

Challenging Norms in Pre-Kindergarten Curriculum by Listening to Young Children: Pre-Service Teachers' Lessons in Phonological Awareness

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Abstract

Phonological Awareness assessments, curriculum and children's literature, have been treated as context-free and value-neutral. However, recent events, such as the discontinuation of six Dr. Seuss books due to racially inappropriate illustrations, suggest that content and pictures of simple rhyming books may be laden with inappropriate content. Teacher education is called to prepare early childhood teachers to meet the needs of the students through child-centered exposure to phonological awareness, including the skills to navigate potentially inappropriate state-endorsed curriculum and books. To address this challenge, four case studies (Stake, 2010) are presented to examine the intersection of a state-endorsed curriculum and early childhood pre-service teachers' construction and implementation of phonological awareness lessons during an eight-week field placement. Using three tenets of childism, this research examined early childhood curriculum and teacher education practice for evidence of regimes of truth which serve to marginalize children's voices, identities, and experiences. The case study data shows evidence of how honoring children's voices can help challenge and reconstruct pedagogic and material norms for the pre-service teachers.

Keywords: Early childhood curriculum, pre-service teacher education, childism, phonological awareness, child-centered

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Suri: Why are they banning Dr. Seuss?

Maxine (reading Helmore, 2021, para 1): "Dr. Seuss Enterprises has made a moral decision of choosing not to profit from work with racist caricature in it..."

Jayda (shows group screen shot of "If I ran the Zoo"): This (loud) isn't right.

Kyra: Does this mean I have to rewrite my lesson plans? (Fieldnotes, March 2021)

During a small group discussion on children's literature, Pre-Service Teachers (PSTs), Suri, Maxine, Jayda, and Kyra (all pseudonyms), considered the news "banning" Dr. Seuss books. While the conversation focused on cancel culture, the PSTs also considered the morality of choosing children's texts to teach phonological awareness. Over the course of an eight-week field placement experience, the PSTs came to value their learning-partner (a four-year-old child of color from a local preschool) in challenging traditional pedagogic practice, developmental norms, and finding child-centered texts and activities.

Until recently, Phonological Awareness (PA) assessments, curriculum and children's literature, have been treated as context-free and value-neutral (Moffatt, Heydon &

Iannacci, 2019; Nell, 2017). PA, the oral language ability to hear and orally manipulate parts of words such as onset-rhyme, syllables, and phonemes (Gillon, 2018), predicts early reading achievements (Jin, Schjolberg, Want, Eadie, Nes, Roysamb, & Tambs, 2020). PA is a focus of four-year-old Pre-Kindergarten (PreK) curriculum where children play with language specifically through children’s literature, songs, chants, and oral word games (Moats, 2020). During literacy learning activities, children’s identities, agency, and power are co-produced (Adair & Colgrove, 2021), and often challenge or reconstruct the regimes of truth (Foucault & Gordon, 1980) circulating in the official curriculum. For example, children of color are specifically challenged when 12.2% of all children’s books published in the US in 2019 have Black/African main characters, (5.3% Latinx, 8.7% Asian and 1% First Nation) (Cooperative Children’s Book Center, 2020). Young Black, Indigenous and People of Color may not see images of themselves in texts or in literacy activities (Souto-Manning, Rabadi-Raol, Robinson, & Perez, 2019b). Even well intentioned teachers embody the norms of the texts when they do not make space for children’s deep engagement with problematic constructs such as how racial identities are taken up (Moffatt, et al., 2019).

Teacher education must prepare early childhood teachers to meet the needs of the students through child-centered exposure to PA, even if the curriculum does not. To address this challenge, the four case studies (Stake, 2010) presented here examine the intersection of a state-endorsed curriculum addressing phonemic awareness and four early childhood PSTs’ construction and implementation of PA lessons during an eight-week field placement, answering the questions:

- (1) What regimes of truth pertaining to cultural norms, values, and classroom expectations are constructed and uncovered by the discourses of phonological awareness in state-endorsed Pre-K curriculum?
- (2) How can field placement experiences help pre-service teachers identify, critique, and co-construct child-centered books and activities for phonological awareness lessons with pre-kindergarteners?

This research examined early childhood curriculum and a teacher education practice for evidence of regimes of truth which serve to marginalize children’s voices, identities, and experiences.

