skills of the school curriculum (Ladson-Billings, 2001).

Preparing Teachers for Urban Schools (2018) reports, 62 percent of teachers surveyed felt unprepared to teach culturally diverse students. The report details the feelings of new teachers as, wanting more knowledge of their students' cultures and concrete needs, and new teachers needing focused training in the complex sociological issues that impact urban education (Temple University & William Penn Foundation, 2018). Preparing early childhood and early childhood preservice teachers for inclusive settings should be the focus of teacher preparation programs. The need for all teachers to be prepared for inclusive settings has become evident with the growing diversity of children in every classroom (Voss & Bufkin, 2011, p. 338). As such, the need for culturally responsive anti-bias education in the early years of education. The next section introduces preservice teachers to culturally responsive anti-bias education and addressing unconscious and explicit bias.

Introduction To Culturally Responsive Anti-Bias Education

Introducing preservice teachers to Culturally Responsive Anti-Bias Education begins with an awareness of unconscious and explicit bias. Unconscious bias are those unaware negative thoughts, feelings, and stereotypes that we hold towards others regarding their race, gender identity, ethnicity, or social class. We all have unconscious bias, but we must become aware of our thinking and stereotypes (Iruka et al., 2020).

Sometimes a person's bias is obvious, or explicit. Explicit biases are undisguised statements. They are attitudes and beliefs about a group of people applied to all individuals in the group (Derman-Sparks & Edwards, 2020, p.60). Examining one's diversity practices can be, and probably should be, a challenging and at times uncomfortable process, particularly for beginning teachers or those experienced teachers uncertain about the process of change (Jacobson, 2003). Biases can complicate educators' efforts to help students reach their full potential (Capatosto & The Kirwan Institute, 2015). Teacher preparation programs have a responsibility to give preservice teachers time to reflect on unconscious or explicit bias. Preservice teachers need to engage in preparation experiences involving critical analysis of social and educational issues related to equity and be provided opportunities for deep self-reflection (Kulkarni et al., 2021).

Studies reveal teachers have different perceptions of children based on their race and ethnicity, and many of these perceptions are fraught with implicit racial bias (Iruka et al., 2020, p. 51). This implicit bias is also evident in many college child development textbooks that have chapters of research about White, middle-class children, and little to virtually almost nothing about "diverse" children (Derman-Sparks & Edwards, 2020, p. 11). Another well researched example of implicit biases influencing teacher behavior is documentation that African American boys are disproportionately suspended from preschool programs for behavioral issues (Friedman

& Mwenelupembe, 2020, p. 12). Research has documented early childhood classrooms and programs can be places that represent institutional racism and inequitable learning practice through policies and procedures. An example of inequitable learning practices is adultification bias. Adultification bias is the view that Black girls need less protection, support, nurturing, and comfort than White girls (Iruka et al., 2020, pp. 58-59). Teaching requires us to keep growing. Uncovering and eliminating prejudicial ideas and behaviors is a part of this growth (Friedman et al., 2021, p. 13).

Why do we need anti-bias education in the early years of student formation? Effective early childhood educators are committed to the principle all children deserve to develop to their fullest potential. At the same time, the world is not yet a place where all children are equally responded to and have equal opportunity to become all they can be (Derman-Spark & Edwards, 20202, p. 6). Recognizing privilege, institutional racism, and bias is not enough. It is critical for education professionals to be able to implement culturally responsive anti-bias education to support all children's learning, especially Black children and other children of color (Iruka et al., 2020, p.58). ABE is an optimistic commitment to supporting children who live in a highly diverse and yet still inequitable world. Rather than a formula for a particular curriculum, it is an underpinning perspective and framework that permeates everything in early childhood education-including your interaction with children, families, and colleagues (Derman-Sparks & Edwards, 2020, p.10). The focus of the anti-bias framework was not only to address anti-bias practices and beliefs within and outside the early childhood classroom, but to provide children with the tools, language, and skills to address biases that relate to gender, race, ethnicity, disability, and other characteristics (Iruka et al., 2020).

The next level of understanding Culturally Responsive Anti-Bias Education is to define CRT and the research to support this framework. Demographics have shifted in the United States and worldwide in recent years. Because of this shift, preservice teachers have to be equipped with an understanding and acceptance of culturally responsive practices. Applying culturally responsive teaching practices, teachers can meet the needs of young children from diverse backgrounds (Gunn et al., 2021).

To ensure all children have access to truly responsive teaching, intentional efforts must be made to identify how the curriculum, practices, and interactions are reflective of the cultures and home experiences of the children being served (Iruka, et. al, 2020, p. 60). Culturally responsive teachers understand learning is facilitated when we capitalize on learners' prior knowledge. Rather than seeing students' culture as an impediment to learning, it becomes the vehicle through which they can acquire the official knowledge and skills of the school curriculum. However, in order to capitalize on students' cultures, teachers have to know the students' cultures (Ladson-Billings, 2001, pp. 99-100).

Advancing Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging in The Early Years

In the early education profession, there is much talk about celebrating diversity. It is difficult for people to authentically celebrate that which they do not accept or, more importantly, fear. More than anything, we have to learn to simply face the fact everyone is different in some way (Jacobson, 2003, p, 34). Data from Migration Policy reports that from 1990 children ages 0 to 5 with at least one immigrant parent was 2,870,000. That number rose to 5,290,000 in 2021 (Migration Policy, 2022). Research shows there is a shift and increase amongst students in schools. This important shift represents a milestone in racial and cultural dynamics in the

country's schools and was a watershed moment in the changing makeup of the nation that will continue to grow over time (Gillanders & Procopio, 2019).

Early childhood educators have a unique opportunity and obligation to advance equity. Advancing the right to equitable learning opportunities requires recognizing and dismantling the systems of bias that accord privilege to some and are unjust to others (Alanís et al., 2021). Equity work cannot begin until we are grounded in a common understanding about the unique realities and brutalities in our history and present, particularly the structures put in place over time to benefit White people and to simultaneously oppress others (Allen et al., 2021).

As the field of education embraces the change in demographics across the country, it must also acknowledge and understand the systemic institutional practices still in place throughout our educational system. These include inequitable levels of educational access and advancement, barriers to resources and funding, and marginal actions toward culturally relevant practices and policies (Iruka, et al., 2021, p. 26). Building programs where diversity and equity can live, and effectively solve the challenges this process involves, rests on a school culture that nurtures creativity, risk-taking, and co-learning. The goal is to create a space where everyone feels they can offer their perspectives, take risks, make mistakes, and contribute at their own pace. This requires everyone learning from and with each other (Alanis et al., 2021, p. 37). In the early year's classroom, teaching with an equity is a multi-layered effort that is complex in execution. In this approach educators of young children must focus on aspects of classroom arrangement, including the reading center, posters on the walls, and guest you invite into your classroom (Friedman & Mwenelupembe, 2020, p.26).

Reflective practice is required to achieve equitable learning opportunities. Self-awareness, humility, respect, and a willingness to learn are key to becoming a teacher who

equitably and effectively supports all children and families (Advancing Equity in Early Childhood Education Position Statement, n.d.). Content and the environment must be reflective of a variety of cultures (The Wiley Handbook of Early Childhood Care and Education, 2019). James A. Banks explains the resistance to multicultural curriculum as; opposition to a multicultural curriculum approach to education is intertwined with ideological opposition. Those who oppose this approach believe this curriculum approach hold the view that knowledge is a form of power and that a multicultural perspective on U.S. society threatens the current power structure. They believe the current mainstream curriculum upholds and reinforces the existing social, economic, and political structure. Multicultural perspectives and diverse viewpoints promote social and social reconstruction, legitimizing their importance (Banks, 2003).

If implemented in thoughtful creative, and effective ways, multicultural education, has the potential to transform schools and other educational institutions in ways that will enable them to prepare students to live and function effectively in the coming century (Banks, 2007, p. 81, as cited in Banks & Banks, 2004). A curriculum that focuses on the experiences of mainstream Americans and largely ignores the experiences, cultures, and histories of other ethnic, racial, cultural, language, and religious groups has negative consequences for both mainstream students and students of color (Banks, 2003, p.242). The five dimensions of multicultural education. Are as follows: (1) content integration, (2) the knowledge construction process, (3) prejudice reduction, (4) an equity pedagogy, and (5) an empowering school culture and social structure (Banks, 2007, pp.83-85). U.S. students can view their culture from the perspectives of other cultures and groups. When people view their culture from the point of view of another culture, they can understand their own culture more fully, to see how it is unique and distinct from other

cultures, and to understand better how it relates to and interacts with other cultures (Banks, 2003, p. 243).

Anti-Bias Framework: The Core Four Goals of Anti-Bias Education

An anti-bias inclusive community that supports each child and family's background sets the stage for productively handling new challenges (LeeKennan & Nimmo, 2016, p. 67). Building an Anti-bias program is a way to positively respond to the challenges facing children and families in our highly diverse and still inequitable world (Olsen Edwards, 2017, p.78). Anti-bias Education goals were developed from the need to identify and prevent the harmful emotional and psychological impacts on children from societal prejudice and bias (Derman-Sparks & Edwards, 2020, p. 5). From birth onward, all children are on a developmental journey, actively forming both their individual, personal identities, and their social group identities (racial, gender, family structure, culture, and so on) (Derman-Sparks & Olsen Edwards, 2016, p. 14). The goals are as follow:

Goal 1 Identity: designed to strengthen children's sense of self and family

Goal 2 Diversity: to support their joy in human diversity

Goal 3 Justice: to enable them to gain the cognitive and social and emotional tools to recognize hurtful behavior

Goal 4 Activism: to develop the confidence and skills to work with others to build inclusive, fairer ways of being in a community (Derman-Sparks & Edwards, 2020, p. 4).

The anti-bias approach, comparable to a developmentally appropriate approach, considers everything that takes place in the early years program. In this approach a program considers the learning environment, one-on-one teachable moments, both pre-planned and spontaneous

curriculum, professional development, and partnerships and relationships with families and staff (Olsen Edwards, 2017).

When teachers and families integrate the four Anti-bias Education goals into teaching and childrearing and engage children in positive, informative conversations about human diversity, children develop the conviction who they are is valued and important (Derman-Sparks & Edwards, 2020, p. 6).

Getting To Know Students, Families, and Communities

It does take a village to educate students! Basic learning begins at home with the family and within the community. Children learn from their parents, peers in school, their community, and religious instructions (Msangi, 2012). Urie Bronfenbrenner's (1979) Bioecological theory provides substantial support for upholding practices of involving families in early care and education. This theory emphasizes the developmental notion that biological predispositions and environmental influences interactively affect human growth (Couchenour & Chrisman, 2013, p.8). Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological theory is organized using Ecosystems Theory. *Microsystems* is the setting in which the individual lives, or other near environment. *Mesosystems* is the relationship among contexts in the microsystem. *Exosytems* is a system removed from direct access of the individual and has an indirect, rather than a direct, effect. *Macrosystems* is the culture in which an individual lives. Chronosystems is the time or the sociohistorical context (Couchenour & Chrisman, 2013, p. 9). The interactions and relationships between the systems influence the individual considerably. The microsystem (the family, peer groups, early childhood institutions or neighborhoods) as the key unit around the child has the direct influence on the child when the two microsystems (teacher and parent) start to work

together to educate the child. Teachers can interact with and partner with parents and provide education about the developmental needs of their children (Msangi, 2012).

