Journal of Educational Studies and Multidisciplinary Approaches

2757-8747

2021

VOLUME 1
NUMBER 2

JESMA

Editors

Editor-in-Chief

Dr. Mevlüt AYDOĞMUŞ
Necmettin Erbakan University

Konya, Turkey

maydogmus@erbakan.edu.tr

Editors:

Prof. Dr. Michael F. Shaughnessy
Eastern New Mexico University

United States

michael.Shaughnessy@enmu.edu

Assistant Professor Dr. Toni Denese Sturdivant
Texas A&M University-Commerce

United States

toni.sturdivant@tamuc.edu

Associated Professor Dr. Daniel D. Liou
Arizona State University

United States

dliou@asu.edu

Assistant Prof. Dr. Daniel Gutiérrez-Ujaque
University of Lleida

Spain

daniel.gutierrez@udl.cat

Editorial Board

Assistant Professor Dr. Davíd G. Martínez, University of South Carolina

United States

Associate Prof. Dr. Mohamed Ibrahim, Arkansas Tech University

United States

Dr. Samaa Haniya, Parkland College, United States

Dr. Julie J. Padilla, United States

Dr. Sabra Brock, Touro College, United States

Dr. Liudmyla Garnyk Liudmyla Garnyk, National Technical University "Kharkiv polytechnic institute", Ukraine

Dr. Sara Movahedazarhouligh, University of North Carolina Wilmington, United States

Professor Dr. Abdeslam Badre, Mohammed V University in Rabat - Morocco, Morocco

Amanda Lacey, University of Louisville, United States

Assistant Professor Dr. Toni Denese Sturdivant, Texas A&M University-Commerce, United States

Prof. Dr. Emilia Alaverdov, Associate Professor, Faculty of Law and International Relations, Georgian Technical University

Dr. Amber J. Godwin, Sam Houston State University, United States

Assoc. Prof. Dr. David D. Timony, Delaware Valley University, United States

Professor Marco Paulo Ferreira, Instituto Superior de Educação e Ciências, ISEC Lisboa, Portugal, Portugal

Dr Hanadi Ahmad Saleh, United Arab Emirates

Dr. Tara Gleason, United States

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Gary Padgett, University of North Alabama, United States

Assistant Professor Dr. Abraham Cazares-Cervantes, Oregon State University, United States

Dr. Fatena Fuad Abuamer, Kuwait University, Kuwait

Dr. Abdelhak Hammoudi, Teacher Training College El Eulma Setif , Algeria, Algeria

Assistant Professor Dr. Emmanuel Fokides, University of the Aegean, Greece

Dr. Ceceilia Parnther, St. John’s University, United States

Dr. Suzie Henning, Eastern Washington University, United States

Dr. Hussain Ahmed Liton, English Language Institute Jazan University, Bangladesh

Professor Dr. Nasser Mansour, Professor of Science Education, University of Exeter, UK, United Kingdom

Assistant Professor Dr. Amir Kalan, McGill University, Canada

Dr. Mark Patrick Ryan, California State University Northridge National University, United States

Prof. Dr. Ferdinand Jacobus Potgieter, North-West University (Potchefstroom campus), South Africa

Assistant Professor Dr. Colin G. Pennington, Tarleton State University, United States

Mr Karl Luke, Cardiff University, United Kingdom

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Bob Spires, Graduate Education University of Richmond, United States

Dr Areej MA ElSayary, Zayed University, United Arab Emirates

Dr. Nataliia Rzhevska, SHEI “Pereiaslav-Khmelnytskyi Hryhorii Skovoroda State Pedagogical University“, Ukraine

Dr Noorunnisa Khan, Iqra University, Karachi, Pakistan

Dr. Nirbhay Kumar Mishra, GLA University, Mathura, India

Reviewers for this Issue

Dr. Islam AlRefaey AlHag Abdou Kafrel-Sheikh University,
Egypt

Dr. Amber J. Godwin Sam Houston State University

United States

Dr. Fatena Abuamer Kuwait University

Kuwait

Karl Luke Cardiff University

United Kingdom

Dr. Rebekah Humphreys, University of Wales

United Kingdom

Dr. David Timony, Delaware Valley University

United States

Dr Areej MA ElSayary, Zayed University, United Arab
Emirates

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Bob Spires, Graduate Education University
of Richmond, United States

Dr Noorunnisa Khan, Iqra University, Karachi, Pakistan

Table of Contents

Complying and Resisting: A Qualitative Metasynthesis of the Race and Gender Discourses found in the Play of Young Children

Toni Denese Sturdivant

84

Middle Grade Students' Perception of Their Connectedness to Nature: Application and Analysis of a Talking Circle Model

Gary Padgett, Kaylen Bishop

105

The Power and Possibilities for Young Viewers of Reality Television when Educators and Researchers Partner Together for Critical Media Literacy

Danielle Ligocki, Sylvia Sturgis

120

An Interview with Jennifer Jordan and Amy Broemmel-Mastering the Art of Feedback for Pre-Service Teachers

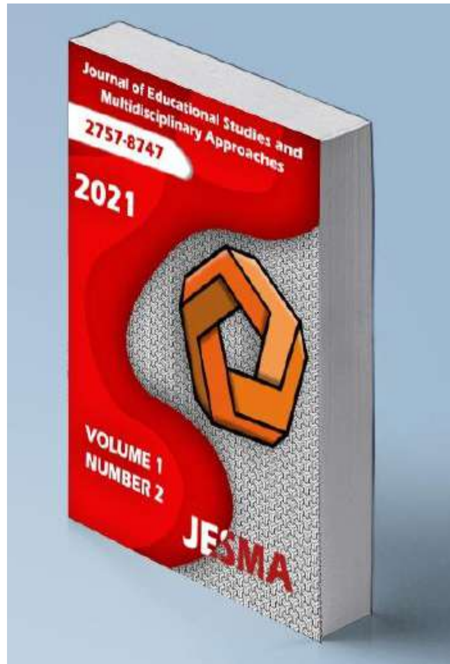
Michael F. Shaughnessy

135

Contemporary challenges in German schools – The potential of the implementation of inclusive pedagogical approaches

Michael Pfeifer, Sarah Wieckert

142



Journal of Educational Studies and Multidisciplinary Approaches (JESMA)

www.jesma.net

Complying and Resisting: A Qualitative Metasynthesis of the Race and Gender Discourses found in the Play of Young Children

Toni Denese Sturdivant[1]

To cite this article:

Sturdivant, T.D. (2021). Complying and Resisting: A Qualitative Metasynthesis of the Race and Gender Discourses found in the Play of Young Children. *Journal of Educational Studies and Multidisciplinary Approaches (JESMA), Vol 1* (2), Page 84-Page 104. http://doi.org/10.51383/jesma.2021.10

Journal of Educational Studies and Multidisciplinary Approaches(JESMA) is an international scientific, high quality open access, peer viewed scholarly journal provides a comprehensive range of unique online-only journal submission services to academics, researchers, advanced doctoral students and other professionals in their field. This journal publishes original research papers, theory-based empirical papers, review papers, case studies, conference reports, book reviews, essay and relevant reports twice a year (March and October) in online versions.

[1] Texas A&M University-Commerce, USA. toni.sturdivant@tamuc.edu

Journal of Educational Studies and Multidisciplinary Approaches (JESMA)
Volume 1, Issue 2 Year 2021 ISSN:2757-8747

Complying and Resisting: A Qualitative Metasynthesis of the Race and Gender Discourses found in the Play of Young Children

Toni Sturdivant https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5507-8927

ARTICLE INFORMATION
Original Research Paper
Doi:http://doi.org/10.51383/jesma.2021.10
Received 23 February 2021
Accepted 18 March 2021

ABSTRACT
The largest early childhood organization in the U.S. has acknowledged work to be done to improve the education of young children in terms of diversity and equity. The purpose of this qualitative metasynthesis is to synthesize the findings of various high-quality studies dealing with issues of race and gender and the play of young children as a way to better understand what messages young children are exposed to, are accepting and are rejecting. The two research questions that guided the study are, given extant research, (a) How is hegemonic intertextuality used in the discourse of children in early childhood classrooms? (b) What hegemonic discourses are present in the speech and actions of young children in early childhood classrooms? Findings show that young children in extant research confirmed hegemonic messages more than any of the other intertextual responses. Implications for researchers, practitioners, and policymakers are discussed.

Keywords: race, gender, play, early childhood

Copyright: © 2021 (Sturdivant) This is an open access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License, which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited.

Introduction

The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) is a powerful early childhood organization. with nearly 7,000 NAEYC accredited centers in the U.S., Europe, and Asia giving the organization a great deal of influence on the field of early childhood education (NAEYC). NAEYC (2019) states that high-quality programs are programs that include diversity within the physical environment of the room and consider the cultural backgrounds of the students in the class. Additionally, the organization published an anti-bias curriculum that provides early childhood teachers with examples of activities, conversations, and information about diversity issues from race and ethnicity to gender and differing abilities. (Derman-Sparks & Olsen Edwards, 2010). This acknowledgment of there being bias in our society sheds light on the responsibility of early childhood educators to teach children about biases. While anti-bias curricula is readily available, there is still a lack of its use in early childhood classrooms, even by well meaning teachers (Sturdivant, 2019). This critical issue may not be getting through to practitioners as past research shows that many adults feel uncomfortable talking to young children about these topics (MacNevin & Berman, 2017; Park, 2011). Unfortunately, children are exposed to our society's ills whether these topics are explicitly discussed with them or not. A lack of adult discussion can lead to young children attempting to make sense of inequitable power relations on their own (Doucet & Adair, 2013) using their understandings of the world. Research shows that children internalize and reproduce negative racial messages in environments where adults are silent about diversity (Sturdivant & Alanis, 2020) and operate without such biases in classroom environments in which educators regularly discuss diversity (Sturdivant, 2020).

In order to get a better idea of how young children are attempting to understand our society and its power relations, several researchers have examined the play of young children to see what themes of gender (Madrid, 2013; Wohlwend, 2012b, 2012a), sexuality (Gansen, 2017; Mayeza, 2018), and race (Earick, 2010; MacNevin & Berman, 2017) are present. While each study of this kind provides excellent information about a specific setting, a particular child, or even a school district, it is difficult to examine some of the ways in which children around the world are making sense of hegemonic ideas. The purpose of this qualitative metasynthesis is to examine the findings of various high-quality studies dealing with issues of race and gender and the play of young children as a way to understand better what messages young children are exposed to, what messages they are accepting and which ones they reject. To date, no systematic literature reviews have been completed. With more information about how children are understanding societal discourse, early childhood educators, policymakers, and teacher educators can be more effective in the ways they approach anti-bias education with young children. Early childhood educators can be more informed about topics that children may discuss, thus preparing them to intervene. Policymakers can create standards and expectations that align with the current social knowledge held by children, and teacher educators can provide more informed examples and experiences to their pre-service teachers. This paper will examine the types of discourse present in the play of young children, in existing research, and how the children comply with or resist the discourse.

Definitions

Early childhood spans birth through age eight. However, for the purposes of this qualitative metasynthesis, young children are being defined as children between the ages of two and a half and six. The researcher selected this age range deliberately because it is before children have entered formal schooling and yet are old enough to talk and engage in social play.

Play can be defined as a child-initiated learning experience (Bates, 2002). NAEYC's position statement on developmentally appropriate practice posits that play is "a universal innate, and essential human activity that children engage in for pleasure, enjoyment, and recreation" (NAEYC, 2020, p.37). Because this report only includes data taken from early childhood classrooms, the researcher used an operational definition of play that includes both child-directed and teacher-directed experiences that are designed for pleasure and recreation such as playing in centers or outdoor free play. The data in this

article includes sociodramatic play situations (indoors and outdoors), enjoyable situations occurring in the writing center, and during interactive read-alouds.

Methods and Materials

In order to integrate the research findings of multiple studies involving young children's play and hegemony, the researcher used a qualitative metasynthesis approach (Sandelowski & Barroso, 2007). Qualitative metasynthesis involves researchers summarizing the findings of different studies, collating them, and then integrating the themes found across the studies (Brown & Lan, 2014, p. 25). The goal of a qualitative metasynthesis is to come to a new understanding or to gain new knowledge about a given topic (Hannes, 2011; Sandelowski & Barroso, 2007).

