TALKING RACE WITH YOUNG CHILDREN

Dr. Erica Frankenberg
Dr. Allison Henward
Educators from Bennett Family Center and Hort Woods Child Care
STATE COLLEGE & U.S.
COLORBLINDNESS & BIAS

More than two-thirds of millennials agreed:

§ Society would be better if it were truly colorblind and never considered race

§ Focusing on race & ethnicity prevents our society from becoming truly colorblind

And yet 80% admit that their friends have racial bias. Less than half report that race was a common topic in their household growing up, and only 20% feel comfortable having conversations about bias.

2014 MTV Strategic Insights - David Binder Research Survey on Millennials & Bias
# RACISM

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Individual-level</th>
<th>Systemic-level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Internalized:</strong> lies within individuals. Examples are private beliefs and biases about race and racism.</td>
<td><strong>Institutional:</strong> occurs within institutions and systems of power. Examples are school districts that concentrate students of color in schools that have the fewest resources.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Interpersonal:</strong> occurs between individuals. Example: how individuals’ racial beliefs affect their interactions with others</td>
<td><strong>Structural:</strong> racial bias among institutions and across society, involving the cumulative effect of many societal &amp; historical factors that privilege white people and disadvantage students of color. Example: how people of color are treated while seeking employment.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Importance of daily inquiry as parents/educators:
- Am I seeing, understanding, and addressing:
  - how society is treating me and my children as racial group members?
  - communities and individuals in their full complexity?
  - the ways opportunities to learn are unequally distributed to racial groups?
- What actions offer opportunities to children in such a world?
- Do my everyday acts promote a more equitable society?

Adapted from *Everyday Antiracism.*
COMMITMENT STATEMENT

- Based on NAEYC Code of Ethical Conduct
- “Although there are rightfully many different perspectives and opinions on public policies, the early childhood profession has clear responsibilities and professional commitments to the wellbeing of every child.” - Derman-Sparks & Edwards

All Children Belong Here
This is Our Promise to You

- We will build an open, safe, and mutually respectful school community in which each child and each family is an important and equal member.
- We will never allow differences of any kind to be an excuse to make fun of, exclude, or hurt you.
- We will listen carefully and lovingly to what worries you and give you thoughtful, age-appropriate information and support.
- We will nurture you to feel strong and proud about yourself and your family.
- We will facilitate your skills to be friends with classmates who are alike and different from you.
- We will honor your family’s importance to you by building respectful partnerships with them.
- We will provide support to you and your family when they feel stress, anxiety, or fear because of current events or acts of prejudice or hate.
- We will learn about and help your family use legal and community resources to keep you safe.
- We will work to uproot our own personal biases as adults and will speak out against prejudice and bias wherever we encounter it.
- We will mobilize our courage and become active with others to resist and change any policies and practices that threaten to hurt you or your family.

We are in this together — working for a world where every child is protected and honored, exactly as they are.
TALKING ABOUT RACE

- Perceived Innocence of children

- History and current state of racism

- Parents and teachers are concerned about “doing it wrong”
WHAT'S THE PROBLEM WITH NOT TALKING ABOUT RACE?

- Children see exclusion and rejection based on race every day

  Pretending it doesn't exist won't make it go away and makes it worse (Pollock, 2015)

- Families of color often have to have conversations to prepare children for race and racism (Hill-Collins, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 2009)

- White families don’t have to and often times don’t (Adair & Doucet, 2013; Vittrup, 2015)
COLORBLINDNESS AND HAIRCUTS
Many of us are taught from an early age that talking about race – even just acknowledging race – is a no-no.

- Colorblindness “I don’t see color. I just see people.” or “We are all just people.”

- Colormuteness: not talking about racialized names.
"Does it come off?" she asked.

"Does what come off?" I asked back.

"The black." She was rubbing her arm on mine as if to get some of my skin color on her.

Her mother, who had been sitting near us, gasped. She turned to me, pale and embarrassed. "I don’t know where she’d come up with such a thing," she said. "We never talk about ... things like that." She pulled her daughter out of the water and ended the lesson, shushing the girl as they left.

EXAMPLES OF "COLORMUTENESS"

- "Does it come off?" she asked.
- "Does what come off?" I asked back.
- "The black." She was rubbing her arm on mine as if to get some of my skin color on her.
- Her mother, who had been sitting near us, gasped. She turned to me, pale and embarrassed. "I don’t know where she’d come up with such a thing," she said. "We never talk about ... things like that." She pulled her daughter out of the water and ended the lesson, shushing the girl as they left.
HEARING FROM EDUCATORS

- Bennett Family Center
- Hort Woods
ASSESSING MATERIALS
(ADAPTED FROM DERMAN-SPARKS TEN QUICK WAYS TO ANALYZE CHILDREN'S BOOKS FOR RACISM AND SEXISM.)

- Every book needs to be accurate, caring, and respectful.
- **Check the Illustrations** - *Look for Stereotypes*
- **Look for Tokenism:** *Is there one person of color?*
- **Look for Invisibility:** *Who is missing?*
- Many children's books use **animal characters instead of people:** such books are not a substitute for exploring issues of diversity and anti-bias fairness with people as the main characters.
- Avoid overuse of folk tales to "teach" about a specific ethnic/cultural group leads to misinformation and confusion.
HAVING RACE CONSCIOUS, ANTI-RACIST CONVERSATIONS (ADAIR & DOUCET, 2013)

- Can be uneasy and can produce anxiety
- Takes place in a community of trust (Ladson-Billings, 2009)
- Require Listening and Questioning
- Go deep
- Are honest
- Show how this happens in life
- Involve families and communities
FOR DISCUSSION...

First ten minutes:
How has what’s been shared resonate with you and your prior experiences?

Second ten minutes:
Name a wondering or core tensions you are feeling.