Exploring the role of Black feminist thought in pre-service Early Childhood Education: on the possibilities of embedded transformative change

Introduction: The state of anti-Black racism in Early Childhood and Care (ECEC)

Recent events in Ontario, a province in Canada, have laid bare the insidious nature of anti-Black racism in early childhood and Kindergarten to Grade 12 (K-12) education settings. In the fall of 2021, a four-year-old Black child was removed from their kindergarten classroom in handcuffs by police in Ontario's Waterloo Region (Duhatschek, 2022). A similar act occurred in the Peel Region, a suburb of Toronto, Ontario, when a six-year-old Black girl was handcuffed by their wrists and ankles for approximately thirty minutes in 2016 (CBC News, 2020). The two highlighted incidents are some of the severe examples of anti-Black racism and the policing of young Black children; however, systemic racism in the education system has been well-documented (Dei, 1996; James and Turner, 2017). The experiences of anti-Black racism faced by Black children, families, educators, and the community are situated within a system that disenfranchises those who transgress the White, heteronormative, non-disabled, middle-class trope of teaching, learning and childhoods (Brady, 2017). Anti-Black racism is not merely a United States issue, contrary to dominant Canadian culture's claims to multiculturalism and positioning as the friendlier neighbour to the north of the US border (Thobani, 2007; Brady and Villegas, 2019). Systemic anti-Black racism is not passively accepted by members of the Black community, despite how it is epitomized. The recent incident of the 4-year-old child being handcuffed has sparked a ripple effect of Black community mobilization by various parents, families, scholars, and community members; however, organizing efforts in the community are not linked to this single issue, and are sustained and ongoing. There is an active level of engagement and community organizing that is sustained in combating systemic anti-Black racism. Decades ago, Keren Brathwaite was a founding member of an organization, the Organization of Parents of Black Children (OPBC). Unconnected to the OPBC, yet certainly extending the preceding organization's legacy, is an organization co-founded by Black mothers and educators, the Parents of Black Children (PoBC). The PoBC actively serves the community through advocacy and reporting of harm towards Black children to affirm Black life in

educational spaces. One of PoBC's recent reports documents what they term system abuse, the systemic forms of anti-Black racism occurring within the school system and among multiple institutions such as childcare centres, child welfare, and police (Parents of Black Children, 2022). Years of tireless community advocacy is what prompted the introduction of Bill 67 on Racial Equity in the Education Act by Member of Provincial Parliament Dr. Laura Mae Lindo in the Ontario Legislature (Ontario Legislative Assembly, 2021). Bill 67 would ultimately amend the Education Act to embed a racial equity perspective leading to actions such as mandating all school boards undergo mandatory anti-racism education. Although the focus of this bill is the K-12 system, there are opportunities to transform early childhood settings.

Members of the early childhood sector have long called for a dismantling of anti-Black racism. For example, a recent well-circulated petition on Lead Now organized by Early Childhood and Education Care (ECEC) activists, leaders, and scholars calls for mandatory anti-racism training in the sector (Anti-Racism ECE Ontario, 2021). Black ECEs have strived to foster space through the founding of the Community of Black ECEs which is part of the Association of Early Childhood Educators Ontario (AECEO). Black early childhood leaders such as Natalie Royer have amplified the issues of anti-Black racism in the field and have called on colleagues in the field to take an inward look at institutional injustices (Royer, 2021). The introspection Royer advocates require members of the field to challenge the overarching discourses, ideology, and assumptions of childhood.

A prevailing ideology within ECEC is childhood innocence, with roots in developmental psychological discourse and arguably childism, it extends the practice of assigning children to neat categories or stages of life. The developmental framing of childhoods permeates the field and as a result, children are deemed as 'too young' to comprehend or engage in dialogue regarding topics of race and racism, let alone sustain systemic racism. Childhood innocence results in the colour-blind approach dominating many of the settings in the field resulting in a disavowal of racism (Berman et al., 2017; Boutte et al., 2011). And even when educators aspire

