

BACKGROUND

Past research indicates that the cultural constructs of race and ethnicity are socialized and that such **socialization processes begins in early childhood** (Phinney, 2000). Though many children spend several waking hours in early childhood settings parents are **key** facilitators to the formation of ethnic identity (Phinney & Chavira, 2002; Hernandez Sheets, 2005), yet **diverse parents are often excluded** from contributing to decisions pertinent to their child's schooling (Olivos, 2006). Moreover, the **parent perspective in the literature is absent**.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

This qualitative **case study** sought to learn more about: the parental role in fostering children's cultural awareness; and parents' collaboration experiences with childcare providers with regard to the fostering process.

METHOD

Five parents of children (ages two-to-five years) from an ethnically and racially diverse preschool were participants. **Qualitative and quantitative data sources** were collected to explore the research questions. The data sources included:

- Three individual, semi-structured interviews
- One group, semi-structured interview (of a married couple)
- The Scale of Ethnocultural Empathy (SEE; Wang et al., 2003)
- The Parent-Teacher Relationship Scale: Teacher Version (PTRS; Vickers & Minke, 1995)

DATA ANALYSIS

A **two-tiered coding system** was used to analyze text data. Data units were indicative of participants' beliefs about a particular topic. The first level of analysis was *a priori*, participants either explicitly or implicitly referred to their ethnicity (E) and race (R).

DATA ANALYSIS

The final level of coding involved open coding (Miles & Huberman, 1994) in which each participant's conceptualizations and beliefs regarding how cultural awareness was being fostered became evident. **Example codes** were: *E self-concept*, *E (self) attachment*, and *Identity*.

Descriptive statistics from each measure were calculated and a mean split was used to create "High" and "Low" categories ($M_{SEE} = 4.93$, $SD_{SEE} = 0.98$; $M_{PTRS} = 4.66$, $SD_{PTRS} = 0.26$). **Qualitative data was then compared using quantitative categories.**

RESULTS

1. **Parents expressed strong affiliation with either their racial or ethnic identities.** The primary identity parents' reflected upon was used as a foundational lens for how they fostered their child's cultural awareness.
2. Parental dialogue, or *cultural talk*, was the crux of race and ethnicity explorations. *Cultural talk* represented how parents were operationalizing race and ethnicity.*
3. Parents had an awareness of how to foster cultural awareness in a **developmentally appropriate manner.****

* (Child) meaning-making activities included **learning from other family members** (e.g., aunts, cousins, and grandparents), visiting museums, referring to encyclopedias, storytelling and other **"surface culture" experiences** (Derman Sparks & Olsen Edwards, 2010).

Racially-identified parents emphasized **racial similarities and differences to their children whereas ethnically-identified parents conveyed ethnic information such as **family ancestry and immigration**.

RESULTS

- **Ethnically-diverse and racially-diverse parents reported high quality and low quality relationships, respectively, with teachers.**
- Results showed **little formal collaboration** between parents and their childcare providers as it related to fostering cultural awareness. **Parents viewed themselves as primarily responsible for teaching their child about race and ethnicity and teachers as supplemental figures.**

EARLY CHILDHOOD IMPLICATIONS & FUTURE DIRECTIONS

- **Teachers** can initiate conversations with parents in an effort to enhance parent-teacher collaboration.
- Individual responsiveness of **childcare centers policies** can improve by integrating **multicultural professional development**.
- **Parents** can learn information to guide race and ethnicity explorations with their young children (e.g., socializing and meaning-making activity ideas).

Future studies should consider:

- How cultural awareness is fostered within families from specific ethnic or racial groups and SES strata.
- How meaning-making actions change with a child's development.
- Use of the **Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure (MEIM; Phinney, 1992)** or the **Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI; Hammer, Bennett, & Wiseman, 2003)** to further investigate the **interrelationships of empathetic characteristics and how cultural awareness is fostered within families.**

***A full list of references is available upon inquiry.**