

I. TITLE PAGE

FINAL REPORT

EXPLORING CRITICAL CONSCIOUSNESS IN TORONTO'S URBAN CLASSROOMS: A CRITICAL PRACTITIONER INQUIRY APPROACH TO UNDERSTANDING AND IMPROVING BLACK STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

Written by: Nicole West-Burns, Ph.D.

Centre for Urban Schooling
Department of Curriculum, Teaching and Learning
Ontario Institute for Studies in Education
University of Toronto
Toronto, Ontario, Canada

July 15, 2015

The views and analysis in this report have been formulated by the author and research co-investigators and do not necessarily represent the views of The Toronto District School Board nor all participants in the initiative.

All names of respondents, participants and schools have been replaced by pseudonyms in this final report. Titles of individual participants are included generally and specifically at times to provide context and emphasis regarding what is being shared.

Title: Exploring Critical Consciousness in Toronto's Urban Classrooms: A Critical Practitioner Inquiry Approach to Black Student Achievement

Author: Nicole West-Burns

Copyright © Centre for Urban Schooling, Department of Curriculum, Teaching and Learning, Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto

Cite as: West-Burns, N. (2015). Exploring Critical Consciousness in Toronto's Urban Classrooms: A Critical Practitioner Inquiry Approach to Black Student Achievement. Unpublished report. Toronto, Ontario, Canada: Centre for Urban Schooling, Department of Curriculum, Teaching and Learning, Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto.

Research Team:

Dr. Tara Goldstein: Principal Investigator

Dr. Rob Simon: Co-Investigator

Dr. Nicole West-Burns: Co-Investigator and Learning Modules Co-Facilitator

Karen Murray: Co-Investigator and Learning Modules Co-Facilitator

Austen Koecher: Graduate Research Assistant

II. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This research would not have been possible without the collaboration from the Toronto District School Board. Specifically, I would like to thank the following individuals:

- Colleen-Russell-Rawlins, Executive Superintendent, Early Years Learning and Care;
- Sheryl Robinson Petrazzini, Central Coordinating Principal, Early Years Learning and Care;
- Darlene Avis-Pottinger, Program Coordinator, Early Years Learning and Care;
- Beth Butcher, Executive Superintendent, Teaching and Learning;
- David Hawker-Budlovsky, Central Coordinating Principal, Teaching and Learning; and
- Karen Murray, Program Coordinator, Teachers Learning and Leading who served as research co-investigator and contributor to the analysis used in writing this report.

Additionally, it must be noted that this work would not have happened without the classroom educators who participated in the initiative and were willing to share their thinking and practices with us. They provided artifacts and journals, highlighting their work as part of *Improving the Achievement of Black Students Initiative* in the early years. I thank them for letting us learn with and from them on their journey.

As noted, all names of individuals and schools in this research have been assigned pseudonyms. The names of schools have been chosen from Black Canadians, past and present, who were trail blazers in different ways. On their shoulders, we stand and remain ever grateful for their contributions.

III. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Improving the Achievement of Black Students was a 2014-2015 Toronto District School Board (TDSB) initiative, prompted by residents and data that spoke to continued concerns over Black student achievement and experiences in K-12 schools. The early years portion of the initiative, spearheaded by Early Years Learning and Care and Teachers Learning and Leading departments engaged K-1 educators in professional learning modules from September to April.

The project brought together roughly 100 educators from 12 school communities, plus a few educators representing a previously held pre-K summer program focused on Black student heritage and achievement. Specifically, the initiative sought to work with teachers in kindergarten and grade 1, and kindergarten early childhood educators (ECEs) to explore their thinking and practices connected to the target population.

The professional learning modules focused on three academic cornerstones: Understanding and Improving Black Student Achievement; Understanding Child Development and Early Years Equity Pedagogy Across the Curriculum; and Learning to do and Become a Critical Practitioner Researcher.

The Centre for Urban Schooling at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE) was a collaborative partner in the initiative and also simultaneously sought to research the initiative utilizing the methodology of critical practitioner research. The Centre research project sought to answer the overarching question of “What happens when we invite educators from school communities in Toronto to engage in critical practitioner inquiry activities that focus on developing critical consciousness tied to improving Black student achievement?”. Sub-questions asked how participants made use of the professional learning modules in their own spaces and how it influenced beliefs. We also wanted to explore implications for future professional learning modules. Two of the professional learning session facilitators, Dr. Nicole West-Burns and Karen Murray, also served as co-investigators on the research project.

This report, provided to TDSB at the conclusion of the initiative provides some answers to the indicated questions. This report provides analysis to date from samples of artifacts from classroom inquiry projects, participant journals, and facilitator reflections. This report also provides a summary of learnings and implications for future projects. It is the hope that readers will understand the extensive, complex, and challenging work that was involved in this initiative and see the positive highlights and the possibilities for moving forward.

Some of the findings include the following:

- The intentional integration of the three academic cornerstones was important to show the connectedness of this equity work, not as an add-on, but as part of early years pedagogical work;
- The work of being a critical practitioner researcher allowed educators to question and try things that met their own curiosity and needs, allowing some to move their thinking and practice;
- Materials/resources given to participating classrooms were widely used and supported the educators' willingness to try new things and create more inclusive environments;
- There is a need for more focus on when and how to have intentional learning and conversations about issues of race. These issues were ones that solicited varying responses and ones that not all participants were comfortable in having, but are important to awareness and moving forward; and
- We must build in continued support for well-prepared on-site leadership to create effective professional learning communities in schools which follow-up to the larger professional learning modules; and provide suggestions and guidance in next steps for classroom practice.

IV. TABLE OF CONTENTS

I.	Title Page	1
II.	Acknowledgements	3
III.	Executive Summary	4
IV.	Table of Contents	5
V.	Statement of the Problem & Rationale for the Research	6
VI.	Research Methodology & Research Questions	7
VII.	Professional Learning and Research Timeline	7
VIII.	Description of Data Sources, Data Collection and Analysis	8
IX.	Findings & Interpretation	9
	Ways Participants Made Use of the Professional Learning	10
	Responses to the Professional Learning	15
	What we Learned from the Critical Practitioner Inquiries	18
X.	Implications & Recommendations for Professional Learning	21
XI.	References	25

V. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM & RATIONALE FOR THE RESEARCH

The purpose of this project was to work with educators in the Toronto District School Board (TDSB) as part of a collaborative Early Years Learning and Care and Teachers Learning and Leading initiative focused on improving the achievement of Black students in the early years. The professional learning modules were co-designed and co-facilitated with these two departments in collaboration with Dr. Nicole West-Burns at the Centre for Urban Schooling at OISE/University of Toronto.

The Centre for Urban Schooling specifically supported the component of the initiative focused on critical practitioner research. It was determined that the methodology of critical practitioner research would offer Kindergarten teachers, grade one teachers and early childhood educators an opportunity to learn about and conduct critical practitioner inquiry within their own sites of practice as one component of the professional learning modules to support Black student success and achievement.

The TDSB has consistently heard the voices of members of the Black community and has gathered data for the past several years tied to classroom academic outcomes and experiences that speak to how the Board is not meeting the needs of Black students, academically and in terms of creating an inclusive environment (Brown & Sinay, 2008; O'Reilly & Yau, 2009; Yau, O'Reilly, Rosolen & Archer, 2011). Interestingly enough, data provided by another TDSB research report in 1991 (Cheng, Yau & Ziegler, 1993) also illuminates some of the same issues. Although, the Board has previously developed initiatives to address these concerns, such as Model Schools for Inner Cities and the Urban Diversity Strategy, there is an acknowledgement by the Board that there is a continuous need for this type of work. Thus, for the 2014-2015 academic year, TDSB established a kindergarten-grade 12 professional learning initiative as a response.

