Journal of
Education and Human Development ISSN 1934-7200
Volume 2, Issue 1, 2008

"Did they Say What I think They Said?" A Multicultural Response Framework to Address Racial Comments in the Classroom

Sheri A. Atwater, Assistant Professor, California State University Los Angeles, satwate@calstatela.edu

Abstract

This article discusses the difficulties inherent in addressing racial issues with students, and acknowledges the learning curve that must take place if teachers are to feel prepared and competent handling racist, stereotyped, or prejudiced comments in the classroom. The author proposes a Multicultural Response Framework of Racial/Cultural Discourse to serve as a framework for teacher reflection and development as they respond to students' questions and comments about race. Findings from a pilot study are presented to illustrate how the framework can be used to classify teacher responses to hypothetical racial vignettes. Implications for psychologists and educators are discussed.

Introduction

In today's American schools, racial and ethnic diversity is a reality of everyday school life. In 2005-2006, children belonging to racial minority groups represented 43 percent of the U.S. public school student body, and this percentage has increased in recent years (National Center for Education Statistics, 2007). While the demographic characteristics of students have become more diverse, their teachers have not; 68 percent of teachers in the United States are White (FPG Child Development Institute, 2007). Thus, to respond to these changing student demographics, multicultural training workshops for teachers have become widely popular. The increase of such "diversity training" courses -- from one-day workshops to year-long pre-service classes -- is evidence of the field's growing recognition of the importance of equipping teachers with the knowledge and skills necessary to teach a diverse student body (Gay, 2005).

However, within the multicultural education literature there is a paradox with which educators continue to struggle. While research documents that teachers play a critical role in student's developing concept of race, particularly in the elementary years (Aboud and Doyle, 1996; Garcia, 1984), there are also many documented instances of teachers' *reluctance and/or inability* to answer children's racial questions or comments in a direct, open manner (Cochran-Smith, 1995; Lawrence and Tatum, 1997; Lewis, 2001; Williams, 1997). Rather, as some studies suggest, teachers often *deliberately distance themselves* from classroom race discussions through strategies of silence and separation from their own responsibility in order to deny perceptions of themselves as "racist" (Case and Hemmings, 2005, Lewis, 2001). Other times, teachers may adopt a "colorblind" stance that stresses racial similarities over differences, which inadvertently denies the experiences and questions of difference that students may legitimately ask (Tatum, 1999). Moreover, teachers often hold exceedingly deficit views about minority students' home lives, cultures, and families that can prevent them from approaching the subject of racial inequalities or difference from an egalitarian perspective (Marx, 2002, 2008).

This paradox of how race is addressed in the classroom suggests that despite good intentions, teachers often feel ill-equipped or confused about what to say "in the moment" to students who make stereotypical comments about race, gender, or ethnicity in a real-life setting. Rather than responding directly in a developmentally appropriate manner, teachers may trivialize or ignore the comment through silence strategies, or adopt a "color-blind" ideology that re-focuses the comment to a similarity when the student is commenting on a difference. Indeed, Bauman (2007) found that by the time students are in high school, many of them recognize that racial and cultural omissions, exclusions, and misrepresentations may be well integrated into a school culture that encourages students to believe that *silence* about certain issues is enough to indicate a lack of bias. These types of responses---whether individual or institutional--

only serve to discourage students' critical thinking about racial issues, and often deny them the opportunity to learn about race in a clear, unbiased manner (Polite and Saenger, 2003).

Towards a "Color-Conscious" Approach

How can teachers appropriately address race in the classroom and positively impact their student's thinking about racial concepts? In one empirical study designed to identify whether talk of race fosters prejudice or tolerance in children, Aboud and Doyle (1996a) found that classroom activities that enable students to discuss race and prejudice *openly* and in a *safe, trusting environment* can help combat students' prejudices. Other studies express similar findings: Hughes, Bigler and Levy (2007) found that elementary school students of European American (White) descent who received classroom history lessons that included historical information about African-American racism showed subsequently less biased attitudes toward African Americans and more complex cognitive responses. Similarly, Bolgatz (2005) found that teachers that deliberately discussed issues of race and racism and asked questions that challenged students to think about these topics encouraged their students to speak openly about the language and meaning of race and racism in class.