Cultures influences so much of who we are that is easy to forget these influences vary from culture to culture (Sullivan, 2016, p. 46). Young children feel the way their family does things is natural and normal. They bring that feeling with them when they enter your classroom or program (Derman-Sparks & Edwards, 2020, p. 79). Cultures do have distinctive learning style patterns, but the great variation among individuals within groups means educators must use diverse teaching strategies with all students (Guild, 1994, p. 16). Some of the elements of culture that influence learning preferences include patterns of communication, values prioritization, social interactions, performance styles, decision making preferences, and strategies for solving conflict (Sullivan, 2016, p. 46). Our ability to give every child a chance to succeed depends upon a full understanding of culture and learning styles (Guild, 1994, p. 16).

Children's learning is facilitated when teaching practices, curricula, and learning environments build on children's strengths and are developmentally, culturally, and linguistically appropriate for each child (Advancing Equity in Early Childhood Education Position Statement, n.d.). Making the children's family cultures visible and integrated into one's daily plan is essential. It is also necessary to honor the diversity of cultures in your program. No matter who people are, how they speak, their place of origin, or their way of living, together you are a community (Derman-Sparks & Edwards, 2020, p. 87).

The inclusion of nontraditional families in the early childhood curriculum often depends on dividual teachers' understanding of its importance, prior training and mentoring, and comfort level in discussing issues such as homosexuality (Gillanders & Procopio, 2019). Creating gender inclusive environments is a necessary foundation, but it is not sufficient for achieving gender

justice in early childhood. A focus on inclusion can be thought of as pro-diversity-inviting all voices to the table (Nicholson et al., 2019, p. 17).

All children—including those with disabilities—need to see themselves and their experiences reflected in the lessons, materials, and surroundings of their learning environments (NAEYC 2019). Such inclusion is not only ideal for educational settings, but also an imperative to meet legal requirements and ethical standards (Erbrederis Meyer, 2021). In high-quality QRIS programs, children with identified disabilities make better progress with physical skills, in cognition, in communication, and in social and emotional development as compared with children in segregated special education programs (Derman-Sparks & Edwards, 2020, p. 152).

Immigrant families have come to the United States for multiple reasons and from all over the globe (Derman-Sparks & Edwards, 2020, p. 83). When immigrant families enroll their children in US early education programs, it is often a mix of hope and apprehension. Many immigrant families are grateful and feel optimistic (Gillanders & Procopio, 2019, p. 57). Many families-whether refugees or immigrants-come from countries where school experiences are very different from those in the United Sates. All families want to be involved and support their children in their new school (Friedman & Mwenelupembe, 2020, p. 40). Some families worry their children's teachers won't understand all aspects of their culture or will be unable to advocate for their children in the classroom (Gillanders & Procopio, 2019, p. 57).

Bilingual children have unique characteristics (including family structures, multiple languages, and racial, ethnic, and cultural differences) that provide rich environments for language development (Alanís et al., 2021, p. 74). Language becomes a critical skill for navigating the world and for providing deep feelings of connection and identity (Derman-Sparks & Edwards, 2020, p. 79). It is important for early childhood educators to be aware children

growing up with two languages will use both languages to learn-not only in the early education setting but also in their home and their community (Alanís et al., 2021, p. 74).

Relationships are the cornerstone of the community of learners. At the heart of a caring and equitable community of learners are meaningful relationships developed and nurtured by teachers with children, positive relationships with peers that are modeled and supported by teachers, and teachers' relationships with families (Friedman et al., 2021). Effective family engagement is a critical marker of quality within early childhood programs. It's also essential for enhancing children's learning and families' well-being (Alanís et al., 2021, p.32).

Historical Context of Educating Black Children

All children are unique, intelligent and are like a locked safe waiting to be unlocked and showcasing their talents. Black children are waiting to show the world their exceptional intellectual ability, creativity, and originality. They can't wait to begin learning all those wonderful things they've been dying to know (Sullivan, 2016, p. 1). Despite BIPOC children becoming the majority, this demographic shift has not improved their experiences. Despite their numerical advantage, some BIPOC children feel disconnected and excluded. BIPOC children do not have the power of their shift in demographics to create equal treatment, as they continue to face social and economic challenges, these students are still viewed as lower class citizens (Iruka et al., 2020). Previous approaches to addressing BIPOC children were flawed because they failed to acknowledge race or the ironic experience of black children's way of being in the early year's classroom.

Early childhood teachers need to be cognizant and understand the racial history of early childhood education and the racism in current early childhood programs (Alanís et al., 2021, p. 114). The High/Scope Perry Preschool Project, which began in 1962, is the focus of an on-going

longitudinal study—conducted by the High/Scope Educational Research Foundation—of 123 high-risk African American children (Parks, 2000, pg. 1). With a focus on serving three-and four-year olds in a center-based program with a home-visiting component. The Perry Preschool Project, focused on promoting children's social, language, and cognitive skills through hands-on play with a specially trained teacher (Iruka et al., 2020, p. 10). In essence, the goal of the Perry Preschool Project was to address Black children's inherent deficits and to create better Americans (Alanís et al., p. 114). BIPOC children have increased and become the majority. Despite becoming the majority in terms of demographics, BIPOC children face hurdles due to social and economic disparities. These hurdles bolster a sense of exclusion and disconnection.

The High/Scope Educational Research Foundation's longitudinal study followed both the preschool and control group of children from their pre-school years through their forties (Derman-Sparks, 2016, p. 93). The study was initiated in the 1960's in a climate rife with civil unrest and overt racism, Black children were viewed as culturally, socially, and economically "deprived" and living in a culture of poverty (Alanís et al., 2021, p. 114). Most of these children's families lived in a housing project in the African American segregated neighborhood, across from the segregated public primary school, which housed the Perry Preschool. Heads of families included two-parents, single parents, and, in a few cases, grandparents (Derman-Sparks, 2016, p.94). From the onset, the Perry Preschool Project and other programs of this time-coupled with the War on Poverty-sought to fix children from families with low income rather than address the structural racism and poverty (Alanís et al., 2021, p. 114). Early years teachers contend with understanding the racial historical context of the field. The High/Scope Perry Preschool Project shed light on the challenges Black children faced. The longitudinal study

highlighted the need to address structural racism and poverty rather than focusing on individual deficits.

Addressing structural and intentional racism in current early childhood education programs typically follows one of two approaches: the color-blind approach and/or the celebration of diversity approach (Doucet & Adair, 2013, p. 89). Both these approaches fail to acknowledge that everyone has lived in a system that is racist; we all come with biases and are inundated with images and messages that influence how we think about and respond to one another (Alanís et al., 2021, p. 115). In many early childhood classrooms, well-intentioned teachers across the racial and ethnic spectrum misinterpret students' ways of being, exploring, learning, processing, communicating, defiance, and disruption (Gillanders & Procopio, 2019, p. 37). Black children come from a distinct, often not fully understood, culture that is deep rooted in West African culture, traditions, values, and language. The irony is when starting school, Black children are expected to have already mastered European culture, but their counterparts are not expected to do the same about other cultures (Sullivan, 2016, p. 47).

Ethnical-racial Reflections in Curriculum, Lessons, and Activities

Classrooms—and the educational materials chosen, like children's books—often reflect the values and beliefs prevalent in a traditional White ethos (Wanless & Crawford, 2016). Most early childhood educators are White and female, their ability to engage young children in honest and developmentally appropriate conversations about race(ism) and discrimination is vital (Wright, 2020). The aforementioned colorblind or color mute approach is not the answer to addressing structural and intentional racism in current early childhood education. There is no evidence that ignoring visible differences benefits anyone (The Wiley Handbook of Early Childhood Care and Education, 2019, p. 154). Understanding the importance of engaging in

open conversations surrounding race and discrimination in the early years of education is vital, especially in programs where Eurocentric values are prominent. The transition towards a multicultural framework not only promotes the development of conscious ethnic identity but is a benefit to everyone is the early years learning environment.

Ethnic-racial development of children includes five interconnected dimensions that work together to shape how they think about, make sense of, and evaluate their own ethnicity-race as well as the ethnicity-race of others. The five dimensions of Ethnic-Racial Development are as follow: Awareness, Self-related processes, Other-related processes, Knowledge, and Racism (Rogers et al., 2021, p. 7). As children grow up and have diverse experiences in the world, these five dimensions of Ethnic-Racial Development become more complex and integrated (Rogers et al., 2021, p.7). Because ethnicity is usually invisible and unconscious, societal norms have been constructed around racial, ethnic, and cultural frameworks, values, and priorities are referred to as "standard American culture" rather than as "ethnic identity" (Clark & Caffarella, 1999, p. 39). With Ethnic-Racial Development, everyone benefits from the development of a conscious ethnic identity and benefits as well when multicultural framework is used in their learning environment (Clark & Caffarella, 1999, p. 39).

There is a possibility for anti-bias education themes and activities in nearly every aspect of early childhood education. For instance, themes of self-discovery, family, and community can be explored deeply with meaning by incorporating abilities, economic class, gender, and racial identity as essential parts of such themes (Derman-Sparks & Edwards, 2020). Literature, videos, STEAM, museums, learning centers, social media, holidays, our collective voices, to name but a few, are ways to make learning and thinking visible, and representative of all students' cultures. Good stories capture the heart, mind, and imagination. They entrance and engage children and

give teachers an opportunity to be their most lively and creative selves ((Derman-Sparks & Edwards, 2020, p. 44). Children's literature has enormous potential for helping children develop positive racial identity. Books can be mirrors in which children see and savor images and representations similar to their own lives and experiences (Wanless & Crawford, 2016). Using multicultural children's books that focus on sensitive topics requires consideration of children's ages to determine developmentally appropriate ways to present the content. Defaulting to the belief a child is too young is not an option; racial bias can start as early as 2 1/2 to 3 years of age (Wright, 2020).

