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Citation:

Lander, V and Fairchild, N (2021) Seeing beyond: Perspectives of Black children in English ECEC. In: Sage Handbook of Global Childhoods. Sage. ISBN 9781529717815

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Document Version:

Book Section (Accepted Version)

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Seeing beyond: Perspectives of Black¹ children in English ECEC

Nikki Fairchild and Vini Lander

Background context

We write this chapter in turbulent times. This year (2020) has witnessed political, social, health and economic upheaval which has impacted many some of which has been caused by the Covid-19 pandemic. From a critical social justice perspective, the impact of this turmoil has further marginalized those at the intersections of race, gender, social class, sexuality and (dis)ability. The #BlackLivesMatters movement in the United States (US) reverberated globally following the murder of George Floyd which raised consciousness to other racially motivated murder in the US. In Europe colonial pasts and heritages have been a focus for polarized debates, mirroring the Rhodes Must Fall movement in South Africa. These happenings challenge the current status quo which has been built on slavery and colonial legacies. Postcolonial and neo-colonial theory has been used to unpick the impact of colonial and settler colonial heritages by attempting “to recognize the complexity of life through such notions of border lives, hybridity and transcultural/transnational existences” (Canella & Viruru, 2004, p. 27). As educators with a strong belief in social justice these concerns are close to our

¹ In the UK, more so in contemporary times, there has been a lack of positive acknowledgements of an individual’s identity. Black and Brown people have been labelled as BAME (Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic) in public policy and discourse. We acknowledge that the term BAME is pejorative, divisive, marginalising and homogenising based on the UK’s political categorisation of Black and Brown people and does not represent the diversity of people in the UK. We are also cognisant with identity discussions globally where People of Colour are reclaiming terms such as Black, Brown and Hispanic (see the work of some of the authors cited in this chapter). In the remainder of this chapter we use the term Black to acknowledge the political nature on the categorisation of people, this is not to set up another homogenising mechanism but to draw attention to an often neglected part of identity politics in the UK.

hearts and we consider our own positionality in our research and teaching. Nikki, teaches undergraduates in Early Childhood Studies and postgraduate degree programmes in England. She acknowledges her White, working class, feminist background and use this to question the privilege she has enjoyed throughout her education and careers. Vini, is a British-Sikh professor and a woman of Indian heritage teaching undergraduate pre-service teachers, postgraduate students and supervising doctoral students in England. As an educator of colour, she has been persistently made aware of her subaltern status within the academy by students and academic colleagues. Vini's racialised experiences form the basis of her research and scholarship. We feel the inequity found in these global issues impacts locally in our wider communities. We need to debate and discuss what is happening globally and locally and we hope we can use this to challenge the students we teach, and also continue to examine our own positionality.

Introduction

The United Kingdom is a nation composed of England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. It has a colonial legacy which has both shaped the diversity found in the population providing a difficult legacy for those who have either migrated to, or were born there (Houston, 2019; Race & Lander, 2014). From 1997 legislation and regulatory powers were devolved to Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. The impact of this in Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) has seen a divergence in curricular requirements, staffing qualifications and regulation. In England ECEC is driven and micromanaged by a statutory curricular framework delivered to children between the ages of birth to five years old (DfE, 2017) which includes mandatory requirements for all registered providers. The Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) (DfE, 2017) is underpinned by a range of other legal frameworks, for example the Equality Act (HM Government, 2010) nationally and the United National Conventions on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) (UNICEF, 1990) globally. It is also important to

note that child development, and in turn the ECEC curriculum, has been strongly influenced by developmental psychology via constructivist and social constructivist theories of learning (Burman, 2008). Canella and Viruru argue that the preoccupation with developmental psychology reflects modernist projects of colonisation which privileged “White European male adults and placed those who were younger (labelled children) and colonized people in much the same position – called savage, incompetent, out of control and incomplete” (2004, p. 87).