The present study involved analyzing qualitative studies that explored how young children handled racial and gendered discourse during center or school-based play, using a lens of intertextuality. Because the initial studies were conducted in various countries the name of the settings differ, but all served young children in buildings that were not homes. Blackledge (2012) defines intertextuality as discourse that, in some way, responds to extant discourse. The two research questions that guided the study are given extant research (a) How is hegemonic intertextuality used in the discourse of children in early childhood classrooms? (b) What hegemonic discourses are present in the speech and actions of young children in early childhood classrooms?

Data Collection

In conducting a research synthesis, it is paramount to collect the highest number of relevant studies as possible (Sandelowski & Barroso, 2007). In order to systematically collect articles, the researcher followed a multiple-step process. After determining the topic of young children and hegemonic discourse, the researcher brainstormed relevant keywords and topics. This brainstorming process included reading articles on the topic to help develop a list of keywords. After the list was completed, the researcher met with a university research librarian to develop the algorithm to search various databases and to determine which database(s) to use. We searched ERIC using EBSCOhost, using the following search: early childhood OR childcare OR kindergarten OR pre-kindergarten OR young children OR preschool children AND (feminism OR gender issues OR gender discrimination OR sexual identity OR sex stereotypes OR gender discourses OR gender differences) OR (race OR race issues OR racial stereotypes OR culture OR divers* OR multicultural OR critical race theory) AND play. We also limited the search to only peer-reviewed studies in academic journals published from 2008 until 2019. This search generated 586 articles.

The author then read the titles and abstracts of the 586 articles to do a preliminary elimination based on the previously determined exclusion criteria. The studies needed to have taken place in a center-based setting. Any study that took place in a home, lab or some other setting was excluded. At least some of the participants needed to be children between the ages of two and six. For example some studies had adult and child participants, while others simply focused on adults. The latter would not be included. The studies had to be empirical research, rather than reviews and discussions of other's work and the study needed to address the research questions regarding hegemonic discourse in some way, such as through race, or gender but not necessarily both. After this exclusion process, 31 articles remained. The author read these 31 studies in detail using the same exclusion criteria as above and was further restricted by adding the researcher's ability to access the reports online given the current subscriptions of the university's library. After this step, 13 articles remained.

Sampling

The 13 studies represent a wide range of participants, including parents, teachers, and children. Settings included child care centers, kindergartens, and nurseries. Various forms of play were represented, including spontaneous sociodramatic play, art, and guided play. For the purposes of this

study, only the data that pertained to the child participants were used. Table 1 provides a summary of the participants and settings included in the synthesis.

Table 1
Participants. Settings and Data Collection Methods

	Sample		Setting	Data Collection Methods
	n	age		
Wohlwend (2012)	21	5 and 6 y/o	Kindergarten, USA	Field notes, audio. video
Wohlwend (2012b)	21	5 and 6 y/o	Kindergarten, USA	video, children's drawings, audio
Mayeza (2018)	40	6 and 7 y/o	Primary School, South Africa	field notes, interview transcripts
Rosen (2017)	80	2 through 4 y/o	Nursery, UK	notes, field notes, and video
MacNevin & Berman (2017)	12	2 through 5 y/o	Preschool/Kinder, Canada	interviews, observations, Toronto Early learning document
Earick (2010)	4	6 y/o	3 Schools, USA	Teacher logs
Wohlwend (2009)	21	5 and 6 y/o	Kindergarten, USA	video, field notes, observations, and participation
Madrid (2013)	14	4 y/o	Preschool, USA	field notes, video, audio, formal and informal adult interviews
Huuki & Renold (2016)	4	6 y/o	Preschool, Finland	Video
Jesuvadian & Wright (2011)	24	4 to 6 y/o	Childcare center, Singapore	semi-structured interviews with persona dolls
Lee, Ramsey, & Sweeney (2008)	13	5 to 6 y/o	Kindergarten, USA	Observations and field notes
Gansen (2017)	116	3 to 5 y/o	3 preschools, USA	Observations and field notes
Earles (2017)	114	4 to 6y/o	10 preschools, USA	observations

Note. y/o= year olds.

Data Analysis

The researcher analyzed the data, both deductively and inductively. The deductive analysis consisted of Imported Concept (Sandelowski & Barroso, 2007), in which ideas drawn from the

discussion of power and discourse found in Blackledge (2012) were used to group and describe the discussions and actions of the participants. For example, Blackledge (2012) draws from Bakhtin and Holquist (1981) work on discourse in literature by stating "discourse bears the traces of the voices of others, is shaped by them, responds to them, contradicts them or confirms them, in one way or another evaluates them" (p. 619). The researcher adopted the concepts of responding, contradicting, or confirming into codes that were used to categorize the types of speech and behaviors of the children in each study. For example, if a child said something that confirmed hegemonic masculinity (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005) such as "girls are stupid," the researcher would code the statement as confirming. If a student responded to this child by saying, "it doesn't matter if you're a girl or a boy, everyone can be smart," the researcher would code this as contradicting. Statements that neither confirmed nor contradicted a prevailing social attitude, but mentioned them were coded as responding. An example of a statement like this is when a boy was playing with a doll, and a fellow student asked him if he liked being a lady (Wohlwend, 2012b).

Following this step, the author conducted an inductive analysis which enacted reciprocal translation in order to integrate the findings. Reciprocal translation is "constant comparisons of intra-study conceptual syntheses" (Sandelowski & Barraso, 2007, p.204). These comparisons helped to isolate the various broad discourses that were present in the children's play across the studies. This analysis was two-tiered. The first tier included only listing the hegemonic discourses found within each piece of the text that had already been marked as including intertextuality. For example, in Jesuvadian & Wright (2011), a child declared that a doll could make more friends if she were White. The researcher initially labeled this as "whiteness as pretty." After all of the discourses found within each study had been labeled, the researcher then looked at the specific labels and developed broader codes that captured multiple labels. The doll statement was eventually coded under lightness as preferable.

The studies were coded using a spreadsheet app on a project management website, in which studies were first labeled as including examples of discourse that confirmed, responded to, or contradicted (Blackledge, 2012) hegemony and then a preliminary title of the discourse was given. After all of the studies had undergone the first round of coding, the researcher looked at the preliminary codes (discourses round one) and created broader secondary codes to group the studies. The studies were then sorted by the final codes (final discourses). Table 2 shows the studies and their codes.

Table 2
Metasynthesis Studies and Codes

Article	Intertextuality	Discourses Round 1	Final Discourses
Wohlwend (2012)	R, Contr, C	Gender as static	GS
Wohlwend (2012b)	R, Contr	Gender as static	GS
Mayeza (2018)	R, Contr, C	masculinity/ femininity binary; heteronormativity	GS, HetNorm
Rosen (2017)	C	Blackness as criminal	DB
MacNevin & Berman (2017)	C	Whiteness as preferable; darkness as criminal	DB, LP
Earick (2010)	R, Contr, C	Blackness as bad; whiteness as pretty	DB, LP
Wohlwend (2009)	Contr	Femininity as weak	EF
Madrid (2013)	R, Contr, C	Femininity as niceness, weakness	EF

Huuki & Renold (2016)	C	Masculinity as power; femininity as weakness	EF, ToxicMasc
Jesuvadian & Wright (2011)	C	Whiteness as pretty	LP
Lee, Ramsey, & Sweeney (2008)	C, Contra	Light skin desirable	LP
Gansen (2017)	R, Contr, C	heteronormativity	HetNorm, ToxicMasc
Earles (2017)	C, R	heteronormativity, masculinity as meanness, femininity as beauty, gender as static	HetNorm, GS, EF, ToxicMasc,

Note. R= responding; Contr= contradicting; C= confirming; GS= gender static; HetNorm= heteronormativity; DB= darkness as bad; LP= lightness as preferable; ToxicMas= toxic masculinity; EF= exaggerated femininity

Themes

After analyzing all of the data deductively and inductively, developing broad codes and then sorting the data by codes, the researcher grouped the codes into four major themes that answered the research question: Children Policing Other Children, Children as Resistors, Passive Compliance and Innocently Questioning. The findings section below includes a detailed description and examples of each of the four themes.

Findings

The findings are based on the two research questions: given extant research (a) How is hegemonic intertextuality used in the discourse of children in early childhood classrooms? (b) What hegemonic discourses are present in the speech and actions of young children in early childhood classrooms? Children contradicted, responded to, and confirmed several hegemonic discourses (Blackledge, 2012). The most common form of intertextuality was confirming. That is, of all the child dialogue reported in the thirteen studies, children were more likely to confirm hegemonic discourse than to contradict or simply respond. Contradicting hegemonic discourses was more frequent than merely responding. Those discourses found were toxic masculinity, heteronormativity, gender as static, exaggerated femininity, lightness as preferable, and darkness as bad. These discourses emerged within four main themes: Children Policing Other Children, Passive Compliance, Children as Resistors, and Innocently Questioning.

Children Policing Other Children

There were times within three of the 13 articles, (Gansen, 2017; Mayeza, 2018; K. E. Wohlwend, 2012a) in which children policed the behaviors of other children. The researcher coded instances in which children verbally expressed disapproval of another child's actions or words as children policing other children. For instance, Wohlwend (2012a) detailed boys enrolled in a US kindergarten class who enjoyed playing with dolls. At one point, Zach was playing with a visually male doll but was pretending it was a mom. Gavin, another student, expressed his disapproval.

Gavin: That's not a girl; it's a boy.
Zach: But it can be a girl or a boy
Gavin: I call it a boy (Wohlwend, 2012a, p. 17)

This example details a milder form of policing, in which Gavin simply made it clear that he was not in agreement with Zach about the ability of visually "male" dolls to be either boys or girls. However, there were times reported when children were much more forceful in their policing. For example, Gansen (2017) described the following wedding dramatic play episode in a preschool in the United States:

Bailey: Where's my wedding girl, Marie?

David: You wanna marry Marie?
Bailey: Yeah
David: Girls, can't marry girls! Eww!
Baily: I'm waiting on my wedding girl.
Emmet: Girls can't marry girls!
Bailey: Girls can marry girls!
Emmett: [whispering] homosexual [then laughed]. (p. 266)

In this excerpt, two separate four-year-old boys, David and Emmett, attempted to police Bailey's pretend play of same-sex marriage. David explicitly showed disgust with the idea by saying "eww," and Emmett insulted Bailey by whispering "homosexual" and laughing. This example makes it clear that children in this preschool class not only understood heteronormativity but also had the vocabulary to describe the situation. This use of what some might think would be adult vocabulary to describe this topic was not isolated. Mayeza (2018) described an early childhood classroom in South Africa where a boy stated that boys that play with girl toys, in this case, a dollhouse, "will become gay" (p. 595) after his classmate attempted to show the researcher the features of the dollhouse in their classroom.

Passive Compliance

Instances where children policed other children, provided explicit examples of the idea of confirming discourse (Blackledge, 2012) but more often than not, children confirmed societal discourse through passive compliance. Eight of the thirteen articles, (Earick, 2010; Earles, 2017; Gansen, 2017; Huuki & Renold, 2016; Jesuvadian & Wright, 2011; MacNevin & Berman, 2017; Mayeza, 2018; Rosen, 2017), provided examples of passive compliance. One example is in Jesuvadian and Wright (2011), a study conducted in a Singapore childcare center. One researcher mentioned to the children that an Indian doll did not have any friends and asked the children if they could help her make friends. After some conversation about her traditional clothing, a student mentioned that her face was "all brown and dark brown" (p. 282). An Indian student responded to this statement by saying she thinks "she should be White also" (p. 282). These two preschool children contended that this doll did not have any friends simply because she had dark skin and, if she were White, she would have friends. This excerpt shows children confirming the lightness as preferable discourse, but they were not doing this by policing another child but by simply feeling (or knowing) that that is the way things are.

Rosen (2017) provides another example from a study in a nursery in the UK, reporting the following exchange:

Gerome (White child): Peter's a baddie.
Rosen: Is he?
Gerome: And I'm a goodie.
Rosen: [nodded.] Why is Peter a baddie?
Gerome: Because he's going to jail. (p. 186).

