

# NUR•TURE

The Power of Black Children



Fall 2020



**BCDI**  
Black Child Development Institute  
ATLANTA

# A Look Inside

Editorial The Value of Black Voices	3
Introduction	5
Nurture Editorial Board	6
Bridging the Gap: An Early Childhood Framework for Implementing Culturally Engaging Practices	12
Ethnocultural Education and Awareness	41
Reading to Learn: Improving K-6 Literacy with Project Based Learning	53
Nurture: 2021 Call For Abstracts	72
Getting Involved	76

## *Editorial*

# The Value of Black Voices



Given the current focus on anti-Black racism in American society, many corporations, organizations, schools, and communities have been forced to take a deeper look into the institutional and systemic racism, which have long plagued our country. Continued brutality and murders of Black men and women at the hands of police officers, the school to prison pipeline disproportionately impacting Black students, and workplace discrimination finding many Black personnel having to choose between hiding or naturally exhibiting their culture, are all examples of race-based occurrences sparking this necessary and direct focus on institutional and systemic inequities. These occurrences are prevalent in our country, systems, institutions, and communities due to the explicit and implicit biases against Black people. The history of racism against Black people in Georgia remains a disturbing ritual, as evidenced by its international top rank in Black imprisonment in jails, immigration detention, and juvenile justice facilities.

One specific and often ignored example of institutional racism is the presence of discrimination in academic publishing. What is currently known about academic publishing is most journals have White editors. As a result of little to no staff diversity, there is a lack of journals with a primary focus on race-related research; Black scholars are more impacted by harsh peer-reviewers; scholarship focused on race and racism, or centering Black people in the analysis, are rarely favored by editors and reviewers and are less likely to be accepted for publication. These issues raise major concerns and lead to even more inequities, as Black scholars are more likely to conduct research on topics impacting the Black community, often use critical race theory to confront systemic and structural biases, and incorporate empowerment lenses to uplift Black people. Without the dissemination of their work in public research journals, education, public policy, and practice will continue to be informed by deficit-based research, which highlights poorer outcomes in Black individuals, families, and communities compared to others.

The need for research centered on the unique experiences of Black children and their families, specifically written from the perspective of scholars championing the Black community is long overdue. BCDI-Atlanta recognizes this need and created *Nurture* in response—a platform for scholars to publish peer-reviewed works about Black children and their families without concentrating on deficits and comparisons to other races and cultures. Instead, *Nurture* focuses on solutions offering peer-reviewed articles championing the topics important to Black children ages 0-8 and their families and presenting readers with the scholarly Black perspective on practices, programs, and implications directly impacting Black communities.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Bisa Batten Lewis". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Bisa" being the most prominent.

Bisa Batten Lewis, EdD  
President & *Nurture* Editor-In-Chief  
Black Child Development Institute (BCDI)-Atlanta

# Introduction



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**Raynice Jean-Sigur, PhD**

is a Professor of Early Childhood Education in the Bagwell College of Education at Kennesaw State University (KSU). She has taught Child Development and Early Childhood Education courses for over 20 years. During her tenure, she launched the Birth through Kindergarten (B-K) undergraduate degree program and served as program coordinator for several years. The B-K program prepares early care providers and interested students to teach and care for very young children from birth through five years of age. Her research interests include early childhood teacher leadership, culture and diversity in early childhood education, families and children with medical/special needs and teacher preparation for early care and learning providers.



**Wendell Campbell, PhD**

serves as the Board Chairman for the Edward C. Mazique Parent Child Center in Washington, DC. He has been involved in early education and Head Start for 30 years, serving in various leadership positions. He works as a

consultant with Childcare Management Solutions, a certified training organization, located in Fort Washington, Maryland. He provides training services for childcare professionals nationally. His extensive experience includes Head Start Program Management, leadership and teaching at the university level, promoting responsive teaching practices, and promoting effective relationship/team building and communication/collaboration strategies.



**Tonia Renee Durden, PhD**

is a Clinical Associate Professor and Birth through 5 Program Coordinator within the Department of Early Childhood and Elementary Education at Georgia State University. Her primary scholarship and research trajectory focuses on exploring how to develop and support African American children's socio-cultural and create racially equitable learning experiences for children of color. Dr. Durden is committed to using teacher education and research as an informative vehicle towards helping develop educators and leaders who become culturally responsive change agents and advocates in their classrooms and communities.



**Linda Grant, PhD** is a Lecturer of Birth-Kindergarten Early Childhood Education at Kennesaw State University. Prior to Fall 2018, she served as Program Director for an associate degree program in Early Childhood Care and Education at a technical college. She also developed a training program for refugee women to earn a national C.D.A.. She has taught for 30 years in various capacities including classroom teacher, parent educator, teacher educator, and consultant. She is a fully certified trainer for the West Ed Program for Infant/Toddler Caregivers and she completed the University of Wisconsin's WIDA Training of Trainers, focused on supporting language development of dual language learners (DLLs) in early education and care programs. She is also fully trained in the CLASS instrument (infant, toddler, and preschool).



**Mark Anthony Gooden, PhD**, is the Christian Johnson Endeavor Professor in Education Leadership and Director of the Endeavor Leadership Initiative. He is the former Director of the Summer Principals Academy-NYC in the Department of Organization and Leadership at Teachers College, Columbia University. Before

entering higher education, Mark served as a secondary mathematics teacher and departmental chairperson who facilitated professional development workshops for and with teachers and educational leaders in Columbus Public Schools. Mark transitioned into higher education as an assistant professor of Educational Leadership at the University of Cincinnati. He went on to eventually rise to the role of the Margie Gurley Seay Centennial Professor of Education at The University of Texas-Austin. Mark has spent 18 years in higher education developing and teaching courses in culturally responsive leadership, race, law, and research methods. During that time, he has designed and facilitated professional development courses/workshops in anti-racist leadership, law, and community building. Mark earned his BA in Mathematics from Albany State University (an HBCU) and his MEd in Mathematics Education, a second master's, and a PhD in Policy and Leadership, all from The Ohio State University.



Established in 1981, Black Child Development Institute (BCDI)-Atlanta coordinates community programs and initiatives throughout the state of Georgia, supporting the six focus areas of the National Black Child Development Institute (NBCDI)—early care and education, literacy, family engagement, child welfare, public policy, and health and wellness.

Since 1970, NBCDI has been at the forefront of engaging leaders, policymakers, professionals and parents around critical and timely issues that directly impact Black children and families. With the support of the organization’s volunteer-driven National Affiliate Network, which includes BCDI-Atlanta, NBCDI is committed to its mission and vision.

### **Vision**

BCDI-Atlanta envisions a society that ensures a successful future for all Georgia’s children.

### **Mission**

To improve and advance the quality of life for Black children and families in Georgia through education and advocacy.

With the support of NBCDI and its local community partners, BCDI-Atlanta delivers high-quality resources that respond to the unique strengths and needs of Black children and their families. BCDI-Atlanta partners with children, families and organizations to implement culturally relevant, culturally responsive, trauma sensitive and evidence-based programs promoting high-quality early care and education, literacy, health, and family engagement.

BCDI-Atlanta is a non-profit organization - 501(c)(3). Learn more about BCDI-Atlanta at [www.bcdiatlanta.org](http://www.bcdiatlanta.org).



# OUR PLATFORMS

PUBLIC POLICY  
EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION  
HEALTH AND WELLNESS  
FAMILY ENGAGEMENT  
LITERACY  
CHILD WELFARE



**BCDI-Atlanta delivers high-quality resources that respond to the unique strengths and needs of Black children and their families.**



**BCDI**  
Black Child Development Institute



BCDI-Atlanta seeks to improve and advance the quality of life for Black children and their families through education and advocacy in the six NBCDI focus areas.

**1 Policy:** Advance the quality of life for Black children, families, and communities by connecting program, policy, and advocacy. Engage members and the broader community in activities designed to address local, state, and federal political and civic matters affecting Black children and families.

**2 Early Care & Education:** Promote the equitable distribution of quality across the birth to eight continuum and the connection between early childhood settings and elementary schools. Coordinate programs and training to increase the well-qualified, culturally & racially diverse workforce.

**3 Health & Wellness:** Promote culturally relevant healthy nutrition and preventative wellness practices among families. Coordinate outreach, programs and activities to engage, educate, and empower.

**4 Family Engagement:** Promote family engagement as a long-term commitment shared between multiple stakeholders from many settings. Coordinate family empowerment outreach, programs and activities that build partnerships and equip families with information and resources.

**5 Literacy:** Coordinate programs, activities, and training to ensure reading proficiency by the end of 3rd grade for all students. Engage students, families, and educators.

**6 Child Welfare:** Promote the improvement of the child welfare system. Coordinate outreach, programs, and activities that focus on prevention and effective, supportive, culturally competent care of children in all settings.

We invite you to join a Program committee at [www.bcdiatlanta.org/programs](http://www.bcdiatlanta.org/programs).

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# *Bridging the Gap:* An Early Childhood Framework for Implementing Culturally Engaging Practices

**Tameka Ardrey, Ph.**

Georgia Southern University

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Tameka Ardrey, PhD, Georgia Southern University, Armstrong Campus, University Hall 254, Statesboro, Georgia, 30460, address, Email: [tardrey@georgiasouthern.edu](mailto:tardrey@georgiasouthern.edu)

## **Abstract**

Although experts in early childhood education have acknowledged the need to address equity in the field, it continues to be a pervasive source of inequity for children all over the United States (UNICEF, 2019), particularly as it relates to Black students. Culturally inclusive pedagogical approaches such as NAEYC'S anti-bias curriculum and Developmentally and Culturally Appropriate Practices (DCAP) have paved the way for addressing this issue by creating meaningful and equitable learning environments for not only Black students but for all children. However, this widespread inclusiveness on multiple cultures may be a missed opportunity to

thoroughly and intricately address the cultural needs of Black students, as they tend to focus on breadth and not depth. Thus, my article will strive to bridge this gap by introducing the Early Childhood Framework for Culturally Engaging Practices (ECCEP). This framework was birthed out of my work as an early childhood administrator and aligns with four guiding principles: 1) The fostering of a school culture of unity, 2) The study of scholars whose cultures reflect those of the teachers and students represented in the program, 3) An emphasis on school readiness, 4) and the inclusion of culturally consonant character education. Although many early educators now understand the importance of culture to the development of young children,

effective and consistent implementation still remains elusive for many. This framework will provide a much-needed blueprint for them.

*Keywords:* culturally engaging practices, Afro-culturalism, early childhood education, pedagogy, African American preschoolers

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## Introduction

There is growing recognition of culture as one of the most significant systems within human development (Hyun, Marshall & Dana, 1995; Lee & Johnson, 2007; Nelson & Rogers, 2003; Nsamenang, 2008). So much so, that even the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) is currently revising their framework of Developmentally Appropriate Practices (DAP) to acknowledge the profound influence of historical, cultural and social contexts of development (NAEYC, 2019). This developmental perspective is particularly valuable for understanding the roots of educational disparities and the need for equitable and sustainable early education policies and practices for each and every child. In correspondence with the establishment of K-12 schools, early childhood education was developed according to White middle-class cultural norms; problematically

reflecting a single perspective focused on members of the most privileged group, thus marginalizing everyone else.

## Engaging Practices

In response to such cultural limitations, several pedagogical resources and educational frameworks have been developed to address the cultural needs and dispositions of diverse learners. The most foundational resource is NAEYC'S Anti-Bias Curriculum: Tools for Empowering Young Children (1989), a practical guide of teaching principles designed to encourage fairness, support identity development, embrace differences and facilitate unbiased cross-cultural interactions in the classroom. Since its conception, it has been the standard for multicultural education in the field and was recently revised to better align with current research on equity and diversity. Additionally, this curriculum has been used as an anchor for other scholarship seeking to enhance the educational experiences of children traditionally marginalized in the schooling process. Fairly recently, Curenton & Iruka (2013) used it to frame their conceptualization of culturally relevant, anti-bias instruction in which they emphasized the inextricable connection between culturally relevant teaching and anti-bias education in the educating of ethnically/racially minoritized children.

Equally impressive was the reconceptualization of DAP to Developmentally and Culturally Appropriate Practices (DCAP) to intentionally position culture at the center of the educational experiences of young children (Hyun, Marshall & Dana, 1995). In alignment with the aforementioned, this framework focuses on providing age-appropriate, culturally infused, and child centered activities. It encourages cultural pride and celebrates diversity while simultaneously challenging inequalities by confronting pervasive stereotypes. Although all of these educational approaches have probably transformed early childhood spaces in powerful ways for diverse learners; it has been my experience that their all-inclusive nature restricts their ability to fully capture the essence of the Black experience.

Multiple scholars of color have acknowledged the complexity of the Black experience as it requires us to continuously navigate three different realms of experience: mainstream, minority, and Afro-cultural/Black (Boykin, 1986; Thornton, 1997), at varying degrees of participation and each with its own set of values and expectations. Unfortunately, proficiency in all three does not typically occur through happenstance but is a learned behavior resulting from some form of socialization. Gay (1993) suggests that

educators can play an instrumental role in the socialization process by serving as “cultural brokers” skilled in finding commonalities between the different realms to use as a basis for classroom practices and interactions. Furthermore, Boutte and Hill (2006) assert that these practices are not only necessary but can be used as powerful affirming tools to inform “best practices” for African American students by centering their culture at the core of curriculum and instruction as opposed to simply using it as a bridge to learning Eurocentric content and norms. Unfortunately, this is exactly where the other frameworks and approaches fail to adequately address the specific needs of the Black children. By taking an all-inclusive, multi-cultural approach, they decentralize the uniqueness of the lived experiences of African American children and their families. From my experience as a Black woman in academia, I fully understood the necessity of being able to proficiently navigate each realm and felt an overwhelming sense of accountability and responsibility to support our students through the process. I also understood the importance of using African American culture as the foundation for socialization as it was where our students’ greatest strengths abound. Hence, it was important for me to find a way to continue promoting the culturally relevant anti-bias values my students

had gained from previous models while intentionally honoring and centering the Black experience as the foundation for learning.

