Give Race Its Place: An Anti-racism Knowledge-sharing Initiative for Early Childhood Educators in Ontario

Rachel Berman, Toronto Metropolitan University, Zuhra Abawi, Niagara University, Fikir Haile, Queen's University, Kerry-Ann Escayg, University of Nebraska-Omaha, Alana Butler, Queen's University, Natalie Royer, Saroy Group Inc., and Beverly-Jean Daniel, Toronto Metropolitan University

Abstract

In the fall of 2020, a group of researchers, along with the Association of Early Childhood Educators Ontario (AECEO) and the College of Early Childhood Educators (CECE), came together to discuss the necessity of providing anti-racism training, with a specific focus on addressing anti-Black racism, to the early childhood sector in Ontario. In the summer of 2021, this group offered four no-cost, two-hour on-line sessions in anti-racism praxis. This project was funded by a SSHRC Connections Grant in partnership with the AECEO and the College of ECE. In this paper the authors discuss the contextual factors that led to this crucial knowledge-sharing initiative, provide an overview of the sessions, some participant input and feedback, and conclude with lessons learned and a call to action for moving forward.

Key words

anti-racism; anti-racism praxis; children, early childhood education; knowledge sharing

Author Biographies

Dr. Rachel Berman is a Professor in the School of Early Childhood Studies at Toronto Metropolitan University and an adjunct member to the graduate program in Gender, Feminist & Women's Studies at York University. Her recent research focuses on 'race' and anti-racism in early childhood settings. Her work has appeared in the International Critical Childhood Policy Studies Journal, the Journal of Childhood Studies, Children & Society, and the International Journal of Qualitative Methods, amongst others. Rachel is a co-editor of the book Equity as Praxis in Early Childhood Education and Care (2021).

Dr. Zuhra Abawi is an Assistant Professor of teacher education and educational leadership. She is also the Program Coordinator of the masters of educational leadership program. She is the author of The Effectiveness of Educational Policy for Bias Free Hiring: Critical Insights to Enhance Diversity in the Canadian Teacher Workforce (2021), and co-editor of Equity as Praxis in Early Childhood Education and Care (2021). Her work focuses on discourses of race, equity and identity and the ways that such terms are mobilized in educational narratives as from a neoliberal lens to uphold white hegemony in the teaching profession. Dr. Abawi holds a doctorate in social justice education from OISE/University of Toronto.

Fikir Haile is a PhD candidate in the department of Political Studies at Queen's University, where she specializes in International Relations and Political Theory. Her research focuses on the areas of International Political economy, African Politics, and the politics of urbanization. Fikir has held numerous research fellowships and research assistantships centered around issues of race and equity in academic institutions. She has worked as an anti-racism advisor, the graduate student body's equity and diversity commissioner, and is a founding member of the Queen's Black Graduate Student Caucus.

Dr. Kerry-Ann Escayg is an Associate Professor of Early Childhood Education at the University of Nebraska-Omaha. Her main research interests are anti-racism in early childhood education, children and race, qualitative research with children, and racial socialization.

Dr. Alana Butler is an Assistant Professor in the Faculty of Education at Queen's University. She has a B.Sc. in Psychology, a Bachelor of Education, a Master of Arts in Education from the University of Toronto. In 2015, she graduated with a Ph.D. in Education from Cornell University in Ithaca, New York. She joined Queen's University in 2017 and currently teaches in the Bachelor of Education Program. Prior to joining Queen's University, she taught at Toronto Metropolitan University and the University of Toronto as a part-time lecturer. She is currently Principal Investigator on a SSHRC Insight Development Grant about post-secondary access for low-income youth. Her research interests include the academic achievement of low-socio economic students, race and schooling, equity and inclusion, and multicultural education.

Natalie Royer is a consultant, strategist and coach at Saroy Group Inc. She holds a Master of Arts degree in Early Childhood Studies from Toronto Metropolitan University. She provides training sessions and consults with companies and organizations on how to promote a space of belonging using an equity, diversity and inclusion lens. She has worked in the healthcare sector (i.e.Hospital For Sick Children) and she has taught at colleges and universities for over 10 years. With a background in early childhood education, she advocates for the next generations and hopes as leaders we can create inclusive spaces where everyone can thrive.

Dr. Beverly-Jean Daniel is an Associate Professor at Toronto Metropolitan University in the School of Child and Youth Care. Her research focuses on the education sector at all levels and recent projects have included: identifying factors that foster healthy racial identity amongst Black youth and the connections to positive academic outcomes; resilience amongst Black females who have aged out of care; the experiences of High Achieving Black Students (HABS) and their families; and the forms of informal cultural capital that promotes post-secondary completion. In addition, she continues to examine issues of race and racism in the ECE sector. Dr. Daniel continues to be a strong proponent for exploring strategies for reducing the impact of anti-Black racism on Black communities.