In anti-bias classrooms, visual images and learning materials are culturally welcoming for all the children and their families and immediately make clear all forms of diversity are welcome and honored (Derman-Sparks & Edwards, 2020, p. 43). Exploring cultures through playful learning helps create authentic, positive learning experiences for young children, valuing the knowledge and traditions children and families bring to the classroom. This exploration also ensures that teaching practices in early childhood educations institutions are democratic (Friedman & Mwenelupembe, 2020, p. 32). Many anti-bias educators use storytelling with a special set of dolls. For each doll, the teacher creates a name and unique identity, which stays constant throughout the school year. Teachers slowly build a collection of persona dolls, some reflecting the specific children and families and others introducing new kinds of diversity (Derman-Sparks & Edwards, 2020, p. 47). One of the most important ways teachers can let students know they are valued and respected is to have conversations with them about home, family, and community life. These conversations are essential to culturally responsive teaching (Saifer et al., 2011). All of this speaks to the importance of preservice teachers receiving coursework and instruction on visibility and representation in curriculum, lessons, and activities.

Authentic Assessments: Observation, Documentation, Presentation, and Reflection

Assessment and reflection are an essential element of culturally responsive standards-based teaching (Saifer et al., 2011, p. 137). *Assessment* is a systematic means of collecting and documenting information about children's learning and development to monitor children's progress toward learning goals, make curriculum decisions, and improve teaching practices (Scott-Little & Reschke, 2022, p. 8). *Authentic assessment*, however, is the process of learning about all the capabilities a child has, including where they are and where they are going. Such an assessment is thoughtful and intentional (Alanís et al., 2021, p. 90). Authentic assessment strategies are culturally responsive. Culturally responsive means that we, as early educators, learn about, build upon, and provide opportunities to understand all the children and families we work with in our programs (Alanís et al., 2021, p. 91).

Petipas & Buchanan (2022) list four steps to the authentic assessment cycle. The first step in the cycle is *observation*. Observation is the heart of early childhood assessment and is a key guide in how teachers support children. It includes gathering, recording, and reflecting on information about children's progress. Quality observations communicate each child's individuality and context (Petitpas & Buchanan, p.4). After careful observation, the early childhood educator begins the second step in the assessment cycle-*documentation*. Documentation involves looking at all of the observational notes and records, photographs, and other materials collected. We put these things together to tell the child's story (Alanís et al., p.91). *Presentation and Reflection* is the third step of the authentic assessment process. Reflection is the process of looking at the information that's been documented, thinking about what it means about the child, and making decisions about learning experiences and interactions that would best support the child's development (Friedman et al., 2021, p. 161). The presentation

and reflection can be done in several formats; each has value in a different way. A presentation can be as simple as inviting a family into the class and having the child share work from a documentation piece within their ePortfolio. Teachers may facilitate more formal gatherings or family celebrations to share collective work and documentation of the group (Alanís et al., 2021, p. 92). Early childhood educators use assessments tools for a variety of purposes, each of which is important for understanding and making informed decisions (Friedman et al., p. 162). The fourth and final step in the *authentic assessment cycle*, which helps the educator think about where the children are, then developmentally and emotionally and consider what to do next in supporting their development. Do some children need more time? Are others ready for the next step? (Alanís et al., p. 92). The authentic assessment cycle highlights the following areas, observation, documentation, presentation, and reflection, as an example of the use of authentic assessment, early educators in New Zealand adopt the Learning Stories approach to assessment.

In New Zealand, educators use the Learning Stories approach to assess children's progress. This narrative tool is a record of a child's life in the classroom and school community based on teachers' observations of the child at play and work. It tells a story written *to* the child that is meant to be shared *with* the family (Escamilla, 2021). Educators typically have children with a range of backgrounds and abilities in their classroom. It is essential to take intentional steps to make sure all children are assessed fairly and in the way that best suits the child (Friedman et al., 2021, p. 162).

> Learning Stories break away from the more traditional methods of teaching, learning, and assessment that often view children and families from a deficit perspective, highlighting what they cannot do. Learning Stories offer an opportunity to reimagine children as

curious, knowledgeable, playful learners and teachers as critical thinkers, creative writers,

and advocates of play (Escamilla, 2021, p. 4).

Learning Stories provide a transformative approach where children are seen as capable and

empowered learners. Early years educators are viewed as facilitators of curiosity, creativity, and

play, therefore reshaping the early learning environment into an environment that is inclusive

and empowering.

Culturally Responsive Teacher Preparation Programs and Field Experience

The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) Higher

Education Standards recommends teacher preparation programs. These programs develop

competent early childhood educators by integrating high-quality field experiences that support

candidates' proficiency in the Professional Standards and Competencies for Early Childhood

Educators and that provide multiple opportunities for candidates to observe and practice with

young children (The National Association for the Education of Young Children, 2021, pp. 31-

34). High-quality field experiences build educators' strong foundational understandings of child

development, family relationships, and community connections in early childhood education.

These experiences offer multiple opportunities to apply that knowledge in authentic settings and

situations. The integration of pedagogical content knowledge with developmentally appropriate

and equitable teaching practices in carefully chosen and sequenced field experiences helps early

childhood teacher candidates hone their skills as they become professionals (Lux et al., 2022).

Introducing future teachers to teaching in urban public schools is therefore part of a long-term

strategy for empowering change in urban communities. Students are immersed in teaching

contexts that require culturally responsive curriculum that reflects students' identities and

experiences. The field-based experience incorporates critical reflection to support preservice

teachers' understanding and appreciation of urban life, communities of practice, and culturally responsive teaching strategies (Penn State Center, Philadelphia, 2020).

The Montana Early Childhood Education Knowledge Base Program is an example of a reflective practice tool. The tool that describes a progression of knowledge and skills that includes opportunities for faculty, teacher-candidates, and in-service teachers to reflect on and write about the ways they demonstrate each standard and competency on a continuum of development (Lux et al., 2022). Visual analysis is another framework to use with teacher candidates. Video Analysis Framework was created to support its development through focused observation, identifying and disrupting bias, and accurately interpreting classroom interactions. The framework encourages teachers to imagine holding a set of binoculars as they view videos of teacher-child interactions in early learning settings and engage in a series of interrelated professional vision skills. Preservice and in-service teachers both benefit from (Packard et al., 2022).

Moving Beyond Awareness of Equity

All early childhood educators have a professional obligation to advance equity (Advancing Equity in Early Childhood Education Position Statement, 2019). Integrating an equity approach to diversity in early childhood education programs calls for both visionary and strategic leadership. It requires critical assessment and change in all parts of an ECE program and engagement of the program-teachers, staff, families, and children (Alanís et al., 2021, p.36). Advancing equity can seem overwhelming for an educator working everyday with young children. You may have different family languages within your classroom. Your background and experiences may be very different from that of the children you teach (Friedman & Mwenelupembe, 2020, p.3). There are things an ECE educator should do. Advocate on behalf of

young children, families, and the early childhood profession. Speak out against unfair policies or practices and challenge biased perspectives. Look for ways to work collectively with others who are committed to equity (Advancing Equity in Early Childhood Education Position Statement). Building programs where diversity and equity can live, and solving the challenges this involves, rests on a school culture that nurtures creativity, risk-taking, and co-learning. The goal is to create a space where everyone can offer their perspectives, take risks, make mistakes, and contribute at their own pace (Alanís et al., p. 37). In addition to advocating for their students, educators must sustain their education practices. Some states, New York and Pennsylvania, have developed culturally responsive sustaining education (CR-SE) frameworks and guides for educators to continue the path to sustain education.

Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy views schools as places where the cultural ways of being in communities of color are sustained, rather than eradicated (California Department of Education, 2022). According to Pennsylvania's CR-SE Competencies, adopted by the Pennsylvania Department of Education, Culturally Relevant Sustaining Educators take an anti-racist stance, which includes acknowledging the systemic inequities that hinder equal access for all learners and stand in solidarity with and act on behalf of every learner. New York State Department of Education CR-SE framework is grounded in four principles: Welcoming and Affirming Environment, High Expectations and Rigorous Instruction, Inclusive Curriculum, and Ongoing Professional Learning. Additionally,

> The Culturally Responsive-Sustaining (CR-S) framework is intended to help education stakeholders create student-centered learning environments that affirm cultural identities; foster positive academic outcomes; develop students' abilities to connect across lines of difference; elevate historically marginalized voices; empower students as agents of social

change; and contribute to individual student engagement, learning, growth, and achievement through the cultivation of critical thinking (New York State Department of Education, et.al., pp. 6-7).

Developing a teaching practice that is humanizing and culturally sustaining is an ongoing, iterative journey, and there is no simple formula or script for doing it (Doucet, 2017, p. 198). When teacher educator programs plan for future teachers to be culturally relevant, responsive, and sustaining, they are focused on cultivating development of educators' humanizing, transgressive, and liberatory pedagogies and practices (Carter Andrews, 2021, p. 421). The journey to becoming a culturally responsive anti-bias educator in the early years of education begins with teacher preparation programs that are dedicated to diversity, equity, and inclusion.

Chapter Summary

This literature review presents the topics and overview of the implementation of culturally responsive anti-bias education in the early year's teacher preparation program. Each section of the literature represents the topics that will be outlined within the following learning modules. The research suggests the following. First, the areas and topics teacher preparation should focus on to prepare preservice teachers to work with diverse groups of students. Second, the historical context and current framework of culturally responsive anti-bias classrooms. Third, how preservice teachers can put current frameworks into practice within their future classrooms. Finally, this research suggests an effective approach to field experiences for preservice teachers.

CHAPTER III: METHOD

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to gain insight from educators, early years preservice teachers, in-service teachers, professional learning instructors, and advocates of early childhood education on preparing teachers for teaching diverse groups of learners in preschool classrooms. Using a series of 7 self-developed learning modules which are focused on cultivating culturally responsive practices in preschool classrooms, the study participants provided feedback on the learning modules and the research question.

This chapter provides a detailed description of the following: chosen research design, rationale for the chosen research design, participants, data collection, data analysis, and background of the researcher, and proposed timeline. This section will also address these specific research questions on the perceptions of early childhood and education preservice instructors, advocates, and professional learning trainers:

Question 1: How do experts in early childhood education explain the status of culturally responsive and sustaining education in preservice teaching?

Question 2: How effective does one anticipate the Culturally Responsive Sustaining Education (CRSE) in Early Learning Modules will be in encouraging preservice teachers to engage in culturally responsive and sustaining education practices?

In addition, this dissertation also has self-developed Learning Modules which were informed by the literature review on culturally responsive anti-bias educators in the early years.

Research Design

Through a pilot of the learning modules, the researcher used a qualitative research approach. As educators completed the learning modules, through professional learning training, these very same participants participated in online focus groups to gain feedback on the self-developed learning modules. Focus groups are used for generating information on collective views, and the meanings that lie behind those views. They are also useful in generating a rich understanding of participants' experiences and beliefs (Mishra, 2016, p. 2). This type of approach gave the researcher an understanding of the posed research questions and insights into the experiences and preparedness of in-service and preservice teachers in the early years in diverse environments.