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to implement a culturally responsive education, they feel a lack of access to resources to do so consistently resulting in sporadic pedagogical practices in this domain (Alaca and Pyle, 2018). I pinpoint attempt to implement culturally responsive pedagogy which aims to centre the cultural experiences of students from non-dominant backgrounds which is not inevitably the same as anti-racism education which aims to disrupt and challenge systemic racism and power (Dei, 1996). It is also worth noting that an anti-bias approach is not akin to anti-racism either in ECEC and education as an anti-bias approach aims to address biases in individuals, while anti-racism addresses systems. Curricular changes are warranted, yet insufficient without examining the deeply entrenched power dynamics which children observe, such as in Full Day Kindergarten settings with the relationship between Ontario Certified Teachers (OCTs), who are largely White and middle-class women, and Early Childhood Educators (ECEs), who are mostly racialized and working-class women (Abawi, 2021). Pérez (2019) describes the lack of women of colour in early childhood spaces appealing for more intentional hiring and centering "epistemologies of the south to share the center stage." (30) How can the issues of anti-Black racism, systemic injustice, and power be disrupted in ECEC settings? I enter this conversation as a Black woman researcher and community activist grounding many of my experiences in community organizing, scholarship, and my reflections as an educator in pre-service ECEC. I think there are possibilities for holistically centering Black feminist approaches to disrupt systemic anti-Black racism and the many intersections of oppression.

Black feminist approaches provide opportunities to disrupt White Eurocentric ways of knowing and being. Scholars such as Cynthia Dillard describe the practical ways that Black feminist epistemologies centre Black women's experiences as juxtaposed to White dominant claims to objectivity (Dillard, 2000). And so, in the paper I centre Black feminism to counter anti-Black racism and re-centre Black women's self-definition and situated knowledges (Collins, 2000). In line with Black feminism, I employ storytelling as a form of recentering and reclaiming as well as disrupting normative ways of knowing and being in ECEC and beyond. This essay is

organized into four main sections: a review of literature, the theoretical framework, and what I advocate for in pre-service ECEC, embedded transformative change.

Review of literature: Issues and possibilities for disruption in ECEC

A plethora of possibilities to disrupt anti-Black racism, developmentalism, and childhood innocence exists. For instance, some reconceptualist scholars and professionals advocate for changes in ECEC that can incorporate various aspects of children's lives, rather than centering on dominant and normative tropes (Kessler and Swadener, 1992; Murris et al., 2020). For example, the paucity of queer ECEC professionals and queer theory in early childhood settings and higher education reinforces a one-size-fits-all dominant and heteronormative approach (Davies, 2021). Queer ways of knowing and being are disenfranchised creating environments whereby queer educators need to conceal, if possible, their identities and experiences to survive heteronormative institutions and settings. When there is 'acceptance' then queer educators flourish and so do children in ECEC as they learn about non-hegemonic and non-dominant intersectional experiences (Davies, 2021). Davies (2021) explores the possibility of learning from queer theory and *queering* pedagogies and masculinity in ECEC and demonstrates the prospects for extending the practice of *queering* beyond gender and sexuality. As such, a queering approach can lead to disrupting dominant developmental discourses which limit the agency of children and the whole child and extend to the possibilities of queering anti-Black racism and other oppressive systems.

The hesitation in ECEC to discuss race, gender, class, Indigeneity, disability, sexuality, immigration status, larger geopolitical issues, religion, ethnicity, and language stems from the childhood innocence approach, as discussed earlier. Scholars have long identified the assumption that racism and discrimination do not materialize in ECEC settings (Bernhard et al, 1998 as cited in Berman et al., 2017). Some reconceptualist scholars have pinpointed the importance of centering children's diverse realities and experiences by employing an anti-bias

approach moving beyond diversity (Derman-Sparks and Edwards 2010). The anti-bias approach requires introspection on the part of the educator, who rethinks their positionality and privilege in order to teach and learn. However, Pacini-Ketchabaw and Berikoff (2008) postulate that anti-bias and multicultural approaches

> mask processes of racialization by understanding racism as an attitudinal issue that can be overcome through teaching tolerance and celebrating diverse cultures. Therefore, interventions take the form of addressing children's attitudes in a developmentally appropriate manner (260).

The critique of the anti-bias approach is also articulated by Kerry-Ann Escayg who describes opportunities for enhancement of such an approach through anti-racism (Escayg, 2018). Similarly, for pre-service educators, King (1991) postulates that "dysconscious racism is a form of racism that tacitly accepts dominant White norms and privileges." (135) King removes the attitudinal dimension of implicit bias, in line with Pacini-Ketchabaw and Berikoff's (2008) critique, and rather examines the system of racism rather than individuals. Scholars have since extended King's dysconscious racism in pre-service educators to examine the intersections of race and disability. Hancock et al., (2021) extends Dis/Ability Critical Race Theory (DisCrit) (see: Annamma and Morrison, 2018), by entrenching dysconscious racism as an analytic frame, so that pre-service ECEC students can acknowledge their own positionality and biases rooted in racism and ableism, providing new imaginaries through their fieldwork placements to support 'Children of Color'[1]. As a salient parallel, some researchers have questioned whether Ontario childhood educators are sufficiently trained to teach Indigenous children, and to support Indigenous families and communities(Lamb, 2020; Milne, 2016). Individual and collective transformation ought to take place to lead to action.