Thus, I would like to introduce The Early Childhood Framework for Culturally Engaging Practices (ECCEP) (Figure 1). This framework was developed to specifically address the developmental needs of the Black children in my program. ECCEP builds on previous anti-bias and culturally relevant frameworks and approaches by positioning Black

culture as the pillar of instruction, interactions, and identity development. In particular, the framework was designed to build on the afro-cultural capital that the children already bring into the classroom. Whereas the other pedagogical approaches center on the breadth of cultural inclusivity, ECCEP emphasizes depth. Utilizing an autoethnographic approach, I will (1) give background on why and how ECCEP was developed, (2) outline and describe the purpose, implementation process, and Afro-centric influence of the core

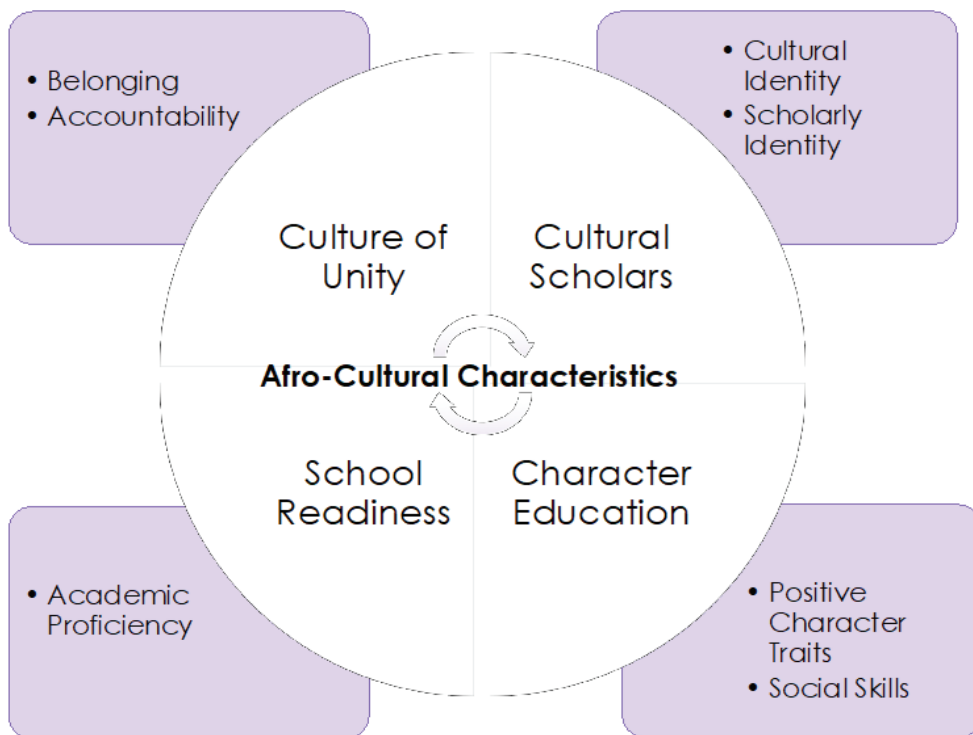


Figure 1: Early Childhood Framework for Culturally Engaging Practices

guiding principles of the framework, and (3) highlight implications and recommendations for administrators.

### **From Missed Opportunity to Counternarrative**

ECCEP was inspired by my work as the administrator of a nationally accredited, five-star child development center located in the Southeast. This center was strategically established in one of the most underserved predominately low-income Black communities to address the lack of access to high quality early learning opportunities. Accordingly, the children served in my program were those traditionally labeled “at risk” for academic failure. In fact, this description was often used as a marketing strategy by the parent organization to solicit donations and additional funding. Unsurprisingly, it often proved to be successful as the appeal of helping poor and struggling Black children have a chance for a better life always seemed to pull at the heart strings of wealthy White philanthropist in search of a worthy cause. Although well meaning, it was often a source of contention between myself and the Director of Donor Services as I consistently clarified that such deficit-driven approaches grossly mischaracterized the strength and tenacity of the children and families we served. Although many of our

families were not financially wealthy, they were unquestionably prosperous in other ways. They brought a wealth of knowledge, skills, and abilities to our center. They were involved, present, and always willing to help. Consequently, as both a member of the Black community and a self-proclaimed scholar activist, I refused to allow this to be the story told about these brilliant Black children and made it my mission to present a powerful counternarrative.

Ironically, I begin my tenure as director at the apex of my doctoral studies. I was three years in and deeply emerged into scholarship addressing the issues of racial inequity in education. Thus, I clearly understood that traditional white-washed approaches to education would not suffice in the creation of this uplifting pro-Black counternarrative and that I had to be willing to do something different. Needless to say, I was up for the challenge as I already felt compelled to tailor the early learning experiences within my program to meet the cultural needs of the Black children and families I served. Subsequently, incorporating aspects of both anti-bias education and DCAP into the structure of my program appeared to be the obvious approach.

Initially, implementation of these approaches went really well. The children learned a lot about themselves, how



they were alike and different and about fairness. However, there still seemed to be a disconnect between many of the them and the course content as evident by complaints of boredom, disruptive behavior during instructional time, or all together disinterest in class activities. Likewise, there was a noticeable lack of engagement among my teachers as well. In fact, all of the educational frameworks and approaches had so many standards and goals that they soon became little more than the newest addition to their already extensive daily to-do list; and were thus implemented inconsistently and at times indifferently.

As I took some time to observe my center in action, I noticed a natural ebb and flow in the daily interactions between students, families and staff. It was unscripted, unplanned and authentic. Being that the demographics of both the staff and the students were overwhelmingly Black, I came to realize that I hadn't recognized it before because it was familiar. It was reflective of normative characteristics of Black culture, our culture. It was a collective experience with shared meaning, and it belonged to all of us. I quickly realized that although the culturally relevant anti-bias work we had done up until this point was awesome, there was still an invaluable missed opportunity for student empowerment and transformative learning. Hence the

birth of the Early Childhood Framework for Culturally Engaging Practices (ECCEP).

### **The Early Childhood Framework for Culturally Engaging Practices**

As the new director, I was charged with developing the center's inaugural preschool summer enrichment program which I affectionately named *Scholars on the Rise*. Summer typically signified a change of pace as enrollment tended to be lower, ratios smaller and teachers more relaxed. Consequently, the teachers would have less students to prepare for but more time to prep, creating a greater space for experimentation and implementation. Thus, I found it to be the perfect time to introduce ECCEP. Furthermore, the smaller enrollment numbers would make it easier for us to truly capture its degree of effectiveness. However, I understood that the framework's success would require a collaborative effort where each and every one of us was an invaluable participant.

### **The Role of the Teacher**

Thirty years of scholarly work has been conducted on best ways to educate children of color and although some progress has been made there is still much left to be done. From years of training and observing early educators,

I submit that part of the problem is that many understand the why and not the how behind incorporating the culture of their students into classroom practices. In fact, research has consistently identified teachers lack competency in culturally responsive teaching as a primary barrier from its consistent and effective implementation into the classroom (Alaca & Boykin, 1992; Gay, 2013). Accordingly, this lack of competence causes many teachers to either rely on stereotypical social cues from the media and popular opinion to determine when and how to address student cultural needs in the classroom or avoid acknowledging culture all together (Alaca & Boykin, 1992).

My experience with my staff reaffirmed much of this research. As an introduction to culturally sustaining pedagogy, I took the last fifteen minutes of a staff meeting to play a YouTube clip of Dr. Gloria Ladson Billings discussing the premise and benefits of culturally relevant teaching. Immediately after the video I asked the teachers to share their thoughts. Many of the teachers boldly conveyed that they were already utilizing it by having multi-cultural pictures and dolls in the classroom. To challenge them to think more critically about their teaching practices I inquired how they use the materials to help the students make personal connections to the

content and their home experiences. In response, the once confident educators now appeared to be uncertain. In fact, one educator admitted, "I don't know. I ain't never think about all that." From this discussion, it was evident that my staff lacked the knowledge and skill set to effectively implement culturally educating pedagogy, even with early education degrees. Unfortunately, most of my teachers were being exposed to these concepts for the very first time. Hence, I wanted to be intentional about empowering my staff to confidently implement culturally engaging pedagogy.

First, I guided my educators through self-reflection exercises to ensure they had a solid introspective understanding of their own cultural biases and their impact on their current teaching practices. One such exercise was a picture reaction exercise in which I displayed several stereotypical images representative of various cultural groups we served and instructed them to write down their initial impression. Afterwards, I asked them to look at their responses and to identify how it may affect their interactions with comparable children and families. This activity led to some rich discussion about the existence of implicit bias, the dangers of color-blind ideology, and the importance of actively countering them both.

Next, we examined several research studies and news articles on the impact of cultural identity on classroom dynamics and the educational inequities, such as discipline disproportionality (Gilliam, 2005) and the overrepresentation in special education programs (Boutte, 2012) they perpetuate for Black students. Moreover, to emphasize the adverse impacts beyond the classroom, we viewed the “Unequal Opportunity Race,” a short film that uses the analogy of a relay race to illustrate how obstacles like wealth disparities, discrimination, and inequitable schooling experiences hinder the social, academic, and economic advancement of African Americans while Caucasians continue to excel and prosper (African American Policy Forum, 2010). The video had a powerful impact as it struck a nerve and generated the type of vulnerable, transparent and candid conversations early educators must have to authentically implement culturally engaged pedagogy. Thus, all that was left to do was to train the staff on the ECCEP framework.

I conducted an ECCEP workshop with my preschool teachers for one hour every Wednesday for a month during which we discussed the five afro-cultural qualities, analyzed the four guiding principles, and engaged in collaborative lesson planning. This was also a time for teachers to ask questions, express concerns and share

ideas with one another. These weekly meetings also provided me with valuable feedback on my effectiveness as a leader in providing sufficient support for the planning and implementation of ECCEP at the classroom level.

### **The Foundation and Structure of ECCEP**

Desiring to take a strengths-based approach by capitalizing on the shared culture already prominent in the center, I wanted to strategically build upon the afro-cultural capital that our students bring into the classroom environment. In fact, the core of ECCEP is the entrenching of the afro-cultural identities and understandings of the students, their families, their communities and even the staff into the design and facilitation of classroom practices and curriculum. This was essential to the development of the framework as these entities represent the key stakeholders in the education process. However, as a Black educator I also understood that there had to be a delicate balance between cultural innovation and normative early childhood education standards particularly as it relates to school readiness and social skills both of which were considered in the development of the guiding principles.

Figure 1 illustrates the conceptual framework that highlights the key

components of ECCEP. As illustrated by the quadrants of the circle, there are four guiding principles that compose the framework. Additionally, the rectangle boxes attached to each quadrant provide insight on the objectives for each guiding principal. As previously stated, ECCEP is child-centered and builds on the afro-cultural capital and lived experiences that students already bring with them. This is demonstrated by Afro-cultural qualities being strategically placed in the center of the circle. The cyclic arrow surrounding it emphasizes the fact that essential qualities of the afro-cultural essence influences the process of learning and development throughout the entire framework.

### **Dimensions of Afro-Culturalism and the ECCEP**

In my quest to succinctly capture the characteristics of the afro-cultural capital of the students, I referred to Boykin's (1983) nine essential qualities of afro-cultural ethos that continue to be central in the lives of Black people even today. Among these qualities are

1. Spirituality: the belief that there is a vital force that helps us successfully navigate the peaks and valleys of life,
2. Verve: the tendency to attend to several concerns at once in an attempt to keep oneself stimulated,
3. Movement expressiveness: the

emphasis on the interconnectedness of music, rhythm and dance,

4. Communalism: a commitment to social connectedness over individualism, and
5. Orality: partiality to oral communication.

These five were selected because they were the most visible in the natural interactions observed throughout the center and thus used in the implementation of the framework. In particular, they were embedded within the expectations, activities, and practices of the four guiding principles.

### **Four Guiding Principles**

As I began to conceptualize the structure of the framework, I immediately started to reflect on the organic familial-like interactions between students and families, parental expectations of academic achievement, staff feedback on previous anti-bias models, traditional standards of school readiness, my own empowering educational experiences, and the knowledge I had gained from my doctoral studies. As I synthesized all of this information, I noticed common themes which I was ultimately able to condense into four guiding principles. These four guiding principles are:

1. The fostering of a school culture of unity,
2. The study of scholars whose

cultures reflect those of the teachers and students represented in the program,

3. An emphasis on school readiness through the reinforcement of essential academic skills,
4. and the inclusion of culturally consonant character education.

### ***The Fostering of a Culture of Unity***

This principle was grounded in the afro-cultural quality of communalism as it hinged on the belief that the strength of the collective transcends the selfish desires of the individual. It was important that the students understood they were a vital part of a larger community; one that values and depends on the individual contributions of each and every one of them to work effectively and efficiently. Accordingly, I wanted to create a sacred space for all of the students to interact, encourage, and learn from each other simultaneously. When reflecting on the demographics and culture of my center, I immediately begin to think about the structure of the Freedom Schools model, a six week culturally responsive summer literacy enrichment program for undeserved K-12 students (Children Defense Fund, 2020).

During the summer prior to the implementation of ECCEP, I was blessed with the opportunity to visit a Freedom School site to experience Harambee.

Harambee was their morning meeting during which the counselors led students in songs that had rhythms and beats akin to those found in hip-hop, rhythm and blues and Black gospel music genres. The students were excited and engaged and I had no doubt that if adapted to a preschool friendly format, my students and teachers would display the same amount of enthusiasm. My first step was to identify a name for our morning assembly. During the process, I thought about some research I had conducted on early childhood in Africa and recalled coming across the South African word Ubuntu that means “I am because we all are” (Thompson, 2017). I knew instantly that this would be the perfect title for our morning assembly as it supported everything we were trying to accomplish.