We can see then that open, direct classroom instruction can significantly decrease student prejudice and help students think critically about racial issues. As Amobi (2007) states, "[E]very teacher is a messenger". Rather than avoiding, ignoring or trivializing racial comments and questions, teachers who provide children with *direct*, *accurate, developmentally appropriate* information about individual differences may help children become more open-minded about racial and ethnic differences (Derman-Sparks et al, 1993). Teachers that adopt a "color-conscious" (rather than "color-blind") approach are those that seek out materials and initiate discussions about race and racism that positively reflect students' identities (Tatum. 1999). Such discussions help children develop respect for individual racial differences (Derman-Sparks, Gutierrez, & Phillips., 1993) and convey an underlying message that all children can be proud of their unique skin color and racial identity.

In addition to discussing race openly, elementary school teachers must also be aware of the language they choose to use; terms they use and descriptions they provide go a long way in fostering a sensitivity and cognitive appreciation of cultural diversity in elementary school children (Finchum, 2006).

A Multicultural Response Framework of Racial/Cultural Discourse

To assist educators in adopting a color-conscious paradigm where race discussions are handled appropriately, a multicultural response framework was created to understand and classify how teachers' can –and should--respond to students' racial discourse. The framework, based on theoretical concepts of Derman-Sparks and colleagues (1989) and Williams (1997), is displayed in Table 1.

Table 1. A Multicultural Response Framework of Racial/Cultural Discourse

Level	Response Category	Description
4	**Appropriate (color-conscious)**	Comments that address and validate the children's questions of differences *in a developmentally appropriate, non-biased manner* (Derman Sparks et al., 1989.)
3	**Expressly Color-blind**	Comments directly reflecting that racial differences do not matter; we are all the same underneath
2	**Inappropriate** a) Avoidant	Ignoring the child's question or comment
	b) Admonishing	Making the child feel wrong or shameful for asking the question
	c) Dismissive	Treating the question as trivial or unserious (i.e. "kids say the darndest things")
1	**Discriminatory**	Answering the question in a prejudiced or stereotyped manner

The levels in this framework are ranked from Level 1 (Discriminatory) through Level 4 (Appropriate) as being increasingly consistent with the goal of engaging the student in an active, direct, developmentally-appropriate dialogue about racial and cultural differences. The model is meant to provide a general sequence that illustrates teachers' increasing cognitive sophistication with racial discourse; however, it does *not* suggest that teachers must work their way through each level in a strict hierarchical order to eventually respond in a Level 1 manner. Many teachers may never respond in one or more "inappropriate" manners, or may "skip" levels depending on their prior experiences or comfort level with the racial comment/question.

To illustrate the Multicultural Response Framework, example responses for each level are presented below (example question and Level 4 response excerpted from Derman-Sparks and the ABC Task Force, 1989, p. 2).

Question (Johnny, 5 years): **"Why is Bobby's skin so dark?"**

Responses:

Level 4 (Appropriate):
"Bobby's skin is dark brown because his mom/dad (or birth mom/dad) has dark brown skin."

Level 3 (Expressly Color-blind):
"His skin color doesn't matter. We are all the same underneath."

Level 2a (Inappropriate - Avoiding):
Pretending the question was not heard (e.g. "Why don't we come over here and play?")

Level 2b (Inappropriate - Admonishing):
"Shh, that's not nice to ask. What if I asked you 'Why are you so white?'"

Level 2c: (Inappropriate - Dismissive):
"Hmm. Let me guess. Did you paint him that color?"

Level 1: (Discriminatory):
"Because he's Black, he's not like you. All Blacks look the same."

