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“Safe and Sound”: Anti-Racist Curriculum Models for the Early Years Classroom

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*Race* continues to be an ongoing and pervasive problem within the United States. Nevertheless, many early childhood teachers remain reluctant to teach children about racism and racial justice in their classrooms. In this paper, we offer an anti-racist curriculum model for helping children identify, resist, and respond to racism in constructive ways. We discuss rationales behind teaching children about race and racism. Next, we describe broad goals for an early childhood anti-racist curriculum. We conclude with practical examples that early childhood teachers might draw from as they develop and implement activities aimed at helping children work toward racial justice.

**Introduction**

After bearing witness to the recent murders of Ahmaud Arbery, George Floyd, Amir Locke, and Breonna Taylor, politically organized sectors of the American public at both federal and state levels have begun a process of consciousness raising around the devastating effects of systemic racism against Black Americans. Although on the federal political stage, the United States may have committed to healing—in the aftermath of innumerable racially-motivated killings, many parents, teachers, and caregivers are left with ongoing questions about how to broach issues of race and racism in their classrooms in meaningful, productive ways. Indeed, for many early childhood educators, the “safest” or least provocative way to address race and racism in the classroom with young children is often to focus on similarities and/or commonalities across different racial groups in specific communities, while simultaneously minimizing or altogether ignoring any differences (Boutte et al., 2011; Winkler, 2012).

As a result, educators in general may opt for so-called colorblind methods that do little to acknowledge, affirm, and incorporate the historical and contemporary experiences of people of color in the US, let alone globally. While categorically discouraging discussions of race and racism in the early years may appear to be a less controversial or even a more politically neutral approach, considerable research suggests that “colorblind” approaches to race and racism fail to adequately educate children from racially diverse and white backgrounds alike (Hagerman, 2019; Waxman, 2021).

Anti-racist early childhood educators may opt to augment and implement a distinctively anti-racist curriculum in their respective teaching contexts as a means of helping children identify, resist, and combat racial injustice in the world around them (Bickford, & Clabough, 2021; Hagerman, 2019; Rollo, 2018). In subsections that follow, the present paper reports on attendant
pedagogical gaps and offers strategies for implementing anti-racist curricula in the early childhood classroom, interrogating curricular violence as experienced by Black children (in engagement with the formal programs and systems espoused and enforced in many early childhood teaching spaces).

More specifically, this interrogation brings to light the psychological consequences for Black children immersed in alienating curricular structures that are hostile to their racial identities. In an ongoing effort to assist teachers in changing time-honored outcomes, anti-racist scholars table broad frameworks for anti-racist curricula suitable to a variety of early childhood contexts. Additionally, by way of defining the overarching tenets and goals that inform anti-racist curriculum development and implementation processes in early childhood classrooms, we provide practical examples for early childhood educators to draw upon as they prepare and contextualize learning materials and educational activities appropriate to their diverse educational settings.

Rationale(s) for Discussing Race and Racism With Young Children

A variety of peer-reviewed studies demonstrate that children may harbor implicit racial biases toward people who do not share the same racial identity (Apfelbaum et al., 2010; Castelli et al., 2009; Dunham et al., 2013). For example, Dunham, Chen, and Banaji (2013) found that children as young as three years of age display implicit racial biases toward people from different racial backgrounds. Their study involved 883 children of Asian, Black, and white descent, ranging from three to 14 years of age. Children were shown a series of faces on a digital screen and asked to identify each face as being either Asian, Black, or white. Some of the images depicted people with angry faces, and others exhibited passive expressions. The skin tone of each face initially appeared in a neutral color. Nonetheless, the white children who participated in the study repeatedly categorized the angry faces as being Black, while the Black children in the study did not. Asian children in the same study also characterized the angry faces as being Black more often than those with passive expressions, which suggests that young children may express biases toward faces that look different from their own (and that those differences are commonly associated with negative character traits).

