Equity in the classroom: Peers, educators, families

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Land Acknowledgement
Goal: To enhance well-being during early childhood by ensuring policy and practice support families that experience inequity.

Approach: Work with community, policy makers, and engage families to co-produce research that mobilizes knowledge and experiences for and with families to inform policy and practice.
Exploring (in)equity in Nova Scotia

• The Nova Scotia context

• Research examples leveraging family and early childhood educator voice among:
  ◦ Newcomer families
  ◦ Black and African Nova Scotian families
  ◦ Well-being of early childhood educators
Nova Scotia is in Mi’kma’ki (MEEG-MA-GEE), the traditional and unceded territory of the Mi’kmaq people.

Population: 1 million people
- Founding cultures: Mi’kmaq, Acadians, African Nova Scotians, and Gaels
- 40% live in rural areas
- Rise in immigrant families

Births: ~8000 per year
~1 in 4 children live in poverty
Child Poverty in Nova Scotia

• There are socioeconomic, geographical, and racial disparities within early childhood systems - or an education debt (Ladson-Billings, 2006)

• In 2020, the child poverty rate was reduced to about 1 in 6 children (or 18.4%)
  ○ Reduction almost entirely due to federal pandemic relief support and top-ups

• Higher poverty among:
  ○ Certain geographical areas
  ○ Immigrant and racialized children
Looking through the lens of newcomer families
Newcomer families in Nova Scotia

• The increasing population in Nova Scotia is primarily due to immigration

• Adjustments and challenges accompany family resettlement as they navigate new physical, social, and cultural settings

• Our scoping review identified interconnected themes in Canadian literature on the experiences of newcomer families with young children
Through the lens of newcomer families

• Participatory photovoice project shaped by feminist theory

• Project goals:
  ◦ Enable participants to record and reflect on assets and concerns
  ◦ Promote critical dialogue about early childhood programs and services, giving voice to experiences through visual methods.
  ◦ Facilitate knowledge mobilization to inform programs and services.

• Recruited family and ECE participants in collaboration with a local settlement organization to take part in a series of virtual workshops
How do newcomer families find and use programs for young children?

My story of a sunflower

Where we live matters

Power of Play

Supporting us in resettlement

Our capable and confident children

Our glimpse into a childcare classroom during the pandemic

Play as the universal language for children
How do newcomer families find and use programs for young children?
Knowledge Mobilization

• CBC Nova Scotia article
• Global News Morning Halifax
• Global News at 11
• CBC Mainstreet

• Presentations for government departments
• Museum of Industry
• Halifax Central Library
• Mount Saint Vincent University
A Pan-Canadian Scan of Early Learning and Child Care for Newcomer Children

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

• How are settlement agencies across Canada delivering ELCC to newcomer families?
• What are the unique priorities for ELCC to support newcomer families and children?

RESEARCH PROCESS

• The environmental scan included an iterative process of a website scan, survey, and interviews to validate the information.

PARTICIPANTS

[Map of Canada showing participation by region]
Findings: Early Learning and Child Care for Newcomer Children

Strengths
- Comprehensive child care programs with connections to other services within the settlement program
- Diversity of program staff – many with newcomer experiences themselves

Challenges
- Unique and complex needs of newcomer families
- Many child care programs were not provincially licensed – could not always access CWELCC funding or supports

“...It’s been hugely beneficial to have people that can speak the language the first language of the child and the family.”

“They [outside professionals] will only go to families’ homes or to license childcare centers. A lot of our newcomers do not want outsiders to come into their homes, they’re just comfortable with their settlement worker.”
Amplifying the Voices of Black Families and Educators

All teachers, all ECEs, they really need to look at their White privilege. There has to be a serious course for them to be able to realize how much they affect our Black children...We affect and can change the world because of our privilege. So why aren’t we doing that?

