


Achieving Equity and Justice in Early Learning Programs

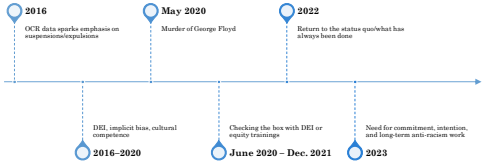
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Timeline of Equity Work in Early Childhood



The timeline shows key events and periods in equity work:

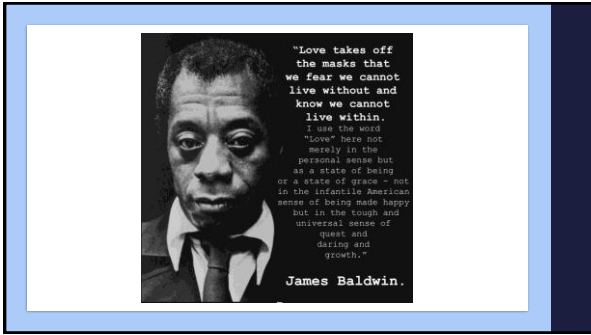
- 2016:** OCR data sparks emphasis on suspensions/expulsions
- 2016-2020:** DEI, implicit bias, cultural competence
- May 2020:** Murder of George Floyd
- June 2020 - Dec. 2021:** Checking the box with DEI or equity trainings
- 2022:** Return to the status quo/what has always been done
- 2023:** Need for commitment, intention, and long-term anti-racism work

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It is time to get messy.

- Our nation and states are becoming increasingly oppressive.
- We cannot create more equitable, inclusive, and just programs by doing what we have always done.
- The status quo prevents creativity and thinking outside the box.
- We must commit to getting messy. That means deconstructing whiteness and anti-blackness within ourselves, our organizations, and in our early childhood practices.
- Messiness is where change occurs.

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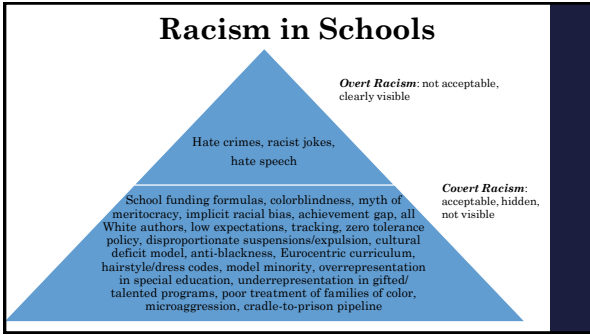
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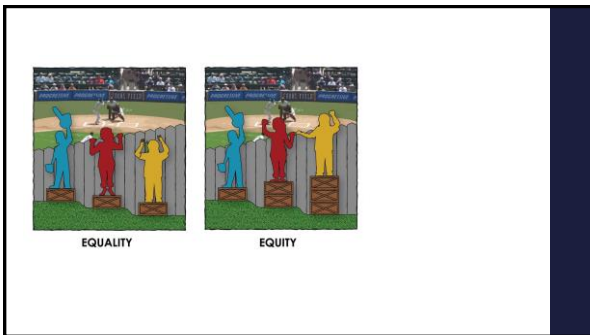


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Diversity, Inclusion, and Equity

<p>Diversity</p> <p>Includes, but is not limited to race, ethnicity, nationality, religion, socioeconomic status, veteran status, education, marital status, language, age, gender, gender expression, gender identity, sexual orientation, mental or physical ability, genetic information, and learning styles.</p>	<p>Inclusion</p> <p>Authentically bringing traditionally excluded individuals and/or groups into processes, activities, and decision/policy-making in a way that shares power and ensures equal access to opportunities and resources</p>	<p>Equity</p> <p>The guarantee of holistic treatment, access, opportunity, and advancement for all while striving to identify and eliminate barriers that have prevented the full participation of any group</p>
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Equity and Instructional Practices

- Students of color tend to experience lower quality **instructional practices** than their White peers (Phillips et al., 1994; Pianta et al., 2002)
- Black children generally experience lower quality activity settings and **receive fewer rich, stimulating experiences** than White children (Early et al., 2010)



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Equity and Teacher-Child Relationships

Black children tend to have relationships with their teachers that are less positive than those formed with White children

(Walker, Alter, & Landers, 2013)

Black children have more negative and conflictual relationships with teachers than White children

(e.g., Hughes, Gleason, & Zhang, 2005; Kosner, 2000; Murray & Murray, 2004)

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Equity and Disciplinary Practices



- 5,000 preschoolers were suspended at least once and nearly 2,500 were suspended a second time (2014)
- **Black preschoolers:** 3.6 times more likely to be suspended than their White peers (2016)
- **Black children:** 18 percent of the preschool population, but 48% of suspensions (2014)
- **Boys:** 49% of the preschool population, but 82% of all suspensions (2014)

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Studies spanning 40 years show that Black children are up to four times more likely to be suspended than White students.