Rosen (2017) stated that the only children ever referred to as baddies were the Black children in the classroom. This matter-of-fact statement of this Black child being a "baddie" and that he was destined for jail provides an example of a child passively complying with the idea of darkness being bad. This child, Gerome, accepted this discourse as fact.

Children also complied with discourse relating to femininity and masculinity. Huuki and Renold (2016) described an outdoor play scene in a preschool in Finland; three boys and one girl engaged in a game they coined as crushing. According to Huuki and Renold (2016), the boys would pile on top of the girl and forcibly kiss her. At one point, the researchers asked one of the boys why the girl was always on the bottom, and he replied, "because she is so wonderful" (Huuki & Renold, 2016, p. 757). This idea that this little girl is "wonderful" confirms a discourse of exaggerated femininity where a girl or woman is regarded as being nice and pretty and subservient to maleness. Also, this idea that the boys had the right to pile on top of this girl and forcibly kiss her confirms discourse related to toxic masculinity. The children reacted in this way, not to resist someone or something or even to police anyone, but simply because they see it as the way things are.

Children as Resistors

Just as some children policed the behaviors of their peers and others acting in ways that showed an ingrained understanding of discourse, some children actively resisted the promotion of negative discourse. This resistance was found in the dialogue between children, children and researchers, and children and teachers. Eight of the 13 studies (Earick, 2010; Gansen, 2017; Lee, Ramsey, & Sweeney, 2008; Madrid, 2013; Mayeza, 2018; K. Wohlwend, 2009; K. E. Wohlwend, 2012a, 2012b) provided instances in which children resisted hegemony. In the excerpt above from Gansen (2017), Bailey resisted the policing of her boy peers by not backing down from their insistence that girls cannot marry girls. Earick (2010) shows an example of a child in a US kindergarten expressing resistance to his teacher:

> I am sad, and the sadness makes me not want to play or work with anyone; look at our classroom; nothing here looks like me! All those books in our library and the only pictures of kids like me are bad, are Black Knights! (p. 135)

This statement was spoken by a Black child that had recently stopped playing with his best friend, a White boy, because the White child insisted that he play the Black Knight during their knight sociodramatic play since he was Black. This example shows that this five-year-old boy had internalized the "darkness as bad" discourse but also noticed that people like him were not positively represented in the classroom. In addition, that suggestion that he play the Black Knight because he was Black provides evidence that young children are aware of race and ethnicity and make decisions based on it.

Children also resisted negative racial discourse in more indirect ways. Lee, Ramsey, and Sweeney (2008) detailed an experience in a US preschool classroom where students were introduced to flesh-toned crayons. A four-year-old named Silas told another friend that he was going to use a specific shade of brown. His friend replied, "It looks like cocoa...beautiful" (p. 71). Although this was purely a positive example, the researcher felt that acknowledging the beauty of a deep brown skin color is an act of resistance, because the prevailing societal view is that lightness is preferred.

Innocently Questioning

There were instances in two separate reports of the same ethnography where a child needed clarification for another classmate's actions. These questions were not meant to be forms of policing but were genuine curiosities expressed that arose due to a child resisting the discourse of gender being static. The first example occurred in Wohlwend (2012b) when a kindergarten boy was playing with a Disney princess doll, and another boy walked over and asked: "Do you like to be the lady?" (p. 602). Though this was just a question, it shows that the child was actively trying to reconcile his prior knowledge and what was presently happening by asking a question. Thus, it shows an awareness of gender expectations and cross-gender play. Wohlwend (2012a) describes a similar situation where two boys were playing with girl dolls, and a boy came over and asked: "Are you guys, girls?" (p. 13). Again, this genuine question shows an awareness that something different was occurring than what the child would expect. Anticipating particular gendered behavior comes from an awareness of discourse related to gender and play.

Discussion

Across thirteen studies, which occurred in various parts of the world, researchers consistently reported that young children have an awareness of hegemonic discourse. This awareness was conveyed through contradicting, confirming, and responding (Blackledge, 2012) to various discourse such as toxic masculinity, darkness as bad, exaggerated feminism, and heteronormativity. Children grappled with this discourse by policing other children, resisting, asking questions, and complying with the discourse through their words and actions. Children were more likely to confirm hegemonic discourse, and this was overwhelmingly done through merely complying. This passive resistance or the seamless integration of hegemonic discourse within children's play and speech shows the salience of these ideas.

In most instances, children were not trying to prove a point or correct anyone but had already internalized these notions at their young age. Furthermore, some children that actively resisted were made fun of and laughed at by their peers. This policing of other children for not complying with expectations shows the power hierarchy found within such discourse and the children's understanding of power. The policing shows an awareness that children were not merely acting strangely but that they were "wrong" and that their behaviors needed to be corrected. In contrast, the presence of the innocent questioning theme shows the opportunity for learning that can occur with these young children. While some children seem to have wholly internalized messages, others are clearly still trying to figure things out. This state of trying to make sense of the world provides an ideal environment for intervention through anti-bias curriculums. Early childhood educators have an opportunity to challenge hegemonic messages with which children are grappling and to step in to mitigate potential damage done by hegemonic comments and actions occurring between peers.

Limitations and Recommendations

This meta-synthesis was completed by one researcher, limited to a single database, and answered two specific questions. It is possible that a search across multiple databases and that included other methods of article retrieval could have uncovered more information about children's discourse. However, with 586 results generated within a single database, the researcher and the research librarian that was consulted found it reasonable to limit the search to ERIC, the most relevant database given the topic.

It is also possible that other studies that did not focus on discourse, play, race, or gender, may have had findings that answered the research question. However, the study had to be limited by specific parameters for plausibility. Limiting the search to peer-reviewed work could have limited the data set, but this is commonly done for quality purposes (Brown & Lan, 2014).

Implications

This meta-synthesis uncovered clear examples of young children's awareness of hegemonic discourse. Future research could seek to determine adult responses to such discourse being reproduced in play. Additionally, empirical data of specific educational practices that reduce the production of such discourse would help to influence best practices for practitioners. Finally, quantitative researchers could create a treatment consisting of activities related to gender and race and compare the use of discourse around the topics with a control group to help to verify the adult's role in the process of handling hegemonic messaging.

Early childhood policymakers should first examine existing policies to determine if hegemony is addressed. Next policymakers should use existing research to determine if current policies adequately address current findings. Finally, if necessary, new policies should be created to align with existing research. For example, if current policies simply address the physical environments and calls for the inclusion of diverse materials, but do not mention conversions or lessons around diversity, as current research offers as important as well.

Early childhood practitioners should not shy away from talking to their students about issues such as race or gender. Research supports that these are two issue that young children are interested in, make decisions based on and talk to each other about. Much work has already been done to help early childhood educators implement anti-bias work in their classroom. Early childhood practitioners should seek out this work and use it to improve their professional practice. Additionally, early childhood practitioners should acknowledge that not all play is innocent and should play a more active role in children's play to help to mitigate some of the effects of children reproducing hegemonic messages.

Conclusion

This meta-synthesis provides evidence of the necessity of early childhood educators to intervene and play an active role in the ways that children internalize messages, by providing counter-discourse and teaching children to resist hegemonic discourse, such as what is championed in anti-bias

curricula. Having evidence that throughout various early childhood settings, there is persistent engagement with hegemonic discourse by young children implies a need to explicitly address what is going on in the world with preschoolers. Despite adult feelings that children are unaware of the world, this meta-synthesis shows that children are very much aware of what is going on and have been accepting ideas as they are presented more often than resisting or questioning them.

Acknowledgements or Notes:

I would like to express my very great appreciation to Rachel Cannady for her help in creating the search criteria for this qualitative metasynthesis.

References

Bakhtin, M. M., & Holquist, M. (1981). *The dialogic imagination: Four essays* (Vol. no. 1). Austin: University of Texas Press.

Bates, J. W. (2002). Play, 309–312.

Blackledge, A. (2012). Discourse and power. In J. P. Gee & M. Handford (Eds.), *The Routledge Handbook of Discourse Analysis*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Brown, C. P., & Lan, Y.-C. (2014). A Qualitative Metasynthesis of How Early Educators in International Contexts Address Cultural Matters That Contrast With Developmentally Appropriate Practices. *Early Education and Development*, *26*(1), 1–24. https://doi.org/10.1080/10409289.2014.934176

Connell, R. W., & Messerschmidt, J. W. (2005). Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept. *Gender & Society*, *19*(6), 829–859. https://doi.org/10.1177/0891243205278639

Derman-Sparks, L., & Olsen Edwards, J. (2010). *Anti-bias education for young children and ourselves*. Washington, DC: National Association for the Education of Young Children.

Doucet, F., & Adair, J. K. (2013). Preschool through primary grades addressing race and inequity in the classroom. *Young Children*, *68*(5), 88–97.

Earick, M. E. (2010). The power of play and language on early childhood racial identity in three U.S. schools. *Diaspora, Indigenous, and Minority Education*, *4*(2), 131–145. https://doi.org/10.108 0/155956 91003635955

Earles, J. (2017). Reading gender: a feminist, queer approach to children's literature and children's discursive agency. *Gender and Education*, *29*(3), 369–388. https://doi.org/10.1080/09540253.2016.1156062

Gansen, H. M. (2017). Reproducing (and Disrupting) Heteronormativity: Gendered Sexual Socialization in Preschool Classrooms. *Sociology of Education*, *90*(3), 255–272. https://doi.org/10.1177 /00380407 17720981

Hannes, K. L., Craig. (2011). *Synthesizing Qualitative Research : Choosing the Right Approach*. Somerset: Wiley. https://doi.org/10.1002/9781119959847

Huuki, T., & Renold, E. (2016). Crush: mapping historical, material and affective force relations in young children's hetero-sexual playground play. *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*, *37*(5), 754–769. https://doi.org/10.1080/01596306.2015.1075730

Jesuvadian, M. K., & Wright, S. (2011). Doll tales: foregrounding children's voices in research. *Early Child Development and Care*, *181*(3), 277–285. https://doi.org/10.1080/03004430903293172

Lee, R., Ramsey, P. G., & Sweeney, B. (2008). Engaging Young Children in Activities and Conversations about Race and Social Class. *YC Young Children*, *63*(6), 68–76.

MacNevin, M., & Berman, R. (2017). The Black baby doll doesn't fit the disconnect between early childhood diversity policy, early childhood educator practice, and children's play. *Early Child Development and Care*, *187*(5–6), 827–839.

Madrid, S. (2013). Playing Aggression: The Social Construction of the 'Sassy Girl' in a Peer Culture Play Routine. *Contemporary Issues in Early Childhood*, *14*(3), 241–254. https://doi.org/10.2304/ci ec.2 013.14.3.241

Mayeza, E. (2018). 'It's not right for boys to play with dolls': young children constructing and policing gender during 'free play' in a South African classroom. *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*, *39*(4), 590–602. https://doi.org/10.1080/01596306.2017.1290584

NAEYC.(n.d.) Search NAEYC accredited programs. Retrieved March 10, 2021, from https://families.naeyc.org/search_programs/results/0/0/0/10/0/0/0/us/0

NAEYC. (2019). Advancing Equity in Early Childhood Education Position Statement. https://www.naeyc.org/resources/position-statements/equity

NAEYC. (2020). Developmentally Appropriate Practice Position Statement. https:// www. naeyc.org/sites/default/files/globally-shared/downloads/PDFs/resources/position-stateme nts/dap-statement_0.pdf

Park, C. C. (2011). Young children making sense of racial and ethnic differences: A sociocultural approach. *American Educational Research Journal*, *48*(2), 387–420. https://doi.org/10.3102/0002831210382889

Rosen, R. (2017). Between play and the quotidian: inscriptions of monstrous characters on the racialised bodies of children. *Race Ethnicity and Education*, *20*(2), 178–191. https://doi.org/10.1080 /136133 24.2015. 1121218

Sandelowski, M., & Barroso, J. (2007). *Handbook for synthesizing qualitative research*. New York: Springer Pub. Co.