Theoretical Framework: Childism

Childhood studies has defined childhood as temporally bound diverse set of experiences informed by a child’s intersectional identities (age, race, nationality, gender, sex, social class, language, culture, family structure, etc.) in local contexts. Deeply rooted in childhood studies, *childism* calls for children’s voices, experiences, and understandings “to challenge adultist imaginations of children’s own complex diverse points of view” (Wall, 2019, p.7). Childism pushes childhood studies in two ways: (1) it recognizes children as social and political agents of change who challenge societal norms directly and indirectly, and (2) “explore(s) what children’s experiences mean for understanding broader child–adult relations” (Wall, 2019, p. 4).

Children have unique perspectives and may show agency through intentionally fronting identities that serve their own purpose during interactions. These perspectives may be expressed through, “children’s verbal and behavioral gestures as meaningful fragments that are directed toward sociocultural means and goals” (Yoon & Templeton, 2019, p. 61). This study considers three tenets of childism:

- (1) Inclusion: Child perspectives, voice, and experience included in the teaching-learning process (Wall, 2019).

- (2) Intersectional Identities: Children make meaning grounded in their intersectional identities in local contexts.
- (3) Reconstruction of Norms: Child perspectives, voice, and experience should reconstruct normative assumptions, beliefs, and structures which marginalize children (Wall, 2019), including the normative and linear hierarchy of children's development and learning (Tesar, Tong, Gibbons, Arndt, & Sansom, 2019), such as phonological awareness.

These tenets unpack how curriculum, policy and teachers might construct the world with adult values and norms, and/or take up children's voices and agency in policy, curriculum and texts (Tesar, et al., 2019) and during interactions (Yoon & Templeton, 2019).

Literature Review

PA in Pre-K Curriculum

PreK curricula have heavily emphasized PA abilities narrowing content and topics in ways that leave child-voice, agency, and interest behind (Au, 2016). PA can be divided into four levels (word, syllable, onset-rhyme, and phoneme). Each level has a skill/ability subset (Moats, 2020). Research suggests a child's unique home language environment and early schooling experience plays a role in children's varied levels of PA ability (Gillon, 2018). Unfortunately, a study of PA curriculum suggest that pre-packaged curriculum does not match individual learner's phonological nor orthographic development, specifically letter manipulation, and may present too many (more than three) PA skills at a time (Brown, Patrick, Fields & Craig, 2021). Because of the individual nature of PA development, one-size-fits-all curriculum packages may not meet the needs of all students in a group, leaving teachers to fill in the gaps. Therefore, teacher knowledge of PA development must play a key role.

Critical Approaches to Early Literacy Children's Texts

In PreK curriculum, picture books, songs, and poems play a significant role in increasing children's exposure to oral language and PA development. Dr. Seuss stories are frequently used with young children to model rhyming and alliteration. However, curriculum writers may not consider the ways that children's texts are written to "convey particular understandings of the world" (Short, 2017, p. 5) through the author's intentional choices of syntax, lexicon, semantic and visual imagery. Researchers have uncovered troubling stereotypes in children's picture books of nationalities (Martinez-Roldan, 2013), race (Nel, 2017), colonialism (Kohl, 1995), and childhood (Tesar, et al, 2019). Studies of read alouds suggest that young children understand and resist "othering" presented in texts (Adair & Colegrove, 2021). The values, assumptions, and norms of children's books become visible to teachers after reading a text with children.

Child-Centered Teacher Education & Critical PA

From a PA perspective, teacher education is tasked with two goals: (1) increase pre-service teacher's knowledge of PA instruction (in order to bridge the gap in knowledge presented in curriculum) and (2) offer guidance regarding child-centered texts that support PA development. Teacher knowledge of PA directly affects the quality and quantity of oral language development instruction they provide their students (Schachter, Spear, Piasta, Justice & Logan, 2016). However, research indicates that PSTs' lack knowledge of PA includes: letter identification skills, confusion about the order of PA ability acquisition and confusion between phonics and phonemic awareness (Carson & Bayetto, 2018). To address the gaps in the curriculum, teachers must be able

to assess a child’s PA ability and support the child’s acquisition in meaningful ways. To unpack problematic content, child agency, and intent, teachers and researchers might increase “reflexive encounters” (Yoon & Hamilton, 2019, p. 73) with children, in which adults closely listen to and observe children’s verbal and non-verbal voice, intention, and agency in order to parse adult assumptions from children’s values, norms, and intention.

