Black Liberatory Education in Canada

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Abstract

Purpose

The purpose of this research is to acknowledge that while there has always been anti-Black oppression and state sanctioned violence towards Black children in schools, there have also always existed spaces where Black children in the care of Black parents and community members are encouraged to demonstrate brilliance and creativity. I am interested in documenting these spaces of resistance and freedom, and in understanding what lessons may be learned from the documentation and archiving of these spaces. The purpose of this work is to amplify the voices of Black community and to highlight the work of Black community spaces.

Problem

What are the tenets that make Black community led educational spaces liberatory and affirming for Black parents and children?

Basic Design

Black parents, youth, and community educators identified community minded educational spaces where they feel affirmed and liberated. I then interviewed Black educators, youth, and parents to understand the pedagogy used in these spaces. Interviews took between 20 minutes and one hour. I then coded the data in order to draw out re-emergent tenets among the community spaces featured in this research. Based on this coding I pulled out 7 tenets of Black liberatory education employed in Ontario.

Findings

This research explores 7 tenets of Black liberatory education that were commonly featured in Black community led educational spaces in Ontario:

1. Transformative Justice
2. Black affirmative curriculum
3. Intersectional curriculum/Disabilities Justice
4. Family building`
5. Arts based curriculum
6. Land Based Learning/Spirituality
7. Community Self-Determination

Foreword

Overarching Introduction to the Major Project [description of its (five) components/parts]

This project is submitted as a culmination to my Plan of Study, which consisted of three major components: 1. Pre-existing conditions of anti-Black racism in education in Canada, 2. Documenting and analyzing sites of Black affirming and Black liberatory education in Canada, and 3. Documenting education as connected to Black liberatory movements. This final major project consists of five parts which I describe below.

In **Part I Freedom School Research Findings in Toronto, Canada,** I set out the research I conducted with Freedom School in Toronto, research that is informed by 5 years as a founder and educator with the Freedom School. This part includes a review of literature related to anti-Black racism in Canada. Methodologically, the study is informed by interviews with parents, youth and educators connected to various community educational based projects in Ontario that are Black affirming. Through their insights, I am able to identify key tenets of Black liberatory education as employed in FreedomSchool - Toronto.

In **Part II Equity-informed "Discipline" Guidelines,** I review the impacts of punitive discipline on Black students. Situated within transformative justice within the context of Black abolitionary movement building, this section provides guidelines for educators and community members who are interested in exploring transformative justice and other alternatives to punitive justice whether in the formal education system or in community settings.

Part III Sample FreedomSchool Curriculum and How-to on using Freedom School developed Black-Affirmative educational resources provides an example of curriculum used as part of FreedomSchool - Toronto's summer program. The lesson: "Flexin in My Complexion" is analyzed in order to understand how it employs the tenets of Black Liberatory Education identified within the research discussed in Part I of this project. The lesson is also analyzed for how it incorporates the 6 Correlates of Effective Black Education as explored by Gloria

Ladson-Billings in Dreemkeepers. The template used for this lesson plan was adapted from a template originally developed by Nicole West Burns, Karen Murray, and Ramon San Vicente. The sample curriculum provided connects Black liberatory subject matter to the Ontario curriculum in order to give educators an idea of how they may reinterpret the Ontario curriculum in order to meet the needs of Black students. It provides both social and academic learning goals in order to approach Black education in a holistic and caring way. In order to facilitate an arts based approach, the lesson is broken up into three parts: minds on, active learning and consolidation. At the end of the lesson plan, students are prompted to pursue further learning at home with additional resources.

Part IV consists of **Guidelines for respectful engagement for non-Black educators.** Although this research highlights the need for Black communities to take leadership in designing and undertaking Black educational initiatives, this paper acknowledges that due to the context of anti-Black racism, many Black students in Ontario are placed in classrooms with white and non-Black educators. As a means of harm reduction, this part provides a guide for how non-Black educators may improve their practice in order to approach Black students in a more just way. This section explores 7 (guidelines for) tips provided to non Black educators which require supporting and recognizing the following

1. **Black Voices in the Classroom**
2. **Centering the Most Marginalized**
3. **Diverting Power and Resources**
4. **Being a Race Traitor**
5. **One of Many Stakeholders**
6. **Trust Building with Black Communities**
7. **Tokenizing vs. Systemic Overhaul**

Finally, **Part V Photo Exhibit of Freedom School's use of the Tenets of Black Liberatory Education** presents pictures from FreedomSchool - Toronto that demonstrate the use of the

tenets of Black liberatory education. This section is meant to make the tenets more accessible for all people, as multimodal information is important.

Dedication and Acknowledgement

This research is dedicated to all Black babies in Canada and those who mind them, particularly Black children who have been underestimated, criminalized, and mistreated within the formal education system. It is dedicated to those Black children and parents who fought back, those who were pushed out, and those who insisted on unapologetic Blackness. This work is dedicated to my own children and to all the brilliant Black children who have taught me so much.

I would like to acknowledge and thank the Black women educators and community organizers who have inspired me and who have been formative to my understanding of what commitment to and love for Black students looks like: Erika Huggins and educators at the Oakland Community School, Anyika Tafari and educators at Umoja Learning Circle, Thando Hyman, Veronica Sullivan, Marina Hodge, Nicole West Burns, Silvia Argentina Arauz, Terri-Anne Lewis and many more. I am grateful to the educators I worked at the Africentric Alternative School whose creativity and who's service to Black community deeply impacted me. I am grateful to the community members who have demanded accountability to Black communities from the education system in Canada and globally, who have fought for the removal of police from schools, and who have stood up to protect their children. These people have paved the way for our work in every way.

As this paper is written from my perspective as a Black queer/trans parent and as a community organizer, I would like to acknowledge those who collaborated with me on this work. I would like to acknowledge the contributions of past and present team members, artists, and members of the parent council for FreedomSchool - Toronto whose ideas and whose love for Black children have created many moments of freedom and power for Black children. I would

especially like to acknowledge FreedomSchool's co-founder and co-director Nauoda Robinson, whose work in transformative justice in education is nothing short of brilliant.

Finally, I would like to thank my family for their ongoing support and collaboration in ideas and community building including: my wife Marsha, my daughters: Diva-D, Naveen, Nahla and Ileda, my parents: Maxine and Freddy Newbold, my sisters Robyn Maynard and Robin Akimbo and my brothers David Newbold and Fred Taylor.

Part 1 Freedom School Research Findings in Toronto, Canada

Research Findings:

Introduction:

This research arises from my desire as a Black parent, community organizer and educator to intervene into the narrative of Black community deficit and Black student failure as the dominant narrative of Black education in Canada. As a necessary intervention into this narrative, I am interested in highlighting Black community power, Black student brilliance, and locations of Black freedom within the city of Toronto. I am interested first in Black educational self-determination and leadership that is currently and historically demonstrated within Black community initiatives. Secondly I am interested in the potential for system wide educational transformation inspired by Black community educational spaces.

Working with Black parents, children, and educators, I put together this research in Toronto based on interviewing community members about their experiences in different Black community arts and educational spaces. I then did a case study zeroing in on the experiences of parents, educators and children of FreedomSchool - Toronto, and analyzing the curriculum of FreedomSchool - Toronto, which I have helped to shape as a Black, queer/transgender educator and community organizer working against state violence.

The research component of this report explores the following questions:

1. What are the best practices for educating Black children in Ontario, particularly for providing Black affirmative and Black liberatory education?

2. What lessons may be learned from the ways in which Black children are successfully engaged outside of the formal Institution of education in Canada and the formal classroom environment?

Through conducting individual interviews and focus groups with parents, educators and children, this paper gathered information about:

From a student's perspective:

1. How did FreedomSchool as a space identified by Black community as being successful in educating Black children, deal with issues of "discipline"?
2. What content has engaged students at FreedomSchool - Toronto?
3. What are the characteristics that have made FreedomSchool - Toronto engaging to Black children?

From an educator perspective:

4. How were educators trained in spaces that are identified by Black community as being successful in educating Black children?
5. What content engaged students in spaces that are identified by Black community as being successful in educating Black children?
6. What are the characteristics that make these spaces engaging to Black children?

From a parent perspective:

1. Why do parents seek out alternatives to mainstream public education for Black children in Toronto?
2. Were parents engaged differently in spaces identified by Black community as being successful in educating Black children? How?
3. What did children share with parents about their learning at FreedomSchool?

These questions were used in order to gain an understanding of what elements of Black classroom and community spaces make Black children feel comfortable, engaged and powerful. These elements were considered to be part of powerful Black educational spaces and therefore to have potential benefits for educators and youth in both community-based and mainstream educational spaces.

Methodology:

In 2018 a small cohort of academics and community organizers working on behalf of Freedom School brought a group of Black educators and parents together to contribute to designing a research study on the tenets of Black affirmative education in Toronto. First, parents and educators were guided as they shared stories of experiencing anti-Black racism in the school system. Second, parents and educators shared their perspectives on where they had received education that engaged them and affirmed their Blackness. Community members mentioned spaces such as their homes and families, churches and religious spaces, FreedomSchool - Toronto, COBA Dance Studio, Black Queer Youth at the Sherbourne Health Centre, The Toronto District School Board Africentric Preschool programs, The Africentric Alternative School, African Canadian Heritage Association, Higher Marks and The Toronto Kiki Ballroom Alliance as sites where they received affirming and effective education. These sites, identified by Black community members, were then further researched through individual interviews and focus groups conducted by myself with children, parents, and educators. Interviews took place in person and were approximately 10-40 minutes long, audio-recorded, semi-structured interviews. About 12 interviews were conducted and confidentiality was not requested in any interviews. Some interviewees have chosen to remain anonymous, while others consented to their names being used in the research.