Sturdivant, T. D. & Alanis, I. (2019). Teaching through culture. Journal of Multicultural Education, 13(3), 203-214. doi:http://dx.doi.org.libweb.lib. utsa.edu/10.1108/JME-03-201 9-0019

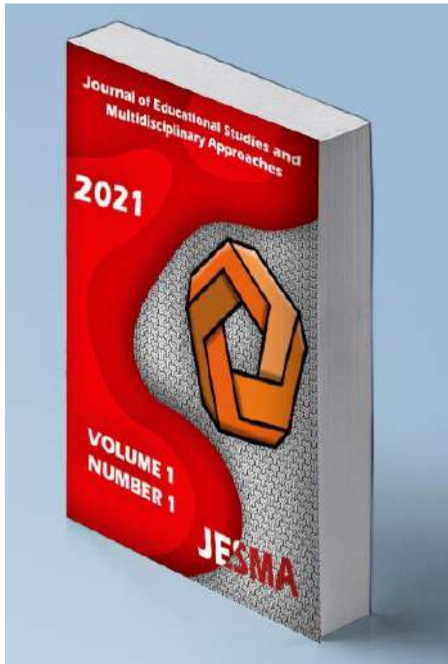
Sturdivant, T. D. (2020). Sociodramatic play with racially diverse dolls in a child development center. Dimensions of Early Childhood, 48(3) 10-14

Sturdivant, T.D. & Alanis, I. (2020) I'm gonna cook my baby in a pot: Young Black girls'racial preferences and play behaviors. Early Childhood Education Journal. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10643-020-01095-9

Wohlwend, K. (2009). Damsels in Discourse: Girls Consuming and Producing Identity Texts Through Disney Princess Play. *Reading Research Quarterly*, *44*(1), 57–83. https://doi.org/10.1598/RRQ.44.1.3

Wohlwend, K. E. (2012a). 'Are You Guys Girls?': Boys, Identity Texts, and Disney Princess Play. *Journal of Early Childhood Literacy*, *12*(1), 3–23. https://doi.org/10.1177/1468798411416787

Wohlwend, K. E. (2012b). The boys who would be princesses: playing with gender identity intertexts in Disney Princess transmedia. *Gender and Education*, *24*(6), 593–610. https://doi.org/10.1080 /09540253.2012. 674495



Journal of Educational Studies and Multidisciplinary Approaches (JESMA)

www.jesma.net

Middle Grade Students' Perception of Their Connectedness to Nature: Application and Analysis of a Talking Circle Model

Gary Padgett, Ph.D.[1]
Kaylen Bishop[2]

To cite this article:

Padgett, G. & Bishop K. (2021). Middle Grade Students' Perception of Their Connectedness to Nature: Application and Analysis of a Talking Circle Model. *Journal of Educational Studies and Multidisciplinary Approaches (JESMA), 1* (2), 105-119. https://doi.org/10.51383/jesma.2021.12

Journal of Educational Studies and Multidisciplinary Approaches(JESMA) is an international scientific, high quality open access, peer viewed scholarly journal provides a comprehensive range of unique online-only journal submission services to academics, researchers, advanced doctoral students and other professionals in their field. This journal publishes original research papers, theory-based empirical papers, review papers, case studies, conference reports, book reviews, essay and relevant reports twice a year (March and October) in online versions.

[1] University of North Alabama, USA, gpadgett@una.edu

[2] Phillips High School,USA, kaylenb27@gmail.com

Journal of Educational Studies and Multidisciplinary Approaches (JESMA)

Volume 1, Issue 2 Year 2021 ISSN:2757-8747

Middle Grade Students' Perception of Their Connectedness to Nature: Application and Analysis of a Talking Circle Model

Gary Padgett Ph.D https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2376-3943

Kaylen Bishop https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2376-3943

ARTICLE INFORMATION

Original Research Paper
Doi:https://doi.org/10.51383/jesma.2021.12
Received 05 March 2021
Accepted 31 March 2021

ABSTRACT (Times New Roman typeface and 10 points)

The purpose of this study was to explore how middle grades students percived their connectedness to nature. This study identified a middle grades population in Southern Appalachia and analyzed how the percieved nature and their role in it. The exploratory question that guided this study was, under what conditions can a talking circle model help illuminate how middle grade students perceive their connectedness to nature? The methodolgy used is a case study (Janesick, 2004; Rubin & Rubin, 2005). The four competencies, as developed by the Center for Ecoliteracy (2009), are Head, Hand, Heart, and Spirit and were used in the organizatioin, coding, and analysis of the data. This study found that throughout the school year the students developed awareness of the role in the environement and what they can do to encourage sustainable practices.

Keywords: Ecopedagogy, Ecoliteracy, Middle Grades, Talking Circle, Connectedness

Copyright: © 2021 (Padgett&Bishop) This is an open access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License, which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited.

Introduction

Rationale and Purpose of the Study

STEM programs are an important topic within the field of education research. An argument can be made that STEM has always dominated this field, and it is generally accepted that the importance of STEM was emphasized in the United States after the launch of the Russian satellite Sputnik. Since that time, science, technology, engineering, and math have been protected subject areas in regards to funding and testing. The Cold War encouraged the development of the field, but other critical areas can benefit from the STEM approach.

The environmental crisis facing the United States is another area where the STEM approach can assist with designing a curriculum that emphasis the real-world applications of science, technology, engineering, and math. While a global scale environmental crisis is too broad to cover, students can learn to think globally while acting locally. In order to this, student can work on urban gardening techniques that include raised bed gardens and composting with worms.

Throughout the United States, children are experiencing Nature Deficit Disorder. This study incorporates aspects of STEAM (science, technology, engineering, art, and math) curriculum, working with raised beds and worms for agricultural purposes, and combating Nature Deficit Disorder to create and test a curriculum that allows participants to identify the crisis and develop real world solutions.

Research Questions

The following exploratory questions guided this study:

1. How do middle grade students perceive their connectedness to nature?
2. Will exposure to an ecoliteracy program influence middle grade students' perception of their connectedness to nature?
3. Under what conditions can a talking circle model help illuminate how middle grade students perceive their connectedness to nature?

Definition of Terms

1. STEM: stands for Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math.
2. STEAM: stands for Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Math. The addition of the arts to STEM came around in the late 2000s, as educators worried about the overemphasis on science and technology in the classroom, to the detriment of traditional liberal arts education.
3. Talking circle: To create a safe, non-judgmental place to discuss an issue or react to a speaker that allows the opportunity for each person to speak without interruption.
4. Middle grades: 4th grade through 8th grade
5. Ecoliteracy: an understanding of the principles of organization of ecosystems and their potential application to understanding how to build a sustainable human society
6. Ecopedagogy: a culturally relevant form of knowledge grounded in normative concepts such as sustainability, planetarity (i.e. identifying as an earthling) and biophilia (i.e. love of all life).

Significance of the Study

In the sixty-three years since the Soviet satellite Sputnik launched, school curriculums have focused on STEM and STEAM curriculums. While this curriculum included environmental study and observation, it has not included instruction that exposes students to, and grounds them in, the natural world. The curricular focus on STEM and STEAM was instituted without student feedback or input.

This study is useful in that it examines a STEM and STEAM curriculum from a unique viewpoint. Rather than utilizing a curriculum that potentially removes students from their environment, this study purposefully made use of a curriculum that sought to ground students in the natural world. This study

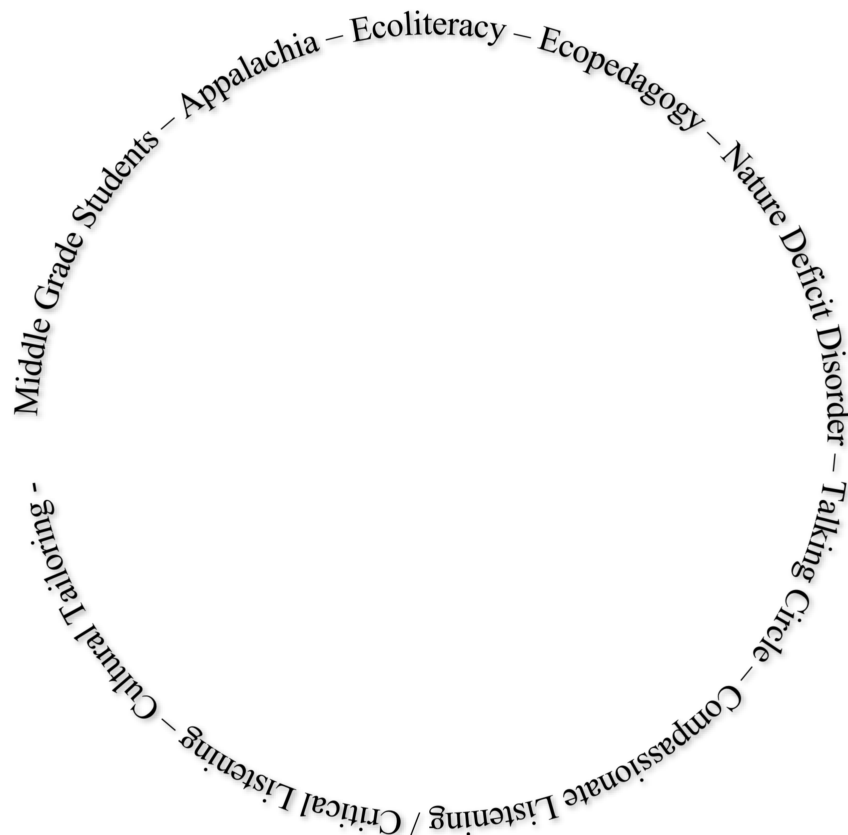
also sought to examine student perceptions, in their words. By making use of a talking circle, this study allowed students to not only examine their perceptions of their connectedness to nature, but to do so in their own words and their own terms.

Review of Related Literature

Introduction

In order to understand where one is going, one must first understand not only where one is, but also where one has been. The following visual schema was created to illustrate the relevant literature preceding and guiding this study. The visual schema corresponds to the talking circle method used to gather data from the middle grade students. All points on the circle are important, and all points on the circle contribute to the whole.

Figure 1
Review of Literature Schema



Middle Grade Students

The authors of this article identify as student centered educators, and while a circle has no beginning or end, this story, as presented by the authors, will always begin and end with the students. This study was conducted utilizing middle grade students. The middle grades are defined as the 4th through 8th grades. These are a challenging time for many students, and “Educators now widely recognize the middle grade years, from the ages of 10 to 15, as a special, critical period of adolescent development.” (Duncan, 2011, para 6) This study focuses on the 4th grade, the earliest stage of the middle grades. Students’ performance during their 4th grade year can serve as a predictor for their

performance and/or completion of high school. (Kieffer, Marinell, Stephenson, 2011) As an identified population with educational challenges that have the potential to impact their future educational status, fourth grade students were chosen for this study.

Appalachia

This study is conducted in, situated in, and concerns students from, Appalachia. According to the Appalachian Regional Commission, Appalachia "is a 205,000-square-mile region that follows the spine of the Appalachian Mountains from southern New York to northern Mississippi. It includes all of West Virginia and parts of 12 other states: Alabama, Georgia, Kentucky, Maryland, Mississippi, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Tennessee, and Virginia."(ARC, 2020, para 1) Appalachia covers too large of an area for the purposes of this study. This study focuses on an area of Southern Appalachia in Northwest Alabama. This area, a mix of urban and rural, contains sections identified as food deserts. (USDA, 2011) Food deserts are defined as "an urban area in which it is difficult to buy affordable or good-quality fresh food." (Dictionary.com, 2020) Situating STEAM based agricultural products within food deserts of Southern Appalachia allows this study to take on a special significance for the authors of this study and the student participants.