Methodology

To answer the research questions, policy analysis within an instrumental-collective case study methodology (Stake, 1995; 2010) was employed. Case study methodology provides an in-depth and complex description of a phenomena that is not “sufficiently” understood (Stake, 1995, p. 133.) In this case, case study methodology was used to study –phonological awareness—specifically (1) The regimes of truth around phonological awareness present in state endorsed curriculum and (2) PSTs’ ability to identify, critique and co-construct racially and culturally appropriate texts to support phonological awareness during a field placement experience.

Context

The Case Study was bound by two contexts: First, a university-based teacher education program that prepares undergraduate students to work with young children (4- to 8-years) as state certified teachers. The teacher education program resides in a large public university, which serves more than 60,000 undergraduate students, in the following categories designated by the University: 46.3% white, 27.5% Latinx, 10.3% Black, 6.4% Asian, and 4.3% Multiracial. The study took place during a one-semester early literacy course which included an 8-week field placement component. The literacy course covered oral language development from birth-to-age 5 years, and primarily focused on phonological awareness.

Second, the field placement was hosted by The Garden School, a private, community-based, birth-to-age-5-years, preschool, which had one Voluntary Pre-Kindergarten (VPK) classroom with 15 students. The VPK students were referred to as “learning-partners.” All learning-partners identified as Black, African American or mixed race, were ages of 4.4 years and 5.2 years, and qualified for free or reduced lunch. In this state, VPK classes are state-sponsored and free for all 4-year-olds. The state department of education required all state-sponsored VPKs that had been operating for less than three years to use one of 15 curriculum choices. The Garden School adopted Frog Street (Frog Street, 2013) in line with the local public school district.

Participants

After Institutional Review Board approval was granted, four preservice teachers (PST) were purposely selected (Merriam, 2009) using specific criteria: (1) admitted to the early childhood teacher certification program; (2) no previous teaching experience in PreK (to eliminate in-service PreK teacher from the selection), (3) worked consistently with one or two four-year-old PreK students over the 8-week field placement and (4) attended all sessions at The Garden School. Participant demographic information:

Participant	Age, Race, & Social Class	Previous Early Childhood Experience	Learning Partner(s)
Maxine	24 years; White, Middle class	Tutored math; volunteered at a racially mixed low-income elementary school	African American male
Kyra	21 years; White,	Volunteered in an afterschool	Mixed race

	Working class	program in a low-income community program	male
Suri	20 years, non-white Hispanic, middle class	Volunteered, tutored and babysat through her church.	African American male
Jayda	21 years, Black (of Haitian and African American decent), Middle class	Babysat for friends and family	African American race female

Data Collection

PST Data Collection: Researcher field notes, PSTs chosen children’s books, and PSTs documents such as PA assessments, lesson plans and lesson plan reflections (LP Reflections), reflective journals (Reflections), and created materials. All names in participant data and fieldnotes are pseudonyms. The data were collected during the Spring semester of an early literacy course, which is the teacher education program’s first formal field placement class. Field placements met weekly for a 2 hour and 50 minute period for 8 weeks at The Garden School. Due to Covid-19 CDC restrictions, the activities were all conducted in an outside space, masked and socially distanced.

Policy/Document Sampling: Using purposeful sampling, the researcher made selections based on the documents’ “typicality” in order to build a case (Cohen & Manion, 1994, p. 89). The researcher selected Frog Street Pre-K (school year) (Frog Street, 2013). The researcher intentionally sampled Frog Street Unit 5: Stories and Rhymes (Shiller, Ada, Campoy & Mowry, 2017) because (1) Unit 5 was taught at the Garden School during the first month of field placements and (2) *Rhyme* was a previously identified code word. In addition to Unit 5, policy documents such as Standards Alignment (Frog Street, 2015), and Assessment Resource Guide (MacDonald, 2010) were sampled.

