

## Building the On-Ramp to Inclusion

### Developing Critical Consciousness in Future Early Childhood Educators

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#### Abstract

This article addresses the need to uncover and examine implicit biases of early childhood educators through the development of critical consciousness. As a key point of entry to the school system, preschool has the capacity to be an on-ramp to inclusive education, where diversity in its many forms is seen as a benefit to all and a natural part of society. But it could also be the on-ramp to the school-to-prison nexus, as diverse students—especially students of color and with disabilities — are expelled at higher rates in preschool and are

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found eligible for services in subjective disability categories that are more likely to lead to a segregated placement. Research indicates that racial biases, most often unconscious, are at play. The development of critical consciousness, particularly around the intersections of race and disability, is therefore necessary to build an on-ramp to an equitable and inclusive education for all students. Teacher educators have an ethical responsibility to model critical consciousness, facilitate difficult conversations, and emphasize the lifelong endeavor of reflection. Following the four core goals of anti-bias early childhood education, examples are provided from the authors' own college classrooms to support this work as a crucial component of high-quality early childhood educator preparation.

*Keywords: Implicit bias, critical consciousness, preservice teachers, school-to-prison nexus, inclusion*

### Introduction

Inclusive education is founded on the tenet that the diversity of human beings should be valued and respected in schools, and that all children should have access to the same learning spaces and opportunities (Division for Early Childhood & National Association for the Education of Young Children, 2009). Early childhood teachers hold an honorable entry point, or on-ramp, into America's public school system as children transition from toddlerhood to the classroom setting. The on-ramp to inclusive education is critical, and not only for academic purposes. Research demonstrates that early childhood education leads to improved opportunities for education, employment, housing, health, and longevity (Meloy et al., 2019; Watts et al., 2018). In addition, children with and without disabilities benefit from inclusive education (Lawrence et al., 2016; Odom et al., 2004). For example, preschoolers with extensive support needs showed more progress on language and social development (Odom et al.; Rafferty et al., 2003) and elementary students with disabilities were engaged more often with the curriculum and peers, were provided more learning opportunities, and demonstrated greater progress in communication, literacy, and math skills (Gee et al., 2020). Within inclusive settings, children without disabilities showed higher levels of understanding, tolerance, friendships, and peer acceptance from their inclusive education (Kart & Kart, 2021).

However, students have historically been segregated by race and disability, even in early childhood settings (Ferri & Connor, 2005; Yell, 2022). With a majority white teacher workforce (de Brey et al., 2019) and the growing racial/ethnic and ability diversity of the student population, early childhood teachers must develop cultural, racial, and

disability literacy. Specifically, they need to integrate a critical lens to proactively challenge how implicit bias may hinder their relationships with and the success of the diverse young children with disabilities in their care (Kohli et al., 2017; Wetzel et al., 2021).

This practitioner report supports teacher educators and their students, from undergraduate and graduate-level credential programs, to collectively explore the implicit biases they hold to ensure an equitable pathway is guaranteed for all students. Through research, the authors identified three responsibilities of teacher educators for supporting this learning, which are described in detail. In addition, a collection of impactful instructional practices are organized around early childhood anti-bias goals (Derman-Sparks et al., 2020) to promote recognition of the relationship of biases to instructional practices. The purpose of such work is to set an authentic and meaningful foundation for future early childhood teachers by which they can develop an asset-based approach to working with diverse children with disabilities and their families, thus establishing the on-ramp to an inclusive and equitable education.

## Literature Review

### ***What is Implicit Bias?***

Implicit bias is defined as an individual's "attitudes or stereotypes that affect their understanding, actions, and decisions in an unconscious manner" (Staats, 2016, p. 29). These automatic predispositions become problematic when they negatively influence one's interactions with and decisions about others, particularly children with marginalized identities, such as disability and race. Such biases are the building blocks to inequitable on-ramps, resulting in segregated learning.

In order to create a more equitable society, educators need to use critical thinking to examine these internal prejudices, a process identified by Paulo Freire as critical consciousness (Freire, 1998). Critical Consciousness (CC) occurs as people identify inner beliefs by assessing their words and actions, as well as the circumstances under which they occur (Bem, 1972). For future teachers of young children, the practice of CC is particularly important to identify how oppressive systems—including the educational system—have sustained and perpetuated inequities and how one's individual prejudices and practices may support or disrupt them (Jemal, 2017; McNeal, 2016).

Developing CC can occur through the lens of Dis/Crit, a theoretical framework that combines Disability Studies and Critical Race Theory to ground equity for individuals with intersecting marginalized

identities, by actively prioritizing the agency and voices of those individuals and engaging in a critical analysis of various oppressive systems (Annamma et al., 2016; Danforth, 2015; Goodley, 2007). The combination of CC and Dis/Crit provides vital tools for early childhood teachers to be a positive force in the lives of their students and families (Freire, 1974; Hancock et al., 2021; Love & Beneke, 2021). In doing so, teachers are empowered to support an on-ramp to inclusion instead of a segregated learning ramp and the school-to-prison nexus.

### ***Why Should Early Childhood Teacher Education Address Implicit Bias?***

Preschool has been called the “on-ramp” to success (Casey et al., 2019), a stepping stone to a more equitable education, where diversity in its many forms is seen as a benefit to all and a natural part of society. But preschool can also be an on-ramp to the school-to-prison nexus, an alternative trajectory for children that starts in their formative years. Young students of color, including those with disabilities, become part of this nexus, as they are closely monitored in classrooms, labeled as displaying challenging behaviors (i.e., noncompliance, hitting, biting, kicking) when no such behavior occurred (Gilliam et al., 2016), and suspended for misunderstood behaviors (Goldman & Rodriguez, 2021). Research indicates that such harsh disciplinary actions lead to academic failure, school dropout, and, ultimately, an increased involvement in the juvenile legal system (Bayat et al., 2010; Skiba et al., 2008).