**Ubuntu.** Ubuntu actually served dual roles in the program. It set the tone of academic excellence for the day and also served as a powerful teaching tool for our students. In alignment with the African origin of the phrase itself, the Ubuntu celebration was an acknowledgement of the historical roots of our ancestors in an effort to bridge the gap between current learning and experiences to their historic African origins. Accordingly, characteristic of communalism, there was an emphasis on connectedness and humanity towards others, ultimately reinforcing that simply being a scholar is

not enough. They had to be accountable for their words and actions because they not only had a personal impact but impacted everyone around them as well, be it positive or negative. Considering the overwhelming disproportionate expulsion rates of Black preschoolers (Gilliam, 2005), the goal was for the children to begin to develop empathy.

Directly aligned with the necessary skills for school readiness that emphasize the importance of social development (Rashid, 2009), this collaborative approach to humanitarian efforts is not only reflective of Black culture but also a key component of engaged pedagogy and culturally relevant teaching (Hooks, 1994; Ladson-Billings, 1995). The benefit of this approach is that it took the burden of social accountability solely off the individual child and made it a shared experience. For the students in my program, this seemed to be advantageous as it was not uncommon to walk into a classroom and hear them correct each other's behaviors. One comment that I remember distinctively occurred during circle time in one of the classrooms. Two little girls were sitting beside one another and when one of them attempted to initiate a side conversation while the teacher was talking, she responded, "You need to stop talking because I am trying hear so I can learn. You gotta learn too." Although I am

sure she was likely repeating a phrase she heard from her teacher, the fact that she had internalized it to govern her own behavior as well as to support her classmate in altering hers was a powerful assertion of the transformative power of the culturally engaging pedagogy used within the framework.

**Daily Affirmation.** Another source of collective empowerment was the daily affirmation in which the children utilized oral tradition to proclaim their worth as individuals and scholars. Students not only recited the affirmation at school, but copies were sent home for them to implement as well. It was important for students to not just recite it but to actually understand what they were saying thus we analyzed each line during Ubuntu to create a collective understanding. In accordance with the tenets of culturally relevant teaching, this affirmation challenged deficit ideologies by presenting a counternarrative to pervasive negative perceptions of Black children (Ladson-Billings, 1995). As opposed to letting others dictate their identities and abilities, they were empowered to proclaim it for themselves and each other. By presenting this counternarrative, it was my hope that we would offset the impact of the many media images of negative stereotypes to which they had already been exposed (Boutte, 2012). One of the greatest rewards

was to see the children internalize the affirmation as evident by their increased confidence to take chances and try new things. Each morning I would ask a student to come up and lead us in the affirmation. It was uplifting to see children who would not normally choose to be the center of attention, out of fear and shyness, eagerly volunteer to take the lead. Apparently, somewhere throughout the summer they begin to view themselves differently and find the strength within to act on it. Although there are several potential contributors to this transformation, it is very likely that the affirmation contributed significantly.

#### The Daily Affirmation

I am uniquely and wonderfully made!  
 I have everything I need inside of me to  
 do my very best!  
 I am smart!  
 I am important!  
 And I am destined for greatness!

**Music and Movement.** Music and movement was another essential element for the creation of the culture of unity and the spirit of communalism. Without question, music is inextricable from Black culture. Throughout history it has been a vehicle of expression and continues to be just as relevant today; hence its incorporation into Ubuntu each morning. During this time, we would sing and

dance to a variety of songs; ranging from songs of affirmation about the brilliance and beauty within ourselves to exploring letters and numbers. The songs we sang with the children had melodies that included rhythms and beats reflective of the music that the children heard in their homes, communities, and churches. For these students, this connection was critical as it eliminated the potential for cultural discontinuity within the learning process.

Cultural discontinuity can impede student's ability to achieve academic success (Ogbu, 1982), as children of color often struggle with reconciling their home culture with the expectations of the school culture. Thus, it is not surprising that many students disengage during the learning process when culture is not utilized as a bridge to connect the two. The music and movement of Ubuntu served as that bridge for many students in our program. The most powerful impact of the utilization of movement expressiveness into our pedagogical practices was the transformation of one of our four-year old boys who had a reputation of being "a problem child." Prior to the ECCEP, he would often destroy the classroom out of frustration and self-proclaimed boredom.

Day after day, I would receive frantic phone calls from his teachers asking

me to come and take him out of the classroom because he was being violent and disruptive. However, shortly after implementation, he began singing, dancing and smiling during every morning celebration. He was now engaged, and it made a difference not only in Ubuntu but in the classroom as well. His teachers reported that he began participating in group time and even took the lead in singing the various chants and songs throughout the day. This was paramount considering the research suggesting that disengagement due to patterns of alienation from the schooling process can be significantly irreversible (Allen & Boykin, 1992). It is imperative that young children are positioned for successful navigation between home and school and that is exactly what the intentional culturally familiar music did for this little boy. Likewise, the infectiousness of the music and movement even spread to the parents as some of them would be heard singing the songs with their children during arrival or reported that they sing along at home.

### ***The Study of Cultural Scholars***

Scholarly identity refers to the identification of oneself as an intelligent and competent learner in the schooling environment (Whiting, 2006). This is an important aspect to academic achievement as it directly relates to an individual's belief in his or her ability to

achieve and succeed in the schooling environment. Research shows that schooling practices are important factors in the development of the academic identity of students (Nasir, McLaughlin, & Jones, 2011). Both directly and indirectly, school practices communicate specific cultural norms that typify what successful students and scholars should look like. Unfortunately, these norms and expectations often differ significantly from those familiar to Black children. It is for this reason, that culturally engaging pedagogy was used as an intentional tool in the development of positive scholarly identity of our students. It was important for these brilliant Black scholars to see that they were already equipped inside with everything they needed to be successful both in school and in life. They were enough! To reinforce this belief, we built upon the afro-cultural characteristic of spirituality, particularly as it related to knowing that they were intentionally created in the image of a loving creator. In fact, the first line of the daily affirmation was derived from Psalms 139:14 where King David declares that he was fearfully and wonderfully made by God (New International Version, 2011). Nonetheless, I realized that sometimes even with such powerful affirmations, we still cannot see things in ourselves until we have first seen it in others, I found it imperative to introduce our students to Black Scholars.



**Focus on Black Scholars.** The study of Black scholars was inspired by Eunique Gibson's (2013) photo campaign of children dressed as influential Black icons entitled *Because of Them, We Can*. Each week the children learned about a prominent Black scholar, related to the theme of study, whose life's work has positively impacted the lives of all of us. More specifically, they learned how these scholars paved the way for all generations behind them, used their gifts and talents to improve the quality of life for everyone, and how they could follow in their footsteps by making their own difference in the world. For example, we talked about Daniel Hale Williams who performed the first successful open-heart surgery and discussed the function of the heart, so they realized the magnitude of his contribution. Exposing young children to positive scholarly role models, representative of their own racial and cultural backgrounds, allows them to make a personal connection. Discussions about these Black scholars not only exposed the children to the richness of their past but also gave them a glimpse of multiple possibilities for their future (Akua, 2020). This glimpse demonstrates the quality of spirituality as it relates to hope in the future; a hope purposed to reassure each and every child that no matter what obstacles they may face, they can still achieve greatness.

Furthermore, aligned with anti-bias education and with the DCAP framework (Hyun, Marshall & Dana, 1995), the presentation of Blacks in professions in which they would not be typically represented challenged pervasive stereotypes about career paths ultimately opening children to a world of options. Additionally, in conjunction with the center affirmation, this exposure reinforced the scholarly identities of the students. It was evident that the students took pride in themselves as they proudly proclaimed their affirmation and declared their love for learning. Common phrases that students would say while engaging with their teachers and peers throughout the center consisted of things like, "I can do it because I'm smart." All of these vocalizations were organic utilizations of the quality of orality and became a common practice as a result of ECCEP. Additionally, they were proof that the children had not only embraced the information but also took pride in themselves and the racial group they represented. This is a key protective factor from negative stereotypes (Seaton, 2010) and an invaluable tool for navigating the mainstream and minority realms of the Black experience.

The student's internalization of the material was also evident in conversations we were having about future aspirations. As opposed to the most common answers

among very young children, such as a basketball player, a singer, a cheerleader, the students began to express interests in becoming artists, scientists and doctors. While all of these professions are honorable, it was exciting to see that they were open to exploring other fields. In numerous classrooms, I would observe little girls dressed up pretending to be Doc McStuffins. Admittedly, with the popularity of the show, little girls had already begun to show interest in the medical field. However, it appeared to be more intensified at least in the classroom setting. The exposure to Doc McStuffins was a definite benefit as it allowed us to activate the student's prior knowledge as a foundation for future knowledge. Up until this point, these children looked at Doc McSuffins as a cartoon character, but we were able to give them a real-life example. During Ubuntu one morning, one of the mothers, who is actually a veterinarian, came and talked about her experiences. This was a powerful moment for many of our students because not only did they realize that they had a personal connection with a Black scholar, but she was a part of our village.

**The Emphasis on School Readiness.** The concept of school readiness has become a universal measurement of how prepared children are to successfully navigate all aspects of the schooling process. In fact,

it has a significant impact on how they adjust to the classroom setting, master course content, and engage in pro-social behaviors with their peers and teachers. Unfortunately, school readiness criteria often fail to address the inequities of life experience and opportunities among students ultimately leaving them with the blame of academic failure (NAEYC, 1995). Accordingly, data from the Early Childhood Longitudinal Survey indicated that Black kindergarteners were ranked by teachers as having the least amount of school readiness skills and behaviors positively linked to higher academic achievement (Kena et al., 2015). I was determined not to allow my students to be counted as part of such statistics.

As both a Black scholar and program administrator, I felt an obligation to present my young scholars as living counternarratives to the deficit perspectives of Black students in the educational system. I was going to ensure that our scholars would acquire all the essential school readiness skills necessary for academic success including effective communication, excitement about learning, recognition of the alphabet, counting and knowing basic concepts (Wesley & Buysse, 2003). Nevertheless, I knew that in order to effectively do so we had to use pedagogical strategies that would cater to the afro-cultural characteristics and

strengths the students already possessed. Hence, they became integral parts of our pedagogical practices. Verve, orality, and movement expressiveness were intentionally incorporated to enhance the lessons taught and experiences created for the children. However, spirituality had a more discreet yet equally powerful space in our school readiness practices. Yakini (1998) declares, "Each child is a unique manifestation of divine spirit with particular gifts, personality, traits and needs. This understanding must guide interactions with our children and must illuminate our attempts to develop appropriate curriculum and instruction for them" (p. 82). This characterized the essence in which we approached the implementation of the school readiness principle as the children were empowered to become active participants in their learning experiences.

**The KWL Chart.** One such pedagogical practice was the utilization of the What I know, What I want to know, and What I learned (KWL) chart. This chart was an invaluable tool for empowering children to become active participants in the education process by activating their prior knowledge as a foundation for future knowledge. Through it, students were given a degree of ownership for the planning of their learning experiences for each theme. Reinforcing the quality of orality, students were encouraged to

vocalize what they already knew about the theme and had the opportunity to determine what they wanted to learn next. Ultimately, the children were empowered as stakeholders in their own education which exemplifies the practice of engaged pedagogy. Engaged pedagogy is about creating a collaborative learning environment between students and teachers that accommodates student voice (Brophy, 2008). In my experience, this student voice seemed to increase the investment students had in their learning opportunities as evident in the change of student feedback.

After the implementation of this practice, many of the students were able to better articulate what they had been learning and discussing in the classroom. For example, part of Ubuntu was a review of everything children had been working on throughout the week. Children were not only able to tell me the name of the theme, but they were able to name the scholar of focus as well as tell me specific details about their impact on society and how it related to their own lives. I must admit I was shocked at how much the kids retained and how they were able to share information with me that I did not know. It showed me that the teachers and students were doing some independent research and having real conversations about the subject matter. All things considered, learning

was no longer simply an obligation for our students, but it was engaging and exciting because they were now able to make personal connections.

**Learning Through Simulation.** The pinnacle of our school readiness strategy was the creation of interactive lifelike experiences that would enhance student learning by positioning them as active and engaged participants. This was particularly important for our students because it catered to several of the essential afro-cultural qualities such as verve, orality, and expressive movement as students were encouraged to actively engage in multiple experiences and discussions simultaneously. The teachers not only embraced this teaching strategy, but they implemented it with a high level of proficiency. The focus of the first week of Scholars on the Rise was Africa. During this week, we discussed the continent of Africa as the origin for Black people. In preparation for this week several of the teachers collaborated on a secret project based on the KWL feedback from the students. They provided me with a list of materials that they needed in advance but whenever I asked them what they were going to do, they told me I had to wait and see. Early Monday morning as I was conducting my routine walk through, I observed two rows of chairs in the hallway. On the wall beside the chairs were several images of windows

overlooking a series of clouds. Each chair had ribbons attached on each side that could be tied together in the middle to simulate a seat belt. The classroom door was adorned with a sign that said, "Welcome to African Airlines" and a list of flight locations and times.

As I walked into the classroom, I saw one of the teachers sitting in a chair dressed in a white coat, wearing a stethoscope around her neck, and a toy doctor's kit on her lap. In her hand was a toy syringe and in front of her was a line of children. "Ok, who's the first patient? Who's ready to get their vaccination before they get on the plane?," asked the teacher. "Me, me, me!," yelled the children almost in unison. Another teacher who had a clipboard full of papers in her hand, looked at the first child and said, "Ms. Pendergrass, the doctor is ready to see you now," and gently pushed her towards the classroom doctor. The doctor gently grabbed the first child by her hand and pulled her closer. "Good Morning, Ms. Pendergrass. How are you today?" inquired the teacher. "Good," replied the little girl with a huge smile on her face. "That's great," the doctor responded as she looked down at the sheet of paper the nurse had just handed her. "I see you need some vaccinations to travel. Where are you going, ma'am?" "Africa!" the little girl yelled with the huge smile still plastered on her face.

