

Dimensions

of Early Childhood

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The Importance of Oral Language Development in Young Literacy Learners

Sociodramatic Play with Racially Diverse Dolls in a Child Development Center

Juegos Socio-dramáticos con Muñecas Racialmente Diversas en Centros de Desarrollo Infantil

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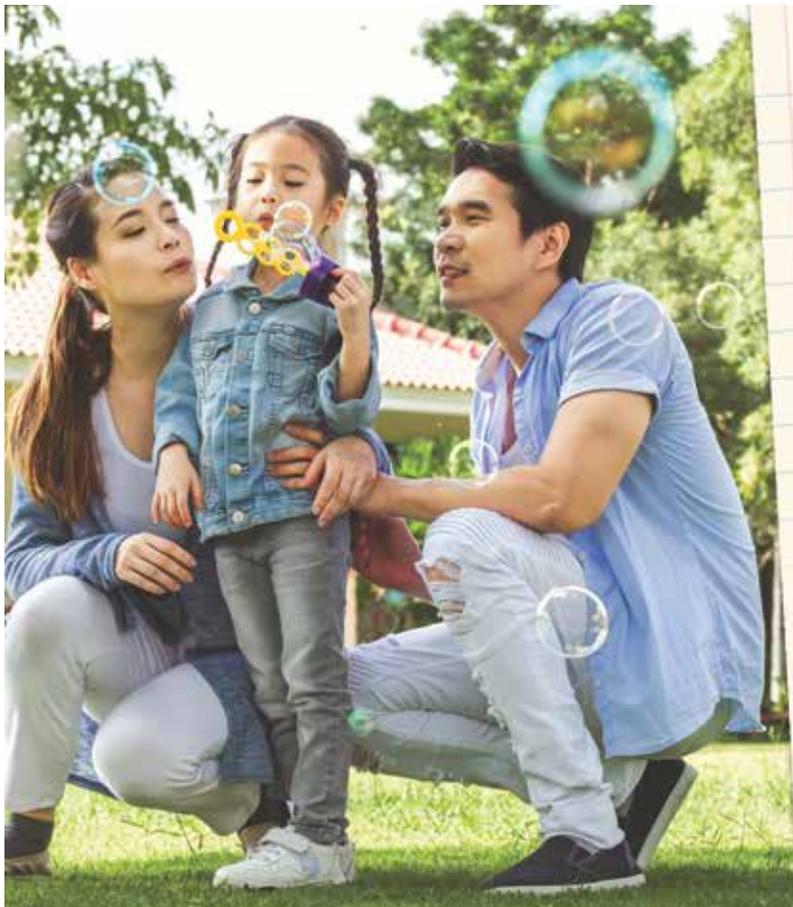


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Editor: Wilma Robles-Melendez, PhD
Dimensions of Early Childhood

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In this Issue

Volume 48
Number 3

- 6** **The Importance of Oral Language Development in Young Literacy Learners: Children Need to Be Seen and Heard**
Jolene Reed and Elizabeth L. Lee
- 10** **Sociodramatic Play with Racially Diverse Dolls in a Child Development Center**
Toni Denese Sturdivant
- 15** **Juegos Socio-dramáticos con Muñecas Racialmente Diversas en Centros de Desarrollo Infantil**
Toni Denese Sturdivant
- 20** **Fear Not Early Childhood Teachers! You are Already Using Algebraic Strategies in Your Classroom**
Amber Beisly, Jill Davis, Vickie E. Lake and Brandy McCombs
- 25** **Boosting Children's Language Skills: Using Mindmaps in Early Childhood Education**
Femke van der Wilt, Rianne Hofma, Monica Koster, and Chiel van der Veen

MILESTONES

A Resource Devoted to Infants & Toddlers

- 30** **Listening to our Teachers: An Interview with Laleta Fingal, Infant & Toddler Teacher at Hurlburt Field Child Development Center**
Kenya Wolff, PhD

Departments

President's Message/Mensaje de la Presidenta	4
Editor's Notes/Mensaje de la Editora	5
In Memoriam	5
Children's Book Review	31

Adapting, Connecting in Times of COVID-19

Debbie Ferguson

I'm hopeful that this message finds you all well and addressing the challenges of how best to serve children and families effectively amidst these different times. As I have reflected over the past few months, I have a renewed gratitude for the relationships I have with others. As many of you, I long for the times when we could experience the impromptu hug from a child, I long for conversations with parents as a check in or to ask what else can we do for your family, I long for the face to face meetings with educators. Even though these simple joys are not available to us (on hold as I like to think) or required modification, it has not dampened our desire to offer the best care possible to our children.

You know what I love about early childhood educators? We are not deterred; you cannot stop us from loving "our" children. We have been preparing for this day since the beginning of time! We live and breathe to be flexible in our everyday life and find a way to make it work; I stand and applaud each and every one of you as you continue to love on your families no matter what. SECA strives to partner with you! We want to help guide and offer you supports as you navigate these waters.

In the coming months you will have an opportunity to respond to a short survey. Please take just a few minutes to help us help you!

This issue is dedicated to learning strategies to teach literacy, math and expand diversity. With the intent to expand our views about diversity, your SECA Board of Directors have begun offering the opportunity for you to join a monthly Zoom meeting as we open our hearts and minds to understanding social injustices and to make lasting changes for our fellow colleagues of color. If you would like to join us for these honest, safe and non-judgmental conversations, please email me at dferguson@glenleven.org. I would love for you be a part of SECA's Conversations for Change. Together we can make this world safer, more inclusive for all and focus on kindness for each other.



Es mi mejor deseo en este mensaje que todos se encuentren

bien y respondiendo al reto para atender a los niños y familias en medio de estos tiempos tan distintos. Mis reflexiones durante los pasados meses me han llevado a renovar mi gratitud por las relaciones que tengo con otros. Al igual que muchos de ustedes, anhelo los tiempos en que podíamos de improviso abrazar a un niño, siento anhelo por las conversaciones con los padres mientras confirmamos como están o vemos si hay algo más para hacer por sus familias y ansío las reuniones presenciales con educadores. A pesar de que al momento estas simples alegrías no están a nuestro alcance (o de tenerlas como me gustaría) o que requieren modificaciones, esto no ha disminuido nuestro deseo para ofrecer el mejor cuidado posible a nuestros niños.



¿Saben qué es lo que más me gusta sobre los educadores del nivel temprano? Nada nos disuade, no pueden contener

nuestro amor por nuestros niños. ¡Hemos estado preparándonos para esto desde el primer día en que empezamos! ¡Vivimos y respiramos como ser flexibles en nuestro diario vivir y encontramos maneras de hacer que las cosas funcionen! Saludo y aplaudo a cada uno de ustedes al continuar amando a sus familias sin importar lo que ocurra ¡SECA busca colaborar y estar junto a ustedes! Queremos ayudarles y a ser su apoyo mientras ustedes navegan en estas aguas. En los próximos meses tendrán una oportunidad de responder a un corto sondeo. Por favor, tomen unos minutos para ayudarnos a que les ayudemos.

Este número está dedicado a prácticas y estrategias de lenguaje, matemáticas, y aumentar nuestros conocimientos sobre diversidad. Precisamente con el fin de dialogar sobre la diversidad, la junta de directores de SECA les ofrece una oportunidad para que ustedes participen en reuniones mensuales a través de Zoom donde abriremos nuestros corazones y mentes para considerar y dialogar sobre las injusticias sociales y que nos lleven a hacer cambios para nuestros colegas de herencia cultural diversa. Si gustan participar en estas conversaciones honestas y sin pasar juicios, por favor comuníquense conmigo por correo electrónico a dferguson@glenleven.org. me encantaría que fuesen parte de las conversaciones de SECA para el cambio. Juntos podemos hacer de este un mundo mas seguro, mas inclusivo para todos y con la mirada puesta en la bondad para cada uno.

Strong and Hopeful Efforts for Children

Wilma Robles-Melendez, PhD

As the window opens in this new issue of *Dimensions*, it begins with a special note of gratitude to our colleague Dr. Mari Riojas-Cortez, who as she announced in the summer issue, has moved to California to assume a new position in her academic journey. Her contributions as editor of this journal will be long lasting. We wish Mari our best and thank her for all that she did as editor of SECA's journal. As the new editor, I want to especially thank her for the continuing friendship that we share with her. Mari, thank you, ¡gracias!

This year continues to call for everyone to be safe and to remain strong. We are witnesses to a different time and efforts to overcome the pandemic are ongoing. They show us how important it is to keep and maintain our hopes and optimism. They also are times to reaffirm our commitment to doing what is best for our children and their families. Their wellbeing continues to be the guiding principle for early childhood educators.

We are also witnessing the call for social justice and equity across our communities. Their voices are a call for reflection about circumstances and conditions impacting young children and their opportunities for successful development. Many are the challenges faced in classrooms, programs, and communities. But many more are the stories that inspiring everyone reveal the determination and commitment of early childhood educators for children. We salute each one for their caring efforts and actions. They are the best example defining our profession always ready to devotedly respond to the needs of our young children and of their families.

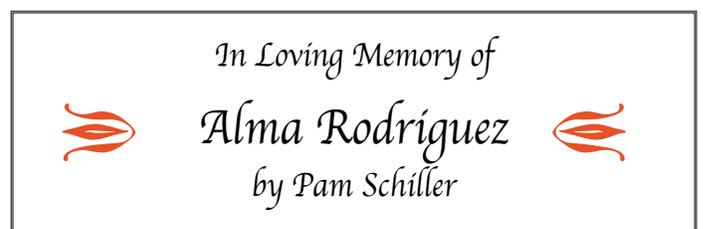
Beyond the ongoing challenges, providing what is best for children remains a central goal in early childhood. This issue is an invitation to enrich our practices and ideas and to enhance children's experiences. This is precisely what describes the content in this issue where each article presents strategies and ideas to enhance efforts and classroom practices. You will find ideas to enhance language and literacy practices as well as strategies addressing the teaching of math in early childhood. The continuing search for practices addressing cultural diversity is focused in one of the articles where we learn more about the influential role of early childhood teachers in building children's views about diversity. We know that this is also your goal and we hope that the contents of this issue will add to your pursuit for what is best for our children.

.....
Al abrir esta nueva ventana que nos ofrece esta edición de *Dimensions*, la misma comienza con una nota de muy especial agradecimiento para la doctora Mari Riojas-Cortez, quien como

anunciara en la edición del verano, nos deja para asumir en California una nueva posición en su trayectoria académica. Su contribución como editora de esta revista profesional son invaluable. Extendemos nuestros mejores deseos de éxito a Mari y agradecemos todo cuanto hizo como editora de la revista de SECA. Como la nueva editora, quiero muy especialmente darle a Mari mi más sincero agradecimiento por la amistad que continuamos compartiendo. Mari, ¡gracias!

Somos testigos de un tiempo muy diferente, donde los esfuerzos para vencer la pandemia continúan. Una vez más, hemos visto cuán importante es mantenernos con esperanza y optimismo. Estos son también tiempos donde reafirmamos nuestro compromiso de hacer todo lo mejor por nuestros niños y niñas y por sus familias, lo cual continúa siendo el principio que nos guía en la educación temprana. Somos también testigos de las voces que claman por justicia social y equidad en nuestras comunidades. Sus voces nos llaman a reflexionar y considerar la múltiples situaciones y condiciones impactando el bienestar y desarrollo de nuestros niños. Son muchos los retos en comunidades como en nuestras aulas y programas. Pero aún más son las historias que siguen inspirándonos mientras revelan la determinación y empeño de los educadores del nivel temprano por los niños y niñas. A cada uno de ellos los saludamos por su dedicación y esfuerzos. Ellos son el mejor ejemplo que define nuestra profesión siempre dispuesta a responder a las necesidades de nuestros niños y sus familias.

Mas allá de los retos, ofrecer a los niños todo lo mejor sigue siendo nuestra meta principal en la educación temprana. Esta edición de *Dimensions* es una invitación a conocer nuevas ideas y estrategias para apoyar las experiencias de los niños. Eso es precisamente lo que describe el contenido de esta edición donde cada artículo ofrece estrategias e ideas para enriquecer las prácticas y esfuerzos en las aulas del nivel temprano. Encontrarán ideas para incrementar las prácticas de lenguaje, así como también estrategias sobre la enseñanza de las matemáticas en el nivel infantil. Uno de los artículos presenta ideas sobre la diversidad cultural donde conoceremos cuán importante es el rol de los maestros del nivel temprano. Esperamos que disfruten de los artículos y que esta edición contribuya en la búsqueda de ofrecer todo lo mejor a los niños y niñas.