Deficit thinking leads to a host of problems. Students of color receive more severe punishments for less serious offenses than their white counterparts (Skiba et al., 2008) and are expelled at higher rates. In fact, young black boys are expelled at a rate three times higher in preschool than in the K-12 population (Civil Rights Data Collection, 2014, 2021). Furthermore, preschoolers who receive special education services under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) are 2.5 times more likely to be expelled than their peers without disabilities (Civil Rights Data Collection). In addition, the disproportionate representation of students of color in special education has been present and consistent over time (Artiles, 2011; Artiles & Trent, 1994; Cruz & Rodl, 2018; Sleeter, 2010), often leading to removal from the general education placement (Ferri & Connor, 2005; Kohli et al., 2017). Specifically, African American and Native American students are overrepresented in special education in subjective disability categories, such as learning and emotional disabilities (Bal et al., 2014, 2017; Coutinho et al., 2002; Karagiannis, 2000; Zhang & Katsiyannis, 2002). Students of color also receive more

stigmatizing disability labels requiring more extensive support needs, and these tend to be equated with a need for segregated placements (Kurth et al. 2019). Startling statistics such as these indicate that implicit biases of teachers may influence their perceptions of and expectations for young children (Annamma & Winn, 2019; Wetzel et al., 2021), thus negatively impacting their educational experience.

Recently, research has indicated that students of color may be *underidentified* in special education (Farkas et al., 2020; Morgan et al., 2015, 2017; Wiley et al., 2013). This line of research has led to a hotly contested debate, as it flies in the face of decades of research detailing overrepresentation (Connor et al., 2019). Numerous researchers have raised concerns with the studies, including the oversimplification of identity markers (Artiles, 2017; Cavendish et al., 2020), the use of deficit thinking (Blanchett & Sealey, 2016), the methods used and the potential consequences to federal laws, policies, and funding for special education (Skiba et al., 2016).

In teacher education, educators cannot wait while researchers battle this out. Regardless of whether children are under- or overrepresented, they are not having their needs met: they are either not receiving the services that will help them succeed, or are having limitations placed upon them. Educators disagree with the idea that services should be provided only when a diagnosis or label has been identified. Instead, the authors see the role of teacher education as providing the knowledge and skills for teachers to address the needs of all the children in their care with competence and confidence (WestEd, 2021).

Using the frame of Dis/Crit, teacher education must move beyond talking about overrepresentation to doing something about it (Connor et al., 2019). The authors believe examining implicit biases is a good way to start, as educators can then better recognize the gifts and strengths in children to cultivate their development within inclusive settings. Through this asset-based approach, educators are better positioned to create an educational system that “is a doorway to opportunity—and not a point of entry to our criminal justice system” (Holder, 2011).

### Methods

To develop this practitioner report, the authors examined their course syllabi, course evaluations, and student work across multiple courses from two universities in Northern California that offer programs in child development and the Early Childhood Special Education (ECSE) preliminary credential. The courses consisted of undergraduate and graduate students and were not exclusive

to students in those specific programs. The activities shared in this article were drawn from introductory courses in inclusive schooling as well as more advanced ECSE credential courses taught by the first two authors (and taken by the second two authors). Many of the students identified as people of color, female, and first-generation college students. Instructional practices were then analyzed through a DisCrit lens and grouped into categories based on similar purposes, which the authors aligned with the four goals of anti-bias education used by early childhood educators to teach young children (Derman-Sparks et al., 2020). The authors realized that all practices are connected by foundational responsibilities of teacher educators that cut across practices. To highlight these practices, assignments submitted by three separate students, one of whom was an undergraduate, are shared. The two graduate students held intern credentials, which meant they were working as the teacher of record in the classroom while completing requirements towards the preliminary teaching credential. Permission was first requested in writing, to share the students' work with current and future students. When developing this article, the authors again reached out for permission to use the students' work with their names. The students all responded affirmatively and approved of a final version of the article.

### **Responsibilities of Early Childhood Teacher Educators to Develop Their Students' Critical Consciousness**

Early childhood teacher educators must intentionally create opportunities by which their students develop equitable instructional practices while they simultaneously analyze oppressive policies and practices, at both the institutional and individual levels. The authors propose that teacher educators have three responsibilities for developing the CC of their students: (1) model self-examination, (2) facilitate difficult conversations, and (3) emphasize the lifelong endeavor of reflection.

#### **Responsibility #1: Early Childhood Teacher Educators Are Models**

Teacher educators have the responsibility to serve as instructional models for their students. For example, in their college classrooms, teacher educators model how to be culturally responsive so their students, future teachers, are more likely to enact similar practices in their own teaching (Aleccia, 2011; Baumgartner et al., 2015). Teacher educators must integrate an asset-based approach in how they discuss

young children with disabilities by presuming competence, modeling the theory of Dis/Crit, and integrating relationship-building strategies during class activities that could be used with young children and their families, such as turn and talk, reflection activities, and check-ins.

Moreover, of high importance is how teacher educators teach and model CC. Jemal (2017) stated that teacher educators, by virtue of their authority, can demonstrate the work of CC and therefore support its development in their students. Teacher educators bear the responsibility of identifying their implicit biases and demonstrating reflective actions to disrupt them (Clark & Zygmunt, 2014). In essence, teacher educators model CC by intentionally weaving conversations, analysis, and advocacy into key aspects of educators' preparation.

**Responsibility #2:  
Early Childhood Teacher Educators  
Are Facilitators of Difficult Conversations**

In order to engage one's students in developing CC, educators first need to acknowledge that addressing these biases is a difficult and painful task (Jacobson, 2003; Watt, 2007). For people going into a service field, and certainly into education, it is difficult to acknowledge internal prejudices and the potential harmful effects to young children (Edge, 2019). As identifying biases contradicts one's sense of self, students may become resistant to engaging in and continuing this kind of reflective practice (Kumashiro, 2000). However, educators need to bring underlying biases to the surface to "better align our implicit biases with the explicit values we uphold" (Jemal, 2017, p. 31).