The professional learning design, connected to the topic of Black student achievement, is predicated on research that effective teachers can and do have a strong impact on academic achievement (Stronge, Ward & Grant, 2011; Delpit, 2013) and positive school experiences.

In planning the curriculum for the early years component, critical practitioner research presented as an excellent approach to use in such professional development work. The term "critical practitioner research" is an umbrella term that encompasses multiple genres and forms of critical research where the practitioner is simultaneously a researcher who is engaged in inquiry with the ultimate purpose of enriching students' learning and experiences (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009).

The critical practitioner inquiry served as one cornerstone, in combination with two other intellectual frameworks for the foundational professional learning modules. The intellectual frameworks/academic cornerstones for this initiative were implemented to address three core areas that were seen by the facilitation team as crucial in this work: Understanding and Improving Black Student Achievement; Understanding Child Development and Early Years Equity Pedagogy Across the Curriculum; and Learning to do and Become a Critical Practitioner Researcher.

Understanding and Improving Black Student Achievement

The theoretical frameworks included: Anti-oppression work (Kumashiro, 2004; Adams et al, 2007); Anti-Racist work (Dei, 1996, 2013) Culturally Responsive (Gay, 2000) and Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1994, 1995, 2001) and African-Centred pedagogy within the Canadian context (Dei & Kempf, 2013). Additional thinking of scholars, such as Lisa Delpit and Asa Hilliard, who have written about the issues of schooling and Black students, also guided the work.

Understanding Child Development and Early Years Equity Pedagogy Across the Curriculum

These theoretical frameworks included: Importance of Anti-bias education in early childhood (Derman-Sparks, L., 2008); Focus on early positive identity development for Black students (Dei & Kempf, 2013); and

Focus on research from classrooms with young learners connected to Culturally Relevant and or Responsive Pedagogy (Lyman, 2000). Components of the early years expectations were integrated into this work by the TDSB Early Years Department Instructional Leadership team.

Learning to do and Become a Critical Practitioner Researcher

Theoretical frameworks included: Critical Practitioner Inquiry (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009) which supported the year-long inquiry-based initiative by each participant; and sharing narratives of teacher educators engaging in “puzzling moments”(Ballenger, 2009).

VI. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY & RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The primary research methodology was critical practitioner inquiry. While the educators in the modules engaged in their own inquiry, the co-facilitators/research co-investigators also engaged in our own critical practitioner research to learn what we could about our design and delivery of the modules. We anticipated our research would push our own thinking and practice in doing this type of work to support educators to support students.

Within this professional learning and research project, by utilizing the research methodology of critical practitioner inquiry and attempting to focus on helping educators to address and interrupt inequities--described as “critical consciousness” work (Ladson-Billings, 1995), we hoped to provide a context in which together educators could explore their thinking and practices. It was our intention to create a collaborative space for educators to explore their understandings and practices that might lead to better experiences and outcomes for Black students in schools. Simultaneously, we anticipated learning how to better support educators in the field to do this type of equity work.

In the research project, we were also seeking to explore ways that educators see this work as embedded; to go beyond the “project” notion to what Cochran-Smith & Lytle (2009) refer to as “inquiry as stance” where participants develop “a counterhegemonic notion...that challenges the ideas about teaching, learning, learners, diversity, knowledge, practice, expertise, evidence, school organizations, and education reform that are implicit or explicit...(p.3).”

The research questions were designed to develop our understandings of this type of professional development work. Our overall research question was the following:

What happens when we invite educators from school communities in Toronto to engage in critical practitioner inquiry activities that focus on developing critical consciousness tied to improving Black student achievement?

Additional questions asked how participants made use of the professional learning content in their own spaces and how it influenced beliefs. We also wanted to explore implications for future professional learning modules.

VII. PROFESSIONAL LEARNING AND RESEARCH TIMELINE

The full professional learning and research project was divided into 5 stages:

Stage 1: Established reading groups tied to the academic cornerstones and synthesized learning for the initiative (May-August 2014)

Stage 2: Designed the foci for the learning modules based on the academic cornerstones (July-August 2014)

Stage 3: Designed the research study (July-August 2014)

Stage 4: Delivered the collaboratively designed modules focused on the academic cornerstones; provided capacity building; collected data artifacts & engaged in preliminary analysis (September 2014-June 2015)

Stage 5: Compiled data sources and engaged in co-analysis with members of the research team for the final report (June-July 2015)

In the initial stages of implementation, Stage 1, the facilitators and the research team at Centre for Urban Schooling began the project by creating reading groups to develop a strong grounding in the three academic conversations/cornerstones: Understanding and Improving Black Student Achievement: Understanding Child Development, Equity Pedagogy and Early Years Curriculum; and Learning to do and Become a Critical Practitioner Researcher. For 8 weeks in the spring of 2014, two reading groups ran weekly and focused on issues and understandings connected to the academic cornerstones. These reading groups were representative of staff from OISE and TDSB, faculty and graduate students who either by position or interest wanted to engage in this unique intellectual community. Graduate students served as note takers and distributed notes to all participants following the meetings. Some who could not attend requested articles and read with the groups “in spirit” as a part of this community. The group was dialogic, intergenerational, and representative of students from different programs and faculty with different areas of expertise. In these groups, participants shared and built upon their knowledge. Collectively, the thinking that unfolded became a part of the foundation for the design of the learning modules in the initiative as well as the research design.

In stages 2 and 3, the Centre worked collaboratively with co-facilitators from the TDSB to establish a plan for the learning modules and an agreed upon research design. Specifically, the Centre for Urban Schooling and Dr. Nicole West-Burns, was the catalyst and primary contributor to the component related to the critical practitioner inquiry within the context of the professional learning. Once ethics approval was granted from the University of Toronto and TDSB, Stage 4 began and participants were invited to join the research process. The participants who signed up to be a part of the research agreed to provide artifacts connected to the professional learning, including documentation of their work from their classroom spaces related to the initiative and their journal entries. Additionally, they agreed to a one-on-one interview at the culmination of the professional learning experience.

Stage 4 of the timeline took place from September to May 2014 and encompassed the on-going journaling, reflecting and creation of artifacts by the initiative participants. Preliminary analysis of the professional learning and the initiative was concurrently on-going during the year. This report, completed in June and July 2015, reflects Stage 5 of the research plan and will serve to highlight some of the findings to date and implications for future professional learning.

VIII. DESCRIPTION OF DATA SOURCES, DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

The data sources utilized to complete this final report are as follows:

Participant Artifacts

Participants created display boards, photo montages, videos and power points to document their critical practitioner inquiries for sharing with colleagues at the final session. As that final session did not take place, some educators submitted their documentation artifact for the co-investigators/co-facilitators in an attempt to share their work for the year.

Participant Journals

Blank journals were given out to participants in the very first professional learning session. At different times, in different sessions, facilitators would ask participants to respond to a question, note an “AHA” moment or reflect on a reading or a video. Some educators also chose to submit their journals for review as a part of the data.

Facilitator Reflections

Facilitators documented their own reflections over the year, following professional learning sessions and meetings held related to the initiative. These reflections were an opportunity for the facilitator to discuss her own learning, challenges, next steps, etc. These reflections provided an on-going record of how the professional learning and issues tied to the initiative were unfolding over the course of the year. The reflections were either hand-written or transcribed and utilized as both a formative and summative tool.

