

## YOU'RE INVITED...MAKING BLACK LIVES MATTER IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

by Denisha Jones

When I joined the Black Lives Matter at School movement, I wanted very much to bring this work into the early childhood field. As a former kindergarten teacher and preschool director, I knew that anti-racist teaching must begin with our youngest learners. Though many early childhood educators and scholars think young children are not developmentally ready to discuss race and racism and receive explicit anti-racism lessons, [others are challenging this assumption](#) by exploring how children internalize implicit and explicit racist ideas. The work of anti-bias in early childhood education provides a much-needed entry point for this work, but it does not explicitly address anti-racism and anti-Blackness. [Blair Imani reminds us](#), "If Black children are 'old enough' to experience racism, then white children are 'old enough' to learn about it." If we are to truly dismantle white supremacy and racism, we need anti-racist teachers, curriculum, and pedagogy in the early years and beyond.

As the Black Lives Matter at School Week of Action grew into a national movement, I was delighted to learn that kindergarten teacher [Laleña Garcia rewrote the 13-guiding principles](#) adopted from the Global Black Lives Matter statement into child-friendly language. This was a crucial step in ensuring this work would be accessible to young children and their teachers. In DC, I worked with a group of educators to identify children's literature to support each of the 13-guiding principles. The [DC Area Educators of Social Justice](#) offered workshops for teachers to explore developmentally appropriate ways to introduce their students to the week of action. [Makai Kellogg, a preschool teacher](#), invited me to speak with her colleagues and director about the importance of introducing Black Lives Matter at School to young children. Knowing this work was happening with 2s, 3s, and 4s, gave me hope.

And then, Takiema Bunche Smith, Executive Director of the Center for Culture, Race & Equity at Bank Street College, organized the first annual [Black Lives Matter at School Early Childhood Symposium](#)! This was the first event I ever heard of, dedicated to supporting young Black children to learn and thrive! More importantly, this symposium addressed Black children from a strength-based perspective that centers Black joy. Anti-racist teaching means dismantling narratives of deprivation and deficiency that often frame conversations about Black children and their families. Given that the most recent symposium had over 1800 attendees, it is clear that the early childhood community is eager to be in spaces that affirm the inherent brilliance in Black children.

As I worked on the recently published co-edited book, [\*Black Lives Matter at School: An Uprising for Educational Justice\*](#), I sought to include many early childhood teachers' stories. [\*Angela Harris, a first-grade teacher\*](#), shared a poignant story about the importance of doing this work in the early grades with her Black students at an African American immersion school. Black Lives Matter at School and anti-racist teaching is for all children of all ages. These stories provide powerful examples of how to do this work in the early years and why the field of early childhood education must take on this responsibility.

In addition to reading these stories, we invite you to hear from these inspiring early childhood teachers and advocates. On Wednesday, March 17, 2021, at 5 pm EST, Defending the Early Years and Haymarket Books will sponsor a panel titled, *Making Black Lives Matter in Early Childhood Education*. Moderated by DEY Co-Founder Nancy Carlsson-Paige, Laleña, Makai, Takiema, Angela, and I will discuss the nuts and bolts of centering the youngest children in the Black Lives Matter at School movement. [You can register here.](#) We hope you will join us in this vital discussion and commit to making Black Lives Matter in early education and beyond.