Participants

The online focus group participants were expert education professionals from early childhood education, secondary education, and higher education. The participants have experience in culturally responsive anti-bias education as advocates, professional development trainers, and instructors in higher education. The researcher was able to recruit five participants who responded to participate in the pilot of the learning modules and one-time online focus group. Participants were required to complete two of the seven self-developed learning modules. However, participants were open to complete the entire seven series of learning modules.

Data Collection

In this qualitative study, open ended questions were used to receive feedback from participants. The focus group was conducted online using Zoom online video conferencing. Participants were emailed a flyer to participate in two of the seven learning modules and to rsvp participation of the online focus group. The link was provided to the Zoom meeting and

participants were sent an email invitation. There were five participants that completed at least two of the seven learning modules and joined the online focus group.

Data Analysis

The researcher used the Creswell & Creswell approach to data analysis. Organizing of the data analysis process is a six-step process outlined by Creswell & Creswell (2018),

- *Step 1 Organize and prepare the data for analysis.* Transcribing focus groups, surveys, optically scanning material, typing up notes, cataloging visual material, and sorting and arranging data into different types depending on the sources of information

- *Step 2 Read or look at all the data.* Reflect on what general ideas participants are saying. What is the tone of the ideas? What is the impression of the overall depth, credibility, and use of the information?

- *Step 3 Start coding all of the data.* Taking text data gathered during data collection, segmenting sentences into categories, and labeling those categorizing with a term.

- *Step 4 Generate a description and themes.* Use the code process to generate a description of the setting or people as well as categories or themes for analysis.

- *Step 5 Representing the description and themes* Use a narrative to convey the findings of the analysis (pp.193-195).

Background of the Researcher

The role of the researcher is a delicate position. Every researcher has to take a flexible and changing role in order to meet the situational demands for building a collaborative relationship (Pérez et al., 1998, p. 241). Teachers at all levels devote their lives to research

(Booth et al., 2016, p.9). At the age of 18, the researcher began their career in Early Childhood Education. After 24 years of experience and advocacy, the researcher has had the opportunity to explore many topics of quality, equity, and diversity in this field of education. Currently, the researcher's role is an Education Instructor at the local community college; the researcher's responsibility is to prepare preservice teachers to teach diverse groups of students. The various roles and positions held in early education places me as an insider. As the researcher and the developer of the learning modules, I bring my own ideals and viewpoints to the topic of culturally responsive anti-bias education in the early years of education.

Chapter Summary

In summary, Chapter 3 Methods outlines forthcoming Chapter 4 Results. This research seeks to gain an understanding and perspective of experts in education, early childhood education, professional learning trainers, and advocates, on preparing preservice and in-service teachers on preparing teachers to teach diverse groups of learners in preschool classrooms. Using seven self-developed learning modules focused on culturally responsive anti-bis education in preschool settings, the online research study focus group involves participants who completed the learning modules. The qualitative approach involves expert education professionals from different levels, exploring their perceptions of current practices and recommendations for enhancing teacher preparation in culturally responsive anti-bias education. The researcher, with 25 years of experience in Early Childhood Education, holds a position as an Education Instructor, bringing a unique insider perspective to the study. The chapter details the research design, participants, data collection, and analysis methods, highlighting the researcher's role and background in the field.

CHAPTER IV: RESULTS AND FINDINGS

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative online focus group is to answer the following research questions:

Question 1: How do experts in early childhood education explain the status of culturally responsive and sustaining education in preservice teaching?

Question 2: How effective do you anticipate the Culturally Responsive Sustaining Education in Early Learning Modules will be in encouraging preservice teachers to engage in culturally responsive and sustaining education practices?

Chapter Four explores the results and findings of the one online focus group conducted with expert educators. In addition to the dissertation research questions, participants shared expertise and experiences on a series of prepared focus group questions. This chapter also introduces the self-developed Learning Modules, Cultivating Culturally Responsive Anti-Bias Educators in the Early Years.

During the online focus group, the participants were asked five prepared questions to guide the discussion. The questions were as follow:

Table 1

Focus Group Questions

Question 1: Describe your Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion coursework and filed experience from your teacher preparation program. Did your coursework and experience prepare you to work with diverse groups of students?
Question 2: From your perspective, how has the current political climate impacted your instruction on anti-bias education?
Question 3: What are you seeing in terms of diversity, equity, inclusion and belonging in your practice?
Question 4: Provide feedback on the Cultivating Culturally Responsive Anti-Bias Educators in the Early Years Learning Modules. Are there suggestions or recommendations of topics to add or replace?
Question 5: Would you use the modules or the contents of the modules/field experience procedures in your teacher preparation program, professional development, and/or classroom practices?

Note. The table represents the specific focus group questions regarding Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging among expert educators. The questions are representative of topics such as coursework and field experience, political climate, teacher preparation in the early years of education, and the self-developed learning modules. Additionally, the focus group questions address feedback of the self-developed learning modules.

Participants were initially recruited by emails to colleagues from Pennsylvania Educators Diversity Consortium (PEDC). A flyer was also posted on behalf of the researcher by the National Association for the Education of Young Children to their online discussion forum Hello. This flyer was also shared by colleagues at the researcher's request. The goal was to recruit seven participants for the online focus group.

Focus Group Participants

The five online participants consisted of professionals from early childhood education, education (K-12), and higher education. There were three women and two men ranging from 40 through 60 years of age. Their current positions include assistant professor in culturally relevant studies, consultants, professional development specialist, and English professor. Each participant

worked with early childhood aged children aged from birth through age 8. Due to the online focus group format, participants represented Pennsylvania, Georgia, and Michigan. The flexibility associated with online focus groups creates opportunities to expand the pool of potential participants and to conduct focus groups that would otherwise be difficult, if not impossible, to bring into a central location for face-to-face group meeting (Stewart & Shamdasani, 2016, p.52). Having participants from other states helps to give differing perspectives of early childhood education and broaden the online focus group conversation differences exist in early childhood education from state to state. Recent early childhood quality improvement efforts also emphasize the need to build cohesion across the fragmented early childhood landscape (Bassok et al., 2016, p.1627). The online focus group of professionals in this study helped to broaden the researchers' understanding of early education on a national level. *Note: Seven people signed up to participate in the focus group. One person had a family emergency on the day of the focus group. The other person did not give notice of their absence.*

Breakdown of the Focus Group

The following Table provides further context for each of the participants:

Table 2

Focus Group Participants

Participant 1	Female, Black, who is approximately 60 years of age. Holds a Doctorate in Education and has experience teaching from the early years through to higher education. Participant 1 is currently an advocate and consultant for diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging
Participant 2	A Black male who is approximately 50 years of age and holds a Doctorate in Education. Has experience with school age children through to higher education.

Participant 3	A Black female who is approximately 60 years of age. Participant 3 has a master's degree in early childhood education and has held a variety of early childhood positions over the last 30 years. Those positions include Quality Advisor, Technical Assistance, and Coaching, all positions were related to early childhood education.
Participant 4	A Black female who is approximately 60 years of age. Participant 4 has been in early childhood education for 40 years and holds a master's degree. Currently, participant 3 is a contractual consultant who focuses on anti-bias education when providing services to early years programs.
Participant 5	A Black male who is approximately 40 years of age. Participant 5 is an instructor of English at a technical college and has taught school age children in after school care.

Note. This table represents the demographic, education, and professional backgrounds. The education and professional experience extend across different educational settings, from the early years of education to higher education. The education expert participants have a common focus of advancing diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging.

The Learning Modules

Prior to the online focus group, participants were required to view any two of the seven learning modules from the Cultivating Culturally Responsive Anti-Bias Educators in the Early Years. These learning modules were available on two platforms: Loom: Async and Video Messaging and Udemy Online Learning and Teaching Marketplace. Prior to viewing the learning modules, participants had received the description of each module on the focus group flyer. The learning modules were free to view, however, Udemy required users to create an account. Each platform tracked the number of views, while Udemy also tracked the location of each participant.

Learning Module 1: Introduction to Culturally Responsive Anti-Bias Education

Preservice and in-service teachers are introduced to Culturally Responsive Anti-Bias Education in the Early Years of education. In Learning Module 1, participants will use reflective practices to reflect on some of the following questions: Why we need culturally responsive anti-bias education in the early years; What is our responsibility as educators to this work; What are the implications of culturally responsive anti-bias education to the classroom.

Learning Module 2: Advancing Equity Culturally Appropriate Preschool Environments

This is a Call To Action! Time to advance equity in the preschool classroom by creating culturally appropriate preschool environments. Learning Module 2 explores creating fair and equitable environments, culturally sustaining and humanizing practices, and integrating multicultural content into schools.

Learning Module 3: Getting To Know Your Students

In this module, preservice and in-service teachers get to know their students through their culture, village, and families. Creating anti-bias relationships with students, families, and communities allows teachers to teach learn from their students' cultures and in return create individualized learning.

Learning Module 4: The Four Core Goals of Anti-Bias Education

The Four Core Goals of Anti-Bias Education is a framework early childhood educators can utilize to become advocates for young children's Identity, Diversity, Justice, and Activism. Through this framework, children gain a sense of their own (and their peers') identity, culture, gender, and ethnicity.

Learning Module 5: Building Your Anti-Bias Culturally Responsive Program: Representations in Curriculum, Lessons, and Activities

Do children see themselves in the classroom, in the curriculum, activities? In Module 5, preservice and in-service teachers reflect on representations in the curriculum, lessons, and activities. Representations make learning visible for young children.

Learning Module 6: Observations. Authentic Assessments, and Video Analysis

Module 6 focuses on observations, authentic assessments, and analysis through video. Teachers must be aware of cultural bias when observing students and assessing their learning. We review a few techniques early childhood teachers can use to create equity, visibility, and reflection while observing and assessing.

Learning Module 7: Field Experience and Teacher Preparation

Is your teacher preparation program partnering with schools and childcare centers in diverse student populations? This module is directed to teacher preparation programs and the role programs play in cultivating culturally responsive anti-bias educators. High quality teacher preparation programs partner with high quality schools!

Procedures

Prior to the online focus group, the researcher reflected on the six tenets of Culturally Responsive Focus Groups (CRFG). According to research from Rodriguez et al. (2011), CRFG researchers should ask themselves the following questions to check their assumptions and reflexivity:

1. What are the participants' social and cultural identities?

2. How do the participants' social and cultural identities inform their unique communication and/or relationship characteristics that are important for me to acknowledge within this research?

3. What are the naturally occurring environments the participants already share?

4. How can I create and/or join a context that feels comfortable and affirming to participants?

5. How do I best acknowledge my own social and cultural identities and minimize the distance between myself and participants?

6. How do I best elicit the rich information these participants can share about their storied lives that in turn will make the research story most rich and representative of their experience (Rodriguez et al., 2011, p.405)?

In applying the six tenets of Culturally Responsive Focus Group, the researcher was able to ensure a reflective process and inclusive approach. Additionally, the researcher was able to honor the participants' social and cultural identities. This approach fostered an environment favorable to producing rich and authentic feedback from participants.