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[1] 'Children of Color' is a term employed by Hancock et al (2021). I tend to operationalize Black, Indigenous, and racialized for specificity of Blackness and Indigeneity in the Canadian state and to denote how racialization is a process rooted in White Supremacist logic whereby communities become raced based on various social-political contexts

Anti-black racism takes form in ECEC in a plethora of ways and there are opportunities to support Black children through realizing Black futurity by giving space for the mundane (Nxumalo, 2021). Neoliberalism leads to a desire for quick-fix solutions to resolve complex issues. For example, Alaca and Pyle (2018) describe how educators then experience feelings of inadequacy of preparedness to incorporate culturally relevant pedagogies in kindergarten classrooms. Centering the mundane in Black life can aid educators in not simply pursuing quick-fix solutions, but can instead provide space for the fullness of Black life and futures (Nxumalo, 2021). Rather than inadequate solutions to anti-Black racism, there are possibilities of fully integrating anti-racist approaches in early childhood education (Escayg, 2019; Escayg et al., 2017).

At this juncture, there is hope for social justice and equity in early childhood (Nxumalo and Adair, 2019). Critical anti-racist and social justice approaches can combat the disavowal of racism in education (Escayg et al., 2017). Many of the policies and documents used to guide the field omit race propagating the widespread silencing of systemic injustices such as race in the field (Pacini-Ketchabaw et al., 2006). Added to that, assumptions of Whiteness imbue ideals of who embodies the role of the pre-service ECEC student learner in larger imaginaries of educators. By challenging these ideals, Black, Indigenous, queer, disabled, and racialized intersectional pre-service ECEC learners can embed their own lived experiences as part of the pedagogies they are exposed to in their programs, and with support from their educators, they can incorporate their lives and histories in their own practices.

Framework: Unravelling the fragments of the modern colonial logic in ECEC

In neo-liberal educational contexts, there is a fragmented approach to knowledge which truncates lived experiences from teaching and learning (Brady, 2017; Dei, 2017). Schooling then centers on the mastery of knowledge rather than practices principles of sharing and relationality (Dei, 2000). Global South scholars describe the everyday colonial practices which

are known as coloniality (Maldonado-Torres, 2007; Mignolo, 2007). Fragmentation of knowledge, compartmentalization of thought, hierarchies of ideas and the categorization of childhood through neatly identified stages, are features of the modern-colonial knowledge which manifests in a multitude of forms. Mignolo (2007) called for epistemological disobedience through delinking which opens up many possibilities in ECEC. The Cartesian approach of disciplines, fields, and stages, can be disrupted by way of delinking which moves away from fragmentation. Returning to Milne's (2016) research about the disconnect between Southern Ontario educators teaching Indigenous children, there are fundamental differences in the epistemologies of Euro-colonial ways of knowing and Indigenous knowledges, and among the largest can be the fundamental clash because of the supposed universality of Western/colonial discourses in education.

Existing hierarchies of professions combined with the milieu of a woman-dominant field associated with care work results in professional disenfranchisement whereby the field is hedged between being absolutely necessary while also lacking worth. This paradoxical position is due to the blurring of social reproduction in the public and private spheres. Care work, hence, is regarded as lower in the rungs of hierarchal, heteropatriarchal and racial structures. Ironically, despite the larger contexts of the situatedness of ECEC, the overrepresentation of developmental psychology is widespread despite its roots in scientific, Western-colonial frameworks that inevitably marginalize ECEC as a field. Children are deemed as incomplete adults, and as *becomings*, in need of development, rather than *beings* (Wells, 2021). Confining children to stages plunders opportunities to celebrate their lives as they are rather than who they will become.