A Level 4 ("Appropriate") response to children's questions of race indicates that teachers accurately addressed a child's question/comment without negative bias, without avoiding or sidestepping the issue, and without making the child feel ashamed or trivial for asking the question. An "appropriate" response to a child's question of race is one that respects children's questions and ideas *while also offering accurate information*.

As illustrated in the above example, teachers who provide a Level 3 response ("Expressly Color-blind") are not responding "appropriately" since they are *not addressing the child's question directly*. Rather, a Level 3 response re-focuses the question to stress similarities *when the child is asking about a difference* (Derman-Sparks, et al., 1989; Williams, 1997). A Level 3 response, however, does *not* attempt to avoid or dismiss the child's question, or admonish the child for asking such a question. Teacher responses that fall into these categories (Level 2 – "Inappropriate") are rated as less appropriate, for not only do they neglect to answer the question directly, but they provide little or no information to the child and may make the child feel ashamed or embarrassed. It is important to note that teachers who employ Level 2 responses may also adhere to a color-blind ideology (e.g. ignoring student's questions may be a way to pretend that racial differences are not important); however, they do not *expressly* advocate such an approach.

Finally, Level 1 responses are rated as the least appropriate as they provide racially biased information to the child or contain discriminatory, stereotypical, or racist overtones. For example, stating that a Black child is "inferior" to Whites, or using a stereotypical label or descriptor (i.e. "lazy" or "dumb") would be a

Level 1 response. Given the shift from overt to other, more aversive forms of racism in the past three decades (Omi & Winant, 1994), it is hypothesized that few teachers would respond in such an overtly racist manner.

Employing the Multicultural Response Framework in a Pilot Study

The Multicultural Response Framework was employed in a pilot study in order to code teacher responses to a series of hypothetical racial vignettes. The goal of this pilot study was to explore the ways in which the Multicultural Response Framework could be used to classify teachers' discuss racial/cultural topics with students when they are "in the moment. A discussion of the methods and findings of the study are presented below.

Methodology

Instrument. To simulate responses to racial incidents in a "real life" simulation, six vignette scenarios were read orally to twelve elementary teacher participants (see Figure 1, below, for Vignettes).

Figure 1. Racial "Vignettes" Used in Pilot Study

Interviewer: "I am going to read to you a set of six different scenarios. I want you to imagine they are happening in front of you. Please tell me what you would say and do, if anything, in each of the following situations. I will ask you follow-up questions for clarification if necessary. Assume each child in a particular scenario is the same age."

Vignette #1
(MALE UPPER GRADE WHITE/LATINO)
1. Derrick, a 10-year-old White child, consistently refers to Joe and Richard as "brown boys" in class. Joe and Richard are Mexican-American.

Vignette #2
(FEMALE LOWER GRADE WHITE/KOREAN)
2. A group of 2nd grade girls are re-creating "the Wild West" for a class play. All of the girls are White except Sophie, who is Korean-American. The girls tell Sophie to play the one "outlaw" since "she isn't like the rest of us".

Vignette #3
(MALE UPPER GRADE NATIVE AMERICAN/WHITE)
3. John, a Native American 5th grader, and Dan, his White friend, are arguing. John insists that he is the real owner of Dan's house and land. John asks you to confirm this, insisting that "white men stole our land".

Vignette #4
(FEMALE LOWER GRADE BLACK/WHITE)
4. Amanda, a 1st grade Black girl, asks you: "Is Samantha is White, why does she have peach skin? She's not White, she's peach!"

Vignette #5
(FEMALE- UPPER GRADE WHITE/LATINO)
5. You overhear two white 4th grade girls urge Vicky, a Mexican-American girl, to ask school staff if she qualifies for "free lunch" since she is Mexican.

Vignette #6
(MALE LOWER GRADE BLACK/WHITE)
6. Toby, a 6-year old Black child has nicknamed his White friend Andrew, "Whitie" and repeatedly refers to him in class as such. When asked why he does this, he responds, "Because, Andrew's white."

