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UNIVERSITY OF REDLANDS

Perceptions of Race and Leadership in Early Childhood Education

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Education in Leadership for Educational Justice

By

Chrystina Smith-Rasshan

August 2020

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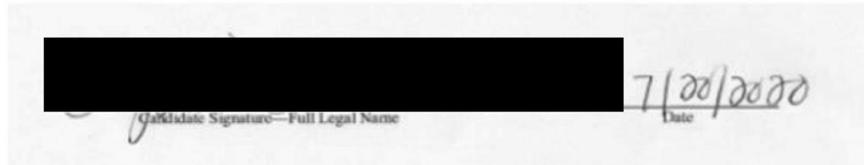
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Abstract

The aim of this research is to examine the perceptions of leadership and race by African American current and or former decision makers within Early Childhood Education programs. This phenomenological study will explore African American leaders' views, attitudes, and beliefs about race pertaining to leadership, children, and themselves. The examination of race within educational leadership is not a new concept; however, with the increased attention now given to early education, it is imperative that issues related to improving learning outcomes for all children are addressed.

Acknowledgments

To My Village, My Tribe

This achievement is ours. What a journey this has been! This journey has taught me about resilience, empathy and humility. I want to express my deepest gratitude to all of you. I would not have been able to accomplish such a dream without your unwavering love, encouragement and support. Thank you for every prayer, and word of encouragement. You have instilled a sense of responsibility to uplift our village, as well as others. This accomplishment is a manifestation of the investment you've made in me.

Mom and Dad, thank you for your many sacrifices! Being a mother, I now realize the love and unselfishness it takes to raise a child. I am forever grateful to you both.

To my sisters and brothers, I feel your pride. It has strengthened me.

Ahmad, my lover and friend, thank you for your support and for believing in me. Thank you for the pep talks when I need them, and thank you for not letting me quit!

██████ and ██████, Momma loves you—your Black Boy Joy brings me so much happiness.

To my ancestors known and unknown, thank you for placing this dream in me; I stand on your shoulders.

To my Cohort 9 crew, Honey, Cynthia and Yolanda: your kindness, thoughtfulness and support made this journey a little sweeter. Also, thank you to my Grammar Queen; you have been instrumental to my success.

Lastly, I want to thank my Dissertation Committee Members, Dr. Valadez, Dr. Hunt and Dr. Hamilton, I truly appreciate of your guidance and patience throughout this journey, and thank you to the faculty and staff that contributed to my success.

In closing, I would like to quote James Baldwin:

“I am what time, circumstance, history have made of me, certainly, but I am also much more than that. So are we all.”

Table of Contents

Acknowledgments.....	4
Self Awareness.....	7
Chapter One:	11
Introduction.....	11
Background.....	11
Chapter Two.....	20
Literature Review.....	20
Leadership in Early Childhood Education	20
Chapter Three.....	32
Methodology	32
Chapter Four	38
Results.....	38
Chapter Five.....	57
Conclusions.....	57

Self Awareness

Given the current climate regarding race, it seems logical to look at studies that explore race and its dynamics within education. At this time in our nation, focal attention to issues of race has been omnipresent; for example, recent killings of unarmed Black males by police officers and unfitting remarks made by President Donald Trump against Muslim, Black and Mexican people have prompted an uptake in public and private conversations about race (Tatum, 2017). As we consume different media platforms, we are all being inundated by racial messaging and programming (Morehead, 2020). Our children are exposed to ideas about race whether we want them to be or not. With today's current climate, it is imperative that we think about what children are being programmed to believe about others and—most importantly—about themselves.

My introduction to race came early in my childhood; I can recall watching *Eyes on the Prize* with my dad around the age of eight. *Eyes on the Prize* is an American television series and 14-hour documentary about the Civil Rights Movement in the United States. The documentary originally aired on the PBS network and also aired in the United Kingdom. Created and executive-produced by Henry Hampton at Blackside, Inc., the series uses archival footage, stills and accounts of contributors to and challengers of the Civil Rights movement.

Often, my dad would share stories with me about the Civil Rights movement, racism and discrimination; thus began my interest in social issues in America, and as I matured this interest expanded greatly. He also stressed the importance of understanding history. The notion of race for me was established through dialogue mostly. My fondest memories of childhood are the conversations shared with my parents and grandparents about history and their experiences growing up Negro, Colored and Black in America.

Early on, the awareness of race and how race functioned in the world emerged as an important factor in my life. I attended school in Pomona, CA, which is located about twenty miles east of Los Angeles. Pomona's school district was Title 1 designated, and around 80 percent of students received free and or reduced lunch (California Department of Education, 2020). I had some great teachers over the years; they inspired and challenged me to be the best and to make a difference in the world. I am forever grateful to my teachers that made me believe I could do anything despite my race, gender or socioeconomics.

Although the student population was diverse, we had one thing in common: poverty and the residuals of poverty. There were not many White students that attended my school; it was mostly Latino and Black students. Though race riots were common during the 1990s, I do not remember discussing race in school, oddly enough—most of those conversations occurred off campus with friends and family. However, somehow it was evident that racial and economic lines had been drawn. We knew where the “kids with money” lived and went to school, and we also knew that not many of them looked like us.

Growing up I was a good student, stayed out of trouble, and did the right thing for the most part. Looking back, I now realize that I was fortunate to have social capital through my network—my “village”—that enabled me to successfully maneuver the education system. My network taught me how to talk, dress and act in order to be successful in school and in life. In addition, I am also aware that being female assisted me in my efforts because *traits that aid academic achievement are more common among females*; this is also known as “female advantage” in education (Applerouth, 2017).

Conversely, as the mother of young Black boys, I am sensitive to and aware of the fact that their experiences in society will be different from mine. My husband and I are very intentional

about how and what we teach them about race. We do our best to educate them; we expose them to their heritage through books, lectures, art, and film. Our mission is to nurture their innate excellence. I can recall preparing my eldest son for his first day of Kindergarten. I purchased crayons and pencils, backpack, folders, etc., but in addition to that I gave him something else: I created a mantra, which went “I am smart, I am kind, I am loved.” Prior to school starting, I shared the mantra with him and explained why I wanted him to have it. I explained to him that some people, even teachers, may believe that he is unkind, unloved and unintelligent simply because of his skin color and also added that if he ever felt unsure, scared, sad or otherwise, that he should always remember his mantra. I still remember the look on his face; he was amused and confused at the same time. He is 12 now and in the sixth grade this year, and he still says his mantra before he gets out of the car each morning to go to school.

In 2012, we moved to our community because it was known to have great schools as well safe communities; we wanted to ensure that our son had the greatest opportunity to obtain a quality education. My son’s schooling experience is much different from mine, as there are not many Black children at this school and there are only two Black teachers. Considering relevant research, I am not surprised by these figures; according to Brookings Institute, in 2012, 44 percent of K-12 students in the U.S. were racial or ethnic minorities compared to only 17 percent of teachers.

Although young, it was clear that my son was aware of race. He was observing and taking in everything that he saw. He was picking up on the roles and rules of public education. I am certain that my son was affected and influenced by his teachers and what they thought. Case in point: his Kindergarten teacher had blonde hair and many of his classmates had blonde hair too. He became fascinated by their yellow hair and wanted to have hair like that too. I spent a good portion of the year affirming that his curly brown hair was beautiful, unique and strong. My son’s

Kindergarten experience went well and further established his love for learning. He had a veteran teacher and he enjoyed being in her class, but what was most important to me was that she recognized that he was an advanced learner and challenged him. She saw what my husband and I saw, an amazing canvas.

My son still attends the same school, although there are not very many Black children, the school is somewhat racially diverse. He has made friends from various backgrounds, and he enjoys and partakes in their cultural foods and customs. Like many schools around the country, neither the school personnel nor the administration reflect the student demographics. The staff is predominantly White and all of administration is White. Frequently, I think about what unintentional consequences will arise and what messages have been subliminally absorbed by my precious one.

Being a parent working within Early Childhood Education as well as one interested in social justice issues has given me a heightened sensitivity toward the schooling of young children. I am frequently in thought about the work I do in early education and the challenges faced. It is evident that race and the residual effects of racism are factors within Early Childhood Education.

My work allows me to interact with leadership at the county, state and national levels. A keen observation of mine has been the lack of People of Color (PoC) in decision maker roles within Early Childhood Education. This observation is important because many of the challenges and issues within early education pertain to children of color and are related to race, yet that perspective is often underrepresented or absent entirely in leadership. Research has shown that decisions, policies and procedures of Early Childhood Education programs have often adversely affected children and families of color.

Chapter One: Introduction

Background

According to the California Department of Education, school is compulsory for children from the age of six, and caretakers of six-year-old children must enroll their children in school (Education Code 48200). In many instances, children enter school around the age of four; however, some programs serve children ages 0-3 (California Department of Education, 2020). Currently in America, it is projected that 5% of 3-year olds and 32% of 4-year olds are in state-funded pre-kindergarten (Johnson-Staub, 2017). Children are developing rapidly at this point in their lives; the brain is making connections that will determine how they learn how to communicate, reason, and interact with the world (First 5 California, 2020). It is a critical time when children are learning about the concept of belonging beyond their own homes and families. Prior to their enrollment in formal school settings, their learning has primarily been observational and social in nature. From this point on, children will spend a significant amount of time at school; for that reason, school must be a place where children's potential is developed and expanded to create positive self-identity.

The emotional and physical health, social skills, and cognitive-linguistic capacities that emerge in the early years are all important for success in school, the workplace, and in the larger community. According to Louise Derman-Sparks, children begin absorbing socially dominant stereotypes, attitudes and prejudices about themselves and others by the age of two. Umana and Taylor (2013) also note that family and the media are primary sources for information learned about race and ethnicity. With a population so diverse, race-related issues must not be ignored. Race cannot just be another area "to address." Instead, it must inform the way we examine matters concerning young children, especially within education.

To start a discussion on race and leadership within Early Childhood Education (ECE), one must first look at the data. California has around 9.1 million children; a fourth of those children reside in Los Angeles, San Diego, Orange, Riverside, and San Bernardino counties. Santa Clara county has the next largest child population (Kids Data, 2018). More importantly, out of 3,024,392 children ages 0-5 in California in 2016, over 70% were children of color. Los Angeles County reported that over 80% were children of color, while Riverside and San Bernardino Counties reported that almost 80% were children of color (Kids Data, 2018).