Coding:

I used the DEPICT model of coding for analysis. First I generated a list of labeled themes that were re-occuring in the audio interviews. I then reviewed and coded the audio interviews using ideas and themes; I selected quotes from the interviews to reflect the themes.

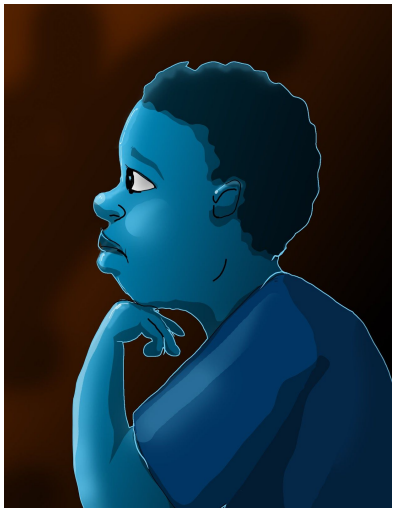
Method of Analysis:

Literature review - Connecting theory and methodology

In approaching this research, I first defined the notion of pedagogy. Coming from the perspective of being not only a classroom educator, but also a Black parent and a community

organizer, I considered that while classrooms employ formal pedagogy, Black community spaces have their own formal and informal pedagogy (the lessons learned by participants being the curriculum and the ways of engaging children being the practice).

In order to ground the experiences of parents, educators and youth, I conducted a literature review on Black education in Canada including interventions into anti-Black racism in education. The works of Black Canadian writers Robyn Maynard (2017) and Carl James were studied in order to gain an understanding of the prevalence and depth of Black erasure and violence towards Black students in Canada. Maynard and James write about anti-Black racism in schools and the wide-scale disenfranchisement and abuse of Black children, youth and families through Ontario's education system. The work of Maynard, James and others speak to a lack of progress in many areas of education for Black students in Canada, and thus to the context in which Black affirmative education in Canada is necessary in order to produce success and safety for Black children.



This literature review found that there is limited documentation and research focused on the success of Black children and youth in Canada's education system. However, the research that exists points towards certain attributes common to environments in which Black students are successful. Significantly, in environments in which Black students are successful - Blackness is affirmed. For example, "identity reinforcement and affirmation" (Dei, 33) is a key feature of African centered education as highlighted in George Dei and Arlo Kempf's book: *New Perspectives on African-Centered Education in Canada (2013)*. Although Dei's research focuses on Canada, he did draw upon American statistics to make arguments for Africentric schooling in Canada. Dei notes the success of Black students in United States Africentric Schools in order to make the case for the implementation and strengthening of African centered schools in Ontario. Dei and Kempf document the academic success of African centered school students in Kansas, Detroit and Chicago in producing math and literacy scores that were in some cases higher than those of both their district and state. They also point to the need for African centered education to be strengthened in areas of intersectionality and the exploration of global Black experiences. This is notable since research on experiences of

anti-Black racism in Canadian schools has focused overwhelmingly on the experiences of Black boys, which has been a consistent critique by Black women and queer scholars, activists, and community members.

Importantly, Lance T. McCready's text: "Making Space for Diverse Masculinities" points out how a "profound masculine anxiety lies at the heart of the Afrocentric curriculum and pedagogy. Moreover, students who enact non-traditional masculine identities catch the brunt of this unease." (McCready, 2010). McCready's work points to the limitations of African centered and Black Nationalist educational projects in acting as a safe or liberatory space for non LGBTTT21Q Black students and their families. Although McCready's work focuses on Black education in the United States, much of his writing is applicable to the ways in which African centered education has been taken up in Canada.

Africentric education in Toronto has its own history with a number of community led projects and a few examples of projects within the school system between the 1970s and early 2000s. In 2008 a public alternative Africentric school was advocated for by the Black community and subsequently opened in Toronto's west end. Students in the Africentric school have shown tremendous brilliance and success, however in 2020, the school is still open and still continues to face challenges such as: lack of funding and resources, and lack of adequate training and support for staff. (Armstrong, 2015)

According to research, Black student success with the use of Eurocentric curriculum has had limited documentation and little success. Henry Codjoe's dissertation: "Black Students and School Success: A Study of the Experience of Academically Successful African-Canadian Student Graduates in Alberta's Secondary Schools" (1997) notes: "A positive Black racial identity, enhanced with an awareness, pride and knowledge of Black and African affairs is crucial to school success." Codjoe notes a number of factors that contributed to school success for the Black youth in his study which were themselves determined, or mediated, by, class location, access, and support systems. For example: high achieving role models and extracurricular activities are listed as contributing factors in Codjoe's research. The factors that contribute to school success for Black children in Canada aren't always accessible for working/class poor Black families. For this reason, when seeking pedagogical solutions for low income Black communities in Canada, it is necessary to look beyond the school system to

community based Black education and Black liberatory education, which challenge structures of inequity.

In their book: *Innovations in Black Education in Canada,* D'Oyley, V et. al (1994) documented a number of community based initiatives taken by Black educators and community members to improve the quality of education for Black students across Canada between 1820-1993. Some initiatives could be described as having liberatory potential or liberatory aspects. Initiatives vary from a summer math camp in Nova Scotia, to a Black theatre project in Quebec, to a student support group in Ontario, to a cultural camp in Saskatchewan, to Black student achievement awards in British Columbia and beyond. The initiatives outlined within the book are examples of projects prioritizing Black achievement in some cases, but also examples of activism and interventions into anti-Black racism in Canada's education system. Although similar initiatives have taken place between 1994 and 2018, there is an absence of documentation in academic writing.

A number of Black American writers have written about schooling and education coming out of movements for Black liberation and ways in which liberatory Black education exists as an act of resistance towards anti-Black racism and white supremacy and white supremacist pedagogy. In their respective chapters in: *Black Protest Thought and Action* (2005), Joy Ann Williamson and Daniel Perlstein explore the ways in which the Black Panther Party's educational programs and the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee Freedom Schools curriculum differed significantly from Institutional public education in so far as it's commitment to teach children about racism, classism, power, and social change. Writers such as Wayne Au et. al have written about the ways in which the #BlackLivesMatter movements and other movements have led to interventions and resistance to anti-Black racism within Institutional public education. Au states:

> We learned that acting in the context of a broader social movement was critical. The police killings of Philando Castile and Alton Sterling in the summer of 2016, as part of the long-standing pattern of Black death at the hands of police, ensured that there were ongoing protests and conversations associated with #BlacklivesMatter. This broader movement created the political space and helped garner support for the actions of both

John Muir Elementary specifically, and Seattle Public Schools more generally." (Au, Wayne et. al, 29, 2018)

In the Canadian context, David Austin (2009) has written about the role of community based education in assisting Black University student activists and adult community members in Montreal to resist police brutality and respond to other manifestations of systemic anti-Black racism in their lives. Chris Harris (2014) has written about the Black Action Defense Committee in Toronto and the pedagogy they used when it came to adult and youth education on social movement learning. However, where children are concerned, there is a marked absence of writing about Black liberatory education in Canada and children's education coming out of Black liberatory movements in Canada. That said, George Dei has done important work concerning the activism of Black parents and children over decades demanding African centered education in Canada.

Gaps in the academic documentation of Black liberatory and Black affirmative education point to an erasure of practices of Black resistance in Canada. There is a need for further investigation of the impact of Black activism in Canada on the creation of Black liberatory pedagogy and Black affirmative pedagogy. There is a need for further writing on the particular educational practices piloted within Black affirmative and Black liberatory spaces in Canada. This study contributes to this need.

Research Findings/Results: Tenets of Black Liberatory Education

As such, this research has conducted interviews with parents, students, and educators in order to gain an understanding of the impact of Black community educational spaces in and around Toronto. Parents named several reasons for seeking out alternatives to Institutional education, with many naming a need for higher expectations for their children's capacity and ability to learn (Parent of child at Higher Marks). In the interviews, the experiences of students, educators, and youth gathered around a number of recurring themes which contributed to the successful nature of various Black classroom and community spaces. These themes could be seen as transferable tenets of Black affirmative pedagogy in Ontario. The seven emerging

tenets of successful Black educational spaces, which arose in the interviews across students, parents and educators alike are as follows:

8. **Transformative Justice**
9. **Black affirmative curriculum**
10. **Intersectional curriculum/Disabilities Justice**
11. **Family building`**
12. **Arts based curriculum**
13. **Land Based Learning/Spirituality**
14. **Community Self-Determination**

Below I explore each of these seven emerging tenets of successful Black educational spaces in Toronto in turn, referring to both their underpinnings in theory and practice, and the observations of research participants.

1. **Transformative Justice**

Within our interviews on practices that engage and transform the experiences of Black children, alternatives to punitive justice emerged as an important practice in the safety and emotional well-being of Black children. The need for alternatives to punitive justice is no surprise since the use of punitive justice in Canada has been used against Black children in violent and harmful ways. As discussed above, the harmful effects of punitive justice in educational settings with Black children in Canada has been thoroughly explored by Black Canadian writers: Carl James, Robyn Maynard, and others. The use of punitive justice in schools has created what many have referred to as a school to prison pipeline for Black children, and in some cases has resulted in Black children experiencing schools as a carceral space. Thus, some community based educational spaces have employed transformative justice in their work with Black children.

For the purposes of this research, transformative justice is a framework that differs significantly from restorative justice. In the framework of restorative justice, people are seen as either perpetrators of violence, or victims. Typically the process centers around the victim and the perpetrator is asked to repair the harm that they have caused so that the status quo can be restored. In the framework of transformative justice, as explained by community organizers like Adrienne Marie Brown (2015), there is an emphasis on understanding the conditions that contribute to harm being done, or to a conflict. These conditions may include power imbalances, relational issues, or issues of dominance and oppression. For example, a child may act up in class because ableism has prevented her from being properly accommodated by the educator. Or, a child may lash out at another child in reaction to ongoing homophobic bullying or anti-Blackness. In these scenarios, it is necessary for underlying issues to be addressed by those with power, rather than hold a child accountable for a mess that is in reality systemic and therefore beyond their control. In the framework of transformative justice a child is supported by a network of caring youth and adults, in order to create a new reality where everyone is closer to having what they need to learn in an environment.