Vignettes were developed from multicultural and research literature (Derman-Sparks et al., 1989; Lewis, 2001; and Williams, 1997), and each vignette described a hypothetical example of a student(s) inquiring about racial or cultural differences. Teachers were asked to "imagine they are happening in front of you" and to "describe what you would say and do…in the following situations."

In order to ensure that the framework, units of analysis, concepts generated, and population characteristics were consistently defined, three faculty experts (two education professors, one ethnic studies professor) provided feedback on content, clarity, organization and sample representation of the instrument. Based upon faculty feedback, several modifications were made to balance the demographic variables for students in the six classroom vignettes.

A focus group of four graduate students (two in education and two in public policy) was also held. Group members provided additional input on wording, content, and item suggestions. The focus group met again after vignette interviews were completed to assist with coding and classification of participant responses to provide inter-rater reliability.

Participants. Twelve elementary school teachers participated in the pilot study. All twelve teachers taught in racially and cultural diverse schools in the Bay Area, California at the time of the interview. Eleven of the interview participants were female and one was male. Participants ranged in age from 27 to 64, with a mean age of 46.6 (SD=10.33). The average number of years experience was 17.83 years (SD=9.07), with a range from 1 to 30 years. Grade level taught ranged from Kindergarten to 5th grade; specifically, four participants taught Kindergarten; one taught 1st grade; two taught 2nd grade; one taught 3rd grade; two taught 4th grade; and two taught 5th grade. Nine of the interview participants were White, while three were non-White (e.g. Bi-/Multi-Racial). Ten of the twelve participants had participated in a workshop, class, seminar or some other form of organized multicultural/diversity training, while two had not received any formalized diversity training.

Procedure. Participants were exposed to vignettes as part of a larger interview study involving a comprehensive multicultural questionnaire. Interviews occurred over a three-month period. In nearly every case, interviews were conducted on the school premises in the teacher's classroom (after-school or during a lunch hour), except in three cases where telephone interviews were preferred. Participants interviewed in person were recorded via audiotape and asked to sign an audio release form prior to the interview (telephone interviews were not audio recorded). The interviews employed a consistent vignette script that focused the dialogue on how teachers would respond "in the moment". With unclear responses. follow-up questions were included to probe for greater detail or enhanced clarification.

Analysis. Responses to the hypothetical vignettes were classified and coded as "Appropriate" (i.e. "Color-Conscious"), "Expressly Color-blind", "Inappropriate" (a, b, or c), or "Discriminatory" based on the Multicultural Response Framework, and were analyzed using descriptive statistics (i.e. percentages)

Results

Teachers' coded responses to the racial vignettes are summarized in Table 2 and illustrated in Figure 2, respectively.

Table 2. Summary of Findings: Responses To Vignettes Using the Multicultural Response Framework

Participants	**Developmental Response Category Codes (Total: 6 vignette examples)**					
	Appro-priate	**Expressly Color-blind**	**Inappropriate**			**Discriminatory**
			a. Avoidant	**b. Admonishing**	**c. Dismissive**	
Jean	6/6					
Jackie	5/6			1/6 Vignette#5**		
Phyllis	5/6			1/6 Vignette#3		
Beth	5/6			1/6 Vignette#6		
Henrietta	4/6	1/6 Vignette#2		1/6 Vignette#5		
Deborah	4//6			1/6 Vignette#2	1/6 Vignette#1	
Mary	4/6			2/6 Vignette#1, 6		
Holly	3/6	1/6 Vignette #6		1/6 Vignette #3	1/6 Vignette #5	
Margaret	2/6	2/6 Vignette1,4	1/6 Vignette#5	1/6 Vignette#3		
Bob	1/6	1/6 Vignette#2	1/6 Vignette#3	3/6 Vignette#1,5,6		
Sophie	1/6	1/6 Vignette#3	1/6 Vignette#4	3/6 Vignette #1,5,6		
Karen	0/6		5/6 Vignette # 1,2,3,5,6			1/6 Vignette #4
Total	40	6	8	15	2	1
*Pseudonyms used. **Please refer to Figure 1 for Vignette scenarios.						