The Importance of Oral Language Development in Young Literacy Learners: Children Need to Be Seen and Heard

Jolene Reed and Elizabeth L. Lee



Bryan's staccato reading often interfered with his ability to comprehend the meaning of the story. He word-called what he knew and then waited for me to tell him the words he did not know. My efforts to get him to put words into meaningful, fluent phrases were often unproductive. Further, in the writing portion of the Reading Recovery lesson where the student and teacher first converse and then write a single sentence generated by the student, Bryan showed no progress. His portion of the student/teacher conversation was usually a one or two-word phrase. He

had extreme difficulty generating a sentence that he wanted to write, and he could not remember his thought long enough for us to get it recorded into his writing journal.

Bryan's lack of success during lessons often left me near desperation. This prompted me to contact the nearest university training center and request a trainer to observe my sessions with Bryan. Following an observation, the trainer emphasized that until I could get Bryan to produce the language needed to anticipate the meaning of text, he would continue to struggle as a literacy learner. This advice prompted me to more closely study the relationship between a child's oral language development and the child's endeavor to learn to read.

Role of Oral Language

The oral language foundation of the young learner is important. Children entering elementary school already understand how to use language and that language has patterns (Halliday, 1975). Teachers and parents should realize that oral language development aids the early foundations of literacy. The process of learning to read requires that the child learn to use the visual information that their eyes perceive on the printed page in tandem with the intuitive knowledge of the semantics and syntax

Children use language structures as a basis for learning how to read. Therefore, literacy learning for young children must incorporate the child's personal use of oral language. It is their personal oral language that supports them as they attempt new concepts and become better readers. Because of the important role that oral language plays in a young child's literacy development, it is of the utmost importance that adults who work with young children support the growth of the child's spoken language beginning in infancy. This article discusses activities that will support oral language development in young children so that they will have a strong linguistic foundation upon which to build literacy skills. Through interactions with the young child that include quality conversations and play, the child's language development will be strengthened, resulting in a greater foundation for literacy learning.

A Challenge

A few years ago, I was a Reading Recovery teacher leader working with a young first grade student whom I will call Bryan (a pseudonym). Reading Recovery is a one-to-one intervention for struggling first grade readers. It was expected that learning to read and write would be difficult for these students. Bryan, however, proved to be a bigger challenge than most.

of oral and written language. The student begins to analyze the relationship between the printed symbols written on a page of text and the structure of their oral language (Clay, 2015, p. 95). The acquisition of these skills depends on the child's utilization of expression, meaning, and their language. The relationship between oral language development and the reading acquisition process of the emerging literacy learner is well documented in the literature (Byrnes & Wasik, 2019; Clay, 2015a, 2015b; Fountas & Pinnell, 2016; Scharer, 2018; Vukelich, Enz, Roskos, & Christie, 2020).

Children's control over how they speak and use language is fundamental to their reading, writing, listening, and speaking acquisition. Children's knowledge of language is subconscious and intuitive. They become masters of the uses of language. For example, they are able to grasp pragmatic knowledge and concepts such as subject/verb agreement, use of tense, the importance of meaning, and the use of register unknowingly. Lindfors (1987) explains that the mastery of oral language controlled by children when they enter kindergarten is basic to all their future learning. What they are able to hear, read, speak, and write depends on their understanding of the relationships between expression and meaning.

Children use language structures as a basis for learning how to read. Therefore, literacy learning must incorporate the child's personal use of oral language. Children apply oral language to grasp the basic foundations of reading. This will support them as they attempt new concepts and become better readers. They then must recognize the patterns in textual language to get better at reading itself. As textual patterns become more sophisticated, children will begin to notice that these patterns differ from the textual patterns they encounter in text. They learn that there are differences in the way they talk and the way that books "talk". They begin to understand that textual language can be different from spoken language. Clay (2015a) asserts that if the literary language encountered in text varies significantly from the language patterns that are familiar to the child, the child may find the process of learning to read difficult and laborious. For this reason, it is important that children learn to "talk like a book" (p.79). "Talking like a book" is evidenced when a child who is not yet reading conventionally sits with an open book and "reads" the story using the tonal inflection of a reader and incorporating phrases of literary language found in text such as "Once upon a time" or "Down came the spider". According to Clay (2015) this child is beginning to acquire "a feeling for the kinds of language that he can expect to find in books" (p.73). The child is also demonstrating knowledge that books at times use language in ways that differ from oral language.

Supporting Oral Language Development

Because of the important role that oral language plays in a young child's literacy development, it is of the utmost importance that adults who work with young children support the growth of the child's spoken language beginning in infancy. Following are some activities that will support the oral language development in young children so that they will have a strong linguistic foun-

ation upon which to build literacy skills. Through interactions with the young child that include quality conversations and play, the child's language development will be strengthened, resulting in a greater foundation for literacy learning.

Oral Interactions with Significant Adults

It will come as no surprise to anyone that the most important way to help young children develop their oral language is for an adult to talk with them and not simply talk to them. The difference between those two small words is extremely important. Speaking to a child only requires the child to listen, which is known as receptive language. Listening is a passive activity. The brain does not have to initiate any activity prior to receiving an incoming message. Speaking, however, is active and requires the child to first mentally develop an idea and then produce language to communicate that thought orally. This is known as expressive language. Speaking with a child allows the child to develop expressive language as they fine-tune comments using increasingly precise vocabulary that more accurately articulates the message they wish to convey.



Clay (2015a) states that one of the most important ways of developing a young child's receptive and expressive language skills includes involving young children in conversation with significant adults. The ideas presented in the child's speech can be appreciated and expanded during daily conversations. This type of interaction provides a scaffold to increase the child's vocabulary as well as increase the complexity of language structures utilized by the child. For example:

Child: Ball
Adult: You need a ball? What kind of a ball do you need?
Child: Red
Adult: You want a red ball? How are you going to use the ball?
What do you want to do?
Child: Play catch.
Adult: Oh. Are you going to play catch with Daddy?
Child: Daddy will play catch with me.

The child described above predominantly speaks in short, 1-2-word phrases. Each phrase communicates his immediate need. The adult in this scenario accepts and appreciates what is being communicated by the child. However, each of the adult's responses encourage the child to expand his communication by



the inclusion of additional details and longer phrases. Over time, this type of interaction with adults encourages the child to spontaneously generate oral patterns of speech that include more information, thus better communicating with the other person involved in the conversation. These communication patterns will grow increasingly complex. For example, a child in the early stages of language development may be able to communicate to a parent that they are hungry. A child with a more developed set of oral language skills will be able to better convey the message of where their level of hunger lies on a continuum. Are they ravenously hungry, feeling like they are starving and need to eat a large meal immediately? Or are they just in the mood to munch on something less substantive—perhaps a cracker or an apple slice? Are they somewhere in between the two ends of this spectrum? The more often complex language patterns of an adult are allowed to swirl around in the mind of the child, the more the child will begin to internalize and incorporate these patterns into the language they produce.

How does this support learning to read? A child just learning to read is supported in their literacy endeavors when they can anticipate and predict the text structures included in the text they are attempting to read. While an early reading text may or may not incorporate the specific phrase of “Daddy will play catch with me”, it will contain phrasing of similar complexity such as “Tom and I will swim in the pool”. A child who can orally produce sentences that include items such as adjectives and descriptive phrases is more readily equipped to anticipate, predict, and produce those same patterns when encountered in literacy activities.

Listening to Stories Read Aloud

We read aloud to children for many of the same reasons that we talk to children. Getting lost in a good story can be a soothing and comforting experience for a child. As a child listens to an adult read aloud, a bonding relationship begins to form be-

tween the child and the adult. Listening to stories read aloud can provide reassurance to the child who is experiencing insecurity. Hearing stories where problems are encountered and solved provides encouragement and moral support to a child experiencing life’s uncertainties. In addition, the child learns to view reading as a pleasurable experience, builds the background needed to understand various stories, increases vocabulary of new words as these words are integrated with the actions of the story, and is exposed to how fluent reading sounds by hearing the phrasing and prosody of the adult reading voice.

Dramatization of Stories

Young children enjoy acting out stories. After hearing readings of stories, children can use props such as puppets and flannel board characters to retell the story. Children, including those who are hesitant to speak publicly, are more willing to retell stories while manipulating these props because the language becomes more about the prop being used and less about their own language. Their language becomes more about the character in the story and how that character responds and less about how they themselves would respond. Children involved in such activity allow themselves to become lost in the activity, the storyline, and the characters. Consequently, they are not as self-conscious about the language they are producing.

Wordless Books

Recently, more and more wordless books are hitting the market. These books tell stories either through the use of pictures alone, or with pictures and very few words added. The lack of words on the page force the telling of the story to become an exercise in oral storytelling. An example is *Tuesday* (1991) by David Wiesner. Printed words in the text are at a bare minimum, primarily telling the reader the day of the week and time of the occurrence. The story is suggested in the pictures with the reader being left with the task of inferring and telling the actual story of the “what and why” of story events. This specific book begins on a Tuesday evening as the people in the story are settling down for the evening. Frogs begin flying on lily pads. As the evening progresses, the flying frogs are seen engaging in all kinds of mischievous escapades. As the sun begins to rise, the frogs fly back to their pond leaving the people in the city to ponder the chaos left behind. No two readers of this text would create the same story. The story of the book is limited only by the reader’s creative mind.

Toys

Toys can promote growth in oral language skills, which are precursors to literacy skills. Literacy skills include listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Listening and speaking skills commonly occur before the ability to read and write; therefore, toys that aid in the development of these skills can be considered tools for literacy learning. Many toys that aid in oral language development also promote the development of the whole child which includes the social, emotional, intellectual, communicative, and physical areas of development. Knowledge concerning various types of toys that most effectively encourage a child to listen and speak can be helpful to adults who are involved in teaching young children.

Pretend Play Toys

Pretend play toys can help a child develop vocabulary skills related to their social/emotional development by regularly encouraging social interaction. Children often think in pretend scenarios imagining they are someone else in a previously observed scene. It is common to observe children role playing the duties of a waitress, bus driver, doctor, teacher, or parent. Toys made for pretend play are meant to enhance a child's listening and speaking skills by encouraging social collaboration and self-expression as they verbalize wants and needs, as well as by describing opinions and emotions related to using pretend play toys in these imaginary scenarios. The social aspects of pretend play toys also prompt discussion, which in turn, extends vocabulary specific to a theme or topic. Examples of pretend play toys that can encourage oral language development include Melissa and Doug Role Playing Sets, Playmobile themed toys, or Little People Playsets.¹

Sensory Play Toys

Sensory play toys can help build a child's oral language skills in relation to their physical development by encouraging them to use their body to interact with the toy. While interacting with the toy the child may describe how the toy smells, feels, sounds, tastes, and/or looks. Little Tikes Fish 'n Splash Water Table, Step2 Naturally Playful Sand Table, and Whitney Brothers Light Table are examples of sensory play toys that offer opportunities for sensory learning. More classic sensory play toys include playdough, stacking and nesting toys, wooden blocks, or balls of various shapes, sizes, and textures. When playing with these toys a child may learn to use comparisons such as bigger or smaller than. When describing the location of these toys they may expand their oral language skills by developing the use of directional prepositions such as on, off, in, out, above, and below. In addition, when describing their size, shape, texture and color they may develop a broader understanding of the use of adjectives.

Technological Toys and Apps

Technological toys and apps often concentrate more specifically on engaging a child's cognitive development through the practice of using sounds, letters, words, phrases, and sentences. Oral language learning through the use of technology and apps is a more direct approach to cognitive-linguistic development. Although typically not as multi-sensory or socially collaborative in approach as pretend play or sensory toys, whenever developmentally based and appropriately used, a major benefit of technological toys and apps is that the child's developmental progress can be stored and retrieved across time. This may prove beneficial to the current understanding as well as future needs of a child's oral language development.

There are several technological toys and digital language applications that strengthen the parts of the brain responsible for oral language development. Some of the technological apps found on Google's Android and Apple's ios may include Peek-a-Boo Barn, Baby Sign and Learn, iTouchIlearn Words Speech and Language Skills, Rosetta Stone Kids Lingo Letter Sounds, Articulation Station, and Teach Your Monster. Examples of technological

toys include LeapFrog Learning Friends 100 Words Book, LeapFrog My Pal, and Alphabet Island.¹

Conclusion

Research shows that early childhood oral development can positively or negatively influence a child's ability to learn language and develop literacy skills (Clay, 2015a; Lindfors, 1987). Adult conversation with the child and the use of pretend play toys, sensory play toys, and technological toys and apps can benefit the oral language development of a child and help prepare them for later learning. Therefore, it is important that adults who are responsible for the development of young children be aware of the importance of the role of conversation and toys in the development of the child's oral language. The scenario involving Bryan at the beginning of this article is a good example. If the adults in his life had more fully recognized the importance of oral language development and incorporated some of these suggestions, his road to literacy learning might have been easier.