At the start of the online focus group, the researcher began introducing themself to the participants. The participants then volunteered to introduce themselves to the group sharing their experiences, location, and current positions following procedures outlined by the researcher below:

- *Provide information*: Share details about the focus group, including its duration, and format (in-online). Discuss the types of questions that will be asked, and the level of participation expected from participants.

- *Confidentiality and anonymity*: Assure participants their responses will be kept confidential and anonymized. Explain any measures taken to ensure their privacy and the steps to protect their personal information.

- *Voluntary participation*: Emphasize participation in the focus group is voluntary and they are free to withdraw at any time without negative consequences. Make it clear they can choose not to answer specific questions if they feel uncomfortable.

- *Discussion of risks and benefits*: Discuss any potential risks associated with participating in the focus group, such as sharing personal experiences or sensitive information. Additionally, highlight the benefits of participation, such as the opportunity to contribute to research or influence decision-making.

- *Question & Answer and clarification*: Allow participants to ask questions about the focus group, the topics to be discussed, or any concerns they may have. Provide clear and honest answers to ensure their understanding and address any potential misconceptions.

- *Consent agreement*: Once participants have had an opportunity to ask questions and are satisfied with the information provided, ask them to provide their consent via an emailed consent form.

Before the start of the single session focus group began, participants were reminded the focus group was being recorded. Zoom has a feature that informs participants when the meeting is being recorded and participants are prompted to confirm that they are aware. The participants were also informed the focus group was being transcribed through Zoom and would be saved for research purposes and would not be shared. Following all the above announcements of the procedures, the researcher asked the participants if there were additional questions before the focus group proceeded. After the conclusion of the focus group, the researcher saved the transcript of the Zoom meeting. The transcript was retrieved from Zoom's cloud service. The

researcher reviewed the transcript and saved the transcription to Microsoft Word and Excel for editing and coding.

Data Results and Analysis

The researcher used a hybrid approach of inductive and deductive coding. Deduction involves applying a predefined theoretical framework by comparing it to observations, while induction starts with observations and aims to identify a pattern within them (Proudfoot, 2022). The researcher used the process below to code participant responses in the focus group transcript and for formatting into Microsoft Excel.

Table 3

Focus Group Coding and Descriptions

	Code	Description
1	Participant	Name of focus group participant
2	Question Number	Questions being ask
3	Structure Code	What/where/when/who/how/noteworthy example
4	Descriptive Code	Single Word/Phrase that encapsulates the general idea of what's being said
5	Phrase	Exact text/quote/response from participant

Note. The table shows the coding process and the description of the coding process. This process was used after transcribing the focus group. Descriptive Codes used for coding are DEI Coursework, Anti-Bias, Culturally Responsive Teaching, Diversity, Equity, Inclusion (DEI), Multicultural Education, Teacher Preparation, Politics, Woke, Families, Culture, Feedback, DEI In The Field, Bias.

The researcher analyzed the data after transcribing the responses from each participant. As such, the next section will highlight the themes that emerged from the online focus group. Four themes emerged from the focus group and coding process.

Four Themes That Emerged from The Focus Group

A pattern of four themes emerged from the coded focus group conversation. The themes address the first research question, how do experts in early childhood education explain the status of culturally responsive and sustaining education in preservice teaching? The four themes described are as follows:

Table 4

Four Themes from the Focus Group

Theme One	Exploring Emotional Dimensions: Perspectives on Early Childhood Education, Anti-Bias Education, and Political Influences in Diverse Learning Environments
Theme Two	Families as Cultural Pillars: Navigating Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging (DEIB) in Early Childhood Education
Theme Three	Navigating the Evolution of DEIB in Teacher Preparation Programs
Theme Four	Intersections of Politics and Progress: Impact on DEIB Advancements in Early Childhood Education

Note. This table denotes the four themes that emerged from the online focus group. The themes represent a series of topics surrounding early childhood education, culturally relevant anti-bias education, DEIB, and teacher preparation programs. The themes that emerged from the focus

group provide insight into cultivating culturally responsive anti-bias educators in the early years of education.

Theme One-Exploring Emotional Dimensions: Perspectives on Early Childhood Education, Anti-Bias Education, and Political Influences in Diverse Learning Environments

Figure 1

Highlights from Theme One-Exploring Emotional Dimensions

Note. Highlights of Theme One-Exploring Emotional Dimensions are, Emotional Engagement, Inclusive Environments, and Expert Insight. Theme One addresses the online focus group question three.

Focus Group Question Three: What are you seeing in terms of diversity, equity, inclusion and belonging in your practice?

Participants' feelings served as a gateway for their discussions on early childhood education and anti-bias education within learning environments during the focus groups. Research Question Three seeks to gain insight from experts on the status of culturally responsive and sustaining education. The themes that emerged from the focus group further reflect participants' sentiments on preparing in-service and preservice teachers to support diverse populations of learners.

During the focus groups, there was a range of feelings expressed by the participants regarding culturally responsive anti-bias education, early childhood education, and the current political climate's impact on teaching diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging. The feelings and emotions expressed by the online focus group participants consisted of the following: concern, support, and reflection. Participant feelings were evident throughout the focus group and as each question was asked, the participants were open, reflective, and thoughtful.

Participants in the focus group highlighted challenges in creating inclusive early learning environments, including support for diverse learning needs, the evolution of family structures, and navigating the current political environment. When gaining an understanding about children in early childhood and creating inclusive environments for them, one participant shared how their program is supportive of children with diverse learning needs. "We take children who have not been accepted into other programs. For example, we take children that speak no English. Our teachers use their phones to translate and communicate with the children and their families. It's hard to be responsive to the children and families in their own language". In being reflective to the changes in the structure of families and the early childhood environment, another participant shared their reflections on the changes to the family structure, "So times have changed. There are homes with two dads, two moms, a lot of children also being co-raised with grandparents. We must know what the grandparents' needs are, their language. It's a constant struggle and we don't mind doing it because it's part of our core values". Another participant expressed concern for the current political environment and its impact on supporting diverse children and families and implementing culturally responsive anti-bias education in early childhood education, "I'm concerned about this current political climate. Its impacting instruction of anti-bias education and good diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging". Through their reflections and concerns,

participants highlighted the importance of continuously adapting their practices to meet the needs of children and families in the early learning environment.

Throughout the focus groups, participants expressed a spectrum of emotions concerning culturally responsive anti-bias education, early childhood education, and the current political climate's influence on teaching diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging. The participants' emotions served as a valuable entry point for discussions surrounding early childhood education and anti-bias education within learning environments during the focus groups. Research Question 1 sought insights from experts on the status of culturally responsive and sustaining education. This question prompted rich thematic emergence in the study, reflecting participants' sentiments on preparing both in-service and preservice teachers for the support of diverse learner populations. As participants shared experiences and perspectives, it became evident that creating inclusive environments for children in early childhood involves navigating changing family structures and addressing the impact of the current political climate on fostering culturally responsive education practices.

Theme Two-Families as Cultural Pillars: Navigating Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and

Belonging (DEIB) in Early Childhood Education

Figure 2

Highlights from Theme Two-Families as Cultural Pillars

Note. Highlights of Theme Two-Families As Cultural Pillars: Navigating Diversity, Equity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging (DEIB) in Early Childhood Education are, Family-Centric Approaches, Practical Challenges and Strategies, and Ongoing Journey. Theme Two addresses the online focus group question three.

In exploring the vital themes of diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging (DEIB) within the realm of early childhood education, participants were prompted to share their firsthand observations and practices. One participant initiated the dialogue by offering a comprehensive definition of diversity in the context of early childhood, emphasizing the myriad differences encompassing age, disability, citizenship, race, language, and more. The discussion delved into the unique family structures within childcare programs, acknowledging families as pivotal contributors to advancing DEIB and Anti-Bias Education. The significance of starting with families and understanding their cultures emerged as a key point, aligning with the notion that

educators need not navigate critical conversations about race and inequity alone, but rather, engage families and communities collaboratively.

Participants were invited to describe what they are seeing in terms of diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging in their individual practices of education. A participant began the topic of discussion of DEIB by sharing a definition of diversity in early childhood, "Diversity speaks to a myriad of differences in families. It includes age, disability, citizenship, race, language, body image, and so much more". The same participant also described the families within their childcare program by offering the uniqueness of the family structures. "Some children in our programs have same sex parents, co-parents, foster parents, grandparents and other relatives raising them". Participants agreed families play an important role in advancing DEIB and Anti-Bias Education in Early Childhood Education. A participant shares that the family is the starting point: "I think one approach that educators might be able to explore is really focusing on children, on families and their culture. That's where it begins, especially in the early childhood realm. You're really talking about culture within the context of the families that are in the programs, the families that you are servicing, starting there". According to an article, Addressing Race and Equity in the Classroom (Adair & Doucet, 2013), early childhood educators need not take on critical conversations about race and inequity alone. Family and community members may be interested in and willing to participate. This speaks to the participants' suggestion to start with families' cultures and include them in the early learning environment.

When continuing the topic of children's individual cultures, a participant shared their thoughts on how children and teachers from other cultures adjust to the early learning environment. "When you get to know more about a child's culture you realize, oh my gosh, this child is going to have problems with language. Maybe they don't want to eat the food we are

serving them because they're not used to eating this kind of food". The same participant shared an approach to getting to know and meeting the diverse families in their program. "It's always good to start with families because if you really learn about families you're going to find various aspects of diversity within the families of the children. Put pictures of family members on the walls. You start talking about families with children and you get to know the families. You get to talk about what makes each family different".

Another DEIB/Anti-Bias education topic discussed during the focus groups was teachers' preparedness and understanding of culturally responsive teaching. Topics discussed during the focus group were the teacher child-relationship, diversity and inclusion materials, and professional development. A participant shared their experience with a teacher's use of diversity dolls: "I bought a set of dolls that needed walkers, seeing eye dogs and a helmet. And there was a card that came with the doll explaining what the different ability is. The teachers took the cards, put the cards away and put the dolls out for the children to play with. So, the children do what all children do. They brush the hair, they took the clothes off. But the teachers didn't know how to present this child learns differently or this child moves differently, or this child does not see with their eyes they have a seeing eye dog". Research demonstrates a teacher can accurately and meaningfully teach about race and other somewhat complicated identity markers if presenting the material in an engaging way that connects with children's experiences (Adair & Doucet, 2013). The self-developed learning modules, Cultivating Culturally Responsive Anti-Bias Educators in the Early Years, is a guidance and resource tool for teachers seeking to implement culturally responsive anti-bias curriculum and materials within their programs. Teachers would have an understanding of the purpose and goals of using a set of diversity dolls.