Figure 2: Participant Vignette Responses by Category

The majority (40/72) of teacher's responses to the six racial vignettes were classified as "Appropriate" (see Figure 1), indicating that overall, most teachers responded in a direct, developmentally appropriate manner to *at least one vignette scenario.* However, only one of the twelve teacher participants received a "perfect score" and responded to all six vignette scenarios in an "Appropriate" manner. Incidentally, this particular teacher noted that she had recently voluntarily participated in a three-year sensitivity training course where racial vignettes were practiced and the "colorblind" philosophy was introduced.

As indicated in Table 2, three teachers answered five out of six scenarios in an "appropriate" manner while another three teachers answered four responses "appropriately". One teacher answered two scenarios in an "appropriate" manner, while the remaining four teachers gave "appropriate" responses in only one out of six scenarios. Examples of "Appropriate" participant responses are noted below.

Appropriate Responses from Interview Data:

Vignette #1: 1. Derrick, a 10-year-old White child, continually refers to Joe and Richard as "brown boys" in class. Joe and Richard are Mexican-American.

Jackie: "I would acknowledge that yes, some people are brown in skin color, and some are White, some are dark brown or black. I would have a whole class discussion, not just those certain kids in the school. I would start a general discussion and say, "I've noticed that people are doing this." How do people think they feel about this? What do you think about it? And I would ask the kids, "Why do you think people are saying this?" I would invoke some thought, some discussion about what the reasoning is for this. My own opinion is that I don't feel very comfortable having people referred to in that way, but I would open it up to the class to come to a resolution."

Vignette#3: John, a Native American 5th grader, and Dan, his White friend, are arguing. John insists that he is the real owner of Dan's house and land. John asks you to confirm this, insisting that "White men stole our land".

Jean: "Wow…. I think both boys need to be validated…if John felt strongly about this, for John to talk about his feelings of the land, and you know, about how Europeans took land from the Native Americans, and then talk about present-day and the laws and civilization that we have in place today. Maybe a discussion around "real" owner and "original" owner, what the difference is, and how history involves changes through time. And so the whole…I think the bigger question is Europeans stealing land...and since it is part of the 5th grade curriculum there's a lot of opportunity to discuss the process of Europeans of having and taking the land, and stealing the land from the Native Americans. I would be sure to have a discussion about this with the class… [discussion] is the most…important aspect of this for kids."

In these examples, the "Appropriate" responses deal directly with the racial/skin color comment and take a "teachable moment" by involving both participants in the vignette (and often the whole class) in a direct and open discussion. Moreover, both teachers in these examples are interested in the *intention* of the remark: Both teachers' responses indicate that they do not assume that the students' comment illustrates a derogatory or discriminatory intent.

As Table 2 indicates, six of the 72 vignettes were coded as "Expressly Color-blind". These comments directly espoused that racial differences do not matter and are not (or should not) be noticeable and avoiding a direct discussion of the racial issue at hand. While these responses did not make the child feel shameful, embarrassed or silly that they voiced the question (e.g. a dismissive, avoidant, or admonishing response), the responses clearly emphasized similarities and trivialized racial/ethnic differences. Examples of Expressly Colorblind responses from the interview data include the following:

“Expressly Colorblind” Responses from Interview Data:

Vignette #2: A group of 2nd grade girls are re-creating “the Wild West” for a class play. All of the girls are White except Sophie, who is Korean-American. The girls tell Sophie to play the one “outlaw” since “she isn’t like the rest of us”.

Sophie: Gee, that’s a hard one…I first….would want to be clear on what the outlaw was supposed to do. I would ask Sophie how she felt about it, and I would suggest to her group that maybe she play more than the outlaw part. And I would want them to ignore skin color and just act it out however they wanted to. Is that right?

