

# Counteracting Dysconscious Racism and Ableism Through Fieldwork: Applying DisCrit Classroom Ecology in Early Childhood Personnel Preparation

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## Abstract

Early childhood personnel preparation programs must prepare future early educators who can counteract racism and ableism to provide all children with an equitable and just education. We applied Dis/ability Critical Race Theory (DisCrit) Classroom Ecology to early childhood and specifically to preschool settings. We argue that early childhood personnel preparation programs can utilize this framework to prepare preservice early educators to facilitate more equitable experiences for Children of Color with disabilities and their families. We discuss the importance of preparing future early educators to counteract racism and ableism through their fieldwork experiences. We also provide a brief overview of DisCrit in relation to early childhood personnel preparation and present DisCrit Classroom Ecology to apply the framework components to preschool fieldwork.

## Keywords

Disability Critical Race Theory, fieldwork, practicum, personnel preparation

Children of Color,<sup>1</sup> who often identify as Black, Latinx, Indigenous, Asian, Biracial, or Multiracial, have the right to learn and experience education in ways responsive to their strengths and gifts, as well as those of their families and communities (Annamma & Morrison, 2018a). Children of Color experience their intersecting social identities (e.g., race and ability) in nuanced and fluid ways, which vary within and across identity categories (Annamma et al., 2013). While each child has unique experiences, Children of Color who are multiply marginalized (e.g., Children of Color with disabilities) largely experience patterns of exclusion and discrimination in early childhood institutions, including increased scrutiny of their behavior (Gilliam et al., 2016) and disproportionate rates of suspension and expulsion (Gilliam, 2016).

Furthermore, children are often exposed to narrow representations of human variation in early childhood settings through classroom literature (Crisp et al., 2016), materials (Souto-Manning et al., 2019), and teacher talk (R. Berman et al., 2017) that omit experiences of Children of Color, particularly those who are multiply marginalized. Limited exposure to human difference within early childhood curricula perpetuates normative ways of being (e.g., White and nondisabled) that collectively minimize children's opportunities to construct expansive understandings of difference

that include race and ability, among other intersectional social identities (Lalvani & Bacon, 2019; Souto-Manning et al., 2019). Counteracting such exclusionary and discriminatory patterns necessitates that personnel preparation addresses the interconnected nature of oppressions such as racism and ableism (Annamma & Morrison, 2018b; Annamma & Winn, 2019).

White, nondisabled individuals, communities, and institutions enact power and prejudice that further marginalize individuals and communities who have historically experienced discrimination (Annamma et al., 2013). Discourses and actions of dominant individuals, communities, and institutions that propagate and justify attributions of inferiority to an individual or community based on *race*, which include, but are not limited to, “socially constructed meanings ascribed to an individual’s skin and eye color, hair texture, and bone structure” (Singleton, 2014, p. 40), constitute *racism* (G. Berman & Paradies, 2010); those based on *ability*,

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which are contextually bound and socially constructed expectations of human performance (Wolbring & Rybchinski, 2013), constitute *ableism* (Campbell, 2009).

Racism and ableism are woven together in educational contexts through policies, practices, curricula, and interactions that (re)produce narrow expectations of normalcy to uphold White, nondisabled norms as most desirable and marginalize those perceived as different (Annamma et al., 2013; Waitoller & Thorius, 2016). Following Beneke and Cheatham (2020), examples of how racism and ableism interdependently reinforce norms of Whiteness and ability in early childhood contexts include frameworks for understanding child development that interpret “typical” development through predominantly White, Eurocentric perspectives and mandates to identify children unlikely to reach milestones associated with those perspectives of development. In addition, the interconnected nature of racism and ableism is apparent in deficit-based perspectives that lead to labeling Children of Color as “at risk,” disciplinary practices that disproportionately suspend and expel Children of Color, and classroom materials that maintain and reinforce Whiteness and ability as normal (Beneke & Cheatham, 2020).

Although social progress has been made to address overt discrimination, instances of prejudice or bias based on race or ability continue in subtle ways (Sritharan & Gawronski, 2010). *Dysconscious racism* (King, 1991) and *dysconscious ableism* (Broderick & Lalvani, 2017) characterize limited and distorted understandings of social equity and human diversity that educators demonstrate and children learn in educational contexts. Dysconscious racism and dysconscious ableism are deeply interrelated because constructions of race and ability are inextricably intertwined (Annamma & Morrison, 2018b). Dysconsciousness perpetuates uncritical acceptance of problematic social practices and ultimately interferes with the provision of equitable education for all children. For example, when early educators monitor and police the actions of Black male children at a higher rate than their White and female peers (Gilliam et al., 2016), they are (re)constructing racialized views of behavior that position Black children as “bad” and less capable of managing their behavior (Broderick & Leonardo, 2016), thereby enacting dysconscious racism and ableism. Focusing on dysconsciousness suggests particular approaches to counteract these practices. For example, critical consciousness affords opportunities to continuously identify, resist, and disrupt how educators enact limited and distorted understandings in classrooms (Brown et al., 2010), offering particular implications for personnel preparation programs (Annamma & Morrison, 2018b).