In this chapter we draw together historical and contemporary policy, practice and discursive influences to explore the ways in which Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME – see footnote 1 for a discussion on this terminology) young children’s experiences may be constructed. In doing so we aim to contextualize the issues faced by Black children which have been driven by changes in public consciousness and the rise of far-right and racist thinking which has been inflamed by Brexit, (im)migration and the Windrush scandal in the UK (Bhopal, 2018). We draw on and apply the tenets of Critical Race Theory (CRT) (Delgado Bernal, 2002; Delgado & Stefancic 2001; Lynn & Dixson, 2013; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002; Taylor, Gillborn & Ladson-Billings 2009) to consider how policy productions and experiences for Black children may manifest themselves. We also consider ways to develop an anti-racist approach for professional practice (see for example Houston, 2019; Nxumalo, 2019; Pérez, 2020; Pérez, Medellín, & Rideaux, 2016) and the implementation of policy, which can lead to the potential for more equitable experiences for Black children. Our rationale for this exploration is rooted in the global shift to more right-wing forms of government, media portrayals and social consciousness which demonstrates that inequity in the UK mirrors what is happening globally.

Theoretical engagement: Critical Race Theory

Introducing the context

ECEC in England encompasses care and education for children from birth to the age of five, where ECEC practitioners and teachers hold a range of vocational and academic qualifications. These practitioners and teachers need to balance both caring and professional aspects of their

role, particularly as children reach compulsory education from the September after their fifth birthday and pedagogy becomes more ‘schoolified’ (Moss, 2017). A preoccupation with developmental psychology has resulted in universalist and essentialized approaches which have homogenized all children, creating an ‘othering’ of children outside of these developmental and Eurocentric norms (Burman, 2017; Nxumalo & Ross, 2019; Pacini-Ketchabaw, 2014; Robinson & Díaz, 2006). The focus on developmentalism in ECEC has seen children conceptualized as being unaware of racial bias. However, critiques have highlighted that young children are very aware of racial difference and this can be manifested in their play (Houston, 2019; Pérez & Saavedra, 2017; Siraj-Blatchford, 1994; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002; Van Ausdale and Feagin, 2001).

Critical Race Theory and Intersectionality

We employ CRT (Delgado Bernal, 2002; Delgado & Stefancic 2001; Lynn & Dixson, 2013; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002; Taylor et al., 2009) as the theoretical framework to unpick policy and practice which contribute to young children’s experiences. Defining key terms is important to make relevant links between CRT and happenings in everyday life. Racialisation is the process by which the notions of race and racism becomes meaningful and is present in everyday occurrences, speech and thinking. Yusoff (2018) traces how racialized language can be related back to colonisation and the slave trade where blackness was a marker of the ways that Black people were treated as less-than-human and seen as ‘property’. Therefore “‘Race’ is about categorisation and classification” and racialisation becomes the process by which groups are characterized by their racial identity (Garner, 2017, p. 24).

CRT grew in prominence in the USA following the rise of the Civil Rights Movement in the US and the subsequent backlash from the resulting reforms (Taylor, 2009). The genealogy of CRT, arising from critical legal studies in 1989, began with the recognition of “the relationship between knowledge, naming and power” (Taylor, 2009, p. 4). This could then be applied to systemic structures of racial inequality which were situated in institutional political and legal structures premised by White supremacy and settler colonialism (Lander, 2011; Lander, 2014; Race and Lander, 2014; Yusoff, 2018). CRT has been applied to education research in both the USA and the UK as a tool to explore racial inequalities and academic achievement (Houston, 2019; Lynn & Dixon, 2013; Race & Lander, 2014). Hartlep (2009)

highlighted the five tenets of CRT: 1) racism is ordinary where colour blindness and meritocracy function to legitimize racism and the struggle to succeed; 2) interest convergence (Bell, 1980) highlights racial justice only occurs when it maintains the status quo; 3) race is a socially constructed phenomena (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001); 4) storytelling and counter-storytelling helps to unlearn dominant beliefs where counter narratives reveal inequity (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002); and 5) civil rights and equality legislation best serves the dominant White majority (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). These five tenets are key to highlighting inequality in wider society (Delgado, 2009). These inequalities have also been conceptualized as intersectional, a term introduced by Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989 to highlight how racial inequalities are magnified by other social structures of power such as gender, social class, disability, and sexuality (Crenshaw, 1989; Collins & Bilge, 2016; Pizzorno, Benozzo & Carey, 2015). CRT has been important in developing contributions to knowledge in education around race and racialisation of children, young people and teachers' experiences both in the USA and the UK (see Delgado Bernal, 2002; Delgado & Stefancic 2001; Lynn & Dixson, 2013; Race & Lander, 2014; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002; Taylor et al., 2009). Interestingly CRT has yet to be employed substantially in ECEC and pre-compulsory education in England and this is highlighted by Houston's (2019) work which is only one of the examples of its usage.