Because of the orientation of children as incomplete and developing adults is a dominant approach in pre-service ECEC, what can be said of Black, queer, and disabled children who do not fit these normative ideals of childhood? Further, a homogenous fixation of childhoods does not explore power dynamics within racist capitalist patriarchal structures. The fragmented

orientation of the developmental approach is not the only issue, rather the universality of Euro-colonial knowledge is detrimental to pre-service ECEC. The universality of Eurocentric knowledge is something that Indigenous knowledge scholars have critiqued as one of its key pillars (Dei, 2000; Simpson, 2004). The modern-colonial logic originates from the Enlightenment era, and later the Scientific Revolution, and it positions Western-colonial thought as all-encompassing. The problem of universality is the assumption of objectivity. While pre-service ECEC learners can engage in theories on development and identify earlier theorists' contributions to the field, this should not be the single approach to their training and education. If developmental discourse is coached in tropes of objectivity, or as a universal characteristic of childhood, then children, families, and communities from disenfranchised communities are cast aside, and so are pre-service ECEC students and researchers who do not fit these dominant configurations of normativity. The dominant universality of developmental discourse is why some scholars have long called for an anti-bias approach to disrupting taken-for-granted ideas of children, families, and communities. As noted before scholars have extended the critiques of moving beyond anti-bias approaches (see: Abawi, 2021; Janmohamed, 2005; Pacinini-Ketchabaw, 2008). Further, to combat anti-Black racism, anti-racist, anti-colonial, Indigenous knowledges and Black feminist intersectional orientations to pre-service teaching and learning are pivotal to delink Euro-colonial ontologies and epistemologies. The universality of Whiteness, maleness, ability, heteronormativity, citizenship, middle-class, English-speaking, and Christocentric orientations further exclude those from intersecting positionalities that do not fit these ideals of humanity. This leads to the pathologizing of disabled children, families, and communities in ECEC. The pathologizing of children who do not fit the prevailing norms is further exacerbated for Black and Indigenous children (Essien, 2019; Ineese-Nash, 2020). Wynter's critique of Man disrupts the ideals of who is categorized as Man, and by extension, human (Wynter, 2001). Perceptions of Man can be extended to the discussion of pre-service

ECEC programs where members can disrupt the characteristic of who is human and deemed worthy of life, while also serving as a way of critiquing the assumptions of objectivity.

Black feminist thought as a site of resistance in ECEC

Pre-service ECEC programs have countless possibilities for disruption of systems that centre on dominant ways of being and knowing, and one approach is Black feminist thought. Part of the disconnect comes from practices of disembodying knowledge from lived experiences which reifies the dominance of objectivity in schooling contexts, and beyond. Through the fragmentation of knowledge, pre-service ECEC students are unable to access their lived experiences in relation to their education. Many higher education students have not lived their childhoods along set stages and have a plethora of experiences from migration to sexuality to being unhoused as well as their parents' engagement in transnational family arrangements. Such varied experiences complicate the types of knowledge students tend to access in pre-service ECEC programs. Black feminism is rooted in situated knowledge which is the lived experiences of Black women who resist multiple oppressive systems (Collins, 2000). Black women's positionality becomes a starting point for theorizing about our[2] experiences. This provides an opportunity for pre-service ECEC practitioners to engage their own lived experiences to understand their social-location and how this colours their experiences and relationality, or not, to the literature and theories they access in their educational journey. Black feminism, therefore, challenges objectivity, by recentering Blackness and women across multiple spaces of gender, race, class, sexuality, migration status, disability, language, and religion. From as early as Sojourner Truth's speech, *'Ain't I a woman?'* (Truth, 1851), as Black women, we have claimed our positionality and entry into political and social contexts which disenfranchise us by challenging efforts which merely analyze gender or race as non-

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[2] As a Black feminist scholar, I employ "we", "I" and "our" with reference to Black women to situate my experiences and social-location reinforcing community and challenge objectivity in research

intersecting domains. Crenshaw articulated this phenomenon by coining the term intersectionality, a Black feminist concept that denotes the unique experiences of Black women at the intersection of their race, gender, and class (Crenshaw, 1989). Our embodied ways of knowing and being serves as a means of disruption.

In this section, I draw attention to and analyze Black feminist and intersectional research in ECEC. Felicia V. Black's (2018) intersectional study discovered the homogenizing of professional expectations in the ECE field through a failure to acknowledge Black women's subjugation through raced, gendered and ableist, hierarchical power structures within the workplace. Thus, Crenshaw's concept of intersectionality nuances the professional experiences and expectations of ECEs in childcare settings and beyond. However, sites of oppression whether it be the workplace, the classroom, or both, are part of larger structures which are deeply rooted in systems of racial capitalism that permeate the ECE space (Nxumalo, 2019). Processes of accumulation and extraction fueling the climate emergency and reproducing a lopsided distribution of wealth between the Global South and the Global North within racial-capitalist hierarchies is sustained through widespread inequality and its justification. According to Nxumalo (2019), new imaginaries and strategies in ECEC should be carefully tended to so not to work in "service of those who benefit from racial capitalism." (169) The racial-capitalist system works to benefit a few by marginalizing many, all while maintaining hierarchies of oppression that become normalized. Pre-service ECEC programs can be a forum to disrupt these forms of oppression. Further, Black women's positionality is in direct conflict with such normalizing ideologies because of the raced, gendered, classed social locations we occupy and is hence understood through deficit-based ideas, if not situated in the broader socio-political contexts. Nxumalo (2019) identifies neoliberal multiculturalism as a site of identifying deficit discourses in ECEC and articulates that such an identification creates avenues for disruption in both research and practice. Pérez (2019) describes how the positionality of educators of colour can disrupt whiteness in the classroom and encourage them to engage their own 'cultural