Another important data point to consider is what demographic groups are attending various early education programs. In 2013, among those children not yet enrolled in kindergarten, 39% of Black children ages 3 to 5 were enrolled in full-day programs, compared to 25% of White children and 22% of Hispanic children (Child Trends, 2018). White children not in kindergarten were the most likely (31%) to be enrolled in a part-day program, whereas Black children were the least likely (18%), and Hispanic children (22%) fell in the middle (Child Trends, 2018). Generally, Hispanic children were the least likely of these groups to be enrolled in any program in 2013, with 56% not enrolled at all, compared with 44% and 43% of Black and White children, respectively (Child Trends, 2018).

Furthermore, preschool is a meeting of race, class, gender, and area codes. Families with higher incomes have the privilege of deciding on where their child will go to preschool. Much like in k-12, the programs serving children of affluence encourage children to develop a sense of agency, larger vocabularies, and enhanced social skills, and children are being asked questions by teachers versus being fed information to remember. Jean Anyon referred to this as the “hidden curriculum” of schoolwork (Anyon, 1980). Anyon furthers states how “differing curricular, pedagogical, and pupil evaluation practices emphasize different cognitive and behavioral skills in

each social setting and thus contribute to the development in the children of certain potential relationships to physical and symbolic capital” (Anyon, 1980).

Furthermore, essential analysis of these outcomes implies that the skills cultivated in middle and upper-class children are those by and large linked to management and leadership, trajectories that many of these children will pursue. In contrast, the prevailing approach of compliance and conceding to teacher control evident in many programs serving low-income children reflects traits valued by employers. Currently, even though efforts appear to be centered on academic readiness, their implementation perpetuates the status quo.

Problem

The examination of the perceptions of race and leadership within Early Childhood Education is important because the education of children is not just what they learn academically but what they learn socially and emotionally. Zimmermann (2018) writes that children's social and behavioral skills in early childhood are as important as academic skills for projecting school success. Children are very impressionable, so adults who work with them significantly affect what and how young children learn in meaningful ways. Therefore, it is imperative that these individuals are equipped to promote cultural diversity by obtaining the proper training and/or education or by being culturally diverse themselves (Reid, 2015).

Much has been written about the demographic gap between the growing racially diverse student population and the teaching force in U.S. schools (Miller, 2014; Sharma, 2005; Waddell, 2012). Moreover, educators' perceptions and outlooks about culturally diverse students in the nation's classrooms are the key aspects in motivating, educating, and making a difference in the education of students irrespective of their gender, ethnicity, age, religion, language, or exceptionality (Waddell, 2012). Principals, like teachers, are mostly a racially homogenous

group. The United States Department of Education reports that of the 89,000 principals in US public schools, 80% of school principals are white, 10% are Black, and 7% are Latino. In contrast, students of color who identify as Latino (27.6%), Black (15.1%), and Asian/Pacific Islander (5.3%) collectively make up a larger portion of total school-age enrollment than white students (47.9%). For school superintendents, the figures are even more troubling. Only 6% of school superintendents self-identify as people of color.

The California Early Care and Education Workforce Study: Licensed Child Care Centers Statewide in 2006 indicated that across job levels, diversity of ethnic makeup decreased as the level of responsibility increased, with the job of director showing the least amount of diversity (Whitebook et al., 2012). The report showed that 24% of directors and 42% of supervisors/managers were non-White, while more than half of professional (55%) and administrative (59%) staff were non-White (Whitebook et al., 2012). This pattern mirrors a similar stratification present in the center-based ECE workforce, with those in director roles being less ethnically diverse than other staff (Whitebook et al., 2012). As a result, there have been serious consequences beyond statistical parity.

Unfortunately, research suggests that not all children's behaviors are evaluated the same by teachers (U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights , 2014). Current data indicate that Black and Brown children are disciplined more frequently and harshly than their White and Asian peers. A report released by the Office for Civil Rights (OCR) in 2014 revealed distinct differences in school discipline for students of color (U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights, 2014). The OCR data showed that the discipline disparities start early and continue across the educational continuum for racially diverse students. This report also highlighted how African Americans made up 18 percent of all preschool age children, however they made up

almost 50 percent of all preschool age children who received out-of-school suspensions in 2012 (U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights, 2014). Reports like the one mentioned above further prove the need for research related to race and the early years.

Purpose

The purpose of this research is to examine the perceptions of race and leadership held by African American decision makers within Early Childhood Education programs. Their perceptions about race are very important because they affect the way they think and make decisions for their programs. Preschool is often an introduction to how the world works; it offers children lifelong lessons the moment they step foot in a classroom. They observe the rules and nuances of relationships, power, race and gender. Since Early Childhood Education has been posited as a key factor in closing the achievement gap; issues within the field of Early Childhood Education are more important than ever.

Theoretical Framework

Critical Race Theory (CRT) derived in the 1970's from the legal sector to better address racism in the justice system. This worked was constituted by legal scholars Derrick Bell, Alan Freeman and Richard Delgado (DeCuir, 2004). Critical Race Theory continues to develop and grow as a theoretical framework and analytical tool for challenging racism and other forms of oppression. Its principles have been defined and framed in various ways (Delgado, 2012). For this qualitative research study, I have chosen to use Critical Race Theory (CRT), a theoretical framework specifically designed for the purpose of examining issues involving race and racism. Ladson-Billings (2000) discusses how CRT has shaped debates about the significance of ethnic epistemologies in qualitative research. She also discussed ways CRT could be used to examine traditional ways of thinking and conducting informative research and practice.

Over the last two decades, Critical Race Theory has progressively become a permanent “fixture in the toolkit of education researchers seeking to critically examine educational opportunities, school climate, representation, and pedagogy” (Ledesma, 2015, p. 207). Researchers have used CRT, “as an epistemological and methodological tool, to help analyze the experiences of historically underrepresented populations across the k-12 educational pipeline” (Ledesma, 2015, p. 207). Parker (2006) writes that Critical Race studies in education could be defined as an analysis of racism as a system of oppression and exploitation that surveys the historic and modern issues of race in our society with specific attention to how these issues are displayed in schools.

In 1991, Critical Race Theory (CRT) and U.S. legal scholar Neil Gotanda penned an important law review theorizing and criticizing color-blind racial philosophy as a tool to sustain White supremacy (Annamma, 2017, p. 27). Gotanda stated that color-blind racial philosophy maintained White supremacy by upholding “the social, economic, and political benefits that Whites retain over other non-Whites” (Annamma, 2017). Solorzano & Yosso (2002) asserted that the Eurocentric versions of U.S. history depict race as a socially fashioned notion, established to distinguish racial groups and to show the superiority of one group over another. Therefore, it is appropriate to use CRT when discussing race and racism within school settings.

Nash et al. (2017) writes: “in the context of early childhood educational research, CRT has three goals: to (1) expose and explore racism as a legal and structural reality; (2) evaluate neo-liberalism and its effects on laws and policies that perpetuate racism; and (3) engage in storytelling and counternarratives to give testimony to voices that have been oppressed by racial realities. We can work toward these three aims with young children through ongoing

socialization, conversation, and action that disrupts and counters racism., and commitment to social justice” (p. 4).

Criticism of Liberalism Critical Race scholars are disparaging of and test the ideas of objectivity, meritocracy, color blindness, race neutrality, equal opportunity, and incremental change (ASHE Higher Education Report, 2015). Meanwhile Ford and Airhihenbuwa concluded that CRT contests the flawed belief that color blindness equates to lack of racism (ASHE Higher Education Report, 2015). Scholars dedicated to social justice must constantly question the ways that racial advancements are supported through White self-interest and a color-blind philosophy (ASHE Higher Education Report, 2015). Incremental change is the notion where change for minorities and other marginalized groups occurs in a tolerable fashion to those currently empowered (ASHE Higher Education Report, 2015). An example of this is the South’s unhurried reaction to the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision (Wilkinson, 1978). Countless people in the South not only resisted integration, but maintained that if it was to happen, it had to transpire in a slow methodical fashion tolerable to White people (Wilkinson, 1978). Regardless of being directed to integrate “with all deliberate speed,” a good number of southern school systems failed to integrate until the beginning of the 1970–1971 school year, 14 years following the *Brown* decision (Wilkinson, 1978).

Lastly, we must acknowledge that educators of color endure messages of inadequacy in the field of Early Childhood Education even as high-level professionals. Despite the era of culturally competent education and inclusivity, these messages are further affirmed through practices and workplace culture. CRT posits that these practices present as institutional norms and have been ingrained in our school systems from the very beginning. African Americans are racialized people in this society; therefore, it is important to give voice to their experiences. On

the other hand, it is through Whiteness that White people have been understood as being devoid of race and therefore have benefitted from a particular level of power and privilege. As Ladson-Billings (1998) states, although there is no fixedness to these categories, in a racialized society where Whiteness is positioned as normative, everyone is ranked and categorized in relation to the dominant group. Hence, there is an obligation to challenge the bounds of mainstream stories and dominant discussions, and the stories of the 11 African American leaders interviewed for this study will provide further insight into the reality of race and racism within Early Childhood Education.

In a time when the country is bombarded with images that indicate race matters, the examination of race and how race is perceived is pertinent. As educators and leaders, we are often asked to respond to these complex issues. Sadly, children have not been exempt from the brutal realities of race relations in America, and therefore this study's significance is further heightened. This study will examine the perception of race and leadership in Early Childhood Education.

Early Childhood Education is a social justice issue in many regards; the issues that persist in K-12 derive from these early years. According to First 5 California, the effects of economic and social inequalities are evident in young children's development as early as 18 months of age and widen throughout early childhood. These opportunity gaps can lead to an achievement gap in a child's school (First 5 California, 2020). The schooling and socialization of children ages 0-5 are essential to a child's success in school and in life.