In contrasting his experience with punitive discipline at school as compared to his experience with transformative justice at FreedomSchool, one child stated:

> At school that was a problem I had to deal with frequently is feeling embarrassed cuz I might have done something wrong. At Freedom School I felt like I made mistakes, but it's like I didn't realize I was making a mistake. It's kind of like tripping and falling on a cushion when you're blindfolded. It's like...I don't think I fell. (Freedom School student, age 10)

Rather than seeing conflicts as a time for escalating punishment, transformative justice sees conflict as a moment for teaching and learning both for children and for adults. First, children are given time to reflect and process what happened, and then they are engaged in a process of community accountability. A student from FreedomSchool - Toronto explains:

> At school I would have to talk to my principal or my vice principal and if it's really that bad we might have to discuss being 'tooken' away from school for like a day or 2. At Freedom School, it's more like just please say sorry, take some time off, stay away from each other. (Freedom School student, age, 10).

Because transformative justice provides a framework to account for factors of power imbalance and oppression, children do not fear that they will not be listened to, or that they will be villainized. As such, children and adults learn to become more comfortable with conflict. This is in contrast to within the school system where power dynamics are reinforced through punitive discipline by granting protection and humanity to white students, while dehumanizing and criminalizing Black students. Bakari Lindsay of COBA dance states:

> A lot of schools tend to favour a particular group or an individual or a power hierarchy as opposed to supporting an entire community. Why is this particular rule in place? Is it something that elevates us all in some way? Or is it just there to keep a particular group in place?" (Bakari, COBA Dance).

In the context of transformative justice, Harlow recounts his experience with participating in transformative justice circles: "At FreedomSchool I feel more comfortable having confrontations [...] I just feel like I'm not gonna be yelled at or treated unfairly because of the colour of my skin or because of how I'm viewed because of past issues" (FreedomSchool student, age 10). In this case, transformative justice was mentioned not only in terms of giving children an alternative way to resolve problems, but also in terms of providing children with an escape from being stigmatized for having exhibited reactive behaviour in the past. For many Black children who have experienced being placed in behavioural classrooms, or who have experienced suspensions, it is important to feel like there is a clean slate, and an opportunity for a respectful relationship between educator and child.

In George Dei's research, *Reconstructing 'Dropout': A Critical Ethnography of the Dynamics of Black Students,* George points out that Black children often see respect as a two way street between educators and children, and are unlikely to comply with school rules in contexts where they feel they are not respected. Participants in this study noted that the use of transformative justice, rather than punitive justice, contributes to a feeling of mutual respect. Harlow mentioned:

> At FreedomSchool I feel safe, I feel understood, I feel taken care of. [...] I don't feel like I have to strive for myself to get the tiny respect that most children or most people deserve. At old schools I felt like I was a wolf that could not keep up with the pack, and

so like...I would have all these things coming after me." (Freedom School student, age 10)

In the context of transformative justice, administrators and educators are encouraged to examine their own complicancy and contribution to conflicts. As such, there is an attempt to break down power dynamics to allow children and parents to exist with dignity within the space where education is taking place.

In spaces where transformative justice is used, many educators talked about an absence of "behaviour problems". Bakari Lindsay states: "We set our expectations at the beginning, and I'd say in our 25 years we've never had to discipline kids in terms of the in-class structure. Sometimes kids bring other issues into the studio space and we've had to deal with that. We have kids understand that it really hurts the community when you do this or say this, or oftentimes we ask: "Is that how this community exists?" We have them reflect on their purpose here." (Educator, COBA Dance).

Within a context of transformative justice, the entire conversation about behaviour and discipline is reframed as a conversation about building healthy communities and confronting conditions that lead to harm in an educational environment.

2. Black Affirmative Curriculum

As supported by George Dei's writing on successful engagement of Black children in Canada, the importance of centering Black identity in the approach to educating and learning with Black children was a recurring theme in interviews I conducted with children, educators, and parents alike. Children engaged in this research spoke about the impact and importance of grounded learning concerning their own histories and culture, and about Black resistance. Children also spoke about the importance of learning not only about Black history, but also learning that they actively contribute to shaping Black identity and Black political realities in the present. Parents spoke about the responsibility they feel to supplement their children's learning at home with Black-focused teachings, as well as the importance of community spaces and arts-based spaces where Blackness is centered. Finally, educators discussed that when Blackness is centered in the classroom or in community spaces, children respond positively. Bakari Lindsay of COBA Dance studio stated: "Kids get very excited when you know something

about them, and you honor it." (Educator, COBA Dance). As such - this research names Black affirmative curriculum as a key tenet of Black affirmative and Black liberatory education.

Learning about Black identity in Canada differs significantly from learning about Black identity in the United States. Because many Black families in Canada are first and second generations immigrants from the Caribbean and Africa, successful engagement in teaching about Black identity and culture often approaches Blackness from a global perspective. Many children interviewed spoke about the importance of learning about Blackness in the context about learning global histories of Black resistance. Some students contrasted the way that Blackness is explored through a global lens in Black affirmative contexts, vs. the monolithic stories of American Blackness taught in their Institutional education. A student from FreedomSchool - Toronto commented:

> Black culture isn't taught in schools. You only hear about a certain amount of people like Harriet Tubman, Martin Luther King, Malcom X and we never actually learn about the past issues except for slavery and that's .. because the teachers aren't educated about that. (Harlow, age 10).

He went on to say:

> In old schools I feel like the only time that is highlighted for Black education is Black history month and even so they think that they're doing a lot and they're not. I feel like going to FreedomSchool it's not only addressed in speaking, it's addressed in different ways for example the play that we did that year talking about Africville and the different ways that it wasn't supported by the government because it was filled with a lot of Black people, and so they didn't get proper housing and all of that. I definitely think that was one of the Black issues in the past that was re-brought-up in FreedomSchool that I would never learn about in old schools or in the school I'm at now." (Freedom School student, age 10)

Another student from FreedomSchool commented: "We don't just talk about Black people in Canada, but we talk about all around the world. We talk about situations - how we could probably fix it. And activities we could probably do to be recognized." (Freedom School

student, 10) Learning about Blackness through a global identity framework allows black students in Canada to see themselves reflected, as well as the stories of their parents, grandparents and ancestors.

Although students interviewed spoke about the importance of understanding Black history, they also spoke about Blackness identity outside of a historicizing context. One child from FreedomSchool - Toronto said: “We get to learn about our culture, our past, our present, and what we need to do in order to go forward as a race, as a people. Being Black is hard, but even though it’s hard you could overcome it. You could speak up and be powerful.” (Freedom School student, 10) Learning about Blackness in the present and the future was described as important to students in terms of having them understand themselves as powerful changemakers.

Children interviewed within this research contrasted the content taught in Black, community based education settings to the content they learn in school. One child said: “[At Freedom School] we learn about if people don’t respect and make fun of other people’s colours. And at school we don’t even talk about that. At FreedomSchool we learn about the rights for everyone and how everyone should be free. At school we don’t do that, we learn French.” (Freedom School student, age 6) Naveen’s comment and others point to the ways in which Eurocentric content is alienating for Black students. This report speaks to the need for educators and parents to incorporate Black focused content and curriculum into their classrooms in order to engage Black students.

3. Intersectionality/Disabilities Justice

In keeping with Lance McCready’s research on Black education, marginalized Black children must be engaged not only as Black, but at the intersection of their various identities. This research has noted that most spaces that parents determined were successful in engaging their children in Ontario not only centered Blackness, but took an intersectional approach to

understanding and exploring identity with children. In cases where an intersectional approach was not taken, parents noted that the lack of an intersectional lens was in some cases damaging, or a hindrance to the family's full participation in the space (Parent of child at Higher Marks). Children, parents, and educators alike from a number of different contexts spoke about how the ways that Blackness is experienced depends on experiences of class, gender, sexuality, religion, disability, location and experiences with migration among other factors.

Educators from a number of Black affirmative community-based educational spaces talked about the need to create spaces for Black LGBTQ students and families. Challenging homophobia and transphobia is seen as specifically Black affirmative, as it is a challenge to notions of gender and sexuality constructed through Eurocentric colonial legacies. Bakari Lindsay of Coba Dance Studio explains:

> Over the years we have had to navigate different genders. Students who are questioning their gender, same sex families… [ ]. How do we navigate empowering those kids, but not disrespecting the parents. [ ] It's constantly navigating the multiplicity of families that we have coming in and how to empower them to be proud of who they are. [ ] "This is a safe space people recognise, that's why they're bringing their children here. We have to be really explicit about how we interact with those children and families. Things like...how we address students in terms of gender." (Educator, COBA Dance).

Alongside challenging homophobia and transphobia, many educators within the study spoke about the importance of challenging classism, and creating spaces that are accessible and respectful to low income Black families. Educators involved with FreedomSchool - Toronto spoke of their intentional choice to create a high quality summer program that is free for students, and that prioritizes offering free bussing and meals. This helps ensure that issues of access do not interfere with Black children's right to quality education. In a similar light, arts based educators spoke about making intentional choices to provide subsidized programming to low income Black families. Bakari Lindsay stated: "Kids need to have access. If they didn't have money chances are they were always relegated by mediocre training (Educator, COBA Dance).