Teacher educators have the ethical responsibility to establish a safe and connected environment for their students to explore internal biases, especially in regards to the multiple marginalized identities of the children and families with whom they work. Students must also reflect on how those biases may appear in words and behavior, and determine what actions need to be taken (Jacobson, 2003; Kohli et al., 2017; Rausch et al., 2019). Let us be clear: safe does not mean comfortable. In fact, developing CC requires people to leave their comfort zone to explore the origins and effects of their previously unconscious biases (Zembylas & Boler, 2002). By sitting with the tension of difficult topics, students question what could produce their perceptions and what could disrupt them, resulting in individual and institutional changes (Greenwald & Lai, 2020; Houser & Overton, 2001). Teacher educators have the obligation to specifically create spaces for difficult conversations that examine



the lived experiences of the children and families with whom they work.

While conversations such as these can be difficult, dialogue can result in deep learning. In fact, Freire identified dialogue as a necessary element for developing CC (1974), which has been described as “listening with the willingness to have one’s mind potentially changed by what one hears” (Cohen, 2011, p. 414). In particular, dialogue and reflective questioning focus on the various systems of inequity, power dynamics, and necessary action steps for change (Garcia et al., 2009), a process that encourages social construction of meaning around educational equity.

### **Responsibility #3:**

#### **Early Childhood Teacher Educators Are Lifelong Reflective Learners**

The goal is not to engage in CC only during one class, but for its development to progress during courses within the student’s program, emphasizing the need for this internal work to continue throughout one’s career. Teacher educators need to explicitly affirm that developing CC is an ongoing endeavor, and “that nobody is ever free of bias” (Mendoza et al., 2016). With new experiences and knowledge, individuals are constantly reorganizing information about the world around them and making sense of it. Continuous reflection brings possibilities for new ways of thinking, acting, and teaching.

#### **Impactful Instructional Practices for Developing Critical Consciousness**

The question of *how* to address implicit biases in order to disrupt ongoing discrimination has been the subject of much research (Calanchini et al., 2021; Fazio & Olson, 2003; Greenwald & Banaji, 2017; Lai et al., 2013, 2014, 2016). Devine and colleagues (2012) explained that individuals first need to be aware of bias and subsequently need to demonstrate concern over the consequences to both individuals and society. In particular, they noted that it is vital for individuals to be able to “translate their knowledge of bias reducing strategies into action” (p. 1276).

In this section, the authors provide numerous strategies, examples, and resources for developing CC. They believe that connecting the work of future early childhood teachers to the rights of and equity for young children is a way to highlight the consequences of internal biases. Therefore, the following learning activities were organized by the four early childhood anti-bias goals for early childhood education (Derman-



Sparks et al., 2020). These goals are: (1) Identity (children construct their own positive personal identities); (2) Diversity (children celebrate human diversity); (3) Justice (children recognize unfairness); and (4) Activism (children are empowered to act against prejudice). Using these anti-bias goals as an organizing framework, teacher educators can model the goals in a meaningful and authentic way and guide students in moving from the theoretical to tangible action in their own practices. The recommendations below allow teacher educators to consider where their students are in addressing implicit biases and can thus support the integration of similar activities throughout courses. Also, student comments and assignments are included that highlight their developing CC.

***Learning Activities to Develop Critical Consciousness  
for Anti-Bias Goal #1: Identity***

When developing CC, identity requires examining and reflecting upon one's own experiences, assumptions, and privileges, and how these influence one's individual identity. This includes reflecting on one's experiences with and messages received from society about people with disabilities. Students engage in a process of rethinking what they have learned to be "true." The main goal is to turn their gaze inward to examine initial "gut reactions." Students analyze if and how implicit biases may prevent them from seeing the strengths of diverse students, and may lead to reactions that miss, and perhaps amplify, the needs of a child. In essence, students need to reflect upon how racist and ableist beliefs contribute to a negative view of a child and may interfere with their pedagogical practices moving forward. This is an effort that does not end.

Multiple activities are recommended to confront past experiences and assumptions. This is especially important as most have not grown up in an inclusive society; therefore, drawing students' attention to these sheltered experiences and the subsequent impact on one's perceptions of marginalized individuals is an important first step in examining implicit biases. Activities that explore identity include writing autobiographies and philosophy statements written through a Dis/Crit lens, discussing scenario-based vignettes that highlight common myths or biases, and viewing films to counter long-held stereotypes about people with disabilities.

Teacher educators also purposefully engage students in metacognitive activities that continuously examine their changing perceptions as they gain more information and insight. For example,

in learning about emotional and behavioral disabilities, a QuickWrite was used first, where students wrote five words that came to mind when thinking about children exhibiting “problem” behaviors. Then, they read an interview with Dan Habib about the documentary, *Who Cares About Kelsey*, and watched the trailer (see Wang, 2013). Next, students completed the IRIS module, *Addressing Disruptive and Noncompliant Behaviors (Part 1): Understanding the Acting-Out Cycle* (see The IRIS Center, 2005, 2022). Finally, they repeated the QuickWrite and reflected on how their words might have changed and why. This series of tasks challenged the students to reconsider their perceptions of behavior, allowing them to recognize the connection between implicit biases and deficit-based thinking. (Additional resources can be found in Table 1. The resources supplied throughout this article are by no means exhaustive, but have been used with success to stimulate discussion and support student learning).

**Implicit Association Test (IAT).** The Implicit Association Test was developed in 1998 (Greenwald, McGhee, & Schwartz) and is now

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**Table 1**  
**Developing Critical Consciousness for Early Childhood Anti-Bias Goal #1: Identity**

Teacher Educator Resources for Early Childhood Anti-Bias Goal #1: Identity  
Harvard Implicit Association Test (IAT)

<https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/takeatest.html>

Countering Stereotypes via Films

- *Crip Camp* (Netflix)
- *The Reason I Jump* (Netflix)
- *Rebound* (Amazon)
- *Temple Grandin* (Amazon)
- *Including Samuel*, Dan Habib <https://includingsamuel.com/>
- *Far from the Tree Documentary*, Andrew Solomon [www.farfromthetree.com/](http://www.farfromthetree.com/)
- *Disabling Segregation*, Dan Habib <https://youtu.be/izkN5vLbnw8>