Jolene Reed, PhD, is an Assistant Professor at Sam Houston State University. She is a former classroom teacher, Reading Recovery Teacher Leader, and literacy coordinator for a public school system. She is heavily involved in community literacy tutoring programs for elementary school children. Her interests include supporting struggling literacy learners and preservice teacher education.

Elizabeth Lee, EdD, is an Assistant Professor at Sam Houston State University. She previously taught elementary grades 1st and 3rd and obtained her doctorate in Reading, Language Arts, and Children's Literature. She is interested in Early Childhood Education.

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¹ Programs, materials, and software listed by the authors do not constitute an endorsement by SECA.

Sociodramatic Play with Racially Diverse Dolls in a Child Development Center

Toni Denese Sturdivant



There is a prevailing myth that young children do not notice race (Doucet & Adair, 2013; Hirschfeld, 2012). While, in fact, infants as early as three months old notice race (Bar-Haim et al., 2006; Kelly et al., 2005). Further, three-year-old children have been documented as showing racial bias (Clark & Clark, 1939b; Spencer & Markstrom-Adams, 1990; Stevenson & Stewart, 1958). Additionally, Hindley and Olsen (2017) argue that “by age eight, racial attitudes are well developed and tend to stay the same unless a child has significant experiences and adult guidance that directly contradict the prevailing social attitudes” (p. 14). Unfortunately, our society is filled with racism (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). In short, children notice race and use the information available to them to make racial preferences. Therefore, if numerous early childhood educators find discussing race and ethnicity inappropriate for young children, children could be left to figure out race and ethnicity using the products of our society that praise some groups and negatively depicts others (Doucet & Adair, 2013).

This study sought to increase our knowledge of racial awareness

in young children by utilizing teacher observations of their students’ play with racially/ ethnically diverse dolls. Thus, the purpose of this exploratory study was to explore racial awareness and racial attitudes through the racial discourse present in the dramatic play of children in the preschool classroom.

Knowing more about how children are making sense of race and ethnicity in their play provides insight in how early childhood educators can address race and ethnicity in classrooms and what specific issues could be of interest to their young learners. The intention of this exploration was also to learn more about the ways in which early childhood teachers notice

and describe racial bias and racial attitudes in the doll play of their preschool students.

What the Literature Reveals

Research involving interviewing young children about dolls has a long history and similar findings. Researchers using Black and White dolls consistently found that both Black and White children showed a preference for whiteness (Clark & Clark, 1939a, 1939b; Spencer & Markstrom-Adams, 1990; Stevenson & Stewart, 1958). Jordan and Hernandez-Reif (2009) found the same White bias in preschoolers that were presented with two choices of a White or Black digital cartoon character. Even recently, Sturdivant and Alanis (2020) found that children in a preschool classroom with no talk about diversity, rejected the Black dolls in the classroom in favor of the White and Latina dolls, both having light skin and straight hair. This is not just a Black American and White American issue either. Jesuadian & Wright (2009) found that children associated the dark skin of an Indian doll with why the doll did not have any friends. Additionally, in an implicit association test of Chinese and Indian

children in Singapore, Setoh et al., (2017) found that the Chinese children (dominant group) showed a clear preference for their own race, and the Indian children did not. Taken together, it is possible that young children tend to prefer the dominant race or ethnic group in their society.

It is important to note that in two of the studies listed above, the researchers were able to alter their racial attitudes through rewards and storytelling (Jordan & Hernandez-Reif, 2009; Spencer & Markstrom-Adams, 1990). While it is unfortunate that this strong preference for whiteness and dislike of blackness has been found over and over again, it is quite encouraging that adults can play a role in the views of children. As stated by Escayg, Berman, and Royer (2017) “although research has demonstrated a pro-White bias among minority children, it is important to note that parents and teachers can play integral roles in promoting a positive racial identity in children” (p.15). While research may show that young children could be influenced by the greater society; there is also evidence that teachers can serve as a buffer.

For example, Sturdivant and Alanis (2019) reported that Black students were visibly excited when their pre-kindergarten teacher was intentional about incorporating their interests into the curriculum. Early childhood teachers that incorporated discussions about their student’s hair through culturally relevant read alouds, also helped to support positive racial identities (Wanless & Crawford, 2016). Additionally, Earick (2010) reported profoundly positive changes in the dispositions of young Black children once their teachers began to incorporate their culture into the classrooms.

Research that involved observing play has also documented examples where children of color showed their preference for whiteness through play (Ausdale & Feagin, 1996; Earick 2010; MacNevin & Berman, 2010). Young children have also been reported to refuse to play with children based on race (MacNevin & Berman, 2010; Park, 2011). Additionally, MacNaughton, Davis and Smith (2010) found that young White Australian children felt that whiteness was “normal” (p.142). Young children in various settings have been reported to show a pro-White bias in their play.

With past research being clear about children in different settings favoring whiteness over non-whiteness, it is interesting to see how children within racially and ethnically diverse classrooms in a nationally accredited preschool interact with racially and ethnically diverse dolls.

Procedures for this Study

This observational study involved two early childhood teachers, two lead preschool teachers, taking notes on the ways in which their students played with dolls during center time. Each teacher observed their students’ play and then reflected and completed a questionnaire about what they observed. In addition, the questionnaire included questions about the teacher’s themselves, including basic demographic information, number of years teach-

ing, and their teacher preparation among other questions. The teachers observed and reflected on the play behavior over a three-week period. The questionnaire included questions about what dolls students preferred, rejected, or simply ignored. It also included questions about which children engaged in play with dolls, with whom they were playing, and the ways the dolls were used in the play. The study explored the ways in which young children played with racially and ethnically diverse dolls by asking the following question: *How do preschool teachers describe the play of preschool children with racially diverse dolls during sociodramatic play?*

Setting

The setting for this project was a university-based child development center where the young learners that attend are either the children of faculty or students of the university. The center serves children from the ages of six weeks to five years. This study focused, specifically, on the two preschool classrooms. The center is accredited by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC). It uses a project-based curriculum that values hands-on learning experiences, play, and social-emotional development. Additionally, the center emphasizes cultural relevancy.

Participants

Following the protocol approved by the researcher’s institutional review board, two teachers were recruited through convenience sampling. The teachers volunteered to be a part of the study after the researcher shared a recruitment flyer with the center director and gained approval to ask the two preschool lead teachers at the center if they would be willing to participate. Pseudonyms were used to protect the participants’ and their students’ confidentiality. Both teachers had four-year degrees in early childhood education.

The first participant, Ms. Laura, a Latina, had been teaching for 33 years. Before working at the study site, she ran her own home child care center and taught and supervised in child development centers. She had taught in Spain, Italy, and the United States and had worked at the study site for the last 15 years, teaching in a preschool classroom. When asked how she addressed diversity in her classroom she replied “by reading different stories, asking parents to come and do an activity with the classroom from their culture... during the holidays the lessons will be on different holidays, Hanukah, Kwanzaa, etc.” She also stated that she has discussions with her students about diversity, including talks and activities about their families.

The second participant, Ms. Sadhvi, an Indian American, had been teaching for 28 years and had spent her entire career teaching preschool (ages three to five). When asked how she addressed diversity in her classroom, she stated that she “acknowledges both individual and cultural differences in a positive matter.”

Data Analysis

A comparative analysis (Mills, 2008) approach was utilized to arrive at the findings discussed below. To analyze the data provided by the teachers, the researcher conducted an initial read of both of the questionnaires. Following this read, the author read



The way in which teachers make an effort to address diversity may influence children's views about human diversity.

Ms. Sadhvi wrote of a similar play experience with four diverse children. The children included Chelsea (White from the USA), Ian (White from the USA), Ming (Asian from China), and Hamed (Middle-Eastern from Iran). The four children were playing in the dramatic play area taking turns with the shopping cart. One of the students had previously placed a Black baby doll in the child seat in the cart.

over the data multiple times, looking for similarities between the responses of the two participants. After finding similarities and noting them the following information was found.

Findings

In order to answer the research question, how do preschool teachers describe the play of preschool children with racially diverse dolls during sociodramatic play, the researcher provided Ms. Sadhvi and Ms. Laura with a questionnaire to fill out after observing their students and reflecting on their play. Both Ms. Sadhvi and Ms. Laura reported that their students showed no preferences for any particular race or ethnicity in the dolls nor did they show any biases. Ms. Sadhvi wrote “regardless of color, dress or shape, they enjoyed playing with all kinds” in response to a question about whether the race or ethnicity of the child matched or did not match the race and ethnicity of the doll with which they chose to play. Ms. Laura provided an example of four children¹: Tommy (White), Kay (African American), Margo (Asian) and Michael (White), playing in the dramatic play area.

Tommy: I am the mommy, you [Margo], are the baby. Lay down on the couch. Go to sleep baby.

[Margo lies down and pretends to be asleep].

[Kay pretends to cook in the kitchen].

Michael: (gets all the babies) These are my babies.

Ms. Laura: Why are they all your babies? You could just play with one.

Michael: No, because nobody wanted them so I will take care of them.

Ms. Laura stated in her reflection that she “has four different dolls (one Black doll, one Asian doll, one White doll, and one Hispanic doll). Therefore, when Michael chose all of the babies, and said “these are my babies” he had four different races/ethnicities represented and did not see this to be an issue in his pretend family.

Despite the doll not matching the race or ethnicity of any of the four children, they pretended to be the baby's parent, shopping at the grocery store.

In this highly diverse childcare center, these two experienced minority teachers reported that their students showed no racial/ethnic bias in doll selection. Both of these teachers reported making an effort to positively acknowledge diversity. Ms. Laura provided that she engages in classroom discussion about differences in addition to including families into the room and reading diverse children's literature. Additionally, Ms. Sadhvi reported that she makes an effort to positively acknowledge and address cultural differences within her classroom.

Teaching Young Children to Accept Diversity

The children in the setting were reported to show no racial bias or preferences in their play. Groups of diverse children were said to play together with diverse dolls without there being any effort to ensure that dolls looked like them, that their families included children and dolls with similar skin tones, or that any of the dolls were not included. These findings are quite the departure from past research in which children are said to disregard and reject Black dolls and toys (MacNevin & Berman, 2017; Sturdivant & Alanis, 2020), show a preference for whiteness (Earick, 2010) and see whiteness as normal or desirable (Jesuvadian & Wright, 2011; MacNaughton, Davis, & Smith, 2010).

While the findings of the present study seem to be a departure from previously published research, there is a possible explanation for this difference. The way in which the teachers make an effort to explicitly discuss human diversity in their classrooms through activities, books, discussions, and family involvement may account for this difference. Perhaps, explicit adult attention to diversity is necessary for young children to accept diversity. MacNevin and Berman (2017) reported that the teachers in their

Table 1 Ways to Celebrate Diversity in the Early Childhood Classroom

	Teaching Practices	The Physical Environment
Get to Know Students	When early childhood educators take time to learn about the backgrounds, interests, and experiences that their students have they are able to include authentic aspects of children into the curriculum.	Include pictures, books, and play materials that represent the children in the classroom and represent them in an authentic way.
Involve Families	Families have talents, skills, interests, and knowledge to share. Involving families in in-class activities as well as meaningful at-home bonding experiences helps to diversify the worldview and ways of knowing to which children are exposed.	Include pictures of the children’s families in the classroom. This helps to show the diversity of family make-ups as well as showing the importance of each family.
Diversify the Space	Early childhood educators can use authentic cultural artifacts as materials for small and large group instruction, as well as learning materials in interest areas.	Including an authentic representation of student’s lives in the physical space of the classroom shows the value and legitimacy of different ways of being. It is important that authentic materials are used. Parents can help with this. As multicultural items from large stores can be stereotypical and actually work to foster stereotypes rather than supporting children.
Engage in Conversations	Play time is a great time to make sure that all children feel valued and belonged. One way to help ensure this feeling is to engage in conversations with children. Having a personal relationship with each child and showing a genuine interest in what each child has to say sends the message that all children are important regardless of their cultural background.	Early childhood educators can include the voices of their students in the physical environment by engaging in shared writing activities where teachers write down the words and ideas shared by the children in the classroom. Making sure that all children are heard and that a diversity of opinions and views are worth writing down shows children that differences are to be celebrated.
Examine own Biases	We all talk, move, and act in the way that we were taught through our own experiences. Oftentimes this translates into the experiences that we offer children as well. For example, some early childhood educators bake pumpkin pies with students during November, without realizing that pumpkin pie is a culturally specific dessert and that some children have other desserts that are just as significant to their culture. Without taking the time to think about how biases may be influencing teaching, early childhood educators run the risk of always incorporating certain cultures and ignoring others.	Packaged curriculums and materials that are commonly used in Early Childhood classrooms sometimes silence and ignore children and families that are not White and middleclass. This fact can be difficult to see as many educators, are accustomed to this flaw as it has been present for so long. It is imperative that educators take time to stop and think about the voices and experiences that are represented in the classroom to better ensure that a message of valuing diversity is being sent.

study did not see a need to openly discuss race with their young children. Other researchers had similar findings in their adult participants’ attitudes toward discussing human diversity (Durden, Escalante, & Blitch, 2015; Earick, 2010; Park, 2011; Sturdivant & Alanis, 2020). Earick (2010) provides further evidence of this, as the African American students in the study began to accept themselves and stop rejecting blackness after their teachers engaged in activities which dealt with celebrating human diversity overtly. This study provides hope for early childhood classrooms where racial bias is not present in the play of the children by providing some evidence on how a difference could be made.