intuition' anchored in Global South ways of knowing and being. By transgressing the boundaries of representation and conformity to White normative structures, Black feminist ECE scholars posit the possibilities for decolonial disruption. Capturing the brilliance of Black children of colour can also extend the possibilities of speaking back against Euro-colonial and normative constructions of childhood.

> When we educators look out at a classroom of black faces, we must understand that we are looking at children at least as brilliant as those from any well-to-do white community. If we do not recognize the brilliance before us, we cannot help but carry on the stereotypic societal views… (29).

Understanding Black brilliance as a pedagogical practice is a form of resistance against colonial conceptions of Blackness and the deficit-orientation to Black childhoods. Teaching the histories of Black, Indigenous, and racialized communities in teacher education programs, employing anti-bias education and intervening based on the educators' own understandings, experiences and perceptions of race are all ways to decolonize ECEC (Pérez, 2019). Interventions that centre educators' situated knowledges are a foundational feature of Black feminist thought. Storytelling in Black feminism is a form of praxis for challenging oppressive systems. Pérez et al. (2016) analyze child narratives by employing a Black feminist analytic framework. In one example, the story of Elsa a Latinx pre-Kindergarten student who was asked to leave the room by an educator for not following an incomplete prompt while playing and was sent to another space to 'play games'; however, that was a space for children to be assessed where the student was then labelled as 'special' (71). The pathologizing of Black and Brown children in education is rampant as identified earlier (Essien, 2019). Pérez et al (2016) unpack the uneven power structures that situate Whiteness at the top of a racial hierarchy as well as the dynamics of power between adult educators and children and how the story of Elsa reinforced such (Pérez et al., 2016). Employing a Black feminist analytic framework, Pérez et al (2016) highlight how the child was disenfranchised from that classroom learning space due to their raced and

gendered subject position. By centering Black brilliance, pre-service ECEC programs can challenge colour-blind/colour-evasive, supposedly neutral tropes of childhood, and rather can engage their own experiences to analyze the systems that reinforce deficit-based approaches in education.

In response to exclusionary practices, Black feminist thought provides an analytic framework to disrupt the racist, capitalist, and patriarchal structures that disenfranchise Black students, educators, and staff. Black pre-service ECEC programs can benefit from transgressing the confines of the overwhelming discourses of development into understanding their own positionality in relation to their practice. As Nxumalo and Adair (2019) highlight 'school-readiness' discourses, the expectation that students should be ready for their education before entering school, reinforces single stories as normative through a system that produces a White middle-class ableist and heteronormative core that further marginalizes students from lower socio-economic and racialized backgrounds. Nxumalo and Adair (2019) articulate Black feminism as a critical source to confront inequity in ECEC and state, "thinking with black feminisms enables educators to make visible the workings of intersecting oppressions in children's families' everyday lives." (671) Extending notions of childhood beyond the individual creates space for Black families and communities. Prominent notions of the child are fragmented from community, family, and environment which is counter to many Black childhood experiences. For pre-service ECEC programs, engaging the multiple intersectional sites through Black feminisms provides for nuanced understandings of the multi-faceted sites of privilege and oppression. Pérez et al., (2016) describe a photovoice project carried out in a pre-service ECEC course that was combined with Black feminist thought. These Black feminist photovoice projects challenged dominant norms while positioning pre-service ECEC students to anchor their analysis in their own childhood and experiences.

