



A National Conversation About Race in Early Childhood Leadership

**A Catalyst Event
November 2020**

Summary Report



PURPOSE

Our nation's children and families increasingly represent a broad range of diverse backgrounds. As such, the needs of those served in early childhood systems are complex, and issues of equity are prevalent. While the entry-level/teacher workforce within the field of early childhood education is racially and ethnically diverse, there is an underrepresentation of Black and Latina women in executive leadership positions in large, direct-service, and policy/systems organizations.¹

There are numerous equity-related challenges that plague the field of early childhood education today. Issues such as the opportunity gap, disproportionate preschool suspension and expulsion rates for Black and Brown children, and a lack of access to high quality care are at the center of education-related media outlets, articles, and empirical research. Educational leaders are charged with the task of understanding these challenges, developing policy, and creating systems that address the issues through sustainable and impactful measures. If we are to truly address the equity-related challenges, it is imperative that there are diverse perspectives represented in the leadership of policy and systems-level early childhood organizations.²

EVENT DETAILS

Co-hosted by Bright Horizons and the National Head Start Association, and sponsored by the Council for Professional Recognition, the catalyst event took place on the afternoon of November 12, 2020. Moderated by Dr. Bernadine Futrell, Senior Director - Effective Practice at NHSA and Dr. Lisa Grant, Principal Consultant & Founder of Early Childhood by Design, the event consisted of an opening address by Dr. Valora Washington of the CAYL Institute, followed by three distinct panel-style sessions: Research, Policy, and Practice. The event closed with remarks from Rachel Robertson, Vice President of Education & Development at Bright Horizons, and Yasmina Vinci, Executive Director at NHSA.



EVENT SUMMARY

The catalyst event kicked off with a keynote session featuring Dr. Valora Washington, CEO & President of The CAYL Institute. During the session, Dr. Washington highlighted the historical context of race and early childhood leadership, ongoing challenges of race and early childhood leadership, our Alpha Generation children as leadership catalysts, and being architects of change in policy and practice. Although there have been decades of thoughtful analysis about race and equity, the vision for equity in early childhood and ECE leadership has yet to be realized. Why? Because "well said is not the same as well done." Essentially, leadership in the field has historically talked about the work from the frame of us/them, speak from a position of privilege, and take a deficit approach. So what can be done? Universal systems of supports, high quality early childhood education and care that is accessible to all, and opportunity equity & family advocacy connected to ECE leadership are all "game changers" in this work.

Dr. Washington closed the opening session with a vision for early childhood leadership: Our leadership supports diverse children, celebrates the workforce, and elevates our profession.

View the recording of the opening keynote session [here](#).

Each of the following three sessions highlighted the unique challenges and opportunities in its respective area within the field of the early childhood (research, policy, & practice), while weaving in the interconnectedness with each of the other facets of the field. Each session was facilitated as a panel discussion with national experts sharing their personal journeys, and providing insight and expertise as to the barriers and opportunities for Black and Brown women navigating a career in early childhood leadership.

View the recording of the closing session [here](#).



Over 1,200 registrants from a variety of roles within the field of early childhood education attended the event.

Research:

The first of three panel discussions, this session focused on race in early childhood leadership through the lens of research. Research is the foundation of policy and practice, and provides the what, how, and why behind our work. Dr. Luisiana Melendez, Clinical Professor at Erikson Institute and Director of the Institute's Bilingual/ESL Program served as moderator. Key topic areas/questions addressed in this session included: the leadership journey of each of the panelists, the history of the current problem, what influences research priorities in the field, what content is researched and who are the subjects of our field's research, and strategies to begin to impart change as it relates to racism in research.

View the recording of the research session [here](#).

Policy:

The second panel discussion focused on race in early childhood leadership through the lens of policy. It is through policy that our work is governed, and it can significantly impact who is at the helm of our work. Lucy Recio, Senior Advisor for Public Policy & Advocacy at The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) served as moderator. Key topic areas/questions addressed in this session included: the leadership journey of each of the panelists, how racism and our historical underpinnings influence the field's policies and systems today, the impact of the current leadership landscape on children and families served by ECE systems, and the role that each individual plays in creating systemic change.

View the recording of the policy session [here](#).