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The beauty of anti-racism is that you don't have to pretend to be free of racism to be an anti-racist. Anti-racism is the commitment to fight racism wherever you find it, including in yourself. And it's the only way forward.

~Ijeoma Oluo

The quote chosen to open this paper, by writer and speaker Ijeoma Oluo, underlines the idea that everyone can fight racism regardless of the context. It reminds each person that no one needs to be 'perfect' in order to fight racism. Oluo's words call for self-awareness. Oluo's words call for ongoing commitment. We make the case in this paper that there is a pressing need for anti-racism commitments, in particular a commitment to fight anti-Black racism, by all early childhood educators and within all early childhood education settings in this province, one of the most diverse regions in the world.

In *Can we talk about race? Confronting Colour Blindness in Early Childhood Settings,* a federally funded research project carried out in Toronto and the Greater Toronto Area between 2014–2016, research participants working in the field of ECE expressed the belief that race and racism were not relevant to children and, not surprisingly, were unfamiliar with anti-racism pedagogy; this had not been part of their education or professional development (Berman et al., 2017; Daniel & Escayg, 2019; MacNevin & Berman, 2017). Given these findings, along with the extant research that suggests that issues of race and racism are often dismissed in early learning settings, providing anti-racism training to the early childhood sector in Ontario in a manner that is meaningful and accessible is crucial. In the summer of 2021, a team of researchers, in partnership with the Association of Early Childhood Educators Ontario (AECEO) and the College of Early Childhood Educators (CECE), offered four no-cost, two-hour on-line sessions in anti-racism praxis to the early childhood sector in Ontario. This project was funded by a SSHRC Connections Grant in partnership with the AECEO and the College of ECE. In this paper, after presenting a review of the literature on race and anti-racism in early childhood education, the authors discuss the contextual factors that led to this knowledge-sharing initiative, provide an overview of the sessions, discuss participant input and feedback, and conclude with some lessons learned for moving forward.

Literature Review

As noted in the introduction, we assert that an anti-racism approach to early childhood pedagogy and curriculum in Ontario is of vital importance to disrupt harmful racist actions toward Black and other racialized children, families, and communities and to promote belonging for all children. This stance is widely supported by the research in ECE on race and anti-racism (Aboud, 1988, 2003; Boutte, 2008; Escayg, et al. 2017; Husband, 2016; MacNaughton & Davis, 2009; MacNevin & Berman, 2017; Pacini-Ketchabaw & Berikoff, 2008; Pahlke et al., 2012; Skattebol, 2003). In this section, we briefly review the research regarding race and children, race and early childhood educators, race and ECE preparation programs, and connect our work to the reconceptualizing movement in early childhood education.

Early childhood spaces are usually conceptualized through Western developmentalist paradigms as "race-neutral" environments with young children constructed as "racially innocent," meaning that they do not "see" or "notice" race and racial differences (Berman et al., 2017; Escayg, 2019). Yet, research in Australia, Canada, the United Kingdom, the United States, and elsewhere consistently demonstrates that young children actively engage in meaning-making processes encompassing race and identity as they seek to understand themselves and the world around them. Indeed, recent research shows that children may identify racial differences as infants (Quinn et al., 2018), with children as young as six- to nine-months-old exhibiting racial bias/preference, including being more predisposed to listen to adults of their own race, as well as associating happy music with the faces of their own race and sad music with the faces of other races (Xiao et al., 2017a; Xiao et al., 2017b). As Escayg et al. (2017) outline, many studies have identified

a pro-white bias among young white children as well as a positive affinity toward whiteness amongst Black and other racialized children, preferences that seem to show up between the ages of three and five (Aboud, 2003; Van Ausdale & Feagin, 2001). Far from being colour-blind or race-neutral, children (in particular, white children) engage in race-segregated play (Brown et al., 2010; Rollo, 2018), as well as participate in race-based discrimination (Dulin-Keita et al., 2011 Essien, 2019). These racialized meaning-making processes, such as pro-white biases displayed by both Black and white children, as well as racially segregated play, do not occur in isolation -- they are embedded within and informed by structural, systemic, and institutional power relations that privilege whiteness (Whitehead, 2021). As Adair and Doucet (2014) demonstrate in their review of the research on the impact of race and culture on play in early childhood classrooms, "young children recognize skin color and then are able to decode how much value skin colors have in the larger society" (p. 358). Clearly, young children are not only aware of race: they may actively engage in and perpetuate the status quo of racialized power relations through play, interactions, preferences for whiteness (such as white dolls and white materials), and through the social exclusion and "othering" of certain bodies, in particular those of Black children (Escayg, 2020; MacNevin & Berman, 2017).