According to educators interviewed in the study, Black affirmative spaces also make an effort to challenge ableism and body shaming. This makes sense based on the fact that Black students with disabilities face some of the most violent experiences in the school system. In order to create safer spaces for Black students, educators talked about the need to engage students in learning about ableism, as well as to center Black students with disabilities in the learning environment. Educators also spoke about the need to confront fatphobia and body shaming:

> The fact that they can witness company members of various sizes doing this and doing it amazing. They get to witness this excellence and they know it comes from a history of oppression and exclusion. [ ] Here it doesn't matter. Everyone can come to it and it doesn't matter what size they are, shape...it doesn't matter. It's about the technique. It's about the physicality and if you can do it, who cares what size you are (Educator, COBA Dance).

4. Family Building

This research indicates that most spaces in Ontario that parents consider successful in engaging their children lay a foundation for children, parents, and educators to recognize each other as family. The family structure created in Black, community-based educational settings often views Black families as a source of strength and begins by acknowledging and engaging Black parents as the first and primary educators of their children. This philosophy is a direct rejection of anti-Black racist educational philosophies such as the cultural deficit model, which have constructed the notion that Black families and Black parenting is problematic, and the view that Black children are most successful when removed from the context of their home lives. Community based, Black educational settings acknowledge Black parents as equal stakeholders in education and humbly promise to offer a parental role to Black children in the potential temporary absence of parents during programming time. Black children in these settings are encouraged to see their peers as siblings and/or mentors, and their educators as parental or family figures (e.g. auntie, uncle). In the context of COBA Dance Studio, an educator there describes this phenomenon:

> When people come they inherently feel the sense of community and they find a place to inject themselves within what's happening. For some of the people who've been for a while they feel it's home, and you'll hear them say that. I think we have the intergenerational piece from the teachers to the students and it goes down. The kids pick up from each other. The younger kids look at the older kids doing homework and it's just passed down." (Educator, COBA Dance).

A parent of a child at Higher Marks noted:

> Parent engagement is way more frequent and more informal in the Higher Marks setting. [ ] Just regular check ins as the need arises as opposed to at a structured time of year when those types of conversations typically would happen" (Parent at Higher Marks).

Because of the level of parental engagement, participants in this research noted that the level of investment parents have in community-based, Black affirmative educational spaces tends to be higher than the level of investment and trust they feel vis-a -vis the Institutional school setting.

An educator at COBA noted:

> The difference within working at COBA and working in the school board is that the relationship between the Institution, the parent community and the students is a lot more close knit. In order for the students here to be successful, those three facets have to be working really closely together. We expect students to work towards high expectations and parents support that. Parents support most of our decisions around discipline. They're a constant part of that. If something needs to be resolved, it gets resolved very quickly because parents are a part of it (Educator COBA Dance).

A parent at Higher Marks noted: "There's a vested interest in seeing the school succeed." (Parent, Higher Marks). This sense of investment that parents and students feel in community based educational spaces is connected to the tenet of community self-determination explored below. Black parents are invested in Black community educational spaces because they reflect the will and values of Black communities.

The building of a family setting at community-based, Black affirmative educational settings serves to engage parents, but it also serves to set up a dynamic where educators are deeply invested in the children, as they would be their own children. In speaking about her experience as a parent whose children attend "Higher Marks" (a Black focused private school in Scarborough) a parent notes: "The school has been providing academic support, as well as just encouragement and high expectations. [ ] It's a small school. It's almost like a family entity. It's primarily Black focused..there are other teachers of colour there. But it's a primarily Black student body and a Black principal. Teachers just seem to be a bit more invested in the wellbeing of the kids whole self, so there's never any issue with getting time with the teachers. A lot of time they'll initiate contact." (Parent of student at Higher Marks). According to an educator at COBA Dance Studio, educators in community spaces often take on a role mentoring children to navigate anti-Black racism in their regular school environment, just as they would take on with their own children. A COBA educator notes: "We have intergenerational conversations, so you'll hear teachers talking with students about social issues or things that happen at school. Sometimes we'll be talking about pride in our history and somebody will say well the teacher said this at school and we will debunk that. We'll say how did that make you feel or why did you not speak up?".

A FreedomSchool children spoke about how a family based learning model makes them feel known and cared for:

> "I feel safe. Not just because I'm with my own kind, but I'm with friends, family and everybody at least knows each other there and knows probably how each other would feel if something might have happened. During the year I don't feel as comfortable as Freedom School because everybody's around me. Nobody really knows me."

5. Arts Based Curriculum

Within the literature review, I refer to an article by Carl James which notes that many arts-based programs available through Toronto's public schools overwhelmingly service privileged white children. This is unfortunate as arts-based curriculum has tremendous potential to create transformative experiences for Black children in Toronto and beyond. In the initial design session for this research project, parents were asked to identify spaces that successfully

engage and educate their Black children. A number of the spaces named through this exercise were arts based organizations including: FreedomSchool - Toronto, COBA Dance Studio, The Toronto Kiki Ballroom Alliance, WATAH Theatre, Rize, Each One Teach One, Stolen From Africa, and others. In in-depth interviews, educators described the potential for arts based programming to engage Black children and youth, because of the kinesthetic/multimodal nature of the activities. Children talked about creating art as an outlet for emotions. As such, this study names arts based curriculum as a key tenet of Black affirmative education.

In discussing the reasons that Black children are successfully engaged through arts based programming, Bakari Lindsay stated:

> They're wired to be multifaceted thinkers, but society and education forces them to be linear thinkers. So, you'll always be fighting a losing battle. Their minds are wired to be able to function on many levels at the same time. If you only give them one think then you lose them. [...] In dance you have to think about the rhythm, you have to think about the movement, you have to think about body position. And they complain..you know...this is so much, but they don't stop." (Educator, COBA Dance Studio)

Bakari's words explain why Black children and youth may demonstrate an ability to calculate angles and perform other geometry tasks in the context of playing sports or braiding hair, and yet may underperform on parallel tasks in the context of standardized exams. This research suggests that there is a need to further examine the ways in which Black children retain and demonstrate academic skills in the context of multi-modal and arts based tasks.

Educators interviewed within this research also spoke to the ways in which art functions as a vehicle to engage children in social and political thought and activism. As art has played an active role in Black and African liberatory movements around the world, it is no surprise that Black community based educational spaces that teach Black affirmative content often do so through the arts. Bakari Lindsay stated: "Within the forum of arts and culture there is a lot of social, political, and civic knowledge. Somebody will be doing a harvest dance, but the time they get together in that particular genre is the only time the people can gather. So they'll talk about all their political issues, they'll talk about the community. So multilayered education is a very African perspective." (Educator, COBA Dance Studio)

In the context of FreedomSchool, art is used to teach about Black liberation histories and as a means of resistance. Mediums such as cooking, capoeira and martial arts, dancehall, musical theatre, visual arts, dub poetry and rap are used to teach history and as a forum of expression and change making. Within FreedomSchool the use of art and movement based practices is connected to disabilities justice as it allows learners for an entry point into Black radical thought and ideas and increases accessibility. It is also connected to Intersectionality as it allows for exploration of Black LGBTQ culture. In collaboration with members of the Toronto Kiki Ballroom Alliance, FreedomSchool has employed ballroom arts (vogue, realness and fashion) to explore Black LGBTQ histories of resistance. Children are taught about the ways that makeup and fashion can be used for gender expression and gender code switching. In the context of Black community educational spaces, arts are used to bring a spiritual element to learning and to provide a level of engagement that allows children to explore complex ideas without feeling intimidated.

6. Land Based Learning

In the context of colonialism and imperialism, education has served a particular purpose in preparing subjects to participate in extractive capitalism. As such, land based skills and knowledge have been deprioritized in colonial education in Canada or across the world. Black people who survived the transAtlantic Slave Trade and ended up in Canada continue to deal with the ramifications of violent displacement and a subsequent loss of connection to land and land-based practices. This loss is reinforced by Institutional education and the deliberate de-emphasizing of land-based practices. In contrast, many Black community based educational projects, which tend to take a more holistic approach to understanding student's needs, have incorporated land based learning into their curriculum.

As many Black communities in Canada have adapted to having little or restricted access to land, land based learning occurs in many forms including through dance. In regards to the COBA Dance program an educator stated: “Most of the work that we do is barefeet. It’s that concept and notion of being connected to the Earth and that spiritual connection. That would be one method of land based” (Educator, COBA Dance Studio).

Other spaces such as the Africentric Alternative Elementary School in Toronto work to build connections between Black students, land and agricultural practices. For example, students from the AfricentricSchool have visited the Black Farmer’s Network land plot at Keele and Sheppard in order to weed and harvest crops with Black farmers. Students also caretake a small plot of outdoor space, planting herbs and vegetables. These practices encourage students to think of Black people as connected to land and food systems.

In FreedomSchool children are intentionally given access to land in collaboration with Indigenous land protectors. Educators intentionally build solidarity between Black and Indigenous communities and build relationships between Black organizers and Indigenous organizers from Turtle Island. Through curriculum, FreedomSchool works to build global understanding of Indigeniety as connected to Black liberation and an understanding that Indigenous people around the world, including in African and the Black Diaspora are seeking the right to speak their own languages and care for their own lands.

7. Community Self Determination

As a beginning point to understanding anti-Blackness in the education system in Canada we must understand that the formal education system in Canada was not designed for or with Black communities. Black communities were first completely excluded from the formal education system. When included Black communities are streamed into non-academic programs, devalued and abused. Additionally, the education system in Canada has consistently upheld a system of racial injustice by preparing young Black people to be locked out of job opportunities and to be exploited as low paid workers.

For this reason - perhaps the most important aspects of the projects highlighted within this research is the fact that they are created by and for Black community members living

intersectional experiences of marginalization with our experiences, needs and liberation at the centre. The curriculum and pedagogy used within Black community initiatives is engaging for young Black people because the curriculum is created by people who understand the experiences that Black children have. The importance of this cannot be under-estimated both practically and politically. The projects highlighted not only expose anti-Blackness, but prepare young people to actively resist these systems.