Research Questions

The following research questions will be addressed:

1. What are the experiences and/or challenges of African Americans in decision making leadership roles within Early Childhood Education?
2. How do African Americans in Early Childhood Education perceive race pertaining to themselves, leadership, and children ages 3-5?

Chapter Two

Literature Review

This review of literature provides a foundation for the research. The first literature under review pertains to leadership in Early Childhood Education, specifically the role of leadership and how it is defined and examined to facilitate understanding of the questions being posed in this study. I will review literature on race and leadership to provide context for the study. The final section explores literature on young children and race, for it is important to understand the research regarding how children develop their understanding of and ability to reason about race.

Leadership in Early Childhood Education

Years of extensive research has led to a deeper understanding about leadership in Early Childhood Education settings. Research on leadership suggests that the most skilled leaders are those who recognize and address challenges from a system-wide standpoint (Goffin, 2019; Talan, 2014). Early childhood leaders must be capable of envisioning goals, bolstering values, inspiring staff, accomplishing unity of purpose, and promoting norms of continuous improvement for their programs (Masterson, 2016).

Simon's (2015) article focuses on balanced vision as the most important characteristic of impactful leadership, with resolve and patience as essential parts of the equation, as well. The article further suggests that impactful leaders join forces with other people and organizations, which then fuels a shared passion. They mentor, and in turn are mentored themselves; they remain aware of the past, present, and future and put together the puzzle systematically (Simon, 2015). These leaders work in partnership for vision acuity, learn using peripheral vision, and finesse the delivery of problematic information. They are forthright and skilled at using data to persuade and establish initiatives composed by people who share a common goal (Simon, 2015).

Traditionally, effective practices include “identifying and articulating a vision; ensuring shared understandings, meanings and goals; effective communication; encouraging reflection; monitoring and assessing practice; commitment to ongoing professional development; distributive leadership; building a learning community and team culture; encouraging and facilitating genuine family and community partnerships; and striking the balance between leading and managing” (Every Child Magazine, 2012; Simon, 2015). Leadership roles may include the expectation to plan and manage professional development for ECE practitioners, conduct field research, advise public policy, and lead government and non-profit early childhood organizations (Whitebook M. S., 2010).

The traditional concept of a leader as being an individual at the top of a hierarchy is an incomplete appreciation of what true leadership must be. Traditional ideas of leadership, however, are not entirely antithetical to Early Childhood Education: effective work style, consideration of work culture, the cultivation of attributes including vision, ethics, and courage are imperative to successful leadership (Kagan, 2001). Today’s Early Childhood Education (ECE) leaders must be politically intelligent, aware of and involved in a variety of contexts extending beyond one’s day-to-day work, and capable of envisioning and bolstering change (Whitebook M. K., 2012).

Interestingly, the field of Early Childhood Education has commonly been described as suffering from a lack of leadership capacity (Nicholson, 2018). Explicit challenges have thwarted leadership development in the field: the lack of an agreed-upon definition of leadership, early childhood professionals’ feelings of uncertainty about authority and their limited opportunities for guiding policy or engaging in professional partnership, the field’s historically low wages and the low value and disregard accorded to teacher and care provider skills in society, the lack of a

clear professional career ladder, and the positioning of leadership training within institutions of higher education (Douglass, 2018; Nicholson, 2018).

Kagan (2001) wrote about three assumptions of leadership theory related to Early Childhood Education. The first traditional theory presumes leadership by a single person, typically a White male. This conceptualization disregards the ideas of shared leadership that are now emergent in modern theory but already present in several Early Childhood Education programs that have commonly been led by women (Douglass, 2018; Kagan, 2001). A second assumption that may render traditional leadership theory less useful to the Early Childhood Education field is that it typically characterizes leaders of large, hierarchical, product-oriented companies rather than leaders of smaller, people-focused organizations. It is not just that the two types of establishments are organizationally dissimilar; they also differ in the strains that are placed on leaders (Kagan, 2001). For example, producing objects is a straightforward process requiring little, if any, flexibility, reinterpretation, or consideration for each object (Kagan, 2001). In contrast, serving children and families requires leaders to revisit strategies and processes on a regular basis (Kagan, 2001). The understanding, flexibility, diversity, and individualization of early childhood programs create a very different leadership context than the uniformity, inflexibility, formality, and bureaucratization that has been traditionally linked to corporate settings (Kagan, 2001). A third assumption of conventional leadership theory is competition rather than collaboration. In most cases in Kagan's study, the notion of collaboration was directed internally to improve organizational productivity (Kagan, 2001).

The McCormick Center extensively researched the topic of leadership in ECE. Their resultant three-component framework defines leadership within the field of ECE. This framework, which includes the competencies of leadership essentials, administrative leadership,

and pedagogical leadership, provides a comprehensive approach to leadership. Leadership essentials, considered anchors for success, include personal skills/attributes and serve as the foundation for the other two competencies (Masterson, 2016). Leadership essentials cultivate healthy environments that yield increased levels of collaboration, efficacy, creativity, and ethical commitment for all parties (Masterson, 2016). Thus, leadership becomes a shared responsibility that relies on mutual engagement and commitment within the context of trust and communication. Both administrative and pedagogical leadership are then maximized (Masterson, 2016).

The framework next introduces the idea of administrative leadership. This is a process of establishing goals, coordinating work, and motivating people to sustain an early childhood organization (Masterson, 2016; Talan, 2014). Effective administrative leaders build systems for consistent implementation of program operations to meet the needs of children, families, and staff. Operational leadership and strategic leadership are two key components of administrative leadership. Operational leadership occurs “through critical functions such as hiring, evaluating, and supporting teaching staff; developing budgets aligned with program goals and needs; and maintaining a positive organizational culture and climate” (Masterson, 2016, p. 3). Strategic leadership, on the other hand, “involves guiding the direction of an early childhood organization with the future in mind. Strategic leaders clarify mission and values, inspire staff to pursue a shared vision, and ensure that program goals and outcomes are attained” (Masterson, 2016, p. 4). Strategic leadership, though, is not just internally focused. Administrative leaders must communicate and align their program services with those of like-minded stakeholders serving young children and families (Masterson, 2016; Simon, 2015). Effective administrative leaders are future oriented and engage in advocacy because they want to influence external conditions

that impact young children, families, and early childhood programs. Remaining current is imperative to success (Masterson, 2016; Simon, 2015).

While administrative and pedagogical leadership are separate, they do work in tandem. Administrative leadership maintains the organizational conditions in which teachers and other staff can do their best work so that children and families thrive (Masterson, 2016). Leadership employed to enrich the art and science of teaching is found in the pedagogical realm. Pedagogical leadership ensures educator dispositions and high-quality interactions with children (Masterson, 2016). Activities of individuals exercising pedagogical leadership include assuring fidelity to curricular philosophy, evaluating children's development and learning, using data for evaluation, and advancing learning (Masterson, 2016). Pedagogical leadership includes instructional leadership as well as supporting classroom teachers in implementing curricula (Masterson, 2016). The framework distinguishes pedagogical leadership as a broader term that embodies activities occurring in early childhood settings that some individuals may not associate with instruction (Masterson, 2016). Effective pedagogical leadership requires promoting partnerships with families, relationships essential to children's learning and growth (Masterson, 2016).

Race and Leadership

Louis (2016) writes that racial identity does not impact views of White male leaders in the same way as Black leaders. White males have played a significant role in the history of the United States by holding key leadership roles, and we are regularly exposed to them as figure heads (Louis, 2016). Minority leaders, then, do not "fit" the perceived idea of being a leader. While the ability to take charge and inspire are imperative to any leadership position, sustaining the credibility needed to do so may come with certain challenges for Black leaders (Louis, 2016).

Their competence may be met with hesitancy by stakeholders holding implicit biases that lead them to question leadership abilities or that correlate blackness with inadequacy, risk or stupidity (Louis, 2016). Black leaders may also be inhibited by which leadership methods may be accepted by their constituents; research indicates that Black leaders rate more favorably when perceived as nonthreatening (Louis, 2016). This leads some black leaders to downplay their power or enthusiasm because such passion may be misconstrued as hostility or anger. In a 2011 study by Arminio and her colleagues, leaders found themselves suppressing their cultural heritage by altering their oral and body language behaviors in White-predominant groups in order to fit in (Arminio, 2000).

Ironically, diverse school leaders are more likely to bring perspectives of cultural competence and forms of capital which are highly regarded by families and communities, specifically within immigrant communities (Castro, 2018). These assets allow such school leaders to be “cultural straddlers,” enabling them to move within and across multiple environments (Castro, 2018). For example, one study showed that Latino school leaders can “prompt Latino parents to change their view of the schooling experience—which results in high family and community engagement” (Castro, 2018). These forms of knowledge allow school leaders to foster stronger engagement with students and families, improve student outcomes, and engage with the community (Castro, 2018).

Race and Young Children

If we don’t discuss race with children, “they will not just come to their own conclusions, they’ll come to racist conclusions,” says Kate Engle, an early childhood educator quoted in Payne and Ralli (2018). The opening quote lends credence to the importance of discussing race with young children. Although the study of young children and how they make sense of racial

differences is taboo in many educational settings, the current racial climate calls for thoughtful consideration.

According to Park (2011), Piagetian developmental psychology came to dominate our understanding of young children's knowledge. Piagetian theorists studying children and race debated the cognitive prerequisites for understanding ideas pertaining to race and the ages and sequences of children becoming racially aware and/or biased (Park, 2011). These theorists asserted that preschool children in the preoperational stage are egocentric, and therefore ethnocentric, so they possess only a basic understanding of race based on such physical traits (Park, 2011). Thus, efforts to reduce the strong in-group preferences of children younger than seven were predicted to have little impact, since children of that age have not yet acquired the ability to consider the perspectives of others (Park, 2011). The underlying premise was that in-group preference is a predictable consequence of cognitive immaturity and would decrease as children matured (Park, 2011).

Piagetian developmental approaches were interested in the point at which and the order in which order all children acquire certain cognitive abilities or schemas (Park, 2011). Insufficient attention, though, was given to the meanings that children learn to attach to racial and ethnic differences and the processes through which they engage in such meaning-making work in their encounters with different people in different contexts (Park, 2011).