Engaging my positionality through storytelling: A method in Black feminist radical tradition and thought

Reflecting on childhood, I think about relationality to family and the wider community, and how central that was to my experiences growing up. The term "extended family" was not in my lexicon because even those who were not biologically related to me would be referred to as aunties. Understanding my childhood now, Black childhood, I know it transgressed the confines of 'normal' childhoods with nuclear families in suburban communities. I would spend my weekends with cousins and my family like my late paternal grandmother travelling all through Toronto by public transit, or her little shared red car. We would visit other aunties and sit together chatting and eating Roti with our hands, while I proved I can handle the dripping curry and pepper sauce, which was no small feat as a Canadian-born child. Women would problem-solve and discuss which hand they have in my grandmother's *susu* (see: Hossein, 2016)*,* which is an "informal" banking system that Black Caribbean women organize as a means of saving and generating income. My maternal grandmother, from Jamaica, would refer to this as a *partner*, but as a child, I would understand it as "pardna". My maternal grandmother later described to me some of the barriers she faced when moving to Canada in accessing banking services, loans, and her first mortgage in the Greater Toronto Area. These systems come from African Indigenous banking systems (Hossein, 2016). Such "informal" banking structures became entrenched in my childhood and weekend activities, learning how to do basic mathematical operations through quick mental math and take notes for record-keeping, and help out however I could, and this was something I did with pride and honour having with been called on.

My paternal grandmother was an avid volunteer in political, community, and social spaces. She loved to fete, so I always looked forward to her getting dressed up and 'ready for di road' for Caribana. Her coop apartment, located in Toronto's Parkdale community, was a base for other women and community members and family to get ready and excitedly walk over

together to enjoy "a little lime". Through this, I learned about my love for dance, the arts, and Black expression. My paternal grandmother migrated from Trinidad to Italy, and then to Canada. She worked, went to school, and gained a number of 'upgrading' courses and other certifications. Both my grandmothers have or had more certifications than the average person can list or remember. This is not unique to their experiences, but quite common among Black women who migrate to the Canadian state. They both engaged in domestic work at some point or another – cooking, cleaning, and engaging in childcare duties for White middle-class families. I remember visiting some of these houses with my paternal grandmother on weekends. I would spend time playing with children in their homes, in awe of the tall endless staircases, rooms dedicated to gyms, and multiple living rooms. When there were no children present, I would volunteer to help my grandmother with light cleaning duties, while enjoying the satisfying scent of glass cleaner and wooden floor polish, that would tell me our job was done.

My maternal grandmother managed to purchase a home on the outskirts of Toronto, and it was there I experienced quiet life. This was thanks to her tremendous efforts, but also, her union job was a result of racial equity provincial legislation that benefited Black community members to access jobs usually shut out to them. I would read endless books, while she spoiled me with rice and peas, delicious breakfasts, and tons of prayers. My mother and father decided not to stay together when I was a young age, but my mom maintained a relationship with my father's family where I have more cousins than I can count. So, I grew up with my mother largely as an only child, although I have many siblings on my father's side and my mother had my sister later in life. My mother would be positioned as a single parent; however, she would always have her friends' children over for weekends, or me at their houses, as well as my cousins from my father's side visit. She did this intentionally to ensure I had a community around me. Janice Fournillier asks whether Black single mothers are truly single (JB Fournillier 2021, personal communication, 21 September). This question causes me to reflect on my childhood to think that my mother was rooted in a community network of children and families, providing me

values and lessons which I learned that were not limited to my own 'home' nor my school. In the wider system that prefers heteronormative nuclear family arrangements, my mother would be deemed as a 'lone parent'; although I know, despite her struggles, she was never really alone. These experiences are not unique to children in the Black community. hooks (2015) describes the loneliness experienced by White women and how during her college experience they would revel in the community of women being together created by the women's movement. The experiences of community connectedness are something that Black women enjoy (Brady, 2020). Closeness with other women was not new for hooks, and this resonates with my experiences. I would visit family and friends when my mom 'needed a break' and without the guilt often perpetuated in White-middle class gendered normative structures.

Local care chains (see: Wells, 2021 for global care chains) created avenues for women to advance their education and careers while maintaining community and Black joy. I also saw local care chains by White working-class mothers. The 'park ladies', White working-class mothers, would watch over us children while our caregivers would run errands or go home to unwind from a stressful day allowing for us children to play outside until sundown. All my mom would need to do in return would be to drop off *Tim's* coffee and sometimes a couple of cigarettes, and just like that without helicopter or coddling approaches, these women would watch over all the children in the park while they chatted about their romantic relationships, bills, struggles, hopes and dreams on the park benches. They would also affirm us, reminding us that we were loved and cared for. These experiences bring to mind the unique experience of heterogeneity in the Canadian state through Black women's intersectional social locations (Wane, 2009). Whether through race, class, disability, gender, or religion, my childhood experiences reflect how culture is not static and denote the various ebbs and flows of the various mutual aid networks created by women to foster change and maintain support.