Data Analysis

After data were collected and transcribed, the data were coded and analyzed to reveal normative understandings and performative markers of PA. Codes were based on PA research (Gillon, 2018) such as concept of a word, rhyme, syllable, phoneme, etc. Additional codes included phrases that signaled performative markers of PA, such as *listen for a sound*, or *produce a rhyming word*. Then, the data was re-coded for three tenets of childism: Inclusion; Intersectional Identities; Reconstruction of Norms.

For the curriculum data, themes were positioned as discourses (Gee, 2014) that constructed and governed how PA was taught and worked to promote identities and positioned those who engaged in the curriculum activity. These themes produced regimes of truth, norms, and values (Foucault & Gordon, 1980, p. 131). This line of inquiry uncovered the general early literacy “conversation” that organized PreK education and informed the context for the four case studies.

The PSTs data was coded for patterns (Saladana, 2021) using critical discourse analysis (Gee, 2014) to closely examine (1) situated identities, (2) recognized or “performed” identities, (3) roles of tools, systems, and context (specifically focusing on PA, children’s literature and the participant created manipulatives) and (4) characteristic ways of valuing, feeling, interacting, knowing, and believing (Gee, 2014, p. 58) to uncover how the PSTs embodied the tenants of childism. The data were laid out on a time-line, cross-compared, and aligned across cases and with the state-endorsed curriculum analysis. All data were coded and triangulated to contribute to a larger collective case study (Stake, 2010).

Limitations and trustworthiness

The data for this study were limited to four case studies in a local preschool field placement (Stake, 2010), and the researchers' intent was to address the particularization of one phenomenon in a local context. To address subjectivity and the trustworthiness of the data analysis, the data were triangulated within and across cases over time (Stake, 2010), and created a systematic process for coding (Saldana, 2021).

Findings

To answer the research questions, the findings are divided into two sections: Curriculum and Pre-Service Teachers. Using the three tenets of childism (inclusion, intersectional identities and reconstructing norms), the first section considers what regimes of truth are present in the curriculum. The second section considers how working with a learning partner at The Garden School helped PSTs' ability to identify, critique and co-construct racially and culturally appropriate texts to support phonological awareness.

Curriculum Norms and Childism

The developmental norms delineated in the Frog Street Standards Alignments (Frog Street, 2015), Assessment Resource Guide (MacDonald, 2010), and Teacher Guides (Schiller, et al., 2017), suggest a child's PA development is sequential and systematic and does not align with childism views that development and learning may not be linear or hierarchical. Frog Street approaches PA sequentially by focusing on two-four PA abilities per unit. In Unit 5, Stories and Rhymes, the PA standard "Produces a word that rhymes with a given word" (MacDonald, 2010, p.68) was cited 32 in 32 different activities. A secondary PA standard, "Produces a word that begins with the same sound as a given pair of words" (MacDonald, 2010, p.68) was cited four times. The curriculum did present several opportunities for the children to engage in above "normed development." For example, after reading and reviewing *The Little Red Hen*, the curriculum asks the teachers to "Display vocabulary words for hen, dog, cat and goose...Ask children which animal has the longest name" (Schiller, et al., 2017, p. 78). All four words are one syllable, so from a PA perspective, each of these words sounds that same length. However, *goose* (with five letters) is a challenge. The "oo" plus "e" at end work together to make three phonemes /gu:s/. While the introduction of the concept of "silent e" presents an opportunity for those children who may be working high above developmental norms, the curriculum provides no phonics background on the "silent e" rule for teachers.

Curriculum: Missing Children's PA Knowledge

Frog Street's Unit 5 curriculum missed many opportunities to include children's voices, experience, and perspectives in the teaching-learning of PA, and does not align with the childism tenant of inclusion. The curriculum did not mention individual assessment for PA. The curriculum offered teachers closed-questions such as, "Have children identify rhyming words" (Schiller, et al., 2017, p. 34). The curriculum offered few opportunities for children to produce new knowledge. Questions where children had the opportunity to create new knowledge required one-word replies: For example, "have the children name other words that rhyme with wall and fall" (Schiller, et al., 2017, p. 22). A second type of question asked for a closed "yes/no" response with an opportunity to explain: "Reflect: Do you like the color black? Why or why not?" (Schiller, et al., 2017, p. 39), asked during a center where children mixed colors during finger painting. This question was embedded in a day in which the children were exposed to the first, and only, mention of African American narrative tradition in Unit 5.