All participants who submitted journals or artifacts signed an informed consent form allowing for these items to be collected and utilized as data for this research project. All artifacts submitted were documented, photographed or photocopied, analyzed and then returned to the owner.

Participants were assured of confidentiality and assigned pseudonyms for themselves and for their schools. As per the informed consent, participants were also assured that all data would be kept secure by the evaluation team and that their names and specific identifying information would not be written in any materials.

Regarding analysis of the artifacts and journals, the co-investigators analyzed this data by looking for key themes of the artifacts that would provide information as to the inquiry question, the curricular focus, and the early years foundation for learning. The researchers established coding/relevancy based on this information. As key themes were noted in the artifacts and journals, the co-investigators noted “take-aways” from the artifact or journal, and additional questions the item led us to ask. Implications for our learning as professional facilitators of this work were also noted.

Several people provided support to this research process. The principal investigator, Tara Goldstein and research co-investigator, Rob Simon, both faculty at OISE, provided consultation and feedback at several critical stages in the design, implementation and collection of data and analysis in the research process. Austin Koecher, OISE graduate research assistant, also contributed to the reflections and on-going analysis. The principal investigator, Tara Goldstein, reviewed the findings and drafts of this final report.

Challenges/Limitations to Data Collection

There are many strengths to what we were able to collect for our data. Of the 12 schools in the initiative, plus representatives from the three schools in the 2014 “Ubora” pre-K summer program, we were able to secure 25 artifacts as part of our data. We also were able to document the artifacts with photographs allowing for the sharing of such images, which reflected some of the work from the year. The educators’ sharing of their journals at this time, also provides an authentic participant voice to enrich the data collection. We also had participants who sent emails of their thinking over the course of the year.

There were also challenges and limitations to our data collection. The Elementary Teachers Federation of Ontario work action prevented educators from attending the final session planned for May 2015 and thus, prevented most of the participants from sharing their work from the year. The final session was planned as a sharing and celebration of the work with reflection and next steps built into the day. Not having this session, did not allow the closing activities nor the information from the year-long participants to inform the final report. Additionally, the interviews that were originally a part of the final phase of the data collection also did not occur for the same reasons.

We also must note limitations to the data collection, in terms of what we had access to collect. Some educators were happy to pass their artifacts along to be utilized as part of the data; others, for likely multiple reasons, did not do so. We are limited in our data to what educators chose to share and not the full complement nor the scope of the work that was done as part of the initiative. That said, we may have missed participants’ ideas, reflections, artifacts and insights on the initiative that could be meaningful to the findings.

IX. FINDINGS AND INTERPRETATION

In response to the research questions, based on the previously noted data, the findings section will highlight the following:

- **Ways Participants Made Use of the Professional Learning**
- **Responses to the Professional Learning**
- **What we Learned from the Critical Practitioner Inquiries**

Ways Participants Made Use of the Professional Learning

A cornerstone and critical component of this professional learning initiative was the inviting of participants to become critical practitioner researchers, whereby they engaged in inquiry with the ultimate purpose of enriching students' learning and experiences (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009). In collaboration with building a learning community of professionals and grounding participants in conversations about Black students and schooling; oppression as a system; anti-bias and equity work in early years and curriculum connections; the desire was to create a space for educators to enter the work in a way that was meaningful for each of them. With schools being selected to participate and with different levels of knowledge and interest by participants, it was essential that the educators had a space to engage their own interests in these equity conversations and pursue the work in a way that was most authentic to them.

The educators in the initiative were supported to develop inquiry questions that centred around their curiosities within their own sites of practice. In line with the provincial policy document, *How Does Learning Happen? Ontario's Pedagogy for the Early Years* (2014), which suggests that educators "be attuned to what children know, what they wonder about, and their working theories about the world"; this approach asked educators to really listen to children, honour their thinking, and learn from them. In doing so, the critical practitioner inquiry approach supported the educators seeking answers which would benefit their own teaching and learning, and their students, beyond the particular learning modules. As we engaged educators in their own inquiry, we intentionally and concurrently focused the professional learning modules on their understanding more about their thinking and practices, especially tied to the target population. An interrogation of beliefs and thoughts as well as working to understand institutional and systemic barriers was a key component in the modules tied to all aspects of the critical practitioner research as well.

The steps that were taken to support the educators in learning to become critical practitioner researchers included the following:

- Introducing the idea of educator as researcher; utilizing exemplars showing teacher research that starts with a "puzzling moment" were shared as models of how this work can connect to the things that happen daily that challenge or puzzle educators. Examples of work were shared from teacher-researchers such as Cindy Ballenger, Vivian Vasquez and Kate Lyman to help the educators to see the accessibility and possibility for their own inquiries within their own classrooms.
- Participants in the modules were asked over several months to note "puzzling moments" and think about a question they might ask related to a moment.
- Throughout the process, participants were working simultaneously on understanding their own positionality and the lens they bring to their work as an educator and now a researcher. Questions of power and privilege were intentionally being addressed within the professional learning modules that connected at times to issues that puzzled educators in the sessions.
- Participants met in small groups or what we came to call, "communities of collaboration", for the educators to discuss their puzzling moments, to question each other about their possible biases and explore possible answers for "What is going on when _____?"
- In cluster sessions, participants spent concentrated time working in small groups to develop critical practitioner inquiry questions from their puzzling moments that were researchable and free of evaluation or prejudice. They were able to practice and develop their skills in this particular workshop format that led to a richness of the questions and a deeper understanding of the process.
- On-site school support through Teachers Learning and Leading Student Work Study Teachers and Early Years Instructional Leaders provided professional learning communities that also supported the growing inquiry questions and deepening content from the large professional learning sessions.

- The phases of a critical practitioner inquiry were shared with the participants for them to understand the process of moving from a question through to findings.
- Participants were introduced to methods of collecting data—many of which educators use daily--and they worked in their communities of collaboration to create a data collection plan to support finding answers to their question.
- Facilitators of the professional learning modules and members of the Student Work Study team shared their own research questions from previous projects and also shared methods for collecting information to answer those questions. These were presented as models of possibility for this type of work.
- Participants engaged in data collection, with each professional learning session allowing time for meeting in communities of collaboration to share the data and receive feedback from their peers about what they were finding in relation to their question. The collaborative nature of this process established a site in which participants shared and learned from one another's perspectives and experiences to enhance their own work and understandings.
- A session on making sense of the data supported educators analysis of what they had collected and allowed them to take the next steps to focus on their learning and implications for their own practice.
- Participants were invited to journal about their work as part of the modules and this was also encouraged outside of the formal meetings as a way to reflect and focus the educators' thinking and learning tied to their inquiry.

The professional learning modules and subsequent work in classrooms by participating educators from Improving the Achievement of Black Students supported the academic cornerstone focused on early years equity pedagogy as well as the provincial Early Learning for Every Child Today (ELECT) Framework (2007) as described in *How Does Learning Happen? Ontario's Pedagogy for the Early Years* (2014).

Principle 1: Positive experiences in early childhood set the foundation for lifelong learning, behaviour, health, and well-being.

Principle 2: Partnerships with families and communities are essential.

Principle 3: Respect for diversity, equity, and inclusion is vital.

Principle 4: An intentional, planned program supports learning.

Principle 5: Play and inquiry are learning approaches that capitalize on children's natural curiosity and exuberance.

Principle 6: Knowledgeable, responsive, and reflective educators are essential.