Reflecting back, many of the practices from my childhood can be demonized as child neglect; however, they are emblematic of the social reproduction practices that sustain

communities which are under-resourced when it comes to formal child-care sites and access to services. Further my childhood experiences when merely understood through a White Eurocentric lens would pathologize my diverse kinship experiences, villainizing such for not fitting within the confines of normative White, middle-class, nuclear arrangements. When an educator without such varied experiences in their own childhood would then ask how my weekend was in class on Monday, no wonder why I would not be able to answer as their expectations and my experiences varied drastically. As such, Black feminism opens up the possibilities for introspection through storytelling which challenges dominant ways of knowing and being.

Embedded transformative change

I am calling for embedded transformative change which is an active and liberatory process and tool to radically shift the landscape of pre-service ECEC. Countless practitioners, researchers, professionals, students, and scholars have already identified the urgent need to realize changes to the longstanding developmental orientation and approach in the field. Now is an opportunity, through a Black feminist theoretical and methodological orientation to create this change. As Nxumalo (2021) states, "Black children cannot wait" (1198). I think of change, not in the neoliberal forms of add and stir solutions but rather in challenges to the system which is deeply rooted in counter-knowledges, lived experiences, and decolonial praxis. I think of change in the sense of the long history of Black feminist radical thought and action. Elsewhere, I have described seven principles that can lead to a shift in rethinking curriculum through a Black educators' socio-political orientation: community-rootedness, humility and reflexiveness, rethinking the classroom in time and space, mentorship, love and care, storytelling, and bold acts of disruption (Brady, 2020). These principles, rooted in decolonial praxis and African Indigenous onto-epistemologies are essential for creating educational experiences that do not

fragment and create further hierarchies, instead, extending the possibilities for reaffirming spaces, practices, and research. This section has four main ideas for engaging embedded transformative change in pre-service ECEC: active engagement and thought, explicit and intentional orientation, centering peripheral knowledges and intersectional differences, and the engagement of Black women's liberatory orientation.

Active engagement and thought

The practice of active engagement in embedded transformative change challenges passivity, in theory, research, and practice and operates as a means for members of the pre-service ECEC field to view themselves as active agents of disruption rather than passive consumers of knowledge through banked pedagogical models (Freire, 2000). By empowering pre-service ECEC students, educators, and the community, we can collectively engage in a process of praxis to challenge systems of oppression and act on those challenges through small acts of disruption to large-scale community-based change. To achieve an active orientation in pre-service ECEC, theories, concepts, and practices all require critical realignment. For example, are Black and Indigenous children textually represented as passive recipients of systems that disenfranchise or are they actively centered to highlight their brilliance, joy, and flourishing? As well, since historical injustices have long-standing impacts on the community, are historical injustices read through passive voice, as accidental issues fixed in the past furthering the justification and normalization of ongoing forms of oppression? For instance, in text is the term "slavery" or "enslaved" used to describe the transatlantic slave trade, or are the resistances and solidarity of Black and Indigenous communities omitted or erased? The active engagement and thought can serve as a basis for educators, students, and practitioners in pre-service ECEC to critically analyze and read text, inside and outside the class, to disrupt, question, and reimagine our role in systems. Often, being active, in the capitalist economic system is associated with productivity, and meaningless or a lack of understanding of labourers' work and outputs;

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however, such a fixation on activity for the means of production further marginalizes disabled, queer, mothers, elderly, Black, newcomers, and those without status, blaming communities for their experiences of injustice and systemic disenfranchisement. I am not calling for activity that directly links to productivity to only benefit a few, rather instead, I think of activity as community orientations and building, challenging, and supporting. Active engagement and thought can be a means to challenge neoliberal systems resulting in robust social programs that benefit communities which are continuously excluded. Active engagement and thought in pre-service ECEC also serves as a site to challenge objectivity, neutrality, and the ideas of "that is just the way things are" rooted in the modern-colonial logic. It also serves as a means to challenge the hierarchies of knowledge. I often ask students in pre-service ECEC classrooms how do their peers, friends, family, and community members value their education and choice of the program? Most of them, if not all, will share that compared to friends in business or science programs, their education is ranked as lower. I then challenge them to think about and discuss why this is and how a field that is rooted in care, largely comprised of women, is situated in broader contexts. Active engagement in their educational experiences as we are living it can create avenues for embedded transformative change. Hierarchies of knowledge are a classic feature of Euro-colonialism whereby taken-for-granted notions can be masked as objective and neutral. By critically and actively disrupting these stratification systems, members of the field can translate this active orientation to their practice.