"I've always wanted to travel to Africa. I heard it was a beautiful place. Ok, I am about to give you two different shots. It's going to be a quick sting but then it will be fine. Are you ready?" the teacher queried. The little girl nodded her head in affirmation. The teacher pressed the toy syringe against the little girl's arm and then opened a Band-Aid and placed it over the location of the pretend shot. "You were so brave. Not one tear. Your shots are now up to date. Enjoy your trip to Africa," stated the teacher. "Thank you," responded the little girl as she turned and walked away to show her friends her Hello Kitty Band-Aid.

Both teachers repeated the entire process on the next child and I decided to ask the children patiently waiting in line a few questions to determine whether or not the children understood what was really going on. Although it was a very creative and interactive experience, it was meaningless if the children did not understand what they were doing or why they were doing it. "Hey Donovan, what are these vaccinations y'all are waiting for?" I asked. "We gotta get shots, Ms. Tameka," he replied as he jumped up and down. "Why do you need shots," I asked next. "Cuz we going to Africa today," he answered. By this time, we had gained the attention of many of the other children in line who had begun to crowd around me as well. "Yeah,"

another child had chimed in "We going on the airplane." "Well, I know you all are traveling to Africa on an airplane but that does not tell me why you all have to get shots. I went to Florida on the airplane, but I didn't have to get any shots before I went," I countered. Donovan looked at me for a second as if he was in deep thought and then he said, "Well, Mrs. Soni said we had to get shots, so we won't get sick because Africa is far far away and sometimes people get sick when they come back." "Oh, I see," I reacted. "It's like the shots we have to get when we were babies and sometimes now too though when we go to the real doctors so we won't get sick, but it's just different kinds of shots," another child stated. "Well, I got a shot from the doctor and it didn't hurt. Well, a little bit it did but I didn't cry, I was brave," another child added.

Next, I noticed another teacher sitting at a table across the classroom working on an activity with students. On the table were crayons and markers and in front of each child was what appeared to be a small booklet. When I got close enough to the table I asked, "Hey friends. What are y'all doing over here?" "Drawing," said one child. "I wrote my name," said another child. "Yeah but tell Ms. Tameka what you are making. What are these called?" the teacher asked holding up one of the booklets on the table. "A

passport," yelled one of the children. "That's right," replied the teacher with a huge smile. "Oh wow," I exclaimed. "That is pretty cool. Why are you all making passports?" "Because we're going on the plane," said the same little girl who had informed me that they were making a passport. "A plane?" I asked. "Where are you traveling to on the plane?" "Africa," several of the children chimed in almost in unison. "How exciting! Can I come too?" I inquired. "Yes!" said one little girl. "But, you gotta make your passport and get your shots first." "Ok," I responded. I will make my appointment with the doctor and be sure to bring my passport." "You already made one?" she inquired. "No, but I have a real one that was made for me," I responded. The little girl opened her mouth wide as if she was surprised and then asked, "You been to Africa, Ms. Tameka?" "No, not Africa. I want to go to Africa one day though. I went to an island called Jamaica," I informed the little girl. "Jamaica? What's Jamaica," she asked. "Jamaica is a beautiful island in the Caribbean. It's surrounded by lots of water so it has a lot of beaches," I responded. "Oh! I been to the beach but my daddy drove us there," she replied and proceeded to finish coloring her passport.

When it was almost time for the flight, the teachers had the children line up. Each

child had a bag in one hand and a slip of paper and the passport in the other. The teacher began to speak, "Good Morning and welcome to Africa Airlines. We are delighted to have you traveling with us today. We will begin to board the plane as soon as the pilot arrives. Please make sure you have your ticket and your passport available." A minute later, I saw one of the students dressed in a pilot's uniform and a cardboard cutout shaped as a plane's steering wheel walking towards the opened classroom door. The teacher instructed him to take his seat in the front of the plane and then continued to speak, "Ok, we are now ready to board. If you are in zone one you may now enter the plane." Then she instructed the children to look at the tickets they were provided to see what number was on it. She repeated the process until she got to zone four and both she and I assisted the children who were having some challenges identifying their numbers throughout the process. Once everyone was seated, the teacher then instructed them to make sure they had fastened their seat belts and informed them that she would be coming by to help anyone who needed assistance.

Then, she gave the children an estimated arrival time and told them to enjoy their trip. Finally, everyone was ready for the trip so she told the pilot that they were

ready to take flight. The little boy began to turn the steering wheel back and forth. After about two to three minutes or so the teacher announced, "After a very long flight, we have finally arrived to the beautiful continent of Africa. We are about to land so please remain seated until I let you know that it is safe to take off your seat belts." The teacher then instructed the little pilot to let her know when the plane had stopped. He immediately responded, "Ok. We're here!" The student passengers began to clap and cheer and the teacher announced, "You may now remove your seat belts and began to exit the plane when I point to your row."

Once everyone was off the plane, the teacher escorted them to the classroom next door. To all of our surprise, the classroom teacher who was previously playing the role of the doctor was now dressed in African attire and was talking with an accent as she welcomed us all to Africa. In the background was the sound of African drums. As I entered the room, I noticed that the teachers had created different learning centers throughout. In the art center were materials such as plastic bottles, paper towel rolls, beans, stickers, construction paper, markers, and colorful tape for children to make their own instruments. In the science area there was an outline of the continent of Africa with pictures of different

animals, landscapes, crayons, glue and scissors for children to make their own pictures of Africa. In the block area were different pictures of homes from Africa for children to use as models for their block structures. In the music area was a variety of drums. In the dramatic play area was a variety of African attire, Kente cloth, and jewelry for the children to use for dressing up. In the manipulative area was a matching game of children from Africa and other continents around the world. In the library area was a variety of picture books about Africa as well as pictures of the African kings and queens, previously discussed during Ubuntu, who looked just like the students themselves.

The richness of this experience for our students was undeniable and proved to be memorable for everyone involved. Most importantly the innumerable teachable moments thoroughly addressed skills pertinent to school readiness. The intentionally planned activities targeted academic skills such as literacy, numeracy, sequencing, fine motor development, and critical thinking. Additionally, they addressed social skills such as following directions, attentiveness, collaboration and turn taking. Most importantly, it was all done in a way that acknowledged and celebrated who the children were and what they knew. The afro-cultural qualities and the prior knowledge that the students brought into the classroom

was used as a catalyst for the new knowledge and skills that the students later acquired.

### **The Inclusion of Character Education.**

In addition, to the above-mentioned character development that took place as a byproduct of the fostering of the culture of unity, the students were introduced to a specific character trait that connected to each cultural scholar. For the children this not only introduced and reinforced positive character traits but it also gave them a visual of that trait in action. For example, when we discussed Ruby Bridges, the first Black child to integrate and all White school in the United States we focused on courage. We defined courage as doing something even when it frightens you, particularly if it something that will help yourself or others. Furthermore, we emphasized the fact that being courageous and doing what is right may require you do to do things by yourself and that there is an inner strength that we are given to help us to do it. The acknowledgement of an inner strength was ultimately an acknowledgement of a greater power guiding and supporting us which is characteristic of the quality of spirituality. To reinforce the concept of courage the students re-enacted Ruby Bridges experience, wrote stories about a time they were courageous, and identified past storybook characters they

felt were courageous.

Even more, the historical context of Ruby Bridges opened the door for beginning discussion around racism and social justice. In particular, we discussed how our differences can be celebrated and used to bring us together or discouraged and used to keep us apart. Additionally, we talked about the fact that there are certain people who are mean to us and will treat us unfairly because of our brown skin, the texture of our hair, or our background. Nonetheless, we empowered the students by letting them know that they do not have to accept the unfair treatment but they can take a stand like Ruby Bridges and her family. We followed this up by providing them with advocacy strategies like writing letters to decision makers and speaking up when they see someone saying or doing something that is not right. Next, we tied it back to courage by emphasizing that when you speak up there will be people who will not like it and may even get mad at you but you have to be courageous and keep speaking until you are heard.

### ***Culturally Consonant Character Education***

This approach is reflective of culturally consonant character education as it juxtaposes traditional approaches. Traditional views of character education are grounded in Western views



of morality and good citizenship, ultimately perpetuating assimilation. In juxtaposition, culturally consonant education does the exact opposite. Instead, it strives to inclusively foster a sense of connectedness while respecting cultural differences and identities (Johnson & Hinton, 2018). In the case of Black students, this type of education directly aligns with the nine dimensions of afro-culturalism and uses them to help students navigate the three different realms of the Black experience. For example, although courage is a universal character trait, its application was customized to highlight the lived experiences of Blacks to foster a greater connection and understanding for the students. It was also conveyed in a way that utilized the afro-cultural capital the students already possessed.

Another aspect of character education was the implementation of service projects and field trips. Our goal was for students to enhance their social skills and learn character traits through collaborative service projects and field trips. Each field trip was selected because it would either enhance the children's understanding of the field of study or of the scholar of focus. For example, during the aviation week, we visited the aviation museum. Additionally, when we discussed a popular artist, we visited a park that was named after him

where children completed their own paintings. Character education was embedded through discussion on what character traits would be necessary for the related scholars to be successful in the designated field. Congruently, the collaborative projects consisted of a series of community outreach projects. The purpose of the service projects was to teach the children the importance of service and showing kindness to others and consisted of activities such as making get well cards for children in the hospital during medical week. These intentional types of service projects not only reinforced the designated character traits but enhanced the learning experiences of the students as well. In fact, research suggests that students who engage in civic engagement opportunities gain more academic knowledge, have higher levels of critical thinking and communication, and increased emotional intelligence and community advocacy (Johnson & Hinton, 2018).

### **Implications and Recommendations**

Overall, the implementation of ECCEP cultivated a transformative and affirming learning environment for both families and teachers in my center and I believe it can do the same for many others. It utilized the afro-cultural capital of the collective as a bridge between home and school, ultimately fostering

meaningful connections between the teachers, students and the course content. Consequently, the teachers felt empowered and confident as educators and the students felt the same as scholars. Although the primary intent was for ECCEP to be a blueprint for implementing culturally engaging practices for our students, it turned out to be so much more. Although this paper highlights implementation during the summer program, it must be noted that the guiding principles and afro-cultural qualities were easily adapted to the school year curriculum as well. This success is due to the fact that ECCEP is primarily a framework of pedagogical approaches as opposed to a curriculum model. That being said, ECCEP is easily transferrable to other early childhood settings as well.

With that in mind, I make the following recommendations for other administrators who are interested in creating similar transformative experiences for their programs:

1. Assess the cultural and programmatic needs of your center by identifying the cultural strengths naturally occurring throughout your center, areas of programmatic improvement, and how the two can be merged to create measurable goals to maximize student outcomes. In addition to administrative observation, this assessment should include input from staff and families.
2. Develop a blueprint for implementation based on the measurable goals identified during your assessment. This blueprint should encompass the 4 guiding principles of ECCEP and intentionally incorporate your center's cultural strengths as teaching strategies.
3. Assess staff knowledge, beliefs, and familiarity with culturally engaging practices to customize a professional development plan that will maximize their strengths and build upon their weaknesses.
4. Create a realistic timeline for implementation of your blueprint that accounts for staff training, planning, and preparation.
5. Create opportunities to discuss implementation experiences and perspectives with staff regularly and adjust accordingly.

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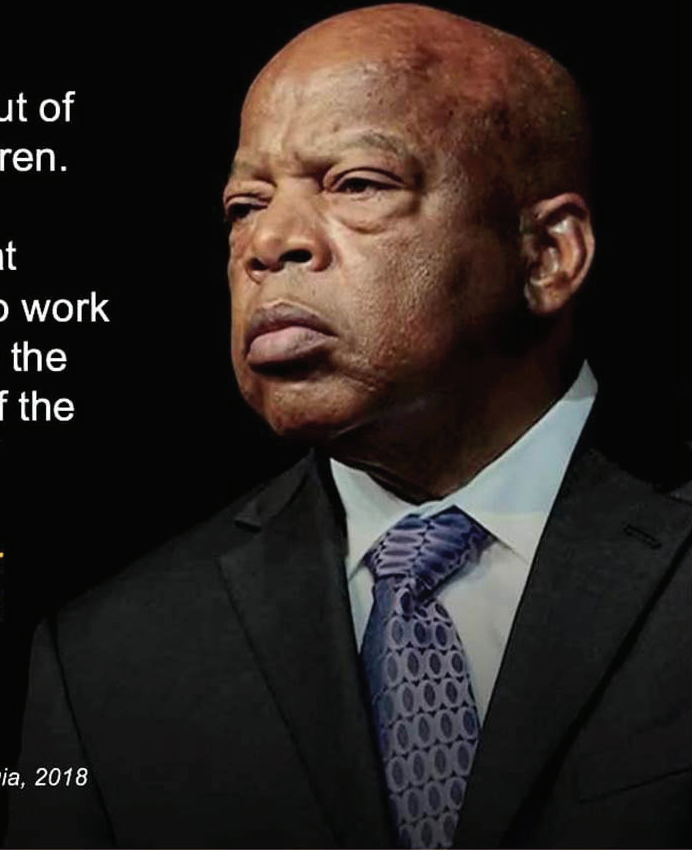


**Tameka Ardrey, PhD** is currently an assistant professor at Georgia Southern University. With more than ten years dedicated service to the early childhood field as an educator, professional development specialist, and a program director, she is committed to enhancing the early care and education experiences of young African American children and their families. As a champion of social justice and advocate for low-income students of color typically labeled as at-risk, Dr. Ardrey has authored several publications addressing issues of cultural diversity and social inequities within the early education field. Additionally, she has had the privilege of sharing her work through presentations, workshops and speaking engagements both nationally and internationally.