The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC, 2019) acknowledged that institutional inequities flourish in early childhood education, and the Council for Exceptional Children (2020) reaffirmed

commitments to social justice, inclusion, and equity. Accompanied by systemic support, early childhood professionals are encouraged to acknowledge and counteract biases and dismantle institutional racism that exists within early education contexts (Division for Early Childhood [DEC], 2020; NAEYC, 2019). Thus, there is growing recognition that personnel preparation programs must explicitly prepare early educators to provide equitable learning opportunities for all children and develop historical and systemic understandings of structural inequities in society and in early childhood (NAEYC, 2019).

To act upon shared professional commitments, early childhood personnel preparation programs must prepare early educators who can counteract racism and ableism as they provide all children with meaningful and equitable educational experiences (NAEYC, 2019). Dis/ability Critical Race Theory (DisCrit; Annamma et al., 2013) is a theoretical lens for analyzing intersecting social identities, which include race and ability, that can help shape the provision of equitable and just education. Therefore, we applied DisCrit Classroom Ecology (Annamma & Morrison, 2018a) to the context of early childhood fieldwork. We argue that early childhood personnel preparation programs can utilize this framework to address bias and prepare future early educators to facilitate equitable and just early childhood experiences for Children of Color who are multiply marginalized and their families. First, we discuss the importance of preparing future early educators to counteract intersections of racism and ableism through their practice, highlighting the role of fieldwork in personnel preparation. Then, we provide a brief overview of DisCrit (Annamma et al., 2013) in relation to early childhood personnel preparation. Finally, we present DisCrit Classroom Ecology (Annamma & Morrison, 2018a) and apply the framework to the context of early childhood fieldwork. As many children’s first school experience, preschool may be the first setting outside of the home where children learn messages about race (Farago et al., 2015) and ability (Lalvani & Bacon, 2019). Although we focus on preschool settings, we recognize that no early childhood context is exempt from racism and ableism, including Part C early intervention, kindergarten, and the primary grades.

## Early Childhood Fieldwork

Teaching and learning take place in sociocultural contexts and are mediated by culture and relationships, making it essential that future educators be prepared to understand and respond to cultural dynamics (Kozleski & Handy, 2017), particularly instances of racism and ableism (Annamma & Winn, 2019; Migliarini & Annamma, 2020). Educators’ understandings of culture impact their interpretations of peer and child–adult interactions, and can contribute to decisions such as when and how to seek additional

services and supports (Kozleski & Handy, 2017). In addition, early educators in the United States are predominantly White, nondisabled females (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Division of Labor Force Statistics, 2019a, 2019b), which can further complicate efforts to prepare all early educators to address intersections of racism and ableism.

Experiences of White, nondisabled preservice early educators are likely to align with the dominant cultural expectations of normalcy that uphold Whiteness and ability embedded within educational systems. While research regarding perspectives and preservice experiences of Teachers of Color is limited, these early educators may experience challenges as they negotiate multiple identities and racialized experiences that normalize Whiteness throughout their preparation programs; Teachers of Color may also develop strategies to resist deficit-based constructions of human difference they encounter within their personnel preparation (Souto-Manning & Cheruvu, 2016). Personnel preparation programs can support all educators to develop critical consciousness regarding the role of culture in teaching and learning (Kozleski & Handy, 2017), including developing competencies to acknowledge, leverage, and sustain young children's sociocultural contexts for learning (Souto-Manning et al., 2019). Furthermore, personnel preparation can facilitate future educators' knowledge and skills to engage in the ongoing work of identifying, interrogating, and resisting racism and ableism (Annamma & Morrison, 2018b; Migliarini & Annamma, 2020).

While coursework is critical to such learning, fieldwork deepens personnel preparation and is recognized for its potential to prepare future educators for diverse classrooms (Nagro & deBettencourt, 2017; Stites et al., 2020). We broadly define *fieldwork* as applied learning opportunities for preservice early educators set in real preschools. Also described as clinical experience, practicum, student teaching, and internship, fieldwork provides opportunities for preservice early educators to apply knowledge and skills in context by observing and practicing teaching, and is therefore integral to effective personnel preparation (DEC, 2017).

