# AMPLIFYING THE VOICES OF BLACK FAMILIES AND EDUCATORS IN NOVA SCOTIA: CHALLENGING ANTI-BLACK RACISM IN EARLY CHILDHOOD ENVIRONMENTS

**Presenters: Jessie-Lee McIsaac (PhD), Milena Pimentel (BA Child and Youth Study Student)**

Team members: Crystal Watson (PhD Candidate), Barb Hamilton-Hinch (PhD), Emma Stirling-Cameron (MA), Nicholas Hickens (BSc)

Early Childhood Collaborative Research Centre

MOUNT SAINT VINCENT UNIVERSITY

DALHOUSIE UNIVERSITY

ON THESE SHOULDERS RESEARCH COLLABORATIVE

# Land Acknowledgement

*This is a photo of the Subenacadie River. The Mi'kmaq have traversed the Shubenacadie River and the lakes to its south as a major transport route since time immemorial.*

# Population Context

Nova Scotia has a rich history of Black heritage in Canada that dates back more than 400 years ago. African Nova Scotians are individuals who self-identify as descendants of Black Loyalists, Jamaican Maroons, Black Refugees, and Caribbean workers that settled in Cape Breton as far back as the 1700s.

African Nova Scotians represent 44% of the racially visible population in Nova Scotia and constitute 2.3% of the total provincial population. Over 77% of African Nova Scotian people have resided in Nova Scotia for three or more generations, with roots in 52 identified African Nova Scotian communities.

With an extensive history beyond four hundred years, and with rich contributions to the establishment of the province, African Nova Scotians have not been afforded the royalties for their longstanding contributions.

We pay respect to the histories, contributions, and legacies of African Nova Scotian communities that have been here for over 400 years and the 52 African Nova Scotian communities throughout the region today.

# About us!



**Dr. Jessie-Lee McIsaac
(she/her)**



**Milena Pimentel
(she/her)**

# About Our Team!

**Barbara Hamilton-Hinch**

**Crystal Watson**

**Emma Cameron-Stirling**

**Nicholas Hickens**

ON THESE SHOULDERS
RESEARCH COLLABORATIVE

Early Childhood
Collaborative
Research Centre

# Early childhood transformation underway

- In 2017, Early Learning and Child Care Bilateral Agreements began providing funding to enhance priorities of accessibility, affordability, quality, and inclusion

- In 2020-21, Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care Bilateral Agreements were negotiated with a commitment to provide affordable, accessible, inclusive, and high-quality child care across Canada.

## **Early learning and child care in Nova Scotia**

- Market-based regulated child care system offered as a fee-for-service by private commercial and not-for-profit operators

**+**

- Publicly delivered Pre-primary Program through public education system targeting children the year before school entry (4 years old)
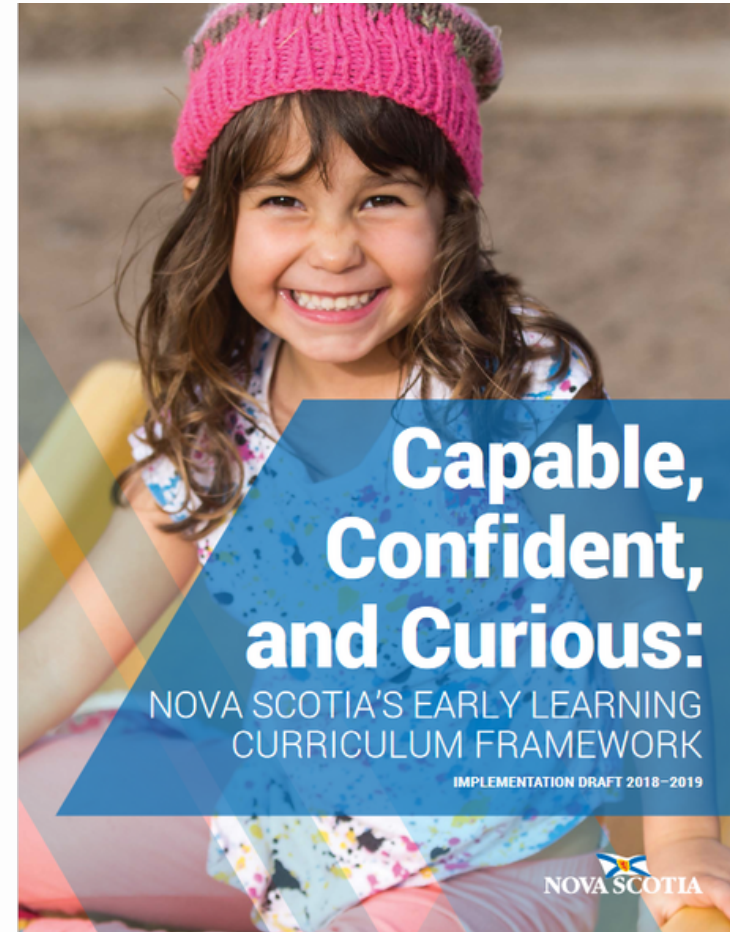
# Investing in young children and families