Practice:

The third and final panel discussion focused on race in early childhood leadership through the lens of practice. Practice is where research and policy come together to create structures that influence and impact the field. It's where all of the direct work with children, their families, and our workforce happens. Dr. Carol Brunson Day, Fellow at The Council for Professional Recognition served as moderator of this session. Key topic areas/questions addressed in this session included: the leadership journey of each of the panelists, effective strategies for charting one's own leadership path, the role of mentorship in leadership development, prioritizing diversity within organizations and at all employee levels, and how people in positions of power and/or authority (including White colleagues) can support the work of increasing diversity in early childhood leadership.

View the recording of the practice session [here](#).

THEMES

So what was learned and what comes next? In reflection of all of the sessions as a collective, it is understood that the idea of diversity in leadership is bigger than any one individual; any one organization; bigger than the field of early childhood education. Regardless of which facet of the field one works in (research, policy, or practice) it will take change in each of those areas in an organized and synchronized fashion to be able to shift the narrative as it relates to representation in leadership.

It is also understood that everyone has a story. Each speaker shared the pathway each of them walked - leading to the platform from which they spoke on this day, with mentoring and career sponsorship serving as a key component on that journey. They shared inspiration about how each individual has a pathway before them; demonstrating there is room within our field for multiple voices to be heard.

Lastly, it is understood that these conversations are just the start. Participants left motivated and having learned something new, but also with the promise that there is more to come. Great work in this area is happening within individual organizations, and there is a commitment to keep this discussion going, and to create actionable solutions at the inter-organizational or systems level.

OPPORTUNITIES

We know that research, policy, and practice are the three facets of our field that intersect and create the platform for what we do, how we do it, and why. In an effort to move beyond conversations towards an action-oriented agenda, the initial collaborators of this catalyst event are excited to continue this work; creating and implementing concrete strategies that elevate this work within their respective organizations with the mission of ensuring that those leading the work of early childhood research, policy, and practice are reflective of the diversity represented among our nation's children and families, and that all leaders have the knowledge, tools, and resources needed to lead with an equity lens. Some of this work includes:

- Supporting and engaging in research in the area of equity in early childhood leadership.
- Evaluating and improving policies and systems related to diversity, equity, and inclusion, particularly at the leadership level.
- Creating and implementing professional pathways and learning opportunities that support growth in the representation of early childhood leaders, and empowers all leaders to lead with an equity lens.

Ultimately, the vision is that all children, families, and educators will live, learn, and thrive within an early childhood system that is intentionally designed with consideration, engagement, and direction from leaders who are representative of our nation's diversity.

Panelists and Event Contributors

Opening Speaker:

Dr. Valora Washington, CEO & President, The CAYL Institute

Research Panelists:

Dr. Alejandra Barraza, President, High Scope

Dr. Tonya Bibbs, Associate Professor, Erikson Institute

Dr. Melissa Casteel, Director of Assessment, McCormick Center

Dr. Luisiana Melendez, Clinical Professor, Erikson Institute

Policy Panelists:

Dr. Angela Chapman, Chief of Transformation & Leadership, Columbus City Schools

Dr. Myra Jones-Taylor, Chief Policy Officer, Zero to Three

Lucy Recio, Senior Advisor - Public Policy & Advocacy, NAEYC

LaTanya Wynn-Hall, Head Start/Early Head Start Director, Lutheran Services Florida

Practice Panelists:

Dr. Carol Brunson Day, Fellow, The Council for Professional Recognition

Isabel Garcia, Executive Director, RCMA

Stacie Mwongozi, Regional Manager, Bright Horizons

Dr. Dawn Williams, Dean, Howard University - School of Education

Closing Speakers:

Dr. Bernadine Futrell, Senior Director - Effective Practice, National Head Start Association

Rachel Robertson, Vice President of Education & Development, Bright Horizons

Yasmina Vinci, Executive Director, National Head Start Association

Event Director:

Dr. Lisa Grant, Principal Consultant & Founder, Early Childhood by Design

This summary report was made possible through support from:



Endnotes

1. Whitebook, M., Kipnis, F., Sakai, L., & Austin, L.J.E. (2012). Early care and education leadership and management roles: Beyond homes and centers. *Early Childhood Research and Practice*. 14(1).
2. Johnson-Staub, C. (2017). *Equity Starts Early: Addressing Racial Inequities in Child Care and Early Education Policy*. Center for Law and Social Policy, Inc. (CLASP).