Kemple et al. conclude that “from the earliest days of infancy, children begin the work of developing a sense of themselves as individuals” (Kemple et al., 2016, p. 98). They explain the concept of self as it relates to children, suggesting that as children increase their social-cognitive ability, they think about themselves instead of merely thinking within themselves. Van Ausdale and Feagin's ethnography demonstrates how racial thinking is just one "tool" that children use to

construct identities, establish dominance in interactions with others, maintain individual space, and secure resources such as peer or adult attention (Winkler, 2009). The study documents the ways in which children are not simply passive receptacles of racist ideologies but are also active producers of racial knowledge. Lewis's (2003) ethnographic study conducted in three public elementary schools demonstrates how race and inequality are produced and reproduced through the institutionalized processes of schooling. Lewis's inquiry sheds light on how schools teach daily lessons about race while denying that race matters (Lewis, 2003).

Hirschfield (2012) wrote about the misconceptions of race and young children and even noted that preschoolers have the ability to recognize racial prejudices; they begin reasoning that the majority group knows more, tells the truth more, and has more money than the minority groups prevalent in their neighborhoods (Hirschfeld, 2012). He aimed to demonstrate the misconceptions of the young child's mind as it relates to race. He identified seven myths: 1) young children are by nature innocent of race; 2) even if they are aware of race, they are without prejudice; 3) children discover race by opening their eyes and looking; 4) children may come to notice race on their own but have to be taught prejudice; 5) children notice race—they may acquire a form of racial bias but ultimately, they believe that race is a superficial quality, literally skin deep; 6) if a child acts color-blind, he is; 7) reducing prejudice is best achieved by affirming that deep down, everyone is the same and/or any difference between them should be celebrated, not scorned. His aim was to identify inaccuracies, present evidence that challenges them and briefly consider why they are resistant to counterevidence.

Hirschfield's work supports the importance of Boutte et al.'s (2011) discussion of why the early childhood years are central for equipping children with skills to address racism. In addition, Boutte et al. (2011) encourage teachers to participate in self-reflection and provide

guidance for beginning discussions concerning race and racism with children. Research clearly establishes that young children are neither naive nor colorblind and that racial relationships are significant parts of their social worlds (Boutte et al., 2011). Young children often eagerly play cross-racially and culturally. Children are social and quickly learn the racial identities and racial stereotypes displayed through media and society. Therefore, if young children are not given chances to begin articulating and challenging their understandings, it is probable that they will develop the seeds of racism (Boutte et al., 2011).

Contrary to popular belief, there are numerous examples in the literature which suggest that young children discriminate based on race and that children of color receive damaging messages from society about the color of their skin. Children begin to notice differences and to categorize and assess groups very early in life (Derman-Sparks, 2012). Between three and five years of age, they start drawing conclusions about essential aspects of their identities, such as race (Derman-Sparks, 2012). Often, young children use racial reasons for refusing to interact with children who are different.

Studies propose that consideration of features arises progressively over the preschool and elementary school years (Dunham, 2014). It has commonly been maintained that an understanding of race as a perceptual category occurs quite early in development (Dunham, 2014). For instance, “3-month-old infants favorably acknowledged faces of the same race as their primary caregivers, and 9-month-olds habituated to a series of White or Asian faces and dishabituation when presented with a face of the other race, demonstrating a simple form of perceptual categorization” (Dunham, 2014). Research dating back to the 1940’s indicated young children’s ability to recognize race. One notable experiment, known as the Clark Doll Studies, involved 250 three to seven-year-old black children from Arkansas and Massachusetts. The

subjects were presented with four dolls: two were brown skinned with black hair and two were white with yellow hair. The children were then asked a series of eight questions about the dolls, with racial distinction being one. The results revealed that 3 to 4-year olds succeeded in over 70% of race categorization trials, while 6 to 7-year-olds succeeded in over 90% (Dunham, 2014).

Another such experiment is Jane Elliot's Blue Eyes/Brown Eyes exercise. On April 5, 1968, the day after Martin Luther King, Jr. was assassinated, Ms. Jane Elliot, a third-grade teacher, conducted a powerful exercise with her class to teach them about racial bias (Bland, 2017; Whitfield, 2017). As part of her exercise, Elliot divided the children, who were all white, by eye color. She then proclaimed that children with brown eyes were smarter, faster and better than those with blue eyes. Elliott came up with an explanation: Intelligence, she told the children, was determined by melanin. The more melanin, the darker the person's eyes—and the smarter the person (Bland, 2017; Whitfield, 2017). What Elliott said she learned from the exercise was that people are not born prejudiced but learn the behavior. “‘And if it can be learned,’ she said, ‘it can be unlearned.’” (Bland, 2017). While these role-playing activities proved to be impactful, not many have been replicated due to federal guidelines prohibiting research that may be stressful to children. However, when children are encouraged through meaningful activities, they can express and even challenge their own views.

Race and Identity

Loyd and Williams (2017) explain the role of racial identity formation and its importance, suggesting that it is commonly accepted as a “normative developmental process through which a young person understands” their place in the world. They add that children who have established a positive self-identity are more likely to make better life choices and less likely to engage in detrimental behaviors (Loyd, 2017). An OCD report offers evidence indicating that

positive racial identity formation can neutralize some of the adverse effects of discrimination that students may encounter in school by promoting higher resilience, self-worth, and self-confidence (University of Pittsburgh, 2016). Nonetheless, the report also revealed that many parents, educators, and other stakeholders feel ill-equipped to support positive racial identity in early childhood (University of Pittsburgh, 2016).

According to Louise Derman-Sparks (2012), by the age of two, children begin absorbing socially dominant stereotypes, attitudes and prejudices about themselves and others around them. They begin to display fear or even hatred toward persons with a dissimilar skin color, unfamiliar language, or physical disability (Derman-Sparks, 2012). Derman-Sparks adds that by the age of four, children seek labels for racial/ethnic identities and they have their own ideas about what causes disability, skin tone, or gender (Derman-Sparks, 2012). Adult verbal and non-verbal responses significantly impact these theories. Children can comprehend that name calling and teasing about a person's appearance, gender, background is unjust (Derman-Sparks, 2012).

By age five, children can begin to ascertain what it means to be from one race versus another. They can even recognize the socioeconomic status of groups and internalize messages that institutions convey to them about who is in charge, who has access to resources, and so on (Derman-Sparks, 2012). Moreover, these realizations begin to influence the child's idea of group and individual identity (Derman-Sparks, 2012). At age six, children can express worth, happiness and wealth in tangible terms, based on what they observe. Finally, they are now capable of seeing themselves as part of a racial group (Derman-Sparks, 2012).

Children ages six to eight continue to collect information, correct or not, and adopt feelings about human features (Derman-Sparks, 2012). They start classifying the various facets

of their identity such as gender, ethnicity, and class. They can make judgments about fairness, injustice and privilege (Derman-Sparks, 2012). By this age they begin to express the “truths,” namely stereotypes and biases they have learned (Derman-Sparks, 2012). These viewpoints have solidified by age nine or 10 (Derman-Sparks, 2012). In most instances, it will take major life changes and experiences to alter their beliefs and behaviors (Derman-Sparks, 2012).

Self-realization and identity are essential to children’s development. Quintana et al. (2006) wrote that children explore their identities most often during late childhood to early adolescence, and then it levels off in the middle to late adolescence stages. Other elements of ethnic identity, such as ethnic membership, do not seem to experience changes during adolescence, but are nonetheless linked to educational outcomes (p. 1135). Moreover, Altschul et al.’s (2006) results dispute the argument that racial minority youth must develop “racelessness” to thrive educationally. This is a common argument and leads to feelings of hostility in many communities because it insinuates that their culture and racial identities are inferior. Instead, Altschul et al. observed that for racially marginalized children to be educationally successful, academic achievement must be connected to their racial identity (Altschul, 2006).

Osuna and Nasir (2016) conducted and reviewed extensive literature on race, culture and identity in education. One article they examined indicated how racial identities are shaped by experiences among those in the classroom through curricular resources. The success of these interactions in cultivating both positive racial and academic identities varies across classrooms and relies largely on the resources available for students to use to interpret their actions and envision themselves as capable or incapable learners (Langer-Osuna, 2016, p. 734).

Chapter Three

Methodology

I analyzed the data using a phenomenological perspective. Phenomenology is an approach to qualitative research that focuses on the commonality of a lived experience within a specific group. The goal of the approach is to reach an explanation of the particular phenomenon (Creswell, 2013). Characteristically, interviews are conducted with a group of individuals who have first-hand experience of an event or situation (Creswell, 2013).

Qualitative techniques are compatible with a phenomenological approach because the emphasis is on reporting the lived experiences of individuals. The goal is to acquire a greater understanding of the perceptions of people relating to a phenomenon, which can be a sentiment, relationship, or an object such as a program, an establishment, or a culture (Patton, 1990). Phenomenological studies pose the question, “What is the essence of experience of the phenomenon for those who experience it?” (Patton, 1990). Phenomenology aims to show the unspoken structure and meaning of such experiences.

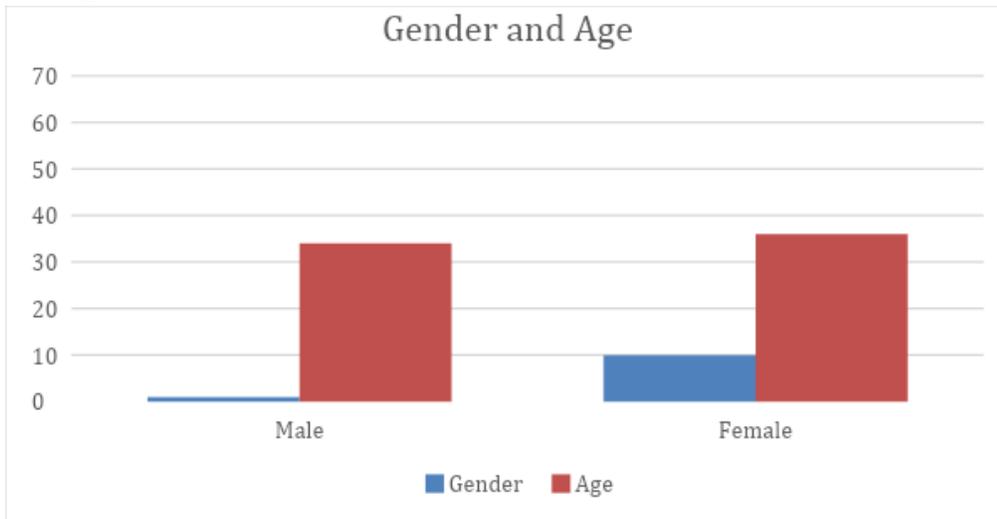
Moreover, “qualitative research is interpretative research; the inquirer is normally involved in a sustained and intensive experience with participants” (Creswell, 2013, p. 236). The purpose of this specific research was to examine the perceptions of race and leadership held by African American decision makers within Early Childhood Education programs. Such perceptions are important because they affect the way these leaders think and make decisions for their programs. Race itself is an important aspect of education and therefore must be examined at all levels within the education system in order to mitigate the continuance of disparity and injustice within that arena.