In addition to believing children do not see race, early childhood educators often insist that they themselves do not see race, (Berman et al., 2017; Boutte et al. 2011; Kintner-Duffy et al., 2021), yet we know children's play acts may be interpreted differently by white educators depending on the child's race, most often to the detriment of Black boys (Adair & Doucet, 2014; Boutte & Bryan 2019; Bryan, 2020). There are a number of reasons why white educators in particular may insist they do not see race, including a lack of confidence in having such discussions with children; fear of repercussions from parents, families, and centre administrators; and/or because they do not think race is relevant (Farago et al., 2015). Some may believe that not discussing race will minimize racism in early learning spaces (Winkler, 2009), however, as noted in this paper, the opposite is true, as children are constantly engaging in and participating in and negotiating processes of racial meaning-making. Not seeing race is evidence of a colour-blind, or what is also known as a colour-denial or colour-evasive, approach that serves to uphold whiteness. Additionally, taking up multiculturalism as a way to engage with difference, a widespread approach in early childhood settings, fails to address issues of power and racism (Abawi, 2021; Nxumalo & Pacini-Ketchabaw, 2022).

The K–12 teaching profession in Ontario, as it is in the United States, is mostly made up of white women (Abawi, 2021). Unfortunately, we have little data about who makes up the early childhood workforce in Ontario. A recent CECE membership report found that of the 57,594 members, 98% are female and 2% male. The survey asked members about Indigenous and/or Francophone heritage but did not ask for other race (or language) data. Of the members who chose to self-identify, 1.5% indicated they identified as both Indigenous Heritage and Francophone (CECE, 2020, p. 14). Butler (2021) states, "what we do know is that white heteronormative biases are manifested in curriculum, policies, and practices of pre-service ECE programs and early learning settings" (p. 33).

It is not surprising that early childhood educators hold white heteronormative views regarding race and children. The assumptions informing early childhood teacher preparation programs heavily reflect Western psychological-developmentalist paradigms that offer reductionary perspectives of young children, most notably, that young children are docile, passive, and unaware of the myriad social interactions within early learning environments as well as in their homes and communities (Abawi & Berman, 2019; Brown et al, 2010; MacNaughton & Davis, 2009; Pacini-Ketchabaw et al, 2011). Further, psychological-developmentalist traditions informing early childhood pedagogies serve to marginalize Black and other racialized children and families by privileging Western and Eurocentric norms of children, childhoods, and child development. Children and families who do not conform to such norms are often pathologized, tracked, and placed under surveillance, including state surveillance in the form of child welfare agencies.

A reconceptualist approach is required to dismantle the hegemony of Eurocentric psychological-developmentalist norms that permeate both pre-service and in-service early childhood education. The reconceptualist movement materialized in the 1980s, offering a multidisciplinary framework to re-thinking children, childhoods, and learning (Berman & Abawi, 2019; Bloch et al., 2014; MacNaughton & Davis, 2009; Pacini-Ketchabaw et al., 2011; Taylor, 2011). Reconceptualist theories assert that mainstream psychological-developmentalist norms privilege the experiences and ways of knowing of

white, able-bodied, and cis-gender children by framing childhood development as ahistorical, apolitical, and colour-blind (Abawi & Berman, 2019; Iannacci & Whitty, 2009; Lubeck, 1994; MacNaughton & Davis, 2009; Pacini-Ketchabaw & Nxumalo, 2013; Taylor, 2007).

Given the conclusions of the body of work on race and anti-racism in early childhood education, anti-racism approaches must be embedded in early childhood teacher preparation programs in order to disrupt racial inequities reinforced by unequal power relations, curriculum, and classroom practices. Until such a time where this is taken up, however, the research team sought to provide professional development on anti-racism, in particular on addressing anti-Black racism, to the early childhood sector in Ontario. The timing of this effort is addressed below.

The Knowledge-sharing Initiative

During the summer of 2021, the research team, with support from the project's community partners (the Association of Early Childhood Educators Ontario (AECEO) and the College of Early Childhood Educators (CECE)) provided four no-cost, two-hour on-line sessions in anti-racism pedagogies geared toward the ECE profession in Ontario. This project was funded by the federal government through a Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council Connections grant.