Social construction of race, ethnicity, Whiteness and White privilege

The term 'race' appeared in the 17th century and it was used "in European and North American scientific writing in the late eighteenth century in order to name and explain certain phenotypical differences between human beings" (Miles 2009, p. 180). Race is a social and political construct which has been used to essentialize particular characteristics of groups of people, classifying and delineating the predominance of Eurocentric superiority (Canella & Viruru, 2004; Walters, 2012). The third tenet of CRT is premised on the social construction of race (Delgado 2009; Delgado & Stefancic 2001; Delgado Bernal, 2002) and how this then breeds the inequality enacted in society. The rise of global populist politics has seen a resurgence in the eugenics movement which asserts a genetic basis to race trying to add scientific credence to categorizing people by their race. Even though the eugenics argument cannot be substantiated it is still part of the wider social construction of race (Lander, 2011; Pilkington, 2003, cited on Walters, 2012; Saini, 2020). This demonstrates the modernist view of Eurocentric science still holds power producing and 'othering' for all who are non-White (Canella & Viruru, 2004). Whiteness tries to categorise racism as an abhorrent feature of

society, however from a CRT perspective racism is present and a normal feature of everyday life (Hartlep, 2009) operating via ‘Whiteness’ and ‘White privilege’ which magnify power structures and reinforce specific political and cultural forms discriminating for those who fall outside these categories (Canella & Viruru, 2004; Lander, 2011). Colour-blindness is a tool of Whiteness (Picower 2009) and is used as a means to re-centre power maintaining hegemony and control, this results in race and racism being disavowed and not recognised. This view can produce further marginalisation and negate the identity and experiences of racism of Black people (Lander, 2011).

English Policy in ECEC

It could be argued that policy becomes the structure to normalize and maintain racial hierarchies as policy is never neutral. Governments and policy makers would challenge this assertion citing equality and diversity statutory requirements, for example the Equality Act 2010 (HM Government, 2010). Unfortunately, schools in the UK are not required to keep records as to how they eliminate discrimination, neither do they need to report this duty. This has meant “schools have no legal obligation to ensure that equality based on race is addressed and consequently, a race equality agenda has been pushed into insignificance” (Bhopal, 2018, p. 67). The lack of reporting presumes that either racism is an acceptable state or if it remains unreported it does not exist, and that the lack of legal obligation is an act of Whiteness, White privilege and White supremacy (Gillborn, 2005, 2008) to preserve the dominant structures of power in school and early years settings (Bradbury, 2014). The Prevent Duty (HM Government, 2015a) became statutory in response to perceived terrorism threats from so called ‘home grown’ terrorists and was a requirement of the Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2015 (HM Government, 2015b). Interest convergence highlights how certain policies distort perceptions and are used to maintain the prevailing status quo and privilege the dominant group. The Prevent Duty has been subject to critique as a policy which separates and ‘others’ those from a Black heritage groups, more specifically Muslims, and contributes to anti-Muslim racism (Lander, 2016; Jerome, Elwick & Kazim, 2019). Part of the same raft of policy development was the introduction of fundamental British values (FBV) defined as: democracy; the rule of law; individual liberty; and mutual respect for, and tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs and for those without faith (DfE, 2014). Although these sentiments seem an important declaration of social wellbeing, research has shown the requirement to promote FBV requires a critical viewpoint on what both ‘British values’ actually are and what institutional

and social structures they valorize or marginalize (Elton-Chalcraft, Lander, Revell, Warner, & Whitworth, 2016). Canella and Viruru (2004) draw on Foucault's theory of governmentality to demonstrate how power and resistance circulate. Discourses are reproduced by policy and by capitalist neoliberal structures where common sense beliefs in meritocracy in education prevail. These are exemplified by the Prevent Duty and FBV which reinforce a particular individualized sense of Britishness which is premised on Whiteness and White privilege (Lander 2018).