As the focus groups unfolded, participants shared insights into the structure of children's individual cultures and the ways teachers and programs can foster an inclusive early learning environment. Notably, the emphasis on understanding diverse families and incorporating their cultures into educational settings resonated as a cornerstone. The discussions expanded to address teachers' preparedness in delivering culturally responsive education, unveiling instances where practical approaches, such as using diversity dolls, sometimes fell short in conveying nuanced lessons about individual abilities. Transitioning into Theme Two, participants reflected on current perspectives, highlighting the need for ongoing exploration and refinement in how both preservice and in-service teachers, along with learning programs, approach DEIB and Anti-Bias Education. These insights collectively underscored the dynamic and evolving nature of discussions surrounding DEIB in early childhood education.

Theme Three-Navigating the Evolution of Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging in

Teacher Preparation Programs

Figure 3

Highlights from Theme Three-Navigating the Evolution of Diversity. Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging in Teacher Preparation Programs

Note. Highlights of Theme Three-Navigating the Evolution of Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging in Teacher Preparation Programs are, Historical Perspectives, Progress and Challenges, and Preservice Teacher Experiences. Theme Three addresses the online focus group question one.

As we delve into the realm of diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging (DEIB) within education and early childhood education, participants shared their personal and professional journeys, reflecting on the transformative landscape of DEIB coursework over the years. The conversation unfolds with insights into the evolution of DEIB coursework since the 80s, 90s, and early 2000s. Participants highlighted the historical absence of explicitly named DEIB coursework in previous decades, contrasting it with the present era where this work is distinctly acknowledged. Personal anecdotes emerged, offering a glimpse into the participant's experiences, ranging from student teaching with culturally relevant teaching practices to

encounters with linguistically diverse families in undergraduate lab preschools. The exploration includes a participant's perspective from a Historically Black College and University (HBCU), revealing the absence of diversity-focused education in their undergraduate program. Grounded in research advocating for culturally relevant pedagogy in teacher education programs, the participants collectively navigate the intricate landscape of their preservice teaching experiences, illuminating both progress and the continued need for advancements in culturally relevant pedagogy. A participant who attended a Historically Black College and University (HBCU) shared their experience, "I was an education major. I graduated undergrad in 2005, we didn't have anything that was talking about inclusion or diversity. I did my undergrad at an HBCU there was nothing about diversity it was more so about being able to teach Black students".

In addition, a participant described their student teaching field experience with culturally relevant teaching as a student teacher, "we didn't call it that in 2007 and 2008, but it was culturally relevant teaching. I would use hip hop to connect with students and connect with the curriculum and that's the work". Another participant shared their experiences as an undergrad student, "there was very little spoken about diversity or culture, when I was in undergrad. However, when I was doing my student teaching I was in early childhood lab preschool with the university, and we had international students and families. As well as just families from the neighborhood. So, I was introduced to working with linguistically diverse families in undergrad, even though my coursework didn't really speak to that".

Research shows culturally relevant pedagogy should include topics of race, urban education, or other equity issues in teacher education programs. Understanding cultural backgrounds and perspectives of ourselves as educators and students is crucial to being an effective educator (Boutte, 2018). Boutte (2018), and research on culturally relevant teaching,

reflects the participants experiences as preservice teachers with culturally relevant coursework. With evolution in culturally relevant pedagogy, the participants collectively shared their perspectives on how teacher preparation programs have evolved by giving a name to the coursework offered. However, there is still work to be done to advance culturally relevant pedagogy in teacher preparation programs.

Theme Four-Intersections of Politics and Progress: Impact on DEIB in Early Childhood Education

Figure 4

Highlights from Theme Four-Intersections of Politics and Progress
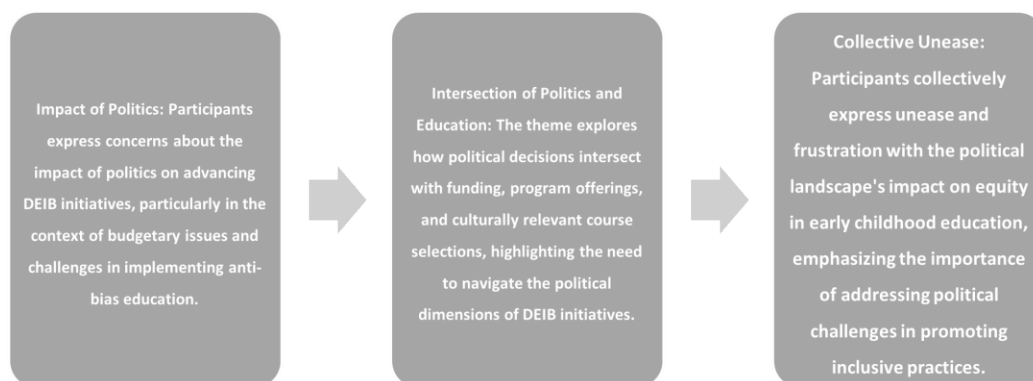
Note. Highlights of Theme Four- Intersections of Politics and Progress are Impact of Politics, Intersection of Politics and Education, and Collective Unease. Theme four addresses the online focus group question two.

In the realm of early childhood education and teacher preparation programs, the influence of the political climate on the advancement of Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging (DEIB) initiatives has become a central theme in the perspectives shared by participants in this focus group. Their collective voices unite on similar views, with the timeliness of this discussion highlighted by the ongoing budget impasse in the state of Pennsylvania, significantly impacting early childhood education funding and hindering the start of Pre-K counts and Head Start programs in the upcoming school year. Participants express concern about the broader impact of politics on the implementation of DEIB coursework and field experiences, reflecting on decades of advancements in teacher preparation programs. The diverse backgrounds and experiences of the focus group expert participants provide varying perspectives on the political intricacies influencing equity in early childhood education and the shaping of culturally responsive anti-bias

teacher preparation programs. The conversation sheds light on the ways in which politics intersects with funding, program offerings, and culturally relevant course selections, revealing a collective unease and frustration with the political landscape's impact on the pursuit of equity in early childhood education.

Participants in the focus group expressed similar views about the political climate's funding impact on Advancing Diversity Equity and Inclusion in Early Childhood Education and Education as a whole. Some participants expressed this specific topic was timely given the state of Pennsylvania's budget impasse. The budget impasse was impacting early childhood education statewide funding and preventing opening Pre-K counts and Head Start programs beginning in the new school year. The participant specifically said, "With budget impasse, there's no money anywhere. It's putting a hold on everything". Another participant, from the state of Michigan shared that their state's Early Childhood program was benefiting from increased funding.

Most of the participants shared that they felt politics plays a part in implementing Diversity Equity Inclusion and Belonging coursework and field experience. Despite advancements over the decades in teacher preparation programs, a participant shared their feelings on the impact of politics in advancing Diversity Equity Inclusion and Belonging, "I'm concerned that this current political climate. It is impacting instruction of anti-bias education, good diversity, inclusion, belonging, all of that".

The topic of the political climate's impact also brought up feelings of political censorship with book banning, historical revisionism within course topics, and surveillance of school districts across America. The first participant to share said, "everybody is running scared. You can't read this book. You can't say gay. Being a slave was really a benefit"? Another participant shared their experience as a university associate professor with culturally responsive and critical

race theory coursework. "Our university stayed true in terms of the courses that we're going to teach. We're not going to shy away from culturally responsive pedagogy in early childhood education courses".

Because the focus group consists of participants with diverse educational backgrounds and experiences, varying perspectives were shared regarding the political impacts on advancing equity in early childhood education and culturally responsive anti-bias teacher preparation programs. From the discussion, participants' feedback disclosed their states funding, budgetary expenses, and program offerings in early learning programs. Furthermore, participants' experiences showed the political impact on higher education teacher preparation programs. Funding and selection of culturally relevant course offerings emerged as topics of greatest political impact in higher education. Overall, participants expressed unease and annoyance with the political impacts on advancing equity in early childhood and the impact of developing and maintaining culturally relevant teacher preparation programs.

Participants Feedback on The Learning Modules

Participants were asked to provide feedback on the learning modules. The learning modules were available to focus group participants via Loom and Udemy platforms for free. On the Udemy platform the learning modules were temporarily made public to access and view. One participant, who did not participate in the focus group, shared feedback after completing the learning modules stating they learned there are areas they must stand up for children to help them succeed in a diverse classroom. Table 5 illustrates some highlights from the participants feedback on the development of the learning modules.

Table 5

Focus Group Highlights from Participants

"I'd like to see more. More training and teaching classes. So, teachers are not so afraid of the subject and brush it past. Cause you're right, when somebody says they don't see color, I usually tell them that's really a shame because people come in so many different colors and hear textures and everything else and you're missing out on it. So, I would like to see front line teachers getting a little bit more, information and education on the subject".
"Today what we need is more anti-bias education and more activism".
"Some of the resources that you have, I wasn't aware of. For the ones I wasn't aware of show you the truth and I think some of them can be valuable".

Note. This chart illustrates highlights from the focus group participants. The highlights represent the necessity for culturally responsive anti-bias education in the early year's education from the voices of the expert participants. One participant also expressed appreciation for resources from the self-developed learning modules.

The discussion of the self-created learning modules began with a discussion of the order of the learning modules. Some participants felt the order of the learning modules should be

reordered to place the module on Getting To Know Students before the learning module on Creating The Learning Environment. All participants shared their appreciation for the resources and activities that accompanied the learning modules. One participant said the resources were "outstanding". The activities and resources were noted as items participants would use with professional development and learners.

"I'd like to see more. More training and teaching classes so teachers are not afraid of the subject of anti-bias education". Delving deeper into the learning modules, participants agreed the learning modules touch on topics needed in the teacher preparation programs and offered in professional development and training. Participants recommended expanding some of the topics of the learning modules. A participant shared, "it's always good to start with families because if you really learn about families you're going to find various aspects of diversity within the families of the children". The same participant recommended more on child adult interactions, "the interactions between adults and kids occur in classrooms as part of that classroom environment".

One participant suggested adding examples of teacher preparation programs that are modeling effective culturally responsive anti-bias coursework and field experience in the early years of education. Overall, the recommendation from participants helps the researcher to identify areas of improvement within the learning modules. The feedback provided will support the early childhood education profession and those who are entering the field.

Chapter Summary

This chapter has presented the results of a qualitative online focus group aimed to address the research question: Question 1: How do experts in early childhood education explain the status of culturally responsive and sustaining education in preservice teaching? Question 2: How

effective do you anticipate the Culturally Responsive Sustaining Education in Early Learning Modules will be in encouraging preservice teachers to engage in culturally responsive and sustaining education practices? Through a series of five prepared questions (See Table 1), discussion and insights shared by the five participants, several key findings and themes emerged:

1. **Exploring Emotional Dimensions: Perspectives on Early Childhood Education, Anti-Bias Education, and Political Influences in Diverse Learning Environments**

   The participants expressed a range of emotions, including concern, support, and reflection, regarding topics of diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging (DEIB) and anti-bias education. These emotions reflect the complexity and significance of culturally responsive anti-bias education in early childhood education. Each theme in this chapter reflects participants feelings and added guided the discussion of DEIB and culturally responsive anti-bias education in early childhood education.