Ontario Ministry of Education (2014)

Some educators focused on inquiries that involved creating positive early learning environments that specifically took an anti-bias approach. This work was based on professional learning sessions including such things as questioning the learning environment for how power and privilege plays out—who is represented and who is not; scanning for bias in posters, texts, displays and other materials; and focusing on culturally relevant and responsive as well as Africentric features of early learning classrooms. The provision

of materials to also create more representation of places, peoples, items, texts, art supplies and toys also facilitated the establishment of this work that aligns to the ELECT principles.

Within this initiative, there was intentionality to make sure that the lens and the purpose of the initiative was not separated out from the conversations of curriculum. One example would be the professional learning session where notions of stereotype threat and expectations of Black students in particular were discussed with the participants. Therefore, if the ELECT Principle 4: “An intentional, planned program that supports learning” was being discussed, then we also discussed the very critical notion that expectations for students and what we believe they can accomplish can have an impact on what they actually learn and do in classroom spaces. One professional learning session, entitled “Improving Black Student Achievement: What’s Math Got to Do with It?” focused on different examples of how expectations and stereotypes can play out in learning spaces. Educators were invited to question themselves and their practices on this topic; reflect on how they understand math beyond a Eurocentric framework; reflect on math in culturally relevant ways; and explore their own personal experiences of when and how bias might enter into their classroom spaces and what they might do to confront it.

Mallory, a kindergarten teacher at Daniel Hill PS, learned from a professional learning community with her Student Work Study teacher about the work of Bob Moses (2001) and the Algebra Project. Dr. Moses is the founder of a math literacy initiative that began when he used the subway line to teach math. Mallory then engaged this idea in a math centre in her kindergarten classroom tied to number sense—using public transportation—something that connects to the life of many of her students—as a tool to build mathematical concepts.

One kindergarten teacher, Corrine from Archie Alleyne PS, shared in her journal how she needed to check her thinking and biases around families and parents after a session focusing on stereotypes and connecting to families, especially those who may face discrimination and historical marginalization within the school board:

“I admit. I am the teacher that often thinks “Parents don’t care”...I realize that I need to overcome certain stereotypes that I hold about parents in the community I work in...Maybe I need to make a simple phone call—maybe that is the answer to communication with parents...Sometimes I have all these ideas and intentions for getting parents involved and I don’t always follow through. I realize that it is TIME (sic) for me to be intentional with my efforts to involve and engage the parents...”

At times, the content connected specifically to the educators’ inquiries and at other times, it informed their overall thinking.

Regarding the four foundational conditions for early learning, these also were apparent as part of the critical practitioner inquiry as well as part of the overall work within the initiative.



FOUNDATIONS	GOALS FOR CHILDREN	EXPECTATIONS FOR PROGRAMS
Belonging	Every child has a sense of belonging when he or she is connected to others and contributes to their world.	Early childhood programs cultivate authentic, caring relationships and connections to create a sense of belonging among and between children, adults, and the world around them.
Well-Being	Every child is developing a sense of self, health, and well-being.	Early childhood programs nurture children's healthy development and support their growing sense of self.
Engagement	Every child is an active and engaged learner who explores the world with body, mind, and senses.	Early childhood programs provide environments and experiences to engage children in active, creative, and meaningful exploration, play, and inquiry.
Expression	Every child is a capable communicator who expresses himself or herself in many ways.	Early childhood programs foster communication and expression in all forms.

Ontario Ministry of Education (2014)

Again, based on the academic cornerstone tied to equity work in the early years, it was our goal to approach these areas with a lens of intentionality toward the initiative. It was important that “well-being” and “belonging” specifically connected to conversations that included race, an important part of students’ identity. Therefore, notions of social identity, as well as personal identity, were a focus for our conversations about creating wholistic learning spaces. In *Anti-Bias Education for Young Children and Ourselves* (Derman-Sparks & Olsen Edwards, 2012), there is specific discussion around the notion that early childhood educators see and do a wonderful job with personal identity aspects and valuing each students unique qualities, but that in early childhood settings too often social identities are ignored, negated and not included, which results in an important component of who students are being left out. This creates situations of marginalization and bias. The initiative intentionally set out to counter this omission.

In relation to the work done in classroom spaces based on the artifacts shared, Murray & West-Burns analyzed the artifacts to determine how they represented the foundations. We found that each artifact did represent at least one, if not two foundations for the early years learning:

Eleven artifacts represented goals and expectations that reflected well-being;

A sample question focused on well-being in a critical practitioner inquiry:

Akua, kindergarten teacher from Faith Nolan PS asks:
“What happens when students see themselves represented in texts?”



(Photographer: Philippe Bicos)

Nine artifacts represented goals and expectations that reflected engagement;
A sample question focused on engagement in a critical practitioner inquiry:

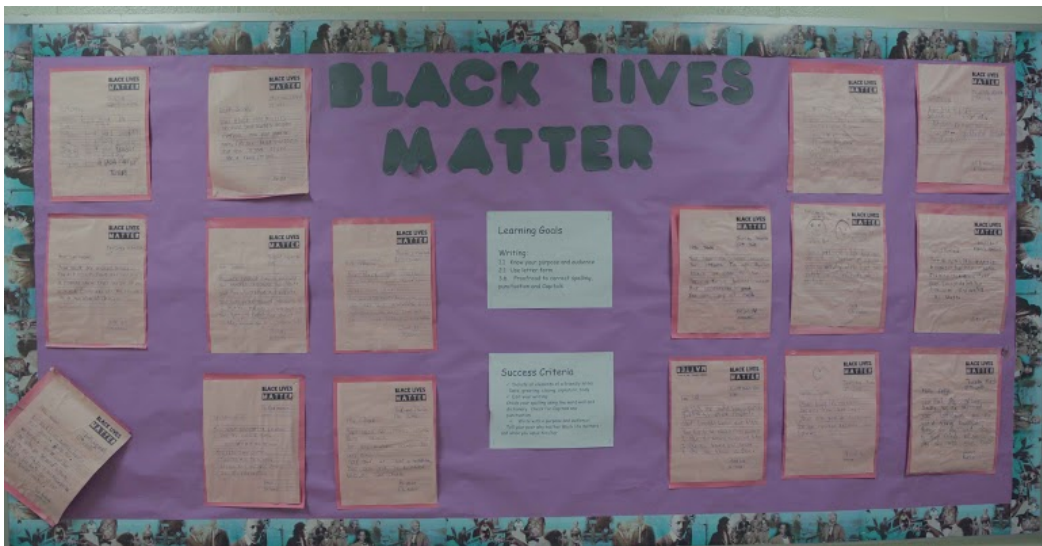
**Dana, kindergarten teacher and Camilla, ECE from Viola Desmond PS ask:
“What does writing mean to you?”**



(Photographer: Philippe Bicos)

Seven artifacts represented goals and expectations that reflected belonging;
A sample question focused on belonging in a critical practitioner inquiry:

**Nora, a grade 1 teacher at Dudley Laws PS asks:
“What happens to student voice when students are given the opportunity to develop a political stance focused on higher order thinking skills?”**

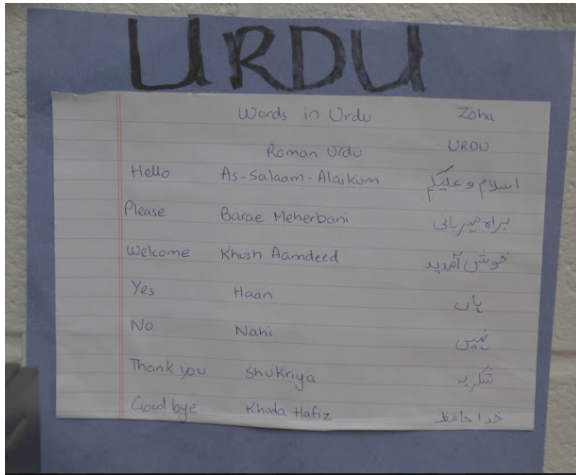


(Photographer: Philippe Bicos)

Seven artifacts represented goals and expectations that reflected expression. A sample question focused on expression in a critical practitioner inquiry:

Fatima, an ECE at Avis Glaze PS asks:

“What happens when children choose not to speak their home language in school spaces?”