***

Margaret: I would tell the girls that that isn’t important, even the Whites can be outlaws – I would emphasize that physical differences exist among all of us...but…I would not emphasize eyes and eye shape too much, because I wouldn’t want those who haven’t thought of it to notice it. But I would say, “Can you think of other ways to choose an outlaw? Sometimes it takes a good actor to make an outlaw”.

Notably, the relatively small number of “Expressly Colorblind” responses (6/72) may have underestimated the extent of the color-blind philosophy among teachers. A number of vignette responses were coded as “Inappropriate – Admonishing” or “Inappropriate –Dismissive” but *also* provided evidence of the color-blind ideology, as evidenced by the following example.

Vignette #1: 1. Derrick, a 10-year-old White child, continually refers to Joe and Richard as “brown boys” in class. Joe and Richard are Mexican-American.

Deborah: I would say ‘Derrick, I don’t know who you’re talking about – what brown boys? I see boys in here, I here Richard, I see Joe, I see a boy with a red sweatshirt, I see a boy with glasses, but I don’t know what you’re talking about when you say brown boys’. And maybe give him [Derrick] some other words to describe, what they’re wearing. I’m never quite sure how to handle these comments, though...

Though the response to this vignette is classified as “Dismissive”, it is also very clearly reflective of a color-blind ideology (the teacher claims that, unlike glasses or other physical descriptors of students, she does not ‘see’ skin color). If color-blind responses were also dismissive or admonishing to the student, they were coded as such, since they were thought to be a less appropriate response of dealing with racial comments than merely adopting a “neutral”- toned color-blind response.

The most frequent “Inappropriate” responses to racial vignettes were classified in the “Admonishing” response category (15 out of 72 vignette responses). Teacher’s who employed an “Admonishing” response made the child feel wrong or shameful for stating the racial question or comment. Examples of such responses are presented below.

“Inappropriate (Admonishing)” Responses from Interview Data:

Vignette #5: You overhear two white 4th grade girls urge Vicky, a Mexican-American girl, to ask school staff if she qualifies for “free lunch” since she is Mexican.

Henrietta: “I would tell Vicky…I would say, God I would tell her to tell them to mind their own business! I would take the two White children aside, and say, ‘Just because someone is of Latin descent does not mean that they don’t have means to provide food for their children.’ I would bring up some wealthy Latin people as examples… and talk about stereotypes…and then tell to mind their own business, it is none of their business whether Vicky qualifies for free lunch. This would be a lecture time!”

Vignette#6: Toby, a 6-year old Black child has nicknamed his White friend Andrew "Whitie" and refers to him in class as such. When asked why he does this, he responds, "Because, Andrew's white."

Mary: …Well then, he's heard this from his family, first of all. Well we make up rules in our classroom about names, and respect, and put-downs and I would explain that this was a put-down, just as if they were called "Blackie", it is not OK, it is something that hurts people. We do not use color labels in my class. If you are angry with someone, use an "I" statement to tell them what you are angry about, but don't do that [use a putdown]. It sounds to me like he's got resentment about something…and it's going through the mouth.

Vignette #3: John, a Native American 5th grader, and Dan, his White friend, are arguing. John insists that he is the real owner of Dan's house and land. John asks you to confirm this, insisting that "white men stole our land".

Karen: As a white person, my initial reaction would be to say, 'I didn't steal anything, I paid money for it.' I mean I know there have been wrongs done to Native Americans…and that the government is trying to make restitutions for it. The Whites did not take the land, nor did Native Americans have it taken from, there is no right or wrong,were all descendents of that time. I would talk to both boys about this.

In the above "Admonishing" scenarios, teachers do not react to the child's comment in a "neutral" or explanatory tone; rather, they act on the assumption that the child in the vignette scenario is deliberately creating a derogatory or even seditious scenario. Their responses to the child reflect a judgmental tone that sends a message that it was wrong to discuss the matter. From these responses, we can easily imagine that the children involved may learn that it is not okay to "wonder aloud" about racial or skin color topics and that reprimands from the teacher, such as those above, will result from such comments.