A semi-structured interview protocol was conducted. A series of 10 questions guided the interview, and the participants were asked for their perceptions of race and racism in relation to themselves, staff, and children ages three to five. Participants were asked if they had experienced racism while working in Early Childhood Educations programs, if they thought children ages three to five understand racism, and if race should be discussed in Early Childhood Education settings. Interviews were audio taped with the permission of the interviewees and later transcribed.

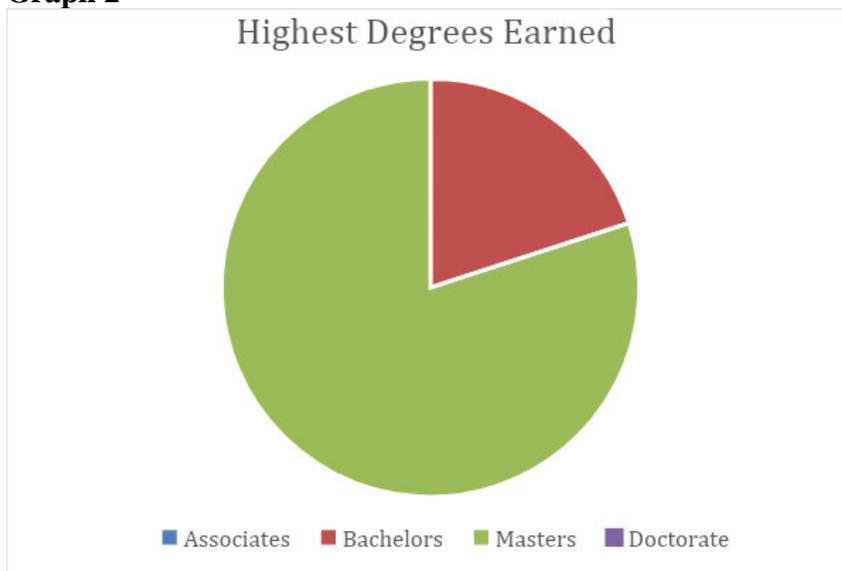
Participant Description

This research included current and/or former African American Early Childhood Education leaders from San Bernardino, Los Angeles and Riverside counties. While a typical sample size for phenomenological studies ranges from one to 10 participants (Mason, 2002), I selected 11 individuals for this study: 10 females and 1 male. The ages ranged from 34 to 65 years old, and they had between 10 and 30 years of experience. This study sought participants functioning as decision makers within their organizations. Notably, the highest level of education achieved among the participants was a Doctorate in Education; however, 8 out 11 participants held a Master's degree. Therefore, there was a range of backgrounds related to experience and educational attainment.

Graph 1



Graph 2



Sampling Procedures

I contacted the individuals in person or by phone and provided them with a letter to explain the purpose of the study, an informed consent form, and screening questions. Interviews were scheduled via email and telephone. The criteria were that they had been working in a decision-making role within an Early Education program for three or more years and identified as African American.

Data Collection and Analysis

In phenomenology, the researcher seeks to understand experiences through the eyes of the participants. A common method of gathering data includes in-depth interviews with participants, as this allows for detailed accounts of their experiences. Creswell suggested interviewing five to 25 individuals who have all experienced the same phenomenon (Creswell, 2013). The interviews were analyzed through reduction to noteworthy statements and quotes and then divided into themes. The process entailed identifying a phenomenon to study and then collecting data from several persons who had experienced the phenomenon. I examined *what* participants experienced as well *how* they experienced race and racism in the context of Early Childhood Education.

Data was collected through interviews with 11 decision-making leaders within Early Education from San Bernardino, Los Angeles and Riverside counties. My interviews were conducted over a three-week period. I met each participant in their respective counties. Interviews were held in public libraries and conference rooms. Participants were contacted by phone or email directly to confirm their understanding and voluntary participation. I wanted to be sure that the participants were aware the study was about race so they would not be caught off guard by the questions.

A set of 10 prepared questions guided the discussion between the researcher and the participants. I was careful in the tone and language used to ask participants about race and racism because I am aware that this may have been an uncomfortable topic for some to discuss. Surprisingly, the participants were very open to discussing their experiences, and many of them showed interest in my questions and overall study. They expressed the need for a study such as this. I was even asked by a few individuals if I would send them my questions because they wanted

to discuss them with their colleagues. The interviews lasted anywhere from 20 to 60 minutes. I noticed that as I conducted more interviews, my level of comfort in asking the questions increased, thereby enriching the overall conversations that occurred during the interviews.

Participants were recorded; I took handwritten notes and used an audio recording device. After each interview, I transcribed them. I listened to each interview and carefully captured the conversations of each participant, listening to the audio slowly, pausing and rewinding to ensure accuracy. After transcribing the audio, I gave each participant a pseudonym so that participants remained anonymous. Once the transcripts were created, they were uploaded into the Atlas program, a coding software. I reviewed the transcription and found patterns of phrases and or words, such as leadership, race and racism, that were related to central concepts of the study. The Atlas software allowed me to make groupings and sub groupings using keywords and/or phrases. The keywords were then arranged into complete sentences, thus creating themes. Ultimately, 17 codes were analyzed into five emerging themes. Analysis of the audio-recorded interviews provided five themes: (1) a definition of leadership; (2) challenges as a leader in Early Childhood Education; (3) importance of identity and culture for children and adults; (4) uncertainty about the discussion of race with children 0-5; and (5) issues related to race within the field of Early Childhood Education.

Participant Protections

Several participant safeguards were put in place during the collection, analysis, and reporting of this study. All participants were adult volunteers, and due to the sampling technique, I as the researcher do not know their names, contact information, places of work, and other identifiable information. This information, however, will not be included in the study. Participants will be referred to by unique identifiers, and other than their responses to the criteria

questions above, they do not have to answer all of the question and may withdraw at any time, all other information will be study specific. If participants in the interviews disclosed any information which would identify them, that information was redacted from the writing and reserved as confidential and solely for the researcher. Data was stored on a password protected computer and destroyed once the study was completed.

Study Timeline

As discussed in the methodology section, the timeline of this study was a critical factor in the development of the design. The general timeline is divided into seven phases: (1) proposal development; (2) proposal defense and IRB approval; (3) data collection and data clean up; (4) data analysis and interpretation; (5) writing up of study findings; (6) feedback and revision of study; and (7) defense and final revisions.

Limitations of Study

There are many limitations of this study, both theoretical and methodological: the participant sample was low because it was difficult to find African American leaders in decision-maker roles. I wanted to interview more leaders in various program types. The lack of literature and databases specific to the research questions was another limitation; there is a need for more access to Early Childhood Education workforce data. The timeframe to conduct the overall study was challenging, as many of the leaders had full schedules and I was also on a university deadline for completion of this doctoral program.

Chapter Four

Results

This phenomenological study examined the views and experiences of African Americans about race and leadership pertaining to children and themselves. Each participant was asked 10 questions. Analysis of the audio-recorded interviews provided five themes: (1) a definition of leadership; (2) challenges as a leader in Early Childhood Education; (3) importance of identity and culture for children and adults; (4) uncertainty about the discussion of race with children 0-5; and (5) issues related to race within the field of Early Childhood Education.

I asked 11 study participants, 10 females and 1 male, to reflect on their experiences as leaders in the field of Early Childhood Education (ECE) and their opinions about race and racism within Early Childhood Education. The interviewees included leaders holding various roles within the field of ECE, ranging from coordinators to executive directors. The participants spanned from 34-65 years of age, with an average of 19 years of leadership in ECE. Every participant held a Master's degree or above. Participants reported that they operated Head Start, Early Head Start, State Preschool and fee-for-pay programs located within San Bernardino, Riverside, and Los Angeles counties. This study did not include family child care or private preschool programs.

Even with three different counties from which to choose, it was very difficult finding African Americans in decision-maker roles in Early Education.

Definition of Leadership: A Vision to Lead

Whereas several definitions of leadership exist, one that appears to capture the central meaning of leadership very well is provided by Robbins, Millet, Cacciope, & Waters who say leadership is “the ability to influence others towards the achievement of goals that contribute to a

worthwhile purpose” (Kivunja, 2015, p. 1710). Participants were asked to define leadership. Overall, participants agreed that having a clear vision was essential to leadership. They also discussed the importance of relationships and building the capacity of others. They described leadership as a shared collaboration and/or vision between parties and a valuing of different perspectives. Many of them mentioned being “called” to do this work. They also shared that being a leader was not one of their original life goals; in fact, several of them entered Early Childhood Education from another industry, including business and law enforcement.

Definitions of leadership have changed over the last decade to focus more on the influence of context, the importance of relationships, and collaboration as opposed to hierarchical organizational structures (Nicholson, 2018). Leadership has been described as the crossroads of knowledge, skills, character, and personality traits that motivate others to work toward a shared vision or purpose; furthermore, it is shown by early childhood professionals in various roles within the field. In addition to having knowledge in specific areas, such as how children develop and learn, effective practices that support families, or supervising staff, early childhood education leaders must understand the early childhood system itself and how policy affects the quality of services available to children and families. Nina, a director in Riverside County, expressed her definition of leadership this way:

For me, leadership means having the ability or taking the stance to influence others to move towards common goals and to move in the same direction. So, for me it involves more than managing tasks. It involves managing the people doing those tasks and forming relationships with the people doing those tasks because without relationships everything else is null and void. And being open to learning

about yourself and about other to better be able to carry out whatever duties that have been assigned....