In FreedomSchool - Toronto for example, curriculum is created by marginalized Black parents and youth. Curriculum is designed specifically for each project and community in which it is used. For example, the curriculum used for a summer program hosted at a community school in Toronto's East ended will not be the same curriculum used for a similar program in another end of the city. As is the case with other Black community educational spaces: team members, pedagogy and policies are decided upon by Black people with Black community in mind.

Many of the educational projects highlighted have taken the stance that Black education cannot separate parents from the process of educating Black children and youth. A COBA educator states: "The difference between COBA and working in the school system is that in the school system when the kids get introduced to the school system there's that cut off. Whereas COBA our first link of engagement is the parent. When kids come to register we meet the parents first and therefore we're able to talk about what expectations are with parents first. With school it's very different. The kids get dropped off and there's a registration process, but it's a form. The kids understand the classroom community, but the parents didn't because they didn't have a strong level of commitment. If the parents are really busy and they didn't go to the parent council there's absolutely no engagement at all with school. The relationship gets broken down and you try to build it back, but it's already too late because issues have already arisen. There should be a week of orientation of getting parents involved in talking about what the school is going to look like and how you're going to do what you're doing. How is the school community going to support the child, and have them have buy in." (Educator, COBA Dance).

As such, the tenet of community self determination is connected to the tenet, "family building". The notion of community self-determination is also connected to theories of Africentricity, Indigenous sovereignty and Black liberation. At the core of self-determination is the notion that Black communities should not be coerced into receives colonial or Eurocentric education.

Rather, Black children have the right to education that centers them and prepares them to seek and win freedom.

Conclusion:

The primary intervention of my research arises from the reality that Black students are not failing at education. Rather - institutional educational spaces are failing Black students who are successful in a number of other settings including both classroom and community-based settings. Through listening to Black students, parents, and educators, this research offers examples of spaces where Black students are successful. Based on student, parent, and educator testimonies the research has named seven key tenets of Black affirmative or Black liberatory education including: **Transformative justice, Black affirmative curriculum, Intersectional curriculum/Disabilities Justice, Family building, Arts based curriculum, Land Based Learning/Spirituality andCommunity Self-Determination.** These tenets do not function in isolation, but rather are inter-related and work together to create healthy educational spaces for Black children. These tenets are put into practice primarily within community-based spaces, but some have the potential to be used in classroom settings with transformative outcomes.

Part II

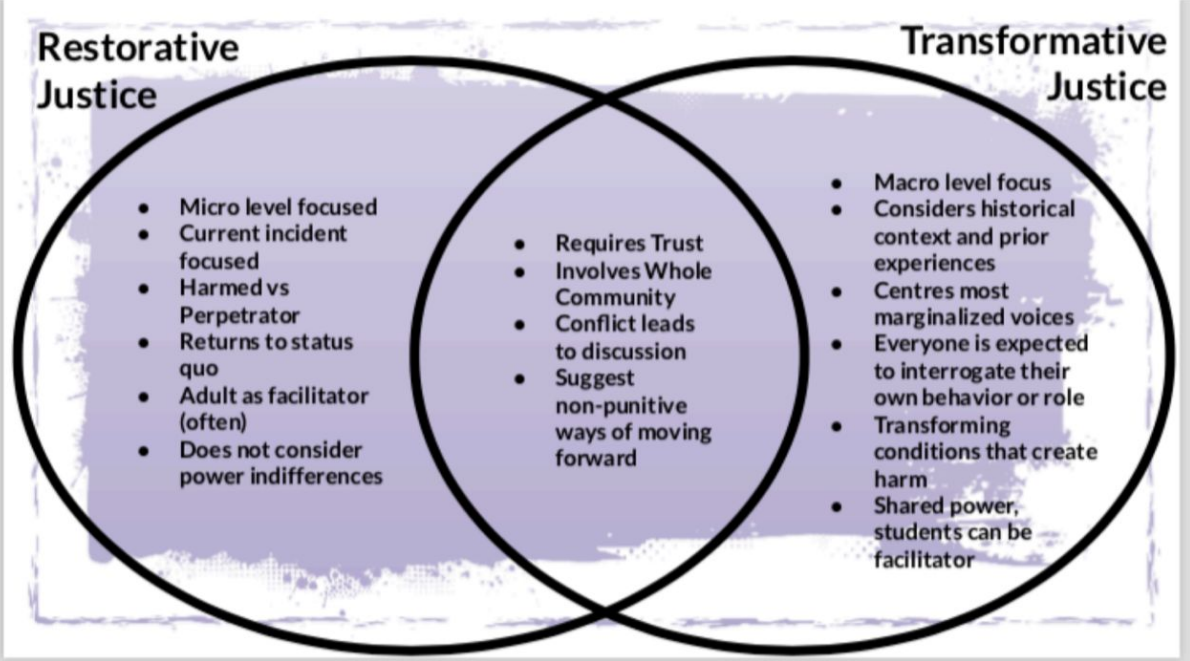
Guidelines for the Implementation of Transformative Justice and Alternatives to Punitive Discipline:

As stated in the research portion of this report, Black children are severely harmed through the use of punitive discipline in Ontario. As documented by Carl James, Robyn Maynard, George Dei and other scholars and advocates, Black children in Canada are over-represented in

behavioural classes, section 23 programs, suspension and expulsion. As noted by Desmond Cole in his article: “7 Things To Know About How Armed Cops Came To Be In Toronto High Schools”, Black children are more often and more severely policed in schools.

Community self-determined Black affirmative educational spaces in Canada have quietly piloted alternatives to punitive discipline with Black children for decades. This is because African and Black traditional systems of justice are not rooted in punishment, but rather in sharing power to find sustainable solutions. However, in many cases traditional forms of justice were created in a context where Black communities were collectively self-governed. As such, restorative practices were often used to return a balance to the community by resolving conflict. In the context of neoliberalism and white supremacist patriarchy and capitalism, approaches to justice must take on forms that are not only restorative but transformative. A just transformation must seek to address oppression and the violence of anti-Black racism. Using transformative justice gives a chance for our most marginalized, Black students to build self esteem by understanding that they are not morally or culturally deficient. Rather, they operate within a system that creates harm by perpetuating oppression, creating crimes of poverty and criminalizing Blackness. Transformative Justice is not about letting harmful behaviours slide, but rather about creating a system of accountability where children, parents, educators, and those with power are accountable to each other for their actions and the context in which actions occur. This report seeks to document and share the work of FreedomSchool - Toronto in using transformative justice with children. Educators who are interested in using FreedomSchool - Toronto method for Transformative Justice may utilize the framework below.

1. **Building Capacity for Young Children to Understand Alternatives to Punitive Discipline Using Read Alouds and Lesson Plans**



Graphic credit: LeRoi Newbold, Sharla Falodi and Chelsea Takalo

This graphic was developed and used for training educators at Rose Avenue Jr. Public School. This training part of a collaborative project between Rose Avenue and FreedomSchool - Toronto in which Rose Avenue endeavored to address anti-Black racism at their school site.

Teaching the validity of punitive discipline and the need for punitive discipline in relation to Black and Indigenous people and communities is part of the unspoken curriculum in Canadian schools. Through the use of detention, suspension and expulsion in schools, children are taught to value detention and incarceration as valid systems of justice for use with adults. Black and Indigenous children and families are taught that they (more than other children) are in need of punitive correction. FreedomSchool - Toronto was born out of the Movement for Black Lives, which prioritizes confronting state violence including the violent policing and habitual incarceration of Black people and the removal of Black children from their families by state authorities. As such, FreedomSchool has been committed to teaching children to question the normalcy, necessity, and validity of punitive justice.

In the context of FreedomSchool - Toronto this teaching is done through story-telling and the analysis of stories. Children are taught to use and understand vocabulary related to restorative and transformative models of solving problems. They are taught to identify systemic issues that lead to harm within communities such as poverty and racism. Children are also taught to brainstorm solutions for problems that are mediated by mitigating conditions of poverty or racism.

For example, young children are asked to read the story: AfroTina and the 3 Bears. In the story, AfroTina breaks into the home of three bears. Similarly to the Traditional Goldilocks and the Bears, AfroTina commits various crimes: eating a young bear's soup, sleeping in his bed and sitting in his chair. AfroTina and the 3 Bears models the concept of restorative justice when rather than being eaten, AfroTina is encouraged to repair the harm she has done by repairing Baby Bear's chair and bringing food from her home to replace the food she ate from the 3 Bears Home. In the context of FreedomSchool - Toronto children are asked to speak to how they feel about this model of resolving the conflict. The children are then asked to imagine what would happen if AfroTina did not have parent support at home to repair Baby Bear's Chair, or if she did not have food at home to replace the food she took from the bear family. At this point, children are encouraged to become aware that harm is sometimes created when individuals lack the resources necessary for their survival - such as food, shelter, or a network of support. If AfroTina did not have food at home or parent support, she would face the harsh consequence of being eaten by 3 bears. Children are asked to brainstorm alternate solutions for the conflict. Children as young as 4 years old suggested that AfroTina start a community garden to grow food together with the family of bears. These solutions look at ensuring people have their needs met, and are no longer put in a position to harm others in order to meet their basic needs. Through exploring stories like AfroTina, children begin to empathise with both victims and perpetrators of harm, and to realize that everyone has a hand in conflict.