Explicit and intentional orientation

Earlier I described the colour-blind approaches in ECEC (see: Berman et al, 2017). The lack of the centering of raced experiences in childhoods, educators, families, and communities results in a deficit-based view of race. Being explicit and intentional is significant because it advocates for naming the very issues creating barriers and injustice. Often, I note the discomfort in students saying the word "Black". Walker (2020) has advocated for intentionality by naming

Blackness and actively shifting the ideals of colour-evasiveness in communicating with children (Walker et al., 2020). An explicit and intentional orientation is a feature of embedded transformative change in pre-service ECEC that can create paths for educators, students, practitioners, and researchers to engage their own social location and perceptions of race and racism. Since pre-service ECEC is often thought of as outside the realm for discussions on systemic racism and various forms of oppression, by the time students enter graduate programs they express their upset for having not learned about multiple experiences of childhoods earlier in their educational journey. Their upset demonstrates that their programs preoccupied a developmental discourse, as a universal feature of childhood, rather than incorporating Black, Indigenous, queer, migrant, disabled, and intersectional ontologies and epistemologies. Similarly, Black, White, and racialized students in undergraduate pre-service ECEC programs express their deep-rooted disappointment of not learning about Black Canadian history when I share a documentary or text. They highlight how Black Canadian history was erased, not only from their educational experiences, but also their communities. For example, students come from the Niagara region in Ontario, however, never learned about the Black resistances taking place in their communities nor the processes that made such neighbourhoods White in the first place (NOTLMuseum, 2021). These reactions from students in regards to learning about Black Canadian history point to what McKittrick (2006) posits of the invisibility/visibility of Blackness in the Canadian state. Explicit and intentional orientations are part of what I am advocating for as embedded transformative change and can serve as a means of disruption.

Centering peripheral knowledges and intersectional differences

A recentering of peripheral South, women of colour knowledges is an act of epistemological disobedience (see: Mignolo, 2007; Pérez, 2019). Anchoring intersectional differences in pre-service ECEC research and practice can create opportunities not to sway from difference or view difference as a deficit, rather it can bolster new orientations in the field. For instance, when discussing global childhood in pre-service ECEC courses, I facilitate conversations whereby

Filipinx students can critically reflect and center their own experiences and that of their parents and caregivers in transnational motherhood, domestic care, and global care chains. By dedicating classroom time and space to centering peripheral knowledges, many of the students not only see themselves in the text but also can rethink their intersectional differences as it relates to childhood and connect global North and global South relations. Students are empowered to know the social reproduction of their families through unequal power relations are what has led to the enrichment of the Canadian state and White middle-class families. I see it as my responsibility to provide students with the opportunity to engage in class, especially if this is a component of their grade, but can only facilitate such a process if peripheral knowledges and differences come to the center. The centering of peripheral knowledges then creates avenues to disrupt taken-for-granted norms and conceptions of family and childhood. Students then rethink how they benefited from such systems etched in uneven distribution of goods, people, and resources. Such an exercise allows for students to reflect upon the complexities of childhoods, and that their own childhoods may not have followed the set stages as prescribed in development serving as a challenge and a way to critically analyze theories and concepts they learn through the engagement of their own intersectional differences. Pre-service ECEC students do not need to 'build up' to discuss systems of power and oppression as it is part of their lived experiences leaving it to the end of the course. If the approach of necessitating the 'build up' for 'difficult conversations' occurs in higher education, this can take root in ECEC practice where childhood innocence discourse dominates.

Conclusion

In this essay, I have articulated some of the pitfalls of the development discourse as stated by researchers in ECEC, the framework of disruption, Black feminism and ECEC. I explore the varied critical scholarly orientations that can challenge developmental and "normative" dominant ways of knowing and being. By offering Black feminism in ECEC, I see this as a theory and

practice in tandem with critical scholarship in the field that challenges the status quo. Of

particular note, I engage in Black feminism to reclaim my own subject-position as done through

storytelling in this article. I engage the possibilities of embedded transformative change which

are deeply rooted in Black women's ways of knowing and being and centers on a liberatory

praxis orientation which is fundamental in Black feminist thought (Wane, 2009). Engaging in

storytelling and disruption are means to challenge systems that oppress. Disrupting single

theories, such as developmental psychological ideas, can lead to the recentering of members of

pre-service ECEC who are often marginalized and by extension, children, families, and wider

communities. Embedded transformative change in pre-service ECEC can be an ongoing form of

engagement, disruption, and praxis with its roots in Black feminist thought.

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