

# Does learning about anti-Black racism count as a professional learning activity? Absolutely! <sup>[1]</sup>

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**Source:** The College of Early Childhood Educators

**Format:** Article

**Publication Date:** 7 Dec 2020

## AVAILABILITY

Access online <sup>[2]</sup>

## EXCERPTS

*Identifying, confronting and disrupting racism is essential and complex; as a profession, we have work to do. This work can take many forms, including individual learning, building relationships and sharing experiences, developing curriculum, or advocating for change in sector. All of these activities can form part of RECEs' CPL goals and activities.*

A foundational component of anti-bias and anti-racism work is to listen to the voices and learn from the experiences of Black members of the learning community. One such RECE, who is a founding member of the Community of Black ECEs, Nicole Cummings-Morgan, shares her experiences and the Continuous Professional Learning (CPL) activities she's engaged in.

### Meet Nicole

Nicole, an ECE since 2009, had worked as an RECE within a Toronto District School Board kindergarten classroom for over six years.

"During my post-secondary education, I was exposed to eurocentric theorists and was led to believe these were the only scholars that have positively influenced the profession," Nicole says. "Later, through my practical experiences within the sector, I was a part of ECE teams led mostly by white RECEs. Upon reflection, I realized this suggested to me that white ECEs had more earning and leadership opportunities. These opportunities felt out of reach for me and it occurred to me that perhaps other Black RECEs were feeling the same way."

"When I would attend conferences, the ECEs presenting were all white," she notes. "Often, they were scholars who would highlight their work within 'marginalized communities' without, what it seemed to be, any indication about whether the marginalized people actually participated in their research." She says this added to the growing instances where she felt unseen, unworthy and unappreciated. "What was happening, and still is happening for me in my professional role in the early childhood education sector, is anti-Black racism. And it is happening in both subtle and overt ways."

Reflecting on her experience at school with eurocentrism, Nicole had a startling realization. Nowhere in their research had these theorists considered the experiences, values, views or ideas from Black children and families, yet their research was foundational to the program. "The theories had some relevance, but I wondered about my training. Was I at my optimum as an educator — the educator I wanted to be — if I didn't learn from Black Scholars? Or from theories that would be applicable to the diverse Black children and families that I would be working with, with their unique stories and histories?" she says.

This realization led Nicole to feel guilty: "How could I, as a Black educator, be unfamiliar with any researchers who looked like me or who had experiences similar to mine?"

She began to consider how to conduct her own research to find out what she needed to know in order to best support the Black children and families she works closely with. Her learning began with self-reflection. From there, it continues to grow as she learns more and more about how to provide diverse Black children, families, and communities with the culturally-relevant pedagogy and curriculum that is critically required.

Nicole's professional learning involved completing a Master's degree as well as researching and critically reflecting with other professionals in her network. She shared aspects of her story with other professionals who, in turn, shared stories of their own. Her journey led her to the Association of Early Childhood Educators of Ontario (AECEO), the profession's advocacy organization, which led to the establishment of the Community of Black Early Childhood Educators.

Here are some of the things Nicole has included in her continuous professional learning portfolio as she continues to work toward her goal of learning more about how to confront anti-Black racism in her professional practice:

Forming a community of Black ECEs to address anti-Black racism in early childhood education. This group provides a place to share, learn, discuss and challenge each other in an ongoing journey;

Connecting with other organizations dedicated to supporting the needs of Black educators, children and families. This collective voice will fuel changes in policy, practices and our educational system; and,

Creating a network of Black ECEs who can share their experiences, strategies and resources in order to encourage, uplift and support one another through personal and professional development.

“Within this community, my professional learning journey continues,” she beams. “I feel I’m in a place in my professional life where the growth has been rapid and inspiring.”

Looking to incorporate more learning about anti-Black racism, diversity and inclusion into your own CPL?

As practice settings and the external environment are constantly evolving, so too can your CPL goals; they can be adapted or revised at any time during your two-year learning cycle.

Registered Early Childhood Educators (RECEs) have varying levels of exposure to, and awareness of, anti-Black racism and the impacts it has on Black children, families and colleagues. Learning about the ways it affects practice is important to RECEs’ responsibility to build welcoming and inclusive learning environments that support the full participation, well-being and development of all children.

Here’s an example of a goal that can be added to learn about anti-Black racism:

Goal: Learn about how to recognize and confront anti-Black racism in my professional practice.

Learning Activities:

- Joining a book study about anti-Black racism in Canada with a community of practice
- Critically reflecting on my beliefs and biases about social differences
- Following advocates on social media to gain access to important information, events, blogs and articles about confronting anti-Black racism
- Attending the AECEO Addressing Anti-Black Racism Webinar series to hear from a range of Black RECEs about their experiences, research and plans for the future.

**Region:** Ontario <sup>[3]</sup>

**Tags:** equity <sup>[4]</sup>

diversity <sup>[5]</sup>

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