(Bradshaw et al., 2010; Children's Defense Fund, 1975; Milner, 2013; Skiba et al., 2011)

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A Focus on Multicultural Education

- Multicultural education: (1) affirms issues of identity and differences; and (2) assertively confronts issues of power and privilege in society by challenging racism, biases, and inequitable structures, policies, and practices of schools and society (Nieto & Bode, 2012).
- **Problems with how Multi-Cultural Education has evolved:**
 - Some efforts of multicultural education have focused more on celebrating differences and affirming identity, and less attention on challenging racism and inequitable structures, policies, and practices.
 - Ideas of diversity, inclusion, equality, cultural competence, anti-bias, and culturally relevant teaching flourished.
 - Conversations about the achievement gap persist in education 30 plus year later.

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Goals for Early Childhood

- **Learning and Ready to Succeed**
 - High-quality early learning
 - On track for school success
 - Reading at grade level
- **Healthy**
 - Healthy Babies
 - Preventive Health Services
 - Food Security
- **Livable Wages**
- **Safe and Nurturing**
 - Safe and secure housing
 - Safe and nurturing relationships
 - Social-emotional health

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Mending the Disconnect between Early Childhood, Families and Communities

- If the goals of early childhood are to:
 - *Help young children learn to read and succeed*
 - *Create safe and nurturing environments*
 - *Access a livable wage*
 - *Promote the health and safety of babies (including prenatally)*

Then, we cannot do that in the absence of connecting and partnering with families and communities.

Too often the focus of early childhood education rest primarily on best practices and trends in supporting the health, development, and learning of young children.


However, children do not exist within a vacuum. They exist within the context of their families and communities. It's imperative that early learning programs engage in authentic partnerships with families and communities.

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Cumulative and Compounding Effects that Lead to Disparities

- Inadequate safe and affordable housing
- Limited access to high quality prenatal care
- Limited access to nutritious foods
- Community, racial, and historical trauma
- Others?

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Will we achieve equity and justice in early childhood by continuing our laser focus on improving quality?

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Addressing the Root Causes

- We **ALL** must move beyond examining biases, becoming culturally competent, and implementing culturally relevant teaching strategies.
- To achieve racial equity and create socially-just programs for all children, we must address the root causes of inequities by:
 - Refocusing our attention on challenging racism and inequitable structures, policies, and practices;
 - Deconstructing Whiteness as the norm in education;
 - Acknowledging the role of Anti-Black racism in the educational system;
 - Confronting issues of power and privilege in our society; and
 - Engaging in efforts to heal from racial trauma - especially the damage to children's sense of self because of racism (York, 2016).

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Equity efforts so far.....



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Addressing Equity in Education

- We are entrenched in “first generation” equity work©.
 - Isolated or 'band aid' interventions
 - Based upon a *blame the victim* mentality (Black children and families are at-risk and in need of fixing)
 - Unwillingness to identify and address root causes

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First Generation Equity Work©

- 😊 Makes us feel like we are doing something meaningful
- 🏠 Allows us to stay in a place of comfort
- 👤 Maintains the opportunity and achievement gaps
- 🌱 Does little to address root causes

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Second Generation Equity Work

- Borrowed from Guralnick (1993):
 - Early intervention was in the midst of a rapid period of change
 - Marked by a movement away from superficial analyses regarding the effectiveness of services and supports for young children with disabilities
 - Researchers and policy makers were being pushed to ask more specific questions and develop a more nuanced understanding about how to meet the needs of young children and their families.



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Moving Into Second Generation Equity Work

- Will require a unique commitment and determination
- Let go of the traditional 'band aid' approach to education and intervention
- Push through some discomfort to understand the structural barriers and root causes **as well as our own role in perpetuating disparities**
- Keen understanding of how our systems were set up and how they have morphed over time

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Anti-Black Racism

A form of racism that devalues (dehumanizes) blackness and systematically marginalized Black people. In short, Anti-blackness is being opposed to or hostile towards Black people.


Based on the alleged inherent inferiority of Africa and African descendants. Racial stratification is commonplace in our society and dictates the life experiences and opportunities for Black people in our society.

Because Black people have been devalued and maligned across the globe, understanding anti-blackness is critical to unpacking the specific ways racism disproportionately impacts different groups of color.