2. Solve Conflicts That Occur in the Classroom Using Transformative Justice Circles

At FreedomSchool - Toronto, a conflict between students or between students and staff is often mediated through the use of a transformative justice circle facilitated by youth and adults in the Transformative Justice League. The purpose of the transformative justice circle is not to have things return to their state prior to the conflict. Rather the goal is to transform conditions and relationships in order to create safer spaces for students. The transformative justice circle begins with circle facilitators deciding who will be present in the circle. Considerations include: Who are the educators/youth with whom the child has a good relationship who may help to hold the child accountable? Who was harmed? Should the harmed person(s) be present or is there some work the child needs to do on their own first, before inviting the harmed in their presence? Was more than one person harmed? Considerations for whether a child's family should be present in a transformative justice circle include: have there been at least 2 activities causing physical harm or significant emotional harm? In this case a child's family should be present. The justice league will also consider the family members with whom the child has a good relationship who can help to hold the child accountable. The justice league will prepare participants in the transformative justice circle by ensuring the family understands that this is not a punitive process.

Next, the justice league will consider access needs when inviting family to ensure that the meeting is accessible. Addressing access needs ensures that harm is not created by alienating people from participate in their children's well-being due to accessibility issues:

The Transformative Justice League Considers the following Accessibility Needs:

- Will child care be provided?
- Is the space provided accessible to students or parents with reduced mobility?
- Does the circle require a high level of literacy, thereby creating barriers for some parents?
- What information about the circle can only be communicated in writing and not orally?
- Are language translators explicitly being made available? (ex: Somali, Twi)
- Have accommodations been made to ensure the parent can attend based on their work schedules?
- Are TTC tickets being made explicitly available?
- Will the circle use language that is incomprehensible or alienating for the parent?
- Has ASL (sign language) translation been made explicitly available?

Once the transformative justice circle is organized, the following process is followed:

Adults and/or youth in the Transformative Justice League begins by asking questions so that they can better understand the immediate conflict from both sides. They ask the questions below (whichever are relevant to the conflict at hand):
What happened?
What were you thinking at the time?
How were you feeling at the time?
What have you thought about since?
Who has been affected by your actions? How?
What do you think you need to do to make things right?
What did you think when you realized what happened?
What impact has the incident had on you and others?
What has been the hardest thing for you?
What do you think needs to happen to make things right?

The questions are used to guide a conversation, through which the Transformative Justice League comes to a consensus with the child about a course correction that will be used to repair the impact/harm done as a result of what has triggered the circle. This course correction is then logged, so that the Transformative Justice League may follow up afterwards.

Additionally, the Transformative Justice League asks questions to determine conditions that led to the incident. Not all of the questions are asked - only those related to the situation:

Why do you think you acted this way?
How do you feel you are treated at school?
Do you feel like you are part of the school community? Why? Why not?
How do you feel you are treated by the person you harmed?
Do you like school?
Do you feel you have everything you need to be successful at school?
How can we support you to acquire the resources you are lacking to be successful at school?

Does your family feel they have all the resources needed to successfully support you in your schooling?
How can we support your family to acquire any additional needed resources?
Describe your relationship with the person who harmed you.
How do you feel you are treated at school?
Do you feel like you are part of the school community? Why? Why not?
How do you feel you are treated by the person who harmed you?
Do you like school?
Do you feel you have everything you need to be successful at school?
How can we support you to acquire the resources you are lacking to be successful at school?
Does your family feel they have all the resources needed to successfully support you in your schooling?
How can we support your family to acquire any additional needed resources?
In what ways do you feel powerful?
What can we do to add to that power?

The Transformative Justice League and the child brought to team then develop a course correction that will be used to repair conditions that may have led to the issue (e.g. issues with relationships, power imbalance, disengagement, lack of resources/support) This course correction is logged for direct follow up, and for ongoing feedback to the educational institution about relational issues present within the space. Finally - a follow up meeting is scheduled.

3. Use Student Feedback from Transformative Justice Circles to Address Systemic Issues Involving Power Dynamics, Relational Issues, Domination and Oppression.

In the Transformative Justice model used at FreedomSchool - Toronto, conflicts are seen not primarily as isolated instances, but as part of larger dynamics of power and oppression. As such, transformative justice circles that are used to mediate a conflict must be followed by a process through which educators, administrators and Institutions interrogate themselves in order to understand how the spaces they create lead to particular kinds of conflicts. Within the model educators, administrators, and Institutions use student feedback in order to ask themselves a number of questions about what student conflicts mean for the overall space.

Considerations For Educators, Administrators and Institutions Using a Transformative Justice Model:

- If the incident was peer on peer conflict, were they potentially reacting to anti-black bullying?
- If the behaviour occurred during instructional time, was the black student potentially disengaged by the material?
- When you are considering suspension, adding documents to the students OSR, such as safety plans, IEPs, punctuality and attendance reports, do you consider how this type of documentation might affect the student in the future considering the stigmatization black students face?
- Have you considered that concepts of childhood and innocence are often not afforded to black students in the same way as others?
- When you meet with Black parents do you consider how previous engagements with staff or the school system as a whole may have created a negative bias towards parent and staff interactions?
- If the parents are newcomers, have you considered the barriers they experience related to complaining or sharing critical feedback? (Ex. impact on immigration status, cultural beliefs about educators as knowledge keepers, fear of authority, language, etc)
- How might anti-black racism have impacted their self-esteem?
- When addressing black students, are you considering the larger cumulative effect of anti-Black racism over time and not just the immediate moment?
- If this was your child, how would you like discipline to be handled?

Safer spaces can be created through using elements of FreedomSchool - Toronto's framework for transformative justice or other alternatives to punitive discipline. This is because educators and Institutions who are committed to transformative justice inherently commit themselves to interrogating and challenging the existence of anti-Black racism and other forms of oppression in their spaces. Taking on the work of reducing or ceasing the use of punitive discipline in schools is a big undertaking. Through processes of colonization and enslavement, Black children and youth have been trained to respond to authoritative and coercive styles of teaching and methods of discipline. Re-introducing traditional forms of justice and/or piloting new

alternatives takes getting used to for children, parents, and educators alike. Additionally, transformative justice works best when those with power are open to self-critique, change, and sharing power. However the work it takes to implement alternatives to punitive discipline is well worth it. Many educators and spaces that have used restorative and transformative practice talk about a drastic reduction in the amount of instructional time that is used to address “behaviour” issues. Most importantly, by developing alternatives to punitive discipline there is a change to reduce ongoing harm done to Black children in educational environments. This provides an opportunity for schools to build trust with Black children, families, and communities by humanizing Black students.

Part III Sample FreedomSchool Curriculum and How-to on using Freedom School developed Black-Affirmative educational resources

Freedom School's curriculum emerges directly from a context of movement building. FreedomSchool was born in the time of the Movement for Black Lives, and out of the need to foster educational settings that are community self-determined and rooted in affirming Blackness, teaching Black histories of resistance and teaching skills related to community organizing. Freedom School's pedagogical philosophy is: Black people are incarnations of greatness. FreedomSchool is a tool through which political transformation can occur and young, Black children can participate in political and analytical resistance. In the context of Freedom School, the social and family background of Black children are seen as a strength that children can bring into their learning environments, since the classroom should be constructed around personal, family, and community experiences. Freedom School's theoretical frameworks are Black Power, Afrocentric Pedagogy, Intersectionality, and Black Consciousness. Freedom School's teachings begin with self love, pride in self and community. These are informed by the politics of intersectionality and anti-oppression as they relate to Afrocentrism. The FreedomSchool curriculum is co-constructed by children, parents, youth and educators. The curriculum is arts based and committed to principles of decolonization, disabilities justice, family building and community self determination.

Freedom School's curriculum is designed for use in a three-week long summer program with children aged 4-10, with one week being dedicated to creating space exclusive for children who identify as girls and/or transgender and/or gender non conforming. The summer program is organized around daily themes such as: #BlackMusilmLivesMatter, Learning Disabilities Justice, From Africville and Beyond, Land Based Practices of Resistance, AfroLatinX Resistance, Trans Sisters in the Struggle etc. Additional curriculum is designed for use as part of Freedom School's Black Power Saturday Club Program or for use in site specific summer programs designed to assist schools within school boards in addressing anti-Black racism at their school site. Below are examples of lesson plans created for Freedom School's summer program.

FREEDOM SCHOOL LESSON PLAN

Name: L. Newbold, Subject(s): language Arts, visual art Grade: NA
Lesson Title: Flexin in My Complexion
Black Liberatory Content/Theme: self-pride, self-love, critical media analysis

Connections to Africentric Pedagogy			
Tenets of Black Liberatory Education a) Black focused content b) Histories of resistance c) Family building c) Spirituality d) Black excellence e) Intersectionality (ex: disabilities justice, decolonial approach) f) arts based curriculum g) community self determination	Approach/Strategy:	code	**The 6 Correlates:** ○ High Expectations (C1) ○ Mentorship (C2) ○ Precise Teaching (C3) ○ Monitoring Data (C4) ○ CRRP ○ Academic Success (C5a) ○ Cult. Comp. (C5b) ○ Crit. Con. (C5c) ○ Community Partnerships (C6)
	1.Community Circle	Ta, Tc, Te	
	2. Media Analysis	Tb, Tf	
	3. Painting	Ta	
	4.		
	5.		
	6.		