The literature base regarding early childhood personnel preparation with specific consideration of intersections of racism and ableism is sparse; investigations have generally focused on either race or ability, rather than the mutual construction of the two, revealing an important gap in the literature. However, some research examines preservice early educators' preparation and practice regarding intersectional understandings of race and ability. Beneke and Cheatham (2020) and Beneke (2020) explored how White, nondisabled preservice early educators were prepared for and engaged in classroom practices to talk about race and ability, and identified ways in which program processes and preservice early educator practices reinforced Whiteness and ability as normative. Through phenomenological interviews and qualitative

mapping with the preservice early educators, Beneke (2020) found that processes within their preservice program compartmentalized learning about race and ability such as through a single required course on multicultural education. Focusing on preservice early educators' shared book reading during preschool fieldwork experiences, Beneke and Cheatham (2020) identified discursive practices used by preservice early educators that ultimately oversimplified the meaning and implications of race and ability, despite the educators' commitments to promoting educational justice.

Yet, much remains to be learned about how preparation programs can support future educators' abilities to recognize and respond to racism and ableism. For example, preservice educators often struggle to acknowledge ways in which racism continues to be present in educational settings and institutional structures (Haviland, 2008). Early educators' attitudes play an essential role in the implementation of inclusive practices (Barton & Smith, 2015; Stites et al., 2020), and researchers have found that preservice educators' beliefs about the value and feasibility of inclusive education are mediated by their own schooling experiences (Beneke et al., 2020). Furthermore, beliefs and attitudes are context-dependent; preservice educators may indicate that they have more progressive views but still demonstrate hesitation when confronted with instances of racism (Garrett & Segall, 2013). Similarly, educators may describe themselves as supporting inclusion while also indicating that they are uncomfortable teaching children with disabilities (de Boer et al., 2011). Finally, even positive attitudes may not translate to practice if educators do not have specific skills, and many educators report feeling unprepared to address racial inequities (Bhopal & Rhamie, 2014) and disability with children (Crowson & Brandes, 2014). Without nuanced understanding of race and ability, preservice early educators are unlikely to consider how racism and ableism are enmeshed in early childhood settings.

Despite the critical nature of fieldwork, researchers have also identified understanding the impact and structural features of effective fieldwork as a gap in special education (Brownell et al., 2020; Nagro & deBettencourt, 2017) and early childhood personnel preparation research (Hanline, 2010; Macy et al., 2009; Stites et al., 2020). In addition to methodological challenges to investigating fieldwork, researchers have identified barriers to actualizing innovative fieldwork approaches. While alignment between personnel preparation program and fieldwork site philosophy is recommended (DEC, 2017), multiple factors must be considered in quality placements, and personnel preparation programs often struggle to identify sites that meet all criteria (Macy et al., 2009; Recchia & Puig, 2011). Thus, preservice early educators often experience disconnects between coursework and the realities of schools, such as dissonance between a preparation program's child-centered philosophy and fieldwork sites that emphasized teacher-led

direct instruction and behavioral control (Recchia & Puig, 2011). However, when coupled with assignments and discussions that facilitate engagement with disconnects, these experiences can deepen early educators' learning (Recchia & Puig, 2011; Stites et al., 2020).

Furthermore, knowledge and skills developed in coursework do not always transfer to fieldwork settings (Zeichner, 2010). For example, Hanline (2010) found that preservice early childhood special educators reflected on their fieldwork in ways that simultaneously espoused and negated family-centered practice (e.g., promoting family engagement as important while depicting families who do not participate in traditional, school-based engagement activities as uninvolved). Shah and Coles (2020) also identified variable transfer of preservice educators' ability to identify, interpret, and respond to racial phenomena. Although preservice educators identified implicit and explicit racial phenomena during a methods course, their student teaching practices were influenced by context (e.g., perceptions of how sites addressed race) and becoming more narrow (e.g., identifying only explicitly racial phenomena) and less critical (e.g., avoiding recognition of power). In addition to these factors, preservice early educators may resist teacher educators' efforts to address race and racism due to inaccurate understandings of children's awareness of these topics (Blanchard et al., 2018; Farago et al., 2015). Such resistance may also impede understanding of how race and ability are co-constructed in early childhood settings.

DEC (2017) has called for early childhood personnel preparation programs to align coursework and fieldwork, ensure coherence between field site and DEC philosophy and practices, and provide scaffolded supports and supervision to preservice early educators. A strong conceptual foundation is essential to ensuring quality early childhood fieldwork (Macy et al., 2009). Although early childhood personnel preparation programs are tasked with ensuring that fieldwork "provide opportunities to work effectively with diverse populations" (NAEYC, 2019, p. 10), simply offering fieldwork placements in settings with children with and without disabilities who are racially, ethnically, and linguistically diverse is not enough. Early childhood personnel preparation must support future early educators' competencies to foster children's learning in diverse and inclusive classrooms (Blanchard et al., 2018) and provide opportunities to practice these competencies through fieldwork. Thus, it is crucial that early childhood personnel preparation programs explicitly consider how fieldwork can better support preservice early educators' knowledge and skills to counteract racism and ableism.

