ETHNIC-RACIAL IDENTITY FORMATION IN THE EARLY YEARS

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ABSTRACT

Children's ethnic-racial identity formation is a critical aspect of their development and has implications across the lifespan. However, there has been limited attention to children's ethnic-racial identity formation, especially among young children of color. This paper provides the current evidence of ethnic-racial identity formation in the early years (ages 0-8). Guided by the literature primarily focused on older age youth, there is growing evidence of the importance of ethnic-racial identity for young children's cognitive and social-emotional development, school engagement and success. The early years are a sensitive period for the formation of positive ethnic-racial identification because it is during these years that personality is first formed, so this is an opportunity to grow the evidence and, more importantly, include it as a critical outcome for children's healthy development and an area for inclusion on national, state, and local indicators of child well-being and worthy of intervention and support. In addition to noting gaps and opportunities for innovation, we call on the need for a cohesive infrastructure, such as a research-practice partnership, focused on developing and implementing a plan that strengthens the research evidence while also integrating ethnic-racial identity and factors that support this outcome in quality rating systems and standards and professional development systems.

INTRODUCTION

The sizeable achievement gap experienced by racially marginalized children, particularly Black[1], Latine[2], and Native American (Bernal et al., McCardle & Berninger, 2014), in comparison to their white (and Asian) peers prior to formal schooling makes it worthwhile to examine racially marginalized children's early experiences because of an unconscious (implicit) bias that operates and is triggered by skin color (i.e., race), historical oppression, or cultural differences. National data indicates about 23 percent and 28 percent of Latine and Black four-year-old children, respectively, were proficient in letter recognition, while almost 37 percent of white children (and even more Asian children) were proficient. Further, about 51 percent and 55 percent of Latine and Black children, respectively, were proficient in math and shape recognition; in contrast, over 73 percent of white children were (Aud et al., 2010). Native American[3] children's reading and math scores were particularly affected by the number of socioeconomic risk factors they faced (Riser et al., 2019). Although Asian American children's reading skills were higher than other racial/ethnic groups at the start of school, their skills declined throughout the elementary years like those of other racially marginalized children (Han, 2008).

Racially marginalized children also bear the brunt of punitive and harsh school discipline. Regarding suspension and expulsion, the US Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights found in their 2013—14 data that Black children represent only 19 percent of preschool enrollment, but 47 percent of preschool children receiving one or more out-of-school suspensions; in comparison, white children represent 41 percent of preschool enrollment, but 28 percent of preschool children receiving one or more out-of-school suspensions were white (Office for Civil Rights, 2016). Latine, Native American, Asian American, and Pacific Islander are also disproportionately represented with in-school suspensions. Combined, this population accounted for 15 percent of the K-12 school group, but 19 percent of suspensions.

Despite the achievement gap and challenges with inequitable school discipline, many Black and Latine children still demonstrate strong social and emotional competence (Baker & Iruka, 2013; Humphries et al., 2012; Jensen et al., 2015), and Chinese American[4] families demonstrate positive emotional competence when they have strong parental supports (Curtis & Tao, 2020). Research indicates that Black children, in particular, have flexible use of language and different ways of storytelling (Gardner-Neblett & Iruka, 2015; Gardner-Neblett et al., 2012), and grammatic language features in their narratives that are aligned with literacy skills and cognitive reasoning (Curenton, 2004; Curenton & Justice, 2004). Being a dual language learner (DLL), which many racially marginalized children are, has positive benefits on various aspects of young children's development (McCabe et al., 2013). Further, research has shown positive effects when specific instructional strategies are used to support Latine children in the

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[1] We use the term Black as a pan-ethnic description of anyone from the African diaspora including, but not exclusively limited to, African Americans, Africans, Afro-Caribbeans, Afro-Latino/a, or any other group that identifies as Black and/or having any ancestral heritage from Africa.

[2] Consistent with experts in the field, we use Latine to refer to individuals whose cultural background originated in Latin America. In U.S. academic circles, Latinx is being used as a gender-inclusive term to refer to people from Latin American backgrounds, but Spanish-speakers find that Latinx is unpronounceable in Spanish. Therefore, we have opted to use the gender-inclusive term Latine, commonly used throughout Spanish-speaking Latin American (Melzi et al., 2020).