2. **Families as Cultural Pillars: Navigating Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging (DEIB) in Early Childhood Education**

   The participants emphasized the importance of families in advancing DEIB and anti-bias education in early childhood education. They recognized the diverse nature of families and their role in shaping children's understanding of diversity and inclusion. Additionally, they discussed the need for educators to be prepared to teach in culturally responsive ways, highlighting the challenges and opportunities in this regard.

3. **Navigating the Evolution of Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging (DEIB) in Teacher Preparation Programs**

The participants shared their personal and professional experiences with DEIB coursework in education and early childhood education. They noted the evolution of DEIB coursework over the years and highlighted the importance of understanding cultural backgrounds and perspectives to be effective educators.

4. **Intersections of Politics and Progress: Impact on DEIB Advancements in Early Childhood Education**

   The focus group participants discussed the impact of the political climate on advancing DEIB and anti-bias education. They expressed concerns about the influence of politics on curriculum content and instructional approaches, particularly in the face of budget constraints and debates surrounding sensitive topics.

Additionally, the focus group provided feedback on the Cultivating Culturally Responsive Anti-Bias Educators in the Early Years learning modules. Participants appreciated the resources and activities provided within the modules but also offered suggestions for improvement. These recommendations included reordering the modules, expanding content related to family engagement, and providing examples of effective teacher preparation programs in early childhood education.

In summary, this focus group has provided important insights into the perceptions and experiences of educators in education and early childhood education regarding culturally responsive anti-bias education. The findings highlight the importance of ongoing efforts to enhance teacher preparation programs and support educators in promoting diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging in their classrooms. These insights will contribute to the continued development and improvement of resources and initiatives aimed at fostering culturally responsive and anti-bias education in the early years of education.

CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION

Introduction

The news headlines read, 'White Preschool Children in Black Face for Black History Month'. Prominent news sources covered an incident in a childcare program located in Miami, Florida, where Black History Month was allegedly commemorated by applying black face paint to preschoolers' faces and outfitting them in construction uniforms. Parents were outraged and shared their feelings in interviews on the teachers' decisions to use Black Face as a celebration of Black History. The childcare center issued an apology to the parents and program. The message was shared by CNN, "We wanted to let all the parents know that we met on Friday afternoon with all the teachers and staff. We went over several ethical and multicultural education points. I will teach the team a class covering all the necessary topics regarding US history and multicultural education … you may rest assured this will never happen again," (Chavez & Jones, 2023). This occurrence and other occurrences of the lack of culturally responsive anti-bias education in the early years have led the research to create the self-developed learning modules: Cultivating Culturally Responsive Anti-Bias Educators in the Early Years and, to answer the following research questions:

Question 1: How do experts in early childhood education explain the status of culturally responsive and sustaining education in preservice teaching?

Question 2: How effective does one anticipate the Culturally Responsive Sustaining Education in Early Learning Modules will be in encouraging pre-service teachers to engage in culturally responsive and sustaining education practices?

Summary Study

This study begins with the researcher's observations and personal connections to observing the needs for culturally responsive anti bias education in the early years of education. The researcher developed a series of 7 learning modules titled, Cultivating Culturally Responsive Anti-Bias Educators in the Early Years and explored through a focus group the following from focus group participants: After completing several of the self-developed learning modules titled, Cultivating Culturally Responsive Anti-Bias Educators in the Early Years, how do experts in early childhood education and education perceive the effectiveness of current practices in preparing preservice and in-service teachers to implement culturally responsive anti-bias education, and what recommendations do they propose for enhancing these preparation strategies?

The literature review represents the overview and topics to be incorporated in the self-developed learning modules series, Cultivating Culturally Responsive Anti-Bias Educators in the Early Years. From the literature review, the researcher suggests the following:

1) First, the areas and topics teacher preparation should focus on to prepare preservice teachers to work with diverse groups of students.

2) Second, the historical context and current framework of culturally responsive anti-bias education.

3) Third, how preservice teachers can put current frameworks into practice within their future classrooms?

4) Finally, this research suggests an effective approach to field experiences for preservice teachers.

Qualitative focus groups will give a broader understanding of where and how to focus on cultivating culturally responsive early years teachers and apply the findings of the literature review and self-developed learning modules.

In this qualitative online focus group, participants shared their expertise and thoughts on the self-developed learning modules and the current state of culturally responsive anti-bias education, and responded to the research questions:

- How do experts in early childhood education explain the status of culturally responsive and sustaining education in preservice teaching?

- How effective do you anticipate the Culturally Responsive Sustaining Education in Early Learning Modules will be in encouraging preservice teachers to engage in culturally responsive and sustaining education practices?

Additionally, focus group participants shared feedback on the learning self-developed learning modules. The researcher reflected on the literature review and participant responses to develop the implications for this study.

Implications

What could early childhood teacher preparation programs look like, which are designed to serve diverse students? Gloria Ladson Billings posed a similar question in the book, *Crossing Over To Canaan: The Journey Of New Teachers In Diverse Classrooms*. How do we as educators intentionally engage children in culturally relevant educational experiences (Iruka et al., 2020)? Based on the feedback from experts who participated in the focus of this study and self-developed learning modules, propose that with coursework and field experience, early years teachers can be prepared to serve schools with diverse students and engage children in culturally relevant experiences.

The researcher recommends the following multi-level approach to prepare teachers to serve diverse students and having children engage in culturally relevant experiences.

Table 6

Researcher Recommendations

Nationwide Early Childhood Education Reform	Develop a required nationwide Culturally Responsive Sustaining Education standards specifically for Infant, Toddler, and Preschool. Establish NAEYC and state NAEYC chapters as a framework for childcare programs, higher education, and lawmakers.
Statewide Early Childhood Education Reform	Staff Qualifications: Requirement for lead teachers to obtain at minimum an associate degree in early childhood education. Standards: Require state level standards that incorporate culturally responsive anti bias education. Initiatives: Increase funding and/or establish initiatives for QRIS, education retention, and tuition assistance for teachers.
City/Municipal Efforts/Initiatives	Increase and fund early childhood initiatives at the local level. Particularly in low-income communities.

Higher Education Teacher Preparation	Accreditation-Requirement for Early Years programs to seek accreditation similar to NAEYC.
	Coursework and Field Experience-Require CRABE coursework as part of required courses. Requirements for observation, field experience, and student teacher in diverse childcare programs.
Childcare Programs	Staffing-Diverse teaching staff, higher lead teachers with minimum of an associate degree.
	Initiatives-Mandatory participation in QRIS and Head Start Initiatives.

Note. From the research gathered from the literature review and the online focus group with expert educators. The research provides recommends reform efforts for early education nationwide, statewide, and local. The researcher also recommends efforts for individual childcare programs.

Implications For Coursework and Field Experience

The results of this study suggest there has been an evolution in culturally relevant anti-bias education. The focus group participants identified the increase in culturally relevant teacher preparation coursework and field experience over the last several decades. The evolution of culturally relevant teacher preparation programs and coursework has included specifically

naming culturally relevant coursework within course catalogs, and teacher preparation programs have also expanded their culturally relevant course offerings. The literature review indicates the coursework and field experience topics that teacher preparation programs should incorporate to further promote culturally responsive anti-bias education. The quality of early childhood education environments and interactions impact children's ongoing development, educators can set the foundation for children's future trajectories. Therefore, it is essential early childhood education teachers are prepared to work effectively with all children and families (Kintner-Duffy et al., 2021). The self-developed learning modules, Cultivating Culturally Responsive Anti-Bias Educators in the Early Years, transformative learning modules designed to prepare preservice and in-service early years educators to educate diverse populations of students. Additionally, participants will learn how to prepare culturally responsive anti-bias lessons and create inclusive environments for young learners. They will gain practical strategies, insights, and resources to foster diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging.

Advancing Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging in the Early Years

Budget constraints, book banning, and political debates are a few of the political impacts identified during the focus group are impeding the progression of culturally relevant coursework. The literature review advocates for advancing diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging in the early years of education through the development of the self-developed learning modules, Cultivating Culturally Responsive Anti-Bias Educators in the Early Years. National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) "Advancing Equity in Early Childhood Education" position statement provides a blueprint for what early childhood education system needs to do to ensure all children have access to high-quality, culturally affirming, and sustaining early learning experiences (Alanís et al., 2021). When early educators create learning

environments, they equitably distribute learning opportunities by helping all children experience responsive interactions nurture their full range of social, emotional, cognitive, physical, and linguistic abilities; reflect and model fundamental principles of fairness and justice; and help them accomplish the goals of anti-bias education (*Advancing Equity in Early Childhood Education Position Statement*, 2019).

The researcher urges the following to early childhood policy makers, programs, educators, and advocates to Advance Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging (DEIB) and to maintain these practices. In addition to the urges listed below the researcher recommends completion of each of the *Cultivating Culturally Responsive Anti-Bias Educators in the Early Years*.

- **Universal Commitments to Advancing DEIB**-Commitments to Advancing DEIB must be developed nationwide. Those commitments are the Childcare providers, higher education, and educators must adhere to those commitments. NAEYC has developed Advancing Equity: Position, with Recommendations for Everyone, Recommendations for Early Childhood Educators, Recommendations for Administrators, Recommendations for Educator Preparation and PD, and Recommendations for Public Policy. Within the Recommendations educators are creating equitable learning spaces, developing relationships, and making commitments to advocate for young children.

- **Emphasizing Family and Community Involvement**-Strengthening relationships with families and communities by involving them in the early learning environment. Gather information on individual cultures and communities.

Celebrate the differences within those families and learn from the families and communities being served.

- **Addressing Bias and Stereotypes**-Speaking up and addressing bias and stereotypes. Working to challenge and address those stereotypes that have been identified. Incorporating developmentally appropriate lessons and discussion on bias, stereotypes, and differences with young learners.

- **Promoting Equity**- Childcare programs, policy makers, advocates, attesting to provide equitable access, resources, support, and opportunities to young children and their families. Creating equitable learning environments, individualized instruction, and adaptations to the learning environment are a few examples of providing an equitable learning environment.

- **Culturally Responsive Anti-Bias Education, Professional Development and Technical Assistance**-Providing curriculum and instruction based on CRABE practices that is designed to prepare teachers to work with diverse groups of learners. Technical Assistance is an additional resource that programs should use to create equitable learning environments by receiving modeling and hands on support from technical assistance consultants. *Cultivating Culturally Responsive Anti-Bias Educators in the Early Years Learning Modules*, developed by the researchers, serves as a framework for providing coursework and or professional development to educators.