Another reason for early childhood educators to implement explicitly anti-racist program material in their classrooms pertains to the concept of ethnocentrism. Much of what is taught within formal and informal curricula foregrounds the experiences, perspectives, and histories of whites in American society and globally (Muhammad, 2022; Paris, 2012). Thus, the contributions, experiences, and perspectives of people of color are often minimized or completely overlooked in the curriculum. Consistent with this line of reasoning, Gangi (2008) identifies what she describes as the “unbearable burden of whiteness” (specifically, in literacy instruction). Through a content analysis of thousands of pedagogical textbooks commonly used to teach reading skills, including guided readings, word studies, phonological awareness training, etc., Gangi addresses the “unbearable whiteness” of pedagogy, especially in the field of literacy instruction, where educators teaching these skills lack resources representative of nonwhite experiences, events, and perspectives. Scholars contend that this lack of representation makes it challenging for children of color to fully engage with the materials that are accessible for them to practice reading at school. For this reason, incorporating an anti-
racist curriculum in early childhood classrooms which affirms, highlights, and honors the histories, experiences, and perspectives of people of color stands to facilitate higher levels of literacy engagement in children of color.

Incorporating explicitly anti-racist teaching resources also constitutes a necessary step in supporting children as they begin to develop the requisite knowledge, skills, and dispositions to identify and resist racial injustice in their everyday lives and the broader world around them. In a study involving 60 children—nine Asian and 51 white—ranging from the ages of eight to 11 years, Apfelbaum et al. (2010) found that children who participated in lessons where racial diversity was emphasized were less likely to identify racial injustice than children who participated in lessons where racial diversity was ignored. In this case, the child-participants read alternative versions of a multimedia ‘storybook’: half of the study’s participants read a “colorblind” version of the story, while the other half read a value-diversity version. In both versions, a narrator advocates for racial justice, but the so-called colorblind version downplays race-based distinctions.

By contrast, the value-diversity version encourages and even embraces racial difference and distinctiveness. As children read curricular stories, they receive instruction based on varying degrees of antiracist allegory. In the control story, for example, a white child experiences marginalization at the hands of his white schoolmates while attempting to contribute to a group science project. In the neutral message, a white student excludes a Black student from his birthday party. In the explicitly biased narrative, a white student assaults a Black student at a soccer game. After researchers share each story with the child-participants, children are tasked with collectively describing the three events and their responses are video-recorded. Data analysis subsequently revealed that children who read the value-diversity version of the story were more likely to identify racial discrimination than the children who read the colorblind version. In fact, 43% of the children identified the discriminatory incident as race-based in the covertly racist story, and 77% of the child-participants identified racial discrimination in the overtly biased story.

Interestingly, the frequency with which children recognized discrimination dropped significantly among the children who read the colorblind version. Approximately 10% of these children recognized racial discrimination in the ambiguous story; only about 50% of these children later recognized racial discrimination in the story that portrayed an overt example of racist behavior. This study denotes a clear need for education around issues of racial injustice as a means of equipping children with the pedagogical tools to recognize and respond to such injustice in their everyday lives.

Although discussions about race are typically rare or circumscribed in the early years largely due to teachers’ variable perceptions about children and racial issues, lack of anti-racist training, and restrictions imposed at the state and/or federal level, a parenting practice which instills racial pride and teaches children to overcome racist and possibly hostile encounters endures—namely, racial socialization—persisting as a common practice among Black parents, and even among parents of younger children, including preschoolers (e.g., Blanchard et al., 2019; Caughy et al., 2002; Edwards & Few-Demo, 2016; Lloyd, 2022). Racial socialization exemplifies the cultural strengths of Black families, provides social and emotional benefits for Black children, and serves
as a counter-narrative to the pervasive, deficit-based perspectives on Black/African American familial ties which often taint parent-teacher relationships (Escayg, 2020a). Conversely, in white households, racial socialization that centers on critiquing racism holds the potential to challenge white children’s racial awareness, although much of the empirical work on racial socialization focuses on African American and racialized families.