(Photographer: Philippe Bicos)

The critical practitioner inquiry and the related classroom work was in-synch with the mandates of the early years program. It did ask educators to apply a lens, to see a principle or component of the foundation with an equity perspective that supported the premise of the initiative. The work serves as a model of how critical practitioner inquiry and related observation, documentation, and reflection can be blended into an early years program, align with the principles and foundations of early years pedagogy and create more intentionality towards equity while engaging in the work of a rigorous, reflective and responsive early years classroom.

Responses to the Professional Learning

Some of the responses to the professional learning modules reflect the challenges and complexities of this type of professional learning; others reflect the positive impact/influence this work has had on their practice. It is important to note that both seemingly “positive” and “challenging” responses existed simultaneously. From the facilitators’ reflections and a sampling of the practitioners’ journals we noted a range of responses from silence, to gratitude, to non-participation, to investment. As well from the professional learning modules, some educators shared thoughts about what is important in their practice; insights from their own self-reflection; and deeper thinking about their own understanding of broader issues of equity.

Responses tied to notions of power and privilege

Participants responded in multiple ways to conversations and activities focused on power and privilege. Specifically, the research co-investigators were intentional about putting this conversation into the work; going deeper than a “multicultural” conversation of co-existence but asking participants to focus on notions of power and privilege throughout the initiative in a myriad of ways connected to schooling, achievement and pedagogical practices.

For some participants, the response to the conversations that addressed race, power and privilege was silence. It is unknown at this time the cause of the silence, but it may speak to what Mica Pollock (2005) described as “colormute”, where people don’t know how to talk about race or people in terms of race, and therefore race does not get discussed.

A conversation and activity on White privilege in schools in an October professional learning session generated a lack of participation by many educators. In this case, it was mostly White educators who did not engage in the activity at all.

We also saw a diversity of responses amongst teachers of colour toward other conversations about race. Sonia, a kindergarten teacher, from Viola Desmond PS, describing her heritage from India, wrote in her journal about not wanting to participate in an activity about choosing texts with a culturally relevant lens:

"I was not comfortable because I had a fear of speaking something wrong. I did not want to embarrass myself in front of other people."(October 22, 2014)

Additionally, Murray and I noted that a small group of Black educators, mostly ECEs, offered unwavering support for the conversations focusing on race. One participant shared with me that she had been wanting to have these conversations "for years" in her school. Overwhelmingly, this group of Black women educators were vocal and participatory. They seemed to flourish in a space that professionally they had not had before. These women pulled us aside and shared stories from their classroom spaces and personal lives related to issues of identity, discrimination, home-land connections and day-to-day challenges. They approached us with comments of support for the initiative, offered hugs of encouragement following sessions, and expressed gratitude for being included in the professional learning modules. Many of these educators commented on the positive impact this work has had for them and their work with students. This supported previous findings from our professional development work that educators want a space to talk about issues of race and class in schools (West-Burns, Murray, & Watt, 2013).

This example of silence in conversations about race to the absolute desire for conversations about race speaks to the complexity of race and the challenges in discussing it. It also suggests avenues for future research.

Impacts on beliefs and practices

In terms of impacts on beliefs and practices, some educators shared insights tied to their students' growth, and their own growth as well.

Hallie, kindergarten teacher at Dudley Laws PS who engaged in an inquiry related to the use of personal word walls, states:

"The inquiry started with me not knowing exactly what I was embarking on...It has concluded...with me seeing my own growth as well as the students...I have seen growth in the children's' ability to read, spell and use words within sentences...Their ideas have blossomed and so has their vocabulary."(April 14, 2015)

Some educators spoke about specific learning from the professional learning modules that impacted them. Camilla, ECE at Viola Desmond PS states:

"I learned a lot on how to use the books as a learning tool in the classroom. The step-by-step process is very useful and has given me insight...I will be able to enrich my teaching..." (January 14, 2015)

Corrine, kindergarten teacher at Archie Alleyne PS noted her excitement upon learning the game Oware connected to the math concept of subitizing, a focus for early years numeracy to "quickly recognize numbers visually" (p. 1, Clements, 1999). In playing this game, which originated on the continent of Africa, participants learned how to connect issues of identity, a skill and the curriculum.

Corrine writes:

"Oware! Wow! I am impressed, amazed and was engaged by what seemed like a simple game with beads! You could feel the excitement of the people in the room learning how to play the game....we shared how we could use

this amazing too at our school. This is a game that I could really see our students engaged in this...Allowing them to build on their math skills and build community with one another. I can't wait to introduce it..."

Corrine notes the aspect of building community as well through this hands-on, skill building experience which is part of the numeracy work that she is teaching.

Sonia, also talked about the power of learning something new. She refers to information shared about learning with an Africentric focus:

"The learning edge was the information on Africentric pedagogy. I believe the information I got from that session is going to make me a better educator."(October 22, 2014)

Although Sonia describes her learning edge—a moment of dissonance or discomfort—as being the information she learned about Africentric pedagogy, she states that she believes her new knowledge will positively impact her work as an educator. This duality or complexity of this statement warrants further investigation as we attempt to learn more deeply the components that participants found value in for their own practice, recognizing that dissonance was also a part of that experience.

Further self reflection on her practice by Sabrina, kindergarten teacher at Viola Desmond PS, shows how she is thinking about many aspects of her practice tied to the content within the professional learning modules:

"I have been reminded of some very important concepts to consider when selecting read-aloud books. I need to be analytical and critical of the message, the voices (heard and unheard), the protagonist and antagonist, etc..." (October 22, 2014)

She states in a later entry, that she is also thinking about the role that all of the educators play in the classroom. This thinking is impacted by a collaborative visit with teachers and ECEs between two schools. A Student Work Study Teacher, supporting the initiative, helped to organize the two schools coming together. Sabrina shares about that experience:

"Although my classroom was open for others to see, I learned a lot today. It helped me to see some of my strengths and needs. One thing I'm doing well is giving students voice. One thing I would like to work on is having my EAs (sic) participate in teaching." (April 9, 2015)

From the collaborations modeled and discussed, and ideas shared between all educators in the early learning environment and the professional learning modules, Sabrina begins to question her own role and that of collaborating with other educators. She expresses an openness to recognizing the value and contribution that another educator can make within the teaching and learning within the classroom community.