The ECEC curriculum in England, the EYFS (DfE, 2017), is imbued with developmental psychology and ages and stages of development. Children are assessed against a range of early learning goals where children either exceed, meet, or have not yet reached expected levels (DfE 2017). Both Prevent Duty and FBV are contained within the statutory requirements. Some of the challenges with the EYFS (DfE, 2017) is that the focus on age and stage development acts as a tool for homogenizing all children. This results in a White Eurocentric view of the child (and indeed the ECEC practitioner) in both popular discourse and policy imaginaries (see Cannella and Viruru, 2004). Even though its non-statutory companion, Development Matters (Early Education, 2012), makes it clear that all children are unique and that the early learning goals are not a performative tool, the need to assess children could produce a linear notion of pedagogical development (Moss, 2014). Hyper capitalism requires linear progression and this ties back into modernist science views of child development where the child is filled with knowledge to move from novice to expert. The universal child is an example of colonial construction (Canella & Viruru, 2004) that privileges 'normal' development. CRT tenets note how storytelling confers power to Black people in order to provide another perspective to the dominant narrative (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002), Black scholars in the ECEC in the UK are employing storytelling to counter the discourses of the universal child and practitioner (see Tembo, 2019, 2020; Henry-Allain, 2020). Houston argues that the EYFS negates children's perceived identities and their cultural heritages which they bring into the ECEC setting thereby "confirm[ing] hierarchal values of Whiteness" (2019, p. 28). The view of the child as 'natural' rather than 'sociological' contributes to a naïve approach to recognizing racism in young children which can get dismissed, ignored. The child may see race as a positive observation; however, this can be negated by adults who are or who want to be colour-blind (Canella, 1997; Pacini-Ketchabaw, 2014; Robinson and Díaz, 2006). Tembo notes "When we, as adults, are silent about race, we reinforce racial prejudice in children. Encouraging dialogue and conversation about difference is important in countering racialised

narratives.” (2019, n.p.). Educators may take this position as either a virtuous or ethical stance or they may be colour-blind themselves and either not want to deal with the messy issue of racism, or they are colour-blind to re-centre the dominant discourse of Whiteness (Lander 2014).

Every ECEC setting is required to be inspected by the Government regulator, the Office for Standards in Education, Children’s Services and Skills (Ofsted) which grades on teaching and learning and children’s progress. This grading now includes the setting’s capacity to build a child’s ‘cultural capital’ which has been defined as “the essential knowledge that children need to be educated citizens” (Ofsted, 2019, p. 31). This term has come under scrutiny with much debate about what ‘cultural capital’ might look like in ECEC teaching. There have been questions raised such as ‘whose culture is privileged?’ The challenge with the term ‘cultural capital’ is the normalisation which maintains Whiteness as the dominant societal position which re-inscribes racial hierarchies that underpin and perpetuate racism. We argue that the above aspects of English policy and its influence on children and families who identify as Black is profoundly problematic. The ethos of ECEC is rooted in the support for the unique child and strong partnerships with families with a focus on supportive and collaborative relationships with all (Dahlberg and Moss, 2005; Dahlberg et al, 2013). Although there may be broader more performative discourses of measurement and datafication of children’s learning (Bradbury and Roberts-Holmes, 2018), there are also wider stories of democratic engagements with practice (Moss, 2014). Engagement with broader international ECEC philosophies provides practitioners and teachers ways in which to connect with, and reconceptualize, the child’s potential (Canella & Viruru, 2004; Yelland & Bentley, 2018) and what this might mean for children’s rights (UNCEF, 1990).

Children’s Experiences in the EYFS

The EYFS curriculum and play based learning

The ECEC sector in England is diverse with different types of non-statutory provision including private day nurseries, children’s centres, nurseries attached to schools (or long day-care/preschools), and childminders (or family day care). Provision can be sessional or full time for up to 51 weeks of the year as selected by parents. The required qualification to work in

these types of settings is a vocational accreditation, which is equivalent to exit-level high school certificates, although academic qualifications have developed to postgraduate level in recent years (DfE, 2017). Once the child passes the September after their fourth birthday, they enter compulsory schooling for the Reception Year, which is generally led by qualified teachers who hold either an undergraduate or a postgraduate teaching qualification (Fairchild, 2019).