Examining Common Myths About Children with Disabilities

- *Myths: Dis/Crit Factors in Early Childhood* (Raush, Joseph, & Steed, 2019) [www.zerotothree.org/resources/3094-dis-ability-critical-race-studies-discrit-for-inclusion-in-early-childhood-education-ethical-considerations-of-implicit-and-explicit-bias](http://www.zerotothree.org/resources/3094-dis-ability-critical-race-studies-discrit-for-inclusion-in-early-childhood-education-ethical-considerations-of-implicit-and-explicit-bias)
- Scenarios can be generated from students based on their Hot Button triggers: [https://challengingbehavior.cbcs.usf.edu/docs/Self-Care\\_Teachers.pdf](https://challengingbehavior.cbcs.usf.edu/docs/Self-Care_Teachers.pdf)
- QuickWrite before and after learning how to teach students with specific needs

housed in Project Implicit, a non-profit organization exploring the implicit bias of individuals on multiple topics, such as race, disability, religion, sexuality, and weight. This educational tool can be used within your courses to help students examine their potential biases toward individuals with disabilities. It is important for students to understand their results may be influenced by environmental factors, such as social media, culture, and experience. When using the IAT, ask them to identify and discuss their general feelings while they take the test(s) and upon viewing the results. It has been helpful to use this test in conjunction with watching a video, like Dan Habib's TedTalk, *Disabling Segregation*, and asking students to share how their experiences with people with disabilities (or lack thereof) may have molded their implicit biases. The tests can begin conversation about the influence of society and language on one's unconscious perceptions of others. For example, one student commented, "I need to continue challenging my own beliefs, keep my ableist privileges in check and most of all make space and be an active listener and allow the ones that I seek to ally and advocate to lead."

Researchers warn to not use the IAT as a standalone activity because students may be uncomfortable with their results, leading to distress or an outright dismissal of their potential for bias (Clark & Zygmunt, 2014). The IAT website notes that the results are not diagnostic of prejudices, but are rather "possible interpretations that have a basis in research" and make no claim to the validity of the results. Keeping that information in mind, this activity is a good entry point for initiating uncomfortable conversations about implicit biases.

**Countering Stereotypes.** Research has indicated that countering stereotypes can be a successful strategy for confronting implicit biases (Calanchini et al., 2021; Lai et al., 2013, 2014, 2016). In teacher education programs, one such assignment required students to watch the Academy Award nominated movie *Crip Camp*. Students were asked to consider how their understanding of disability studies, intersectionality, special education, inclusive education, and civil rights were informed by the movie. Specifically, students were asked: Did/how did the movie change your perceptions of disability and your role as an educator? Below is one student's response:

The things that struck me most about *Crip Camp* were the scenes that were so humanizing and just raw and honest and real (i.e. the camp getting crabs, the sexuality, the drag performance, the messiness and flirtiness of camp, and sarcasm, and just the true humanity of humans). It feels so wrong that I was struck by the need to humanize

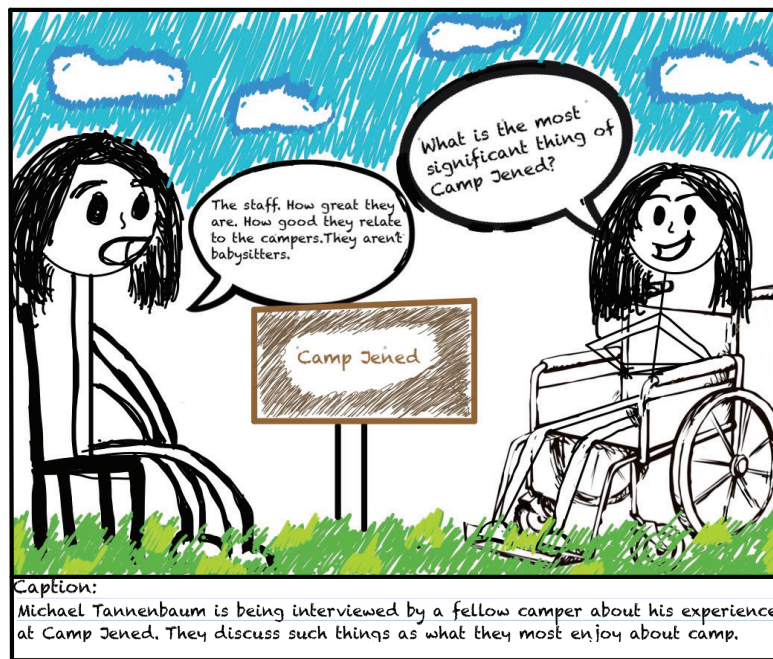
disabled folks because they are all human, and should not have to face dehumanization in the first place.

This quote demonstrates the students' own understanding of how oppression dehumanizes both the oppressed and the oppressor (Freiri, 1998).

Another student, Josephine Guzman, decided to share her thoughts about *Crip Camp* via a cartoon (See Figure 1 for one panel of her work), where she reflected on the inclusion of teachers of color to support student learning.

**Figure 1**

*Assignment Submission of a Critical Reflection on "Crip Camp," by Josephine Guzman*



As I watched *Crip Camp*, I started developing my thoughts between my current/future career in education. The main connection that I automatically resonated to was the way the campers talked about their counselors. In education building a bond with each student is how you gain trust and a connection. What I thought was most important about this scene is that the counselors understood their campers in their own unique and personal way. Now I see how working in a predominantly black and brown school is helpful for my students and I to build a connection because of our culture similarities. As I see this it's critical for educators to do their research and educate themselves to understand their students as much as possible.

**Learning Activities to Develop Critical Consciousness  
for Anti-Bias Goal #2: Diversity**

As CC develops, it is necessary for individuals to reflect upon similarities and differences between themselves and others and to critically analyze the impact of inequitable systems on young children and families. In particular, the goal of diversity in anti-bias education is to promote “comfort and joy” with diversity, resulting in empathy towards and respect for people from a multitude of backgrounds (Derman-Sparks & Edwards, 2020, p. 5).