Curriculum: Missing Visible Identities

The most salient theme that emerged from the data was the lack of racial representation. In Unit 5, PA standards were primarily embedded in 59 books, poems, songs, and chants; none of the texts had photographs. Of the 29 children's texts with drawn illustrations, 13 had white main characters and 16 had animals as main characters. The visual depiction of the 13 texts with White main characters show a slight variation in skin color from peach with slight brown undertone to white with pink undertone. Additionally, the content of the 59 children's texts were primarily Euro-centric poems and stories (including, Paul Bunyan, Pecos Bill, Johnny Appleseed), and included 8 texts from non-European countries with only *Odon, the Giant* (Philippines) as a primary text. There were no Black characters in the children's texts. As childism suggests, children make meaning grounded in their intersectional identities in a local context. For the children at the Garden School, who self-identified as African American, Black or mixed race, the curriculum texts presented no visual images of characters who were black, dark brown or brown.

Curriculum: State endorsed Racism

The lack of diversity in the visual images presented in Unit 5 were problematically accompanied by only text identified as "African American": "Miss Mary Mack." The curriculum states, "Today they will focus on a rhyme that is believed to be African American, "Miss Mary Mack" (Schiller, et al., 2017, p. 34). However, Miss Mary Mack does not represent a Black character, "Miss Mary Mack/All dressed in black" (Schiller, et al., 2017, p. 180). The curriculum instructs teachers to have the children isolate and identify the /m/ sound in Miss Mary Mack (alliteration) as well as rhyming patterns (mack-black). Near the bottom of the page, the curriculum states, "Tell children that this song is thought to have originated with slave children who often played the clapping game in cotton fields" (Schiller, et al., 2017, p. 34). To the left is a vocabulary box with "Fleece, silver, fifty cents, slave, cotton field" (Schiller, et al., 2017, p. 34).

The curriculum problematically uses "the happy slave" metanarrative. The "happy slave" narrative is the systemic portrayal of enslaved people as joyous recipients in the institution of slavery" (Dugan, 2019, p. 65). Children are given no opportunity to discuss enslaved people. No consideration was given to children's unique understanding of history. Young children conceptualize present (now) and a long time ago (past). However, *long time ago* to young children varies and can mean when their baby brother was born or when dinosaurs roamed the earth. No guidance was offered to teachers regarding teaching enslavement or pre-Civil War history. Gaunt (2006) described Miss Mary Mack, a rhyming game-song, as "the most common hand-clapping game in the English-speaking world, and the most familiar in the black repertoire;" however, with unclear origins, "the first lines of Mary Mack are based on a riddle for "coffin" that has origins in English oral practices" (p. 63).

The curriculum positioned the children as recipients, not creators or co-producers, of PA knowledge. While the curriculum challenged some notions of developmental norms, it did not offer teacher's background knowledge to support learners. Frog Street positioned young Black children as "other" without agency through the exclusion of Black characters (Souto-Manning, Falk, Lopez, Cruz, Bradt, Cardwell, McGowan, Perez, Rabadi-Raol, & Rollins, 2019a). Finally, the state endorsed curriculum puts forth a regime of truth that is historically inaccurate: the view of "happy enslaved children," and offers no opportunity for children (or teachers) to reconstruct this norm.

Preservice Teachers and Childism

While the PSTs were not asked to teach the Frog Street Curriculum, the state-endorsed curriculum set the larger context for the PSTs' interactions with their learning-partners. This section examines how the PSTs' approached PA lesson plan writing during their experience at The Garden School with their learning-partners.

Pre-service Teacher: Inclusion of Children's Voice

The PSTs viewed child-voice as nuanced. Young children demonstrate their interests, values, and norms not only verbally, but also in non-verbal ways. *Distraction*, *focus*, and *boredom* became markers of non-verbal voice in data. Maxine reflected on her learning-partner, "The distractions were high, but S managed to stay focused, only looking up a handful of times...His enthusiasm was contagious" (Reflection, February 2021). Kyra wrote, "My child is easily distracted. Something is either too boring or too exciting for him to focus" (Lesson Plan (LP) Reflection, April 2021). In addition to voice, the data showed the PSTs accounted for child agency and intent. Suri reflected on her learning-partner's agency when her goal (writing his name) intersected with *his* goal (writing his brother's names), "He wanted to write his name on the paper of all of his brothers with each letter having a different color. This was the first time he wrote his name in the correct direction for me and I did not even do any directing for him to do so" (LP Reflection, March 2021). Jayda also wrote about her learning-partner's intent, "She often answered questions by saying what I said probably because she was just trying to appease me" (Reflection, February 2021). Jayda acknowledged her learning-partner's intent in performing the role of student. The PSTs listened to and observed the children's verbal and non-verbal interactions which allowed the PSTs insight into the children's wants, needs as well as intent and agency.