Curriculum Connections	
Subject 1: language arts	Subject 2: visual arts
Media Literacy 1 - Demonstrate an understanding of a variety of media texts 1.2 Making Inferences/Interpreting Messages	Overall Expectations: Art D1 Creating and Presenting Specific Expectations:

1.5 Point of View	D1.3 Communicate Ideas 2.5 Animal adaptation
Academic Learning Goals: Identify overt and implied messages in simple fashion magazines (Ex: Overt msg: purchase a particular product. Implied msg: white/light skin is more beautiful than dark skin) Identify, initially with support and direction, whose point of view (e.g., a European/Eurocentric perspective) is presented in a simple media text and suggest how the text might change if a different point of view were used	Social Learning Goals: Deconstruct the notion of white skin/light as inherently more beautiful/superior. Deconstruct the notion of dark skinned people as less beautiful. Understand that beautiful dark skin people have the power to celebrate by create independent media. Build confidence as dark skinned Black children.
Assessment & Evaluation	
Assessment/Success Criteria: Participates in conversations about implied messages of Vogue magazine covers and overwhelming representations of whiteness. Anecdotal Notes: Identifies whose perspective is being represented in various media (vogue magazine, Kheris Roger's website, pinterest...note that pinterest has a multiplicity of perspectives as a relatively accessible social network).	Assessment Tools:Anecdotal notes Observation: Educator takes notes during circle time Conference: Ask child how they feel about their representation of themself and why Note: In the context of Black liberatory education - an educator is charged with the responsibility of identifying a learner's unique gifts and talents rather than simply evaluating the consumption of information.

Prior Learning
Prior to this lesson, students will have an experiential or learned understanding of what is dark/light, and an understanding of Blackness as not only a colour but a historical/political identity.

Materials and Resources

Text: Kheris Rogers:
https://drive.google.com/open?id=1tO02RH_P3htMpEIE8-50y2vGYzmMTIHRFz4Ej7189Jo

Access to computers to look at:
Google image search for beauty:
https://www.google.ca/search?q=beauty&source=lnms&tbm=isch&sa=X&sqi=2&ved=0ahUKEwj2o53m9oPVAhVhwYMKHXS2AtoQ_AUIBigB&biw=1523&bih=711
Google image search for vogue magazine:

https://www.google.ca/search?q=beauty&source=lnms&tbm=isch&sa=X&sqi=2&ved=0ahUKEwj2o53m9oPVAhVhwYMKHXS2AtoQ_AUIBigB&biw=1523&bih=711#tbm=isch&q=vogue

Pinterest board: Melanin/beauty
https://www.pinterest.com/ponsyboy/beautymelanin/

OR
Copy of google search for beauty and google search for vogue magazine
Beauty google search:
https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B0Rd8gXlUPtuS0VUVWw1TVBHOWs/view?usp=sharing
Vogue Magazine Covers:
https://drive.google.com/open?id=0B0Rd8gXlUPtuWEw0UVlQX1hfTUU
Pinterest Board images:
Drawing template for Flexin In My Complexion Shirt drawing

Lesson:					
Time	**Grouping** **W / S / I**	**Steps/Activities**	**Tenets of Black Liberatory Education and Africentric Approach** · 6 correlates		**Assessment As/For/Of Learning**
		Minds On · Establish a positive learning environment · Connect to prior learning and/or experiences · Setting the context for learning	(Code)	**Approach/Strategy**	**Assessment Opportunities**

15 min	W	Sit down in a circle on the floor. Educator explains that Black people look many different ways. Blackness isn't about only the colour of people's skin, but also about the history we share as people who originally come from Africa. African people now live all over the world , but Black people have a shared history as people of African descent. Educator points out that a man named Stephen Biko made up a **MESSAGE**: "Black is beautiful". He spread this **MESSAGE** because many times if we look in media, it is not African people (especially dark skinned African people) who are presented as beautiful. Explain that we are going to look at different types of media, so that we can understand why Black people have to fight/resist to know that: BLACK IS BEAUTIFUL. ● Educator explains what media is: an outlet or tool that helps people to communicate a message. Different media communicates different messages. Some messages are explicit (on purpose) and some messages are implicit (they sink into our brains and bodies without us thinking about them much) ● Educator shows what comes up when we google search BEAUTY. Educator asks students: What do you notice about the people you see when we google search beauty? (Ex: they are almost all white/European).		Ta, Tc, Te	Anecdotal notes/ note participation in conversation

		What implicit message do you think people might get because of this. (Ex: Only white people are beautiful?) ● Educator explains that a fashion magazine is a type of media. It has an explicit message: it tells people to buy clothes. It also has an implicit message: it chooses certain models to give a message about who is beautiful and who is not. Educator shows children the covers of dozens of vogue magazines. What do you notice about the people you see on the cover of vogue magazines? (Ex: they are almost all white/European). What implicit message do you think people might get because of this. (Ex: Only white people are beautiful?) ● Educator explains that a fashion magazine is a very mainstream type of media that is produced by a company with a lot of $$$. But there are also other types of media that anyone can participate in. For example: Pinterest. Pinterest is a social network where you can share, like, and collect pictures/images that you like. On Pinterest you can sort all the images you like on a board. Educator shares the pinterest board: Melanin Beauty with the students. This is to remind the students that we can find images that build our confidence and remind us that dark skin is beautiful. Educator asks children: How do you feel when you see the images that come up when we search beauty?			

		How do you feel when you see the images that come up when you see the Melanin Beauty Pinterest Board? Point out that explicit and implicit messages in media make people feel ways about themselves and about other people. Educator explains that we will move into small groups to learn about one person's story who felt bad about herself and now is making her own media about how Black is beautiful.			
		Action · Introduce new learning or extending/reinforcing prior to learning · Providing opportunities for practice and application of learning (guided/independent)	(Code)	**Approach/Strategy**	**Assessment Opportunities**
15 mins	S	Educator introduces the non-fiction (true) story of Kheris Rogers. https://drive.google.com/open?id=1tO02RH_P3htMpElE8-50y2vGYzmMTIHRFz4Ej7189Jo ● Depending on the age of the students - students can either take turns reading, or the educator can read the story to the children. Educator asks the students questions to discuss as a group: 1. Why do you think Kheris Rogers was bullied for having dark skin? Do yo think media played a role in this? 2. How do you think getting 30 000 likes on her twitter page changed Kheris feelings about how she looks? 3. How do you think it felt for other dark skin Black kids to see		Ta, Tb, Tf	Anecdotal notes

25 mins	W	beautiful pictures of Kheris on her twitter? Educator tells the students that we can all flex in our complexion like Kheris Rogers. Meaning: we can all fight to see ourselves as beautiful. Educator gives students a template to draw/paint themselves wearing a Flexin in My Complexion Shirt from Kheris Rogers fashion line. Educator encourages children to choose a paint or marker colour that is close to/celebrates their skin tone. Educator supports students to draw their faces.	N6		
		Consolidation and Connection · Helping students demonstrate what they've learned · Providing opportunities for consolidation and reflection	(Code)	**Approach/Strategy**	**Assessment Opportunities**
5 min	W	Gallery walk: hang the children's paintings on the wall. Talk about paintings. Ask each child how she/he/they felt about drawing their skin colour and why. Inform the class that this piece will stay on the wall as a reminder that darkness is beautiful and that dark skinned peoples Black life matters.			Group conference
		Extensions Discuss your skin shade with your parents and your feelings about your shade.	**Next Steps**		

Part IV: Reflections and Conclusion to the Major Project

Guidelines for respectful engagement for non-Black educators

Part of the beauty of many of the educational initiatives discussed in the research portion of this report is the exercise of community self-determination that led to the creation of the various community-based, Black educational spaces. Many Black children and families found safety and an opportunity to thrive in the context of Black run spaces. However, it is the reality that on a day to day basis a vast majority of Black children in Ontario attend public schools with administrators and/or teachers who are white or non-Black. As such, this report makes recommendations to white and non-Black teachers who wish to implement elements of Black liberatory pedagogy in their classrooms and/or spaces to optimize the safety and success of Black students. White and non-Black teachers have a responsibility to move through discomfort in order to interrogate themselves and their practice and in order to confront anti-Black racism in their school spaces. White and non-Black teachers also have a responsibility to participate in activism to increase access and representation for more Black teachers to be in the classroom.

1. Black Voices in the Classroom

It is essential that Black children have access to educators that understand Black experiences and can help Black children to effectively navigate both their education and their surroundings. An article by Turner in 2011 noted that "26 percent of Ontarians were "racialized" (visible minorities) — a figure that soars to 72 per cent in Markham, 66 per cent in Brampton, 54 per cent in Mississauga and 49 per cent in Toronto. However, she said the

percentage of teachers of colour lags behind the population. Some 31 per cent of the Toronto District School Board's staff self-identified as visible minorities in 2012." The lack of racialized teachers to identify with the experiences of racialized children in schools is a serious systemic issue with ramifications for students of colour, and one that must be addressed on a system level. However as racialized students continue to attend public schools, there must be immediate attempts to create space for racialized parents and community members to take up space as educators in public school classrooms. As such, white educators with the power to curate classroom content have a responsibility to share power and space with racialized community educators and parents (particularly those who are representative of their school's student demographic). White and non-Black teachers who work with Black students must work to engage Black community members in the capacity of oral storytellers, workshop facilitators, guest artists, scientists in the school etc. Additionally, white and non-Black teachers have a responsibility to challenge school board and Ontario Ministry policies and participate in activism to reduce barriers to Black parents and community members who wish to be present in classrooms and schools. For example, policies that require Black people to submit themselves to police checks in order to volunteer in schools create barriers for Black parents and community engagement. Lengthy and highly bureaucratic processes to screen community groups and programs in order to grant them access to classrooms need to be overhauled. White and non-Black educators need to speak up on hire committees in order to support the hiring of Black teachers who have an understanding and commitment to Black liberatory education.

2. Centering the Most Marginalized

It is necessary for white and non-Black educators to recognize a state of emergency specifically when it comes to serving Black students (especially Black students experiencing intersectional marginalization). There is overwhelming data to demonstrate the impacts of the school to prison pipeline in Canada, including a 2018 article by Ericka Blount on Black women being the fastest rising prison population in Canada. There is overwhelming data explored within the literature review in order to demonstrate the harm being done to Black students in the school system in Canada. For this reason it is imperative that white and non-Black educators in Canada intervene into "all lives matter" discourse. Black students in Black neighbourhoods,

Black students with disabilities and Black LGBTQ students are not having the same experiences that all other students are having with the school system. Therefore it is urgently important that educators within the school system employ pedagogy that centres Black marginalized students. This centering must happen through advocating against punitive discipline of Black students, including alternatives to punitive discipline within classrooms and schools, offering Black liberatory curriculum and participating in interventions into anti-Blackness in school cultures. White and non-Black educators need to move beyond frameworks of inclusion and equity into frameworks of transformation.