The Team

The project team consisted of faculty members from various institutions, led by Principal Investigator Dr. Rachel Berman, professor, and graduate program director at the School of Early Childhood Studies at Toronto Metropolitan University. The co-investigators included Dr. Beverly-Jean Daniel, associate professor at Toronto Metropolitan University's School of Child and Youth Care, Dr. Alana Butler, assistant professor at Queen's University's Faculty of Education; Dr. Zuhra Abawi, assistant professor at Niagara University's College of Education; and Ms. Natalie Royer, a consultant at Saroy Group Inc. Each member of the team has expertise in research and teaching in areas concerning race and young children. Some of the members were part of the research project that took place during 2014–2016, *Can we talk about race? Confronting Colour Blindness in Early Childhood Settings*, and, due to similar research interests in anti-racism in the ECE sector, the team expanded to include academics who shared the same vision. The AECEO and the CECE promoted the event through their websites, social media, and listservs; created a reflection resource document; and provided certificates upon the completion of the sessions. Dr. Kerry-Ann Escayg, an associate professor of early childhood education at the University of Nebraska-Omaha's College of Education was hired as a facilitator and session developer. Dr. Escayg developed the content for sessions one, three, and four, while Dr. Daniel developed the content for session two. Dr. Escayg's work is focused on anti-racism in early childhood education, children and race, qualitative research with children, and Black children's racial identity development. Dr. Daniel's research interests centre on the production and treatment of difference to explore questions of race, racism, and equity in education and justice systems in Canada. Three students were hired as research assistants for this initiative: Stephanie Jones and Kadeem Brown, both students at Toronto Metropolitan University, and Fikir Haile, a doctoral student at Queen's University.

Timing

Why now? To put the project into a context, it is important to know that during the 1990s, following Stephen Lewis's 1992 provincial report on race relations and the activism of Black women, the City of Toronto Children's Services put in place a number of requirements for anti-racism practice and policy in childcare settings. In their *Can we talk about race?* project, Berman et al. (2017) discovered these requirements had subsequently been "forgotten," ignored, or removed on both the part of childcare centres and the provincial government. Given that such efforts had been silenced, the very public murder of George Floyd in May of 2021 that had propelled the topic to the top of public consciousness, and galvanized by the Black Lives Matter movement, the research team felt the time had come to mobilize their research expertise to provide anti-racism education for the province's early childhood sector.

Purpose

The specific objectives of these sessions were:

- to help educators develop an understanding of the nature, prevalence, and manifestation of racism and anti-Black racism in Ontario and Canada;
- to become more aware of the effects of racism and anti-Black racism on children, families, and communities;

- to understand how anti-Black racism impacts Black children and shapes their racial awareness;
- to recognize the salience of anti-racism practices in early childhood education;
- to develop skills regarding anti-racism pedagogy;
- to recognize the importance of critical self-reflection in relation to building positive, respectful relationships with racialized families;
- to foster respectful dialogue with colleagues in regard to race and racism.

The sessions have been briefly described below; any copyrighted information has been omitted.

Session Overviews and Organization

The first session, "Racism and anti-Black Racism in Canada," provided a critical historical and contemporary overview of manifestations of race and anti-Black racism pertaining to Canada and the Canadian education system.

The first session allowed educators to:

- use a variety of self-reflection and reflective practice tools;
- explore how anti-Black racism impacts the life chances and opportunities of Black communities;
- use critical dialogue to unpack the multifaceted ways in which curricular approaches and epistemological underpinnings marginalize and silence issues and incidents of race and anti-Black racism in early learning spaces.

The second session, "Understanding Concepts of Diversity," outlined shifting demographic trends across Canada, characterized by increasing diversity among race, gender, sexual orientation, social class, religion, and other social identities. Despite such seismic demographic shifts, early childhood learning spaces and early childhood teacher training programs have not kept pace.

This session provided educators with:

- the opportunity to engage in critical dialogue through a shared language to explore and understand discourses and narratives of difference and othering;
- a focus on how identities intersect and inform social location and positionality;
- an understanding of how such intersectionalities impact the lived experiences of the children and families they work with.

In the remaining sessions, participants explored concepts related to children, race and racism, anti-racism partnerships with families, and pedagogy in the early years. Recognizing children's racial competencies and rethinking approaches to parental engagement are not only critical components of anti-racism in ECE but also complement anti-racism pedagogy. The four sessions were not recorded because the facilitators believed this might inhibit open and honest conversation. As one participant noted, the sessions were "safe but candid." All participants were sent additional resources and the PowerPoint slides after the four sessions.

Participants

Held over two weeks in July 2021 via Zoom, 498 out of an available 500 tickets were booked in advance of the sessions. In the end, over 300 people attended. While initially planned for people living in Ontario, because of the virtual nature of the program, people from across Canada and North America were able to join us for these sessions. Most attendees were from Ontario. Attendees came from a variety of backgrounds, including childcare staff, agency leads, early childhood education students, and college and university faculty. While the sessions were originally designed for 300 attendees, because of the overwhelming demand, we made technological upgrades to accommodate as many people as possible. Each of these Zoom sessions featured hundreds of attendees to whom our speakers gave presentations, shared resources, and asked questions to spur engagement. Participants' interest and engagement, as evidenced by the robust conversations and exchanges that were happening in the Chat feature on Zoom, was quite high across all four sessions.