Limitations

It is important to mention that the study had some constraints. One is the fact that this study was conducted with two teachers from the same center. Because the students attend the same center, there may be unintentional similarities between the two classrooms. Additionally, teachers reflected on the play that occurred rather than recording the play as it happened.

Conclusions and Suggestions

Early childhood educators may have the power to positively im-

pact the preferences and biases in their young children. These two experienced educators reported no biases in their young learners' doll selections. As reported by the teachers, they made an intentional and explicit effort to discuss and include issues of diversity in their classrooms. Early childhood educators that would like to facilitate the development of children who see human diversity as a fact of life may be able to achieve this goal by engaging in the activities mentioned by Ms. Laura and Ms. Sadhvi. For early childhood educators aiming to engage in culturally diverse practices and create classrooms where diversity is celebrated, just as Ms. Laura and Ms. Sadhvi have, may wish to include some of their practices listed in Table 1.

Using the Teachable Moments

In addition to the intentional diversity techniques in Table 1 and the teaching practices used by the study participants, early childhood educators should also be prepared to respond to teachable moments, in which children ask questions or display a misunderstanding about human diversity. It is in these moments where teachers can truly show a commitment to diversity and the importance of celebrating differences because, instead of ignoring or glossing over these sometimes uncomfortable moments, teachers spend time in discussions and investigations with children just as would likely happen if a child found a worm on the playground. Ms. Laura's and Ms. Sadhvi's classrooms provide hope that with an intentional focus on diversity, we can educate young children to accept and celebrate differences.

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¹ All names of children as well as of teachers are pseudonyms.

Juegos Socio-dramáticos con Muñecas Racialmente Diversas en Centros de Desarrollo Infantil

Toni Denese Sturdivant



Introducción

Según un mito predominante los niños no se dan cuenta de la raza. Lo cierto es que, a partir de los tres meses de edad, los bebés ya pueden identificar la raza. De igual manera, se ha documentado que los niños de tres años muestran prejuicios raciales. Además, Hindley y Olsen (2017) señalan que "a los ocho años, las actitudes raciales están bien desarrolladas y tienden a permanecer iguales a menos que un niño tenga experiencias significativas y la dirección de un adulto que contradiga directamente las actitudes sociales predominantes" (p.14). Desafortunadamente, nuestra sociedad está repleta de racismo (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Sin duda, los niños se dan cuenta de la raza y usan la información a su alcance para hacer preferencias raciales. Por lo tanto, si para muchos educadores de educación temprana consideran que hablar sobre la raza y el origen étnico es inapropiado para los niños pequeños, estaríamos dejando a que los niños descubrieran lo que es la raza y el origen étnico utilizando ideas que hay en la sociedad donde se elogian a algunos grupos y describen negativamente a otros (Doucet y Adair, 2013).

En un estudio que realizamos se procuró aumentar nuestro conocimiento de la conciencia racial en los niños pequeños mediante la utilización de las observaciones de los maestros sobre el

juego de sus estudiantes con muñecas de diversas razas o etnias. Así, el propósito de este estudio exploratorio fue explorar la conciencia racial y las actitudes raciales a través de las ideas sobre raza presentes en el juego dramático de los niños en el salón de preescolar.

Saber más sobre cómo los niños forman ideas sobre la raza y el origen étnico en su juego provee una visión en torno a cómo los educadores de educación temprana pueden abordar la raza y el origen étnico en los salones de clases y sobre qué temas específicos podrían ser de interés para sus pequeños alumnos. La intención de esta

exploración también fue aprender más sobre las formas en que los maestros de educación temprana se percatan y describen los prejuicios raciales y las actitudes raciales en el juego con muñecas de sus estudiantes de preescolar.

Lo que revela la literatura

El uso de entrevistas en las investigaciones con niños pequeños sobre muñecas tiene una larga historia y hallazgos similares. Aquellos investigadores que utilizaron muñecos blancos y negros encontraron de forma constante que tanto los niños blancos como los negros mostraban una preferencia por lo blanco (Clark y Clark, 1939a, 1939b; Spencer y Markstrom-Adams, 1990; Stevenson y Stewart, 1958). Jordan y Hernandez-Reif (2009) encontraron la misma preferencia hacia lo blanco en niños de edad preescolar a quienes se les presentaron dos opciones para seleccionar entre un personaje de dibujos animados digital blanco o negro. Incluso recientemente, Sturdivant y Alanis (2020) hallaron que los niños en un aula preescolar, sin hablar sobre diversidad, rechazaban las muñecas negras favoreciendo las muñecas blancas y latinas, ambas con piel clara y cabello lacio. Este no es sólo un problema de afroamericanos y blancos. Jesuadian y Wright (2009) encontraron que los niños asociaban la piel oscura de una muñeca de la India como la razón por la cual la muñeca no tenía amigos. Además,

en Singapur en una prueba de asociación implícita con niños chinos e indios, Setoh et al., (2017) encontraron que los niños chinos (grupo dominante) mostraban una clara preferencia por su propia raza y no así los niños de la India. En conjunto, es posible que los niños pequeños tiendan a preferir la raza o grupo étnico dominante en su sociedad.

Es importante señalar que en dos de los estudios mencionados anteriormente, los investigadores pudieron modificar las actitudes raciales a través del uso de recompensas y narraciones de cuentos (Jordan y Hernandez-Reif, 2009; Spencer y Markstrom-Adams, 1990). Si bien es lamentable que esta fuerte preferencia por lo blanco y el desagrado por lo negro se haya encontrado una y otra vez, es bastante alentador saber que los adultos pueden tener un rol importante en las opiniones de los niños. Como afirman Escayg, Berman y Royer (2017), "aunque la investigación ha demostrado una parcialidad pro-blanca entre los niños de minorías, es importante señalar que los padres y maestros pueden desempeñar un papel integral en la promoción de una identidad racial positiva en los niños" (p. 15). Si bien la investigación puede mostrar que los niños pequeños podrían verse influenciados por la sociedad en general, también hay pruebas de que los maestros pueden contrarrestar las mismas. Por ejemplo, Sturdivant y Alanis (2019) informaron que los estudiantes negros demostraron estar visiblemente emocionados cuando su maestra de pre-kínder mostro su intención de incorporar los intereses de los niños en las actividades. Los maestros de educación temprana que incorporaron discusiones sobre el cabello de sus estudiantes a través de lecturas también contribuyeron a apoyar de manera positiva su identidad racial (Wanless & Crawford, 2016). Además, Earick (2010) informó sobre cambios significativamente positivos en las disposiciones de los niños negros una vez sus maestros comenzaron a incorporar su cultura en los salones de clases.

Las investigaciones donde se hizo uso de observaciones durante el juego también han documentado ejemplos en los que los niños de color mostraron su preferencia por lo blanco a través del juego (Ausdale y Feagin, 1996; Earick 2010; MacNevin y Berman, 2010). También se ha reportado que los niños pequeños se niegan a jugar con niños por motivos de raza (MacNevin y Berman, 2010; Park, 2011). Además, MacNaughton, Davis y Smith (2010) encontraron que los niños australianos blancos sentían que lo blanco era "normal" (p.142). Se reportó que los niños pequeños en distintos entornos muestran una parcialidad hacia lo blanco en el juego.

Dado que las investigaciones anteriores han sido claras acerca de que los niños en diferentes entornos favorecen lo blanco por encima de aquello que no es blanco, motivó a conocer cómo los niños en salones de clase con diversidad racial y étnica en un preescolar acreditado a nivel nacional interactuaban con muñecas representando diversidad racial y étnica.

Procedimientos para este estudio

Este estudio observacional involucró a dos maestros de educación temprana, ambos maestros de preescolar; que tomaron notas

sobre las formas en que sus estudiantes jugaban con muñecas en sus aulas en el centro. Cada maestro observó el juego de sus alumnos y luego reflexionó y completó un cuestionario sobre lo que observaron. Además, el cuestionario incluía preguntas sobre los propios maestros, que incluía información demográfica básica, el número de años de experiencia y su preparación docente, entre otras preguntas.

Los maestros observaron y reflexionaron sobre el comportamiento durante el juego durante un período de tres semanas. El cuestionario incluía preguntas sobre qué muñecas preferían, rechazaron o simplemente ignoraron los estudiantes. También incluyó preguntas sobre qué niños jugaban con muñecas, con quién jugaban y las formas en que se usaban las muñecas en el juego. El estudio exploró las formas en que los niños pequeños jugaban con muñecas de diversas razas y etnias al hacer la siguiente pregunta:

¿Cómo describen los maestros de preescolar el juego de niños en edad preescolar con muñecos de diversas razas durante el juego socio-dramático?

Escenario del estudio

El lugar donde se realizó este proyecto fue un centro de desarrollo infantil con sede en la universidad donde los pequeños estudiantes que asisten son hijos de profesores o de estudiantes de la universidad. El centro atiende a niños de seis semanas a cinco años. Este estudio se centró, específicamente, en los dos salones de preescolar. El centro está acreditado por la National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC). El centro utiliza un currículo basado en proyectos que valora las experiencias prácticas de aprendizaje, el juego y el desarrollo socioemocional. Además, el centro enfatiza la relevancia cultural.

Participantes

Siguiendo el protocolo aprobado por la junta de revisión institucional del investigador, se reclutaron dos profesoras mediante muestreo por conveniencia. Las maestras se ofrecieron como voluntarias para ser parte del estudio después de que la investigadora compartiera un folleto de reclutamiento con el director del centro y obtuviera la aprobación para preguntarles a las dos maestras líderes de preescolar en el centro si estarían dispuestos a participar. Se utilizaron seudónimos para proteger la confidencialidad de los participantes y de sus estudiantes. Ambas maestras tenían títulos en educación temprana.

La primera participante, la Sra. Laura, una latina, había enseñado durante 33 años. Antes de trabajar en el lugar del estudio, dirigió su propio centro de cuidado infantil en el hogar y enseñó y supervisó en centros de desarrollo infantil. Había enseñado en España, Italia y los Estados Unidos y había trabajado en el lugar de estudio durante los últimos 15 años, enseñando en un salón preescolar. Cuando se le preguntó cómo introdujo el tema de la diversidad en su salón de clases, respondió diciendo "leyendo diferentes historias, pidiendo a los padres que vengan y realicen una actividad con el salón acerca de su cultura ... durante las vacaciones las lecciones serán sobre diferentes días festivos, Hanukah, Kwanzaa, etc." También dijo que acostumbraba a tener

conversaciones con sus estudiantes sobre la diversidad, incluyendo charlas y actividades sobre sus familias.

La segunda participante, la Sra. Sadhvi, una indo-americana, había enseñado durante 28 años y había pasado toda su carrera enseñando preescolar (niños de tres a cinco años). Cuando se le preguntó cómo abordó la diversidad en su salón de clases, dijo que ella “reconoce las diferencias tanto individuales como culturales de manera positiva.”

Análisis de los datos

Se utilizó un enfoque de análisis comparativo (Mills, 2008) para llegar a los hallazgos que se discuten a continuación. Para analizar los datos proporcionados por los docentes, la investigadora realizó una lectura inicial de ambos cuestionarios. Después de esta lectura, la autora leyó los datos varias veces, buscando similitudes entre las respuestas de las dos participantes. Después de encontrar similitudes y anotarlas se encontró la siguiente información.