[3] While we use the term Native American as denoted in the US Census and as used in the research studies we cite, we recognize the term is embedded in ethnic nomenclature, racial attitudes, the legal and political status of American Indian nations and American Indian people, and cultural change (Horse, 2005). Nevertheless we recognize that Native Americans and Tribal Communities are Indigenous people, making it clear that this group occupied the land first, without assigning the American nationality.

[4] We recognize that Asian American/Pacific Islanders have roots in at least 29 Asian countries and 20 Pacific Islander cultures (Ghosh, 2003). We name the specific group based on the specific group(s) referenced.

classroom (Castro et al., 2017; Jensen et al., 2018). Nevertheless, Black and Latine children's developmental strengths (e.g., storytelling, cooperation) are not often incorporated in or valued in classroom interactions and instruction, which may be a missed opportunity for fostering their learning. Nor are these strengths the current lens through which early learning classroom interactions are gauged. Current early learning standards about classroom interactions limit their focus to those positive developmental skills typically found in middle-class, white populations, ignoring culturally-grounded social competence skills, like having a positive ethnic-racial identity.

Considering the development of a positive ethnic-racial identity as a social-emotional skill (and arguably, also a cognitive skill) is a recent development. For instance, the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning, also known as CASEL, has reconceptualized commonly held notions of social-emotional learning into what they refer to as transformative social and emotional learning (SEL) (Caven, 2020; Jagers et al., 2018). Transformative SEL is grounded in the idea that students learn to build strong, respectful relationships that appreciate people's differences and similarities and learn to critically examine issues and seek collaborative solutions to social problems. Positive racial identity fits within this transformational view in terms of the important social-emotional skill of **self-awareness**, which CASEL believes is the foundation for equity. Social awareness is the ability for children to understand their personality, behavior, internal states, and their role in social networks. Not only can a positive and transformative view of self-awareness be critical to white students in terms of making them realize their power and privilege, but it is also essential to helping racially marginalized children develop a positive ethnic-racial identity. Another critical aspect of the transformative SEL view that applies to ethnic-racial identity is **social awareness**. Social awareness is a child's ability to engage in empathy and perspective-taking and their ability to respect diversity. When children develop a strong sense of social awareness, they will be able to decipher negative stereotypic messages about race and culture, and it will allow students to discern racial and class power dynamics, both of which are skills that can help children envision and co-create a new environmental context that is not plagued by racial bias.

A focus on positive ethnic-racial identity is crucial as scholars have found positive links between beliefs about one's ethnic/racial group and Black and Latine children's achievement and social-emotional development (Brown & Chu, 2012; Estela Zarate et al., 2005) and Cherokee youth's psychosocial outcomes (Hoffman et al., 2021). Research has found that when children receive messages about having positive self-worth and self-identity, balanced with messages about racial inequalities, this results in positive school grades (Bowman & Howard, 1985; Sanders, 1997), academic curiosity, and persistence (Neblett Jr et al., 2006). In contrast, experiences of discrimination, real or perceived, by teachers and peers are negatively related to youth's self-esteem and positively associated with levels of anger, depressive symptomatology, involvement in problem behaviors (Wong et al., 2003), and academic orientation and achievement and healthy outcomes (Neblett et al., 2006). By not attending to the specific needs and assets of racial and ethnic minority children, especially Black children who have historically been disenfranchised from equitable access to education, we will continue to see disparities in their experiences and outcomes (i.e., disproportionate expulsion and suspension, low expectations, and conflictual teacher-child relationships) (Iruka et al., 2020; Meek et al., 2020).

What is ethnic-racial identity?

Identity is the "integration of self-concept and self-esteem with the perceptions of future development and includes an awareness of group membership, expectations, social responsibilities, and privileges according to group membership. Ethnic-racial identity [includes] attitudes and beliefs an individual holds about [their] particular racial or ethnic group" (Thomas & Speight, 1999, pp. 152-153). To unpack the meaning of these two concepts, **racial identity** can be described as the effect of an individual's social and political experiences on their psychological well-being based on their group membership's physical characteristics. At the same time, **ethnic identity** focuses on an individual's psychological connection with members of a shared cultural heritage, including a particular worldview, language, and behavioral dynamic (McMahon & Watts, 2002). Together we refer to these concepts as ethnic-racial identity.