**Intergroup Contact.** Some of the most powerful learning occurs not from learning about people with disabilities but learning *from* people with disabilities. This strategy of intergroup contact has been successful at addressing implicit biases over time (Calanchini et al., 2021; Lai et al., 2014; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006). “Nothing About Us without Us” is the slogan of the Disability Rights Movement (Charlton, 2000) and educators need to honor that by providing learning opportunities from people with disabilities. Therefore, bring in members of the community who are recognized at the local, national, and international levels. One student commented, “I really appreciate how (the guest speaker) talked about her experiences and thoughts on disability studies. She had some great suggestions for teaching students with disabilities, especially in nontraditional ways.” An often untapped resource is local family resource centers. For example, in California, these are referred to as Family Resource/ Engagement Centers (FRC/FEC) and can be found on the Family Resource Centers Network of California website (FRCNCA, 2020) and the Seeds of Partnership website (Seeds of Partnership, n.d.). Teacher educators can connect with their local FRC/FEC to learn about their resources and to invite family members raising children/ youth with disabilities to share their personal experiences with their students.

Another way to learn from members of the disabled community is by reading their work and inviting students to reflect upon how their perspectives have been challenged and/or changed. After reading *The Reason I Jump*, written by an adolescent with autism, a student noted: “This book changed my understanding and perspective on my students with autism. My teaching has totally changed because of it.” (See Table 2 for additional recommended learning activities for intergroup contact).

**Jigsaw Activities.** As detailed previously, an integral strategy for developing CC is dialogue (Freire, 1974). The value of dialogue is derived from the cyclical nature of “reading, dialogue, reflection

and action” (Watts et al., 2011, p. 45), which has been supported by numerous researchers (Gutierrez & Ortega, 1991; Jemal, 2017; Smith-Maddox & Solórzano, 2002). A learning strategy centering dialogue is a jigsaw activity, where students learn about different aspects of a similar topic and then teach it to their peers. Students can learn from a variety of materials, such as blogs, videos, poetry, podcasts, children’s books, or music.

Within one class, students used TED Talk videos, where the speaker was a person with a disability, to compare the social and medical models of disability. Students chose one of multiple videos and met with others who viewed the same video to discuss and respond to guiding questions, while also being charged to develop questions of their own. Collaboratively, students created a presentation to highlight the learning they found most significant (the use of Google Slides or Jamboard is recommended so there is one space for the information). After the initial discussion, students moved to mixed small groups,

**Table 2**  
**Developing Critical Consciousness**  
**Through Learning Activities for Intergroup Contact**

Teacher Educator Resources for Early Childhood Anti-Bias Goal #2:  
Diversity Learning Activities for Intergroup Contact

- Family panel, inclusion symposium of educators, disability activist guest speakers
- Discuss stories, memoirs, and fieldwork experiences using the following:
  - Higashida, N. (2007). *The reason I jump: The inner voice of a thirteen-year-old boy with autism*. Random House.
  - Harry, B. (2010). *Melanie, bird with a broken wing: A mother’s story*. Brookes Publishing.
  - Interactive story panel at: Solomon, A. (2012). *Far from the tree*. [www.farfromthetree.com/](http://www.farfromthetree.com/)
  - Saxton, M. (2009). *Sticks and stones: Disabled people’s stories of abuse, defiance and resilience*. World Institute on Disability.
  - Video stories at: Story Corps. (2003 - 2022). *Stories*. <https://storycorps.org/stories>
  - SBSK. (2018). *Special books by special kids: Normalizing the diversity of the human condition*. <https://sbsk.org/>
  - Case studies in: California Department of Education (CDE). (2021). *Inclusion works! Creating child care programs that promote belonging for children with disabilities* (2nd ed.). [www.cde.ca.gov/sp/cd/re/documents/inclusionworks2ed.pdf](http://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/cd/re/documents/inclusionworks2ed.pdf)
  - Videos of personal stories in: California MAP to Inclusion & Belonging: Making Access Possible (n.d.). *Video Collection*. <https://cainclusion.org/camap/resources-and-links/video-collection/>



where each student had experienced a different video. Instead of talking specifically about the content of each TED Talk, students compared their learning across guiding questions, using their recently developed presentations to facilitate the conversations. Below are student responses to this specific activity on co-constructed knowledge around disability through dialogue:

“I found the initial discussion so helpful and it also brought up new ideas for me to share with others.”

“It was nice to see different group’s ideas and how our slides connect, overlap, and relate to different existing ideologies, principles, ideas, themes, analogies, and symbols brought up in the (first) group discussion.”

“There was so much to learn and having in-depth conversations amongst all of us is awesome.”

Students were encouraged to discuss not only the specific content of each class activity but also how it related to prior learning experiences, as seen in this student comment: “The final line of the video about society taking a collective approach to prioritizing access is not only the main thesis of the video but a thru line that I see appear again and again in our readings.” (See Table 3 for a list of recommended resources for jigsaw activities).

**Book Clubs and Literature Circles.** Book Clubs and Literature Circles provide an excellent opportunity to engage with diversity and further explore previously unchallenged perceptions and attitudes. Guiding questions can be provided by teacher educators in a general format or specific to the chapter or source. In addition, students can generate the questions to lead discussions. Dialogue supports the development of CC by integrating new ideas and understandings into one’s view of self and by questioning and challenging long-held perspectives (Levy, 2011) (see Table 4 for a list of recommended books).

After a Book Club with selected chapters from *The Disability Studies Reader*, a student commented:

We discussed how issues around legal and cultural views of disability engender oppression, and reinforce segregation of Disabled individuals in school and society, limiting non-Disabled individuals interactions and thus opportunities to be presented with a reality that challenges their expectations, and so there’s a lack of opportunity for critical reflection about ableism biases, reinforcing the need to include voices and bodies of the Disabled living full human lives.