- Providing the best start for the youngest generation is a growing priority with education, health, and economic benefits
  - Critical brain development – the rapid growth of cognitive, language, social, emotional, and motor skills during the early years
  - The environments of children shape their development

- High-quality and longer duration of early learning can lead to better outcomes, especially for children (and families) with socio-economic disadvantage
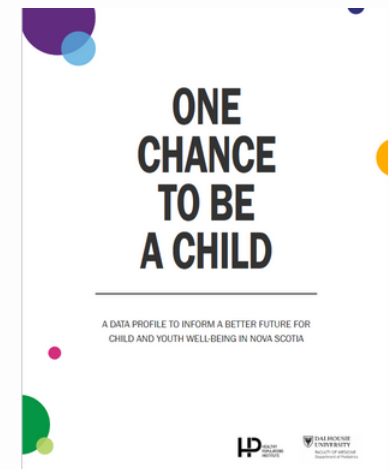
# Key principles within early learning and child care

- Play is a multi-faceted concept and is recognized as a human right and fundamental for healthy child development
  - Risky play also supports children's development through thrilling and exciting forms of physical play that involve uncertainty and have the potential for physical injury

- Nova Scotia's principles of early learning
  - Play-based learning
  - Relationships
  - Inclusion, diversity, and equity
  - Learning environments
  - Reflective practice



Capable, Confident, and Curious:
NOVA SCOTIA'S EARLY LEARNING CURRICULUM FRAMEWORK
IMPLEMENTATION DRAFT 2018–2019

NOVA SCOTIA

# Disparities in early learning and child care

- There are racial disparities within early childhood systems - or an education debt (Ladson-Billings, 2013)
    - A direct result of colonialism, segregation, discrimination, and structural and systemic racism that influences play-based learning environments (e.g., lack of community infrastructure, over-surveillance, and fear of repercussions from injury )

- Black children experience anti-Black racism and violence in school settings  - less is known about the experiences within early childhood settings

- We wanted to hear the stories from African Nova Scotian and Black families and educators to inform current transformations to achieve a high-quality, accessible, and culturally-responsive early learning and child care system

ONE CHANCE TO BE A CHILD

A DATA PROFILE TO INFORM A BETTER FUTURE FOR CHILD AND YOUTH WELL-BEING IN NOVA SCOTIA

https://www.onechancens.ca/

SPOTLIGHT ON
THE WELL-BEING OF AFRICAN NOVA SCOTIAN CHILDREN AND YOUTH

Key author:
Barb Hamilton-Hinch, PhD
School of Health and Human Performance, Faculty of Health, Dalhousie University

*The overall purpose of this project was to explore caregivers' perception of outdoor risky play and Black children's early experiences accessing early learning and child care.*

## Research Questions

- How families and ECEs view early learning and child care environments for Black children in Nova Scotia?