## Theoretical Underpinnings

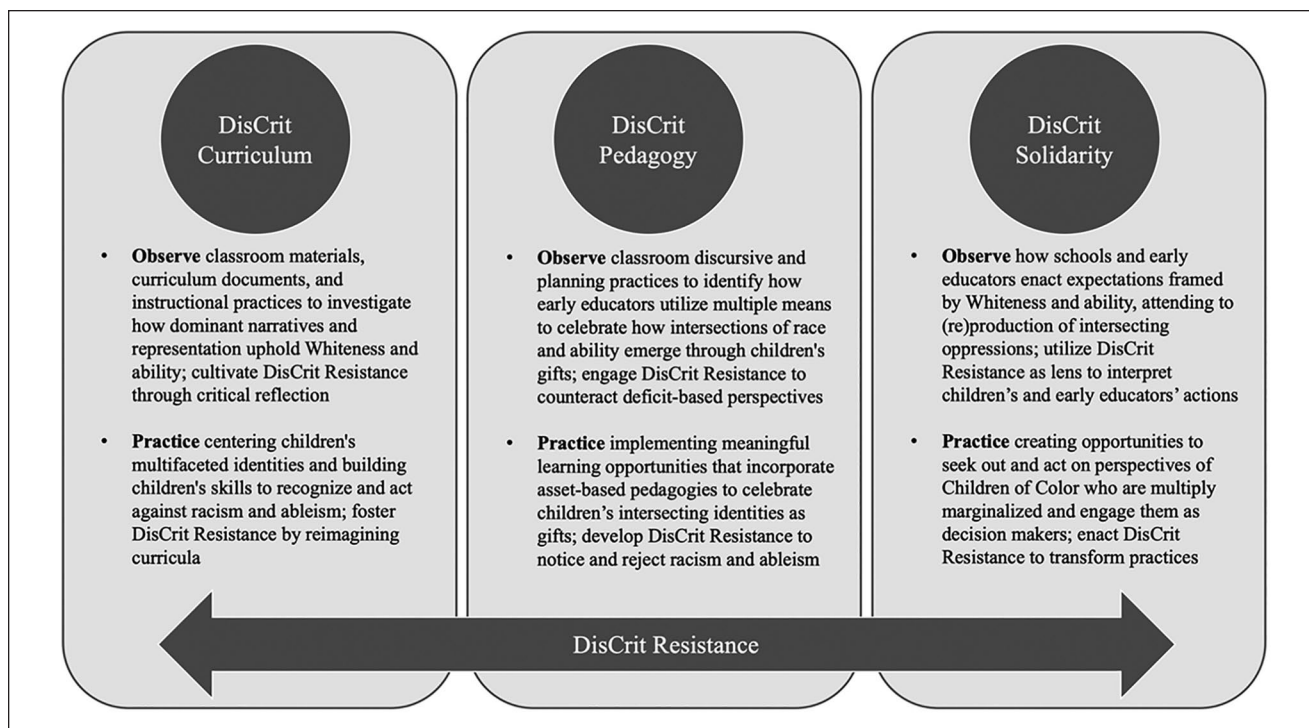
Pursuing educational equity involves intentional actions in the design and facilitation of learning experiences, which

necessitates awareness of ways teaching practices maintain racism and ableism. While the literature base on implicit bias continues to expand, this scholarship appears insufficient to explain the clear demarcations of inequity along intersections of race and ability within education (Beratan, 2006). *Implicit bias* suggests that there is an unconscious manner in which people harbor demeaning attitudes and negative stereotypes toward others, but scrutiny must be given to this notion when such dispositions become institutionalized and systemic (Annamma & Morrison, 2018b). Rather, following Annamma and Morrison (2018a), this article frames what may be considered implicit biases that uphold racist and ableist policies and practices as dysconscious racism (King, 1991) and dysconscious ableism (Broderick & Lalvani, 2017). Dysconsciousness suggests that the core issue "is not the *absence* of consciousness but an *impaired* consciousness" that causes implicit acceptance and exhibition of White and nondisabled cultural norms (King, 1991, p. 135, emphasis original). This framing allows early educators who are predominantly White and nondisabled (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Division of Labor Force Statistics, 2019a, 2019b) to not only take responsibility for ways that certain children are disadvantaged, but more importantly to detect and counteract dysfunctional actions. Dysconsciousness permits propagation of mistruths concerning inequity and cultural diversity that impedes effective action toward educational equity (Annamma & Morrison, 2018a, 2018b; Broderick & Lalvani, 2017; King, 1991).

## DisCrit

Understanding ways that racism and ableism manifest in modern education requires awareness of taken-for-granted beliefs about race and ability that have produced exclusionary social structures. Scientific racism, consisting of pseudoscientific attempts to legitimate notions of racial superiority/inferiority, has been used throughout American history to demean the intelligence, and even humanity, of nondominant racial and ethnic groups (Annamma et al., 2013). From justifications for chattel slavery and racial segregation to disproportionate special education referrals and placements, oppressive social policies have been enforced based on nefarious "science" (Du Bois, 1920; Losen & Orfield, 2002; Menchaca, 1997).