Of the 72 vignette responses, two were coded as "Dismissive" – treating the child's question as trivial and unserious. An example of a Dismissive response is presented below.

"Dismissive" Response from Interview Data:

Vignette #4: Amanda, a 1st grade Black girl, asks you: "Is Samantha is White, why does she have peach skin? She's not White, she's peach!"

Pat: I would do what I usually do.. …talk about science, everyone has a different color of skin, you know, physiologically, a mix of different bloods. I would probably throw in, that you look different by how you eat. I also [would] say, wonder where peach came from, what color is peach? That's an interesting color. And then I might sit down and be creative and say, wouldn't it be great, if you could just change colors to be purple…green…and if I was in a really long-winded mood, I would say, "Gosh, would you be a different person if you were green, and you changed colors?"

In the above example, the students' comment or question about racial difference is not directly or accurately addressed but rather treated as a silly or trivial remark. The child is asking about why skin color labels such as "White" do not appear to be accurate; the teacher responds by telling the child dismissively that we all have different skin colors; however, he never addresses the inaccuracy of society's labels, which is the child's real question. Moreover, the teacher immediately redirects the discussion to a fantastical, imaginative scenario (e.g. changing to a purple or green skin color) that trivializes the child's initial question.

Finally, as seen in Table 2, eight of the 72 responses were coded as "Avoidant" – ignoring the child's question or comment. These responses tended to "talk around the issue" while never directly addressing the question or comment. The one remaining response was coded as "Discriminatory" and answered the child's question in a prejudiced or stereotyped manner.

Discussion and Implications

What does this data suggest? As a pilot study, the findings must be treated with caution; nonetheless, we can see that three initial findings emerge.

First, not all teachers– even teachers who are committed to discussions of diversity and multiculturalism -- respond to children's racial questions or comments in a manner that consistently answers the child's racial question in a developmentally appropriate way. This indicates that there is a failure in some educational situations to appropriately capture what could be an important "teachable moment" in the child's racial understanding.

Second, teachers' who do respond "inappropriately" to children's racial comments often do so in an "admonishing" manner that *makes the child feel wrong or shameful* about approaching the topic. As the research indicates, this response pattern fails to give the child the "boost" to critical thinking about racial differences, and may even teach the child that racial differences are inherently "bad".

Third, the low number of responses in the pilot study coded as "Expressly Color-blind" --coupled with the color-blind messages found within other "Inappropriate" responses-- indicates that the true level of teachers' adherence to a color-blind ideology *may be masked*; color-blind comments were often embedded within or coupled with an "Admonishing" or "Dismissive" teacher response.

Thus, tentative findings from this pilot study suggest that psychologists and teacher educators can help teachers be prepared to handle racial or cultural comments in class by incorporating *direct, specific instruction* on how to handle students' questions and comments within a diversity training curriculum. Moreover, teachers in the pilot study often expressed confusion about how to accurately address racial comments and questions (e.g.. "Is that right?" or "I am never quite sure of how to do this"); this indicates that teachers would clearly benefit from specific discussion that enables them to translate knowledge they have gained about diversity issues into their classroom dialogue, and be able to clarify and integrate these understandings into their practices. The more practice teachers have at addressing racial questions and comments in a developmentally appropriate manner, the more adept they may feel at addressing these issues.

Specifically, this study's initial findings support the validity of the Multicultural Response Framework and hypothetical "vignette" scenarios as promising tools for assessing teacher practice. Educating teachers about the framework and role-playing classroom examples such as these hypothetical "vignette" scenarios will undoubtedly spark self-reflection and encourage teachers to begin to translate knowledge into practice, while under the guidance of diversity trainers who can help facilitate teacher thinking. "Brainstorming" input from fellow colleagues who can share their insights and questions can also facilitate methods used that are successful in handling such situations.