ECEC pedagogy is primarily play-based and practitioners and teachers tend to follow children's interests and engage in a blend of child-directed and adult-led learning both inside and outside the classroom (Wood, 2013). However, pedagogy can become more adult-led in the Reception Year in an effort to 'prepare' children for more formal compulsory stages of education. This is reinforced through curricular controls that include a range of assessed early learning goals where children either exceed, meet, or have not yet reached expected levels (DfE 2017). The resultant tensions with this model of assessment can produce performative expectations which "lead us to read backwards from the end point" (MacRae, 2019, p. 5) and can promote a more neoliberal linear view of learning and development. The EYFS is clear that teachers need an understanding of child development to support children's learning. However, scholars working on decolonizing childhood and teaching question the epistemological and ontological assumptions of developmental psychology. The normalization of a particular kind of child sets up a "normal/abnormal dualism" (Canella & Viruru, 2004, p. 103) where science demands observation, assessment and testing of children. Overcoming dualistic approaches is a challenge where "epistemology is more than a 'way of knowing'" (Ladson-Billings, 2000, p. 257) encompassing a "system of knowing; that has historically privileged Eurocentric perspectives as if they are 'the only legitimate way to view the world'" (Ladson-Billings, 2000, p. 258). Pérez & Saavedra (2017) argue that thinking with Global South onto-epistemologies, including Black and Chicana feminisms, can help to deviate from post-positivist practice and encourage a focus on lived experiences which challenges racialized understandings for young children.

The play based approach to ECEC has been widely accepted and implemented in ECEC settings. However, Houston (2019) has considered the ways in which a play based approach in England might be considered by Black families. There is little doubt that education is a double-

bind for Black children where Bhopal notes that “from an early age unequal participation and access to education shapes the lives of young people” (2018, p. 65). Data indicates that children from Black Caribbean backgrounds perform less well at gaining five GCSE’s (high school examinations at age 16), than children from Asian heritages. Houston (2019) argues that parents of Black children can value a more structured and adult-led style of teaching and learning in ECEC and that this view may be linked to the desire for more positive outcomes for their children as they enter compulsory schooling. The focus on lived experience could be construed as a colonizing practice where parents succumb to the dominant view of education and could be seen as a CRT interest convergence (Hartlep, 2009). However, power circulations are manifested by the need to conform to institutional structures where attainment becomes “a cultural construction...that conceptualizes one way of behaving and explaining the world” (Canella & Viruru, 2004, p. 106). These constructions of lived experience can, therefore, exclude other ways of knowing and being. The effect of this is that children who engage in alternative ways of being or don’t conform to the state sanctioned cultural norms become othered leading to the possibility of becoming/being constituted as educational outsiders from an early age.

Currently children are assessed against the EYFS early learning goals at the end of the Foundation Stage (the Reception Year). Assessment also becomes problematic where children are under surveillance. Observations and assessments are not apolitical and this can be seen through the Department for Education statistics which considers local and national pictures of children’s attainment (see DfE, 2019a). Interestingly the granular details on the end of year assessment are split by gender and location but racial identity is included in a second table which is not linked to the main text of the document (DfE, 2019b). In this way Black children are part of a ‘data gap’ which could have arisen as, although the DfE and schools need to uphold the public sector equality duty mandated by the Equality Act (2010), there is no requirement to publish intersectional data such as race, gender and disability. These data gaps make it a challenge to understand the impact of Whiteness on equal opportunities, under a critical lens it becomes impossible to demonstrate whether Black children are afforded equitable access to education as their White counterparts. Gillborn (2008) would contend this is part of the conspiracy of Whiteness i.e. the lack of data to make comparisons compounds but also renders invisible structural racial inequalities. So racial disadvantage is perpetuated but simultaneously cannot be proved. The notion of meritocracy, where anyone who works hard is rewarded,

ignores the systemic inequalities that institutional racism provides (Taylor et al., 2009). In fact, from a CRT perspective the notion of meritocracy is a fallacy and a construct of Whiteness which becomes a vehicle for some, and not all, to further their own power, and privilege