Ecoliteracy

Ecological literacy, also known as ecoliteracy, is the foundation from which this study's STEAM based agricultural projects began. Ecoliteracy is "the ability to understand the natural systems that make life on earth possible." (Graham, 2018, para 5) The term for this understanding, ecoliteracy, was first used in the 1990s by David W. Orr and Fritjof Capra. According to the Center for Ecoliteracy, children need to learn five fundamental facts of life:

- "Matter cycles continually through the web of life.
- Most of the energy driving the ecological cycles flows from the sun.
- Diversity assures resilience.
- One species' waste is another species' food.
- Life did not take over the planet by combat but by networking"

(Stone, 2012, para 2)

This is further developed by Goleman, Bennett, and Barlow (2012) who developed five practices to help educators to develop ecoliteracy in their students. These five practices are as follows:

1. Develop empathy for all forms of life
2. Embrace sustainability as a community practice
3. Make the invisible visible
4. Anticipate unintended consequences
5. Understand how nature sustains life

Ecoliteracy cannot, however, be fully developed by just following the above mentioned steps. "Ecoliteracy is developed through knowledge and experiences. It cannot be taught in an environmental science class alone. Instead, it needs to be integrated into all areas of curriculum and students need to be provided with opportunities to experience the natural world first hand." (Schimek, 2016, pp. 34-35) A hands on approach, utilizing a multidisciplinary curriculum, was employed by study. This multidisciplinary approach provided students with an opportunity to explore social justice standards as well as science, math, history, and English language arts standards.

Ecopedagogy

When combining a multidisciplinary STEAM curriculum with social justice standards, the result is a curricular transformation from ecoliteracy to ecopedagogy. Ecopedagogy can be defined as transformative teaching rooted "in critical theories and Freirean popular education movements in Latin American…in which educators dialectically problem-pose the politics of socio-environmental connections through local, global, and planetary lenses." (Misiaszek, 2018, pp. 1) This philosophy was explored in 2018 when Padgett (2018) wrote, "With this in mind, a sustainable education system must care not only for the person, but also for that which surrounds the person". (Padgett, 2018, pp. 6) That

which surrounds the person, within the context of this study, is Southern Appalachia, a specific subregion of the United States. According to Kahn (2010), "these frameworks…are centered in, or are otherwise directed from relatively privileged institutional domains based in North America." Kahn goes on to write that the "ecopedagogy movement, by contrast, has coalesced largely within Latin America over the last two decades. Due in part to its being situated in the global south, the movement has thus provided focus and political action on the ways in which environmental degradation results from fundamental sociocultural, political, and economic inequalities." (Kahn, 2010, pp. 19) While not located in the "global south", Southern Appalachia faces many of the same issues of environmental degradation and sociocultural, political, and economic inequalities.

One of the originators of ecopedaogy, Freire, writes, "It is urgent that we assume the duty of fighting for the fundamental ethical principles, like respect for the life of human beings, the life of other animals, the life of birds, the life of rivers and forests. I do not believe in love between men and women, between human beings, if we are not able to love the world." (Freire, 2004) Situating this within the context of middle grades curriculum, this study seeks to analyze students' perceptions of, and connectedness to, nature.

Nature Deficit Disorder

The idea that children are spending more times indoors and less time outside is not a new concept. However, it was not until 2005 that this idea caught national attention. Richard Louv, an author journalist, interviewed parents and children over a ten year period about their experiences in nature. His findings led him to develop the concept of Nature Deficit Disorder. Louve writes, "I coined the phrase to serve as a description of the human costs of alienation from nature and it is not meant to be a medical diagnosis (although perhaps it should be), but as a way to talk about an urgent problem that many of us knew was growing, but had no language to describe it. The term caught on, and is now a rallying cry for an international movement to connect children to rest of nature. Since then, this New Nature Movement has broadened to include adults and whole communities." (Louv, 2011, para 2) For the purposes of this study, Nature Deficit Disorder guided the analysis of students' perceptions of their connectedness to nature.

Talking Circle

Talking circles are one of the traditions that originated with the indigenous people of what is now called North America. Within this tradition, "the process was used to ensure that all leaders in the tribal council were heard, and that those who were speaking were not interrupted." (Currie; Kaminski, 2009, para 2) For the purposes of this study, this format was used with 4th grade students but for the same purpose – to make sure everyone was heard and that those who were speaking were not interrupted (Campbell; Padgett, 2020). Researchers (Lowe,2006; Lowe 2012 Baldwin et al, 2020) have continuously demonstrated the effectiveness of utilizing talking circles when working with students. Organizations such as White Bison, Inc. and Wellbriety Training Institute have also demonstrated the effectiveness of talking circles in addressing community issues. While traditional talking circles are used within indigenous communities, they have also been adapted for use outside of indigenous communities and with non-indigenous or multicultural/multiracial audiences. Prison systems within the United States and Canada have made use of talking circles, also known as peacemaking circles or restorative justice circles, in their work with inmates of all races and ethnicities (Nowotny, Carrara, 2018; Pollack, 2016; Crocker, 2015; Thomas, Bilger, Wilson, Draine, 2019). Teachers have adopted these models for classroom management (edutopia, 2014) and listening strategies. This study draws on each of these models to work with the participating middle grades students.

Compassionate Listening/Critical Listening

In order to create an effective as possible talking circle, compassionate listening/critical listening was utilized. Compassionate listening is defined as "a quality of listening which creates a safe container for people to be free to express themselves and to go to the level of their deep concerns. It simply and profoundly means empathizing with the feelings and condition of people who have been affected by events and circumstances, sometimes of their own doing, and sometimes out of their control. It has everything to do with caring for the state of another human being."(Hwoschinsky, 2001, para 10)

When working with middle grades students, this was an important concept that helped to build rapport amongst the students and between the researchers and the students.

Cultural Tailoring

One issue with conducting a study such as this is cultural appropriateness and cultural appropriation. Careful attention was given to the topic of utilizing a talking circle model. The talking circle model was first developed by, and for, the use of indigenous communities. While the population of this study did include some students with indigenous ancestry, it should not be considered an indigenous community. The other issue was to create a talking circle model that was culturally appropriate and meaningful to the students that would participate in it. Researchers such as Lowe (2020) and Patchel (2012) utilize a format of creating a culturally appropriate models called the Circular Model of Cultural Tailoring. This study utilizes this strategy to create a culturally appropriate and meaningful talking circle model for middle grades students in Southern Appalachia.

Research Design and Methodology

Introduction

The research design for this study was a case study based on the three qualities of exemplary case studies as defined by Janesick (2004):

1. The case study must be significant to the researcher
2. The case study must be complete
3. The case study must be composed in an engaging manner

This study also follows Janesick's format of answering the questions who, why, how, and where. Janesick (2004) explains this by writing:

Who: Explain who the individual is and what the immediate setting looks like.
Why: Describe why you chose that particular student, why you are doing the study, and what changes you propose making at the conclusion of the study.
How: Discuss how and where you are going to conduct the study, what questions you will use, and how you are going to develop some assumptions that you will interpret.
Where: Describe the political context of the classroom, the school, the family, and the immediate community. (Janesick, 2004, pp. 36-37)

Utilizing Janesick's approach allowed the researchers to conduct the case study in accordance with established qualitative methods. In addition to using an established methodology, interview transcripts were provided for member checks and used triangulation during the coding process to assure credibility and validity.

Who

The first of Janesick's (2004) questions in regards to a case study is, Who? This study was conducted using a purpose sample. A purposeful sample was utilized in order to work with a population that met the following criteria:

1. Middle grades students
2. Located in Southern Appalachia
3. Teacher willingness to implement STEAM based curriculum

In order to meet this criteria, a fourth grade class was selected to be the participant population. This population was selected because the study was focused on middle grades students, which are students in grades 4th-8th. The selected fourth grade class is part of a laboratory school, providing access to the researchers and a faculty that was receptive to implementing new ideas. The laboratory school is also located in Southern Appalachia, fulfilling all of the requirements set forth in the criteria.

Why

Every researcher should answer the second question posed by Janesick (2004), which is Why? The authors look to their own lives to answer this question. Janesick (2004) goes on to write that "the case study must be significant to the researcher." This study is of particular personal significance to the authors. Both authors reside in the area in which the study is conducted and have personal connections to students attending the selected laboratory school. The authors have cultural and ancestral ties to Southern Appalachia, providing a personal reason for wanting to conduct research in, and tell the story of, a region not often written about.

Where

Janesick (2004), calls on the researcher conducting a case study to answer the question, Where? This study was conducted in a sub region of Appalachia. This region, known as Southern Appalachia, is of not only personal significance to the authors, but is also of interest to the United States as a whole. In 2010, Southern Appalachia's population was 7,798,620 people. This indicates an increase of over 16 percent. During the same census year, 25 percent of Southern Appalachia's population was under the age of 18. (Pollard, 2011) This study's population is situated squarely within a significantly growing population within a region known for its poverty rates, 15.8% compared to the national average of 14.1%, and unemployment, 4.2% compared to the national average of 3.9%. (ARC, 2019) Southern Appalachia has a growing population, a significant portion of which is under the age of 18, and has higher rates of poverty and unemployment when compared to the national average. These numbers help to highlight the significance of conducting research into how STEAM education can influence middle grades students' perception of their connectedness to nature.

How

In order to gather data and analyze it for this case study, the authors answered Janesick's (2004) question, How? This study utilized a talking circle model created for this project but modeled on that of Lowe (2006, 2012, 2020), White Bison, Inc., and the Wellbriety Training Institute. Talking circles for this studied were culturally tailored for the participant population and conducted four times over the 2019-2020 school year.

Data Collection

Creation of the Talking Circle

The circle allowed participants/students to explore outwardly and inwardly without any barriers or fears of being ridiculed. The way to do this was to chart students' progress made through the Cherokee Talking Circle Method created by Dr. John Lowe. This model focuses on "two cultural themes: (a) being true to oneself and (b) being connected (Lowe, 2006). Thus, the creation of the talking circle began to draw a correlation between being connected to nature is being true to oneself. Using these two cultural themes as a backbone, students were scaffolded into thinking about their own individual role in nature through Lowe's conceptualization of self-reliance of these two cultural themes. Lowe's self-reliance definition is applied to students' role and identity in nature: "(a) being responsible, (b) being disciplined, and (c) being confident" (Lowe, 2006). As a result, goals were created for students to not only see nature, but for students to see nature, connect to it, and see their role in the circle that is nature.

Implementation of the Talking Circle

After hands-on experiences with nature, students were asked to participate in a Connectedness to Nature Survey. From the students' responses, the Talking Circle Facilitator (TCF) examined the responses in order to tailor questions to foster growth and connectedness to nature during the Talking Circle sessions. With the goals of the circle in mind, a path was developed to guide students by using the Connectedness to Nature Survey questions and creating others for students to relate and connect. Outlined below is each Talking Circle Session with goals, questions, and student takeaways from the session. Circle One is an introduction to the Talking Circle Model along with gauging students'

impression about nature and observer of nature. Circle Two focuses on the student's role as nature. Circle Three charts the growth of students' responses of their connectedness to nature. Circle Four reinforces the students' connectedness to nature by observing their big and small roles in nature, and is a call to arms for action to help preserve and protect nature.

Circle #1

There were two major goals of the first talking circle with students. The first goal was to scaffold the students into the protocols and procedures of the Talking Circle Method. The circle was built on trust and community. As a result, the circle began with the introduction of the TCF, and it highlighted the TCF's love of nature and favorite things to do in nature to try to build community and trust with the TCF and the students, who knew each other well. The circle began with a series of questions created by the TCF to help foster contemplative responses based on the Connectedness to Nature Survey and begin building a foundation to observe our part in nature. The foundation questions for students are as follows:

1. What is your favorite hobby in nature?
2. What do you appreciate the most about the nature around you?
3. Do you feel connected to nature?
4. Why should we appreciate nature?

All questions were tailored for students to explore their role in nature and listen to others' roles in nature.

Circle #2

In the first circle, students looked at nature as something to enjoy, and they began to look inward at how they are a part of nature. The major goal of Talking Circle 2 was for students to realize that their role or existence in nature can not only help nature, but it can destroy nature too. Students were briefly reminded of the procedures of the circle before beginning the circle. The Talking Circle 2 questions were as follows:

1. How can we appreciate nature? What activities can we do to appreciate it?
2. How can our actions and your actions affect nature? How do you affect it negatively and positively?
3. In our everyday living, water is important to us. We use it throughout the day. How can we make sure we are not using too much water?

These questions built on how and why students should appreciate nature, and it gave them an avenue to explore their role as humans and nature.