“There is no future out of reach for Black children. Across every corner of our great state, let us continue to work together to actualize the hopes and dreams of the next generation.”

**Civil Rights Leader  
REP. JOHN LEWIS  
1940-2020**

*Being Black Is Not a Risk Factor – Georgia, 2018*



**BCDI**  
Black Child Development Institute  
ATLANTA

Foreword:

## WE ARE THE HOPES AND DREAMS

REPRESENTATIVE JOHN LEWIS  
(Fifth District-Georgia)

*Being Black Is Not A Risk Factor - Georgia, 2018*

As I walk the halls of Congress, I often reflect on where my journey began, walking into a segregated classroom in Pike County, Alabama. Like every other Black child there, I represented the hopes and dreams of my family. My parents were sharecroppers determined that I would reach far beyond the limits of the Jim Crow Era South. Education was the pathway to my future, to opportunities which had escaped my parents' reach, yet were not out of sight for their children.

The wrenching "separate and unequal" experiences of these formative years became the fuel for my life-long passion to advocate for the human rights and dignity of all people. Moreover, I found a nurturing village in the classroom that built my resolve and integrity. As a student at Fisk University and member of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, I led and organized sit-ins and marches in protest to the injustices of racism and segregation. Through those experiences, I recognized the inextricable link between freedom, justice, and education. The right to an equitable education had been unjustly denied for the same reasons we fought and continue to fight to secure this basic right. It is through education that Black children demonstrate that they are far from inferior. Education is the key to progress—not only for the individual, but for our families and communities as well as for our country.

We understand, then, that it is no coincidence that the National Black Child Development Institute was founded on the heels of the Civil Rights Movement to advance Black children and families through advocacy and education. The demand for justice and its demonstration through education is a part of our history, woven into the fabric of our families and into our struggle for our humanity. Importantly, with the publication of the *"Being Black Is Not a Risk Factor"* national and state reports, the National Black Child Development Institute makes the declaration of our humanity plain by highlighting the strength and resilience of Black children.

The importance of this message rings ever true as the rhetoric of our time seeks to define our children and families based on limitations. At such a time, it is up

to us to reassert the values and traditions that have helped us to overcome. That is why I am especially proud of the work represented in *"Being Black Is Not a Risk Factor: Strengths-based Solutions and Statistics in the State of Georgia"* publication. Throughout the state of Georgia, with the communities and families I represent, the fight for civil rights—for our humanity—and for our children continues through advocacy and programs that enrich their lives and nurture their spirits.

The fight continues in the development and preparation of our teachers, as they learn to cultivate classrooms that are responsive to the needs of Black children. It comes alive through the Empowered Youth Program in Athens, GA, where through a partnership with the University of Georgia, students are not only mentored and tutored, but also exposed to experiential learning and new cultures. It is realized through literacy programs promoting the importance of early language development in Savannah and programs at Premier Academy in Atlanta designed to respond to the needs of young children and their families.

The doors of life can open for every person when they hold the keys—education is one of those keys. We will fight to maintain the significant social and economic progress we have made since the Civil Rights Movement *and* push forward to secure a bright future for our children. As we continue the fight, it is incumbent upon us all that we never forget the importance of an equitable education and its roots on the Civil Rights battlefield. It is ever more important that we engage families and communities in today's battles. I am proud to say that "The Movement" is still alive across the state of Georgia through our educators, practitioners, caregivers, advocates, researchers, and our families. Families who, like my parents, work tirelessly to ensure their children have every opportunity to succeed.

There is no future out of reach for Black children. Across every corner of our great state, let us continue to work together to actualize the hopes and dreams of the next generation.



# Ethnocultural Education and Awareness

**Christopher McMullen**

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Christopher McMullen,  
Email: [mcmullen1424@gmail.com](mailto:mcmullen1424@gmail.com)

## **Abstract**

The working infrastructure of the United States has developed a systematic use of symbolic racism. Symbolic racism can be defined as an ideology rooted in conservative values and anti-Blackness. With many persons believing that the United States has moved beyond race and racism, a sense of color-blindness has been adopted in places of employment. This study presents a case study, highlighting the author's experience working as a lead behavioral specialist at a summer therapeutic residential retreat in New York. This residential retreat serves youth from all over the world impacted by challenges not limited to socio-emotional, behavioral, physical, mental, and medical. This case study will examine a racially motivated event that occurred between an adolescent attendant and the author, highlight the author's response, and implications for

practice for Black professionals in the workplace.

*Keywords:* Systemic racism, White privilege, Color-blind, Cognitive development

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## **Introduction**

Vygotsky's cognitive theory posits that children are social creatures who learn from their socially constructed environment (Santrock, 2013; Vygotsky, 1978). Children develop methods of thinking and understanding by primarily engaging their social environment (Santrock, 2013; Vygotsky, 1978). In the exploration of this theory, Vygotsky identified the concept of zone of proximal development (ZPD) which addresses the social influences on children's cognitive development (Santrock, 2013). ZPD is described as the range of tasks that presents as too difficult for children to

conduct by themselves, but that can be learned through guidance and assistance from adults or more-skilled children (Santrock, 2013). Vygotsky's theory has been applied in many settings because of its broad scope of child cognitive development. For the purpose of this case study, Vygotsky's theory is applied to the notion that some children's family environment can reflect racial ideologies.

Families are the child's first introduction to social awareness and provides the foundation for how a child learns to view and engage with their world. This is particularly important among children as their minds are extremely malleable (Santrock, 2013). Their brains are ever-changing, taking on new information, and dismissing under-utilized information. Therefore, if a child develops in a home where cultural identity is shaped by references of the internal group as superior and the external group(s) as inferior, the child may develop racially discriminatory views, thoughts, and behaviors. Ausdale & Feagin (2002, p. 1) further demonstrates this in their book , *The first R – How Children Learn Race and Racism*, when describing an observed response to race by a preschool child:

"Carla, a three-year-old in a nursery, wants to take a nap. She prepares by moving her cot to the opposite side of the room. When asked by a teacher

what she was doing, Carla replies, 'I need to move this.' 'Why?' asks the teacher. 'Because I can't sleep next to a nigger,' she says pointing to the four-year-old Black child sleeping in a nearby cot. She then adds, '[N-words] are stinky. I can't sleep next to one.'

Gilbert Gottlieb, widely considered the pioneer of the epigenetic view, postulated that development is a bi-directional interchange between heredity and environment (Santrock, 2013). If a child is raised in a home where they have limited or absent exposure to other cultures and ethnicities, they may develop a biased view of people from other groups. More so, in an age where social media is widespread, the effects of biased portrayals of ethnic groups in media can exacerbate biased beliefs, as some researchers have attributed the belief and ideology of symbolic racism to images portrayed in media (Ledford, 2018). For example, multiple studies indicate that negative perspectives toward Blacks in regards to government welfare are conjured from systematic methods to media coverage which portrays welfare beneficiaries as disproportionately Black (Avery & Peffley, 2003; Entman, 1990, 1992).

Addressing the reality of racial teachings and undertones within the child's home must be examined. Once identified,

provision of education should be rendered, and should include teaching of the color-blind racial ideology (CBRI) (Neville et al., 2016), and developing practices that adhere to cultural sensitivity. The CBRI suggests the United States has ventured beyond racism and race, and that color does not matter in today's society (Neville et al., 2016). Educating people who are unaware of different cultural beliefs, practices, and norms about the adverse impact of the application of CBRI in daily life, especially to the lives of people of color, is imperative. This education may help individuals understand the importance of integrating with different ethnic groups effectively, the oppression that people of color face, and how people of color's experiences impact their outcomes (Frankenberg, 1993).

### Case Study

I have many colleagues who worked at residential retreats in the past and they all positioned them to be great. However, my Black colleagues' experiences were mentioned with a reference of separatism and lack of inclusion. Serving as a lead behavioral specialist during the Summer of 2018, I worked with adolescent boys aged 9-13, and managed three to four camp counselors who served the youth within that assigned bunk. Similar to my colleagues, I also had a rewarding

experience, and also like them, I had experiences that highlighted the racial differences between me and the campers.

One camper that I worked with during that summer left a long-lasting impression. He was a twelve-year-old white boy from Idaho. He was a bright kid with a great deal of personality. Our interactions would be met at a crossroads with signs indicating a path towards choices. One late afternoon, all campers were engaged in an activity with a visiting organization. This camper was not too pleased with the activity the organization provided and made sure they were informed with verbally aggressive commentary. Staff, including other counselors and myself, redirected the camper several times by providing pros and cons about the outcomes of his verbal outbursts. The camper maintained a high level of disagreement and walked away from the main group and positioned himself behind one of the nearby buildings. An area director and I walked after the camper to keep him in our view and continued to provide redirection. After several steps, the camper turned and stated, "No wonder you people were slaves in this country. You do not deserve to live in a f\*\*\*\*\* free country."

There was an instant shock wave as a

sense of unbelief went through my veins. I recalled conversations I had with my grandmother about racist encounters with white people. Particularly, a story in which she remembered white people spitting and throwing rocks at her while she was walking to school. I recalled vivid pictures of white people lynching Black men, women, and children; while simultaneously celebrating the event as if it were a festive party. I recalled the state of America where Black people were being gunned down by the hands of white police officers. How could the words from a twelve-year-old white adolescent boy force me to recall so much pain? I believe that the boldness to say such things stems from white privilege. White privilege can be elucidated as the "...widespread educational practice which secretly promotes racism that is too important to suppress or deny for any reason given the long history of suppression and denial in the United States" (Margolin, 2015, pg. 2). There is an inherent identification within some white individuals in which they believe to be more valued and more worthy than other groups of people in this country. Margolin (2015) explains this more in depth, "...they never noticed it in the way children born to wealth often don't see anything special in their enormous house, their servants, and plentiful food. Their enchantment was like the air they breathed, unquestioned because it had

always been there" (Margolin, 2015, pg. 3).

A great deal of historical pain was coursing through my body and I needed space and opportunity to release it in a healthy way. I called my significant other to discuss the incident, as she has experience with addressing major issues of ethnic bias and prejudice within organizations. The following day, I reached out to upper level management and informed them of the action I planned to take to handle this situation. Having heard about the incident the night before, they all questioned why the young boy would use the words he used and sent their unbelief and disgrace of the campers' statement. I explained that I would speak with the camper and provide information regarding the violence associated with racism that has been practiced in the United States.

I met with the camper the next morning. I began the conversation by stating the history of prejudicial language and practices in the United States that impacted people of color. I explained to the camper the impact his words had on me. I concluded the conversation by offering him socratic questioning and thinking. I challenged the camper to no longer walk in ignorance, and to not use the type of language he used in the previous incident. I encouraged the

camper to get to know people for who they are instead of allowing personal bias to impact how he interacts with others from different racial/ethnic backgrounds. The camper was very emotional at the end of the conversation and stated that he did not know those words meant so much harm and pain and that he did not mean to make anyone feel that way. Filled with emotion, he cried and wanted to ensure that I understood his plan to change his future behavior. Although it is unlikely that this camper will change his behaviors and mindset overnight, I believe he will make a change. It is important to note that the actions of that camper is no different from a thirty-year-old white executive of a company. If racial mindsets and behaviors are never confronted when they are expressed, a sense of “I can” and “I will” will continue to invade professional workspaces.

### Impact

Providing policy, welfare, and education that empowers communities and engage parents are essential to the Black collective (What We Do, n.d.). Furthermore, addressing the healing from emotional scars that festers in Black communities is a top priority. I am not stating that Black people should educate white people on white privilege. What I am stating is that healing is crucial to the continued development of a

more inclusive society. As furious as I was to hear that camper make such a statement, the best response was to help him understand his words, and the impact of his words. Could I really blame the camper for what was said? Was that camper born with such a regard towards a particular group of people? By being part of that situation, I was invited to create the change in which I would like to see in the world. For me to do so, completely, I had to undergo my own healing. This healing of historical trauma and pain should start at an early age.

As Black children develop in this world, they must be educated from a place where they feel love, connection, and community. Henderson et al. (2016) identified a socio-ecological model of prevention and resilience among economically disadvantaged ethnic minority youth. The model takes into context the phrase “it really takes a village” by detailing the intricate layers of community social relations and how it ties to developing a growing environment for the child (Henderson et al., 2016). The model identifies an “at-risk” concept and turns it into an “at promise” frame to capture the essence of growth for the child (Henderson et al., 2016). Economically disadvantaged ethnic minority youth need access to school, family, and community resources to counteract risks and promote positivity

(Henderson et al., 2016).

The socio-ecological model posits that the flow of resources and relational ties through micro and macro levels are crucial in the development of children as they grow from adolescents to adulthood (Bronfenbrenner, 1977; Bronfenbrenner & Evans, 2000; Kelly, 1986). By targeting the community system, it will reframe the social ecology of “at-risk” youth to “at-promise” youth (Henderson et al., 2016). The National Black Child Development Institute (NBCDI) understands that change cannot come without having a vision which “envisions a society that ensures a successful future for all children” (Who We Are, n.d.). To provide a clear message, having the gall to confront outright forms of racism requires a mature development of self. As Black children grow, teaching them knowledge of self through Black history can aid in instrumental understanding of self, which is necessary in the fight against widespread discrimination and symbolic racism.

## Discussion

### Implications for Ethnocultural Education and Awareness

Understand self. Thompson & Alfred (2009) elucidated that Black liberation psychology suggests that for people of African descent situated in oppressive

and discriminatory environments like the United States, being mentally healthy requires the recognition of and to fight those forces that inhibit their lives. Without a strong sense of identity, the ability to identify prejudice or injustice will be impaired. Cross (1971) provides the five stages (Negro-to-Black conversion experience) that engage an individual’s maturation in racial identity attitudes: pre-encounter, encounter, immersion-emersion, internalization, and internalization-commitment.