Annamma et al. (2013) draw from scholarship on this history in conjunction with recent scholarship that has offered analyses of the race-ability nexus to introduce a theoretical framework that combines aspects of Disability Studies and Critical Race Theory, which they call DisCrit. Despite the growing body of literature examining intersections of race and ability, DisCrit is uniquely positioned by allowing for explorations of the social construction and interdependence of race and ability (Annamma et al., 2013).



**Figure 1.** Sample fieldwork activities that embed DisCrit Classroom Ecology components.

Note. DisCrit = Dis/ability Critical Race Theory.

Source. This figure expands on Annamma and Morrison (2018).

In other words, race and ability are given equal attention to adequately conceptualize the complex ways that racism and ableism influence each other and interdependently construct notions of Whiteness and ability as normal, through processes that often appear neutral or invisible. DisCrit (Annamma et al., 2013) consists of seven tenets that problematize conceptions of normativity and centralize the perspectives of those who have been multiply marginalized by intersecting oppressions. DisCrit recognizes that although race and ability are socially constructed, there are real material and psychological effects to being perceived as raced or disabled, and social constructions of Whiteness and ability legitimate economic benefits through interest convergence with White individuals (Annamma et al., 2013). DisCrit supports consideration of educational practices through a legal and historical lens to examine how inequities may be embedded in policy and maintained through legal systems (Annamma et al., 2013). While many theories give insight into consequences of normativity, DisCrit goes further than simply acknowledging discriminatory constructs to promote explicit rejection of and resistance to society's dehumanization of people based on constructions of difference. Furthermore, the importance of DisCrit can be exemplified through personnel preparation and fieldwork.

Applying DisCrit to fieldwork of preservice early educators builds on scholarship that recognizes the importance of educators who can explicitly engage in issues of power and

justice by teaching and interacting with Children of Color who are multiply marginalized in meaningful ways as they actively counteract racism and ableism (Annamma & Morrison, 2018a). To provide equitable and just educational experiences for all children, future early educators must have opportunities (Macy et al., 2009) to see themselves as change agents in creating inclusive educational cultures by proactively identifying and disrupting racism and ableism. Specifically, fieldwork is a place where preservice educators enact what they have learned in context, and fieldwork can support preservice early educators and teacher educators to identify and analyze application and misapplication of program aims (Macy et al., 2009). Inspired by DisCrit (Annamma et al., 2013), we describe DisCrit Classroom Ecology (Annamma & Morrison, 2018a) next and describe how it can serve as an actionable framework that preservice educators can enact through their teaching within preschool settings.

### Applying DisCrit Classroom Ecology to Early Childhood Fieldwork

In this section, we present the four components of DisCrit Classroom Ecology: DisCrit Resistance, Curriculum, Pedagogy, and Solidarity (Annamma & Morrison, 2018a). We outline and connect each component to early childhood fieldwork (see Figure 1), presenting considerations for how

teacher educators can facilitate learning opportunities as preservice early educators observe and practice teaching. To further illustrate these examples, we embed brief vignettes that draw on our experiences as early educators and fieldwork supervisors (first two authors), as well as researchers and teacher educators (all authors). Building from the tenets of DisCrit (Annamma et al., 2013) described above, DisCrit Classroom Ecology (a) resists deficit-oriented, dominant narratives of learning that most negatively impact educational experiences of Children of Color, especially with multiply marginalized social identities, by (b) illuminating historical inequities and oppressions faced by Communities of Color, (c) appreciating children's strengths and fostering these gifts through instruction, and (d) recognizing children's actions as strategies of resistance to dismantle dysfunctional systems. Thus, we propose that teacher educators and early educator preparation programs can utilize this framework as one possible solution to address dysconscious racism and ableism by better preparing preservice early educators to facilitate more equitable and just educational experiences for Children of Color who are multiply marginalized and their families.

*Like the majority of her classmates earning initial teaching certification in inclusive early childhood education at Midwestern University, Tess is a White, nondisabled, English-speaking female. This semester she is completing student teaching in an urban public school's preschool program. Tess and her mentor teacher have identified two focus children from the class of 18. Alfonso is a Mexican American boy who loves building with blocks and riding trikes outside. He has a diagnosis of autism and participates in special education and speech services in the classroom. Frankie is a Black boy who loves dramatic play and making music. He is beginning the referral process for evaluation after concerns about his cognitive and language skills.*