To understand identity formation, it is essential to distinguish between race versus ethnicity. While there is an overlap between race and ethnicity, they are different constructs. **Race** is a social construct primarily based on skin color, hair texture, and other physical attributes. It is a societal social structure engineered to communicate who has power and who does not, and race is used to distort views of groups, such as seeing groups as threatening, lazy, etc, and it is also uses to justify oppression (Markus, 2008). There is no biological underpinning for race, yet it operates via societally created notions of difference and superiority. Similarly, there is no biological basis for **ethnicity**, but it is based on "a framework for acquiring a view of the self, the world, and future opportunities, while also providing a structure for interpersonal relations and subjective experiences" (Spencer & Markstrom-Adams, 1990, p. 292) such as a shared language, religious heritage, or geographic location. Members of ethnic groups may differ by race, such as Latines who have a shared language of Spanish, national heritage, or shared ancestry. But ethnicity may also be used to describe a sense of belonging among members of different racial groups, such as Blacks or those who are multiracial. Phinney and Ong (2007) indicated a sense of belonging as a critical component of ethnic identity, implicating that as individuals from ethnically marginalized groups associate positive feelings with their group membership, they will also hold positive beliefs and attitudes about themselves as a group member. When a healthy identity has been formed, members of racial and ethnic groups are proud and feel a sense of belonging and are motivated to be a part of their racial-ethnic group (Markus, 2008).

Racial-ethnic identity formation

All children go through the process of identity formation in general. However, children of color are confronted with developing an additional identity rooted in their group membership and based in their group's experiences with racism, prejudice, and biases. The development of this aspect of children of color's identity is shaped by their racial and ethnic identification, racial and ethnic preference, racial and ethnic attitudes, and reference group orientation (Spencer & Markstrom-Adams, 1990). **Racial and ethnic identification** is the ability to identify oneself as part of a racial or ethnic group. **Racial and ethnic preference** is an indication of having a positive

feeling about one's racial and ethnic group. **Racial and ethnic attitude** is how a particular racial or ethnic group is viewed in society, such as the ability to know and understand stereotypes. **Reference group orientation** is an indication of how racially or ethnically diverse children determine their identity in relation to their ethnic-racial group.

Evidence shows that children's racial awareness and identity begin in the early childhood years.   The literature is clear that very young children are processing race and racial differences as early as three months. In one study, Kelly et al. (2005) found that three-month-old white infants living in the United Kingdom shown stimuli of faces from different racial and ethnic groups demonstrated a preference for faces from their own racial and ethnic group based on eye movement. Further research indicates that between three and nine months, infants become familiar with ethnic-racial stimuli through the process of perceptual narrowing (Williams et al., 2020). During this developmental period, children begin to develop preferences for racial and ethnic groups familiar to them. Work by Metzoff (2006) also shows that while infants may not have full language, they are able to interpret and attempt to mimic adult behaviors whether directed at them or not. This indicates that children's perceptions about themselves, others, and the environment are influenced long before children have language. While there is a need for more studies showing how early children can distinguish racial and ethnic differences, evidence is clear that by the age of two, children can use racial categories to reason about others and their behaviors (Hirschfeld, 2008). By three to four years of age, children can categorize people based on the color of their skin, such as brown or pink-colored skin, and this is aligned with Swanson et al.'s (2009) study that found that racial identity in childhood goes through age-related progression beginning with knowledge of color categories and culminating with the awareness of racial categories. By five to six years of age, children can accurately label people by socially constructed racial categories, like Black and white. This is when children associate positive attributes with white and negative attributes with Black, leading to a pro-white bias in ethnic-racial socialization (Spencer & Markstrom-Adams, 1990).

During these early years, race begins to affect children's behavior and how they see themselves. For example, by the age of five, children are likely to succumb to