**Language Usage.** One way respect for human diversity is demonstrated is in one's language usage. Learning in the college classroom should examine varied perspectives. For example, in learning about the differences between the medical and social models of disability, students were asked to watch two TED Talks on autism (see

**Table 3**  
**Developing Critical Consciousness Through Jigsaw Activities**

Teacher Educator Resources for Early Childhood Anti-Bias Goal #2: Diversity Jigsaw Activities

TED Talks

- TEDx Talks. (2018, Feb 13). *Changing the way we talk about disability*, Amy Oulton, TEDxBrighton [Video]. YouTube.  
<https://youtu.be/4WIP1VgPnc0>
- TEDx Talks. (2015, Sep 1). *The truth about growing up disabled*, Dylan Alcott, TEDxYouth@Sydney [Video]. YouTube.  
<https://youtu.be/tvNOzJ7x8qQ>
- TEDx Talks. (2019, Mar 18). *DeafBlind: Blind but not blind*, JennyLynn Dietrich, TEDxSalem [Video]. YouTube.  
<https://youtu.be/6uxZ4u6nses>
- TEDx Talks. (2018, Jun 7). *I'm deaf, but we can still talk*, Rebekah Afari, TEDxExeter [Video]. YouTube.  
[https://youtu.be/M3f\\_mENOQaE](https://youtu.be/M3f_mENOQaE)
- TEDx Talks. (2015, Jul 1). *I have one more chromosome than you. So what?* Karen Gaffney, TEDxPortland [Video]. YouTube.  
<https://youtu.be/HwxjoBQdn0s>

Podcasts/Videos

- Wong, A. (Executive Producer). (2017 – 2021). *Disability Visibility: First-Person Stories from the Twenty First Century* [Audio podcast] Disability Visibility Project.  
<https://disabilityvisibilityproject.com/podcast-2/>
- Heumann, J. (Executive Producer). (2021 – Present). *The Heumann Perspective* [Audio Podcast].  
<https://judithheumann.com/heumann-perspective/>
- Heumann, J. (n.d.). Judy Heumann [YouTube Channel]. YouTube. Retrieved August 11, 2022, from [www.youtube.com/channel/UCB7pemkbDQYezB6PeDFXTvg](http://www.youtube.com/channel/UCB7pemkbDQYezB6PeDFXTvg)
- Swift Schools (Executive Producer). (2015 – Present). *SWIFT Unscripted* [Audio Podcast].  
<https://swiftschools.org/unscripted>
- Villegas, T. (Executive Producer). (2012 – Present). *Think Inclusive* [Audio Podcast]. [www.thinkinclusive.us/](http://www.thinkinclusive.us/)
- Moore, S. (n.d.). *5MM Library*. 5 Moore Minutes with Shelley Moore.  
<https://fivemooreminutes.com/inclusion-library/>

Table 5 for links). The first speech is by a medical doctor and the second is by Temple Grandin, a scientist with autism who earned a doctorate and is a leader in the field of animal husbandry. Students were asked to consider questions around the use of language and the models of disability in relation to each video. By challenging how language was used in the videos, and in particular how language portrayed ableist

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**Table 4**  
**Developing Critical Consciousness via Book Clubs and Literature Circles**

Teacher Educator Resources for Early Childhood Anti-Bias Goal #2: Diversity Book Clubs/Literature Circles

Books: 1st Person Accounts

- Heumann, J. (2020). *Being Heumann: An unrepentant memoir of a disability rights activist*. Beacon Press.
- Linton, S. (2007). *My body politic: A memoir*. University of Michigan Press.
- Longmore, P. K. (2003). *Why I burned my book and other essays on disability*. Temple University Press.
- Piepzna-Samarasinha, L. L. (2018). *Care work: Dreaming disability justice*. Arsenal Pulp Press.
- Sutton, M. (Ed.). (2015). *The real experts: Readings for parents of autistic children*. Autonomous Press. (Note: while this book is out of print, the blogs can be located individually online)
- Wong, A. (Ed.). (2020). *Disability visibility: First-person stories from the twenty first century*. Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group.

Books: Young Adult Novels

- Bell, C. (2014). *El deafo*. Abrams.
- Draper, S. (2012). *Out of my mind* (Vol. 1). Simon & Schuster.
- Erskine, K. (2018). *Mockingbird*. Usborne Publishing Ltd.
- Gerber, A. (2019). *Focused*. Scholastic Inc.
- Hunt, L. M. (2017). *Fish in a tree*. Penguin.

Books: Disability History and Rights

- Annamma, S. (2017). *The pedagogy of pathologization: Dis/abled girls of color in the school-prison nexus*. Routledge.
- Charlton, J. I. (2000). *Nothing about us without us: Disability oppression and empowerment*. University of California Press.
- Davis, L. J. (Ed.). (2016). *The disability studies reader* (5th ed.). Routledge.
- Longmore, P. K. & Umansky, L. (Eds.). (2001). *The new disability history: American perspectives (The history of disability, 6)*. New York University Press.
- Pelka, F. (2013). *What we have done: An oral history of the disability rights movement*. University of Massachusetts Press.

**Table 5**  
**Developing Critical Consciousness by Examining Language Usage**

Teacher Educator Resources for Early Childhood Anti-Bias Goal #2: Diversity  
 Examining Language Usage

TED Talks

- TED. (2014, Apr 28). *Autism—what we know (and what we don't know yet)*. Wendy Chung [Video]. YouTube. <https://youtu.be/wKIMcLTqRLs>
- TED-Ed. (2013, Feb 10). *The world needs all kinds of minds - Temple Grandin* [Video]. YouTube. <https://youtu.be/UKhg68QJlo0>

Person First vs. Identity First Language Videos

- Andrea Lausell. (2018, Apr 16). *Why I don't use person first language, #SpinaBifida* [Video]. YouTube. <https://youtu.be/lCajTVTj0-g>
- Annie Elaine. (2016, Nov 22). *Disabled person OR person with a disability?* [Video]. YouTube. <https://youtu.be/SMKKze48Qbo>

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perspectives, students explored how the social model of disability can lay the foundation for the on-ramp to inclusion.

**Learning Activities to Develop Critical Consciousness  
 for Anti-Bias Goal #3: Justice**

Justice entails recognizing fairness, or where it is lacking, and how people with “othered” identities are marginalized in society. Developing a CC around justice also involves recognizing how intersections of identities result in compounded oppression (Crenshaw, 2017).