### DisCrit Resistance

Gift Theory (Rabaka, 2010) and DisCrit (Annamma et al., 2013) inform DisCrit Resistance (Annamma & Morrison, 2018a), which underlies all framework components by encouraging social transformation and human liberation. To accomplish this, educators can redefine educational expectations by simultaneously challenging their own conceptions of race and ability and framing Children of Color who are multiply marginalized as agents in resisting oppressions (Freire, 1970). Early educators must first address their own dysconsciousness and be aware of intersecting marginalization to recognize and value unique knowledge that Children of Color who are multiply marginalized bring to educational spaces as innovative, clever, strengths-based gifts. Much like Funds of Knowledge (González et al., 2005), DisCrit Resistance emphasizes the inherent value of lived

experiences, knowledge, and practices embodied by each Child of Color's family, community, and culture. Thus, early educators can engage in transformative work as they actively resist and seek to disrupt systemic inequities. Because DisCrit Resistance informs each component of the DisCrit Classroom Ecology (Annamma & Morrison, 2018a), we discuss how it can be enacted during fieldwork in subsequent sections.

### DisCrit Curriculum

Early educators can engage in resistance through the substance of the education they provide via DisCrit Curriculum, which recognizes inequity-laden histories of People and Communities of Color to inform ways to counteract intersecting oppressions (Annamma & Morrison, 2018a). Master curricula infused with dominant narratives often include incomplete or inaccurate historical depictions (Busey & Walker, 2017) that reduce or isolate People and Communities of Color to specific holidays or months (Ladson-Billings, 2003) and normalize problematic narratives about disability (Erevelles, 2005). Thus, early educators can infuse curricula with opportunities for children to explore their identities, including consideration of the multifaceted nature of identities, variation across identities, and recognition of disability as identity, which can foster pride and create a sense of belonging for Children of Color who are multiply marginalized (Lalvani & Bacon, 2019).

Teacher educators can encourage preservice early educators to draw on DisCrit Curriculum through fieldwork activities to observe teaching, such as analyzing classroom materials and practices for dominant narratives that uphold Whiteness and ability as normal, and facilitating preservice early educators' reflection on ways in which these narratives may further marginalize Children of Color with disabilities. For example, early educators might review classroom books for representations of social identities, specifically how race and ability are co-constructed. Particular attention can be paid to whose voices are centered, whose voices are silenced, and consequences for inclusion and exclusion (Souto-Manning et al., 2019). Through written assignments, peer discussion, or supervision debriefing, preservice early educators can cultivate DisCrit Resistance as they further explore implications of these representations for children's learning and sense of belonging. To take such an assignment further, teacher educators might encourage preservice early educators to identify or develop a new material to fill an identified gap or further diversify representations of Children of Color who are multiply marginalized. In doing so, teacher educators can encourage preservice early educators to consider how systems, circumstances, and norms constrain schools' and educators' efforts to implement culturally responsive and sustaining curricula (Waitoller & Thorius, 2016). In addition, preservice early educators can review

curricular planning materials through the lens of DisCrit Curriculum and consider to what extent planning requirements encourage consideration of children's intersecting identities and the full range of human difference, as well as consequences for children and adults.

When preservice early educators are practicing teaching, teacher educators can encourage consideration of DisCrit Curriculum through lesson planning assignments that center children's multifaceted identities or build children's skills to recognize and act against unfairness. Teacher educators can thus create a space for preservice early educators to further engage DisCrit Resistance as they imagine how to select, adapt, and implement curricula that center gifts and strengths of Children of Color who are multiply marginalized in their current fieldwork sites as well as their future classrooms. In particular, teacher educators can incorporate practice for preservice early educators to discuss and explore children's multifaceted identities through selection of materials for reading (Beneke & Cheatham, 2020) and play (Farago et al., 2015). Curriculum can promote children's learning about different ways of being and disrupt problematic views of normalcy (Lalvani & Bacon, 2019), and teacher educators and fieldwork supervisors can guide preservice early educators' exploration of how to draw on curriculum to achieve such aims.

*After a few days in the classroom, Tess visits the library center during planning time to explore environmental arrangement and materials for a course assignment. Tess glances at the photos of the children and their families displayed at the center, and notices books that seem to represent the diversity of the classroom. Flipping through the books, Tess notices that the nonfiction book with photos of children with disabilities predominantly depicts White children. A picture book addressing racial diversity does not address children with disabilities. Tess looks from the books to the family photos, and wonders: What do books such as these mean for the sense of belonging and learning of Children of Color who are multiply marginalized and their White, nondisabled peers? How might I engage the children in conversation about representation based on the current books? How might changing the books and materials influence opportunities available to discuss difference? Tess decides to talk with her mentor teacher and fieldwork supervisor about this, and pay close attention to whether Alfonso and Frankie independently visit this center, and if so, which books they choose.*

### DisCrit Pedagogy

To embody expansive learning approaches, educators can reframe their perceptions of Children of Color who are multiply marginalized through DisCrit Pedagogy (Annamma & Morrison, 2018a). Instead of holding deficit-oriented perceptions of the abilities, knowledge, and skills of Children

of Color who are multiply marginalized that stifle their opportunities to thrive, educators can resist dominant discourses and challenge their own dysconsciousness (Migliarini & Annamma, 2020). Early educators can draw on asset-based pedagogies to implement multiple and varied representations of content, opportunities for children's engagement, and expressions of child learning (Center for Applied Special Technology, 2011) with consideration of the interconnected nature of racism and ableism (Waitoller & Thorius, 2016). Within a DisCrit Classroom Ecology (Annamma & Morrison, 2018a), educators can reshape strengths-based conceptions of Children of Color who are multiply marginalized by celebrating and sustaining children's multifaceted identities and enabling their abilities to fully engage in learning (Waitoller & Thorius, 2016).