3. Diverting Power and Resources

At the time of the opening of the public Africentric Alternative School in Toronto mainstream media hysteria revealed a deep fear and paranoia of Black led educational initiatives and of initiatives centering Black students. This fear and paranoia is reflective of a need to control Black communities and deny communities the right to organize for educational self-determination. The media hysteria and the surrounding discourse about the Africentric school being an example of “segregation” also exposed a deep level of ignorance when it comes to what segregation actually means and what it has looked like in Canada. In general segregation refers to a forced system that disadvantages marginalized people. In Canada specifically, educational segregation enacted through forced migration of Indigenous peoples, streaming of Black populations in non-academic programs, under-resourcing of schools in low income neighbourhoods, policing and criminalization of schools in Black neighbourhoods etc.

Students in public schools are having wildly different experiences depending on the neighbourhoods in which they live. For example, with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, many families with the financial means to do so are opting out of the publicly funded system because the government is refusing to fund smaller class sizes in order to protect students. While low income families face the possibility of returning into poorly funded and unsafe classrooms, monied families are talking about hiring private tutors in order to facilitate safe, remote learning for their children at home. Even prior to the pandemic, wealthy communities fundraised to double and triple their school budgets, even opening non-profit organizations to provide opportunities for more fundraising. Research by Carl James has demonstrated that programs such as gifted programs, French Immersion programs and arts based programs are

accessed primarily by wealthy white students, rather than providing alternatives to Black students and students in dire need of alternatives.

For these reasons, it is imperative that white and non Black educators participate in finding opportunities to share resources and divert power from the formal education system to communities. Facilitating opportunities for students and parents to skill-share and/or learn from each other is one example of sharing power. Collaborating with parent councils within wealthy schools to fundraise for low income schools and community based initiatives is an example of diverting resources. It is necessary to be both thoughtful and creative when it comes to thinking of ways to share privilege and power.

8. Being a Race Traitor as a Means to Building Trust

The legitimate distrust that low income, Black communities hold towards white and non-Black educators can be a difficult thing for non-Black educators who feel that they are well intentioned and working towards justice for communities of colour. However, it is important to remember that a legacy of unchecked violence has resulted in generations of trauma for many Black families "schooled" in Canada. As part of this legacy of violence, teachers have acted as an arm of the state by helping agencies such as Children's Aid Society and the police to intervene into the lives and parenting of Black families. Educators who wish to challenge the system and to participate in Black liberatory/Black abolitionist movement building must be willing to betray the trust that they are entitled with when they are granted with white privilege and when they are granted with the responsibility of "overseeing" Black families as teachers. For example, educators must seek to support families by providing Black led resources and referrals rather than reporting families to CAS for crimes of poverty. Educators must seek the support of their unions in order to fight against suspension and expulsions of Black children and youth in their classrooms. It is necessary for white and non-Black teachers to use white privilege as leverage in order to intervene into anti-Black racism discursively, practically and politically.

9. One of Many Stakeholders

Within the framework of white supremacist Capitalism and meritocracy, accreditation for educators is given to people who are successful and demonstrate excellence in navigating white supremacist education and who committ themselves to continue to be in spaces where Eurocentric curriculum and pedagogy is mandated. This type of training and accreditation is

vapid of accountability to Black communities and devoid of commitment to freedom for Black people. Formal teachers within the education system should at the very least see themselves as partners with Black parents and community members with experience and/or mentorship in: raising and creating a foundation of love and support for Black children, fighting for freedom for all Black people, fighting for prison abolition and an end to new iteration of slavery, living multiple and intersecting oppressions, immersion in Black centered, Afrocentric, Africentric, and/or Black liberatory education, speaking African and Black diasporic languages, practicing African centering spirituality. Teachers within the formal education system must approach Black parents and community members understanding that they are knowledgeable and valuable.

10. Tokenizing vs. Systemic Overhaul

Typically white and non-Black people are most comfortable with solutions to anti-Black racism that are symbolic, reformist and that ultimately allow for the continued domination of Black/Indigenous people locally and globally. If one is seeking to participate in Black liberatory education, these "solutions" will not do. For example, it is not enough to simply provide anti-Black racism training to teachers within the public school system or to hire more Black teachers. These are examples of reducing direct and immediate harm to Black children. In order to create system transformation it is necessary to acknowledge spaces where Black children are cared for, validated, celebrated, and encouraged as active agents of change. It is necessary to provide opportunities for marginalized Black people to create our own curriculum, our own spaces, and our own models. Together, the tenets of Black liberatory education can guide non-Black educators to collaborate with Black communities to support change.

Part V Photo Exhibit of Freedom School's use of the Tenets of Black Liberatory Education

I have included this section as an example of multi-modal information sharing and so that my work may be accessible and understood by all learners, especially children.

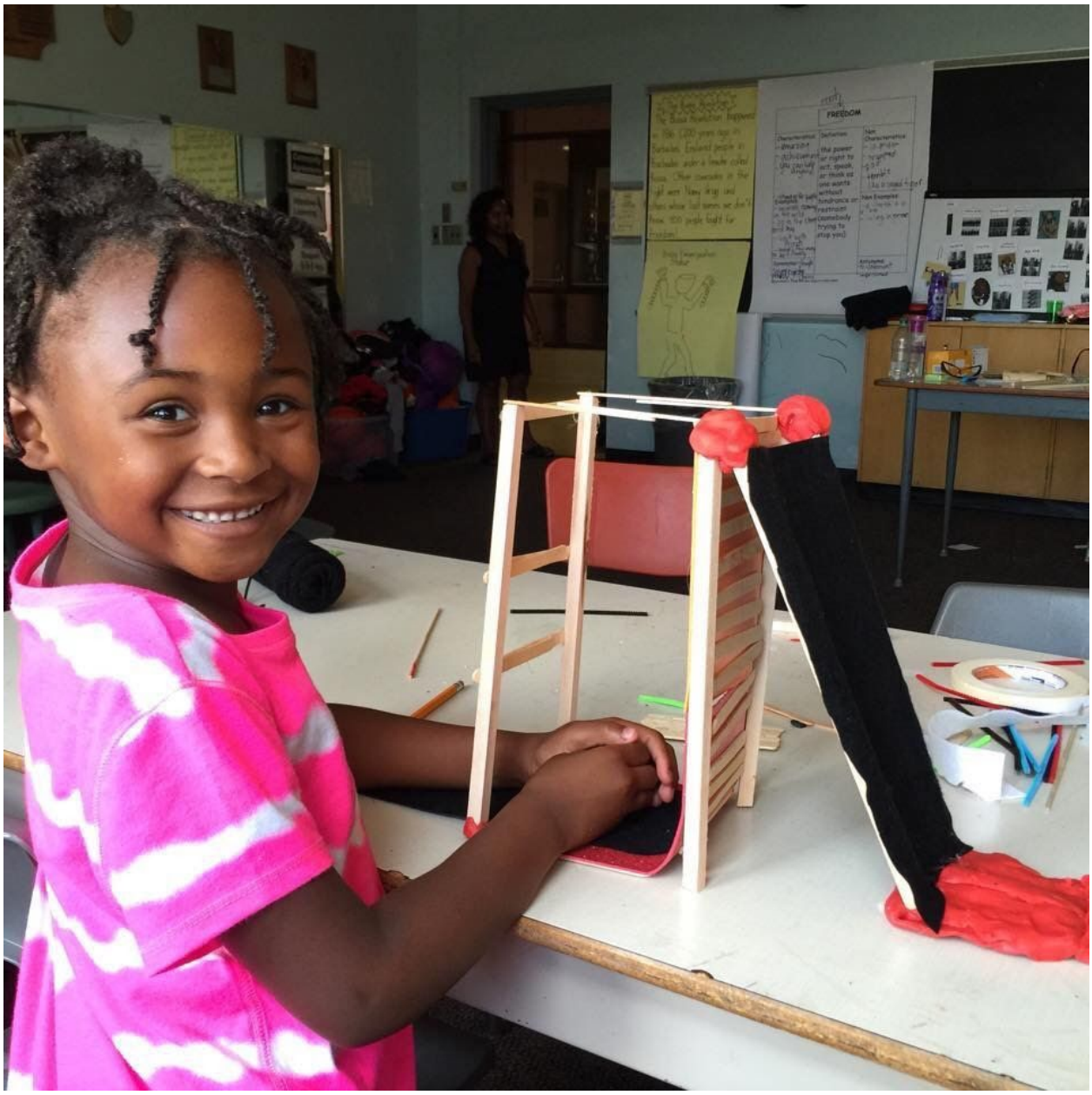
1. **Transformative Justice**

2. **Black affirmative curriculum**

3. **Intersectional curriculum/Disabilities Justice**


Letter Writing for Martin with Siblings
9:00-10:00 Boys group
10:15-10:30 Break
10:30-12:00 Boys group
12:00-1:00 Break
1:00-2:00 Girls group
2:00-3:00 Boys group
3:00-3:30 Break
3:30-4:15 Mix group
Ms. Paul
Ms. Major
ORDER NOW


BLACK
TRANS
LIVES
MATTER


FREEDOM

4. Family building

5. **Arts based curriculum**


Driscoll's

6. **Land Based Learning/Spirituality**

7. **Community Self-Determination**


a hero

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