Some educators also shared how the work that they engaged in connected to broader issues and their own understandings. Jessica, an ECE from Harry Jerome PS emailed the following to one of the co-facilitators toward the end of the school year:

"I want to give a personal comment on the IBSA program. I have always tried to be an informed and socially just person; I have come to the conclusion after many years of reading and thinking that a new story has to be written for two groups of people in North America. These groups are the people of African-American descent and the native (sic) peoples. We cannot pretend to be just unless we start to address the wrongs of the past and give real hope for the future. The IBSA program is one way that can help accomplish these goals within the student community of the TDSB. It is a socially important program that shows thoughtful leadership within the TDSB. I was lucky to be a part of it and found it to be a practical program for students." (June 14, 2015)

From journals and reflections, the research co-investigators found that both challenges and learning existed, sometimes in opposition to each other and sometimes as partners in the process of doing the equity work

that the initiative called for participants to do within the modules and within their own classroom spaces. Additional information from participants at a future time would be helpful in specifically understanding the components of both their challenges and their learnings that influenced beliefs and practices within this initiative.

What We Learned From the Critical Practitioner Inquiries

The critical practitioner inquiries supported possibilities for “critical consciousness” work.

In Gloria Ladson-Billings seminal work on culturally relevant teaching, she discusses three components of that work that are interrelated and central to her equity pedagogy: High expectations, cultural competence and critical consciousness are the three central tenets; with the third component described as attempting to address and interrupt societal inequities (Ladson-Billings, 1995). However, what we know from our own equity professional learning facilitation over years is that educators are least likely to engage in this component and this is supported by research also on culturally relevant teaching. As Morrison, Robbins & Rose (2008) confirm in their work on how teachers engage with culturally relevant teaching, they state that critical consciousness is taken up the least of the three components of this work. Yet, they state it is “through critical consciousness that students are empowered with the tools to transform their lives and ultimately the conduct of our society” (p. 443).

What Murray and I have experienced is that educators may not engage in developing critical consciousness as many of the educators are unaware of the inequities; have not received formal or informal training on understanding them or have not personally experienced them. Most of our experience has shown that they also have not had any opportunities to discuss issues of power and privilege in their own lives. This stands to reason then that they would be less likely to incorporate this within their teaching.

For the purposes of these professional learning modules and research, for these reasons, there was intentionality in the design to offer opportunities for the educators to think about and explore issues of critical consciousness by:

- questioning and examining issues of identity and power and privilege;
- supporting understandings and actions tied to issues of social justice;
- supporting understandings of power dynamics in schooling and in society; and
- supporting ways to centre students and student voice

Based on the artifacts that were provided, the research co-investigators found that educators engaged in a variety of inquiries; however, of the 25 artifacts collected at the culmination of the initiative, 6 of the critical practitioner inquiries and the related work with students clearly represented intentional inclusion of the central tenet of culturally relevant teaching that is referred to as critical consciousness (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Some of the inquiry questions and issues addressed: student voice in special education; silencing of home language at school; developing a political stance on an issue; addressing stereotypes tied to social identities; and exploring and understanding biases regarding skin colour.

Eight more inquiries asked questions that addressed an issue of critical consciousness; however, there was not an indication from the artifacts that critical consciousness work was integrated at the student level. What happened on these inquiry journeys? Why did the educators make the choices and decisions made in these inquiries to pursue or not pursue certain work related to their questions? This would be an area for further investigation.

Both of these findings however, are significant as noted previously the work connected to critical consciousness is work that is often not done (Morrison, Robbins & Rose, 2008). However, it leads us to ask what is the relationship between the critical practitioner inquiry and the asking of critical consciousness questions? What aspects of the professional learning modules, if any, impacted the type of inquiry question

asked? For the educators who have a level of their own critical consciousness already, did the practitioner inquiry further their work or simply create an additional space to do the work they already are doing?

Additionally, while several educators utilized the materials that they had been provided as a part of their participation in the initiative, some chose to use these resources as core parts of their inquiry work. Repeatedly, we found evidence of texts and other instructional items such as learning centre items (dolls, arts materials, etc.) at the core of the materials utilized in the inquiries. Additionally, and significantly, some educators utilized the professional learning content provided from the larger sessions to build their own inquiry tied to these very issues. One example of this, is that in the very first professional learning module for the initiative, a short video clip was shown that highlighted Dr. Kenneth Clarke's famous "doll study" where Black children chose a White doll as the favoured one and ascribed positive characteristics to this White doll and ascribed negative characteristics to the Black doll, which represented themselves. Although the silence in the professional learning session was palpable at that time, and several participants questioned the veracity and validity of that study, even with more modern day evidence shared, something about children's preferences for dolls intrigued many of the participants and in different ways became a part of several inquiries.

A team of kindergarten educators from one school expressed their uncertainty about whether the students in their kindergarten class or children in general, even noticed race. This was their belief even after reading about a kindergarten teacher discussing race in her classroom from *Rethinking Early Childhood Education* (Pelo, 2008) and articles supporting the developmental appropriateness of this type of work from the text, *Anti-Bias Education for Young Children and Ourselves* (Derman-Sparks & Olsen Edwards, 2012). Consequently, these educators decided that they wanted to bring in dolls of different races to their classroom and observe the responses and reactions of their students. Once underway, the ECE described her students as "enthusiastically" stating that the White girl doll was the best, and the educators proceeded to observe how the children treated the dolls and comments they made.

Based on their observations, the educators began by asking this question for their "puzzling moment": "What is going on when children choose the white dolls over the black dolls?"

This eventually shaped their critical practitioner inquiry question: "What happens if we build students' sense of identity through read alouds, discussions, and follow up activities?"

Through a cohesive and integrated approach with literacy and social studies, and resources and supports from the professional learning modules, this team of kindergarten educators engaged in exploring this inquiry with their students. Conversations about skin colour and discrimination were a part of the teaching and learning; and the educators utilized texts from the "bin" that had been given to every school that looked at issues of race and people who had fought in history for racial justice. Some of these same texts had also been utilized as models in the professional learning modules.

The educators documented student comments and observed their students for the next few months. They shared that students began to embrace the Black dolls AND show compassion and support to each other in the classroom spaces. One component of their analysis at the end of their inquiry stated:

"When we engage in intentional, inclusive, anti-racist practices, our students will likely feel more valued, motivated, and able to develop positive relationships with their peers...we have a responsibility to develop a critical consciousness within them and ourselves to combat the power/privilege dynamic that puts many at a disadvantage."



(Display board documenting inquiry journey: Left side: Initial question and puzzling moment-photo of Black doll being left in the “play oven” in the classroom. Middle: sharing of texts and resources they engaged in with the students to talk about identity, race, discrimination and rights. Includes text activities based on stories of civil rights leaders: Martin Luther King, Jr., Ruby Bridges and Rosa Parks. Right side: Post inquiry activities- Showing students care for Black dolls and working with one another.)

Through their own work and their own question, these educators saw for themselves what they didn’t believe from the literature or the professional learning modules. The inquiry facilitated their valuing of this work and supporting their learning as educators; ultimately supporting their teaching and learning for their students; in this case a lesson in anti-racism, as they define it that will help their students to better navigate the world.

It is also important to note that although the critical practitioner inquiry questions may lend themselves to supporting developing a critical consciousness for both the educators and the students, the ways in which the educators took up or didn’t take up those conversations had an impact on the results of that inquiry and the subsequent teaching and learning.

The critical practitioner inquiry training extended into understandings tied to the overall initiative. Specifically, as participants were being trained in becoming critical practitioner researchers, conversations about the educator/researcher having power were included. In line with Debra Appleman’s (2003) work which quotes a student asking her, “Are you makin me famous or makin me a fool?” we attempted to highlight the important conversation about why, how and in what ways we engage in research with our students and particularly students who may already be historically marginalized by the larger systems in some ways. In addition to the role of power of the educator/researcher, we also discussed the idea that we all have biases and see things from our particular perspectives that are not universal but based on who we are and what we bring. This was a critical part of the training on becoming an educator/researcher.