stereotype threat (Ambady et al., 2001). Stereotype threat is a cognitive process where a person's performance on standardized tasks is diminished when primed with a stereotype about their group (e.g., Black students are not smart, boys do better in math). In a study with Asian American children, Ambady et al. (2001) found that elementary school children (kindergarten to grade two) showed a change in their performance on a standardized measure when primed with negative and positive stereotypes. Thus, it is clear that by the time children enter formal schooling, the internalization of their racial identity, and the stereotypes that go along with it, have an impact on their achievement and social-emotional development. However, it is essential to note that while children may be able to make social attributions based on skin color, it does not necessarily mean that they have poor self-concept and self-hatred. For example, Beale Spencer (1982) showed that children could simultaneously have a Eurocentric preference and have a high self-concept about being Black. However, this Eurocentric preference for all children changed as children got older, around age nine, and it diverged to the extent that Black children began to display Black preference. In contrast, their white peers' preference remained Eurocentric. Black children's preference for their own racial group continued to grow with age (Smith et al., 2009). In fact, Black children were more likely to report experiencing racial pride than white children or mixed-race children; 58 percent of them were likely to answer in response to questions about what is racial pride, and made statements such as, "I think it means I'm proud to be Black. I like who I am" (Black boy, grade four), compared to only 29 percent of mixed-race and 13 percent of white children (Rogers & Meltzoff, 2017, pp. 328). Even though racially marginalized children show skills in identity formation, the understanding of skin color distinction and the ability to identify as a member of a racial or ethnic group is a multi-stage process that occurs across several years, as several racial or ethnic identity formation models articulate. For example, Cross Jr (1995) developed a five-stage identity formation model of racial identity for Black people based on his work with children and adolescents. The five stages are pre-encounter, encounter, immersion, internalization, and political activity.

01. Pre-encounter: Individual's identity may not be a salient part of their identity, or they may be anti-Black or pro-white.

02. Encounter: This is the stage when individuals experience an event or receive a stimulus that causes them to challenge their beliefs about their identity or make them aware of their identity (e.g., called a racial slur, excluded from events or opportunities due to race). Individuals will likely experience confusion, alarm, depression, and eventually guilt, anger, and anxiety (Thomas & Speight, 1999).

03. Immersion: Individuals immerse themselves in the Afrocentric culture, including the values, beliefs, traditions, language, and activities. Individuals are likely to feel anger during this stage.

04. Internalization/Commitment: This is the stage when individuals have internalized their racial identity with their self-concept. This means that individuals primarily view themselves and their experiences through their racial and cultural identity.

05. Political activity: The final stage is the active behavior of ending all people's oppression primarily through political action.

Beyond racial identity, ethnic identity has also been examined. In 1987, Aboud (1987) and Rotheram and Phinney (1987) identified the components of ethnic identity; this was updated by Bernal and colleagues (1990). The five components of ethnic identity include:

- Ethnic self-identification: This is the ability to categorize one as a member of an ethnic group and recognizing appropriate cues.

- Ethnic constancy: This is the knowledge that one's ethnic characteristics are permanent across time and settings.

- Use of ethnic role behaviors: This is engaging in behaviors that reflect the culture, styles, and customs of the ethnic group.

- Ethnic knowledge: This is the knowledge that certain behaviors, customs, traits, and behaviors are meaningful for one's ethnic group.

- Ethnic preferences and feelings: This is the feeling and preference about being a member of an ethnic group, and also a preference for one's ethnic-racial groups' behaviors, customs, language, and values.

While the literature on ethnic identity is still limited, there is agreement that children can classify themselves and others based on ethnic identity. It is thought that

ethnic identity may occur later compared to racial identity because the social markers may be more ambiguous. It may be easier for young children to categorize by race because this is generally categorized based on skin color and other physical features like hair type and texture. The five ethnic identity components described by Bernal and colleagues seem to occur at different developmental stages. Serrano-Villar and Calzada (2016) indicate that "From the preschool (four- to five-year-old) to school-aged (six- to 10-year-old) years, self-identification shifted from an 'empty' label (i.e., that is parroted) to a 'meaningful' one (i.e., that reflects an understanding of why an individual is [Mexican American]), and the other components shifted from simple imitation of what family members were doing to more complex, individualized knowledge, behaviors and feelings/preferences" (pp. 3-4). They still found that about half of preschoolers were found to self-identify.

THE STATE OF EVIDENCE ABOUT ETHNIC-RACIAL IDENTITY FORMATION

We briefly present the current evidence about the links between ethnic-racial identity on various child outcomes and factors shown to support ethnic-racial identity.

