Recently, a colleague and I have shared thoughts on the concept of Centering Blackness. We come from two different professions, but share the same passion to support and include the lives of our students in our teaching. Our conversation focused on what Centering Blackness looks like for us in academia. Here are some of her powerful thoughts.

“What do you do when your academic community does not look like your community-community? There is so much racially coded behavior modeled and expected of our children in schools—how to properly act, speak, write, emote—these are all ways that we restrict Black children and begin the process of degrading their sense of self. This contributes to why some Black children see school as a white space, and why Black children who excel in school are often considered by their community to be “Oreos”—Black on the outside but white on the inside. At all levels, beginning with our youngest, we mold children into the image of the dominant culture.”

She goes on to say, “It ... helps me to be unapologetically Black when I question, ‘Why am I changing to be accepted by the academy ... and is that change just? Am I changing for a good and just reason?’ That call to change is really a racist call. It is defeating your Blackness. You are asked to diminish that, and amplify this, and it is because Black is not considered in the academic space. Either that, or we do not know what a Black academic space looks like. We have not seen enough of that model. It is very narrow. I wish that I could go into a classroom and say “Y’all’ and use my hip-hop jargon

Centering Blackness is an act of love.
and still be taken seriously. I do not want my students to lose their voice, that is the saddest thing. I lost my voice—it got me the grades, but it was not me. I feel like it stymied me in a lot of creative ways, and I do not want that for my students, particularly for students who speak any other English, an English that is seen as less intelligent, or however it is criticized” (Kisha Quesada Turner, 2020).

How do we take these compelling invitations from Kisha to preserve our children’s authentic voices and bring Blackness into the academic space? How can we make sure our classrooms and learning environments are safe spaces, not sources of more racial trauma for children, employees and families? How can you reflect on your own Blackness as an educator and create space for Blackness in your learning environments?

**Centering Blackness in ECE: What it Is, What it Is Not**

Centering Blackness is not reverse racism. It is not focusing on Blackness at the cost of other people of color. It is not excluding the interests of others. Centering Blackness is about opening, not closing.

Centering Blackness in early care and education is an invitation, not an exclusion. It is an invitation to build upon the experiences of Black children, families, teachers, site supervisors, directors and administrators in the many settings where we are present. It is an invitation to look deeply at why there are not Black people in any of the spaces where we are missing. It is an invitation to step back and listen to the everyday lived experiences of a community.

Centering Blackness is an invitation to acknowledge that our field, like many others, is pushed ahead and buoyed by the work of Black and brown people. Who are the people bringing much needed linguistic diversity into our classrooms? Who are the people primarily providing much needed infant and toddler care in home-based settings? Who are the aides and assistants that make our classrooms run, and yet so often have little authority to make changes?

As in many other fields, this work is underappreciated and undercompensated. In terms of Black workers, many structures focus solely on “what” they bring instead of “who” they are. The worker goes unnoticed for their uniqueness and “who” they bring to every encounter. Centering Blackness is about all learning environments seeking out and then using the wisdom of Black people, in order to put equity into action. We must commit to continuing to learn, grow, and change not just ourselves, but our communities.

My offering is not intended to solve a problem; I posed more questions than answers. The work of Centering Blackness and creating academic equity happens in the process of creating the answers that make sense in your community. There is no recipe to make this happen. Reflective action is required. A reimagining of our work is required.

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**Centering Blackness Is...**

- an act of love.
- not reverse racism.
- an invitation to build upon the experiences of Black children, families, teachers, site supervisors, directors, and administrators.
- an invitation to look deeply at why there are not Black people in any of the spaces where we are missing.
- an invitation to step back and listen to the everyday lived experiences of a community.
- an invitation to build trust.
- an invitation to acknowledge that our field, like many others, is pushed ahead and buoyed by the work of Black and brown people.
- about using the wisdom of Black people, to put equity into action.