Teacher educators can create many opportunities for preservice early educators to embody DisCrit Pedagogy as they observe teaching during fieldwork. For example, preservice early educators can observe and analyze language (e.g., discussion among children and adults), practices (e.g., providing prompts), and materials (e.g., individualized education plans) that convey early educators' social constructions of children, with close attention to when and how early educators recognize and celebrate the strengths, gifts, assets, and interests of Children of Color who are multiply marginalized (González et al., 2005; Rabaka, 2010) in contrast to perceived child deficits (Dyson, 2015). How educators think (Thornton & Underwood, 2013) and talk (Mercer, 2010) about children reflects their underlying pedagogical stances, and with guidance from teacher educators, preservice early educators can shape their pedagogical approach to embody who they want to be as an educator (Annamma & Winn, 2019). Methods of resistance to racism and ableism can be both intrapersonal and interpersonal as preservice early educators resist adoption of inequitable teaching practices by noticing and rejecting these norms. Through coursework, teacher educators can prepare preservice early educators to observe and identify how early educators design and implement learning opportunities that position Children of Color who are multiply marginalized as experts and embed skills for countering oppressive systems such as racism and ableism (e.g., Waitoller & Thorius, 2016).

Through activities to plan and practice teaching, teacher educators also can encourage preservice early educators to critically reflect on ways in which traditional schooling and instructional practices uphold Whiteness and ability as expected norms (Annamma et al., 2013; Waitoller & Thorius, 2016). Because children develop a sense of belonging within their classroom communities through their participation, preservice early educators should have ongoing opportunities to practice making learning opportunities meaningful for all children (Cologon & Mevawalla, 2018), with particular consideration of Children of Color who are multiply marginalized. Through coursework and fieldwork,

preservice early educators can develop a repertoire of multiple means of representation, such as conveying content through spoken and signed communication. Furthermore, children can experience multiple means of engagement when preservice educators implement activities that forefront the gifts of Children of Color, such as by engaging in interactive read-alouds where children discuss and process events as a story unfolds, in contrast to unilateral book reading where children are asked to remain seated and silent (Brown et al., 2010). Finally, preservice early educators can preemptively plan to document children's understandings of the world through multiple means of expression, where children can demonstrate their acquisition of concepts and language in various ways that sustain and revitalize the cultures of Children of Color, such as through performances, writing, illustrations, photographs, and three-dimensional creations (Paris & Alim, 2017). Thus, by providing children with expansive ways to learn, preservice early educators can practice planning and implementing activities that embrace the gifts of Children of Color who are multiply marginalized.

*In her second week of leading read-alouds, Tess is determined to make adjustments. Both she and her mentor teacher recognize that pacing was an issue last week, with Tess frequently stopping to remind children about expectations, especially raising hands and waiting to be called on. During a regularly scheduled debriefing session with her fieldwork supervisor, Tess tries to focus on the positive and pictures the children who could reliably be pointed out as models during large group reading. In doing so, she realizes they were all White and nondisabled. With encouragement from her supervisor, Tess begins to envision a different approach to shared book reading that could decenter expectations aligned with Whiteness and ability, and could open new ways of participating. They decide that she could explicitly introduce different styles of read-alouds, just as the class had been discussing different genres of books. Tess plans to start with a call-and-response participation structure, eliminating the need to call on individual children to participate. Building from a suggestion from her supervisor, Tess makes a note to look for a book with an accompanying song like Follow the Drinking Gourd (Winter, 1988) and to incorporate signs and/or gestures into her reading so that children can participate in multiple ways. In addition to these reasons, this book also lets Tess infuse DisCrit Resistance through its story about the Underground Railroad.*

### **DisCrit Solidarity**

To recognize the social nature of learning and educational contexts, educators can nurture interactions and relationships through DisCrit Solidarity (Annamma & Morrison, 2018a). The teacher–learner dichotomy creates an inherent

power imbalance that positions educators as enforcers of boundaries (Annamma & Handy, 2019) upheld by labeling, surveilling, and punishing Children of Color who are multiply marginalized (Annamma, 2018). How educators perceive and respond to the actions of Children of Color who are multiply marginalized shape whether these actions are recognized as acts of rebellion or gifts of resistance. Educators can demonstrate solidarity by resisting desires to control children's behavior manifested through institutional and individual expectations for children's actions (Migliarini & Annamma, 2020) and confronting their power (Annamma & Handy, 2019) while subsequently engaging children in classroom dialogue to critically negotiate differences and identities (Carbado et al., 2013). Educators have the responsibility to cultivate positive educator–child and peer relationships and can intentionally focus on ethics of interdependence and care (Annamma & Handy, 2019).