Circle #3

Talking Circle 3 looked at the specifics of the build up of The Talking Circle Method. Since students had been scaffolded into thinking about nature and the cyclic patterns of nature, this talking circle dove deeper into what they learned to build up to the discussions. The first main goal of Talking Circle 3 was to examine an aspect of nature that is small and seemingly unimportant, but this aspect plays a vital role in the students' daily lives and in nature as a whole. The second goal was to chart their progress on becoming more aware and connected to nature since the beginning of the process. The Talking Circle 3 questions were created to chart their progress:

1. Tell me one thing about what you have learned about the worms since you have been working with them.
2. What do worms do? What is their role in nature? Are they good for nature? Are they bad for nature? Are they just kind of there? Why are they important to your garden?
3. Let's imagine that something has happened, some epidemic or something has happened and all the worms in the word are gone. What would the world look like? What would that do for us? How would our food source look?
4. Have you found that you're being more aware of nature? Are you noticing things about nature? If so, what are you noticing?

Circle #4

Talking Circle 4 was the last circle conducted. As a result, the Talking Circle 4 goals were to examine the types of roles people have as a part of nature, how big and small nature is, and how powerful nature is. This circle compares and contrasts how human beings can seem like they have a big role in nature, but compared to massive storms, what can a human do? The goal of this Talking Circle is to see the permanent changes humans can make on nature, but also explores how small humans can be when compared to nature. The questions formulated to achieve Talking Circle 4 questions were:

1. Have you ever thought about how powerful nature is? In what way have you even seen power in nature?
2. How big can nature be? How small can nature be?
3. Let's think about our role in nature as a human and part of nature. Is it big? Is it small? Do we have one in the middle? What role do you play as a human being?

By implementing this model, students were able to grasp the importance of connectedness to nature because they are a part of nature, whether they realized it or not. As a result, students ended the talking circle process with a heightened sense of their role in nature and how to connect to it by observing it from other perspectives. The process pointed students to more sustainable habits from growing crops, reducing their waste of water and recyclable products, and understanding their small and big role in nature as they grow with the nature around them.

IRB Protocols

The steps of the IRB protocols began with obtaining consent from the school site and superintendent to work with their student body. After permission was granted, parental consent was obtained for students to participate in the study along with permission to be audio recorded for the student. After parental consent, student consent was obtained. Student consent was the most important in making sure that the students felt safe and protected. Some students did not choose to participate, and they were allowed to leave the classroom.

Coding and Analysis

The audio recordings of the talking circles were transcribed verbatim and provided to the talking circle facilitator to review and check for accuracy. The transcripts were then coded and analyzed using the five steps identified by Rubin and Rubin (2005) and illustrated in Table 1:

Table 1. *Rubin & Rubin Steps toward Data Analysis*

Step	Action	Purpose
1	Recognize	Find the concepts, themes, events, and topical markers in the interviews.
2	Examine	Clarify what is meant by specific concepts and themes and synthesize different events in order to put together my understanding of the overall narrative. This leads to elaboration.
3	Code	Figure out a brief label to designate each concept/ theme and mark the text where they are found. This allows for the easy retrieval and examination of the data units.
4	Sort	Group all of the data units with the same label together. Then, look for how the concept was seen overall and examine for nuances.
5	Synthesize	Put the concepts and themes together and show how they answer my research questions and produce broader implications.

(Rubin & Rubin, 2005, pp. 206-208).

Each talking circle transcript analyzed for common themes by both authors. The four competencies developed by the Center for Ecoliteracy (Stone, Zenobia, 2009) guided the development of themes. The four competencies are:

1. Head (learning to know)
2. Heart (learning to be)
3. Hands (learning to do)
4. Spirit (learning to live together)

The common themes were then organized in order to create a narrative according to the individual researcher. The researchers then coded their lists, assigning labels and names to each theme. The researchers then organized the themes into larger groups based on the four competencies developed by the Center for Ecoliteracy (Stone, Zenobia, 2009). The individual researches then came together to synthesize the two lists into one list of common themes. This list was then utilized to answer the research questions put forth by the researchers.

Assumptions of the Researchers

The authors acknowledge their own assumptions and biases. As residents with cultural and ancestral ties to the region of the study, the authors acknowledge their personal connection to area and students being studied. As student centered educators, the authors acknowledge that a curriculum that encourages students to connect what they have learned to the world of their lived experiences is of vital importance. The authors also enjoy being active and participating in outdoor activities, and acknowledge that as a motivation for this study.

Presentation of Data

Introduction

The authors utilized the format developed by Rubin&Rubin (2005) in order to gather and analyze the data from the talking circle transcripts. This method provided the authors with a list of themes from which to code according to the four competencies developed by the Center for Ecoliteracy (Stone, Zenobia 2009.) Andriani, Hartati, and Kurniawan (2017) used the four competencies to conduct a narrative analysis of science textbooks. This study utilized their format to present the data collected from the talking circles.

All four themes are based on parts of the body, and the first of these are those related to the head. According to Andriani, Hartati, and Kurniawan (2017), the first competency is demonstrated like this:

Competency 1: Head (Cognitive)

a. Approaching the issues and situations from a systems perspective
b. Understanding the fundamental of ecological principles
c. Thinking critically, solving the problems creatively, and applying knowledge to new situations
d. Assessing the impacts and ethical effects of human technologies and actions
e. Envision the long-term consequences of decisions

After analyzing and coding the transcripts, the authors found examples of statements that fall under the first competency, the head. Examples of these statements are as follows:

"*So, the reason I appreciate nature is, well, without it, we wouldn't survive for three reasons. One of them, destroying the plants would take away oxygen so we couldn't breathe. Two, without water, we couldn't drink. So that's one of the things that you need. The last one, food. Because there would be no plants to eat. You might say you could eat meat, but, the animals you get the meat from eat plants or other animals.*"

"*Yes, I know stuff grows back, but, if all the grass is gone, then no grass seeds will be around. So you can't just put water in the ground without any grass seeds for it to grow."*

"If we didn't have worms, we wouldn't have really good soil. Yes you could buy soil, but the best soil we have would be worm soil. If we didn't have good soil, then we wouldn't have plants and I don't think you'd have really good all your vitamins and you need vitamins to stay healthy, so then you'd just be eating protein and sweets."

The second theme is based on the heart, or an emotional response. According to Andriani, Hartati, and Kurniawan (2017), the second competency is demonstrated like this:

Competency 2: Heart (Emotional)

a. Feeling concern, empathy, and respect for other people and living things
b. Seeing from and appreciate multiple perspectives; work with and value others with different backgrounds, motivations, and intentions
c. Commit to equity, justice, inclusivity, and respect for all people

After analyzing and coding the transcripts, the authors found examples of statements that corresponded to the heart, or demonstrated an emotional connection. A few examples of these statements are as follows:

"*I feel really connected to it because it just kind of, it's just kind of everywhere everything is made up of and we can't get all this without nature and that's why I feel very connected to it."*

"Since we've had these talking circles, I just started appreciating nature more."

"Nature is like the reality. Nature is like infinite."

The third theme corresponds to the hands and activities that are related to sustainable activity. According to Andriani, Hartati, and Kurniawan (2017), the third competency is demonstrated like this:

Competency 3: Hands (Active)

a. Creating and use tools, objects, and procedures required by sustainable communities
b. Turning convictions into practical and effective action, and apply ecological knowledge to the practice of ecological design
c. Assessing and adjust uses of energy and resources

"*A way you could destroy nature, which no one would unless they were absolutely evil, light a match and chunk it at a tree. So, yeah don't do that."*

"A way to not use as much water daily, maybe like only taking two minute showers."

"Sometimes I used to like rip up stuff and like my dad would put down mulch or something and I would just throw it back into the yard. I used to do that but now I don't do that."

"I usually used to just throw it away, but now I tell the teachers if it can be recycled, and if it can, I always recycle."

The fourth and final theme is described as corresponding to the spirit, or to a person's connection to the environment. According to Andriani, Hartati, and Kurniawan (2017), the fourth competency is demonstrated like this:

Competency 4: Spirit (Connectional)

a. Experiencing the wonder and awe toward nature
b. Revering the Earth and all living things
c. Feeling a strong bond with and deep appreciation of place
d. Feeling a kinship with the natural world and invoke that feeling in others

The authors analyzed and coded the transcripts, during which time they found examples of statements that corresponded to the spirit, or expressed a connection to the natural world. Examples of statements the correspond to the fourth competency are as follows:

"*The thing that I like about nature the most is probably because it's my friend and I make friends with the animals very quickly.*"

"*You know how people are like, there's no snowflake alike? Also, like no tree alike, exactly alike. There's no fruit exactly alike I don't think, so I've noticed that.*"

"But also like metaphoric power or whatever which is like it's pretty much like everything started with just nature. The world at first, when it was created, nature was everywhere. There was nothing that wasn't nature on earth."

Analysis of Data

Circle 1

The major takeaways and goals from this circle was the establishment to the correlation of the never-ending circle that was the talking circle in the room to the never-ending circle of nature. Students jokingly referred to the "Circle of Life" from the movie, The Lion King. However, this funny reference applied perfectly to what the TCF wanted the students to realize. The focus of the students centered on how nature feeds off everything, and how they, themselves, are nature. Thus, they further built upon the correlation of how they are nature and nature is them.

Circle 2

Students reflected on the destructive acts towards nature, and how nature is underappreciated because of littering. One student expressed that even eating junk food is littering nature because it litters their own bodies, and as a result, students were becoming more cognitive of their choices not only as themselves but as a part of the circle that is nature. Other students discussed how they could help build up and support nature such as planting a garden. Within this circle, students explored examples of ways to destroy and build nature as themselves and as a part of nature. Students achieved their goal of exploring both their role of helping and hurting nature as they explored actions of their own beings and actions of other beings.

Circle 3

The students reached both goals and reflected on the importance of the worms. One student reflected that each little worm matters because they create and help replenish the soil. As a result, this helps crops and plants grow, and this affects them as beings in nature. Students reflected that, without worms, their food supply would change. In addition, students highlighted that not only would their food supply change, but animals and other aspects in nature would have a changed food supply too. As a result, students achieved goal one in Talking Circle 3 by looking inwardly and outwardly at their role of nature and other roles in nature. They made the correlation that one small, seemingly insignificant worm can make all the difference. Students achieved goal number two by not only stating what activities they enjoy in nature like the first circle, but they discussed what they had stopped doing that harmed nature. Students showed growth by becoming more cognitive of their role in nature.

Circle 4

Students reflected that nature has a lot of power from lighting to natural disasters. However, within these major events, a student reflected that nature can be the size of an electron which forms something. His example was the solar system that works together as a team just like nature, and it begins with a single atom. Many students reflected on how the small aspects of nature make up and create the big aspects in nature. Perhaps summed up the best by a quote from a student saying, “Nature is reality. Nature is infinite.” As a result, students discussed their role in nature is just like these atoms. Their roles can be small or big based on their actions as they build up. Students agreed that their actions can either build up to help nature or build up to destroy nature.

Recommendations for Future Research

A review of the data raises questions that require more attention. The coding of the transcripts demonstrates that more statements were related to the hand than to the spirit. More research is needed to explore the causes behind this. This may be a result of the curriculum focusing on the causes and effects of environmental actions rather than encouraging students to reflect on their role within the larger world.

This study was conducted as a qualitative study with fourth grade students. The focus on concrete examples of what they can do to help or harm the environment may be due to that age group’s ability to utilize abstract thinking. More research is needed to determine if this trend continues across age groups or if this changes as students are better able to think abstractly.

Conclusion

Throughout the process, students became more aware of nature, and they made connections to the cyclical process that is nature. What started as a simple question of “What is your favorite hobby in nature” turned into “Let’s think about our role in nature as a human and part of nature. Is it big? Is it small? Do we have one in the middle? What role do you play as a human being?” Students explored everything from nature’s complex circle to the smallest features that create the circle. Students learned their place in nature as a part of nature itself, and that as a part of nature, they have the responsibility to be connected and to help the cycle progress in more sustainable ways. The talking circle reinforced being true to oneself and being connected by understanding their responsibility in nature, being disciplined in that responsibility, and being confident in that role.

