



**AMPLIFYING THE VOICES OF BLACK FAMILIES AND
EDUCATORS IN NOVA SCOTIA:
*Challenging Anti-Black Racism in Early Childhood
Environments*
Community Report July 2022**

PREPARED BY

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Land Acknowledgement

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Our research was conducted in Mi'kma'ki, the ancestral and unceded territory of the Mi'kmaq people. This territory is covered by the "Treaties of Peace and Friendship," which the Mi'kmaq and Wolastoqiyik (Maliseet) people first signed with the British Crown in 1725. The treaties did not deal with the surrender of lands and resources but recognized Mi'kmaq and Wolastoqiyik (Maliseet) titles and established the rules for what was to be an ongoing relationship between nations.

We also pay respect to the histories, contributions, and legacies of African Nova Scotian communities that have been here for over 400 years and the 52 African Nova Scotian communities throughout the region today.

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Amplifying the Voices of Black Families and Educators: A Community Research Report

Study Background

- As a result of anti-Black racism, Black children, including African Nova Scotian children, are provided with fewer learning opportunities compared to White children.
- There is an opportunity gap in the early childhood period (1-5 years) that can impact children's mental and physical wellbeing, academic achievement, and access to learning, recreation and play opportunities.
- Our research was guided by the following Critical Race Theory principles:
 - 1) Racism is everywhere, all the time;
 - 2) Storytelling and personal experience is invaluable;
 - 3) True fight for equity requires more than remaining neutral, objective, and color blind;
 - 4) The stories of those whom the system oppresses must be heard; and
 - 5) The goal must always remain focused on seeking social justice.

Study goals:

Our focus was to understand the experiences of early childhood educators (ECEs) and parents in Nova Scotia who have and care for young Black children through three areas:

- How Black children in Nova Scotia access play including risky and outdoor play;
- How racism and discrimination are experienced by Black children in Nova Scotia in the early childhood period;
- How families and ECEs view the early learning and child care environment for Black children in Nova Scotia.

Who participated in the study?

Participants	Racial Identity	Location	Gender/Relationship
7 Parents of Black children in Nova Scotia aged 18 months - 5 years old	6 Black 1 White	6 HRM 1 Preston Township	1 Father 6 Mothers
8 Early Childhood Educators who work in African Nova Scotian communities or with Black children	2 Black 2 Biracial/ African Descent 4 White	4 HRM 2 Preston Township 2 Rural	1 Man 7 Women

OUTDOOR PLAY FOR BLACK CHILDREN IN NOVA SCOTIA

This section focuses on how risky and outdoor play is accessed and perceived by Black families in Nova Scotia.

Black families and ECEs value outdoor play

- Families and ECEs in African Nova Scotian communities spoke fondly about their own experiences with outdoor play as young children.
- Participants described personal experiences growing up in Black communities, where unsupervised, free play was encouraged and normalized.

Families are fearful of over-policing, stereotyping, and over-surveillance

- Participants across communities spoke about the fear families experience when Black children engage in risky play due to the consequences associated with potential injuries.
- Participants shared the history of over-surveillance on Black parents through child protective services and the medical system.

"They're gonna get hovered over if they go to the [children's hospital], and we've had situations in the past where the mom would call me and say, 'The social worker is gonna call you and you need to let them know that this happened at daycare,' so yeah there is a fear of that extra policing." -ECE

Outdoor play spaces are limited in many historic African Nova Scotian communities

- Black children have fewer opportunities to engage safely in play due to negative interactions, a lack of inclusive spaces, and unsafe infrastructure.
- Participants stated that African Nova Scotian communities have not received infrastructure upgrades and amenities compared to other communities, such as those for playgrounds, recreation centres, and parks.
- Some communities lacked sidewalks, safe speed limits, and effective public transportation.



"Yeah, I definitely think outdoor play is important... He loves it outside and he loves playing, getting dirty... Even at home when he's just watching, he goes to the door, gets his coat, and his boots, and kind of just looks at me."

-Parent

RACISM AND ITS IMPACT ON BLACK FAMILIES IN NOVA SCOTIA



This section focuses on the impacts of anti-Black racism on children and families well-being.

Intergenerational impacts of racism

- Black parents and educators expressed fears and concerns for their children due to the racism and discrimination they have experienced.
- Participants knew their children would eventually encounter racial violence or injustice, just as they had experienced, and their parents before them.
- Families felt a great sense of unease and stress with parenting a Black child(ren) in a place where anti-Blackness remains prevalent.

"My mom tells me stories of teachers actually mentioning my hair being too big or how to put it in braids... Or children making fun. I was called the 'N' word... Unfortunately, I feel my children are probably going to go through the same thing."
-Parent

Experiences of racism across systems

- Nearly every parent participant and ECE could recall a racist incident that impacted their child, or another child in an early childhood program.
- Racism in early childhood has manifested through implicit biases, overt use of hate speech, racially abusive language, over-punishment of children, and racial profiling.
- Families also spoke about negative experiences in the healthcare and other support systems.