A review of this subsection of the literature reveals that in many cases, contrary to the parenting strategies of Black Americans, white American parents’ racial socialization strategies are characterized by an absence of racial conversations—also known as a “silence about race”—and/or of messages that evoke egalitarian ideals (Hughes et al., 2006; Zucker & Patterson, 2018). For instance, in a study with parents of four- to seven-year-olds, Vittrup (2018) discovered that while parents endorsed discussions about race, the majority failed to engage in these conversations with their children (which the scholar in question tellingly referred to as a “color-mute” approach). Of equal concern is that among the sample group of participants who discussed racial discrimination and stereotypes, many limited such conversations to historical subject matter, without considering current manifestations of racism.

Concomitantly, in Zucker and Patterson’s (2018) investigation into how white American parents’ racial attitudes, identities, and the racial diversity of their children’s schools, inform their racial socialization strategies with participants aged eight through 12, it was discovered that “less than one-third of parents… indicated that they encouraged their child to talk about racial issues with them” (p. 3923). Such “race silence” conforms to a general pattern, according to the extant findings on white Americans parents’ racial socialization strategies (Abaied & Perry, 2021; Abaied et al., 2021), although enough evidence exists to suggest that some white parents actively engage in “color-conscious” practices (Hagerman, 2014; Zucker & Patterson, 2018). In contrast to colorblind strategies and outright refusals to broach topics around race, color-conscious approaches encompass open, transparent discussions about race, racial injustice, white privilege, and the exposure of children to diverse contexts, including an encouragement of activism and direct action to challenge racism (Hagerman, 2014; Thomas, 2019).

The efforts of some parents to engage in anti-racist parenting notwithstanding, a deafening silence around race, as an overall dearth of research reflects, accounts for central and consistent strategies of omission in the child-rearing repertoire of white parents. And yet, in the absence of anti-racist discussions, in which systemic racism is named and examined critically, young children—especially those who are being raised in predominantly white environments—may further internalize racist messages and beliefs. Clearly, it is both naïve and incongruent with the scholarly literature to posit that colorblind messages can foster anti-racist worldviews in children and youth. In fact, such naïveté stems from a privileged position, one entirely based on race (Bigler et al., 2020). While white privilege is the result of entrenched systems, both economic and socio-cultural, the most pertinent aspect of this privilege as it relates to parenting, pertains to that of the physical and psychological protection which it affords (i.e., feelings of safety and belonging). Put more plainly, white parents do not contend with the same fears and concerns as Black/African American parents. It should be acknowledged that, contrary to the positionality of whiteness and its attendant privileges, daily exposure to anti-Black racism remains a lived reality.
Colonization as “Thingification” and Anti-Black Racism in the United States

Renowned anti-colonial thinker, Aimé Césaire, characterizes the process of colonization as, in part, a “thingification” (1972) or a process via which the colonizer, by way of denying the humanity of the colonized through both psychological and physical violence, reduces them to an object, a nameless “thing.” The “thingification” of the colonized serves as the rationale for oppression and the colonial enterprise. Such a process of racialization was also the ideological lynchpin of slavery; while its legacy continues to be present in the contours and manifestations of white supremacy in the United States, recognizing the distinction between racism in general and the specificity of anti-Black racism is central to re-theorizing and positioning the uniquely embodied Black experiences in anti-racist scholarship, theory, and early childhood teaching practices (for examples, see Boutte & Bryan, 2021).

It is equally important to note that anti-Black racism shelters within—and is supported by—the social constructs of anti-Blackness. In short, anti-Blackness is “…an embodied lived experience of social suffering and resistance, and perhaps most importantly, as an antagonism, in which the Black is a despised thing-in-itself” (Dumas & Ross, 2016, p. 416). The inexcusable violence representative of anti-Black racism manifests in various forms, and especially in the lives of Black children, who suffer from the long term “spirit injuries” associated with racial dehumanization (Love, 2019).