References

Andriani, E. N., Hartati, T., & Kurniawan, E. Analysis of Student Text Books rom Ecoliteracy Perspective In Indonesia.

Appalachian Regional Commission. (2020) About the Appalachian region. Retrieved from https://www.arc.gov/about-the-appalachian-region/

Appalachian Regional Commission. (2019) *Data reports*. Retrieved from https://data.arc.gov/data

Baldwin, J. A., Lowe, J., Brooks, J., Charbonneau-Dahlen, B. K., Lawrence, G., Johnson-Jennings, M., Padgett, G, Kelley, M. & Camplain, C. (2020). *Formative Research and Cultural Tailoring of a Substance Abuse Prevention Program for American Indian Youth: Findings From the Intertribal Talking Circle Intervention*. Health promotion practice, 1524839920918551.

Campbell, A., & Padgett, G. (2020). Ecopedagogy in the Fourth Grade Classroom: Reflections on Implementing a Multidisciplinary STEAM Program. *The STEAM Journal, 4*(2), 7.

Crocker, D. (2015). Implementing and evaluating restorative justice projects in prison. *Criminal justice policy review, 26*(1), 45-64.

Currie, S., & Kaminski, J. (2009). Talking circles overview from the first nations pedagogy online project. Retrieved from https://firstnationspedagogy.ca/circletalks.html

Duncan, A. (2011). *Making the middle grades matter*. Retrieved from https://www.ed.gov/news/speeches/making-middle-grades-matter

Edutopia. (2014, July 02). *Dialogue circles and positive classroom culture*. Retrieved from https://www.edutopia.org/practice/stw-glenview-practice-dialogue-circles-video

Food desert. (n.d.). Retrieved 2020, from https://www.dictionary.com/browse/food-desert

Freire, P. (2004). *Pedagogy of indignation.* London: Routledge.

Goleman, D., Bennett, L., & Barlow, Z. (2012). *Ecoliterate: How educators are cultivating emotional, social and ecological intelligence*.San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Graham, W. (2018, November 25). What is ecoliteracy ? Retrieved from http://www.freshvista.com/2018/what_is_ecoliteracy/

Hwoschinsky, C. (2002). *Listening with the heart: A guide for compassionate listening*. Indianola, WA: Compassionate Listening Project.

Janesick, V. J. (2004). Stretching Exercises for Qualitative Researchers, Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2004.

Kahn, R., & Kahn, R. V. (2010). Critical pedagogy, ecoliteracy, & planetary crisis: The ecopedagogy movement (Vol. 359). Peter Lang.

Kieffer, M. J., Marinell, W. H., & Stephenson, N. S. (2011). *The middle grades student transitions study.* Research Alliance for New York City.

Louv, R. (2011). Last child in the woods: Saving our children from nature-deficit disorder. Algonquin books.

Lowe, J. (2006). Teen Intervention Project--Cherokee (TIP-C). Pediatric Nursing, 32(5).

Lowe, J., Liang, H., Riggs, C., Henson, J., & Elder, T. (2012). Community partnership to affect substance abuse among Native American adolescents. *The American Journal of Drug and Alcohol Abuse, 38*(5), 450-455.

Misiaszek, G. W. (2019). Ecopedagogy: teaching critical literacies of 'development','sustainability', and 'sustainable development'. Teaching in Higher Education.

Nowotny, J. J., & Carrara, M. (2018). The use of restorative practices to reduce prison gang violence: Lessons on transforming cultures of violence. *Conflict Resolution Quarterly, 36*(2), 131-144.

Padgett, G. (2018). Sustainability of Education: An Ecopedagogical Approach. *Journal of Sustainability Studies, 1*(1), 5.

Patchell, B., Robbins, L., Hoke, M., & Lowe, J. (2012). Circular model of cultural tailoring: An intervention adaption. *Journal of Theory Construction and Testing, 16*(2), 45-51.

Pollard, K., & Jacobsen, L. A. (2011). *The Appalachian region in 2010: A census data overview chartbook.* URL http://www. arc. gov/research/researchreportdetails. asp.

Pollack, S. (2016). Building bridges: Experiential and integrative learning in a Canadian women's prison. *Journal of Teaching in Social Work, 36*(5), 503-518.

Rubin, H., & Rubin, I. (2005). Qualitative interviewing: The art of hearing data (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.

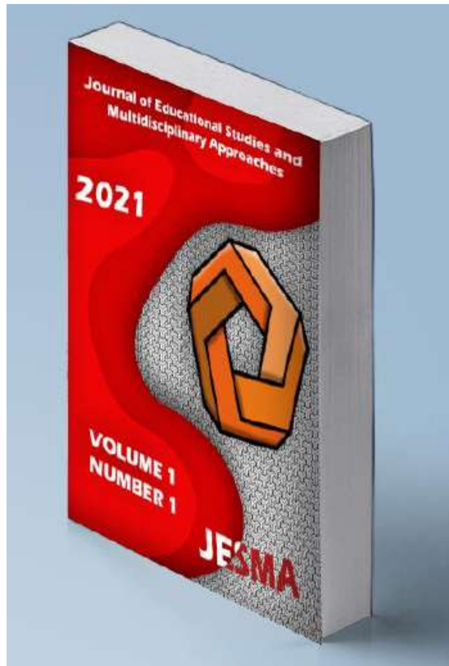
Schimek, M. J. (2016). *How an Experience in Nature Affects Ecoliteracy of High School Students* (Unpublished master's thesis). Hamline University. doi:https://digitalcommons.hamline.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=5132&context=hse_all

Stone, M. (2012, July 25). Applying ecological principles. Retrieved from https://www.ecoliteracy.org/article/applying-ecological-principles

Stone, M. K., & Barlow, Z. (2009). *Smart by nature: Schooling for sustainability*. Healdsburg, CA: Watershed Media.

Thomas, E. C., Bilger, A., Wilson, A. B., & Draine, J. (2019). Conceptualizing restorative justice for people with mental illnesses leaving prison or jail. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry, 89*(6), 693.

USDA. (2011) Mapping food deserts in the United States. Retrieved from https://www.ers.usda.gov/amber-waves/2011/december/data-feature-mapping-food-deserts-in-the-us/



Journal of Educational Studies and Multidisciplinary Approaches (JESMA)

www.jesma.net

The Power and Possibilities for Young Viewers of Reality Television when Educators and Researchers Partner Together for Critical Media Literacy

Danielle T. Ligocki, Ed.D.[1]
Sylvia Sturgis[2]

To cite this article:

Ligocki, D. & Sturgis, S. (2021). The Power and Possibilities for Young Viewers of Reality Television when Educators and Researchers Partner Together for Critical Media Literacy. *Journal of Educational Studies and Multidisciplinary Approaches (JESMA), 1* (2), 120-134. https://doi.org/10.51383/jesma.2021.11

Journal of Educational Studies and Multidisciplinary Approaches (JESMA) is an international scientific, high quality open access, peer viewed scholarly journal provides a comprehensive range of unique online-only journal submission services to academics, researchers, advanced doctoral students and other professionals in their field. This journal publishes original research papers, theory-based empirical papers, review papers, case studies, conference reports, book reviews, essay and relevant reports twice a year (March and October) in online versions.

[1] Oakland University, USA, danielleligocki@oakland.edu

[2] Pontiac International Technology Academy, USA, Sylvia.sturgis@pontiacschools.org

Journal of Educational Studies and Multidisciplinary Approaches (JESMA)

Volume 1, Issue 2 Year 2021 ISSN:2757-8747

The Power and Possibilities for Young Viewers of Reality Television when Educators and Researchers Partner Together for Critical Media Literacy

Danielle Ligocki https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2013-3567

Sylvia Sturgis https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3754-8574

ARTICLE INFORMATION

Original Research Paper
Doi:https://doi.org/10.51383/jesma.2021.12
Received 04 March 2021
Accepted 11 April 2021

ABSTRACT

Abstract: Different forms of media inundate young people on a regular basis, including social media sites, television, music, movies, and literature. These forms of media often go unquestioned in the traditional classroom, as the United States does not value instruction in critical media literacy. Through interviews with pre-teens and teenagers about their interactions with reality television, this paper explicates the need for critical media literacy in schools in the United States. Findings indicate the need for critical media literacy in the classroom in order to mediate the impact of consumption of reality television and the perceptions young people develop based on messaging and imagery found in reality television shows. One way to bring critical media literacy into the classroom is to develop a university-school partnership, where professionals could collaborate to help make change in the classroom

Keywords: Critical media literacy, youth culture, school-university partnerships, reality television

Copyright: © 2021 (Padgett&Bishop) This is an open access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License, which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited.

Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to explore the potential link between personal connection to reality television shows and socioeconomic status. This exploration grew out of previous research (Author, 2018), which appeared to indicate a potential correlation between one's socioeconomic status and the personal connection to, and desire to take part in, reality television shows. This second investigation into the way young people interact with reality television shows will help to create a school-level professional development series that will assist teachers in working with students in the area of critical media literacy. Shirley Steinberg (2011) makes clear that media is one of the strongest forces in the lives of young people, so it makes sense to use this influence in the classroom, as teachers and other stakeholders work in partnership to educate young people on a daily basis.

Having spent 11 years teaching junior high school, the time that young people spend watching reality television shows was often a topic of conversation in the classroom. On a regular basis, I would hear the conversations my students were having; often thinking they were talking about friends or family members. It was not until I engaged more deeply in their conversations that I realized they were not talking about people they knew personally, but rather about characters on their favorite reality television shows. This level of engagement and interest on the part of pre-teens and teenagers peaked my interest and made me wonder about how young people interact with reality television and how it may act as an influence on them.

In the United States, reality television can be traced back to the 1940s, when "Candid Camera" first hit the airwaves. At the time, reality television was held in high esteem, as sociologists from across the United States believed the host, Allen Funt, was an absolute gem who provided a lens through which to view society at the time (McCarthy, 2009). This show was off and on the air for decades, but it was not until 1973 that American viewers had their first taste of a weekly episodic program featuring the lives of real people for all to see. A show called "An American Family" (NPR, 2009) featured the Loud family in 12, one-hour long episodes after filming hundreds of hours of footage. From there the weekly format of reality television shows was born. Since then, television in the United States has been saturated with reality television shows, to the point that Bill Carter of *The New York Times* (2010) stated that television viewers believed reality television to be the most overdone genre of television. In spite of that critique, reality television shows in the United States continue to highlight everything from 90-day relationships to quiz shows to physical challenges to the purported daily workings of people's homes and family lives. This genre is so abundant that, according to Todd VanDerWerff (2016) of the website Vox, 750 reality shows aired in 2015 and about 350 of them were new. Clearly, there is both a market and an interest in reality television and it has acted as a cultural pedagogue for decades.

With this in mind, using the lens of critical media literacy, I interrogate the ways in which young people interact with various forms of media, but specifically, reality television. I uncover their beliefs about the shows and their characters, their opinions about the ways reality television plays a role in the lives of young people, and the degree to which young people do or do not question the power that is inherent in media messaging.

Theoretical Framework

Both the theory of and the need for critical media literacy ground this study. Douglas Kellner and Jeff Share define critical media literacy as an approach to teaching literacy that "focuses on ideology critique and analyzing the politics of representation of crucial dimensions of gender, race, class, and sexuality; incorporating alternative media production; and expanding textual analysis to include issues of

social context, control, resistance, and pleasure" (2007, p. 62). Schools in the United States often neglect this approach to teaching literacy, which puts students at a disadvantage. Different forms of media permeate the lives of young people, and by neglecting to adjust teaching practices and offer a critical community where we can tap into students' interests, we leave our most vulnerable students at a disadvantage. This is especially palpable in schools districts with high levels of poverty and traditionally marginalized students, as they often spend much of their time after school with different forms of media due to lack of funds to participate in outside activities or lack of supervision due to parents and guardians working multiple jobs. Essentially, by not educating all students in the area of critical media literacy, we are leaving our most vulnerable population at a disadvantage.

What is media literacy?