**Critical Analysis of Data.** Teacher educators must challenge current practices and systems by intentionally presenting data from governmental reports and research, such as annual reports to Congress on IDEA and the Civil Rights Data Collection (2021). Specifically, when teaching about assessment and identification practices, teacher educators need to facilitate a critical analysis of inclusion/segregation statistics and disproportionate representation of students of color in various disability categories and the use of biased assessment tools, most often by race and/or language (Kohli et al., 2017). Teacher educators have an obligation to present data about expulsion and suspension rates of students of color, particularly boys, when presenting on Positive Behavior and Intervention Supports (PBIS), as observations based on white norms lack insight into their lived experiences (Wetzel et al., 2021).

**Examining Intersectionality.** Centering stories of real individuals and their experiences of discrimination can tap into one's humanity and provide keen insight into issues that cannot be fully understood through statistics (Neimand et al., 2021). Be explicit about the repercussions of the intersection of race and disability. For example, the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960's led directly to the Disability Rights Movement. In fact, the argument used to end segregation of schools based on race, "Separate is not equal," was used—albeit almost 20 years later—to end the educational segregation of children with disabilities. The similarities between these movements for basic human rights can be a powerful realization for students.

Students were directed to read the book *Warriors Don't Cry* by Dr. Melba Patillo Beals, a member of the Little Rock Nine who integrated Central High School in 1957. In addition, students watched an episode on school integration from the series, *Eyes on the Prize: Fighting Back (1957-1962)* and listened to a National Public Radio (NPR) interview with Dr. Beals, *'They Didn't Want Me There: Remembering the Terror of School Integration* (see Table 6). (These materials contain derogatory and violent actions, images, and words, and may be disturbing and/or triggering). Specifically, students were asked to consider how the actions of those teenagers paved the way for education for students with disabilities. Instead of the standard college essay, students were encouraged to demonstrate their thoughts and learning across multiple resources in a manner of their choosing, such as a podcast, cartoon, or artistic creation. One graduate student, Leah Garcia, shared her learning via a poem, which demonstrates her explicit understanding about school segregation across identity markers (see Figure 2).

Another student demonstrated their CC of intersectionality in a written response to class activities:

When answering the question about how to integrate Disabled students into [general education] classrooms, I was reminded of the historical arguments between Booker T. Washington and W. E. B. DuBois regarding how to best navigate racism and segregation. Under this framework, should a DuBois stance of full integration now to halt current oppression, centering the lives of the Disabled, be taken for "general" oppression from Ableism?

Another graduate student, Jerome Tatum, also used a poem to illustrate how a teacher's implicit biases—disguised in "support" for the student—can stifle the potential of children (see Figure 3).

Other activities examining intersectionality include the use of videos, case studies, and stories to uncover the ingrained racism and ableism that impact the education system's youngest learners (See

Table 6 for additional resources for addressing the anti-bias goal of justice).

**Learning Activities to Develop Critical Consciousness  
for Anti-Bias Goal #4: Activism**

Activism addresses inequities present in education settings and its larger system. Educators first must address implicit bias that supports the school-to-prison nexus and be purposeful in creating an equitable on-ramp to inclusive education. One's teaching is an act towards change and justice.

**Establishing an Asset-Based Approach.** In practice, CC requires

**Figure 2**  
**Assignment Submission on the Intersection of Race and Disability**

*Critical Reflection: Civil Rights*

Leah Garcia

My thoughts are scattered, I do not know where to begin  
 How could education for all be a sin?  
 Black, brown, disabled, or queer  
 Because of The Little Rock Nine, our dreams are near.  
 The 14th amendment, ratified in 1868  
 Gave "equal protection to all"  
 But did not eliminate hate.  
 1896 "separate but equal," what a joke  
 We are still denying people the right/access to vote!  
 1954 "Brown v Board"  
 It took 33 more years for Section 504.  
 Melba and her cohort of eight  
 Walked into Central High without showing any hesitation in their gait.  
 In 1957 The Little Rock Nine  
 Lived in fear of being attacked from behind.  
 They paved the way for the Civil Rights Act of 1964  
 But wait... there is more:  
 It is not until 1990 that ADA was signed into law  
 But we still have to fight to change educational flaws.  
 Faith seems to be Melba's driving force  
 I will take her lead as I walk my course.  
 85% of prisoners have learning disabilities imagine a system where they had  
 received Special education services such as IEP's.  
 Dr. Melba Patillo Beals has confirmed my choice  
 to educate those who don't have a voice.  
 I will give them the platform to voice what they need  
 I will plant the seeds for them to succeed.

an asset-based approach in how educators speak to, with, and about young children and their families (Rausch et al., 2019). In developing an asset-based approach, students learn first to presume competence, regardless of disability, race, or additional marginalized identities. In the college classroom, teacher educators model the use of language, and take ownership of and responsibility for mistakes. A student evaluation noted the use of language by an instructor: “She was very mindful of people in the class as well as the humans that we discussed. I appreciated her care and attention to the systemic issues around people with disabilities and intersecting marginalized identities.”

Teacher educators can advocate for a social model of disability that focuses on the whole child, and in particular their strengths, interests, and funds of knowledge (Biklen & Burke, 2006; Collado, 2021; Collins & Ferri, 2016). This can be done through consistent projects that require strengths-based descriptions of students and analysis of strengths-based language used in various spaces like classrooms, Individualized Education Program (IEP) meetings, and team meetings.

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**Figure 3**  
**Assignment Submission on the Expectations**  
**and Intersectionality in Special Education**

*Who Has a Learning Disorder?*  
Jerome Tatum

My teacher said, “Poor kid I know why you can’t read,  
It’s because you have a learning disability.  
Those things are permanent you see,  
so you will never be able to read like me.  
It would be a waste of time and effort to try and see.  
if maybe you could learn in a different way than we.  
It might seem unfair but it’s my responsibility,  
to make sure that we lower our expectations of what you can be.  
You should be glad that you have an IEP.  
Thank God for S. P. E. D.”

After processing what I heard I said, “Look teach,  
I don’t believe that I have a learning disability.  
That’s a general diagnosis for a wide group of peeps,  
so much so that we really don’t know what you mean.  
And why when white kids struggle their cognitive ability,  
compared to me isn’t under the same kind of scrutiny.  
They still go class to class and earn their degree,  
while I’m stuck in the same class all day with the same teach.  
Have we considered racism, sexism or poverty?  
Maybe one of these is the reason I can’t read.”