During the pre-encounter phase, a person is constructed to believe, think, and perceive the world from a European perspective and does so to devalue Blackness and promote whiteness (Parham and Helms, 1985). The next phase is the encounter phase in which the person starts to abandon their old-world view and develops a new perspective based on the consequence of an experience or social event (Parham and Helms, 1985). The third phase is the immersion-emersion phase in which the individual realizes their own Blackness and begins to develop positive affirmations and attitudes regarding oneself by immersing self in Black experiences, valuing Blackness, and imagery associated with Blackness (Parham and Helms, 1985). The fourth phase is the internalization phase which is when the individual achieves a

sense of inner-security by incorporating components from the immersion-emersion phase and downloading them into their own self-concept (Parham and Helms, 1985). Lastly, the internalization-commitment phase is the individual continuing to express their Blackness by taking political involvement for the greater good of the collective group (Parham and Helms, 1985).

Differentiate between severity and likelihood of impact. Racial cohesion differs from social cohesion, which occurs when a reciprocal sense of community and community involvement collide in a specific environment without cultural considerations (Peterson & Hughey, 2004; Peterson et al., 2005; Sampson et al., 1997). Given said situation, what is the likelihood of it re-occurring? Does the severity of the situation instill oppressive sentiments and values? Addressing similar questions can provide the impacted individual with an understanding of the issue whether it is worth confronting. By having access to healthy food intake combined with physical, mental and social well-being, Black communities can have a better grasp and clarity regarding their decision-making process.

Provide healing that is indigenous rather than allopathic. Research has yielded that indigenous healing practices

are more widely used than allopathic (Western biomedical) methods (Gielen et al., 2004). Indigenous healing can be defined as helping beliefs and strategies that originate within a culture or society and are designed for treating the members of a given cultural group (Constantine et al., 2004, pg. 111). If White privilege is viewed as a culture or group of shared beliefs, dissecting its origin can be better achieved through healing that impacts its root.

Assess potential for change. Black people can identify key factors to assess if a biased individual can be open or willing to make "changes" in their life: (1) awareness; is the person in question aware of self or are they willing to adapt tools necessary to identify self and who they are?, (2) knowledge; provision of education should be recommended for said individual to be educated on history in its entirety rather from a solely Western perspective, (3) and skills; ability to conceptualize adverse instances of inaccurate or incomplete historical facts that may contribute to un-cultured belief and/or practices (Cervantes and Parham, 2005). Understanding human development can provide a foundation regarding the decision being made to address ethnocultural issues.

### **Implementation of Implications for Practice**

For Black people in professional or academic environments, these simple steps offer a breakdown of the aforementioned philosophical implications for practice: 1) take time to develop a healthy nutritional regiment, 2) conduct research on self and locate who and where you identify as a Black individual living in America, 3) achieve understanding of self by adopting practices that are “homegrown” or culturally appropriate to yourself and, 4) create Black healing circles by connecting with other Black people who may be experiencing similar invisible but highly recognizable issues in their environments. One example of a healing space is the Emotional Emancipation Circles (EEC), created by The Community Healing Network and the Association of Black Psychologists to confront intergenerational trauma of colonialism and the effects on Black persons throughout the world (Barlow, 2018, pg. 895).

Moreover, many racially charged issues can occur in these environments, but when addressed with non-Black colleagues, they may not be able to comprehend or acknowledge said actions. EEC’s provide a holistic approach towards healing by centering on the personal narratives of marginalized populations and negating

the lie of Black inferiority (Barlow, 2018, p. 895). When speaking on these issues within a Black healing circle, a sense of relief can be felt by fellow Black people validating similar experiences. Finding comfort and solace in a Black healing circle can be synonymous to a thirsty animal going days without water finding a riverbed.

### **Conclusion**

From the color-blind racial perspective, the notion of race and/or racism is behind most Americans after the election of Barack Obama (Neville et al., 2016). Continuing to act as if instances of white privilege are not present in professional and educational environments is detrimental to the progression of this nation. Past research has highlighted the impact of generational trauma on marginalized groups; however future research must explore the generational transmission of white privilege, and how this also impacts outcomes of all people. Black people often encounter invisible but highly recognizable forms of white privilege and lack of inclusion.



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**Christopher McMullen** was born and raised in Macon, GA. Christopher received a bachelors in Sociology from Savannah State University. Upon graduating, he relocated to Los Angeles, California to receive a master's degree in psychology with a specialization in Forensic Psychology at The Chicago School of Professional Psychology. Christopher worked with youth in educational, community, inpatient, and outpatient settings, and is passionate about providing trauma-informed care for the many Black youth that has sustained engrained complex generational trauma. Christopher currently works with adjudicated youth providing case management services in the Atlanta area.



In BCDI-Atlanta's Black Children Count initiative, we are excited to support families, childcare centers, and communities in ensuring all children are counted in the 2020 US Census. We are inviting members and allies to take part in our community outreach by connecting with childcare centers in hard-to-count areas to provide support in helping their parents and stakeholders complete the 2020 Census questionnaire.

Learn more about our virtual outreach activities with Georgia's childcare centers at [blackchildrencount.org](https://blackchildrencount.org).

Share your 2020 Census status at [blackchildrencount.org/support](https://blackchildrencount.org/support).

# *Reading to Learn:* Improving K-6 Literacy with Project Based Learning

**Betty Nugent, EdD**

Forest Lake Academy

*Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Dr. Betty Nugent, Address: 3615 Craigsher Drive, Apopka, FL. 32712, Email: [bettyfnugent@gmail.com](mailto:bettyfnugent@gmail.com)*

## **Abstract**

The ability to read at grade level is necessary for students to succeed in all subjects. Reading proficiency of Black students in the fourth grade in the United States is less than 20%, while White students are at 45% and Asian students are at 55%. Project based learning (PBL) provides a variety of reading to learn opportunities. In this article, stories of students who learned in PBL environments are woven into a discussion of how PBL might contribute to improved reading proficiency of Black students as they read to learn.

**Keywords:** Reading proficiency, Project-based learning, Ready to learn

## **Introduction**

When DeShawn (D. Smith, personal communication, September 1, 2020) entered the fourth grade, he struggled to read with comprehension. He stammered when reading and never read out loud in class or at home. Since the second grade, DeShawn had been pulled out of his general education classroom for four days a week to be taught by the Varying Exceptionality teacher, or teachers who teach students of various disabilities. The pull-out program allowed students with special needs to spend part of the day in the traditional classroom and meet with the special education teacher for a part of the day. Usually he went willingly, but the fourth-grade year was different. In the fourth grade, his teacher used Project Based Learning (PBL) and each day when he left, DeShawn felt that he

was missing out on something special. Late in September, his classmates began reading aloud *Bud, Not Buddy* by Christopher Paul Curtis, as a part of a project-based lesson. Everyone seemed to be enjoying the book and the group projects. In early October, DeShawn began asking his teacher, parents, and principal when it would be possible for him to stay with the rest of the class so he could read the book and do the project, too. It was decided that DeShawn's pull-out hours would be reduced on a trial basis. By March, DeShawn was taking the lead in project development and presentation for his group's project. DeShawn's teacher was using an approach in which DeShawn wanted to learn to read to learn.

The purpose of this article is to open dialogue about Project Based Learning (PBL) and improving literacy of African American students. It discusses how PBL might contribute to motivating students to read to learn. PBL is appropriate for grades K-12 but the discussions in this article relate to K-6 classrooms. Flesch (1955) wrote, *Why Johnny Can't Read*, to illustrate how every child can learn to read. His approach was uncommon but gained steam. Several of my former students who are identified as African American were interviewed about their experiences while learning in a project-based environment. Their stories are

woven into a discussion of PBL to help us see how this uncommon approach that is gaining steam, can help answer the question, "How can we help DeShawn want to read?"

### Literacy and the Reading Achievement Gap

Literacy can be defined as "the ability to communicate in real-world situations, which involves the abilities of individuals to read, write, speak, listen, view, and think" (Cooper, 2000, p. 6). Since all elements of literacy develop simultaneously, this is the method by which they should be taught. PBL provides students the opportunity to engage in real-world situations as they interact with group members, using the elements described by Cooper (2000) to research and discover answers to a guided question together. Literacy learning follows the traditional method of learning life-long skills, such as making approximations, test the idea, make mistakes then start all over, sort of like riding a bicycle or solving an algebra problem. According to Cooper (2000) language literacy develops in the following manner:

1. When a significant need exists
2. Peers and adults actively engage
3. Students make approximations of the expected language

It sounds as if Cooper is describing a classroom that is utilizing the PBL process. “Constructing meaning is the ultimate goal of all literacy instruction” (Cooper, 2000, p.17) and is the foundation of PBL. Students should be surrounded by a plethora of media to help activate prior knowledge as they construct meaning of new material and read to learn.

The ability to read at grade level is necessary for students to succeed in all subjects. Rich reading opportunities, in and out of the classroom, must be present for students to test their ideas about vocabulary in content comprehension, with all forms of media related to communication, in order to read to learn in all subject areas. Appropriate reading opportunities exist for some students, but others fall on the negative side of the reading achievement gap. An achievement gap occurs when one group of students outperforms another group, and the difference in average scores for the two groups is statistically significant (National Center for Education Statistics, 2013). When the achievement gap is significant and constant over time, a population of learners is denied the necessary skills to read to learn. The Nation’s Report Card (National Center for Education Statistics, 2019) reported the Reading Achievement Proficiency of selected grades. There was no statistically significant change in

reading proficiency from 2017 to 2019 for any racial group. The small change that transpired was a drop for White, Black, and Asian/Pacific Islanders. The decline was 47% to 45%, 20% to 18%, and 56% to 55% respectively. Table 1 provides a more expanded version of the reading proficiency distribution. Since the consistent tracking of proficiency scores began in 1992, neither Black nor Hispanic students have attained grade level Reading Proficiency. With the 2019 results, it is clear that the reading gap remains unbalanced between 4<sup>th</sup> grade Black students and all other races.

After concluding that their students were lacking read to learn strategies, McKee and Carr (2016) collaborated on an extensive read to learn strategy developed by a group of Grade 1 teachers. It is a cyclical strategy called Read, Stop, Think, Ask, Connect. The strategy details how teachers can help students learn to read to learn.

1. *Read*

The reader reads the text as well as text features and images.

2. *Stop*

The reader stops reading frequently to process unfamiliar terms and concepts.

3. *Think*

The reader thinks about structural elements, such as signal words, and

how they support understanding. The reader is prompted to begin synthesizing information.

4. *Ask*

The reader asks the author questions about the text to support comprehension.

5. *Connect*

The reader considers other information he or she may know about the subject matter and makes connections to personal experiences, other texts, and/or world events (Mckee & Carr, 2016, p.360).

As students conduct independent and group research this comprehensive strategy reinforces literacy skills. Teaching strategies which encourage students to intentionally read, stop, think, and ask will naturally foster connections as students learn to read to learn in all subjects and become lifelong learners. Herman and Wardrip (2012) recommend annotation as a strategy to help students read to learn in science class. As students markup important information such as vocabulary, main ideas and inferences, they develop an understanding of the author's message while constructing mental models of the readings. Graphic organizers such as double-entry journals and Venn Diagrams can serve as reading response tools to support the apperception of the text in a rigorous curriculum. Intentionally designed

cooperative learning experiences resulting in authentic final projects is also a tried and true strategy. These types of strategies are practiced regularly while using PBL.

Providing a rigorous curriculum that is relevant to the real world and sensitive to the culture of the student fosters more engagement than worksheets and listening to a lecture and can help students construct meaning. Constructivist teaching models such as PBL provide inquiry-based activities with authentic problems embedded in real-world interactions and practices. Successful interactions through oral language support the development of literacy. Adopting PBL may enhance students' communication, collaboration, public speaking and study skills. Each PBL concludes with students displaying what they have developed as a team. Constituents and family reinforce success by their presence and interaction. It pulls together all of the best teaching strategies to engage students in successful interactions.

No Child Left Behind and other initiatives have intentionally attacked the literacy crisis that remains in the United States, but with little success. Although 2019 scores reflect a slight increase, the proficiency in reading gap between 4<sup>th</sup> grade Black and Hispanic students in



the United States when compared to their White and Asian/Pacific Islander counterparts remains significant. Factors related to the reading achievement gap continue to be debated by researchers (International Center for Leadership in Education, 2006; Delpit, 2012; Boykin & Noguera, 2011). Although no formal consensus is declared and they do not all appear together, the significance of issues related to reading achievement gap of students to such factors as *teacher quality*, *student engagement*, *high expectations*, and *rigorous curriculum* are repeated in the literature. Let's explore these with PBL in mind.

### **Teacher Quality**

It seems a matter of common sense that highly qualified teachers will produce high achieving students. Teachers with the greatest expertise in reading are usually offered positions in schools that always have highly qualified teachers. Fewer dollars are spent for in-service training at low-income schools. Darling-Hammond, (2010) attributes measures such as certification and subject area expertise as indicators of teacher qualification which improve student achievement. Student access to highly qualified teachers, with the greatest access to the latest pedagogy, who are experts in their field, is the number one indicator of student academic success. Less qualified teachers are

disproportionately assigned to low-income schools. (Darling-Hammond, 2000). Despite the good intentions and tremendous efforts of desegregation, 73% of the Black students in this country still attend low-income schools with the less qualified teachers. Thus, it should come as no surprise that an inverse relationship exists between schools with higher percentages of Black students and higher qualified teachers.

Regardless of previous training and experience, educators who engage in Project Based teaching join a network of educators who have bonded for the purpose of improving classroom learning. Teacher quality automatically improves as teachers implement PBL because they access and engage in best teaching practices. PBL blends teaching innovations, instructional methodologies, and common assumptions into a pedagogy that combines best practices as reflected in research, theory, and experience of expert teachers.