Pre-sessions Data

Prior to the sessions, the team wanted an understanding of the background of participants. The team prepared and sent out five pre-sessions survey questions and received 218 responses. The purpose of the survey was not to evaluate changes in beliefs or practice after the sessions but, rather, were designed for other purposes. First, the questions were used to assess participants' existing understanding and experience with anti-racism training in ECE. Questions one and two asked participants

whether they had received anti-racism training as part of their ECE diploma, degree, or professional development. Question three sought to assess what proportion of participants actively sought out and consulted anti-racism resources in their work, while question four measured to what degree participants actively thought about their own positionality in relation to anti-racism in ECE. Finally, question five asked participants what they hoped to learn from the sessions. While most of the questions were used to measure participants' level of understanding before the sessions, question five was especially useful in helping presenters tailor the sessions to what participants most wanted to learn.

The responses were exceptionally useful for the sessions and informative about anti-racism in the ECE landscape. Most respondents (72.5%) had not received anti-racism training as part of their ECE diploma or degree program, while 22.2% had. Fifty-two percent (52%) of respondents had received anti-racism professional development through their employers, which included municipalities, school boards, agencies, childcare centres, hospitals, or professional organizations, while 44% had not. Some noted engaging in conversations with colleagues or choosing to do informal professional development on their own (readings, listening to podcasts). However, while some respondents specifically noted training in anti-racism in their responses, others included training in anti-bias, cultural competence, diversity, and inclusion. Forty-three percent (43%) noted consulting anti-racism resources specific to ECE for program/planning, while 45% did not. A majority of respondents (69%) believed that they were aware of their own identities and implicit biases and how these impacted their practice, programming, and interactions with children, families, and communities.

Respondents gave a variety of responses to the question of what they hoped to learn in these sessions. Some of the most common responses were:

- wanting to learn how to include anti-racism in planning, curriculum, programming, and everyday teaching;
- looking for resources, including books, teaching materials and resources, to share with students and families;
- wanting to develop the vocabulary to have anti-racism conversations with their own positionality in mind;
- wanting to learn how to address situations that arise in the course of their work;
- wanting to understand their own biases and how to challenge/overcome them;
- wanting to create a more inclusive and welcoming space for all;
- wanting to better support their students and families;
- wanting to teach their own children about anti-racism;
- for personal development and growth.

Figure 1

Respondents who received anti-racism training as part of their ECE diploma or degree program

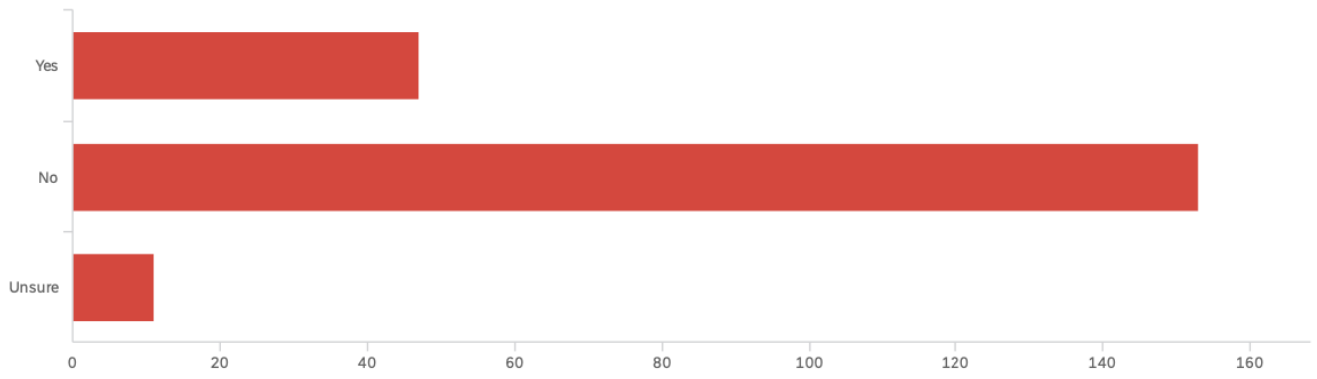


Figure 2

Participants who received anti-racism professional development or training through their employer or professional association