By way of classification, in early childhood education (ECE), Black children encounter physical violence, symbolic violence, and systemic violence, to name but a few common forms of harm (Boutte & Bryan, 2021). More pointedly, ethnographic studies have shown that when among their white peers, Black children experience microaggressions, name-calling, and exclusion (Essien & Wood, 2021), which developmental scholars classify as tantamount to racial trauma (Jernigan & Daniel, 2011). The literature posits that a traditional ECE curriculum may perpetuate anti-Black racism, while acknowledging that a curricular review stands to be effective as a potential instrument—one reoriented toward anti-racist practices grounded in the specificity of Black experiences—of social and emotional well-being for Black children. Since it is beyond the scope of our present discussion to submit the myriad manifestations of anti-Black racism to which Black children are exposed in early childhood spaces, this pedagogical framework amplifies discussions around curricular content.

Interrogating Curriculum Violence in Early Childhood Education

Classifying racism as a form of systemic violence provides insights into the prevalence of curriculum violence in school settings, including early childhood classrooms. Indeed, integrated systems of oppression and racial inequity are intimately linked—via personal experience—to racialized power and privilege (Escayg, 2020a). Venet (2021) usefully defines curriculum violence as consisting of learning materials as well as pedagogical theories that negatively impact children’s psychological well-being and academic success. The reproduction of school-based trauma is a central feature of systemic racial violence, comparable to forms which situate Black children within a skewed institutional narrative of oppression/slavery (Jones, 2020). Instead of presenting Black lives as multifaceted and their acts of resistance as collective
exemplars of hope and agency, curriculum violence categorically disregards the survival strategies of Black children and their families, how they embody Black brilliance and Black success, and how they resisted racism and oppression in the past (and further overlooks their ongoing advocacy for human rights the world over).

In an insightful report on anti-Black violence in early childhood classrooms, Boutte and Bryan (2021) discussed how in one case, a social studies lesson on the origins of the American hate group the Ku Klux Klan was delivered from such a narrow perspective that a child expressed acute fear for the lives of his family, as if in present danger. While comparable examples of curriculum violence abound in elementary schools, we find similar patterns in the preschool and kindergarten years, particularly in play-based settings. As Kinard et al. (2021) observed, play-based pedagogy in the U.S. occurs in context with Eurocentric educational theories, a cultural bias which inevitably privileges white children. Current articulations of anti-racist play-based learning for children more broadly conceptualize the notion of play by way of including the cultural perspectives of racialized groups, notably African Americans and Black peoples of the diaspora (Escayg, 2021). The potential for an anti-racist leveling of organizational constructs shows promise in the ongoing process of transforming the early childhood curriculum such that, through culturally specific centers, literature, and texts, children are routinely exposed to diverse permutations of Black humanity.

Regrettably, across all grade levels, including kindergarten, and in the absence of anti-racist pedagogy, an array of curriculum violence goes unchecked, thereby exacerbating said “spirit injury” (Love, 2019). To expound on the topic of harm reduction in accordance with Love’s model, learning materials and activities designed to educate without accounting for intersections of ancestry and privilege inflict a symbolic wounding on the souls of Black children, who subsequently re-experience and revisit the collective pain and trauma of their ancestors while denied the opportunity to see themselves as agents of change (nor as belonging to a people of strength and rich history). The heartbeat of spirit injury amplifies a sense of grief for the loss of a child’s knowledge about the truth of his/her identity. As Pan-African activist Marcus Garvey admonishes, eradicating a people’s history—with a mind to dissipating their collective identity—also constitutes a blow to the soul, an affliction to which young children are especially vulnerable as part of a vicious cycle of self-hate and indoctrination attributable to Eurocentric ideologies that overlook their collective humanity and individual personhood. Alternatively, a significant measure of redemptive power originates from self-love and ancestral knowledge.

Love, Light, and Liberation: The Anti-Racist Curriculum Model

Definition

The present paper intends to reform curricular material into an uncompromisingly anti-racist theoretical, political, and practical framework for curriculum re-design and implementation designed to equip and empower children with the knowledge, skills, and dispositions necessary to recognize, resist, and respond to various forms of racism in historical and contemporary contexts. In contrast to Western conceptions of educational curricula, an anti-racist curriculum seeks to deconstruct and dismantle whiteness and white supremacy within the formal school curriculum by centering the voices, perspectives, histories, and language systems of people of
color. Children are encouraged to develop a critical consciousness around race and racism via participation in a series of purposeful lesson plans, projects, assignments, and other learning experiences, including play-based environments.