### **Student Engagement**

Central Elementary School staff decided to close the achievement gap of its students by focusing on enrichment (Beecher & Sweeny, 2008). They realized that the lack of student engagement was systematic but could be reversed. A school improvement plan was designed by the staff to implement teaching

strategies that emphasized active student engagement. The school culture reframed enrichment as essential educational opportunities to motivate students to learn. The learning environment changed from one of remediation to school-wide academic success. Differentiation became the instructional norm, with teachers receiving extensive training in appropriate strategies to meet the learning needs of students, including PBL type strategies. After seven years of the new school-wide initiative, the school reported that the remedial category of the state test contained no Black or Hispanic students from their school. Additionally, a statistically significant decrease of the grade level reading achievement gap between Black and Hispanic students and their White counterparts existed for reading.

Authentic learning experiences that students encounter in PBL capitalize on the natural curiosity of children, basically embedding student engagement within the process. They are forced to ask questions, explore, and find solutions (Laur & Ackers, 2017). Regardless of the project, students collaborate daily with the group to gather information and design the final authentic presentation. When students realize that their voice matters, they remain active in group planning and decisions. As students retrieve information to answer the

guiding questions, the value of the discovery is novel and more significant than if the teachers would have simply given notes or required reading from a textbook. As the presentation day of projects approaches, efforts at perfection increases. Everyone in the groups diligently works to fine tune for the upcoming audience (Blumfeld et al., 1991; Brophy, 2013; Thomas, 2000).

### **Teacher Expectations**

This is socially referred to as the self-fulfilling prophecy. Jensen (2008) reports that teacher expectations influence learning because expectations increase the likelihood, influencing the outcome. There is a direct link between negative teacher beliefs about students and academic achievement and placement. A classroom culture of high expectations is standard in advanced courses such as gifted or college credit. Students placed in remedial courses in elementary school tend to remain in those courses throughout their school life. Boykin and Noguera (2011) reported consistently low number of Black and Latino students enrolled in advanced courses, while an exorbitant number are in remedial and special needs courses in the schools they studied.

Throughout the project planning, development, and presentation preparation, the teacher is present as a coach

and guide, reminding students that success is expected and will happen. The teacher helps students become “better at collaboration, critical thinking, communication, and creativity” (Boss & Larmer, 2018, p. 145). Although students might encounter bumps along the road that result in discouragement and frustration, the teacher is there to help, encourage, and keep them in the right lane. Teacher-group conferences might sometimes be necessary to refresh the standards for the Collaboration Rubric or the expectations for the daily Project Work Report. Regardless of the purpose, the teacher in the PBL classroom consistently roams the room, encouraging and coaching the students towards success.

### **Rigorous Curriculum**

The results of a student survey by the National Assessment of Educational Progress (2012) found that identifiers for rigor for reading and other subjects indicated that too many students in grades four, eight, and twelve are not being challenged in U. S. schools. This suggests grave concerns for at level literacy preparation for college and careers after high school. An examination of 4<sup>th</sup> grade access to rigorous learning opportunities resulted in 73% of White students and 56% of the Black students with a clear understanding in science class (Boser & Rosenthal, 2012).

PBL involves academically rigorous projects in which “students acquire deep content knowledge while also mastering 21<sup>st</sup> century skills. These skills involve knowing how to think critically, analyze information for reliability, collaborate with diverse colleagues, and solve problems creatively” (Boss & Larmer, 2018 p. 1). The extent of the rigor with PBL depends upon the comfort level of the students, training of the teacher, standards addressed, and the expected outcomes.

### **What is Project Based Learning?**

PBL pulls students through the learning process as they explore a meaningful question, solve a real-world problem, or design something. The challenging question and the process to address it are designed to enable mastery of appropriate standards, according to surface, deep, and transfer level learning. Mergendoller, Markham, Ravitz, & Larmer (2006) define PBL as a “series of complex tasks that include planning and design, problem solving, decision making, creating artifacts, and communicating results” (p. 583). Students who are engaged in PBL are guided through curricular standards by a significant exploratory question, which will result in an authentic, real-world, problem to solve. PBL prepares

students for academic, personal, and career success, and readies young people to rise to the challenges of their lives and the world they will inherit. The PBL classroom is actually a community of learners in which the students' work matters beyond grades and exams and assessment is ongoing.

PBL is a student-centered approach, with the teacher serving as facilitator and guide, as students acquire information to resolve authentic problems in groups (McDowell, 2017). Projects might be the primary method of instruction or used occasionally (Larmer, Ross, & Mergendoller, 2017). More success has been found when the classroom culture centers around project type learning across the subject areas. Another example is Jonay (J. Jenkins, personal communication, April 18, 2020), a student who already enjoyed reading but could not do mathematics.

By the time Jonay reached third grade, she had decided that she would never learn how to do math. She excelled in reading but failed every math test and told her mother that she was a math dummy. In fourth grade, Jonay entered a classroom in which the teacher taught with projects as the norm. Jonay began to shine when she worked with a small group to plan a cross country road trip from Florida to Alaska. The teacher was

amazed at the ease with which Jonay explained the mathematical methods the team used to calculate mileage, tolls, hotel costs, and other finances related to the trip. During the project, Jonay was able to help a team member who struggled with sight words while another team member helped her understand necessary math skills. The teacher functioned as the guide during the daily small group conferences to track their progress and lead them in the direction they needed to go. Jonay is now a middle school teacher.

PBL is entrenched in personal and global experiences for the learner, based on constructivist principles. Student learning is context-specific with learners being involved actively in the learning process. PBL utilizes inquiry-based learning where the context of learning is provided through authentic questions and problems within real-world practices (Al-Balushi and Alamri, 2014). It engages the students in continuous learning activity on a daily basis, providing novelty for the brain, and just might be the framework to help students want to read so that they can learn. Novelty is a significant feature of why PBL helps students read to learn. The process requires students to collaborate as they find solutions. Group collaboration can be challenging for children who find it difficult to sit still and learn. During the

learning process students like Martavious (M. Flynn, personal communication, April 19, 2020) learn that if they slow down and listen to others, the voice of the entire group produces a better product. Martavious' greatest challenge in school is doing everything too fast. His favorite PBL was in first grade when he and his group researched butterflies. It gave him the opportunity to learn with his friends but he had to slow down, listen to the contributions of others and proofread everything he did for the project. He was very proud of the final project, a book they wrote, illustrated, and read at the Scholastic Book Fair. Martavious is currently a second grader who comfortably communicates and speaks in public in a variety of situations.

### **Project Based Components**

There are many approaches to PBL in the classroom. The PBL Gold Standard is a comprehensive model sponsored by the Buck Institute (2019). Essential project components of this model include:

1. Essential question which drives the whole project
2. Significant academic content built in—the students research and the teacher fills in the gaps as needed with mini-lessons
3. Multiple drafts of work and critique on work provided by peers, teachers and others
4. A student-created final project
5. Public exhibition of the work created and presentation to an audience outside of the immediate class works best
6. An authentic audience to view and to comment on the work created.

For optimal success, PBL must be implemented after extensive teacher training and with the support of school administration. At the Buck institute PBL Works website, teachers have access to ready-made projects that are conveniently organized by grade level and content subjects. Step-by-step instructions for implementation of each project is provided. Currently, there are 12 projects for English Language Arts (ELA) alone. Lesson planning forms, exit forms, rubrics, and variety of other reporting forms are on the website, along with instructions as to how to use each of them. Technical support and how-to assistance are available. There is no cost to use anything on the website. Educators who would like to learn how to design their own projects and become more proficient at implementation of PBL are encouraged to attend the workshops. Throughout the school year, regional workshops are held to train and certify teachers in the best practices associated with PBL. In the summer, the PBL Premier Conference is held to re-visit and refine what worked, what did not and why not, and what can be adjusted to make the

next school year better.

### **Assessment and PBL**

As students read to learn it is important that prior knowledge be exposed, examined, and adapted for future learning. PBL is ideal for this process, since formative assessment practices are easily built into the process. As the groups progress through their inquiry and product preparation, the teacher uses a variety of techniques to help answer four significant questions for all students related to the learning process:

1. Where am I going?
2. Where am I now?
3. What is next?
4. How do I improve?

Moraya needed extra time in math and science throughout elementary school to help answer all of these questions. Tutors helped but she wanted to experience success on her own. Her life began to change in 3<sup>rd</sup> grade as they researched and presented on ecosystems of animals. She enjoyed the ability to speak with peers and her teacher openly about the subject matter. She said learning with small group projects helped her think clearer as she learned new knowledge, built upon that knowledge and applied it. It made it easier to understand the material before assessments. Moraya (M. White, personal communication, March

3, 2020) currently serves as a Summer Youth Consultant, helping students obtain summer work opportunities.

Moraya appreciated the scaffolding aspect of PBL. "In Project Based Teaching, scaffolding provides necessary supports so all students can grow as learners, regardless of where they start" Boss & Larmer, 2018, p.128). With PBL, teachers are able to provide the necessary support allowing every student to master the learning targets. Teachers need to be cognizant of the group that awaits his or her presence, but always be ready to encourage, with the idea of weaning groups from constant adult dependence. As students become more comfortable with the project and more comfortable with their group, the weaning process happens naturally. Project Based Teaching approaches learning as if all students are capable of excellence regardless of prior attainment, needs, or background.

Exenia (E. Scott, personal communication, April 19, 2020), now a sophomore in college, remembers the good feeling she had in fifth grade when she and her group completed a project. She said it was not easy but once they finished the project, the learning stayed with her for the assessment. Formative and summative assessment are vital throughout the project and at the

presentation. Formative assessment such as exit tickets and group reports, help students stay focused on the guiding question. Critique for revision help students improve and models appropriate questioning techniques. Appropriate assessment leads learners to be more independent, more critical of their own and others' work, and guides learners to make improvements in their work. The final product should be displayed somehow, after its public presentation. The final product can be presented using videos, photographs, sketches, reports, models, and other collected artifacts (Holubova, 2008). Teachers using PBL must balance the positive outcomes regarding students' communication and presentation skills and the schools' perceived difficulty in quantifying systematic progress in learning while using PBL (Menzies, 2016).

Several recommendations regarding assessment and data collection of achievement include:

1. Tools for Tracking and Storing such as portfolios
2. Final Product—use rubrics
3. Presentations to an Audience—use rubrics
4. Audience Feedback—use feedback forms
5. Reflection—by students in the whole group and small groups

Shontarious' (S. Brown, personal communication, April 19, 2020) greatest challenge in elementary school was being able to keep up with classwork and homework. He was not comfortable asking the teacher for help. He vividly remembers working with his small group to recreate a Native American village in fourth grade to show how they lived. He remembers the positive feedback his group received when the audience commented on specific features of the village. The teacher required Shontarious' class to submit weekly reports to assess where they were and where they still needed to go.

Whereas research remains fertile for the impact of PBL in elementary classrooms, several studies stand out. When Karacalli & Korur (2014) studied fourth graders who engaged in a science PBL, assessment was ongoing. The students' knowledge and their activities at the end of each week were collected by a Weekly Project Progress Form, together with what they planned to do next week. At the end of the third week, group members evaluated each other using a Peer Evaluation Form. They responded with respect to each teammate taking responsibility and their level of encouragement and cooperation. Every student completed a Self-Evaluation Form at the end. They reported and

evaluated their contributions to the project. Throughout the process, one of the researchers filled in a Project Evaluation Form. The results indicated better academic achievement and knowledge retention of students in the PBL group than those in the traditional teaching group.

Drake and Long (2009) also concluded that fourth graders learned more science in PBL type settings than traditional classrooms. A significant study of 2<sup>nd</sup> graders found improved achievement in social studies, reading and writing for low SES students engaged in PBL (Halvorsen et al., 2014). The goal of this study was to investigate the possibility of closing the reading achievement gap.

### **PBL and Standards**

As teachers select and design projects, they should be aligned to the standards. This ensures that academic rigor is inherent from the beginning. High-priority standards the relate to big ideas are encouraged, as they require deep thought and foster several connections as students delve into the guiding question. Larmer, Mergendoller, & Boss (2015) suggest that most ELA standards can be taught within the PBL framework. For example, Writing Standard 6 states that “the learner must use technology, including the Internet, to produce, publish, and update individual or shared

writing products, taking advantage of technology’s capacity to link to other information and to display information flexibly and dynamically” (p. 13). Every project ends with a final authentic product. Technology, such as typing on a tablet or computer or website designs, might be used by project groups to prepared, present, share, meet, and track tasks. Another appropriate ELA standard is Speaking and Listening 1, the student will prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others’ ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively. It is clear to see how this standard can be fulfilled with PBL. While students are working, they collaborate and converse in order to complete the project. In a project, when students work in teams, they have regular and multiple opportunities to discuss plans, ideas, and products. They may also talk with outside experts, mentors, and family and community members.

PBL can be designed to meet all the Social Studies and most literacy standards for second grade (Duke, Hovorsen, Strachan, Kim & Konstantopoulos, 2017). A study on the impact of PBL on Social Studies and Literacy (2017) found that students who were taught Social Studies using PBL scored significantly higher than those in traditional classes. Traditional



and PBL lessons were designed around the National Council for the Social Studies (2013) C3 Framework. Students were also assessed using six of the ten second-grade Common Core Standards for English Language (CCSS) for Reading Informational Text. As with Social Studies, students in the PBL groups scored significantly higher than the traditional group in both reading and writing of informational text (Duke, Hovorsen, Strachan, Kim & Konstantopoulos, 2017). Although the study did not differentiate results by race, 40.337% of the students in the sample were White; 32.975% were Black; 15.491% of the students were multi-racial; 5.36 of the participants were Asian; and 4.48% of the participants were Hispanic. The authors concluded that,

Children in low-SES settings were more successful, not less so, in a curricular context in which they were provided with opportunities to read and write in a content area, lead some of their educational activities, inquire, make some choices in their reading, exercise some authorial control in their writing, and write for audiences beyond the teacher (p. 38).