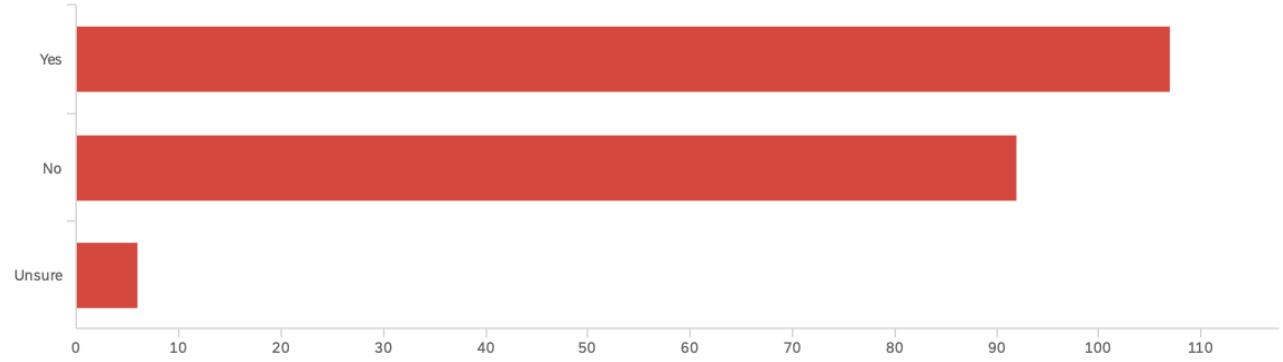


Figure 3

Respondents who consult anti-racism, in particular anti-Black racism, resources specific to ECE for their programming

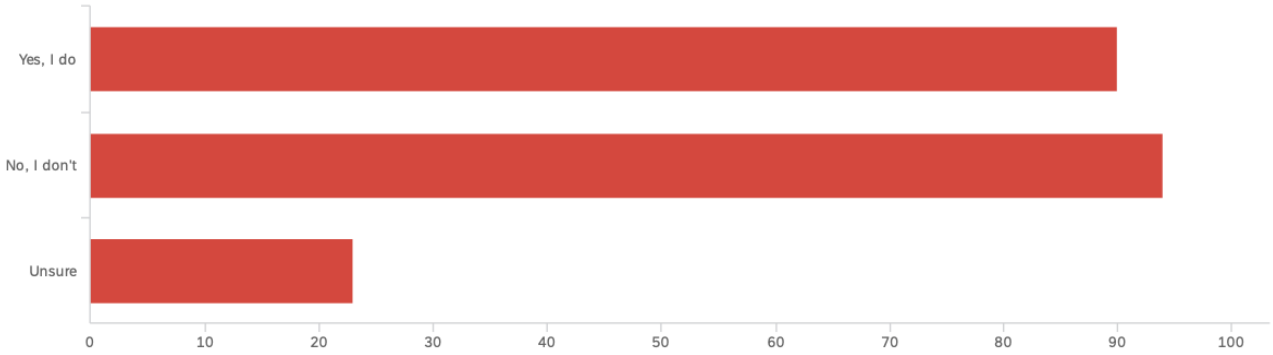
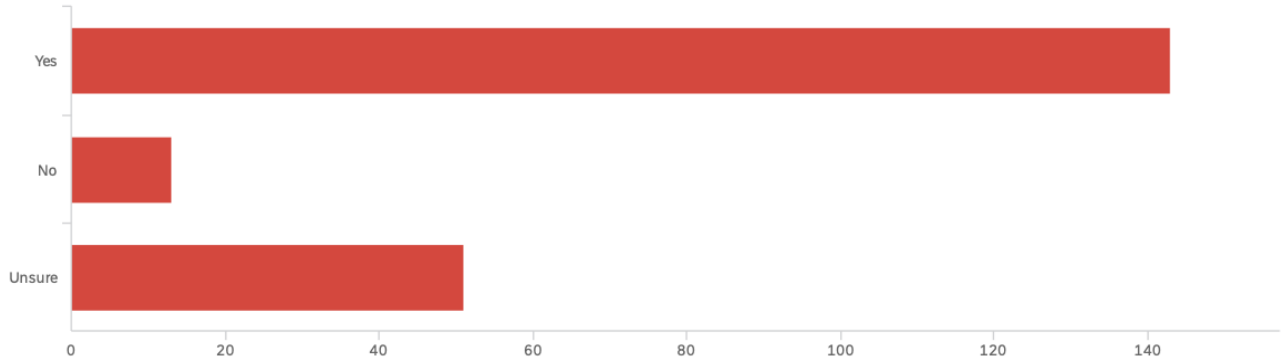


Figure 4

Respondents who believe they are aware of their identity(s) and implicit biases and how such biases may impact their professional practice, programming, and interaction with children, families, and the communities they serve



Results from the pre-sessions data allowed the team to gauge the scope of anti-racism educational and professional development experiences participants had. The findings revealed the gaps in participant professional knowledge and learning that helped inform the approach to the four sessions.

Post-sessions Data

Participants were given a reflection resource document created by the College of ECE that they could fill out after each session. This resource invited participants to reflect on the major takeaways from the session, what new information they learned, how they planned to change their practice, and what they would like to learn more about. A private document that they did not have to share with the organizers, this resource was designed as a space for deeper reflection after each session. It was hoped that completion of this form would encourage participants to take time to more fully engage with the themes that were raised in each session.