Sarah, a veteran educator in Los Angeles County and a 13-year ECE leader, remarked:

Leadership is being able to plan a vision of excellence. Being able to communicate my expectations and the goal of the program and being respectful to folks I worked with and supervised. Be willing to do the work, don't ask them to do anything that I wouldn't do.

Anita, an ECE Director in San Bernardino County spoke about the notion of vision:

That's a deep one, I definitely try to be an example, Leadership is, I believe it's a joint effort it's a direction, a leader would be someone who has a vision, and who has staff or others that agree with that vision and we work together to meet that vision. Anyone can be a leader; child can be a leader. Leadership runs like a well machine you can tell where there is leadership happening. There is someone who had the idea and someone who is implementing the idea, even the implementer can be leaders.

The typical idea of a leader as being a person at the top of a hierarchy lacks an appreciation for what real leadership must be. Leadership is a process accomplished by individuals and teams, as one connects and relates one to another, to make the changes that reflect a common mission or goal (Lewis, J., 2020). Leadership is both an individual and collective responsibility (Lewis, J., 2020). Billie, a veteran ECE executive director in Los Angeles County offered a glimpse into servant leadership:

Leadership for me means that you are committed to acting beyond yourself and to be a steward of systems whether that be human systems whether that be

community systems but all of that through servitude. You cannot do it without having relationships, understanding people, and denying oneself. I'm a firm believer that leaders are made but leaders have to first be called because it has to be something intrinsic within you that allows that internal part. For me if say you're a leader but you are a narcissistic leader...you are not really a leader. A leader is a selfless individual who is willing to be adaptable for . . . the greater.

Greenleaf (2002) asserts that the moral basis of the servant leader derives from a purpose to serve. "The servant-leader is servant first. It starts with the innate desire wants to serve first. Then conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead. That person is noticeably different from those that adhere to leader first, conceivably because of the need to assuage an unusual power drive or to attain material possessions" (Greenleaf, 2002, p. 7).

The McCormick Center's framework states that strategic leadership involves guiding the direction of an early childhood organization with the future in mind. "Strategic leaders clarify mission and values, inspire staff to pursue a shared vision, and ensure that program goals and outcomes are attained" (Masterson, 2016, p. 4). Betty, an ECE manager in Los Angeles County, recounts the importance of big picture thinking:

Wow, that's a really good question! One thing I would just say is that you lead by example. I also think you have to have a vision of looking at the big picture of where the organization is going. It is also looking at the organization and really honing in on how we work towards that mission and we demonstrate that we are working toward that mission. I think it is part coaching your team and providing support to them in order for them to carry out their own job functions. I would also say as leader you do have to be that one who makes decisions on some of the

processes ... Making sure that the decisions that's being made are not just because you decide to make those decisions, but they do support our overall goals and objectives.

Challenges in the Field as a Leader

While the responsibilities and roles of the leaders varied, they all expressed the difficulty of navigating programs and politics. Some of the responsibilities included curriculum development, coaching, managing and hiring staff, employee evaluations, writing reports, relieving staff in the classroom, teaching, monitoring and managing budgets, and funding compliances. It was evident that within the field of ECE there are funding, licensing and other mandates that often create challenges in serving families and or collaborating with community partners. Abbey, an ECE Manager in Los Angeles County, spoke about the bureaucracy within Early Childhood Education:

[P]robably one of the things is that politics is always a challenge. It's a challenge now when you are trying to go out and trying to collaborate with organizations and come up with systems, there is politics. There's barriers between funding sources, or being perceived as the big, trying to gobble up everything. Those kinds of things, but's it all political. Once you realize all that you learn how to navigate it but I also realize that at a certain point I have to bump it up to a higher level...I have no shame in saying that we need some extra influence.

Leaders of color may intentionally draw on their racial identity to perform leadership (Opsina, 2009). Studies that have examined the leadership style of racial groups show how these leaders are able to convert traditional means of oppression into positive means for constructive change and redefine race as an asset (Opsina, 2009). Moreover, minority leaders must be bi-culturally

fluent, working and relating in ways that connect with their own racial group while also connecting with the White middle class. Billie, an ECE Director in Los Angeles County, discusses the expectations and accountability of leadership:

I used to say that I didn't want to move up because I know I had to conform ... because that was not a role, that you look up at the top and say, look at that Caucasian, blonde haired, blue eyed person who is stiff and serious, the business man or that business woman and that's not me. I'm outgoing, I'm loud, I'm vibrant, and I don't even want to go there (meaning advancement) because I don't want to change. People always say that 'you change when you get up there.' I don't think I have changed my role has changed. When I go out into the field staff say, we love you because you haven't changed. You give me hope that I can get there seen with the personality that have, the race I am ... people are watching and admiring us.

Some leaders expressed being questioned as to how they obtained a leadership position and reported being asked who they knew in order to get the position they held. While it was not explicit, many of these remarks were perceived as being related to the race of these leaders. Anita, a deputy director in San Bernardino County, shared her familiarity with the frequent questioning of the executive leadership team she created:

The executive team at this organization is all African American, there has been questions and criticism about how and why this is ...it was said that they all must be friends or know each other. What happen there? It's always something other than skill set that allowed them to be in that role. It's hard...No one questions when four Caucasian people are in the same roles.

Louis (2016) writes that racial identity does not impact views of White male leaders in the same way as with Black leaders, for White males have played a significant role in the history of the United States by holding key leadership roles, and we are regularly exposed to them as figure heads (Louis, 2016). Minority leaders, then, do not “fit” the leader prototype, namely White and male, so oftentimes the question of competency arises. The leaders interviewed spoke of parents and staff having low expectations of them regarding their knowledge and expertise as potential leaders. There was also a lack of confidence and respect toward them in certain communities (especially in higher socioeconomic communities).

Leadership roles have proven especially difficult for women, particularly women of color, the majority of participants in this study. Female gender roles and the attributes of a leader are not viewed as compatible because women’s gender expectations are not demonstrated in the conventional leader (Louis, 2016). Males, considered “aggressive, independent, competent, decisive, and forceful,” share these agentic abilities that supposedly produce a strong leader for an organization (Louis, 2016, p. 2099). Female leaders are presumed to follow a shared style of leadership, which concentrates on individuals rather than organizational outcomes (Louis, 2016). Specific examples of these presumed attributes are being “gentle, caring, bothered and sympathetic towards others’ feelings” (Louis, 2016, p. 2099). For Black women, though, leadership is even more complex; they are battling racial biases as well as sexism. Nina, an ECE Director in Riverside County, provides insight into the intersectionality of race, age and gender:

. . . I think it comes when people don’t expect for you to be roles because of the color of your skin, and my age. I am a young black girl, and she is here telling us what to do and that was from parents and staff. Where I was previously it was more blunt, they did not have a problem telling you that ‘we don’t trust your

judgement, we will ask the teacher because she looks like me/us, she can understand us culturally.’ So being in my position as an African American woman wasn’t being knowledgeable as someone who was three positions below were better perceived because they weren’t African American. I don’t think I’ve experienced hardcore racism, it is just the things you know that are there and that the decisions they are making is based upon that although they don’t come out and say it directly but you can figure it out, when it comes to you or them it always them.

The question of legitimacy as a leader is an expressed challenge of African American leadership. It is common for African American leaders to feel that they have to perform exemplarily to gain respect as a professional, especially if in a leadership position. “Generally, there is an assumption that leaders of color are disadvantaged because they are not seen as legitimate. Some research suggests that subordinates are less likely to authorize people of color as leaders, while other research finds that positional leaders of color may face challenges to their leadership that white leaders do not.” (Opsina, 2009, p. 879)

Importance of Race, Identity, and Culture for Children and Adults

The leaders expressed that race, culture and identity are important because they shape who we are. Many of them spoke about how they are proud to be African American and proud of their ancestry. They shared how it was important to know about one’s heritage, its contributions to society, and its connection to self-esteem for children in ECE. Children enter preschool with varying knowledge of their culture and/or heritage; some have a very strong foundation while others have none. Below are excerpts from the participants on the importance of race, identity

and culture; Anita speaks to the importance of representation: “A child needs to see possibilities, it’s important for children to see themselves.” Nina adds to Anita’s point about children and race:

It is important to me I think that sets an identity for people, something for them to identify with...for me not only do I identify as a certain but other identify me as a certain race. If I am not aware of who I am it is going to be easy for others to project their images upon me. So, I think race is important and that people, especially young children need to be made aware of not only their own race but that there is different races no two people are the same and you can’t assume what a person is. It is best to ask that person because those associations can definitely be different.

Betty speaks to the importance of race:

Race is very important to me. It’s important for us to know our heritage, I think it’s important to know where we come from...it’s important for us to even know the struggles that we’ve gone through. I think it’s also important to know all of the accomplishments we have made and to know that just because of what color you are, whatever race you are does not define who you are as an individual it just gives you some kind of foundation. It giving you a journey to who you are, it does not define who you are.

Sarah expounds on Betty’s remarks about the importance of race:

Yeah, it’s part of you DNA. How people respond to you...So I think in terms of race as a Black person you need to realize that but not let it stop you from doing or being you want to be or who you dream to be. But you need to realize it because you’re going to have obstacles. People are going to try to put their crap

on you. You've got to have enough within you be it history, the Bible, God, your spirit. For me it's faith...

Billie talks about the connection between race and beliefs:

It's important to me from a perspective that if I don't understand where people are from and their beliefs...Race is important to me beyond just ethnicity because if I don't understand your beliefs and where you come from then how am I going to appreciate them? So that exposure and knowledge of cultural proficiency is important as we build on a child's social emotional development. Is it important to me? Yeah it's important to me....Understanding the history of different cultural groups is essential to leading and educating others. This knowledge helps to provide a point of reference in relation to how others see the world. When used properly it enables one to avoid misconceptions related to culture and race, it provides an opportunity for connection and acceptance.

