

Learning Activity Part B: The Black Lives Matter Movement

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There have been many social movements over the century that have brought communities together in an effort for social justice. Social justice is about “taking a critical stance against injustice and inequality across a broad spectrum of social and political issues” and “taking action on behalf of individuals and groups that have been historically marginalized due to race, colour, gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, language, culture, or disability” (Sykes as cited in Fabbuzzo, 2022, slide 3). The Black Lives Matter Movement functions for social justice and is currently being advocated for to this day. With this movement comes current and developing leaders. This paper will discuss the Black Lives Matter Movement in more detail, as well as discuss its leaders and what makes them leaders. This paper will further explain what is being done in Canada in support of this movement and how the Black Lives Matter Movement relates to the Convention on the Rights of the Child. With this, the paper will be discussing how early childhood educators are advocates and what they can do to support this movement.

An Overview of the Black Lives Matter Movement

The Black Lives Matter Movement was created in 2013 in The United States, in response to the murder of 17-year-old Trayvon Martin (Seaton et al., 2020), a Black boy who was shot and killed by George Zimmerman, who at the time was a neighbourhood watchman in a Sanford, Florida neighbourhood (CNN, 2022). Zimmerman claimed that Trayvon Martin was a ‘suspicious person’ and shot him in ‘self-defence’ (CNN, 2022). When the family went to seek justice for the death of Trayvon Martin, it was ruled that Zimmerman was not guilty of murder and had been acquitted (CNN, 2022).

The creators of the Black Lives Matter Movement “Alicia Garza, Patrisse Khan-Cullors, and Opal Tometi” (Seaton et al., 2020, p. 1242), rallied together to advocate for black people and support Trayvon Martin’s family (Seaton et al., 2020). The purpose of

the Black Lives Matter Movement is to “rebuild the Black liberation movement in the face of patriarchy, exploitative capitalism, militarism, and white supremacy in domestic and global contexts” (Seaton et al., 2020, p. 1242). The Black Lives Matter Movement has spread across the United States and into the United Kingdom as well as Canada in an effort to counter acts of oppression, and violence toward Black people from all walks of life regardless of gender, sexuality or creed (Black Lives Matter, n.d.). Essentially, the Black Lives Matter Movement works towards outreach and the affirmation of life and humanity (Black Lives Matter, n.d.).

A Canadian-Based Campaign

The death of Trayvon Martin had an immense effect on communities across the world and “inspired a new generation of protests against police and vigilante violence toward Black people, one that would go on to highlight systemic racism in nearly every aspect of American life” (Thebault, 2022, para. 2). This would transfer to the lives of Black Canadians as well as other individuals in support of the movement. An individual by the name of Janaya Khan is one of the members who organized the Black Lives Matter Toronto Chapter, which has been responsible for several “demonstrations across the city in response to high profile anti-Black police violence and murders in the U.S and Canada” (Lewis-Pearl, 2016, para. 2). The Black Lives Matter Toronto Chapter was the first chapter made outside of the United States (Black Lives Matter - Toronto, n.d.-a). The Black Lives Matter Toronto Campaign works at a micro and a macro level to give an outlet for black communities across Canada to liberate Blackness, support Black healing, dismantle all forms of anti-Black racism, create the freedom to love, affirm Black existence and be able to self-identify (Black Lives Matter - Toronto, n.d.-a). The Black Lives Matter Toronto chapter also works to “forge critical connections and to work in solidarity with Black communities, Black-centric networks, solidarity movements, and allies in order to dismantle all forms of state-sanctioned oppression, violence, and brutality committed against all Black communities, including

African, Caribbean, Afro-Indigenous, migrant, queer, trans, and disabled Black communities” (Black Lives Matter - Toronto, n.d.-a, para. 2). In other words, The Black Lives Matter Toronto Chapter also works towards preventing the death of members of the Black community at the hands of people in authority (police officers), by having the government defund the police in hopes that those funds can be put towards building up communities (Black Lives Matter - Toronto, n.d.-b).

The Functions and Characteristics of the Leader

Anyone can be a leader. Those who care about other people and encourage others to better their personal development or performance are considered leaders (Sullivan, 2010). Leaders see the importance of building relationships with others, as well as encouraging, empowering, and supporting others in achieving common goals or creating change (Sullivan, 2010). Janaya Khan is one of these leaders. As mentioned earlier, Janaya Khan is one of the members who organized the Black Lives Matter Toronto Chapter (Lewis-Pearl, 2016). They do public speaking, and teaching and have worked tirelessly for the equality of the Black community since they were in their teens (AnOther Magazine, 2020). Janaya Khan “also uses social media as a tool for education, discussing queer identity, abuse of corporate power, Black feminism and police abolition” (AnOther Magazine, 2020, para. 1).

In an interview for the AnOther Magazine, Khan says “I started to fight for Black Lives Matter because I am Black, but I fight for BLM now because I understand that Black liberation is integral for all liberation. And my job is to make this revolution irresistible” (AnOther Magazine, 2020, para. 12). Later on in the interview, Khan mentions the experience they had when another Black man was Murdered by police officers and said “When Mike Brown was killed, nine of us... stood out in front of the US consulate with signs, by ourselves. And then, months later, when Jermaine Carby happened, 5,000 people showed up. So there was a shift that we could feel. We started shutting down highways and freeways.