In her journal, Sonia, a kindergarten teacher noted as an AHA moment from a session regarding her inquiry that her negative “bias can have an impact” on her inquiry question, a thought she states she had not had before.

From the critical practitioner inquiry work, some educators seemed to understand more about the implications of who they are and what they bring, tied to their research but also to their classroom spaces.

One early childhood educator reflected on her AHA moment in that session. She stated that she looked at herself and as a Black woman who was wearing her hair straightened, she questioned, what if any message does

that send to her Black students as she is having conversations about loving your hair and skin as part of her inquiry work? The politics of that conversation are not simple and there are no clear cut answers as was evident as that debate ensued in the professional learning session; however, what was clear is that this educator thought about representation, messaging and identity for the first time as an educator and that was powerful to her. She stated to me after that session and I noted in my reflection, "What are the messages I am giving to my students all the time by what I say and do?" (December 4, 2014). This was connected to her work on her critical practitioner inquiry, but was also about her realization of her power in the classroom and that who she is and what she says and does can have an impact on the students and the classroom climate.

The critical practitioner inquiry process held value for the educators as a tool that impacted their thinking and practice as the process unfolded.

From the practitioner documentation, we find evidence of educators grappling with and changing their question based on new learnings and colleagues suggestions; making connections between professional learning content and their own inquiry; and learning from and questioning their own practice connected to their experiences in their inquiries.

One educator shared her thoughts about the value of this type of inquiry:

"An inquiry focus on the children who puzzle us will not only help us tune into children and develop our teaching, but it is also the crucial piece of a more democratic classroom. I think you can develop activities from the discussions and conversations that you have with children, and they feed into the curriculum. In teaching English Language Arts, more and more people are given lists of lessons that the kids should learn. Good readers find the main characters. Good readers notice figurative language. However, most of these ideas come also from listening to children's discussions and noticing the things they are worrying about or observing....."

Another educator shared these thoughts about how the initiative and the inquiry has pushed her thinking:

"So far, throughout the IBSA initiative, I have experienced the power of reflection and relationships. This initiative has forced my students and I to wonder: "Who am I? Who am I becoming? What are my dreams? Why do I matter?". These questions revolving around my identities inform the ways that I build relationships with my students and their parents, as well as with colleagues. The IBSA initiative has reaffirmed my belief in the importance of building strong dynamic relationships with stakeholders that are continuously negotiated and redefined in order to ensure that the academic and emotional needs of a child are met. This is especially true in the case of Black children whose identities and dreams have been dismissed, silenced and negated. My inquiry questions are:

- *In what ways, through a nine-week intervention, did the students express and engage in literacy?*
- *In what ways do the students see themselves as literate?*

This initiative has reminded me of the importance of building capacity not only in the schools, but also within the larger community. I believe that through mobilizing, organizing and sharing knowledge, students, caregivers, teachers and communities are empowered. "

In summary, the critical practitioner inquiry work made a significant contribution to the initiative as it resulted in educators creating their own questions with the potential to explore issues of critical consciousness—an important component of culturally relevant teaching that is not often done; it facilitated educators making connections between their inquiry work and the content tied to identity and bias that really is central to all of their work; it engaged the educators in their own authentic learning about the issues that challenge them tied to their students and their practice; and it supported a culture of reflection, learning and questioning for the educators who participated.

X. Implications & Recommendations for Professional Learning

The Content

Intentional integration of the academic cornerstones was important and more is needed

The three academic cornerstones served as important and clear grounding for the goals of the professional learning modules. They offered the possibility for educators to see an integrated model. Additionally, in some classrooms the work of the inquiry and suggestions from the initiative were clearly integrated into literacy, numeracy, social studies or STEM and in some, this did not occur. More supports on school-sites or within the professional learning modules could facilitate a conversation regarding integration and not just of these three areas but of all of the initiatives that the educators are attempting to participate in. If there could be more time and discussion toward aligning this professional learning with other current initiatives to support a cohesive teaching and learning model, more educators may be more willing to try new things that are integrated and not “one-off” lessons in a sea of activity traps.

Critical Practitioner Inquiry can move educators to meet their own professional learning needs

With such diverse levels of participants, experiences and knowledge, it is necessary to think about the ways in which professional learning becomes a tool for educators to focus in on their own needs. With the option to choose an entry point connected to their own puzzling moments, participants could find something that interested them within a broad category of equity work tied to the initiative and find ways to further their own day-to-day practice.

Need for going deeper into curriculum

Time to engage further in different areas of curriculum would be a recommendation for the future. As educators began to delve into their interests with their students, be it tied to literacy, numeracy, STEM or social studies, educators began to seek more support tied to specific skills and strategies to deepen the teaching and learning. This was also evident in some of the critical inquiry paths followed, where it was observed based on artifacts and steps taken that more curricular supports may have benefitted the particular educator in enhancing the teaching and learning.

Need for more attention to intentional learning and conversation about issues of race

With such different experiences, levels of knowledge and comfort levels coming into the professional learning modules, time for carefully facilitated conversations are essential. Many times over the course of the sessions, facilitators would ask the participants who had ever heard of “X”—it could have been a person, a place, a phenomenon like “White privilege” or “stereotype threat” and overwhelmingly the hands were always low and there seemed to be little knowledge about things that are important to the broader conversation. Educators cannot check themselves for biases that they don’t even think exist; nor teach content that they have never learned themselves. More time is needed for intentionality toward how to talk about the issues that are a part of this broader conversation and more time is needed for educators to spend time in analysis and conversation with others as they challenge themselves within their own sites of practice.

The Structure

Need for well-prepared on-site support

The intentionality of creating sessions in clusters to work with educators on coming up with questions and “working” their questions to create critical, researchable, and bias-free questions cannot be taken for granted in the development of the individual educator’s work. Although the professional learning modules also provided an opportunity for “communities of collaboration” to share and support each other’s inquiry journeys, the time to do so in the large sessions was limited. Thus, the role of the on-site support in schools appeared to offer support in moving inquiry questions and work forward. The smaller environment, allowing more conversation and more collegial support, was a necessary component in the evolution of the inquiries. While this role is important, the on-site leadership for this role must also be provided with capacity building in order to fulfill the requirements of the role, to provide knowledgeable leadership to the work at the school level. Several people in this role within this initiative expressed their own appreciation and need for the capacity building that supported them along the way.

Need for differentiation

As noted previously, participants come to any professional learning session with various levels of knowledge and experience tied to the topic at hand. It would be important in future such work to seek more ways to

differentiate the professional learning and create more time for on-going sharing related to what the participants already are bringing into the learning space. Although the critical practitioner inquiry does offer educators to enter into their own question, finding ways to also allow this to happen more frequently across different conversations would better honour the expertise in the room in more consistent ways. This would be an area as well for further investigation and possibly the use of an on-line component for participants to communicate between sessions and across schools.

The Outcomes

Resources matter

Generally, we saw an overwhelming utilization of the resources that were provided to schools in the initiative. Within the professional learning sessions and the professional learning communities held at school sites, educators engaged in possibilities for HOW to use the resources. This proved to be helpful as following these sessions, most classes did use the resources in meaningful ways to support their inquiries. The provision of models for the use of the resources also cannot be discounted. Although the professional facilitators do not believe that resources can make an initiative “successful”, what we found in this work is that resources with ideas for implementation and modelling of such did create a space where participants utilized them.