Recomendaciones

Para responder a la pregunta de investigación, cómo describen los maestros de preescolar el juego de los niños en edad preescolar con muñecas de diversas razas durante el juego socio-dramático, el investigador proporcionó a la Sra. Sadhvi y a la Sra. Laura un cuestionario para completar después de observar a sus alumnos y reflexionar sobre sus juegos. Tanto la Sra. Sadhvi como la Sra. Laura expresaron que sus alumnos no mostraban preferencias por ninguna raza o etnia en particular en las muñecas ni mostraban prejuicios. La Sra. Sadhvi escribió “sin importar el color, la vestimenta o su forma, disfrutaban jugando con todo tipo” fue su respuesta a una pregunta sobre si la raza o el origen étnico del niño coincidía o no con la raza y el origen étnico de la muñeca con la que eligieron jugar. La Sra. Laura proporcionó un ejemplo de cuatro niños: Tommy (blanco), Kay (afroamericano), Margo (asiático) y Michael (blanco), jugando en el área de juegos dramáticos.

Tommy: Yo soy la mami, tú [Margo], eres el bebé. Acuéstate en el sofá. Vete a dormir bebé.

[Margo se acuesta y finge estar dormida].

[Kay finge cocinar en la cocina].

Michael: (recibe a todos los bebés) Estos son mis bebés.

Sra. Laura: ¿Por qué son todos sus bebés? Podrías jugar con uno.

Michael: No, porque nadie los quería, así que yo me ocuparé de ellos.

La Sra. Laura afirmó en su reflexión que “tiene cuatro muñecas diferentes (una muñeca negra, una muñeca asiática, una muñeca blanca y una muñeca hispana). Por lo tanto, cuando Michael eligió a todos los bebés y dijo “estos son mis bebés”, tenía cuatro razas/etnias diferentes representadas y no vio que esto fuera un problema en su familia imaginaria.

La Sra. Sadhvi escribió sobre una experiencia de juego similar con cuatro niños diversos. Los niños incluían a Chelsea (blanca de EE. UU.), Ian (blanca de EE. UU.), Ming (asiático de China) y Hamed (Medio Oriente de Irán). Los cuatro niños jugaban en el área de juegos dramáticos tomando turnos con el carrito de compras.

Uno de los estudiantes había colocado previamente una muñeca negra en el asiento para niños del carrito. A pesar de que la muñeca no coincidía con la raza o el origen étnico de ninguno de los cuatro niños, fingieron ser los padres del bebé, haciendo compra en el supermercado.

En este centro de cuidado infantil altamente diverso, estas dos maestras de minorías étnicas con experiencia como docentes de educación temprana, informaron que sus estudiantes no mostraron prejuicios raciales/étnicos en la selección de muñecas. Ambas maestras revelaron haber hecho un esfuerzo por reconocer de manera positiva la diversidad. La Sra. Laura dijo que en su salón de clases se discuten las diferencias, además de incluir a las familias en el aula y leer literatura infantil diversa. También, la Sra. Sadhvi informó que hace un esfuerzo por reconocer y discutir de manera positiva las diferencias culturales dentro de su salón de clases.

Enseñándole a los Niños a Aceptar la Diversidad

De acuerdo con los resultados los niños del centro donde se realizó el estudio no mostraban prejuicios o preferencias raciales en su juego. Se dijo que los grupos de niños con características diversas jugaban juntos con muñecas representando diversidad sin que se hicieran esfuerzos por asegurar que las muñecas se parecieran a ellos, que en sus familias hubiera niños y muñecas con tonos de piel similares, o que no se incluyera a alguno de los muñecos. Estos hallazgos se apartan bastante de otras investigaciones en las que se dice que los niños ignoran y rechazan las muñecas y juguetes por su color negro (MacNevin y Berman, 2017; Sturdivant y Alanis, 2020), muestran una preferencia por lo blanco (Earick, 2010) y que ven lo blanco como normal o deseable (Jesuvadian y Wright, 2011; MacNaughton, Davis y Smith, 2010).

Si bien los hallazgos del presente estudio parecen alejarse de las investigaciones publicadas anteriormente, existe una posible explicación para esta diferencia. La forma en que las maestras se esfuerzan por discutir explícitamente la diversidad humana en sus salones de clase a través de actividades, libros, discusiones y la participación familiar puede explicar esta diferencia. Es muy posible que la atención explícita de los adultos a la diversidad sea necesaria para que los niños pequeños la acepten. MacNevin y Berman (2017) informaron que los maestros en su estudio no vieron la necesidad de discutir abiertamente la raza con sus hijos pequeños. Otros investigadores encontraron similitudes en las actitudes de sus participantes adultos hacia la discusión de la diversidad humana (Durden, Escalante y Blitch, 2015; Earick, 2010; Park, 2011; Sturdivant y Alanis, 2020). Earick (2010) proporciona más evidencia sobre esto, ya que los estudiantes afroamericanos en el estudio comenzaron a aceptarse a sí mismos y dejaron de rechazar la negritud después de que sus maestros participaron en actividades que trataban de celebrar abiertamente la diversidad humana. Este estudio brinda esperanza para los salones de clase de educación temprana donde el prejuicio racial no está presente en el juego de los niños al brindar alguna evidencia sobre cómo se puede hacer una diferencia.

Tabla 1 Maneras de Celebrar la Diversidad en el Salón de Clases Preescolar

	Prácticas de Enseñanza	El Ambiente Físico
Conozca a sus Estudiantes	Cuando los educadores de preescolar se toman el tiempo para aprender sobre los antecedentes, los intereses y las experiencias que tienen sus estudiantes, pueden incluir aspectos auténticos de los niños en el currículo	Incluya imágenes, libros y materiales de juego que representen a los niños en el aula y los representen de manera auténtica.
Involucre a las Familias	Las familias tienen talentos, habilidades, intereses y conocimientos para compartir. Involucrar a las familias en las actividades de la clase, así como en experiencias significativas de vinculación en el hogar, ayuda a diversificar la visión del mundo y las formas de saber a qué niños están expuestos.	Incluya fotografías de las familias de los niños en el salón. Esto ayuda a mostrar la diversidad de la estructura familiar, así como a mostrar la importancia de cada familia.
Diversifique el Espacio	Los educadores de la primera infancia pueden utilizar auténticos artefactos culturales como materiales para la instrucción en grupos pequeños y grandes, así como materiales de aprendizaje en áreas de interés.	Incluir una representación auténtica de la vida de los estudiantes en el espacio físico del salón muestra el valor y la legitimidad de las diferentes formas de ser. Es importante que se utilicen materiales auténticos. Los padres pueden ayudar con esto. Dado que los artículos multiculturales de las grandes tiendas pueden ser estereotipados y en realidad funcionan para fomentar estereotipos en lugar de apoyar a los niños.
Involúcrese en Conversaciones	El tiempo de juego es un buen momento para asegurarse de que todos los niños se sientan valorados y que pertenecen. Una forma de ayudar a garantizar este sentimiento es entablar conversaciones con los niños. Tener una relación personal con cada niño y mostrar un interés genuino en lo que cada niño tiene que decir envía el mensaje de que todos los niños son importantes independientemente de su origen cultural.	Los educadores de preescolar pueden incluir las voces de sus estudiantes en el entorno físico participando en actividades de escritura compartida donde los maestros escriben las palabras y las ideas compartidas por los niños en el salón. Asegurarse de que se escuche a todos los niños y de que vale la pena tener en cuenta la diversidad de opiniones y puntos de vista muestra a los niños que las diferencias deben celebrarse.
Examine sus Propios Prejuicios	Todos hablamos, nos movemos y actuamos de la forma en que nos enseñaron nuestras propias experiencias. A menudo, esto también se traduce en las experiencias que ofrecemos a los niños. Por ejemplo, algunos educadores de la primera infancia hornean pasteles de calabaza con los estudiantes durante noviembre, sin darse cuenta de que el pastel de calabaza es un postre culturalmente específico y que algunos niños tienen otros postres que son igualmente importantes para su cultura. Sin tomarse el tiempo para pensar en cómo los prejuicios pueden estar influyendo en la enseñanza, los educadores de preescolar corren el riesgo de incorporar siempre ciertas culturas e ignorar otras.	Los currículos y materiales que se usan comúnmente en los salones de preescolar a veces silencian e ignoran a los niños y las familias que no son de raza blanca ni de clase media. Este hecho puede resultar difícil de ver ya que muchos educadores, están acostumbrados a este defecto puesto a que él ha estado presente durante tanto tiempo. Es imperativo que los educadores se tomen el tiempo para detenerse y pensar en las voces y experiencias que están representadas en el aula para garantizar mejor que se envíe un mensaje sobre la valoración de la diversidad.

Limitaciones

Es importante mencionar que el estudio tuvo algunas limitaciones. Una es el hecho de que este estudio se realizó con dos maestras del mismo centro. Debido a que los estudiantes asis-

ten al mismo centro, puede haber similitudes no intencionales entre los dos salones. Además, las maestras reflexionaron sobre el juego que ocurrió en lugar de grabar el juego tal como sucedió.

Conclusiones y sugerencias

Los educadores de la primera infancia pueden tener el poder de influir positivamente en las preferencias y prejuicios de sus hijos pequeños. Estos dos educadores experimentados no informaron sesgos en la selección de muñecas de sus jóvenes estudiantes. Según lo informado por los maestros, hicieron un esfuerzo intencional y explícito para discutir e incluir temas de diversidad en sus aulas. Los educadores de la primera infancia que quieren facilitar el desarrollo de los niños que ven la diversidad humana como un hecho de la vida pueden lograr este objetivo participando en las actividades mencionadas por la Sra. Laura y la Sra. Sadhvi. Para los educadores de la primera infancia que deseen participar en prácticas culturalmente diversas y crear aulas donde se celebre la diversidad, tal como lo han hecho la Sra. Laura y la Sra. Sadhvi, tal vez deseen incluir algunas de sus prácticas indicadas en la Tabla 1.

Aprovechar los momentos de enseñanza

Además de las técnicas de atención intencional a la diversidad que aparecen en la Tabla 1 y las prácticas de enseñanza utilizadas por los participantes del estudio, los educadores de preescolar también deben estar preparados para responder a los momentos de enseñanza que surgen cuando los niños hacen preguntas o muestran ideas equivocadas sobre la diversidad humana. Es en estos momentos donde los maestros pueden mostrar verdaderamente un compromiso con la diversidad y la importancia de celebrar las diferencias porque, en lugar de ignorar o pasar por alto estos momentos a veces incómodos, los maestros dedican tiempo a discusiones e investigaciones con los niños, tal como probablemente sucedería si un niño encontrara un gusano en el patio de recreo. Los salones de clases de la Sra. Laura y la Sra. Sadhvi brindan una esperanza de que, con un enfoque intencional en la diversidad, podamos educar a los niños pequeños para que acepten y celebren las diferencias.

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Fear Not Early Childhood Teachers! You are Already Using Algebraic Strategies in Your Classroom

Amber Beisly, Jill Davis, Vickie E. Lake, and Brandy McCombs



Algebra! Just seeing or hearing the word can cause anxiety in early childhood teachers. However, this anxiety is socially acceptable, because in the United States some consider that it is okay not to like math (Isiksal, Curran, Koc, & Askun, 2009). For decades research has demonstrated that mathematical thinking is evident in children as young as preschool age (Bredenkamp & Copple, 1987, 1998; Coople & Bredenkamp, 2009; Curico & Schwartz, 1997; Hartley, 1952) and that algebraic reasoning is important for learning advanced mathematical concepts (Cross, Olufonke, Lee, & Perez, 2012). Moreover, Cross et al. state that young children are adept at developing spatial and algebraic reasoning, provided they engage in appropriate activities. Nevertheless, these algebraic activities may not take place in early childhood classrooms if teachers bring with them years of math anxiety and negative math experiences.

Many early childhood teachers state that they chose to teach young children (birth – age 8) because they do not like mathematics, are not good at mathematics, or will not have to know or teach a lot of math (Lake & Kelly, 2014). When asked to explain what algebra would look like in their classrooms, Elliott (2005) described preservice early childhood and elementary teachers' answers as vague, uncertain, tentative, and full of negative memories of how they struggled with the content and were forced to memorize facts and formulas. The fact is that most teachers of young children have had little experience dealing with algebra since they were in high school (Blanton & Kaput, 2003).

Teachers' negative experiences can be detrimental to how they teach math because their beliefs about mathematics affect how they see themselves, their instructional practices, and the level of appropriate mathematics activities offered in their classrooms (Hadley & Dorward, 2011; Mewborn & Cross, 2007). We know that positive beliefs about mathematics lead to increased stu-

dent involvement and opportunities to learn, while teachers' "negative attitudes toward mathematics can produce negative results in mathematics" (Vinson, 2001, 90).

Along with our own experiences of working with, teaching, and observing teachers and preservice teachers in the area of math for over 25 years, research has shown that there are many classrooms where appropriate activities are happening but teachers do not recognize the math involved, and they may not understand how the activities promote algebraic understanding. With some coaching and math training, teachers begin to see that math is everywhere and can start to expand on the activities already occurring in their classrooms to promote algebraic thinking.