- **Inclusive Curriculum and Creating Inclusive Environments**-Purchase or develop curriculum and learning materials based on culturally responsive anti-bias learning standards. Materials should be representative of a variety of cultures

and abilities. Lesson plans and activities must be inclusive and individualized for learners who need individualization based on learning needs. Create a classroom environment that is inclusive or students and families that are represented in the classroom.

- **Community Partnerships/Initiatives**-. Seek out and participate in community partnerships with stakeholders that support your programs missions to advance diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging. Connect with other childcare providers to support each program's efforts.

- **Program Assessment**-Evaluate and regularly assess your program's efforts at Advancing Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging. Hold focus groups with families, staff, and the community to review areas of improvement and success. Seek outside organizations to conduct audits if financially able.

Proposed Professional Learning

Cultivating Culturally Responsive Anti-Bias Educators in the Early Years, learning modules were developed as a tool to prepare preservice and in-service teachers to teach diverse populations of young learners. Prior to the development of the learning modules, the researcher instructed a course on Culture, the Family, and Community Partnerships, to preservice teachers. During an assignment presentation on sharing your culture, many of the students expressed their lack of family culture. The researcher reassured learners that "we all have culture" and to connect to our student's culture we must have awareness of our own culture. As the researcher developed the learning modules, the assignment presentation served as a reference of how to guide preservice teachers to become reflective practitioners and culturally responsive anti-bias educators.

The self-developed learning modules were initially developed as coursework learning modules, specifically for preservice teachers enrolled in at least an Associate's degree program in Early Childhood Education. Following the focus group feedback and reflection, the focus group is recommended for all early educators. In-service teachers, preservice teachers, administrators, advocates, and those who work directly with young children and their families can benefit from Cultivating Culturally Responsive Anti-Bias Educators in the Early Years.

The learning modules are designed as coursework and can be modified as professional development and technical assistance. To effectively implement the learning modules and any culturally relevant coursework, teacher preparation programs and early learning programs responsible for professional development should examine their program expectations. The Teacher for Diversity Program proposes the following program expectations:

- Prepare teachers who accept and promote access and equal opportunity for all students to the central areas of learning in the school and classroom, and who affirm educational equity with curriculum, instruction, and schooling practices for students who are marginalized.

- Students develop an understanding of teaching that will allow them to exercise "situational diversity", considering the home-school context in the choice of curriculum and teaching strategies.

- Provide a dedicated and knowledgeable teaching staff-university faculty, teachers, and administrators (Ladson-Billings, 2001).

Early Educators who participate in the learning modules can produce impactful outcomes which will benefit the culture of their learning environment, their students and families, and

themselves as educators. The following Table lists the researcher's expected outcome for the learning modules.

Table 7

Learning Module Outcomes

Teachers will develop Culturally Responsive Anti-Bias Teaching strategies and practices that will support diverse families and environments.
Teachers will utilize reflective skills to become reflective practitioners and focus particularly on their roles as culturally responsive teachers.
Teachers will create inclusive learning environments that support young learners multiple learning styles and abilities.
Teachers will be able to recognize bias that exist within themselves and their learning programs. Administrators will develop policies to address bias that exist within their learning environment.
Teachers will develop strategies to support and include the family and community in the early learning environment.
Overall, teachers' participation in the learning modules will have an impact on children's cultural identity.

Note. Table 7 identifies the overall outcomes of the self-developed Learning Modules, Cultivating Culturally Responsive Anti-Bias Educators in the Early Years. The outcomes are based on the research from the literature review, feedback from experts who participated in the online focus group, and the researchers' experience. The outcomes will have a positive impact for all children within a learning environment and their families.

The promising aspects of completing the Culturally Responsive Anti-Bias Education in the Early Years learning modules, include the positive impacts on children's sociocultural development, the creation of an inclusive environment, and personal growth and development. The researcher identified the following areas as promising aspects of completion of the learning modules for both teachers and young learners.

Table 8

Promising Aspects of the Learning Modules

Promising For Teachers	- Cultural Competency Development - Preparing Young Learners for Global Citizenship - Teachers developing into Advocates for DEIB - Curriculum and lessons that are aligned with culturally sustaining standards
Promising For Young Learners	- Early Social Justice Awareness - Parent Support and involvement in the learning environment - Cultural representation in the curriculum

Note. Table 8 lists the promising aspects of the self-developed learning modules for teachers and young learners. The researchers identified the areas of promise from the literature review, education experts from the online focus group, and the researcher's expertise in early education. The areas of promise include preparing young learners to be global citizens and young children becoming aware of social justice in the early years of education.

Limitations of Current Practices

The nature of the United States early childhood education teaching workforce is complicated, as are the approaches to teachers' professional preparation and professional development (Gomez et al., 2015). The limitations of implementing culturally responsive anti-

bias education coursework and professional development for teachers in early education begins with differing standards nationwide as each state governs early childhood according to their established guidelines. Quality Rating Issuance Systems (QRIS) and NAEYC recommended standards, guidelines, and policies for quality childcare and teacher preparation programs.

However, these systems are optional, and some states reject the recommendations. The researcher proposes establishing a national system of standards, guidelines, and policies required for each state to maintain quality in early learning environments, the early years teacher workforce, and teacher preparation programs.

Why is the NAEYC and full participation in states QRIS initiatives optional? The researcher has 24 years of experience as an early educator in Pennsylvania and has insight into the state's operation of the QRIS program. With experience and education, the researcher has identified additional limitations of current practice. First, the requirement of early education for young learners. The age and grade of when children are required to start school varies from state to state. Children are expected to begin school in kindergarten and or first grade. This limits the importance of an early start in education for young learners and becomes "optional" where it should be "required." Second, because of the limitation of an early start, states do not prioritize funding, policies, teacher qualifications, and has turned the need for early education into a political agenda item. When states are unified in prioritizing early education, the outcomes will be beneficial to learners as they go through elementary, middle, and high school. Schools and districts may see improvements in standards-based assessments. Finally, the current political climate is viewed as a limitation of current practice. Through media and news outlets, there are reports on book bans, issues with gender identity policies and sports, removal of DEIB classes and coursework, across the United States and in all levels of education. School districts are

becoming organizations of personal and political attacks impeding and limiting the advancement of diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging efforts.

Future Research

The insight provided from the literature review and focus group highlighted the need for future research in early childhood education about diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging. The following areas are critical to addressing the need to advance and bring about change.

- **Equity Centered Early Childhood Education Reform-**the goal is for all children to have equitable learning opportunities. Future research should focus on transforming the early childhood education system to guarantee all students have access to a quality start. Some identified areas to research are policy, curriculum, funding, and diversifying the teaching field.

- **Diversity and Inclusion in Leadership and Amplifying Voices of Scholars and Researchers of Color**-The visible lack of diversity and inclusion and leadership in early childhood education is another concern to address. Future research should explore opportunities to increase representation of individuals of color in leadership positions and roles. Increase in leadership representation should also include positions with licensing, credentialing, higher education, as well as overall decision making. Additionally, research should include ways to amplify and place at the forefront the voices of scholars and researchers of color.

- **Cross-Disciplinary Collaboration**- To address the complexities of early childhood education, future research should include cross-disciplinary approaches and collaboration. Exploring the intersections and disciplines of the following fields: psychology, sociology, social services, public policy, and cultural studies. Cross-

disciplinary collaboration will help to gain an understanding of the issues relating to diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging.

▪ **Family and Community Engagement for Equitable Education**- The involvement of families and communities is vital to the success of early childhood education and creating equitable learning experiences. Future research should delve into strategies and resources that engage diverse families and communities in the learning process. The research should further investigate the impacts of community and family engagement with learning outcomes.

Reflection

Early childhood education serves as the foundational stages of education in a young child's life. This foundational stage creates an opportunity to nurture a safe inclusive environment for all children. The path to creating equal opportunities in early childhood education can be met with challenging moments and moments of progression. Over the years, there have been transformational changes to providing quality care and inclusive learning environments. Throughout this transformation, research shows quality must include the need for teachers to be prepared to work with diverse populations of young learners and their families.

The self-developed learning modules, Cultivating Culturally Responsive Anti-Bias Educators in the Early Years, can be used as a tool to prepare teachers to work with diverse populations of young learners. With the learning modules, teachers are guided in reflecting on their culturally responsive anti-bias teaching practices. The modules were designed to help educators self-reflect on their own biases, engage with diverse perspectives, and develop strategies to nurture an inclusive and equitable learning environment. They serve as a guide,

assisting early educators in creating equitable learning environments and culturally responsive anti-bias practices.

As the researcher reflects on the landscape of early childhood education and this research process, we are in a fight for equality in early childhood education. There is much to celebrate in the progress individual states have made towards equitable early childhood education; however, there is more work to be done nationwide. We must begin to acknowledge the significance of early childhood education as the foundation of education, social emotional development, friendships, embrace diversity, and shape young diverse learners. The journey towards equitable early learning experiences continues.

This work serves as a call to action for us all, but specifically educators, policymakers, and researchers to jointly address the deficiencies in implementing culturally responsive anti-bias education in the early years. The proposed early education reforms and self-developed learning modules offer steps toward a more inclusive and equitable early childhood education system. However, the challenges outlined underscore the complexity of this endeavor and emphasize the need for sustained efforts and collaborative engagement from all stakeholders.

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APPENDIX: LETTER OF INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

RE: Cultivating Culturally Responsive Anti-Bias Educators in the Early Years: Focus Group

July 19, 2023

Dear Student/Colleague,

My name is Kamiesha Vann, and I am an adjunct instructor at Montgomery County Community College and Bay Mills Community College. I am writing to invite you to participate in a focus group on cultivating culturally responsive anti-bias educators in the early years of education. In addition to my role as a teacher educator, I am also a doctoral student at Antioch University. This is questionnaire/focus group questions are part of my dissertation and doctoral degree in Education Leadership.

The purpose of this focus group is as follow:

- Gather feedback from colleagues and students in the early years of education on being prepared to teach diverse groups of students;
- Understand how teacher preparation programs prepare preservice teachers through coursework and field experiences in culturally responsive anti-bias education;
- Understand how teachers prepare to educate students using culturally responsive anti-bias frameworks; and
- Gather feedback on participation in created learning modules.

Learning Module Access (No longer available)

Participation in this study will include:

Approximately 60-minute focus group discussion. The focus group will take place virtually over Zoom, on Wednesday, August 2, 2023, at 6:30pm EST. Prior to the focus group, I will send the questions to participants. The focus group will be recorded through Zoom, and I will be taking notes from participant responses.

Your participation in this research study is voluntary. Participants will not be compensated for participation. If you choose to participate you may discontinue participation at any time. Your participation in the Zoom and returning this signed form indicates your consent to participate.

If you are interested in learning more about participation, RSVP on or before July 30, 2023.

Please contact me via email xxxxx@xxxxxxx.xxx

Sincerely,

Kamiesha Vann

_____   _____

Participant Signature