In addition to the private reflection resource document, the team also conducted a post-sessions survey to assess what respondents had learned, what they found most helpful, and how the sessions could be improved in the future. We received 69 responses to the post-sessions survey. Post-sessions survey responses were significantly lower, as low as 10 and 11 per cent in many instances, in line with the team's expectations. Question one asked participants to identify key learnings from the sessions and to detail why this specific learning was most impactful. Question two called on participants to outline the ways in which the sessions informed their roles and responsibilities in the ECE field. Question three sought to understand which resources educators found most helpful in enhancing their understanding of anti-Black racism in Canada and early childhood education. Questions four and five encouraged participants to provide feedback, such as what could have been done to improve the sessions, as well as what they felt went well. Finally, question six provided an opportunity for participants to post any lingering questions or comments for the team and facilitators.

Most respondents found that the four sessions greatly impacted their professional learning as early childhood teachers. Although the response rate was significantly lower for the post-sessions survey than that of the pre-sessions survey, there were several emerging themes. These included the pervasiveness of colour-blind and bias-free approaches based on assumptions that children are too young, developmentally, to discuss and understand race and racism. The naming of race and racism and being direct when responding to incidents of racism, especially anti-Black racism and microaggressions, as well as the acknowledgement of racism in Canada against the backdrop of multiculturalism was noted. Many participants called for more training programs on anti-racism, both at their centres and at early childhood teacher preparation programs. For example: "I am a black woman in the field who is doing much work on decolonizing my being to bring authenticity to the field. This webinar should be mandatory because I see and deal with racism at work every day."

While many participants mentioned the importance of understanding issues of anti-racism, especially anti-Black racism, many others deflected to a bias-free approach to facilitating inclusive classrooms, such as treating everyone the same and including everyone. There appeared to be a hesitancy toward naming and acknowledging difference, in tune with Western psychological-developmentalist epistemologies that are rooted in the Derman-Sparks *Anti-Bias Curriculum* (1989, 2020) and which continue to inform early childhood teacher preparation programs and curricular approaches and norms. The *Anti-Bias Curriculum* views diversity as a positive, celebratory phenomenon and encourages the use of diverse materials and resources, without recognizing the silencing of any dialogue or understanding of the power relations that inform racial differences. Even after these sessions, many of the strategies that educators referred to in creating more anti-racism classroom and learning environments aligned with tenets of the anti-bias approach or additive multiculturalism, such as increased diversity in classroom materials, for example: "Include all religions/race"; "Having different cultural dolls"; "I have learned the ways we can incorporate inclusion in our classrooms."

The responses to question three on anti-Black racism were substantially less detailed and focused more on what resources they enjoyed from the sessions and wanted to utilize going forward. There was less discussion on how educators might interrupt, disrupt, and interrogate anti-Black racism carried out through play, interactions, and responses to and with Black children and families, and how they could conceptualize their role in being an ally, although this was certainly

noted by some respondents. Some more direct resistance also came through, as did a few racist comments. One participant wrote: "It was difficult to hear so much about 'white privilege people' as I don't consider myself a racist person however it was a great opportunity for self-reflection." Another participant accused a presenter of being "anti-white."

The responses that take up a multicultural approach indicate not only a colour-blind lens, as the respondents do not acknowledge the implications and importance of power relations in terms of white privilege; but also the enactment of what Gorski (2019) refers to as *equity detours*. Equity detours are implemented as a mechanism to avoid conversations of race and racism and thus detour from their salience. In cases of direct resistance, the respondents detoured from engaging in anti-racism, self-reflective praxis by claiming they are not racist or by accusing Black women of being anti-white and invoking claims of reverse-racism.

Recommendations and Next Steps

There were only four sessions over the span of two weeks, and we recognize that anti-racism pedagogies, training, allyship, and practice are not single events but rather processes that require systemic, structural, and institutional changes. Thus, these sessions are meant to be a component of an anti-racism learning journey that educators must commit to in order to be anti-racism educators, allies, and practitioners. We need to increase ECE community capacity building and continue ECE training in anti-racism pedagogies.

We received a number of useful ideas regarding our approach, for example, one participant suggested: "Maybe have a group of sessions for people just beginning the anti-racism journey and another session for individuals who've already done extensive work to be anti-racist."

While the sessions were meant to build on one another, not everyone attended all four for whatever reason and, as one participant noted, "I think folks that missed the first week were not able to fully grasp content."

Other feedback dealt with the structure of the sessions, for example, appreciating the use of Padlet or positive or negative comments with the way Chat was utilized in Zoom.

It is very clear from the data gathered for this initiative that anti-racism education is particularly salient in a racially diverse context like the province of Ontario. Ontario is often touted as one of the world's most diverse regions (United Way, 2019), with Toronto, its capital and largest city, having the motto of *Diversity Our Strength*. In 2016, 3.8 million Ontarians—representing 29.3% of the total population—identified as racialized (Statistics Canada, 2016). However, despite projections from Statistics Canada (2016) that the racialized population of Ontario would grow significantly faster than the non-racialized population, Black and racialized Ontarians continue to face steep barriers in accessing opportunities. Black and racialized Ontarians are overrepresented in precarious and dangerous employment, income disparities, and obstacles to obtaining healthcare, housing, and education (Colour of Poverty, 2019; United Way, 2019). Additionally, while the available data on the early childhood sector workforce are limited, as noted earlier, numerous trends suggest that the field is becoming defined by precarious labour and the feminization of poverty, which cannot be isolated from race (Abawi, et al., 2019).