What is Algebra

Heddens and Speer (2001, 182) state that algebra is a "process of generalizing, abstracting, and representing functions and relationships." The Principles and Standards for School Mathematics (NCTM, 2000) state that "even young children can be encouraged to use algebraic reasoning as they study numbers and operations and as they investigate patterns and relations among sets of numbers" (p. 3). Additionally, the NCTM document provides a vision of pre-K-12 algebra around the following four themes:

- Understanding patterns, relations, and functions
- Representing and analyzing mathematical situations and structures using algebraic symbols
- Using mathematical models to represent and understand quantitative relationships
- Analyze change in various concepts

Van de Walle, Lovin, Karp, and Bay-Williams (2014) have further refined this vision of algebraic thinking for early childhood classrooms stating that it involves the following:

- Recognizing patterns and relationships and analyzing these relationships,
- Thinking about the use of symbols to generalize certain kinds of math operations, and
- Thinking about the props that children use to represent things and support their increasing ability to understand and use abstract symbols.

While the refinement of algebra is helpful, it still does not explain what early childhood teachers should do to foster algebraic thinking in their classrooms. Fortunately, Elliott (2005) provides

Table 1. Opportunities to Pose Questions

You are probably ...	You can expand learning by...
Modeling your thinking when demonstrating or explaining a mathematical problem	Asking questions that prompt children to explain or justify their thinking, examples include: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• How did you arrive at that answer?• How would you convince your classmates of your answer?• Is this always true? Explain.• Have you found all of the possibilities? How can you be sure?

five different ways teachers can help children engage in algebra: “pose questions about their world, precisely; look for patterns, continuously; represent structures, symbolically; model relationships, quantitatively; and analyze change, periodically” (p. 104). These five strategies will serve as the framework for this article. We describe each strategy and how it demonstrates algebraic thinking, tell what early childhood teachers are already doing in their classrooms, and share ideas they might try in order to expand algebraic thinking for their students. We acknowledge that the examples listed are not exclusive to one category; they have been classified in ways that make sense based on our experiences in the classroom; readers may see them as fitting in another category. The important thing is not what category they fit in, but rather that teachers include a variety of opportunities for algebraic thinking in their classrooms.

Pose Questions about Their World, Precisely

Asking questions allows children the opportunity to organize their thinking and create ideas about mathematics, developing children’s eyes and ears for algebra (Blanton 2008). Open-ended questions can also prompt children to explain or justify their thinking (see Table 1) Hearing a counter example, one that does not match their idea, can place children in cognitive conflict. In order to resolve the conflict, they must either distort the new idea to fit their existing body of knowledge or change their body of knowledge to fit the new idea. It is through this continuous cycle of conflict and resolution that cognitive growth occurs (Amirshokoohi & Wisniewski, 2018).

The following scenario provides an example of how to pose questions to children.

Mrs. McCombs asks the children what two numbers added together are the same as 5? She writes the combinations children provide on the board: 2+3, 4+1, 3+2, 1+4. “Is that all the combinations?” The children say yes. “There are two more combinations. Use your counters, work with your partner, and let’s find the final two combinations.” Children work until they find 5+0 and 0+5.

Mrs. McCombs also keeps a list of mathematical terms posted on her classroom wall so that she is always reminded of these vocabulary words and can use them in real-world conversations naturally. Examples of first grade words are: compare, order, congruent, and symmetry. Her chart also includes math terms from kindergarten to 5th grade, which helps her differentiate

and tailor her conversations with particular children or small groups. *When walking in the hall, the class notices another class’ displayed work. “Are the papers vertically or horizontally placed? Compare why the author might have oriented the paper that way for their particular work.”*

Look for Patterns, Continuously

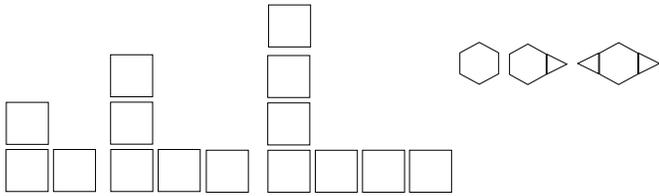
Although patterns have other meanings in different contexts, mathematical patterns can be defined as “any replicable regularity” (Papic, Mulligan, & Mitchelmore 2011, p. 238) and begin to appear in the pre-k curriculum. Many teachers believe the “AB” pattern is the most basic type of pattern and start by teaching those. However, introducing children to “A” patterns will help them understand that a pattern is simply a repeating unit (McGarvey, 2013). Early childhood teachers can encourage children to find “A” patterns in their environment. One way to do this is to take children on a pattern walk around the school and neighborhood. They can identify “A” in many places including the square on the sidewalk, tiled floors and walls, brick or vinyl siding on buildings, or slats on a wooden fence; focus on more than one “A” pattern, so children see how it continually repeats. After children have experience identifying patterns, they can begin to generalize what “A” or “AB” stands for in each pattern (Kinach, 2014). Using concrete models and describing them with letters or symbols ultimately helps children understand abstract forms of numbers and symbols that will form the basis of later algebra (Lee, Collins, & Melton, 2016).

The NCTM (2000) pre-K-2nd grade section of the standards for algebra includes the expectation that children will generate and

Figure 1: “A” Patterns – Brick, Fence, and Sidewalk



Figure 2: Non-linear Growing Patterns



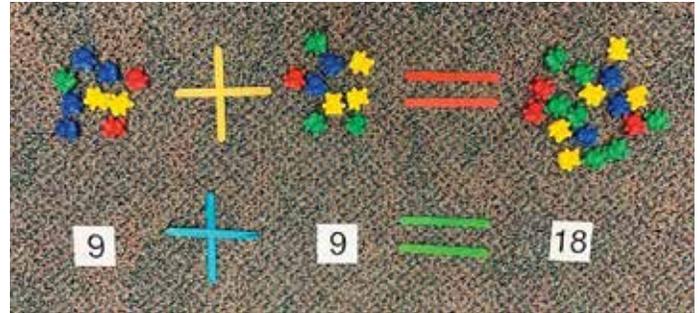
analyze both repeating and growing patterns. A repeating pattern is one that repeats and stays the same; there is never anything added to the sequence. Most children become interested in repeated patterns about age 4. A growing pattern is one that demonstrates a relationship in every sequence. An example of a growing shape pattern is ●, ●■, ●■▲, ●■▲◆. In each sequence the same shapes are repeated, while one more is added. A growing number pattern is 1,12,123,1234. In this case the next numerals added to the series would be 12345. The previous numerals are repeated plus the next numeral in the sequence. Experiences should not be limited to linear patterns. Non-linear growing patterns can be created by the children using a variety of materials including square tiles, pattern blocks, or even toothpicks (Figure 3). Growing patterns can be introduced in first grade if children have a firm foundation of repeated patterns. When introducing growing patterns, teachers should provide the first three examples of the pattern before letting children explore the pattern. Examples of how teachers can expand children’s knowledge of patterns are summarized in Table 2.

Represent Structures, Symbolically

Early childhood teachers can use a homemade or commercially purchased bucket balance, balance scales, or pan scale as a concrete way to demonstrate equivalence. Children can manipulate with Unifix® cubes, bear counters, or other manipulatives to try to make the two sides balance. Children are using algebraic thinking when they understand the relationship that is occurring between the two sides of the balance (Warren, Mollinson, & Oestrich, 2016). The children can represent what happens with the balance using terms such as *greater than*, *less than*, *equal*, and *not equal*. Working with the balance can also help children develop a concrete understanding of the equal sign (Knuth et al., 2016). While many children believe that the equal sign means, ‘the answer is coming up’ or ‘do something,’ activities with the balance help children understand that the equal sign means both sides of the equation are the same (Lee, Collins, & Melton, 2016).

Let’s return to Mrs. McComb’s classroom to see an example of ways to represent structure. Mrs. McCombs places two hula

Figure 3. Picture of number sentence



hoops on the ground. She invites four children into the hoop (three girls and one boy) and asks the class, “How do I make the second hoop the same?” One child says, “we need to add four friends.” Another child adds, “we need to add three girls and one boy to make it match.” This activity engages the class in a conversation of equal, same, and match.

Model Relationships, Quantitatively

Early childhood children are expected to use concrete, pictorial, and verbal representations of mathematical situations (NCTM, 2000). In many early childhood classrooms, children count how many children are at school as part of their daily routine. Teachers can extend this by encouraging children to categorize (e.g., boy/girl, 6-year olds/7-year olds, wearing tie shoes/Velcro shoes, or wearing glasses/no glasses) to determine who is present. As an extension, the children can determine other categories. At the beginning of the year, the teacher should model how to create a concrete representation by counting actual children. For example, all of the boys can stand in one group and the girls in another. One child can volunteer to count each group (not forgetting to count themselves, of course). Next, the teacher models how to create a pictorial representation using one of these categories. For example, 12  + 7  = 19  would represent that there are 12 boys and 7 girls in class for a total of 19 children. After the children master creating pictorial representations, they should be encouraged to find other ways to represent how many children are at school (see Table 4).

Mrs. McComb’s class provides an addition example of how to model relationships. Two children in Mrs. McCombs class used counting bears, popsicle sticks, and number tiles to represent their understanding of number sentences (see Figure 4). They first used the bears to show quantity and the popsicle sticks for the operations (+ and =). Underneath the bears, they put the number tiles to show the quantity and duplicated the operation signs with popsicle sticks.

Table 2. Ways to Expand Patterning

You are probably ...	You can expand learning by...
Helping children recognize and create simple repeating patterns such as AB, ABC, etc.	Encouraging children to identify “A” patterns
Focusing on linear, repeating patterns	Giving children opportunities to explore (identify and create) growing patterns, both linear and non-linear

Table 3. Representing Structures

You are probably ...	You can expand learning by...
Comparing groups of objects using vocabulary such as same, different, more, and less	Modeling the relationship of algebraic equality using greater than, less than, equal, and not equal

Table 4. Modeling Relationships

You are probably ...	You can expand learning by...
Counting the number of students who are at school	Creating concrete, pictorial, and verbal representations of how many children based on a variety of categories

They said, “Mrs. McCombs, we just made a number sentence.”

Analyze Change, Periodically

Understanding change can help children to better understand the world around them, a major goal of mathematics (Björklund, 2010). Early childhood teachers keep track of many events that occur in the classroom, such as lost teeth, but do not necessarily encourage children to make mathematical meaning. Young children need opportunities to describe change using both quantitative and qualitative language. Quantitative changes, as the name implies, include looking at quantities. In the example of lost teeth, the children can describe the decreases or increases in the number of teeth lost from month to month. In one classroom, 7 teeth were lost in August, 3 in September, and 5 in October. The children could describe this quantitatively as a change of 4 from the first to the second month and then a change of 2 from the second to the third month. A qualitative description of the change would be that more teeth were lost during than first month than the second and third months.

You are probably ...	You can expand learning by...
Keeping track of how many children lost teeth	Using quantitative and qualitative mathematical language to describe the changes in the number of teeth lost

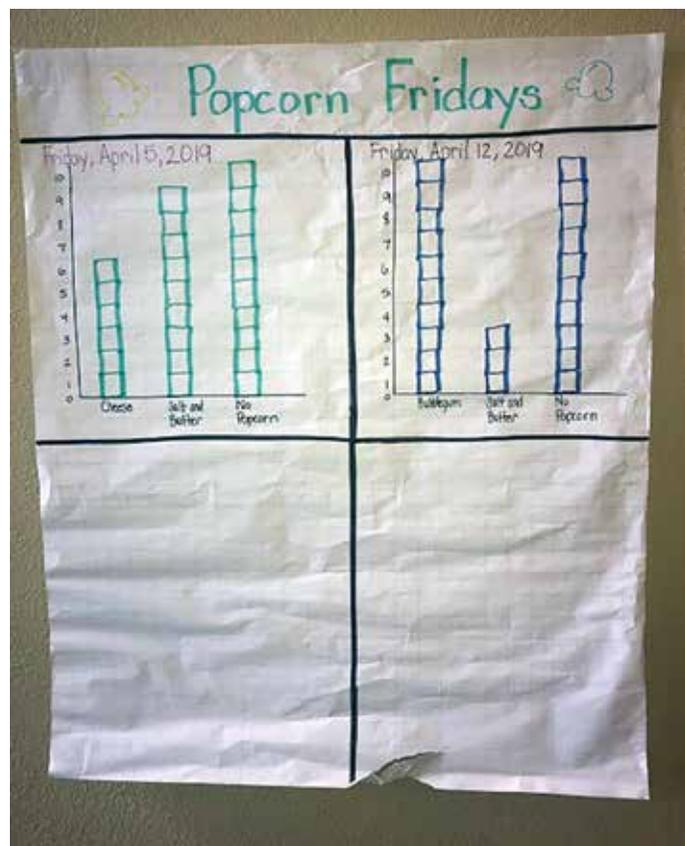
Mrs. McCombs class also works to analyze change. This scenario shows what she does.