Teacher educators can create opportunities within fieldwork to explore DisCrit Solidarity and promote understanding of how systematic oppressions are (re)produced in classrooms, as well as what educators and children can do to resist oppressions (Migliarini & Annamma, 2020). Through observation activities, preservice early educators can review documents (e.g., school handbook, lesson plans) and materials (e.g., visual representations of rules for children) related to behavioral expectations and how they co-construct race and ability. Teacher educators might create assignments wherein preservice early educators select a classroom management practice and observe how it is applied, with attention to which children receive feedback, and what type of feedback they receive (e.g., positive, corrective). Through discussion with supervisors, peers, or faculty, preservice early educators can further cultivate DisCrit Resistance as they consider how systems of power play a role in expectations by exploring questions such as the following: If this rule no longer existed, what impacts might result for children, adults, and the school system? How might this practice be reimagined as practicing solidarity with children? (Annamma & Winn, 2019; Migliarini & Annamma, 2020)

Teacher educators can also ensure preservice early educators practice teaching activities that share power with children by seeking out—and acting on—children's perspectives, solutions, and ideas. DisCrit Resistance is subversive in nature and seeks transformation (Annamma & Morrison, 2018a); therefore, preservice early educators can resist dominant norms of how learning activities are designed and facilitated as they center experiences and perspectives of Children of Color who are multiply marginalized. For example, preservice early educators might plan discussion about an issue faced by the classroom community, including preparation of needed supports such as definitions, visuals, and assistive technology. This discussion might address topics such as a classroom expectation (e.g.,



clean-up time consistently taking too long) or another topic selected by children; preservice early educators can plan how to document what children share and take steps to position children as partners in constructing a positive classroom community by enacting their solutions. In addition, preservice early educators might plan and implement multiple ways to engage children in a variety of classroom decisions (e.g., voting, coming to consensus through deliberation). Teacher educators can facilitate critical reflection on such activities by asking preservice early educators to consider how educators have and use power (e.g., presenting options to be voted on, determining what is and is not negotiable).

*During center time, Tess invites children over to play an alphabet game and practice identifying letter names. When she calls out Frankie's name, he does not respond, and continues "cooking" in the restaurant set up in the dramatic play area. Tess smiles and waves as she walks toward him, saying, "Your turn to play my game, Frankie!" He turns his body away, saying "No, no game." Tess's mentor teacher catches her eye and says, "Here we go again. Let me know if you need help." Though Tess feels a bit flustered, she reminds herself to consider Frankie's resistance as a gift and uses this as an opportunity to enact solidarity by reframing racialized constructions of "badness." She asks herself: What is he telling me by choosing not to participate? How will my response position him as "bad" or "good"? How might my response influence Frankie's relationships with myself and his peers? Does it really matter if he participates in this activity as I originally planned it? Tess decides to follow Frankie's lead and pulls out a chair. "Hello, Chef Frankie. Do you have any alphabet soup?"*

## Conclusion

We applied DisCrit Classroom Ecology (Annamma & Morrison, 2018a) in early childhood contexts, offering a means to counteract dysconscious racism and ableism through personnel preparation. More research is needed to better understand effective fieldwork for preservice early educators (Hanline, 2010; Stites et al., 2020), as well as further investigate how teacher educators can draw on DisCrit in program and course design (Migliarini & Annamma, 2020). Early childhood personnel preparation programs and teacher educators must use a strong conceptual framework to establish quality fieldwork experiences (Macy et al., 2009). Deeply grounded in theory, DisCrit Classroom Ecology offers a framework that embodies the values and calls to action for personnel preparation programs to more explicitly prepare early educators to serve Children of Color who are multiply marginalized and their families. This framework is not intended to be an additional constraint for early childhood personnel preparation, but a reframing of practice to enrich the field so that Children of Color who are

multiply marginalized are intentionally repositioned from the margins to the center (Annamma & Winn, 2019). By drawing on DisCrit Resistance, Curriculum, Pedagogy, and Solidarity to design fieldwork, preparation programs can support early educators in facilitating more equitable and just educational experiences while also fulfilling broader recommendations for personnel preparation from DEC (2017) and NAEYC (2019).



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## Note

1. Throughout this article, we capitalize terms such as Children, Families, and Communities of Color to highlight the socially significant, political, and liberatory nature of racial identity for those who identify as Black, Latinx, Indigenous, Asian, Biracial, or Multiracial (Gotanda, 1991).

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