Racial inequities in access to opportunities such as employment, education, and other services emerge in the early years and set the foundation for future trajectories. The emerging themes of colour-blindness, being bias-free, and the unwillingness to name and address racism and racist incidents contribute to the overall complicity in racism and racist practices, particularly on part of the state, which oversees education. These practices and policies become more lethal over time, from the handcuffing of young Black children in schools, the push out of Black and other racialized students from High School, and predatory child welfare policies to name but a few problematic outcomes.

While the role of ECEs in child welfare reporting across the province is ambiguous due to a lack of data, we do know that Black children and families are overrepresented in child welfare. A report released by the Ontario Human Rights Commission (OHRC) in 2018 entitled: *Interrupted Childhoods: Overrepresentation of Indigenous and Black children in Ontario Child Welfare* attributes this overrepresentation to multiple factors, including disparities in income and access to opportunities due to Ontario's racially stratified job market, ongoing settler-colonialism, and the intergenerational trauma of colonial violence and slavery, as well as Eurocentric norms of children,

childhoods, and parenting. Systemic racism in Canada, which manifests itself within racist surveillance and policing practices and notably disproportionate child welfare involvement in Black and Indigenous families, is reflected in the glaring omission of anti-racism pedagogies in pre-service programs and professional development. Canadian racialized disparities, or "racial profiling" practices exist due to embedded Eurocentric norms, narratives, and epistemologies that pathologize and "other" non-white families and children (OHRC, 2018). Thus, the implications of supposedly being race-neutral by downplaying the salience of race and racism in early childhood contexts has far-reaching, often violent and cruel implications for Black and other racialized children, families, and communities.

Because young children are constantly engaged in meaning-making encounters of race and racism, whether the encounters be through play interactions or relationships among early childhood teachers, families, or communities, resources, materials, and curriculum must constantly be challenged and deconstructed to resist the normalcy of white supremacy and white privilege. Educators must not shy away from critical conversations and interactions involving race and racism and must coherently name them when they arise, a tendency that was revealed in the project's findings. As the study by Berman and colleagues (2017) indicated, colour-blind attitudes in the early childhood sector prevent racism from being addressed. Our sessions interrupted this colour-evasiveness by advocating for and calling on early childhood teachers to take part in conversations and dialogue in order to be anti-racism educators and allies. The rise in anti-Asian acts during the pandemic also speaks to the necessity of talking about race and racism with pre-service educators, those in the field already, and with children. Additionally, while this training did not focus on confronting anti-Indigenous racism (AIR), attention to AIR and Indigenous ways of knowing and approaches to ECE must also receive further attention in professional development and pre-service education (Simon, 2021; TRC, 2015).

It is important to note that not all Black and other racialized educators will be uniformly anti-racist, and it is important that all educators self-reflect and engage in their own critical unpacking of their positionalities and how their social location impacts pedagogies, interactions, and relationships with children and families. Our sessions scratched the surface of the depth of work required across the province. With ongoing anti-racism learning and critical dialogue, such as that facilitated within our sessions, the early childhood landscape across Ontario can be reimagined as spaces where children and educators actively engage in and explore social constructions of identities, notions of belonging, and resistance to tendencies of white supremacy disguised by race-neutral or colour-denial approaches. The field must embrace Black joy (Dunn & Love, 2020)!

In response to a string of police violence against Black people, most notably the murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis, Minnesota, a Community of Black ECEs, a group affiliated with the Association of Early Childhood Educators Ontario, formed in the fall of 2020 to demand that ECE programs in Ontario:

- Include a mandatory course on anti-racism, taught by a Black educator, in the first year of all pre-service early childhood programs. This course must centre Black and Indigenous scholarship and theory and consider how trauma, gender, and disability intersect with race to ensure multiple identities are explored.
- Insert anti-racist frameworks into the entirety of all pre-service early childhood courses provided in Ontario universities and colleges.
- Contribute to the development of anti-racist policies within the entirety of the childcare system. (https://antiracismece.wixsite.com/ontario).

Whether pre-service ECE programs in Ontario answer these calls to action remains to be seen, but, realistically, can young Black children and their families bear the wait? Delay is denial. Early childhood educators, regulatory bodies, and colleges and universities offering pre-service programs must become more transformative in their practices, policies, and initiatives toward anti-racism, and continue to work for early childhood pedagogy and curriculum to be more socially just.

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