Ethnic-racial identity formation and child outcomes

Numerous studies find multiple links between racial identity and children and youth's prosocial development. Rivas-Drake and colleagues (2014) provide a comprehensive review of the effects of ethnic–racial identity on developmental outcomes in five main dimensions for African American, Latine, Asian American, Pacific Islander, and Native American youth. The five dimensions are (a) exploration, (b) resolution, (c) centrality, (d) positive affect, and (e) public regard. *Exploration* dimension is related to children seeking out more information, "including media consumption related to the history and cultural norms of their group, as well as seeking membership in same-race collectives that increase exposure to and experiences with group norms and beliefs" (Huguley et al., 2019, p. 440). Rivas-Drake et al. (2014) find this dimension is related to positive self-esteem, more interest in learning, and fewer depressive symptoms. *Resolution* is when youth

have made meaning of their racial identity and clarified what their identity means to them, which is associated with more interest in learning. *Centrality* is focused on how much group members are important to the youth's self-concept. This is linked to their prosocial behavior, high academic motivation, and peer acceptance and popularity. *Positive affect* is the youth's evaluation of affirmation and pride about their membership and a sense of belonging. This is found to be associated with positive self-esteem, prosocial behavior, and fewer depressive symptoms. This dimension is also linked to positive academic engagement and achievement and greater school success and connectedness. Finally, *public regard* is the perception of others' evaluation of a youth's group, which is linked to youth's fewer somatic symptoms, greater school belonging, academic competence, and higher grades.

In sum, Rivas-Drake and colleagues (2014) found ethnic-racial identity was consistently and positively associated with psychosocial functioning and mental health, and this is especially true for youths' positive feelings about their ethnic or racial group (e.g., affirmation, private regard) and Black and Latine youth psychosocial adjustment. Ethnic-racial identity was also associated with academic outcomes for Black, Latine, and Asian American youth to some extent. There were less consistent findings for Native American youth.

While most studies linking ethnic-racial identity focus on older-age children and youth, evidence shows that parental ethnic-racial identity has positive links to young children's early skills and outcomes and social-emotional development. For example, in their study using a sample of 193 Black mother-child dyads enrolled in an Early Head Start (EHS) program, Halgunseth et al. (2005) found maternal racial identity attitudes related to children's cognitive achievement and social competence. Children of mothers who internalized Black-centered values (i.e., values that uplift Black people) had stronger social competence, indicating that the more mothers internalized a positive racial identity, the likely it supported children's sense of self. Counter to expectations, children with mothers in the pre-encounter stage (i.e., endorse white mainstream attitudes) had stronger cognitive outcomes. The authors speculate such a finding may indicate that mothers who were at the pre-encounter stage felt it was important to align to society's expectations and engaged in behaviors

aligned with and ensured success in white culture. In another study, Smith et al. (2009) examined the link between ethnic-racial identity and 713 Black elementary students' achievement and behavior. In addition to finding that own-group racial preferences increased with age, they found that ethnic-racial identity is positively related to children's social acceptance, physical appearance, and behavioral conduct; and positive ethnic-racial identity is positively predictive of children's reading and listening comprehension above and beyond socio-demographics (e.g., age, education, income) and self-esteem.

Factors that support ethnic-racial identity formation

Various factors have been found to support young children's racial identity formation and positive racial identity. McAdoo's (2002) foundational study with preschool children showed that parents are critical primary agents for ethnic-racial identity formation. Specifically, parents' teaching about racial history and strategies for addressing discrimination were instrumental in children's racial attitudes and preferences. These practices are called **racial socialization**, and they are necessary to develop positive racial identity and mitigate the psychological harm from continuous negative messages about one's race (Hughes, 2003; Murry et al., 2001). Beyond the family and home, schools and communities also socialize and contribute to children's racial identity formation. Based on 98 fourth-grade Black children, Smith et al. (2003) found that children whose teachers exhibited higher levels of ethnic-racial trust and perceived fewer barriers due to race and ethnicity evidenced more trust and optimism. Children living in communities with higher proportions of college-educated residents also exhibited more positive ethnic-racial attitudes. An examination of racial socialization practices and their effects among 241 African American first graders found that neighborhood quality also matters for children's ethnic-racial identity (Caughy et al., 2006). Specifically, the greater the social capital of the neighborhood, the stronger children's racial pride, but on the contrary, disadvantaged neighborhoods were associated with greater feelings of racial mistrust and greater emphasis on preparing for racial bias. Additionally, Caughy and colleagues found that all racial socialization messages are not created equal, such that racial socialization

practices that communicated being mistrustful of whites were associated with externalizing behavior problems in boys and internalizing behavior problems in girls.