In Mrs. McCombs’s class, they graph everything. A piece of chart paper becomes an anchor chart for popcorn Fridays, which is a school fundraiser where children can purchase flavored popcorn for \$1.00. Using $\frac{1}{4}$ of the chart paper, the children graph how many bought each of the two flavors of popcorn and who did not buy popcorn. This portion of the chart is dated then compared to the previous week’s popcorn selection. This anchor chart allows for the class to compare four weeks of popcorn buying, flavor selection, and the amount of money spent each week and cumulatively (see Figure 4).

Conclusion

Young children are very capable of spatial and algebraic reasoning (Cross et al., 2012); it is a disservice to them not to be pro-

Figure 4. Picture of anchor chart



vided opportunities for engagement in algebra. Whether they know it or not, many early childhood teachers utilize basic strategies that promote algebraic thinking; it all starts with concrete pre-algebra activities (Lee et al., 2016). Research by Knuth et al. (2016) has shown that young “children can develop critical algebraic thinking skills that are foundational to the successful study of algebra in the secondary grades” (p. 68), and that this early algebra exposure may decrease some of the difficulty children experience in middle and high school.

Our goal was to highlight algebraic strategies from Mrs. McCombs’ first grade classroom so other teachers might identify similar strategies they are using and deepen their understanding of how each one promotes algebraic thinking. In our work with preservice and practicing teachers, we have found that once they connect a strategy to algebra, they are more willing to provide similar activities. This understanding also lessens teachers’

anxiety and fear of teaching algebra, thus increasing time spent on algebraic learning.

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¹ All names of children as well as of teachers are pseudonyms.

Boosting Children's Language Skills: Using Mindmaps in Early Childhood Education

Femke van der Wilt, Rianne Hofma, Monica Koster, and Chiel van der Veen



This short excerpt shows a frequently occurring practice in early childhood classrooms: shared book reading. In fact, it is estimated that more than 90 percent of early childhood teachers reads to their class at least three times a week (Ghonem-Woets, 2009). Why do they do it? The benefits of shared book reading can explain why teachers spend a considerable amount of time using this strategy. Research has indicated, for example, that shared book reading teaches children how to engage with books and makes them aware of letter-sound relations, which is foundational for learning to read (Zucker, Ward, & Justice, 2009; also see Pollard-Durodola et al., 2016; Gonzalez et al., 2010).

Miss Jane¹ is reading the book *The Black Rabbit* (Leathers, 2013) to her preschool class (children ages 4-6).

Miss Jane: (Reads) But oh! There was something completely wrong. He was not alone. Rabbit got scared. "Go away, Black Rabbit!", he yells. But the Black Rabbit doesn't move. (Pauses) Tom, how does Rabbit feel?

Tom: Scared.

Miss Jane: Why?

Tom: Black Rabbit.

Miss Jane: Because he is scared of the Black Rabbit? (Tom nods)

Yes. Who else is scared sometimes? David? Are you ever scared?

David: No, not at all. I'm not even scared of bats. I've seen one once, you know.

Miss Jane: Okay, so that's not something you're scared of? Let's ask Lindsey. Lindsey, are you ever scared? (Lindsey nods) Yes? When are you scared?

Lindsey: Of slugs.

Miss Jane: Slugs! And why is that?

Lindsey: Because they ... on the ground ... but ... I just find them a bit scary.

Miss Jane: You find them a bit scary. Because they are a little slippery? (Lindsey nods). Okay, let's move on and see how the story goes.

(All names are pseudonyms)

There are, however, many ways in which teachers can implement shared book reading in their classroom. Some approaches might be more effective than others. According to sociocultural theory, learning is a social process, meaning that children learn by participating in meaningful sociocultural activities (Vygotsky, 1978;). It is, therefore, not surprising that shared book reading has been found to be even more effective when teachers actively engage children in classroom discussions (Gosen, 2012; Mol, Bus, de Jong, & Smeets, 2008; Mol, Bus, & de Jong, 2009). This type of shared book reading is generally referred to as interactive book reading.

Interactive book reading and its effect on language skills

During interactive book reading, the teacher bridges the gap between written and spoken language by explaining difficult concepts and asking children to respond to the story that is being read. This creates opportunities for children to participate in complex discourse in which they are encouraged to use academic language (Mol et al., 2008; Mol et al., 2009).

An important question is, however, how can teachers implement interactive reading in their classroom? Specifically, although the

predictable storylines and repetitive character of picture books makes them highly suitable for recurrent and in-depth discussions, not all types of classroom discussions are considered interactive. Traditional classroom discussions, for example, have been criticized for being overly teacher-steered and primarily focused on the reproduction of factual knowledge (Boyd & Kong, 2015).

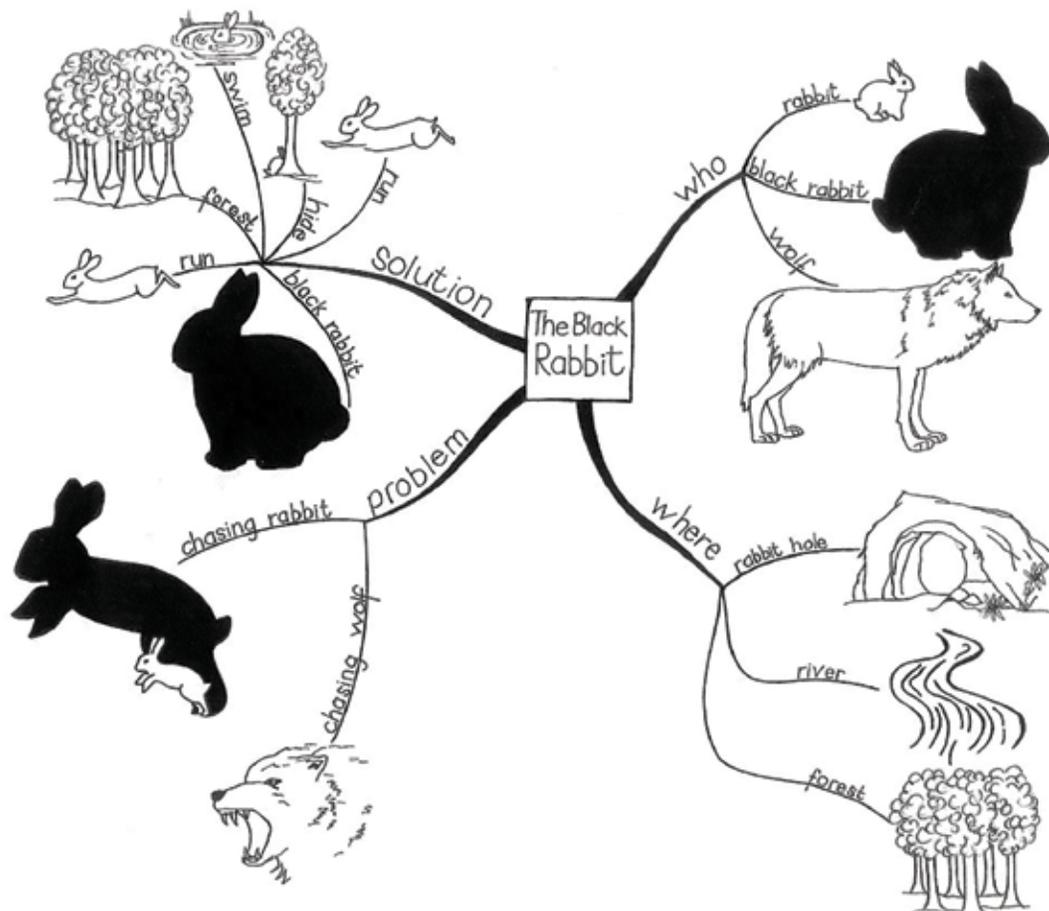
There have been several attempts to increasingly involve children in classroom discussions where they are encouraged to carefully listen to each other, negotiate meanings, and collaboratively make progress in their thinking (e.g., Michaels & O'Connor, 2012; 2015). Such discussions have shown to be positively related to the development of children's language skills (Howe & Abedin, 2013; Resnick, Asterhan, & Clarke, 2015).

Research has indicated that shared book reading that is characterized by interactive classroom discussion elicits relatively complex vocabulary and, consequently, contributes to children's vocabulary acquisition (Gonzalez et al. 2014). In addition, this type of book reading has also been found to be related to building listening, comprehension, and narrative skills (Lever & Sénéchal, 2011; Mol & Bus, 2011). Lever and Sénéchal (2011), for example, showed that children who were involved in an interactive reading intervention became better at structuring their narratives and increasingly included references to the story's characters and events.

The use of mindmaps: An alternative way?

Besides interactive book reading, there are also alternative ways to promote children's language skills during shared book reading. One such alternative concerns the use of visual supports, like graphic organizers. Graphic organizers can be defined as "spatial arrangements of words (or word groups) intended to represent the conceptual organization of text" (Stull & Mayer 2007, p. 810). The assumption is that they help learners in structuring and interpreting new information by offering a framework that relates new knowledge to prior knowledge (Dexter & Hughes, 2011; Dexter, Park, & Hughes, 2011; Sam & Rajan, 2013).

Figure 1. Example of a mindmap of the picture book *The Black Rabbit* (Leathers, 2013)



One particular type of graphic organizer is being increasingly used during interactive book reading: mindmaps (see Figure 1 for an example). Mindmaps have many similarities with word webs because they present a story's central theme in the center, from which several main branches emerge (Buzan, 2005). These main branches represent a story's main concepts. Nevertheless, mindmaps are also unique. In contrast to word webs, which usually represent all concepts at merely one level, mindmaps represent a story's subordinate concepts by sub-branches that are connected to the main branches. Together, these branches reflect the structure of the story and show the relations between its different parts (Somers, Passerini, Parhankangas, & Casal, 2014). Figure 1 provides an example of a story mindmap.

The particular principles upon which mindmaps are usually constructed are based on insights from educational studies and brain research. These principles consider, for example, the number of concepts that should be included (Stull & Mayer, 2007). As mindmaps are being increasingly used in educational settings, mindmap-principles have been found to be very helpful (Buzan, 2005).

Mindmaps promote understanding

Based on the cognitive load theory (Sweller, 1994; Paas, Renkl, & Sweller, 2003), it might be expected that the use of mind-

maps during shared book reading can have a facilitative effect on learning. According to this theory, learners process information in their working memory. When learners receive a lot of new information (as would be expected in the case of young children who hear a story for the first time), one's working memory gets overloaded. An overloaded working memory cannot function properly.

In particular, learners whose working memory system are overloaded cannot concentrate on teacher instructions, experience difficulties in remembering information, and find it harder to keep track in structured learning activities (Gathercole & Alloway, 2008). Over time, these missed learning opportunities might result in poor academic attainment (Holmes, Gathercole, & Dunning, 2010). Mindmaps could provide a solution to this problem by serving as a tool to help structure new information. The structured manner in which new information is visualized in a mindmap might reduce children's cognitive load and, thereby, support their learning.

How to use mindmaps in early childhood education

As children in early childhood classrooms are often in an emerging literacy stage, not yet able to write or read, an important question is: Can mindmaps be used in early childhood education? The work of Gallenstein (2013) has provided valuable clues of how mindmaps can be adapted in order to suit the needs of young children, for example by using pictures. Based on Gallenstein's work, as well as that of Buzan (2005), early childhood teacher Miss Rianne designed a mindmap approach that can be implemented during shared book reading activities in early childhood classrooms. This approach is explained below by using an example of a mindmap based on the book *The Black Rabbit* (Leathers, 2013).

Preparation – Choose a picture book

Choose a picture book that you would like to read during shared book reading. Ensure that the book has rich illustrations, contains challenging vocabulary, and suits the interests of your students. On a large piece of paper, write the title of the book in the center. You will read this book three times, but each reading session focusses on one/two central question(s) that is/are asked prior to reading the book:

1. Who are the characters in the story?
2. Where does the story take place?
3. What is/are the main problem(s) in the story?
4. What is/are the main solution(s) in the story?

Short synopsis of *The Black Rabbit*

The Black Rabbit is a children's book about a Rabbit who is confronted with a large rabbit chasing him: Black Rabbit. Rabbit is afraid of Black Rabbit and tries to get rid of him, but Black Rabbit keeps following him wherever Rabbit goes. Who is this mysterious Black Rabbit? And why won't he go away? Only from the pictures does it finally become clear that Black Rabbit is actually Rabbit's own shadow.