**Building an On-Ramp to Inclusion through Action Plans.** Students will need guidance in setting achievable goals with actionable steps for implementing asset-based practices, facilitating inclusive education, and explicitly breaking down the school-to-prison nexus.

**Table 6**  
**Developing Critical Consciousness for Early Childhood Anti-Bias Goal #3: Justice**

Teacher Educator Resources for Early Childhood Anti-Bias Goal #3: Justice

Critical Analysis of Data

- Office of Special Education Program's (OSEP). (2021). Annual Reports to Congress on the Implementation of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).  
<https://sites.ed.gov/idea/annual-reports-to-congress/>
- Civil Rights Data Collection (CRDC). (n.d.). Special Reports.  
<https://ocrdata.ed.gov/specialreports>

Media for the Intersection of Theory and Practice

- Barnard Center for Research on Women. (2017, May 9). *Ableism is the bane of my (expletive) existence* [Video]. YouTube.  
<https://youtu.be/IelmZUxBIq0>
- PBS (Writer & Director). (2021, April 4). *Fighting back (1957-1962)* (Season 1, Episode 2) [TV series episode]. In PBS, Eyes on the Prize.  
[www.pbs.org/video/fighting-back-19571962-0wxrve/](http://www.pbs.org/video/fighting-back-19571962-0wxrve/)
- Davies, D. (Host). (2018, January 15). *'They didn't want me there: Remembering the terror of school integration* [Audio podcast episode]. In Fresh Air. NPR. [www.npr.org/transcripts/577371750](http://www.npr.org/transcripts/577371750)
- Brewster, J. & Stephenson, M. (Filmmakers). (2014, Feb 3). *American promise* [Video]. Point of View (POV).  
<http://archive.pov.org/americanpromise/>
- *Intelligent lives*. A film by Dan Habib (n.d.). <https://intelligentlives.org/>
- The Opportunity Agenda. (2017). *Ten tips for putting intersectionality into practice*.  
[www.opportunityagenda.org/explore/resources-publications/ten-tips-putting-intersectionality-practice](http://www.opportunityagenda.org/explore/resources-publications/ten-tips-putting-intersectionality-practice)

Books for the Intersection of Theory and Practice

- Connor, D. J. Ferri, B. A. & Annamma, S. A. (Eds.) (2015). *DisCrit: Disability studies and critical race theory in education* (Disability, culture, and equity series). Teachers College Press.
- Baglieri, S. & Shapiro, A. (2017). *Disability studies and the inclusive classroom: Critical practices for embracing diversity in education* (2nd Ed.). Routledge.
- Baglieri, S. & Lalvani, P. (2019). *Undoing ableism: Teaching about disability in K-12 classrooms*. Routledge.
- Jacobson, T. (2003). *Confronting our discomfort: Clearing the way for anti-bias in early childhood*. Heinemann.



Depending on where students are located within their CC journey, these plans could range from further reading, to educating others about inclusion as a civil rights issue, to writing an advocacy letter to the superintendent. (See Table 7 for additional resources for addressing the anti-bias goal of activism).

### Conclusion

Teacher educators must continue the challenging work of confronting one's implicit biases around race, disability, and other identity markers that are traditionally marginalized in our society, and

**Table 7**

***Developing Critical Consciousness for Early Childhood Anti-Bias Goal #4: Activism***

Teacher Educator Resources for Early Childhood Anti-Bias Goal #4: Activism

Resources for a Strengths/Assets-Based Approach

- Analyze the connections between a strengths-based approach, equity-based approach, and inclusive approach to writing Individualized Family Service Plans (IFSPs) and Individualized Education Program (IEP) goals and commit to apply to one's own practice (see Vandercook et al., 2021)

Resources for Action Plans

- Self-assess current inclusion practices at the state and local level through a DisCrit lens and identify priority areas for improvement (see ECTA, n.d., Tools on Inclusion)
- Self-assess barriers to inclusion using the Managing Complex Change framework (Knoster, 2000; Lippitt, 1987) and identify goals to advocate for an equitable inclusion on-ramp (see King, 2019)
- Identify specific practices that represent the Least Dangerous Assumption by using the TIES Center Inclusive Practice Series Tips and make a plan to implement in one's own practice (see Taub et al., 2019)

Resources for Advocacy

- Use current position statements and policies to advocate at the local and state level for inclusion as a social justice issue (see ECTA, n.d., Policy and Position Statements on Inclusion)
- Join your school/district level teams and committees that support students and integrate an equity approach in conversations and decisions
- Practice advocating for change using RAFT, whereby students craft their assignment by choosing one of each aspect (e.g., Role: student, teacher, desk; Audience: superintendent, community, school; Format: podcast, letter, OpEd; Topic: inclusion, ableism, intersectionality) (see Reading Rockets, n.d.)

support our students in doing so as well. Although one's biases may be unintentional, they can still perpetuate inequities, as evidenced by expulsion rates and over/under-representation of students of color in special education, and may lead children to the school-to-prison nexus (Artiles & Trent, 1994; Blanchett, 2006; Civil Rights Data Collection, 2021; de Brey et al., 2019; Ferri & Connor, 2005; Gilliam et al., 2016). In moving towards a more equitable, inclusive education, educators need to recognize misrepresentation as "a social, cultural, and historical issue" (Cavendish et al., 2020, p. 4) rather than as deficits located within the child (Connor et al., 2019).

Learning about internal, unintentional biases can be powerful, as seen in this student's comment about a disability studies class: "You've completely changed my perspective on teaching students with disabilities. Before I was resistant, now I'm engaged. It's their civil right and they deserve no less of an education."

Future research needs to examine students' perspectives of bias before, during, and at the culmination of teacher preparation programs. In addition to evaluating the development of CC, research should also evaluate its possible ramifications in early childhood learning environments. It is imperative for teacher educators to engage students in reflective practices towards CC for their practices to intentionally employ an asset-based approach with the children and families they serve, thereby providing the on-ramp to an equitable and inclusive education, where diversity is embraced as a joyful aspect of learning and living.

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