In their lifespan model of ethnic-racial identity, Williams et al. (2020) find various influencers of children's identity formation in the early years. In early childhood, parents and families serve as the primary agent where children learn about their culture and are prepared for racialized experiences, including messages about pride and mistrust. These experiences could also vary based on families' socio-economic status and community and children's characteristics such as their age, gender, and skin tone. Other contexts that can also impact children's ethnic-racial identity include contexts such as their early care and education setting and educators and other adults in this setting. In contrast, in middle childhood, children have a more concrete understanding of their ethnic and racial identity and engage in more behaviors that align with their ethnic-racial identity. Beyond the home and family, during this period, children are more influenced by their current context, peers, and the school community, including same-race friends and more media exposure and other social life, such as extracurricular activities. Thus, as children's contexts expand beyond their home and family, the influencers of their ethnic-racial identity also broaden.

While there still remains a dearth of study on ethnic-racial identity formation for many groups of children including Native American, Latine, Asian American/ Pacific Islander, and Black children across the diaspora (e.g., Afro-Latines, Carribean-Americans), there is emerging work examining the ethnic-racial identity of multiracial and transracially adopted children based on their genetics, perception by majority society, and internal feeling of racial identity (e.g., Ung et al., 2012). Nishina and Witkow (2020) describe all the nuances of multiracial children's identity development and why child development researchers should care about the ethnic-racial identity of these children and why it is important to include these children in studies that focus on identity development. While we agree with their suggestion that multiracial children should be considered as their own ethnic group, we recognize there are limitations in terms of how the results of their developmental trajectories might be able to be understood given the vast heterogeneity among the children, their family configurations, and their

interactions with the communities that form their identity. Therefore, for studies, and even perhaps for demographic purposes, lumping multiracial children together ignores the diversity that exists within this group and the ways in which multiracial children's identity could vary depending on how they themselves identify, how others see them, and the quantity and quality of social interactions they have with members of their ethnic groups. Nishina and Witkow's conceptual piece presents the field with lots to consider, and in-depth work on multiracial children's identity development is just beginning. Thus, there is a need to attend to the multi-dimensionality and complexity of multiracial ethnic-racial identity, especially when considering that such identity intersects with other factors such as phenotype, gender, and community connection.

Programs supporting young children's ethnic-racial identity formation

In light of the emerging importance of ethnic-racial identity for young children's social and academic competence, there is a need to examine programs found to, directly and indirectly, promote and support this aspect of children's development. We review several programs purporting to directly or indirectly support children's ethnic-racial identity (see Table 1). This is not an exhaustive list but a list to show the nature of the programming, target age, and settings.

Table 1

ETHNIC-RACIAL SOCIALIZATION PROGRAMS IN EARLY CHILDHOOD

ORGANIZATION	ESTABLISHED	NATURE OF PROGRAMS	TARGET AGE	PARTICIPANTS
Advancing Racial and Ethnic Equity in Head Start	n.d.	Webinar series aims to promote anti-bias and anti-racism strategies Head Start and Early Head Start programs can use in their practices, services, and systems; includes children's understanding of race and identity development.	Infants, toddlers, and preschoolers	Head Start and Early Head Start staff
Abriendo Puertas, Opening Doors	2007	Ten-session curriculum for parents delivered by local partners promotes practices that foster children's learning and development, parent leadership, and advocacy.	Preschool-aged children	Parents
Children's Institute	1906	Early education, behavioral health, and family strengthening services. Training for professionals and caregivers in trauma-informed care, evidence-based clinical treatment, parenting, and fatherhood, including training staff to confront their own experiences with racism.	Early childhood, school-age children, and teenagers	Children, caregivers, and teachers
Center on Culture, Race & Equity at Bank Street College of Education's Black Lives Matter at School	2016	Annual weekly symposium designed to promote dialogue, curricula, and community events that explore racism in educational environments and the policies and curriculum that promote equity for Black children and community events such as National Youth Day.	Early childhood	Educators, students, parents, families, community members
EmbraceRace	2016	Community and resources including articles, webinars, action guides, children's books, resources, and stories to support those raising and guiding children to be inclusive, informed, and brave when it comes to race.	Preschool and elementary-aged children	Caregivers and early childhood educators
National Black Child Development Institute	1970	Strengths-based culturally relevant, evidence-based, and trauma-informed resources, programs, and events, including grassroots efforts at the local level through their National Affiliate Network. Examples of resources include direct distribution of culturally relevant and developmentally appropriate children's books and supplemental materials. Programs and events include an Annual Conference, programs across the country focused on health and wellness, literacy, and family engagement.	Birth to age eight	Leaders, policymakers, professionals, and parents
P.R.I.D.E.: Positive Racial Identity Development in Early Education	2017	For teachers: speaker series, cohort program with monthly sessions. For parents: Parent Village program with weekly meetings. For teachers & parents: Pop up mini art festivals with affirming art activities. Other: fee-for-service PD.	Three to eight years old	Primarily teachers and caregivers, with opportunities for child and family involvement and PD opportunities at institutions such as museums and libraries