- What are the unique lived experiences and perspectives of Black ECEs practicing in Nova Scotia Early Learning and Child Care programs?

- How racism and discrimination are experienced by Black children and families in Nova Scotia during the early years?

- How Black children in Nova Scotia experience and access play, including risky and outdoor play?

# Data Collection

- Qualitative Description (QD approach)
- In depth-interviews with caregivers of Black children (parents and early childhood educators) in summer 2021
- Recruitment through social media and partners

| Participants | Racial Identity | Location | Gender/ Relationship |
|---|---|---|---|
| 7 Parents of Black children aged 18 months - 5 years old | 6 Black<br><br>1 White | 6 HRM<br><br>1 Preston Township | 1 Father<br><br>6 Mothers |
| 8 Early Childhood Educators who work in African NS communities | 2 Black<br><br>2 Biracial/ African Descent<br><br>4 White | 4 HRM<br><br>2 Preston Township<br><br>2 Rural | 1 Man<br><br>7 Women |

# Critical Race Theory and Black Critical Theory

*Crenshaw et al., 1995; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Dumas and Ross, 2016*

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

- Anti-Black Racism is Endemic and Intersectional

- Challenging Claims of Neutrality, Objectivity, Color-evasiveness, and

  Meritocracy

- The Centrality of Experiential Knowledge and the Value of Storytelling

- Interrogating and Challenging of the Dominant Ideology

- Commitment to Social Justice

# Data Analysis

*Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2022). Thematic Analysis: A Practical Guide. SAGE Publications. https://us.sagepub.com/en-us/nam/thematic-analysis/book248481*
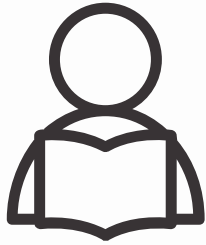
6 phases of reflexive thematic analysis:
"an open, exploratory, flexible and iterative" process

Coding process

Theming: "patterns of shared meaning underpinned or united by a core concept"

# An Exploration of Parent and Early Childhood Educators' Perspectives on Early Learning and Child Care Environments

*Manuscript under review: Journal of Childhood Studies*

- Anti-Black Approach to Curriculum

"I feel like certain educators and people that may be doing it for years and years and years and things have been a certain way for so long and they're not changing their practice I feel like there needs to be a little bit more investigation as far as like who we are actually choosing to just work with kids in general but also if you don't have the education then really make sure that quality education is being given to the Early Childhood Educators that are working with African-Nova Scotians."
–ECE

- Inaction on Racism, Social Justice, and Equity

"After the [discovery of the] Indigenous children [remains] I tried to do something with them and they were like no I don't think you should do that because they wouldn't understand it or their families wouldn't talk about it.. I feel like with the George Floyd thing they definitely didn't do anything either."
–ECE

- Precluding Black Children from Culturally Safe Environments

" [...] When I picked him up I told you about the biting so he bit someone right before I picked him up just now and I was kind of reading through the paper and it's like "she made him go sit by himself and told him not to bite his friends ".
–Parent

# Telling the stories, experiences, and reflections of Black and African Nova Scotian Early Childhood Educators



- Lack of representation in Nova Scotian ELCC settings and its impacts on Black ECEs

"It was a little weird because when I went in, they noticed that I myself was Black and I just felt they were kind of questioning me a lot on it. It was really weird."

- Lack of cultural safety currently experienced by Black ECEs within ELCC settings

"You know what, your world is different than my world and I don't need to be like you".

- ECEs reflections on Culturally Safe Spaces

That was the first time in my career [...] that I felt at home and comfortable and I could be with people that I felt safe with.