Pre-service Teacher: Critique Materials for Intersectional Identities and Representation

The PSTs also closely listened to their learning-partners to evaluate the effectiveness of book selection and activities. Suri considered how her child's attention and focus altered when she brought a book on a topic her learning-partner voiced interest in, "He really loved talking about Batman so during the next visit I'll make sure to have a new Batman book to share" (Reflection, February 2021). However, Suri noticed that many of the superhero books had white characters and she wrote, "I want the super heroes to look like him. Where are all Black superheroes?" (Reflection, March 2021). Suri spent several weeks searching for new books. She wrote, "I found "Even Superheroes Make Mistakes" (Becker, 2018). The superheroes are people of color" (Reflection, March 2021). She later reflected, "With great power comes great responsibility...Kids need to see themselves in their heroes" (LP Reflection, April 2021).

Listening to and including children's interests was not always successful. Jayda struggled to find "the right book" for her learning-partner. Jayda reflected on her limited success with a text, from a story by Meadows and Glenn (2020), that she chose for the "strong, Black female" main character, "the Simone Biles story was so long, she became uninterested. I could not quite reel her back in...producing rhymes confused her and she would say 'but I don't know how to read'" (Reflection, March 2021). A month later, Jayda found a match for her learning-partner, "Princess Truly I am a Super Girl" (Greenawalt, 2019) is about a (Black) princess who uses her superpowers to help her friends. We used our super listening powers to help each other find rhymes in our book" (LP Reflection, April 2021). Jayda realized that racial representation was not enough when the words, sentences, and language did not engage her learning-partner.

Pre-service Teacher: Critique and Reconstruction of Developmental Norms

While standards, curriculum, and research present PA development as a linear, systematic development for young children, the PSTs noticed their learning-partner's inconsistent PA abilities. Kyra states, "Last week he was able to play a rhyming game with me, but this week he couldn't tell me one rhyme. What does that mean?" She continued, "This (assessment) is messy. Is he distracted? Did he eat breakfast?" (Reflection, March 2021). Maxine also noticed inconsistencies when she compared her child to the PA levels, "He can rhyme. He can tell me the first sound of a word, but he can't count words (in a sentence). As noted in the paragraph above, Jayda puzzled about her learning-partner's contextual ability to make rhymes, which disappeared when the Simon Biles book was read, "...She did it (producing rhyming words) before" (Reflection, March 2021). While Suri did not write about her learning-partner's inconsistent PA levels, fieldnotes indicate that she asked several questions during class, including, "Can kids make some rhymes but not make others?" (Fieldnotes, March, 2021). Aligned with childism, the PSTs pushed back on the normative, linear PA development present in curriculum and standards by noting that their learning-partner's language development was uneven and contextual.

Pre-service Teacher: Reconstruct Pedagogic Practice

The PSTs were asked to assess PA abilities using play-based games and then create lessons. In line with childism, fieldnotes (April 2021) indicated the researcher's surprise at the PSTs' willingness to allow their learning-partners to be empowered in their own learning. Instead of following the prescribed lesson plan and assessment templates, the PSTs reflected on what worked for their learning-partner and changed their pedagogy, materials or engagement style to meet the needs of the child. Maxine developed open-ended activities for her child to create his own knowledge, such as drawing words he wanted, "I think this process of coming up with words with the same initial sound and then visually seeing the pictures...Once he drew a picture, he would look at it and show me with a big smile on his face" (LP Reflection, April 2021). In Maxine's final lesson plan, a rhyme-matching game, she wrote about the result of creating racially affirming materials, "S loves running and I searched for a picture of a boy who looks like him. He got it right away. He yelled 'that's me! run!' and he took off" (LP Reflection, April 2021). Maxine reflected, "Why wouldn't I choose something he loves? With phonemic awareness we just need to play with sounds. I can do that with anything" (Fieldnotes, April 2021). Unlike Maxine, Kyra struggled with listening to her learning-partner at the beginning of their time together, "I read Dr. Seuss books with him...but he was distracted when I read 'Green Eggs.' Maybe he is bored" (Reflection, February 2021). This initial experience, coupled with the PST group discussion on banning Dr. Seuss, lead Kyra to reconsider her text choices, "It seemed like N was interested in the stories but not necessarily the books themselves. I am going to have to rethink the books for him" (LP Reflection, April 2021). Kyra turned her lesson planning to PA games, rather than books, stating, "this is what works for N. Who am I to argue? He's really getting the rhyming now" (LP Reflection, April 2021).