At the early childhood level, anti-racist curricula regulate activity in play-based settings at evocatively designed anti-racist centers, in the practice of literacy activities that promote racial pride and an awareness of systemic injustices, and by way of teacher-guided play based on anti-racist pedagogical documentation which supports children in confronting racism and thinking critically about race. Contemporary studies explicitly foregrounding the experiences and perspectives of African American children—often from a site of interrogation that seeks to accurately delineate, “what is whiteness?” (Escayg, 2020b)—also highlight questions around how racism Black children in psychological terms. Interestingly, the preceding study’s apparatus of data analysis revealed that children indicated both internalizing (with sadness and fear being most frequent) and externalizing behaviors (acting out of negative emotions such as anger) when prompted to disclose their feelings about racism and injustice in an American social context. To redress such damaging effects, a wide-ranging anti-racist early years curriculum advocates for Black children’s mental health, socio-emotional well-being, and the discovery of their own path of resistance by safeguarding opportunities to first develop a strong and positive racial identity, in order to better confront the emotional complexities related to racial trauma.

**Goals**

As indicated in anti-bias and anti-racist pedagogy, early childhood educators may inadvertently endorse so-called colorblind ideologies in their respective workspaces. Rather than focusing on how social networks of racial discrimination and social injustice continue to encroach on the operations of classrooms and care centers, some teachers intentionally ignore or ‘turn a colorblind eye’ to such seemingly controversial topics. An anti-racist early childhood curriculum appropriate for unilateral use across current developmental contexts pursues, as a minimum, the following pedagogical goals: a) anti-racist action; b) racial identity development; c) racialized knowledge acquisition; d) promotion of racial awareness; and e) racial healing (see Figure 1).

As it pertains to anti-racist action in praxis, the primary goal of an anti-racist curriculum is for children to develop a critical consciousness (Freire, 2000) of race and racism in the world, to centralize discussions of race, racism, and racial justice. Curriculum content that conveys an awareness of the systemic effects of racism in a meaningful and sustained manner likewise supports children in casting off an uninformed, apolitical, superficial, and almost “magical” (Freire, 2000) state of cognizance about race and racism, and taking on a critical stance toward social justice issues. A child’s capability to fathom concepts of race and racism, and to understand such concepts in ways unique to their own experience, affords a significant foundational element in the identity development stage.

The secondary goal of an anti-racist early childhood curriculum aims toward the development of a positive—and non-supremacist—racial identity. Reviews of the current anti-racist pedagogical outcomes reveal that white children often display implicit biases against racialized adults and children. In the interest of practicality, a sustainable or ‘self-perpetuating’ early childhood
curriculum subverts misconceptions such as white superiority to combat and eradicate these implicit racial biases in the hearts and minds of children, and instead infuse the classroom

![Diagram of Anti-Racist Early Childhood Curriculum]

**Figure 1**  
*Curricular Goals of an Anti-Racist Early Childhood Education*

with content that celebrates and focalizes the diverse perspectives of people of color. By incorporating imagery into a rigorous process of exposing children to positive, affirmative, and non-prejudiced information about people of color, educators stand to disrupt the racially biased stereotypes that white children may be harboring in the early years (Aboud, 2008). At the same time, the process will lead children of color to develop a positive sense of self in relation to other racial groups in their community (Johnson & Aboud, 2017).