Reading session 1 – Who are the characters in the story?

During the first session, introduce the picture book (e.g., by reading the title of the book and looking at its pictures). Next, ask the first question: "Who are the characters in the story?" Ask children to listen carefully while you read to them and to focus primarily on the characters of the story. Interrupt as little as possible while reading the book. After you finish reading, discuss question 1 and, together with your students, create the first branch of the mindmap (the "who" branch). Draw a large branch that starts from the center and is directed towards the upper right corner (wide near the center, thin towards the outside). Above this branch, write the word "who". Next, draw smaller branches that are connected to this main branch. The number of smaller branches depends of the number of characters in the story. Based on the input of your students, write the names of the main characters above the smaller branches and use (existing) pictures (or draw them yourself) that represent the main characters of the story. In our example, the book "The Black Rabbit" contains three main characters: Rabbit, Black Rabbit, and Wolf (see Figure 1).

Reading session 2 – Where does the story take place?

During the second session, first activate children's prior knowledge by asking them about the main characters of the story. Next, ask children to focus on question 2: "where does the story take place?" while you read the book for the second time. Afterwards, discuss the different locations of the story and collaboratively create the second branch of the mindmap (the "where" branch). This time, draw a large branch starting from the center, but now directed towards the lower right corner. Write the word "where" near this branch and then draw smaller branches that are connected to this branch. Write the names of the locations above the smaller branches and use pictures to represent the different locations. In "The Black Rabbit", three locations can be identified: rabbit hole, river, and forest (see Figure 1).

Reading session 3 – What is/are the main problem(s) and solution(s) in the story?

During the third and final session, activate children's prior knowledge again (e.g., "Who is the story about? Where does the story take place?"). Next, ask children to focus on question 3 and 4: "what is/are the problem(s) in the story?" and "what is/are the solution(s)?" before reading the book one last time and discussing these questions afterwards. During the discussion, collaboratively construct the final two branches of the mindmap (the "problem(s)" branch and the "solution(s)" branch): one branch starting at the center and directed towards the lower left corner and another branch starting at the center and directed towards the upper left corner. Write "problem" near the lower branch and "solution" near the upper branch. Draw smaller branches and write keywords and use pictures to represent the main problem(s) and solution(s). "The Black Rabbit" describes two main problems (chasing rabbit and chasing wolf) and six (temporary) solutions (run, hide, swim, forest, run, black rabbit).

Figure 2 Using mindmaps in the classroom

Using mindmaps in early childhood education? Just try it out!

- Choose a picture book that you would like to read to your students.
- Read the picture book three times and ask the following questions prior to each reading session:
 1. Who are the characters in the story?
 2. Where do the events take place?
 3. What is/are the problem(s) in the story and (4) what is/are the solution(s)?
- After reading the book, engage children in a discussion about the question that you have asked.
- Collaboratively construct a part of a mindmap while discussing the central question. Verbalize your actions, so that children learn how a mindmap is created.
- Finalize the mindmap at the end of the three reading sessions: include the title of the book, children's answers to the main questions, and the four branches: who, where, problem(s), and solution(s).
- Model how children can use the mindmap during story table activities in order to help them to retell the story and thereby practice their narrative skills.

Want to know more?

- More information on mind mapping can be found on the website of Tony Buzan, who has pioneered mind mapping. The website also offers a free online course 'How to Mind Map': tonybuzan.com
- Software for mind mapping can be found at imindmap.com
- Pinterest offers loads of examples of picture book story tables: www.pinterest.com

Programs and sources do not constitute an endorsement by SECA.

the "who" branch. (Miss Lucy points to the mindmap) Now I draw a smaller branch and write "Black Rabbit". (Miss Lucy creates the branch and writes "Black Rabbit".) You see? Later today, we can add a picture of the Black Rabbit.

This excerpt shows how children support each other in improving their understanding of the story about the Black Rabbit. It also illustrates how the central question (in this case "who are the characters in the story?") structures the discussion. The use of such a main question seems to promote interactive discussions in which children are encouraged to express their ideas regarding this question and discuss these ideas in order to reach agreement. And what about Miss Lucy? Miss Lucy lets her students talk and creates parts of the mindmap while she verbalizes what she is doing.

Using mindmaps: Classroom discussions and children's language skills

What does a classroom discussion about a mindmap look like? Several teachers have tried the mindmap approach in their early childhood classroom. In Miss Lucy's class, the question about the different characters of the book *The Black Rabbit* triggered a discussion about the identity of the Black Rabbit.

Anna: Maybe it's his mom!

Miss Lucy: Whose mom?

Anna: The Black Rabbit

Miss Lucy: The Black Rabbit you mean? Is that little Rabbit's mom?

Christopher: I don't think so.

Sam: No, that's not it, because the Rabbit... No, because when there is sun, there is always shadow – when you walk outside.

Christopher: Yeah, not when it's dark!

Miss Lucy: Wait a minute, because I want to know – Anna just said: "Maybe it's his mom". If that's the case, then there is also a mom involved in the story. But Anna, now Sam explains how he thinks about it. That it's a shadow. Sam, could you repeat what you just said?

Sam: Because the Rabbit held out his hand and then the shadow did the same.

Miss Lucy: Okay, so the Black Rabbit is part of the story, and you say, Sam, that it is the shadow of Rabbit? Then let's add the Black Rabbit to our mindmap. Here we have the large branch,

Does the use of mindmaps during shared book reading improve children's language skills and their story comprehension? In order to investigate the effect of our mindmap approach, we conducted a large study in which seven early childhood teachers and their 143 students participated. Outcomes showed that student's language skills and story comprehension were significantly improved over a six-week period. This indicates that even young children, who are not yet able to read or write, appear to be able to understand a mindmap. Teachers who aim to engage their students in a variety of shared book reading activities are therefore encouraged to try out the mindmap-approach in their own early childhood classroom!

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Chiel van der Veen, PhD, is an assistant professor in the Department of Educational and Family Studies at Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam. His research focused on productive classroom talk and language development in early childhood education.

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Listening to our Teachers: An Interview with Laleta Fingal, Infant & Toddler Teacher at Hurlburt Field Child Development Center

Kenya Wolff, PhD

What does it mean to teach a very young child? In this interview, we learn about the aspirations and work of early childhood educators caring for the youngest children. We meet Laleta Fingal, an infant and toddler teacher at the Hurlburt Field Child Development Center in Florida. With 11 years of experience, she shares her insights about teaching very young children.

Q: How long have you been an Infant/Toddler Teacher?
A: 11 years

Q: What is the most rewarding thing about your job?

A: The most rewarding thing is just to see them grow and bloom. One day they are at one stage, and then you see them blossoming so fast. At this age, they just, just grow physically, socially, and emotionally so rapidly.

Q: What is the most challenging thing about working with toddlers?

A: They can't express themselves. Because when they can't express themselves and they get into conflicts and they act out in ways that can be unsafe. So you have to anticipate what they are doing and be there to help because they can react in ways that aren't appropriate, and you have to teach them the right way.

Q: You went to school and obtained a four-year degree in Early Childhood Education. Was it helpful?

A: Yes, I wanted to keep learning and find out more about children. Strategies are changing, and the more knowledge I learn and the more I know, enables me to be a better teacher. So I'd encourage others, that even if you know the basics, there is so much new information and new knowledge that you gain as a teacher and it will help you grow and do things differently.

Q: What would you say to someone who says what you do is just babysitting?

A: I'd say, just knowing how to raise a child is not enough. You may have raised your own children on the information from what your auntie said, but as teachers we need to have knowledge on brain research and an education to help them grow.

Q: What advice could you give other teachers and caregivers about working with parents?



Laleta Fingal is an experienced early childhood educator. She has 11 years of experience working with infants at toddlers.

A: Have an open positive relationship with parents. Remember that parents are the child's first teachers. The ultimate goal is to help that child and help that family and the best way you can do that is to keep the communication lines open.

Q: You work on a military base. Is there anything different about working with military families?

A: For the military families who deploy a lot, we have to be the secure base for the children to help keep them emotionally stable. The main difference working in military child care is learning to be really loving and caring for the kids because when parents are deployed, we are the stability for the children. Also, we ask parents to tell us when they are going away so that if we notice they are acting out or being extra sensitive, we can help.

Q: Have you ever had a challenge with a family?

A: One time I had a child who wasn't reacting to their name when I'd call it. I advised the family to have their hearing checked out. The parent wasn't happy about this. I asked her if she could sit in the classroom and watch as I talked to the child and he didn't respond... for some time the mom was still in denial, but eventually took her child to a hearing screening. Well, it turns out that he did have a hearing problem and, luckily, we were able to catch it early so that it was remedied. We are there with them all day and you have to be very observant, and when you can help, it is very rewarding.

Q: Is there any advice you'd give to teachers during this time of the pandemic?

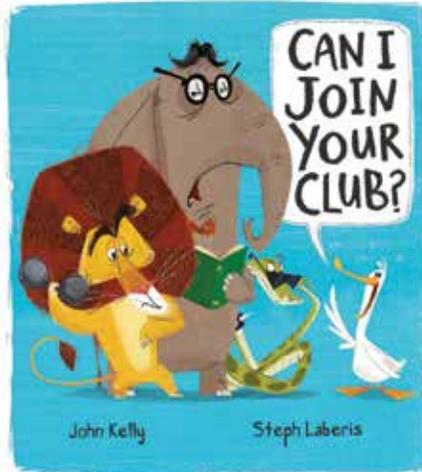
A: You still have to be the teacher that the children rely on. It's a stressful time and so you have to be extra loving and caring. Help children wash their hands more.

Kenya Wolff, PhD, is an Assistant Professor of Early Childhood Education at the University of Mississippi and is also the director of the Willie Price Laboratory School. Her experience as a classroom teacher and administrator allows her to bring real-world knowledge to the students she teaches. Dr. Wolff's research utilizes qualitative methodologies and focuses on various social contexts of childhood. She currently holds a position of chair for the editorial board for the Southern Early Childhood Association Journal, *Dimensions*, and serves as board member for the Mississippi Early Childhood Association.

Book Review

Dina Costa-Treff

A sense of belonging and establishing friendships are both something that children seek from an early age. That is just what Duck is looking for in John Kelly's *Can I Join Your Club?* (2017). Duck was interested in joining a club. Unfortunately, he cannot roar like a lion or trumpet like an elephant. Unlike Snake, Duck has legs and is unable to hiss. Duck can only QUACK! This leads to multiple instances of "Application DENIED!" As Duck attempts to join club after club, he finds that they are not welcoming to him and he doesn't meet the requirements. Duck then creates his own club, a club for everyone. A club that requires you to just be yourself. "Application Accepted!" The illustrations by Steph Laberis are entertaining and provide the reader with a comical and joyful experience. *Can I Join Your Club?* honors differences, diversity, and acceptance. Not only acceptance of others but also self-acceptance.



Dos cosas que buscan los niños durante la edad temprana es sentir que pertenecen así como formar amistades. Eso es justamente lo que Duck busca en el libro de cuentos *Can I join your club?* (2017) [¿Puedo pertenecer a tu club?] que escribe John Kelly. A Duck le interesaba formar parte de un club. Sin embargo, él no puede rugir como un león o barritar r como un elefante. A diferencia de una serpiente, Duck tiene patas y no puede silbar. Duck sólo puede hacer ¡Cuac! Por esto es que sigue recibiendo una nota donde dice, "¡Solicitud denegada!" Las alegres ilustraciones de Stephen Laberis le ofrecen al lector una experiencia cómica y divertida. En *Can I join your club?* se celebran las diferencias, la diversidad y la tolerancia. No tan solo celebra la aceptación sino también reconoce la aceptación de quien y como somos.

The banner features the text 'SECA Conversations for Change' on the left, with a small icon of two people walking. To the right is a graphic of several colorful hands (red, blue, green, yellow, purple) reaching out. Below the graphic is a green speech bubble containing the text 'for Change'.

Since 1948 SECA's membership has been **open to everyone regardless of race, ethnicity, language or religious belief**. SECA was one of the first organizations in the South to work for a positive change in racial relations.

The first SECA conferences were held in churches to assure **All members would be welcome**. SECA is very proud of our humble beginnings. Given our multicultural philosophy, we feel that in our current climate SECA should be at the forefront of some long overdue conversations.



Join SECA President, Debbie Ferguson, for **SECA Conversations for Change** and engage in meaningful, rich, non-judgmental, safe conversations with state leaders and members in an attempt to grow individually and to explore how SECA can use their platform to ensure all children and families receive the respect and acceptance they deserve regardless of their race or culture.

Want to join the conversations? Email us at info@seca.info to be added to the notices.



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