Storytelling: Multiculturalism and curriculum resources

The acknowledgement of the need for a multicultural view of society is summed up by Race who notes “multiculturalism, at the very least, is a desirable acknowledgement of cultural diversity within a pluralistic society” (2011, p. 5). However, he also acknowledges the concept is fraught with historical debates in the UK on the perceived need to integrate and assimilate people into the predominantly White dominated culture. It can be questioned what the focus on multiculturalism might produce in ECEC especially when, in the 1990’s, educational curriculums tokenistically focussed on ethnic differences and cultural stereotypes (Troyna & Carrington, 1990). The hidden curriculum can reveal a colour blindness where Black children might be receiving messages about their, or other, cultures based on tokenistic activities which may exoticize or marginalize them. Therefore, thinking critically about curriculum delivery and resources on offer to young children is crucial to encourage equity practices in settings (Houston, 2019; Robinson & Díaz, 2006) as ECEC classrooms can be seen as political spaces which reproduce, replicate and reinforce the dominant norms and discourses of a White male society (Siraj-Blatchford, 1994).

It is also important to consider how Black children might be represented in classroom displays and resources. A recent CLPE report noted the absence of Black characters in children’s books noting “There were 11,011 children’s books published in the UK in 2018. Of these 743 featured BAME characters... 4% of the children’s books published in the UK in 2018 had a BAME main character” (2019, p. 5). This is a challenging statistic as the DfE (2018) reported that 33.1% of pupils of compulsory school age in England were of minority ethnic origin. In ECEC the predominance of cultural stereotypes in books can be noted in texts such as *Handa’s Surprise* (Browne, 1994) which is very popular in settings. Although the book contains the story of a young girl’s journey in Kenya and who she meets on the way, it provides a reinforcement of certain stereotypical imagery of native village life. Robinson and Díaz (2006) consider the key aspect of the successful usage of a range of multicultural resources in settings is a critical understanding of the pedagogy that surrounds their usage. This is important

as it is a means to move beyond the social construction of the ideology of Whiteness and cultural uniformity which sees Black children as the Other (Pérez, 2020). Robinson and Díaz note:

educators need to observe children taking up subject positions in discourse of Whiteness in order to fully appreciate the complexities and contradictory positions through which many children are positioned (2006, p. 79).

This approach will ensure Black children do not feel like space invaders (Puwar, 2004) where spaces, resources and the hidden curriculum have the effect of normalizing Whiteness as a racializing practice.

Decolonizing ECEC: How can we move beyond this?

Anti-racist, anti-bias and abolitionist approaches

Taking a critical perspective, the importance of anti-racist, anti-bias and abolitionist approaches can become a way to develop and decolonize traditional notions of learning and development in ECEC (Canella & Viruru, 2004; Love, 2019a; Nxumalo, 2017; Pérez, 2020; Smidt, 2020). Pacini-Ketchabaw provides an important critique which suggests a multicultural approach in ECEC is often based on “essentialist views of culture and development” (2014, p. 70) and that this does not account for the heterogenous and complex nature of the children and their families. An anti-bias approach in ECEC aims to support young children to understand and value difference within and between others. It is based on the premise that racism and racialisation are socially constructed understandings and that only by exploring these can people understand and move beyond bias and stereotypical behaviours. However, an anti-bias approach does not always resolve the issues of essentialism, racism and discrimination. These approaches can appear just as homogenizing as multiculturalism as they do not always allow for individuality to be displayed and, although power relations are addressed, there may be a lack of focus on social relations (Becher, 2004). There have also been concerns that even though power relations are considered in anti-bias education they tend to take a dichotomous approach of perpetrators and victims which does not always consider the impacts of racism and intersectionality (Vandenbroeck, 2007). An anti-racist approach is cognisant of the impact of intersectionality on racialized discourses. Specific attention is paid to how Whiteness is normalized and the impact this has on categorisations which apply within societies