In the final week of the field placement, Jayda walked away from her written lesson plan to "make it work" for her learning-partner. After trying to read a story and play a PA game, Jayda wrote, "I moved on. She likes drawing. She drew a bat and a hat then she drew a cat with a crown because I pointed out that was on her shirt" (LP Reflection, April 2021). Using the environment, the drawings on her learning-partner's shirt, Jayda was able to support her learning-partner's PA. Like Jayda, Suri also relied on the environment and learning-partner's interest to support PA development. Suri noted that her partner did not want to listen to her read a book, but had other interests in the garden. Suri wrote, "He loved playing with the 'treasure' in the dirt at the mud garden. When he found a rock, I asked him if the word 'clock' rhymed. He said no so we went over more words that rhyme with rock and why they rhyme" (LP Reflection, April 2021). Suri recognized that traditional approaches, such as reading a rhyming book, did

not support her learning-partner's growth. The PSTs demonstrated their PA knowledge by moving beyond the traditional read-aloud and/or rhyming game lesson plans to drawing on environment and child interests.

The PSTs approach to learning and development closely mirrored childism. After listening to their learning-partners, the PSTs moved beyond teaching PA using traditional pedagogic strategies and included materials that reflected not only their learning-partner's intersectional identities, but also their interests. The PSTs questioned the linear PA development presented in the curriculum after they listening to their learning-partners. Finally, the PSTs were willing to make careful note of children's behavior and voice to alter their lesson plans in order to fit the children's PA needs and interests.

Discussion & Conclusion

Early childhood teacher education is tasked with two significant goals regarding PA: increase PSTs' knowledge of PA and offer guidance on material selection, including curriculum that present troubling views of child development. Scholars have long argued that pre-packaged behaviorally-specified curriculum are used to control (female) teachers, who are deemed not to have the content knowledge to meet the standards or to meet assessment outcomes expectations (Apple, 1983; Au, 2016). Frog Street, and other pre-packaged curriculum, leave no space for children to negotiate meanings or co-construct their identity. The didactic language of the curriculum tells teachers what to say, and leaves no opportunity for child or teacher questioning of the regimes of truth the curriculum presents, such as an inaccurate and unnecessary framing of a children's rhyme with "happy" enslaved children. Curriculum developers present at best ignorance and at worst intentionally reproducing systems of racial oppression for the consumers (young children) of their product.

In this study, the PSTs valued their learning-partners as a guide to finding child-centered texts, challenging developmental norms, and reconstructing traditional pedagogic practice, such as reading a book aloud. The learning-partners' verbal and non-verbal interactions taught the PSTs that texts, content and learning are co-constructed, locally produced and contextually informed (Yoon & Templeton, 2019). PSTs also learned what research has already shown: "Students of color need to see themselves in the texts" (Souto-Manning, et al, 2019a, p. 259). Souto-Manning, et al (2019a) called for early childhood teachers and teacher educators to reshape and reconsider how early childhood teacher education can be made more answerable "to children, families, and communities of color, whose voices, values, perspectives and knowledges have too often been missing" (p. 252). Perhaps one way to do that is to give PSTs more experience working with young children of color. Creating a field placement experience where PSTs are encouraged to develop "an innate curiosity that attends to children's questions" (Yoon & Templeton, 2019, p.56). As childism would suggest, curriculum writers, early childhood teacher educators and researchers should also listen for the ways that children challenge the social norms and values. We all must move to recognize the ways children are agents of change.

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