Uncertainty About the Discussion of Race with Children Ages 0-5

The leaders expressed mixed feelings about whether race should be discussed in school settings with children ages three to five because if it is not done appropriately, sensitively and carefully, it could do more harm than good. However, they agreed that teachers and administrators need to be knowledgeable about race, but around 30% of the leaders admitted that they do not feel prepared to discuss race with staff. Some admitted they avoid discussing race personally, as well. They also stated that they were not completely prepared to discuss race with parents because those conversations are uncomfortable, and parents sometimes become defensive. Overall, they agreed that there is a need for teacher training regarding race and how to

discuss race with young children. Billie provides an example of why it is important to discuss race with young children:

I do and I'll tell you why. I had a baby run up to me.... Maybe two months ago. I try to go classroom every so often and I had baby walk up to me it just warmed my heart but it also pointed to something to me. And he came up to me and said, 'I'm the same color as you are' ...he was about your complexion. He said, 'You're African American' and just walked away. But what it pointed to me was that distinction is sooo prominent. That somebody had to be teaching him that you're African American, that you're different . The class was predominantly Latino...So yes absolutely it is what we present them to, what do we put before them as their understanding that. We make our children bias by the exposures and what we feed to their brain we can feed the development is a positive way to show yes here's all your cultures, disabilities, whatever but this is how you embrace them and this is how you are all special. It's what you give 'em...

Ella expressed her sentiments, echoing much of what common thought is around children and race. The notion is that children do not understand race and that we should focus on the human aspect, not individual races.

Because we are an educational institution, we educate our parents on how to be aware of everyone's unique qualities and understanding these biases are sometimes learned versus what is currently happening in the world today. So wan to teach them they everyone is human... we need to be focused on. The human race not the individual races.

Nationwide and worldwide, children of all backgrounds are living in a time in which conversations about race, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, religion, and culture are

common in their everyday lives. For years, many people have avoided these discussions because they fear that conversations about race, bias, and racism may result in feelings of anger, guilt, discomfort, sadness, and contempt. The current climate of our nation, however, no longer permits the luxury of ignoring these types of discussions. Nina also agrees that race should be discussed with young children in the classroom:

I think we do children a disservice when we fail to talk about those things because difference is difference, whether it's race, age, eye color, it doesn't matter difference is difference. Children need to be made aware of those differences, it needs to be brought to them in a non-confrontational way. I think when we shun them from it and it comes up, it come up as the oddball and children pick up on that so if it's not something that is constantly acknowledged...it becomes something like 'oh they didn't want to talk bout that, I wonder why?' So, it becomes this thing of it must be off the table, if we bring into the classroom it's acknowledged, children are learning about it and becomes the norm it doesn't stand out to them that should highlighted as different..."

Sarah's response reflects the caution taken when it comes to discussing race with young children:

If I got kids calling you, you Black so and so or Brown and it's derogatory then yeah. But if it just to bring to just to bring it up no cause a lot of time kids plays with each other regardless of. If they distinguish a color difference unless they have been poisoned by their parents or their environment, then they don't really deal with Black and White. But I do think it needs to be discussed and brought up in training for teachers. But with the little ones if it comes up you need to address it. But to just talk about race, I don't think so.

Abbey provides insight on the socialization of children and race:

With the babies? I think in terms of acknowledging our differences and similarities and learning how to value people that are different. From that way I do, I think kids don't know the difference, they don't know racism yet...I don't know that they understand race and racism as it is but I know that they sometimes can make choices that seem racist. You know about the Black baby doll and White baby doll, right?...It is something in our culture, I believe it automatically comes...in American culture. I think if we are not careful and kids are put in certain environments they automatically, or they hear certain things or they see certain things, it's automatically. If you always see a woman with blue eyes with blonde hair and the on TV that is the sign of beauty, you're not really, subconsciously you just think that is pretty. So when you get the dark woman with the beautiful smooth Black skin and the beautiful pretty lips, you don't think that's pretty but it's not because somebody has said it to you that that's not pretty! It's just the way that you have been programmed. And I don't think it's intentional, but I think we have an opportunity in the classroom to talk about everybody being pretty....

Betty shares about the role of adults and children related to race:

Hmm...yeah I feel children....I would say yes, children at that age are sponges. They're sponges, they really need to. Yes depending on how it's conveyed to children. I think it's a way teach about these things without just teaching about racism. But rather just understanding who you are as an individual. I think children are sponges. The earlier they begin to learn about who they are and what

they represent and where they come from and what are some of the attributes they have and what their culture is about. I think that the easier it is for them to be a part of this society and interact with others...So I don't think it's a bad thing cause I think children need to learn about diversity as early as..... Hmm...no I think they understand what is displayed in front of them. I think they understand what been modeled. I don't understand if they are doing something that is offensive or displaying some racism. I don't think they really know that what they're displaying. I had a similar situation that happen to me driving down my street. This little, Caucasian kid about five years old flip me off. I was like, hmm that was interesting but then late on I was walking the dogs and that same kid said 'ew you're dark, you don't look like me.' I was like hmm that was an interesting conversation. It's something that someone has already said to him to make him think that ...he really said it in a way like ugh! It wasn't like you're a different shade... kids learned off of what's been modeled for them ...I don't truly think they understand to its fullness of what's racism.

Issues of Race Within the Field of Early Childhood Education

Leaders discussed incidents involving children as well as adults in the ECE field. The main issues with adults were due to the lack of cultural understanding and racism. The issues pertaining to children are related to discipline. African American children face more discipline for the same behavior as their non-African American peers. Literature regarding discipline and suspensions confirm that this same trend is found in the k-12 system. Sarah shared insight on the intersection of race and gender within Early Childhood Education when she said, "A lot of situations with Black boys—sometimes you see folks go automatically to the disciplinary as

opposed to seek to understand.” The leaders also added that children are aware of racial differences because they have been told or heard things from their families or others in their surroundings. Research shows that while some parents avoid discussing race with young children, it is evident that they do not restrain themselves from making racist comments in the presence of their young children.

Nina discussed the value of representation and diverse perspectives:

...I have one African American teacher out of 52 and an African American aide. This past year we've seen that it's hard to teach that don't identify with children to understand what those children may be going through at home and the cultural boundaries and things that are being pushed upon them at home why they can't function in the classroom because they did not have to experience those things...me in my role at the top of the pole, it has been challenging to get them to understand that when that Black mom comes to pick up her child and you want to pull her to the side and tell her all the bad things that child has done, you don't want that child to be getting at home... that usually come up in meetings, where we are talking about that classroom support ..to you that make look challenging but when I come into that classroom I'm accustomed to seeing that and it's fine, that child did fine because I understand on a more cultural level...I'm able to take that and I am able to tell my teachers this is what you need to do when you are dealing with all children to accommodate the African American child or Hispanic child. So if we had more people at this level that could relate to those children they would be much better supported in the classroom because they are not just getting

that one perspective. There are so many things culturally relevant that can be taken into consideration because there is no that can relate to it to push it down. For several members of the White middle class in the United States, being cognizant of one's racial identity as linked to privilege may not be a welcome or common acknowledgement. For the most part, most people have never been asked or forced to think about their personal privileged status; as it relates to racial identity, doing so might feel unnerving. Conceivably, some White Americans may view being "colorblind" as progress toward equality, believing that it abates privilege. However, many White Americans either may not be aware of or may evade thinking how simply being White bestows special status or allowances, often to the harm of those who are not White. While many White people do not see themselves as fortunate because of their economic or social status, the benefit of being in the racial group is real, even if unseen. Billie shared a poignant incident related to race in the field of Early Childhood Education:

A situation had brewing... It just had gotten out of control. When I sat at the table with people I looked at the dynamics, it ended up being two Caucasian women and the brotha on this side. The brotha, a very smart man was having some temperamental feelings about things he felt that they were doing. He felt they were doing end-run around him, undermining his authority. And when I was looking at that dynamic I was like hmm it could have gone either way. They have not called it end-runs but they didn't feel, they didn't respect him because they felt the he was hard to approach. Over here he's feeling offended so when they come to him...it should have been dealt with a long time ago if they would have been honest about what was going on with each other. And that one person being sensitive, if I am sensitive I need to tell you, I'm feeling a little sensitive right

now. But what I also saw was this brotha and his pride. Having come from an environment where men were suppressed, that's what I saw. And he was trying to exert...push himself back up here and not be suppressed...One of the things he said when we finished all of this, he said that 'as a man I apologize if I offended you' so when I was debriefing individually, one of the people said it just seems like he saying he was a man...I said see you took that wrong, because what you gotta understand is that...What does manhood mean to African American man? I said let me help you understand what manhood means. The pride and for a man to stand up and say I'm sorry and take responsibility for that...that putting a notch in their belt but it's also (hand gesture of digging) you saw it that way but that was a big deal. He is telling you Im'a man up and I'm ownin' this. I'm not going to put it over there. I said so you need accept him 'manning up if you will. But made a judgment about him trying to be pushy and you gotta understand his side too....

The way in which people perceive how leaders obtain their power may influence how staff relates to them (Louis, 2016). When a leader obtains power legitimately, staff are more apt to respect their choices because that displays competency (Louis, 2016). Legitimate power can lessen bias because the structure in which the power was assumed allows the staff to see the leader's decisions as just and merited (Louis, 2016). Nancy, an ECE Director in Los Angeles County, shared a great example of the challenge of legitimacy:

I'll give you an example, I was at a school site I modeling for the site and I had got engaged in a BINGO game with a group of students. One little boy chose a prize. Closely after his mom had come to pick him up. She signed him out and went excitedly to show her what he had won. As she is signing him

out he is explain to her look mom I won this prize. I played BINGO today with Dr. W. The mom stopped writing said Dr. W. well who is Dr. W? The little boy pointed to me and as I was leading another BINGO game. She says oh you mean Nancy? So then the boy says no that Dr. W! They were going back and forth with this. The little boy was getting red in the face. So I thought let me go and help the little boy out. So I had gone over and the boy was still saying 'NO her name is Dr. W!' So as I went over to let mom know he was correct. I told her the kid knows me by Dr. W and although you call me Nancy, the kids refer to me as Dr. W...So the mom stops what she was doing, she turned around and looked at me from head to toe and said 'oh , and so where did you get your doctorate degree from?' I responded USC. And she looked at me again and said 'Okay NANCY' and turned back around to finish signing her child out. So, it's things like that sometimes it is very apparent and then other times when it is subtle...