The third goal of an anti-racist early childhood curriculum is to assist children of all racial backgrounds in acquiring authentic, valid, and accurate knowledge about the activism, histories, movements, and language systems of people of color. As research shows, the formal curricula replicated in many early childhood learning spaces intend to minimize and neglect the experiences of Black people. As a result, most white children are exempt from pedagogical interactions based on Black history in meaningful, ongoing, and factually accurate ways (Boutte & Bryan, 2021). Even more so, due to the exclusion of racially diverse perspectives and experiences from the curriculum, children of color are similarly denied opportunities to learn about their own racial heritage in authentic, meaningful, and sustainable ways.
An anti-racist curriculum seeks to equip children with the requisite personality traits necessary in any process of identifying and naming racial injustice—which may include a natural curiosity and/or a predisposition toward such learning ‘for knowledge’s sake’—and then prompts them to respond in constructive ways. To follow up on the preceding conception by Césaire, the dehumanization of Black people affects nearly every institution and system worldwide. Consequently, children are likely to face racism at some point in or perhaps at many times throughout their daily lives. Therefore, children’s voices must be amplified as they develop the ability to recognize, resist, and respond to racial bias and injustice in constructive and developmentally appropriate ways. In keeping with this amplification policy, an anti-racist curriculum provides opportunities to advocate for racial justice in both local and global contexts. After carefully weighing the intersectional factors brought to bear on a particular social justice issue—immigration programs, racial profiling, racist language, etc.—by virtue of engaging in anti-racist praxis, children are encouraged to develop and enact a plan of action to combat the social issue in question. In this sense, an anti-racist early childhood curriculum seeks to move beyond helping children acquire theoretical knowledge related to race and racism and toward empowering children with the tools that they need to apply this knowledge in meaningful and actionable social contexts.

Combating racism is a commitment and practice that should not be limited to the confines of a single school or classroom. As a result, an anti-racist curriculum seeks to provide opportunities for teachers and children to partner with families and community members to identify, resist, and respond to racism in constructive and sustainable ways. A comprehensive anti-racist curriculum provides spaces and opportunities where families and community members associated with the institution can pool their knowledge and expertise related to race and racial justice.

The penultimate goal of anti-racist early childhood education, at a curricula/pedagogical level, is to establish and facilitate spaces where Black children can work toward healing from racial trauma. In association with an array of psychological conditions made manifest in young children, the study of related forms of trauma constitutes a growing field of medical research (Jernigan & Daniel, 2011; Saleem et al., 2020). As Saleem et al. (2020) noted, “direct or vicarious experiences with RST (racial stress trauma) may elicit trauma symptoms, fear, helplessness, and worry about the bodily integrity of themselves and their caregivers based on race” (p. 5); however, a lack of fully developed social-cognitive skills may hinder children’s ability to articulate and interpret such encounters (Saleem et al., 2020). In any case, the significant impact of racial trauma on the well-being of young children necessitates the inclusion of anti-racist educational and psychological curricular supports.

Thus, we propose that a psychological framework of radical healing, which includes central components such as strength and resistance, social and emotional support, critical consciousness, and cultural authenticity and self-knowledge (French et al., 2020, p. 24) should inform any anti-racist early years curriculum from the planning stage. To this end, such models may be of use by way of instructing early childhood educators on the prevention of—and resilience against—racial trauma (French et al., 2020, p. 24; Moseley et al., 2021). Anti-racist curricular scaffolding, as described in the preceding scholarship, proffers sound support for young Black children healing from and resisting the psychological impact of racism. As an example, for preschoolers aged four and five, a broadly Black-centered play-based approach means that the content at
individual centers reflects the racial identities of students and their families. Dependent on preschool and childcare programs at each institution and how they draw on students’ cultural traditions, a writing center might include messages to Black authors, while a gross motor center could feature Black inventors (along with storytelling to be carried out at an informal drama center). In findings congruent with the extant literature (Mosley et al., 2021), we acknowledge positive racial identity development as a foundational step toward acquiring a critical racial consciousness. Simply put, instead of institutionalizing the Eurocentric traditional play-based classroom, when steeped in Afrocentric values and ideals, such spaces can serve as sources of both joy and discovery for Black children. It is only from within a locus of belonging and positive racial identity that critical consciousness emerges, and hopefully, flourishes.