# The Privilege of Risky Outdoor Play

*Manuscript under review: Leisure/Loisir*



- Valuing Outdoor Play

"Yeah, I definitely think outdoor play is important... He loves it outside and he loves playing, getting dirty... Even at home when he's just watching, he goes to the door, gets his coat, and his boots, and kind of just looks at me."
*-Parent*

- Anti-Black Outdoor Spaces

"They're gonna get hovered over if they go to the [children's hospital], and we've had situations in the past where the mom would call me and say, 'The social worker is gonna call you and you need to let them know that this happened at daycare,' so yeah there is a fear of that extra policing."
*-ECE*

- Under-resourced Black Communities

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

# Racism and its Impact on Black Families in Nova Scotia

*Manuscript accepted: Journal of Health Promotion and Chronic Disease Prevention in Canada*



- Intergenerational impacts of racism

"My mom tells me stories of teachers actually mentioning my hair being too big or how to put it in braids [...] Or children making fun. I was called the 'N' word... Unfortunately, I feel my children are probably going to go through the same thing"
*–Parent*

- Experiences of racism across systems

"I remember one of the nurses. She said, 'Coloured babies, they have this Mongolian spot.' And I was just taken back, because she said 'coloured.'"
*–Parent*

- White is always the norm

"I hope they don't feel different. That they know that how they look is normal and they don't need to be "othered" or feel segregated in any way. Just to see diversity and know that diversity is normal, and that White isn't the norm, because that's very apparent throughout society—White is always the norm"
-Parent

- The importance of positive self-identity and cultural pride

"My wife is often sitting with my daughter, and she's telling her about her hair, she's telling her about her skin colour, and reminding her about the proud families that she came from."
*–Parent*

# Knowledge Mobilization

*Community Event*



*Local Media*

- https://www.cbc.ca/listen/live-radio/1-27-information-morning-ns/clip/15927457-n.s.-researchers-team-look-barriers-faced-african-nova

- https://globalnews.ca/video/9018645/challenging-anti-black-racism-in-early-childhood-environments/

*Presentations*

- IWK Child Safety Link
- Early Years Branch
- HRM Parks and Recreation

# Key Takeaways

- There are culturally unsafe early learning and child care environments in Nova Scotia for Black children and their families

- We need to build competencies and capacity for anti-racist, culturally responsive, and inclusive practices at the educator, program, and system levels
    - Prioritize funding for African NS communities
    - Create Anti-Black racism policies and action plans to ensure cultural safety
    - Implement pre-service and professional development to build and sustain knowledge, skills, and communities of practice (e.g., NSCC Africentric Cohort, Culturally Responsive Practice Modules)
    - Motivate action to inspire anti-racist and culturally rich early learning environments

# Opportunity for Discussion

# THANK YOU

For more information, contact:
Dr. Jessie-Lee McIssac
Jessie-Lee.McIsaac@msvu.ca

**To learn more, visit our website:**
https://tinyurl.com/amplifyingthevoices

**Community Report:**
https://tinyurl.com/amplifyingthevoicesreport

# References

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2022). *Thematic Analysis: A Practical Guide. SAGE Publications. https://us.sagepub.com/en-us/nam/thematic-analysis/book248481*

Crenshaw, K. W., Gotanda, N., Peller, G., & Thomas, K. (1995). *Critical Race Theory: The Key Writings that Formed the Movement* (First Ed). New York University Press.

Dumas, M. J., & ross, kihana miraya. (2016). "Be Real Black for Me": Imagining BlackCrit in Education. *Urban Education*, 51(4), 415–442. https://doi.org/10.1177/0042085916628611

Hamilton-Hinch, B. (2022). The Well-Being of African Nova Scotian Children and Youth. One Chance to Be a Child: Healthy Populations Institute, Dalhousie University. https://www.onechancens.ca/_files/ugd/db246d_ab8ac88b1cc44ddb93002b9dcb5b6d05.pdf

Ladson-Billings, G., & Tate, W. F. (1995). Toward a critical race theory of education. *Teachers College Record,* 97(1), 47–68.

LeBlanc J, Hamilton-Hinch B, Harkins MJ, McIsaac JLD. (2019). The Achievement Gap in African Nova Scotian Learners: what is it and what can we do about it. Presentation to the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development.