Variety of learning spaces can engage (Special education and multilingual students)

It is important that in this work we think about the viability and possibility in all learning spaces. Within this initiative, there were educators from a diagnostic kindergarten as well as from classes with large numbers of multilingual learners, sometimes called English Language Learners. What was evident in this work is that critical practitioner inquiry can be suited to all classroom spaces and gets taken up by the participants in those spaces in the ways in which it is needed, to support teaching and learning. The educators in these spaces created inquiry questions and paths for their inquiry that were specific to their students and were specific to their needs. This work can be done across a variety of learning spaces as it is not a boxed, scripted, “one size fits all” way of engaging with students but is about the students and the questions that are present in this moment.

Artifacts only tell part of the story

What continued to surface in our analysis of the artifacts is that we have more questions for the educators related to their critical practitioner inquiries. Although at times, we can assume some of the thinking connected to the work that is shown, we cannot assume that this is reflective for all or that our thinking fully captures what the educator is trying to express. We do have a documentation of some of the work, some of the learnings, and some of the intentionality to address particular important issues. However, we also are unable to find out the complexities and the challenges and how participants navigated those in their work related to this initiative. The visual artifacts that represent some of the classroom work are important; yet also do not tell us other important parts of this narrative. The artifacts are a partial demonstration that would be richer with voices of participants.

Scholarly Significance

The scholarly significance of this work is multi-faceted. There is very little written about how to deepen the work of developing critical consciousness within teachers and students within the Canadian Context. Although many speak about “equity” and “culturally relevant” practices within Toronto, the implementation of this work that focuses on attempting to establish a critical consciousness for both educators and students exists in few spaces. As noted, many educators may not have their own understandings of this work or see possibilities for how to connect this within their practice.

With the intentionality within the professional learning modules to address critical consciousness of the educators, we created spaces for introspection, questioning and deepening understandings that can potentially build the educators’ skills and sense of efficacy in supporting Black students in the early years.

Through the three academic cornerstones of this initiative and the related professional learning modules, specifically the critical practitioner inquiry work, we have seen possibilities for how to better provide educators with a way to see and understand themselves and their daily practice. By locating themselves within their own contexts and providing the educators with support to create questions that focused on their interests/needs/puzzling moments, we found that some educators did engage in critical consciousness work for themselves and their students; some attempted to address issues that explored critical consciousness in their questions and all engaged in a process that allowed them to locate the majority of the work within their own site of practice and with their own students. Given what the literature says about the potential of critical practitioner research to promote student achievement (Lieberman & Mace 2010; National Writing Project 2010), we hope to explore the continued possibilities and the learnings of the educators who were a part of this initiative. It is our hope to explore further what has specifically informed their practice, what evidence of student achievement they might site and how they have progressed in their own thinking and understandings tied to promoting Black student achievement, and their own learnings about themselves and their practices within their own classroom spaces.

XI. References

- Adams, M., Bell, L.A., Griffin, P. (Eds.) (2007). *Teaching for Diversity and Social Justice*, Second edition. New York: Routledge.
- Appleman, D. (2003) "Are you makin' me famous or makin' me a fool?" Responsibility and respect in representation. In Greene, S. & Abt-Perkins, D. (Eds), *Making race visible: literacy research for cultural understanding*. (pp. 71-85). New York: Teachers College Press.
- Ballenger, C. (2009). *Puzzling Moments, Teachable Moments: Practicing Teacher Research in Urban Classrooms*. NY: Teachers College Press.
- Brown, R.S., Sinay, E. (2008). *2006 Student Census: Linking Demographic Data with Student Achievement*. Toronto: The Toronto District School Board, Research and Information Services.
- Cheng, M., M. Yau, and S. Ziegler. (1993). *The 1991 Every Secondary Student Survey, Part II: Detailed Profiles of Toronto's Secondary School Students*. Toronto: Research Services, Toronto Board of Education.
- Clements, D. H. (1999). Subitizing: What is it? Why teach it? *Teaching Children Mathematics*, March, 400-405.
- Cochran-Smith, M., & Lytle, S. (2009). *Inquiry as Stance: Practitioner Research in the Next Generation*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.
- Dei, G. (1996). *Anti Racism Education: Theory and Practice*. Halifax, N.S.: Fernwood Publishing.
- Dei, G. J. S., & Kempf, A. (2013). *New perspectives on African-centred education in Canada*. Toronto, ON: Canadian Scholars' Press Inc.
- Derman-Sparks, L. (2008). Why an anti-bias curriculum? In A. Pelo (Ed.), *Rethinking Early Childhood Education* (pp. 7–12). Milwaukee, WI: Rethinking Schools.
- Gay, G. (2000) *Culturally Responsive Teaching : Theory, Research, and Practice (Multicultural Education Series, No. 8)*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Kumashiro, K. (2004). *Against Common Sense: Teaching and Learning toward Social Justice*. New York: Routledge Falmer.
- Ladson-Billings, G. (1994). *The Dreamkeepers: Successful Teachers of African-American Children*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.
- Ladson Billings, G. (1995). Toward a theory of culturally relevant pedagogy. *American Educational Research Journal*, 32(3), 465–491.
- Ladson-Billings, G. (2001). *Crossing over to Canaan: The Journey of New teachers in Diverse Classrooms*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.
- Lieberman, A., & Pointer Mace, D. (2010). Making Practice Public: Teacher Learning in the 21st Century. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 61(1-2), 77-88.
- Lyman, K. (2007). Ribbons, racism, and a placenta: The challenges and surprises of culturally relevant teaching. In C. Caro-Bruce, R. Flessner, M. Klehr, & K. Zeichner (Eds.), *Creating Equitable Classrooms Through Action Research* (pp. 170–201). Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.
- Morrison, K. A., Robbins, H. H., and Rose, D. G. (2008). Operationalizing Culturally Relevant Pedagogy: A Synthesis of Classroom-Based Research. *Equity & Excellence in Education*, 41(4), 433-452.
- Moses, R. and Cobb, Jr, C. E. (2001). *Radical Equations: Civil Rights from Mississippi to the Algebra Project*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- National Writing Project (2010). *Writing Project Professional Development Continues to Yield Gains in Student Writing Achievement*. Research Brief No. 2, 2010.
- Ontario Ministry of Education (2007). *Early learning for every child today: A framework for Ontario early childhood settings (ELECT)*. Best Start Expert Panel on Early Learning. Toronto: Author.
- Ontario Ministry of Education (2014). *How does learning happen? Ontario's pedagogy for the early years*. Toronto: Author.
- O'Reilly, J., Yau, M., (2009). *2008 Parent Census, Kindergarten-Grade 6: System Overview and Detailed Findings*. Toronto: The Toronto District School Board, Research and Information Services.

Pollock, M. (2005). *Colormute: Race Talk Dilemmas in an American School*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Stronge, J.H., Ward, T.J., Grant, L.W. (2011). What Makes Good Teachers Good? A Cross-Case Analysis of the Connection Between Teacher Effectiveness and Student Achievement. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 62, 4 339-355.

Pelo, A. (Ed.). (2008). *Rethinking Early Childhood Education*. Milwaukee, WI: Rethinking Schools.

West-Burns, N., Murray, K. & Watt, J. (2013). Voices of equity. *Journal of Staff Development*, 34(6), 34–37.

Yau, M., O'Reilly, J., Rosolen, L., & Archer, B. (2011). *Census Portraits: Understanding Our Students' Ethno-racial backgrounds*. Toronto: The Toronto District School Board, Research and Information Services.