Often African American leaders are treated with a lack of respect and are not seen as a knowledgeable authority. In some instances, this type of racism and disregard is subtle, as mentioned above, but in other cases it is very clear. Delgado and Stefancic (2001) highlight how a key tenet of CRT is that racism is a normal occurrence instead of uncommon, racism is embedded within our society. The subtlety of racism is problematic because it is difficult to detect and consequently harder to address.

Interpretations

This study sought to explore the phenomenon related to African American Early Childhood Education leaders' perceptions, attitudes, and beliefs about race and leadership. It was

evident that Early Childhood leaders are faced with a host of challenges in providing preschool children with experiences that prepare them to thrive in kindergarten and beyond. Competing demands within the field often make this goal challenging to accomplish. However, Early Childhood Education leaders are committed to ensuring that children, families and staff are supported while providing children with optimal learning environments.

The study required African American leaders to be vulnerable in sharing their professional experiences. The researcher conducted semi-structured, one-on-one interviews to obtain insight into the experiences of each participant. This study provided a voice to a population within the Early Childhood Education field that is often unheard and seldom has opportunities to speak about the conditions and factors that impact them as leaders. Participants in this study expressed that many of them did not plan to be in their current roles, as some even came from other industries.

This study indicated that there is not a consensus regarding the discussion of race in ECE settings. This was interesting because the literature suggests that racial identity begins around the age of two. However, this study indicated that race is not being discussed or fully explored within ECE learning environments because the adults are reluctant to address the topic, which may suggest a missed opportunity to lay a strong foundation regarding race. Many participants revealed that they were not fully prepared to discuss race in ECE settings. They were, however, comfortable with cultural celebrations such as Cinco De Mayo, Chinese New Year, and so on. Additionally, there seems to be confusion about the difference between culture and race; many of the participants articulated their beliefs that race and culture were interchangeable.

Chapter Five

Conclusions

This study presented insight into the lived experiences of African American Early Childhood Education leaders. Although this population shares common experiences with the overall ECE leadership workforce, unique challenges and barriers remain. They encounter a range of challenges within their roles and responsibilities, and many of these unique barriers were acknowledged by this study's five themes: (1) a definition of leadership; (2) challenges as a leader in Early Childhood Education; (3) importance of identity and culture for children and adults; (4) discussion of race in school settings; (5) issues related to race within the field of Early Childhood Education.

Tackling the subject of race in early learning school settings can seem challenging. Despite my own findings, some educators believe that a colorblind approach is best in that we should avoid explicit discussions of racial differences at all costs. They find nobility in the idea of not seeing color; however, this idea can disregard the ways in which race is ascribed. Furthermore, it may not take into account the ways in which racism is embedded in institutional structures and systems. James Banks (2010) concludes in his research that colorblindness is appealing because its focuses on Western idea of the individual; however, this leads to misconceptions of reality and is harmful to minority groups. Hirschfield, for one, aimed to demonstrate the misconceptions of the young child's mind as it relates to race. He identified seven myths: 1) young children are by nature innocent of race; 2) even if they are aware of race, they are without prejudice; 3) children discover race by opening their eyes and looking; 4) children may come to notice race on their own but have to be taught prejudice; 5) children notice race in that they acquire a form of racial bias but ultimately believe race is a superficial quality,

literally skin deep; 6) if a child acts color-blind, he or she actually is; 7) reducing prejudice is best achieved by affirming that deep down, everyone is the same and/or any difference between them should be celebrated, not scorned. Hirschfield and other scholars all agree that young children recognize and understand race. The “colorblind” viewpoint is tempting, for it allows one to avoid more challenging questions and uncomfortable questions or remarks. The issue of race is further complicated because each individual has been socialized in very different ways; race, age, and class are all factors that affect this process.

Clearly, the research emphasizes the need to create workplace experiences and conditions for African American Early Childhood Education leaders by implementing culturally relevant practices that value them as equal, important, and knowledgeable members of a growing and diverse industry. The leaders’ perceived realities indicated by this study should assist stakeholders—scholars, practitioners, policymakers, state departments of education, school districts, governing regulatory bodies, public and private Early Childhood Education organizations, higher education institutions, and fellow colleagues in the ECE workforce—to gain a better understand what is necessary to improve opportunities and experiences for African American leaders within the ECE workforce.

Additionally, it is evident that more training and exposure to the importance of racial identity to children’s development is needed for those in the field of Early Childhood Education. While the adults in the field of Early Education certainly have good intentions, the research on racial identity indicated that not discussing race with young children may cause them to become racist in the future. There is a need to move past cultural celebrations and provide children with powerful learning opportunities about themselves and others around them.

In order to fully tackle the issue of race and racism within education, adults need to be honest with themselves about their perceptions and beliefs. Research demonstrates how race affects an African American's ability to lead in education, a further indication of the importance of addressing race in a deep and meaningful way. If the goal is to prepare children to thrive in the school and beyond, how can we avoid a topic that will stay with them the rest of their lives? Whether we want to accept it or not, race will be a determining factor in many of our students' future endeavors.

The conclusions of this study provide practical answers to each of the study's research questions.

1. What are the experiences and or challenges of African Americans in decision-making leadership roles within Early Childhood Education?

Leadership has been described as the crossroads of knowledge, skills, character and personality traits that motivate others to work toward a shared vision or purpose; furthermore, it is shown by early childhood professionals in various roles within the field. In addition to having knowledge in specific areas such as how children develop and learn, effective practices that support families, or in supervising staff, early childhood education leaders must understand the early childhood system itself and how policy affects the quality of services available to children and families. Overall, African American early childhood education leaders' perceptions about effective competencies to lead and manage high-quality preschool programs were consistent: personal leadership; the ability to establish a clear vision, build capacity within staff, and work with and serve people from diverse ethnic, cultural, and linguistic backgrounds; and compliance with internal and external governing and regulatory standards. Areas of conflict dealt with bureaucracy-laden requirements imposed by funders and stakeholders.

All but one of the participants of this study were African American females who expressed the challenges of leadership as women and the lack of respect given to them in their roles. Research affirmed this to be true, as women are frequently expected to adhere to passive leadership styles. Additionally, they shared how their competency as leaders was questioned and challenged within and outside of their respective organizations. However, their passion for and devotion to creating high quality programs and making a difference for children, family, and staff in the ECE field served as a driving force for remaining ECE leaders.

2. How do African Americans in Early Childhood Education perceive race pertaining to themselves, leadership and children ages three to five?

Interestingly, not many of the leaders admitted that they had perceived racism toward them, personally; however, many stated that they have witnessed racism in the workplace. They lamented the low numbers of African Americans holding higher level leadership roles within education, especially Early Childhood Education, with some alluding to race being a factor. However, Louis (2016) writes how racial identity does not impact views of White male leaders in the same way as Black leaders. He adds that White males have played a significant role in the history of the United States by holding key leadership roles and thus we are regularly exposed to them as figureheads (Louis, 2016). Minority leaders, then, do not fit the “leader prototype” and may endure questions regarding their competency.

The study showed that professional preparation was not a barrier for African American leaders, for a significant number of the leaders held a Master’s degree and had many years of experience in the field. Each leader exhibited confidence in his/her professional abilities and dedication to the profession.

Race was important to the participants as evidenced by pride in their African American heritage, and they articulated the importance of race and identity for themselves and others. However, there was uncertainty about *how* and *if* race should be discussed with young children even though participants mentioned instances when children verbalized difference based on racial identity. While the participants had good intentions, there was an undertone of colorblindness. My research also revealed to me how each leader's privilege of knowledge and education granted them the luxury of colorblindness. Nearly half of the participants stated that they felt prepared to discuss race with staff and parents, whereas only two out of the 11 leaders stated that they are actively addressing race through professional development trainings. **As I considered the leaders' uncertainties regarding how to handle race within Early Childhood Education settings, I wondered about the leaders who expressed they had not experienced racism but witnessed it. Did this really happen? Had they been socialized not to recognize racism toward them, meaning they had become desensitized to racism? If that were the case, how much of that had been "transferred" to staff and students?**

Implications

The results from this study provide the early childhood education field, policymakers, school districts and stakeholders a lens for exploring opportunities to build leadership and management capacity from diverse populations of the ECE workforce where a deficit presently exists. I believe that the following implications are indicated from the results of this study:

1. Future research should be conducted to explore the lack of diversity within ECE leadership roles.

2. Reproduce the study to explore other diverse ECE leaders' (including leaders who identify as Latinos, Asian Americans, American Indians, Middle Eastern Americans, and male) experiences and perceptions about race and leadership.
3. Conduct research that explores why African Americans are not going into the ECE field.

Recommendations

Five themes emerged from the findings of this study. The Results section outlines the themes that support the following recommendations:

Theme One: Definition of Leadership

More literature and studies that affirm African Americans as legitimate leaders are needed, and the narrative that only White males can succeed as leaders must be challenged.

Theme Two: Challenges as a Leader in ECE

Develop teacher leadership and principal pathway opportunities for teachers. Establishing well-structured mentoring programs for teachers of color can increase the number of teachers who go on to pursue leadership positions.

Theme Three: The Importance of Identity and Culture for Children and Adults

Intentionally integrate racial identity development theory into ECE curriculum and child development courses.

Theme Four: The Discussion of Race, Children 0-5

Create relevant early childhood education trainings and courses that provide support and strategies to ECE professionals on ways to discuss race with children and adults.

Discuss race with children, even informally; do not avoid talking with children about race.

Set the example we want children to follow. Children are watching our actions. Help children navigate their curiosity and expose them to diverse groups. Teach children about the contributions made by People of Color, and make the lesson relatable (not just on cultural holidays). History can be complex but transparent when addressing mistakes.

Theme Five: The Issues Related to Race within the Field of ECE

Create relevant ECE professional development opportunities that address race within ECE settings. Courses should include the examination of concepts such as privilege, bias and the dynamics of power within ECE.

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