Assessing children's ethnic-racial identity

Two measures – Doll Test (Clark & Clark, 1947) and the Preschool Racial Attitude Measure (Williams et al., 1975) are two of the premier measures to measure ethnic-racial attitude and identity in early childhood. However, there is concern that forced-choice methods may not indicate the child's true racial attitude (Jensen & Tisak, 2020). The Multi-Response Racial Attitude measure (MRA; Doyle & Aboud, 1995) allows children to attribute positive and negative adjectives to more than one photo, thereby overcoming previous studies' main flaws. The MRA consists of the following tasks and stimuli: 10 positive and 10 negative adjectives. These adjectives are represented on index cards. For example, "naughty" was depicted by three cards showing a room with crayons on the floor and crayon scribbles on one wall. The child is then asked to sort the photos into separate boxes. A photo depicting a specific racial group (white, Black, and Indigenous) is posted outside the box. The researcher states, "Some children are naughty. They often do things like drawing on the wall with crayons. Who is naughty?''

Ethnic-Racial Preference. Only a few measures have been used to assess children's ethnic-racial identity during the early years. One is the Racial Attitudes Beliefs Scale-II (RABS-II) developed by Spencer (1996). The RABS-II was designed for K-2nd graders and used a pictorial projective technique to determine children's racial preference. Children are shown two gendered (boy/girl) sets of photographs of children from various ethnic-racial groups (African American, Latine, white, and Asian). For each set of pictures, children were asked: (a) with whom would you rather be friends, (b) who do you think is smarter, (c) who do you think is meaner, and (d) who do you think is better looking? The measure is then scored for own-group preference (α = .71), which reflects how often the child chose a photograph of a child that matched their ethnic-racial identity, versus other-group preference (alpha = .73), which reflects how often a child chose a picture that did not match their ethnic-racial identity. There is also an overall preference that ranges from-3 to 9 and reflects the frequency of preference for their own group for positive items versus negative questions (α = .75)

Ethnic-Racial Identity. In third grade, children are competent in answering questions based on a Likert scale, so the Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure (MEIM; Phinney, 1992) can be used. Examples of items are, "I am happy that I am a member of the group I belong to," and

"I feel a strong attachment toward my own ethnic group." Responses are scaled from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree); α = .74.

Gaps in evidence regarding ethnic-racial identity formation

While there is growing literature on ethnic-racial identity formation, there are still gaps in this area, especially in early childhood. There is a need for in-depth examination about the stages of ethnic-racial identity formation in the first few years of life, and to what extent this may differ across racial and ethnic groups, especially for Asian Americans, Native Americans, as well as members of the African diaspora (e.g., African American, Afro-Caribbean and African children). One area of research that needs to be studied more in terms of ethnic-racial identity is examining biracial and multiracial children's identity development, especially for those whose biracial identity comprises two racially marginalized groups, such as Afro-Latine children. For instance, qualitative research by Castillo and colleagues (2020) has shown that youth with a Black-Asian ethnic-racial identity report racial identity conflict across their two communities, such as being alienated by the Asian community or having their ethnic-racial identity validity questioned within the Black community. Also, Black-Asian female youth reported being hypersexualized due to their biracial identity. Beyond children who are members of marginalized groups, there is a need to understand the process and factors that impact white children's racial identity formation, or at the minimum, recognition of their identity in relation to children of color.