(MacNaughton, 2005). From an anti-racist perspective it is important to consider the power that flows through Whiteness, racism and White supremacy and how this can be critiqued to open out for activism which “transforms, and reforms, social relations, through racial categories and consciousness” (Lee & Lutz, 2005, p. 4, cited in Pacini-Ketchabaw, 2014, p. 72). The abolitionist approach has been developed in the USA and championed by Bettina Love. The abolitionist teacher focuses on the teacher’s ability to highlight and refuse racist practices that may result in the teacher being subject to racism and racist practices themselves. Abolitionist pedagogy might take the form of protest, identifying racism and countering this and implementing a pedagogy based on CRT. Love (2019b) explained that abolitionist teaching is not a set of guidance and best practices, it is way of living out anti-racism in every interaction the teacher has.

There has been a consideration of how to decolonize ECEC curriculums, learning and development which have been based on settler colonialism. This has occurred in Canada, USA, New Zealand and Australia where an appreciation of Indigenous communities, Black and Chicana feminism has played an important role in understanding different ontological and epistemological perspectives (Nxumalo & kihana ross, 2019; Pérez & Saavedra, 2017). The premise of these approaches is to consider the legacies of White settler colonisation and how these have impacted/are impacting on contemporary colonialist perspectives (Pacini-Ketchabaw & Taylor, 2015). Practitioners and scholars have championed a greater understanding of Indigenous knowledges, oral traditions and cultural heritages. This has been done in collaboration and partnership with local Indigenous people. Recognizing lived experience, which chimes with CRT storytelling, can reframe the “brilliance of children of color” (Pérez & Saavedra, 2017, p. 4) and pays due regards to how Black understanding does not ignore the influence of colonization and settler colonialism (Canella & Viruru, 2004, Nxumalo & kihana ross, 2019). These collaborative partnerships promote recognition and equity as they notice, name and share colonial discourses and struggles which can then be utilized to disrupt dominant racialized narratives in the curriculum (Pérez, 2020). There have also been moves to respect and include Indigenous ontologies and knowledge practices to develop broader understandings of the relationships between people and the land on which they live. This has been coupled with posthumanist thinking, to explore and reveal the connections between space/place and pedagogy (Nxumalo, 2019; Pacini-Ketchabaw & Taylor, 2015).

The New Zealand ECEC curriculum, *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, n.d.), has been lauded for the way it has bridged the juncture between Indigenous and settler communities. However, this needs to be set in the context that many of the ex-colonial nations remain divided with Indigenous populations still marginalized and stigmatized. The overarching theme of all anti-bias and anti-racist approaches are as a form of activism which has the potential to raise the profile of the issues faced by marginalized families and to work towards a social justice approach (Kessler & Swadener, 2020; Scarlett, 2016). This can also be coupled with both postcolonial (Viruru, 2005) and post-developmental approaches to teaching and learning (Canella, 1997). A postcolonial approach is concerned with making visible and confronting oppressive practices in ECEC to move beyond Eurocentric discourse and consider the impact of colonialism on perceptions of young children. Post development perspectives are not “singular approaches: they can and do work together to enrich understanding” (Pacini-Ketchabaw, 2014, p. 71) and this has been exemplified in work and research which might take a poststructural or posthuman perspective of teaching, learning and children’s development (for example Pacini-Ketchabaw & Taylor, 2015).

Counter storytelling: Critical pedagogy and ECEC practitioners’ education and training

A way forward for ECEC practitioners and teachers is to consider a critical approach to pedagogy. A critical pedagogy is based on a commitment to promoting more democratic approaches to all aspects of schooling (Darder, Baltodan, & Torres, 2003). This commitment extends to exploring the impact of both neoliberal capitalism, gendered and racialized relations and how these influence children’s experiences. Freire (1970) has had a profound influence on how critical pedagogy can help support emancipatory practices for marginalized peoples (in his case in Brazil). Other philosophical influences were drawn from Gramsci and Foucault (Darder et al., 2003) which considered the influences of power derived from discourse and how this circulated through society. Rethinking education as a political act can allow ECEC practitioners to challenge injustice in their classrooms, if they have the training and confidence to do so, and explore how this might intersect with gender, race, social class and dis/ability. However, this approach can be problematic as educators, who may be predominantly White, need to interrogate their own views and positionality as “cultural intuition is a complex process

that is experiential, intuitive, historical, personal, collective, and dynamic” (Delgado Bernal, 2016, p. 1).