**Conclusion and Considerations**

Anti-racist early years pedagogy argues for the implementation of an explicitly anti-racist curriculum in learning spaces as a means of combatting implicit racial biases, stereotypes, and underrepresentation within the formal and informal curricula, and for developing racial pride, encouraging activism, and promoting racial justice. While scholars certainly view this endeavor as both critical and necessary, we further acknowledge that educators must first carefully consider three important and necessary action steps prior to engaging in curriculum work with a mind for social transformation. First, anti-racist curriculum development must begin with critical self-reflection related to the ways in which race and racism operate in the world in general, and within personal and professional lives individually (Milner, 2020). Since early childhood educators operate within a system that deems topics of race and racism as taboo, some educators will make neither time nor effort to consider how race and racism may directly and/or indirectly influence their daily interactions with children, expectations of children, disciplinary practices, and curriculum design implementation (Dillard, 2019). For this reason, early childhood educators should devote a considerable amount of time and energy to reflecting on the ways in which race and racism shape their attitudes and subsequently, their decision-making, in the classroom.

In addition to engaging in critical self-reflection related to racism and racism, designing, and implementing an anti-racist curriculum requires that early childhood educators perform an audit of any formal curricular structures which currently inform teaching on racial stereotypes, racial representation, and racial justice (Muhammad, 2022). In other words, prior to developing and implementing an anti-racist curriculum, early childhood teachers should closely examine and audit the degrees to which racial stereotypes currently exist within their curriculum. For educators who use a play-based curriculum, it is imperative to reflect critically on their approach to pedagogical documentation, their interpretations of Black children’s and racialized children’s play, and how white children engage in racialized play to assert dominance and control in their peer interactions with Black children, thereby reinforcing practices germane to anti-Blackness and anti-Black racism. Next, early childhood teachers should aim to identify, quantify, and compare the extent to which the experiences, histories, language systems, and knowledge bases of people of color are represented in the curriculum, in relation to those of white people. A process of auditing the current curriculum will indicate to what degree the curriculum disproportionately foregrounds whiteness; this process will also reveal areas within the early childhood curriculum where the experiences, histories, language systems, and knowledge bases of people of color have been minimized or categorically excluded.
When anti-racist early childhood educators engage in the indispensable processes of critical self-reflection and racialized curriculum auditing, they are laying a psychological and educational foundation for the social and political commitments necessary to developing a curriculum that centers the experiences, histories, languages systems, and knowledge bases of people of color. In other words, early childhood teachers should work toward developing and implementing curriculum content that foregrounds and highlights the past and present ways of knowing and being of people of color. Rather than designing an early childhood curriculum that shares the contributions of Indigenous people in the United States in relation to the experiences and contributions of white people, an early childhood teacher pursuant to an anti-racist curriculum should only include the experiences of white people as tangential to the experiences of Indigenous people. This process ensures that Indigeneity is neither minimized nor excluded from the curriculum—too often the case in early childhood classrooms—by centering the contributions of racialized groups as a key component in anti-racist early years education.

Although discussions of such sensitive topics are both vehemently discouraged and outwardly opposed in customary institutional contexts, the work of committed anti-racist educators reminds us that change is possible. Like #BlackLivesMatter, which began as an online tribute to Trayvon Martin in 2013, anti-racism, broadly construed, has evolved into a movement to combat increasingly violent forms of injustice in a systemic way. As referenced throughout, thoroughgoing critiques of current approaches to the early years redress curricular deficiencies while reconceptualizing the meaning and value of education, and in so doing, engaging children with the precepts fundamental to anti-racism, equity, and social change.

Curriculum is plainly but one method by which anti-racist pedagogy seeks to combat the harm of anti-Blackness and the systemic racist violence which disrupt learning processes in the early years, erupting in hallways and in schoolyards, poisoning children’s minds, and assailing their souls. With the implementation of an anti-racist curriculum, however, the process of teaching and learning serves as a developmental conduit of racial pride, resistance, and self-knowledge. To such an auspicious and worthy goal should all educators aspire; otherwise, what outcomes can be hoped for our children?

Author Notes

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