- ECE

“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
Black and African Nova Scotia families

• Nova Scotia has a rich history of Black heritage
  ◦ Over 77% of African Nova Scotian people have been in NS for three or more generations, with roots in 52 African Nova Scotian communities.
  ◦ African Nova Scotians represent 44% of the racially visible population

• African Nova Scotian children experience education debt as a result of anti-Black racism

• To achieve our vision of equity, we need to amplify stories from families and educators who care for Black children to identify the system-wide changes
Interviews with:
• 7 Parents of Black children aged 18 months - 5 years old
• 8 Early Childhood Educators who work in African NS communities

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.

Framing Ideas from Critical Race Theory and BlackCrit that guided our work:

- Anti-Black Racism is Endemic and Intersectional
- Challenging Claims of Neutrality, Objectivity, Color-evasiveness, and Meritocracy
- The Centrality of Experiential Knowledge and the Value of Storytelling
- Interrogating and Challenging of the Dominant Ideology
- Commitment to Social Justice
• Black and ANS families and ECEs value outdoor play
• Families are fearful of over-policing, stereotyping, and over-surveillance
• Outdoor play spaces are limited in many historic ANS communities

"As a child, we lived right off the main road. So, the risk of us going to the end of the driveway was scary for my parents. They were scared I'd be running out on the road with the cars going by. I didn't really get to do a lot of that, and it wasn't until much later on that I really got to experience going outside. Still wasn't doing what we would consider risky play. I had still none of that, no climbing, even going to something as simple as the Lake or the beach, we didn't do that. And too because my parents didn't get to experience that, I think they were scared for us to experience it."
-Parent

"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
Black Families and ECEs Experiences Within Early Childhood Settings

- Anti-Black Approach to Curriculum
- Inaction on Racism, Social Justice, and Equity
- Precluding Black Children from Culturally Safe Environments

"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

"[...] When I picked him up I told you about the biting 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
Racism and its Impact on Black Families in Nova Scotia

• Intergenerational impacts of racism

"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

"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
Equity and well-being among early childhood educators

• Early childhood educators have reported feeling "unappreciated and underpaid" (Saulnier and Frank, 2020)

• NS CWELCC workforce strategy focuses on:
  ○ Professional recognition (including compensation framework released fall 2022)
  ○ Pathways to Education
  ○ Lifelong learning

• Considering the ongoing changes and emphasis on workforce, we were curious about how the state of well-being of early childhood professionals
Exploring the well-being of early childhood professionals

DATA COLLECTION

The online survey was shared on social media and emailed in fall 2022 to:
• Early childhood professionals working in early learning and child care in NS
• NS Early Childhood Development Intervention Services (NSECDIS) Inclusion Coaches

EARLY CHILDHOOD PROFESSIONAL WELL-BEING QUESTIONNAIRE (ECPW-Q)

• The survey used a validated measurement instrument called the ECPW-Q (McMullen et al., 2020) to score participants' level of professional well-being. Overall well-being is the average score of early childhood professionals' responses to the items on the ECPW-Q.
• Items covered nine senses of well-being including their sense of security, comfort, communication, self-respect, affinity, engagement, contribution, agency, and efficacy.
• ECPW is located at the meeting point when these senses are felt by an individual.
The higher the score, the higher the professional well-being of an individual. The highest possible score to rank on the ECPW-Q is 135. The average ECPW-Q score in NS was 107.
"Being an early childhood educator is the most rewarding thing I’ve done to feel fulfilled in my life, but it is a struggle financially to live without stress and worry." - ECE
Recommendations from research for addressing (in)equity

• Enable partnerships within and outside of early learning and child care systems to respond to unique needs related to access

• Support the well-being of all early childhood educators through fair compensation, enhancing professional identity, and ensuring cultural and social-emotional safety

• Participatory and community-engaged research can mobilize the voices of educators, families, and children to identify solutions
Moving toward equity

• Critically examine socioeconomic, geographical, and racial disparities within early childhood systems

• Address anti-oppression within programs and build inclusive and culturally responsive programs

• Seek opportunities to leverage voices from those that experience inequity in the stories from families and early childhood educators
Thank you

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