In *Teaching to Transgress* bell hooks (1994) saw the opportunity for educators to raise their own awareness, their critical consciousness, to broader societal issues. This becomes important as it connects with a reflection of practitioners’ and teachers’ own positionality and how they might respond to racism and racialisation. Being open to new ways of knowing children can promote cultural pluralism and produce a culturally sustaining pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 2014). We feel that practitioners and teachers should be encouraged to turn attention to their own positionality, however hard this may be, as it is a crucial part of moving towards anti-bias, anti-racist practice and abolitionist teaching. It is very easy to accede to the common sense, taken for granted, normalisation of Whiteness and White supremacy and this becomes reflected in White privilege and can result in a colour-blind approach which is used to defend, both conscious and unconscious, racist views (Lander, 2014). This has been demonstrated in Houston’s (2019) research when she spoke to ECEC practitioners who had not been aware of the micro-aggressions they were displaying to the Black children in their setting. It was only on speaking with Houston (2019) and understanding the effect these micro-aggressions, and their own intersectional White privilege, were having that they could be conscious of their own positionality and how this impacted their practice. Furthermore, Tembo (2020) explored Black teachers experiences and counter-narratives in ECEC which impact the ways in which they construct their identity.

It therefore becomes critical to ensure that ECEC practitioner and teacher education allow for spaces to discuss issues of racism and racialisation in safe spaces so they can start to navigate issues of equity, equality and diversity (Patrick, 2010; Souto-Manning, 2019; Souto-Manning & Cheruvu, 2016). Lucero, Araujo, & Pérez argue that professionalization of the workforce should ensure that future educators value “minoritized knowledges and resist serving as gatekeepers that exacerbate inequities” (2020. p 9). The inclusion of these types of topics in practitioner and teacher education help students to problematize and interrogate their own positionality and how this might impact their professional practice. The impact for practice, after practitioners and teachers have finished their pre-service educational journey and enter the workforce, could help and support the development of a critical approach to aspects

of ECEC practice. Encouraging practitioners and teachers to understand how racism is manifested, and asking them to reflect on experience through a CRT lens, might help them understand how policy and practice can marginalize and stigmatize Black children (Lander, 2014). This critical intervention has the potential to transform aspects of Black children and families experiences of ECEC and provide ways to embrace social justice for all children. This is particularly important given contemporary British contexts which are manifested via ECEC policy (including FBV and the Prevent Duty) and social ramifications of public perceptions post Brexit referendum.

Conclusion

In this chapter we have drawn together a number of key threads to consider how experiences for Black children in ECEC in England might be conceptualized. We commenced our debate by exploring the contemporary social and political context in England and what this might mean for discussions that surround Whiteness, racism and racialisation. The tenets of CRT became our theoretical underpinning where we considered how policy has framed racialized debates and could be seen as a mechanism for marginalisation for Black children and families. We argued that these policies can seek to uphold Whiteness and White privilege and this is a legacy from our colonialist history. Although the Equality Act (2010) focusses on equity and equal opportunities this does not always translate to the fine grain practices which happen in ECEC on a daily basis. There has also been a lack of application of CRT in ECEC research, except for the work of Houston (2019), even though CRT has successfully been contextualized for children and teachers in older age phases. This could be based on legacies which have seen the child as developmentally immature and colour blind, although evidence to counter this exists (Canella & Viruru, 2004).

Anti-racist, anti-bias and abolitionist approaches in ECEC have moved beyond discussions of multiculturalism. There have been successful examples of how anti-racist and anti-bias approaches have been used to interrogate the relationships between settler colonialism and Indigenous peoples and how this can disrupt racism and racialisation refocusing on equitable practice. We turn to epistemologies of the Global South, such as Black and Chicana feminisms and critical pedagogy, as a way to encourage ECEC practitioners and teachers to

interrogate their own positionality and practice. It is only by equipping practitioners and teachers with the confidence to challenge these normative racialized dominant discourses that it becomes possible to consider a more inclusive vision for Black children and families.

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