In other words, students from all backgrounds experienced significant achievement in Social Studies and

literacy standards using the project-based approach to teach. Results such as these are encouraging for parents who have tried all of the traditional methods to help their children experience success.

### **PBL Examples**

“Excuse Me?!” was the only reply Rishaun’s dad (R. Henley, personal communication, March 2, 2020) could give the second-grade teacher. The end the year parent-teacher conference was closing and the teacher had just recommended that Rishaun get tested for ADD. Once he gained his composure, Rishaun’s father asked her to explain her reasons. The teacher shared that Rishaun roamed the classroom while the rest of the students worked quietly in their seats. He stared out the window and tapped his pencil while she taught up front. In short, it would be difficult for him to learn to read at level or succeed at any other subject in school without help to sit still and focus. That something became Ritalin, a yoga ball for a class chair, and play dough with which to fidget. Rishaun entered 3<sup>rd</sup> grade as a much more subdued, but still a non-functioning student. He no longer roamed the classroom but he also did not complete his assignments. Rishaun confessed to his father that he felt like a dummy. During the second semester of 4<sup>th</sup> grade, Rishaun joined the Robotics class at his school. He worked with a team to design robots and create inquiry

projects that solved real world problems. His content classroom teachers noticed that the grades of all of the students in the Robotics class improved. Currently Rishaun is a junior in college majoring in mechanical engineering and applied mathematics who volunteers to help struggling students.

The light turned on for Rishaun in a Robotics class that implemented PBL. Content areas teachers can design their own projects, work with fellow teachers, or access and adapt current projects. The two examples that follow are detailed on the PBL Works website.

### ***The Storytime Channel***

Students in K-2 can improve literacy skills while making stories come alive in the project found on the Buck Institute PBL Works Website.

In this project, students build their reading fluency and comprehension skills as they create engaging video productions of fables and folktales from diverse cultures. Students work in teams to engage in close reading of selected stories, create storyboards, and write Reader's Theater-style scripts for these stories, and then plan and produce their dramatic readings as video stories for a class "Storytime Channel." Student "hosts" conclude each story with an explanation of the

story's central message, moral, or theme (Buck Institute, 2019, para.1).

PBL is driven by an initial real world question so as to allow pupils to cover pre-planned significant educational content. The question above would be, "How can we make stories come alive for kids in our community?" (2019). Or another possible guiding question might be, "How can we make culturally relevant stories come alive for kids in our community?" The final product would be:

Students launching their Storytime Channel videos with a premiere party and screening at school or local library, sharing their stories with younger children from the school or community. They also make the Storytime Channel videos available online for ongoing enjoyment (2019, K-2 ELA, para. 2).

### ***Journey to the Red Planet***

Students in grades 3-5 might enjoy this Mars exploration. The project is interdisciplinary and, as with all PBL units, the students work together towards a final authentic project. Students research space exploration, past and present, while using the engineering design process to determine problems related to exploring the Red Planet. Each group will design an invention to help resolve

the identified exploration problems. The invention will be presented to a group of investors or engineers.

Each project leads to a student-created output which has a purpose and is displayed to an audience relevant to the project. The focus is on producing high quality work to answer the driving question, which has value to the pupils and relevance outside of school project work and involves creating multiple drafts incorporating feedback and suggestions ('critique') from peers, teachers and others, such as community members, into the work. Projects also allow flexibility for student creativity and direction in creating outputs. Project Based Teaching can still involve traditional teaching, such as reading texts and completing appropriate activity sheets to gather content. Best teaching practices are used to help students gain the knowledge the students need to know how to prepare and present the final product.

### **Suggestions for Educators**

PBL leads to meaningful experiences that result from reading to learn, regardless of the socio-economic status or race. Students experience increased Reading Achievement and Social Studies skills using PBL in Michigan. Edutopia (2019) reports improved literacy and science with Multiple Literacies using PBL and

Next Generation Science Standards in Michigan as well as more science students being actively engaged and performing better when using PBL in California. A breakdown of these results by race would be helpful. Additional research into the specific impact of PBL and literacy development and the process of reading to learn of African American students is needed.

Teachers should utilize PBL at least twice a year to bolster academic achievement and knowledge retention. Administrators can help teachers find funding for project-based learning professional development. Districts can organize geographic cohorts of those teaching with the project-based approach and identify coaches as needed. Teachers in these cohorts can design PBL units which employ culturally relevant literature that African American students can identify with.

With the positive results of PBL in so many different conditions, it is clear that this approach can have a positive impact on elementary students who are learning to read to learn. It is time that we push forward, full steam ahead, with training for teachers who can implement PBL, by any means necessary. Students like DeShawn deserve to learn in classrooms that they want to remain in all day. If we are to close the reading achievement

gap, classrooms with teachers who are trained in an approach that fosters student engagement, while a rigorous curriculum is implemented with high expectations as the norm, must be the standard. It is time for us to give PBL a try, so that DeShawn will be successful in elementary school, high school, college, and beyond.

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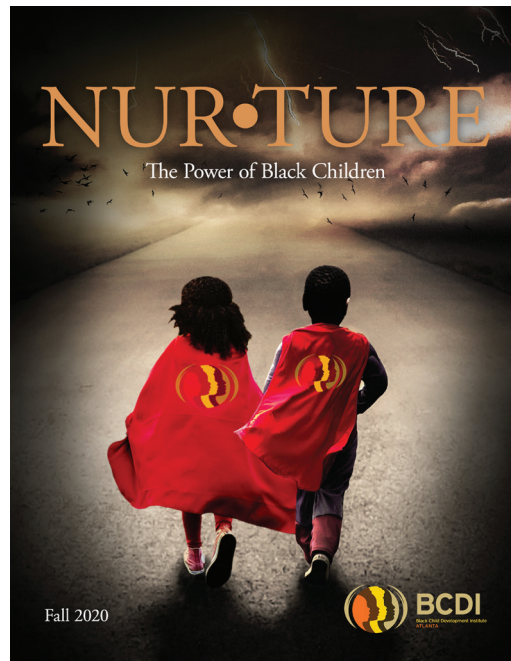
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**Betty F. Nugent, EdD**, is an educator with over 30 years of experience as a K-12 teacher, grant writer, special projects coordinator, and administrator. At the university level, she has served as a supervisor of student teachers and professor of various educational methods courses. She graduated from Southern Adventist University, Andrews University, and Walden University with a doctorate in teaching mathematics.

# *Nurture:* 2021 CALL FOR ABSTRACTS

**Journal of Black Child Development Institute (BCDI)-Atlanta**



Black Child Development Institute (BCDI) – Atlanta, an affiliate of the National Black Child Development Institute (NBCDI), launches its **Call for Abstracts** for the second edition of *Nurture*, our peer-reviewed journal championing the topics important to Black children ages 0-8 and their families.

BCDI-Atlanta publishes high-quality original works based on the six NBCDI focus areas of Public Policy, Early Care and Education, Health and Wellness, Family Engagement, Literacy, and Child Welfare. Each focus area is described below. Selected authors will be invited to submit full articles by the posted deadline. See submission requirements below.

**BCDI-Atlanta seeks to improve and advance the quality of life for Black children and their families through education and advocacy in the six NBCDI focus areas, accordingly:**

**Child Welfare:** Promote the improvement of the child welfare system. Coordinate outreach, programs, and activities that focus on prevention and effective, supportive, culturally competent care of children in all settings.

**Early Care & Education:** Promote the equitable distribution of quality across the birth to eight continuum and the connection between early childhood settings and elementary schools. Coordinate programs and training to increase the well-qualified, culturally & racially diverse workforce.

**Family Engagement:** Promote family engagement as a long-term commitment shared between multiple stakeholders from many settings. Coordinate family empowerment outreach, programs and activities that builds partnerships and equips families with information and resources.

**Health & Wellness:** Promote culturally relevant healthy nutrition and preventative wellness practices among families. Coordinate outreach, programs and activities to engage, educate, and empower.

**Literacy:** Coordinate programs, activities, and training to ensure reading proficiency by the end of 3rd grade for all students. Engage students, families, and educators.

**Policy:** Advance the quality of life for Black children, families, and communities by connecting program, policy, and advocacy. Engage members and the broader community in activities designed to address local, state, and federal political and civic matters affecting Black children and families.

**Abstract Submission Requirements:**

**ABSTRACT:** Interested authors should submit an abstract and topical outline of a proposed article. The abstract must be no more than 250 words in length and the topical outline should be detailed enough to provide a general overview of the article. The topical outline should not be included in the word count of the abstract. The



abstract and outline should be submitted electronically as an MS Word (.doc or .docx) attachment to: [nurture@bcdiatlanta.org](mailto:nurture@bcdiatlanta.org) and should include the subject line: "2021 *Nurture* Call for Abstracts." In the text of the email, please include the following: (1) names, titles, and affiliations of all authors in authorship order; (2) brief bios of all authors; and (3) the NBCDI focus area (see above) that is the best fit for the proposed article. An email confirming receipt of the abstract will follow its submission within 3 business days.

### **Process/Timeline:**

Call for Abstracts opens: **December 1, 2020**

Call for Abstracts closes: **January 29, 2021**

Invitations sent to selected authors: **February 19, 2021**

Deadline for final papers: **April 23, 2021**

Final editorial decisions: **May 28, 2021**

Publication date: **July 1, 2021**

### **Article Submission Requirements**

If selected, authors should be prepared to submit the full article by the established due date. All articles should be prepared according to the latest version of the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association*. All parts of the manuscript must be submitted electronically as an email attachment to: [nurture@bcdiatlanta.org](mailto:nurture@bcdiatlanta.org). Documents from 6,500 to 10,000 words with an abstract of 250 words should be submitted as MS Word documents (.doc), not converted to PDF's, without embedded commands or special formatting. All photos should be submitted as separate JPEG files. References, tables, charts, other texts, art, graphics and appendices should be included at the end of the document. These should not be included in the document word-count described above. Authors are asked to submit a professional headshot as a separate JPEG attachment. Unless otherwise indicated, notification of manuscripts selected for publication will be made by the date listed in the timeline above.

## **Ad Information**

BCDI-Atlanta will publish its next edition of *Nurture*, our new peer-reviewed, electronic journal championing topics important to Black children ages 0-8 and their families, **July 1, 2021**. *Nurture* will include high-quality original works based on the six NBCDI focus areas of Public Policy, Early Care and Education, Health and Wellness, Family Engagement, Literacy, and Child Welfare. The content from *Nurture* will influence practice, policy, and future research that will guide the experiences of Black children in families in their homes, communities, and learning environments.

BCDI-Atlanta is passionate about highlighting and partnering with local community agencies and businesses, and this extends into our first edition of *Nurture*. We are *offering* our partners and other local organizations the opportunity to advertise in *Nurture*. This is not only a great way to support BCDI-Atlanta, but also a great way for your mission to reach the Georgia community.

## **Nurture Advertisement Options**

### **The following advertisement pages are offered in color only:**

Back cover - \$5,000.00

Last page (facing rear cover) - \$2,500.00

Inside front cover - \$2,500

Inside back cover - \$2,500

### **Black & White Advertisements:**

2-page spread - \$1,750

1 page - \$1,000

1/2 page - \$750

1/4 page - \$500

\*\*Color: +\$500 to the B&W advertisement price

Please complete the [Nurture Journal Advertisement Application](#) form if you are interested in purchasing an ad in the next edition.

# GETTING INVOLVED

Our members are the backbone of our organization. Together, we are able to engage in important and effective education and advocacy to achieve our mission of improving and advancing the quality of life for Black children and their families. We invite you to become a member.

## MEMBERSHIP BENEFITS

### Access to Resources

- BCDI-Atlanta membership gives **access to resources** you need to make a positive impact in the lives of Black children and their families and enables the organization to engage in collective, strengths-based culturally relevant education and advocacy.

### Keeps You Connected

- **Affiliates.** Join one of nearly 30 affiliates in communities across the country, with access to local networks of leaders.
- **Networking.** Become part of a community of thousands of educators, parents and policymakers committed to ensuring that our children are loved, valued, educated and supported.
- **Social Media.** Join our community of educators, parents, researchers and more as you engage with us online.

### Builds Your Knowledge and Skills

- **Professional Development.** Take advantage of dynamic opportunities, including our annual conference, to build your skills and expand your knowledge, online and in person.
- **Resources.** Access culturally relevant and research-based curricula, resources and information on literacy, health and wellness, family engagement and social-emotional development.
- **Advocacy.** Become a leader, and participate in national, state and local trainings, events, collaborations and activities in order to ensure that our policymakers are making positive and equitable decisions that support our children, families and communities.

### **Saves You Money**

- Receive **discounts** on NBCDI's Annual Conference, BCDI-Atlanta's Annual State Conference, all our publications, events and products!

### **Great Value**

- **Student Member: \$25** (must provide a copy of a student ID and/or current transcript)
- **Regular Member: \$40** (includes membership in a local BCDI Affiliate, if applicable)
- **Independent Member: \$40** (means you choose not to join a local Affiliate)
- **Non-profit Organizational Membership: \$250** (includes 7 individual memberships; must supply tax-exempt ID number)
- **Corporate Membership: \$500** (includes 7 individual memberships)

# **BECOME A MEMBER**

**Together we are able to engage in important and effective education and advocacy to achieve our missions of improving and advancing the quality of life for Black children and their families.**



Look no further for research centered on the unique experiences of Black children and their families, specifically written from the perspective of scholars championing the Black community.

**[Click HERE to become a member!](#)**

FOR MORE INFORMATION, CONTACT US:

<https://www.bcdiatlanta.org/>



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