There is also a need to examine whether there are differences based on children's individual characteristics such as age, gender, size, and phenotype (skin color, hair texture), family characteristics, such as income level, family structure, language, and parental education, and community characteristics, such as urban or rural environment, the proportion of ethnically and racially diverse community members, among other factors. With many young children in out-of-home care and exposed to media, there is a need for more studies examining how these non-familial contexts may be influencing the growth of children's ethnic-racial identity.

There is some indication that children as young as nine months prefer faces from their own racial and ethnic group, but this study was done in another country

with white children (Kelly et al., 2005). There is a need for studies focused on very young children in the US and other racial and ethnic groups. Furthermore, studies asking children to label dolls show that young children place positive attributes on white dolls and negative attitudes on Black/Brown dolls. However, there is debate as to whether this indicates children's negative internalization or just categorization based on environmental and social cues. For example, Gopaul-McNicol (1995) interpreted Black West Indian children's preference for a white versus Black Cabbage Patch doll to be an indicator of internalized oppression due to colonialism. Thus, there is more to be done about the development of children's ethnic-racial identity, how we assess their racial-ethnic identity, and factors across children's environment that strengthen positive racial identity, and what this may mean for children's social, emotional, and academic skills.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR AN ACTION-ORIENTED APPROACH

The literature on ethnic-racial identity formation shows the importance of children's development and school and life success. It also shows that many factors can strengthen (or detract) from children's positive ethnic-racial identity. While there are emerging science-based programs that directly and indirectly support children's ethnic-racial identity, there is no rigorously validated approach for examining or measuring it. As the early years are viewed as a sensitive period for children's development and learning, and the understanding that children's identity is an essential aspect of children's social-emotional and cognitive competence, early care and education programs and systems must begin to consider this as an area of importance for children's development. There has been an intentional focus on children's language, cognitive, and social-emotional development, but primarily centered on white normative standards. In light of the call to better meet children of color's needs and support their holistic development, a focus on their ethnic-racial identity formation is one critical area needing attention. Thus, we recommend a cohensive scholarly infrastructure to ensure research is aligned with practice and policy to translate the science to support children's ethnic-racial identity. One suggested approach to create an action-oriented infrastructure is the development of

an **Ethnic-Racial Identity Formation Research-Practice Partnership. The focus of this working group is to ensure that ethnic-racial identity formation is (a) further studied as a component of child development during the early years (age 0-8), (b) an area of focus for quality rating and improvement system and quality initiatives, including home visiting programs, coaching, and other training and technical assistance, and (c) a standard in early care and education programs and systems**.

This Research-Practice Partnership will review this white paper along with the other relevant documents (e.g., The Hunt Institute's Racial Identity Formation final report) to develop a plan to holistically examine, address, and recommend how the science of ethnic-racial identity formation can be strengthened in the early years and how ethnic-racial identity formation can be strengthened within early care and education systems and programs. This group will be charged with **developing and implementing** a plan that includes the following:

01. furthering the field's understanding of positive ethnic-racial identity, including stages of development and factors that impact and support it, with an emphasis on children of color;

02. examining how early care and education settings and systems can promote positive ethnic-racial identity, especially for children of color, as part of chidlren's development and to support children's school and life success;

03. conceptualizing early childhood professional development education and training to provide the workforce with the skills they need to support children's positive SEL related to ethnic-racial identity;

04. conducting a comprehensive review of measurements and assessment of young children's ethnic-racial identity formation, and attend to the source (parent, child, educator, rater) and level of information (e.g., child-level, classroom level, or program level), again with the focus on organizational environments that can be improved;

05. prioritizing measurement development and indicator selection to support inclusion in national, state, and local early childhood classroom environmental indicators and programming standards and outcomes;

06. conducting a comprehensive review of programs intending to strengthen children's ethnic-racial identity formation and from this review, provide lessons for new program development, especially for children of color;

07. prioritizing funding for additional studies needed about how to integrate identified programs into current early care and education systems and infrastructure; and

08. developing an extensive communication and dissemination plan with diverse stakeholders across the early childhood field to communicate the importance of ethnic-racial identity for children's development and school and life skills and the importance of parent, family, schools, and community partnerships (e.g., parents, educators, education leaders, administrators, community leaders) to support positive ethnic-racial identity, with an emphasis on children of color.

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