Protest is art, and we're the curators" (AnOther Magazine, 2020, para. 14). This means that Janaya Khan was out supporting her community through a small protest, had an impact on others and in turn, others came to show a united front. Another Quote that stands out from that interview is when Janaya Khan mentions leadership and says "I really thought about what kind of leader I wanted to be. Did I want to be the kind that told everyone they should be more like me, or did I want to help them on the path to be their most authentic selves? And that's true leadership. When people can see themselves with you and not as you" (AnOther Magazine, 2020, para. 16). This shows that Khan is someone who reflects on and recognizes their role and also wants to be a role model for others and their aspiring leadership role. This in other words shows that Janaya Khan is a transformational leader.

Transformational leadership is "changing, motivating, and elevating both leaders and followers in ways that improve society and prepare children and adults to participate in the leadership process" (Sullivan, 2010, p. 12). With this being said, transformational leaders provide a vision and effectively work with ambiguity, uncertainty and complexity, as well as focus on inspiring and influencing others to create change (Sullivan, 2010). Janaya Khan motivates others to support the Black Lives Matter movement and has a vision for equity (AnOther Magazine, 2020). They also care for others, learned to listen more to others and formed their life around advocating for Black people and people part of the LGBTQ+ community (AnOther Magazine, 2020). Overall, Janaya Khan shows multiple aspects of a leader.

The Black Lives Matter Movement and Children's Rights

The Black Lives Matter Movement has many intersecting beliefs as the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The following will connect those beliefs. Article 2 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child states that each child has the right not to be discriminated against based on colour, race, sex, religion, disability, political opinion,

ethnicity, social orientation, property, or status” (Unicef, n.d., para. 14). In connection to this Article 8 states that children have the right to their own identity and Article 30 states that children have the right to their own culture, religion and language (Unicef, n.d.). The Black Lives Matter Movement shares these beliefs. The Black Lives Matter Movement expresses these beliefs by addressing the experiences of discrimination against Black people because of gender, disabilities, race, status and criminal record (Seaton et al., 2020). In addition to this, Article 6 states that all children have a right to live, while Article 19 states that all children have the right to protection from physical, emotional and sexual injury or abuse as well as neglectful treatment (Unicef, n.d.). The Black Lives Matter Movement has aligned its beliefs with these Articles by wanting to combat gun violence, and sexual assault, and work towards preventing the wrongful death of Black lives (Thebault, 2022). Finally, Article 15 states that children have the right to peaceful assembly, in other words, the right to protest (Unicef, n.d.). In parallel, The Black Lives Matter Movement practices their right to peacefully protest the injustices to Black people. Overall, it can be seen that the Black Lives Matter Movement and the Convention on the Rights of the Child have similar beliefs. Though all individuals deserve these rights, Black people in particular have been oppressed and discriminated against. These rights cannot apply to ALL people if it is not applied to Black people.

Advocating for Black Lives as an Early Childhood Educator

School advocacy Canada states that “An advocate is a person who speaks up for, and defends the rights of him or herself, or of another person” (Fabbruzzo, 2020, slide 5). Early childhood educators advocates for children as well as their families. Early childhood educators are advocates at different levels based on their comfort level and preference, which are at the micro level; concerning a small group, the meso level; concerning connection within the small group, and the macro level; concerning larger community settings

(Fabbruzzo, 2020, slide 7). This means that early childhood educators are capable of advocating for the Black Lives Matter Movement in their own way.

Early childhood educators can advocate for Black lives in their practice by building relationships and a sense of belonging with children and their families to set children on the right path going forward into the world. Early childhood educators influence how children see themselves and others. The *How Does Learning Happen* document mentions that early childhood programs are meant to “nurture children’s healthy development and support their growing sense of self” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2014, p. 23). In other words, early childhood educators take part in building children up and positively empowering them. Early childhood educators are in a position where they can establish meaningful relationships with children and their families, which is a priority (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2014). Part of this is getting to know the families of the children, and where they come from, as well as valuing the diverse experiences that the families have gone through (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2014). It is also about using the early childhood environment as a way to mirror the ideas, cultures, values and attitudes of those who use the space (Malaguzzi as cited in Ontario Ministry of Education, 2014). This in turn reflects the child’s right to their ethnicity and culture, and their right not to be discriminated against. The *How Does Learning Happen* document explains that the early childhood program expectation is to “cultivate authentic, caring relationships and connections to create a sense of belonging among and between children, adults, and the world around them” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2014, p. 24). This means that Early childhood professionals support children from a young age to see themselves as part of a community. Part of this is also instilling in children that they are capable and intelligent and that they matter (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2014), so they can go on into the world and advocate for themselves.

Closing Remarks

In conclusion, the Black Lives Matter movement supports justice, well-being, liberation and equity for Black people. Leaders such as Janaya Khan has has been an advocate for the Black Lives Matter Movement a well as inspired others to advocate for the cause. The Black Live Matter Movement expresses beliefs that are parallels to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, showing that these right not only apply to children but also to grown individuals and showing that this movement matters. Advocating for Black lives can take many different forms and depend on comfort level, but as early childhood educators, one of their roles is to advocate for children and their families and support children in their development. That support can be simply showing the children that they belong and that they matter.

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