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What is Whiteness?

- Whiteness is viewed as the norm, the standard for universal human values by which all others are viewed and to which they are compared (Roediger, 1991).
- “Authority of experience” vs. “oppression of experience”
- Affluent White whiteness



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Whiteness as Property

The phrase Whiteness as Property was coined by Cheryl Harris in 1993. The phrase has been used to capture the social and economic advantages of Whiteness.

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The phrase captures the reality that being perceived as White carries more than a mere racial classification. It is a social and institutional status and identity with legal, political, economic, and social rights and privileges that are denied to others (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017).

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False Narratives of Whiteness

- Whiteness places value on certain experiences within society, including social, educational, financial, etc.
- Whiteness tells us that superior education, wealth, and materialism are the gold standard of success in our society.
- Whiteness dictates dress, hairstyles, attractiveness, tone of voice, behavior, how to show respect, etc.
- Whiteness tells individuals what it means to be a boy/man or girl/woman within society.

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False Narratives of Whiteness within Education

- Whiteness dictates how and what children are taught.
- Whiteness tells us what achievement looks like (e.g., early learning standards, grades, test scores).
- Whiteness determines what high-quality education looks like (i.e., teacher as purveyor of knowledge, child as recipient of knowledge).
- Whiteness does not allow for the acknowledgement of multiple intelligences.
- Whiteness dictates what behaviors are acceptable/not acceptable in school.

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The educational system was set up to enable and perpetuate whiteness.

- Who could learn
- Who got funding/resources and how much
- Where children learned
- Forced(s) Black children to learn in an educational system that was not set up for them
- Myth of meritocracy
- Use of curricula, teaching methods, assessments, and environmental scales designed by White people
- Controlling of bodies, emotions, knowledge, access

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How the Educational System Perpetuates Whiteness

- What curricula do we use? Who designed them? Do they represent a strengths-based approach or a deficit model?
- How do we determine academic achievement? What assessments do we use? What worldview do they represent?
- How do we determine high-quality education? What worldview does the instruction represent?
- What ideal of achievement are we promoting? The right college? The right job? What school readiness skills are important?
- How do we educate future teachers?
- Is academic achievement the primary goal of education?
- Does our educational system promote conformity?
- Does our educational system, knowingly or unknowingly, perpetuate hierarchies within our society (e.g., patriarchy, class, race)?

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Envisioning a Transformed Educational System

- Focusing on the intellectual and spiritual growth of our children
- Schools as places for healing – children, families, teachers, staff
- Providing meaningful connections between content and real-life experiences
- Altering what we teach and how we teach it
- Revising our ideals for academic achievement and life success – “true revolution of values” (MLK, 1968)

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What This Means for the Educational System.....

- Revised academic/learning standards and how we measure achievement
- New curricula that are focused on providing culturally responsive anti-bias practices
- Replace false narratives about our history and society
- New definitions of high-quality and ways for measuring it
- Provide a holistic education that is focused on mind-body-spirit for children, families, teachers, and staff
- Building community – within schools and within classrooms
- Include and empower a diverse set of voices to guide the transformation

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Achieving Equity and Social Justice in Education

- Focus on outcomes is important, but we also must:
 - Examine the root causes of inequities, including what they look like in everyday practice.
 - Eliminate policies, practices, and attitudes that perpetuate disparate outcomes.
 - Enact policies and practices that address the root causes of inequity *and* promote better outcomes.



(National Council of Teachers of English, 2016)

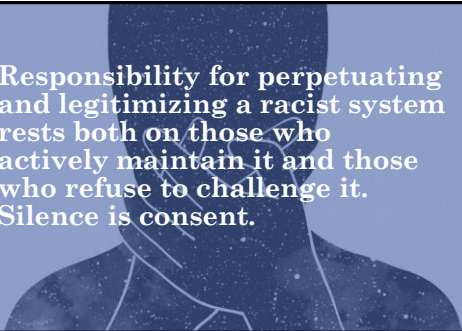
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What is Needed Right Now

- Deep understanding of the issues and approach needed to achieve lasting change – improving quality is not enough
- Changes in policies (e.g., hiring, discipline, special education, teacher prep, early learning standards, funding)
- Investment in intensive pre- and in-service professional development (e.g., behavior management, trauma, CRAB, and Antiracist practices and pedagogies)
- Commitment to helping children, families, and communities heal from historical, racial, and multigenerational trauma

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Responsibility for perpetuating and legitimizing a racist system rests both on those who actively maintain it and those who refuse to challenge it. Silence is consent.



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