Just as in the learning of any knew concept or skill, there is a learning curve involved in understanding the art of discussing racial comments --and dismantling prejudiced responses –in the classroom. To appropriately master the ability to discuss race or other sensitive topics in the classroom, teachers must have an adequate knowledge base, understanding of the skill, and be able to practice and "rate" themselves on how well they are performing. Once educators have mastered these techniques, they are more likely to feel comfortable taking the "teachable moments" that arise in day-to-day classroom scenarios.

References

Aboud, F. & Doyle, A. (1996a). Does talk of race foster prejudice or tolerance in children? *Canadian Journal of Behavioural Science,* 28(3), 161-170.

Amobi, F. (2007) The Message or the Messenger: Reflection on the Volatility of Evoking Novice Teachers' Courageous Conversations on Race. *Multicultural Education*, v14 n3 p2-7.

Bauman, A. (2007) Delicate Moments: Kids Talk about Socially Complicated Issues. *Bank Street College of Education*. 40 pp.

Bolgatz, J. (2005). Teachers Initiating Conversations About Race and Racism in a High School Class. *Multicultural Perspectives*; 2005, Vol. 7 Issue 3, p28-35, 8p

Case, K. and Hemmings, A. (2005). Distancing Strategies: White Women Preservice Teachers and Antiracist Curriculum. *Urban Education* 2005; 40; 606

Child Development Institute (2007). Preparing Culturally Competent Early Childhood Teachers. FPG Snapshot. # 37.

Cochran-Smith, M. (1995). Color blindness and basket making are not the answers:Confronting the dilemmas of race, culture, and language diversity in teacher education. *American Educational Research Journal*, 32(3), 493-522.

Derman-Sparks, L. & the ABC Task Force. (1989). *Anti-bias curriculum:Tools for empowering young children*. Washington, DC: NAEYC.

Derman-Sparks, L. Gutierrez, M. & Phillips, C.B. (1989). *Teaching Young Children to Resist Bias: What Parents Can Do.* [Brochure]. Washington, D.C.: National Association for the Education of Young Children.

Finchum, M. "I" Is for Indian?: Dealing with Stereotypes in the Classroom. *Social Studies and the Young Learner,* v18 n4 p4-5 Mar-Apr 2006. 2 pp.

Garcia, R. (1984). Countering classroom discrimination. *Theory into Practice*, 23, 104-9.

Gay, G. (2005). Politics of Multicultural Education. *Journal of Teacher Education* 56 (3), p221-228.

Hughes, J., Bigler, R. and S. Levy (2007). Consequences of Learning about Historical Racism among European American and African American Children *Child Development,* v78 n6 p1689-1705.

Lawrence, S.M, & Tatum, B.D. (1997). Teachers in transition: The impact of antiracist professional development on classroom practice. *Teachers College Board*, 99, 162–178.

Lewis, A. (2001). There is no “race” in the schoolyard: Color-blind ideology in an (almost) all-white school. *American Education Research Journal*, 38 (4), 781-811.

Marx, S. (2002, April). *Entanglements of altruism, whiteness, and deficit thinking: Preservice teachers working with English language learners of color.* Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, New Orleans, LA.

Marx, S. (2008). Popular White Teachers of Latina/o Kids: The Strengths of Personal Experiences and the Limitations of Whiteness. *Urban Education,* 43 (1), 29-67.

National Center for Education Statistics (2007). Racial/Ethnic Distribution of Public School Students *The Condition of Education 2007*. Retrieved February 8, 2008 from http://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=2007064.

Polite, L. ,and Baird, E. (2003). A Pernicious Silence: Confronting Race in the Elementary Classroom. *Phi Delta Kappan*, v85 n4 p274-78

Tatum, B. (1999). Color blind or color conscious? *School Administrator*; 56 (6), 28-30.

Williams, P. (1997.) *Seeing a color-blind future: The paradox of race.* New York: The Noonday Press.