"I remember one of the nurses. She said, 'Coloured babies, they have this Mongolian spot.' And I was just taken back, because she said 'coloured.'"
-Parent

The importance of positive self-identity and cultural pride

"My wife is often sitting with my daughter, and she's telling her about her hair, she's telling her about her skin colour, and reminding her about the proud families that she came from."
-Parent

- Parents stated that they knew they would be raising their children in spaces that were often majority-White.
- Parents promoted and engaged in resistance and advocacy against normalizing Whiteness and worked to promote inclusive and safe spaces for their children.
- Parents felt that the best thing they could do to support their children was to bolster their self-confidence and sense of Black pride.

EXPERIENCES OF BLACK FAMILIES AND EDUCATORS WITHIN EARLY CHILDHOOD

This section explores how early childhood settings, curriculum, and early childhood educators' perceptions and actions influence the experiences of Black children in Nova Scotia.



Mainstream Approach to Curriculum

- Parents and ECEs noted the pervasiveness of white normativity in early childhood settings, such as through curriculum and programming.
- Black ECEs discussed challenges they have encountered when incorporating an Africentric approach in their programs.
- Parents expressed their desires for curriculum and programming that would allow for their children to embrace and celebrate their Black identity.

"I feel like certain educators and people that may be doing it for years and years and years and things have been a certain way for so long and they're not changing their practice I feel like there needs to be a little bit more investigation as far as like who we are actually choosing to just work with kids in general but also if you don't have the education then really make sure that quality education is being given to the Early Childhood Educators that are working with African-Nova Scotians." -ECE

Lack of Responsiveness to Racism, Social Justice and Equity.

- ECEs noted incidents of racism amongst children, and White ECEs indicated feelings of unpreparedness in addressing such issues.
- ECEs and parents discussed how their programs responded to social justice issues.
- ECEs and parents reported the lack of acknowledgment of Black cultural and heritage celebrations.

"So he bit someone right before I picked him up just now and I was kind of reading through the paper and it's like "she made him go sit by himself and told him not to bite his friends." -Parent

"After the [discovery] Indigenous children [remains] I tried to do something with them and they were like no I don't think you should do that because they wouldn't understand it or their families wouldn't talk about it.. I feel like with the George Floyd thing they definitely didn't do anything either." -ECE

Absence of Cultural Safety

- Parents and ECEs reflected on the diversity in early childhood settings, often linking the importance of representation to children's sense of belonging.
- Parents discussed stigmas and stereotypes, especially in the context of hair, that they've encountered in child care settings.
- Parents expressed concern for how their children were being treated differently than their peers by educators, often being reprimanded for incidents that are considered developmentally appropriate.

Key Takeaways & Conclusions

- There is a lack of equitable opportunities for Black children to engage in outdoor play.
- Generational trauma and fear exists among Black families due to their own experiences with play and early childhood.
- Black children experience racial discrimination, stereotyping, stigma and over-surveillance, which affects their identity and autonomy.
- Some early learning and child care settings lack cultural sensitivity and awareness of Black children's experiences, creating unsafe spaces for them and their families.
- Mainstream approaches to early learning and child care, colour-blind attitudes, and implicit biases of ECEs ignore the socio-economic and racial disparities present in the early learning and child care system.
- There are no universal procedures that monitors, reports, and challenges racism in early childhood programs in Nova Scotia, which dismisses the experiences and wellbeing of Black children.

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Especially for a Black child, no one takes the time to ask or examine whether these kinds of play is acceptable in our community [...] instantly looking at if that Black child pushes a white child, then we got to call the police, you know, that kind of thing.

-Parent

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I would say at daycare, they were very quick to blame him for whatever happened. So, when I picked him up [...] if he got in trouble, I would be speaking to him harshly about the fact that “you can't be pushing kids” and stuff like that [...] but later on he would tell me “Well mommy he actually pushed me I just pushed him back” [...] So once again, because of the colour of his skin. He was getting in trouble and its not right.

-Parent

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Conclusions

- There is a lack of equitable opportunities in early childhood for Black children which increases the opportunity gap and negatively impacts their overall health and well-being.
- Our research has indicated a need for inclusive and responsive frameworks, policies, and practices to improve the cultural safety and needs of Black families and children in Nova Scotia in early learning and child care settings.
- Further initiatives must center on Africentric foundations and values that encourage and empowers Black children to embrace their culture and identity.

Next Steps

- Continue to voice the needs of Black children, families, and educators to create equitable systems and prioritize funding for African NS communities.
- Address the lack of infrastructure, stereotyping, and racism to improve cultural safety and empower Black children to embrace their culture and identity.
- Provide additional professional development to support early childhood educators and programs to deliver Africentric and culturally responsive programs.
- Enable a diverse workforce that supports Black ECEs to build thriving and diverse programs.

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