The call for media literacy is not necessarily a new one. The National Association for Media Literacy Education got its start in 1997, as the Partnership for Media Education. In 2008, it renamed itself, as a way of "evolving with the times". In fact, many of the most popular websites that focus on media literacy often take their definition from the work of the National Association for Media Literacy Education. There are multiple websites, such as Media Literacy Project, Center for Media Literacy and Media Literacy Now that have been in existence for over twenty years. When one looks at their definitions or mission statements, admirable goals for each are clear. The Center for Media Literacy uses a 1992 definition from the Aspen Media Literacy Leadership Institute that defines media literacy as, "the ability to access, analyze, evaluate and create media in a variety of forms." More recently, they acknowledged that definitions evolve over time and they now choose to use the following phrase to define media literacy:

> Media literacy is a 21st century approach to education. It provides a framework to access, analyze, evaluate, create and participate with messages in a variety of forms – from print to video to the Internet. Media literacy builds an understanding of the role of media in society as well as essential skills of inquiry and self-expression necessary for citizens of democracy.

While this organization appears to realize that that being an informed citizen includes being media literate, the definition did not change a great deal from 25 years ago, nor did they approach what it means to be critical about interactions with different forms of text and media. While the website itself offers materials for professional development, a newsletter that one can subscribe to, and even a store full of materials to buy, at no location on their page do they reference how their work can inform students and professionals in a critical way.

A visit to the Media Literacy Project page, which formed in 1993, acknowledges the ability to read many types of media as "an essential skill in the 21st century" and offers the following definition for media literacy:

> Media literacy is the ability to access, analyze, evaluate, and create media. Media literate youth and adults are better able to understand the complex messages we receive from television, radio, Internet, newspapers, magazines, books, billboards, video games, music, and all other forms of media.

Similar to the definition used by the Center for Media Literacy, one can see the verbs access, analyze, evaluate and create; however, there is still no mention of raising critical awareness or the value of questioning various forms of media. When one looks a bit deeper, the organization does mention the idea of media justice and the ways in which power and privilege come into play when media is involved. They offer an endorsement of what gaining media literacy skills can do for students and adults, which seems to offer a bit more than their initial definition. The authors state,

Media literacy skills can help youth and adults:

- Develop critical thinking skills
- Understand how media messages shape our culture and society
- Identify target marketing strategies
- Recognize what the media maker wants us to believe or do
- Name the techniques of persuasion used
- Recognize bias, spin, misinformation, and lies
- Discover the parts of the story that are not being told
- Evaluate media messages based on our own experiences, skills, beliefs, and values
- Create and distribute our own media messages
- Advocate for media justice

(www.medialiteracyproject.org)

Of interest here is the idea that this organization does seem to have an element of criticality about it, but it is not clear at first glance. It is possible that this is due to a reluctance to use the word "critical" in their title, or simply an evolution of the organization over time. Either way, this group seems to take media literacy a step further, but still does not dig deep enough into the realm of what it truly means to be critically media literate. What is particularly interesting though is that, the one site for media literacy that seems to possess a critical lens had to close its doors on June 30, 2016.

One final example is Media Literacy Now, which uses the exact same language as the Center for Media Literacy when defining media literacy. This group has been in existence since 2011 and works to support positive uses of media so that children can interact with it in a healthier way. The group describes their strategy as one that aims to show that media literacy works. They state that their aim is to share knowledge and resources as a means of encouraging awareness and advocacy; however, they do not say what they are advocating for, outside of their original claim that media literacy works. Media Literacy Now also collaborates with the American Pediatric Association, as well as the American Psychological Association as a way to get kids thinking about healthy habits and pro-social behaviors. Finally, the website promotes a great deal of resources meant for both educators as well as parents. Again, while this website seems to take the idea of advocacy quite seriously, there appears to be some very glaring omissions in terms of the information shared on this site.

The webpages listed above, as well as the countless headlines, newspaper articles, and blogs that are now calling for media literacy all fall under one of the three modes of media literacy that Kellner and Share (2005) argue do not go far enough. Again, while these approaches all have positive aspects to them, they fall short of offering the examination of power and the inherent inequities that exist in the media. One common approach to media education is the protectionist approach. This approach aims to push blame on the media for all of society's ills and it frames the person who is engaging with these texts as a passive victim. When one thinks of many of the current headlines, it is easy to see why educators would like to blame the media for the behaviors of viewers. However, this far over-simplifies the ways in which we interact with and make sense of media.

A second approach to media education is media arts education. This approach advocates for self-expression and gaining the means to create art and media. However, not only is this approach rarely a part of the everyday curricula (instead opting for after school clubs and programs) but it also ignores the need for critical analysis of different forms of media. While these types of programs may support students in their need to express themselves, they do not promote a conscious analysis. Without a critical approach to making media, students run the risk of learning how to reproduce the same hegemonic ideas that are already prevalent in different media sources (Kellner & Share, 2017). Like the protectionist approach, the media arts approach to media literacy does not do enough to teach critical thinking skills, and this is true of the basic approach to media literacy as well.

The basic approach to media literacy education is still fairly small and new, as referenced above. It has produced national organizations and multiple websites that work to expose students to media content without any of the questioning that should go along with that exposure. For many educators who

stand behind this approach, the idea is that education and specifically media education can and should be politically neutral. This is a troubling idea, as basic exposure does nothing to address the injustices and inequalities that are entrenched in interactions with media. By taking this approach to media literacy, there becomes the quest for the perfect cookbook of media literacy skills – one that will take the educator through all of the steps of a basic curriculum without ever having to dig deep or confront the greater societal issues that must be examined through our use of media.

Media literacy, as summarized here, offers multiple approaches to educating our young people that all fall short. This is troubling when young people in the United States are living in a time of frightening political rhetoric and an overabundance of technology at their fingertips. While there is power in recognizing that students need to be media literate and while it is promising that there is now a national outcry questioning how prepared we are as a national citizenry to address different forms of media, until the qualifier of “critical” is added to the approach to media literacy, we will continue to be comfortable in the status quo, reproducing the dominant discourse that people all too often accept in an unquestioning way. If our hope is to avoid that fate, we need to gain a clear understanding of and put our support behind critical media literacy.

Critical Media Literacy

When first working with young people regarding their interactions with reality television and how these shows may be affecting their lives, I naively sought out an understanding of whether or not the pre-teenagers and teenagers involved in the discussions thought reality television shows were real or not. Little did I know how deeply these young people were affected by reality television shows or how much of an influence these shows and characters had in their world. It was after months of research and transcribing data that I found myself even more deeply committed to the need for critical media literacy. I, like many other scholars and educators already understood what Ernest Morrell was saying when he wrote that “media are, for today’s youth, their primary cultural influence, surpassing the family and the school” (2008, p. 156). However, while I thought I had a good understanding of how youth interact with media, I was still stunned when a participant in my research explained to me that reality television was like a big sister to her. If young people are connecting with a reality television show in that personal of a way, then it should be clear that critical media literacy is something that needs to be just as embedded in their world as the shows that they watch are.

With this in mind, it should be clear that critical media literacy needs to go well beyond a basic exposure to media that is accompanied by neutral discussions. It also needs to surpass the time and space offered to young people to create new media. As the definition of critical media literacy shared above articulates, what all of the approaches to media literacy explained earlier missed was the element of power, questioning, and critical analysis. Educators and their students must critically question the various texts they interact with if they are to begin to understand the power that is inherent in media.

This is where critical media literacy goes beyond the approaches to media literacy described earlier. If educators are going to ensure an educated citizenry that can participate in democracy and be well versed in the ways that media works to influence everyone’s lives, educators must start from a place of understanding and an imperative need to question. Parents, educators, and researchers must ensure that all students get the chance to learn these skills and understand the ways in which media mediates their understanding of the world. In today’s media-saturated world, this should seem like an obvious - if not imperative - skill for all youth to become quite proficient in. Unfortunately, unlike scholars and educators in places such as Canada, Great Britain, and Australia, the United States views critical media literacy as something that is seen as optional, at best and unnecessary, at worst (Kellner & Share, 2007).

Considering the capacity that media has to present images and meaning to youth and, thus, to understand their world, educators must rise to the challenge of helping students understand the multicultural society that they now inhabit. Because so much of what is presented to students is either what they choose to see or what the mainstream media allows them to see, it is imperative that educators help young people become sensitized to topics that are not brought to light in the classroom, including

social inequities and injustices. Alvermann, Moon, and Hagood (1999) give a plethora of examples of how to do this work in the classroom in meaningful ways, with all grade levels. In addition to their work, there has been an influx in practical and theoretical work regarding the importance of critical media literacy in U.S. schools for the last few decades (Author, 2020; Author, 2019; Macedo & Steinberg, 2009; Marshall & Sensoy, 2011; Morrell, 2008). This work builds on the thinking of the Frankfurt School theorists, who were the first to consider the effects of mass culture on the working class almost 100 years ago. Their critical questioning laid the foundation for the work of critical media literacy in the United States.

Critical media literacy that acknowledges media texts of all types that students are engaging with needs to be included in the formal school curriculum. Without some guidance and dialogue, the relationship that youth and media share will be one of stereotypes and discriminatory views based on gender, race, class, and sexuality. As educators work to help students manage all of this, however, it is important to remember that young people are not passive in this process. Students can and should become active in the meaning-making process and as Beverly Daniel Tatum reminds us, "children need to be able to recognize distorted representations, they also need to know what can be done about them" (1997, p. 49). By exposing both youth and adults to critical media literacy, they gain the opportunity to explore ideas that are not otherwise discussed with them at home or at school. Additionally, they get to work with these messages and experiment with what they mean to them and how these hegemonic and stereotypical images and messages affect their own identities and thoughts. These moments of exploration and understanding can prove very powerful in the lives of youth and allow them the freedom and agency to decide how media will affect their lives in the future. These moments can allow students the opportunity to not only be consumers of media, but also to capitalize on their skills as new producers of media. Youth as producers of media is on the rise, especially with easily accessible apps, so it is even more important for them to question elements of power, voice, and representation in different forms of media.

The effect that media has on young people needs to be examined and critiqued, and that is what critical media literacy strives to do. Kellner explains that by working to teach critical media literacy in our schools, we can work toward the goal of truly analyzing mainstream media and examine the ideology, power, and domination that are in play in all forms of media that young people are interacting with on a daily basis. This examination of media and technology can then allow students to gain a greater understanding of both the reality that they are experiencing as well as the social realities of the world around them. In this way, not only are students working to understand the ways in which they receive media and make meaning of it, but they are also becoming active members in a society that needs to challenge the dominant discourse and the messages disseminated to the public. Talking about it simply is not enough.

Additionally, by helping students gain literacy skills that address how they receive information, not only can youth understand changing cultural views and values, but they can also work toward a greater sense of democracy, as more and more people will be able to take an active role in the world and the ways it is now structured, defined, and presented. It is important that educators capitalize on how media savvy young people are and take advantage of how accessible technologies of communication are to today's youth. By working with youth collaboratively, educators can promote discussion of topics such as democracy, politics, the spectacle that is the media and social issues that are pertinent to their worlds. In this way, critical media literacy acts as a way to arm young people to interact critically with a variety of texts, as well as interact critically with the world around them, which can promote a sense of "radical democracy." The idea of radical democracy is an important one, as it "depends on individuals caring about each other, involved in social issues, and working together to build a more egalitarian less oppressive society" (Kellner & Share, 2007, p. 65). This is an admirable goal and one that educators can work toward if we help youth learn how to better critically analyze media.

Methods

Researchers implemented a critical qualitative case study approach, identifying nine participants in cooperation with a public school situated near the university, just outside a major metropolitan area in the Midwestern United States. All participants showed interest in discussing different forms of text and media that they interacted with on a regular basis and chose to be a part of this study. After researchers fulfilled all proper IRB requirements and the parents or guardians and students filled out the consent and assent forms, the primary researcher conducted focus groups and individual interviews, which were semi-structured in nature. The primary researcher conducted four focus groups, which lasted approximately 60 minutes each. After the focus groups concluded, the primary researcher conducted interviews with individual participants, and those ranged in length from 15 to 30 minutes, depending on the participants' responses. Participants attended both the focus group sessions and one-on-one interviews in a classroom at the school the participants attended.

The primary researcher transcribed and coded the data after all focus groups and interviews had taken place. The questions used during both the interviews and the focus groups lend themselves well to the approach to critical media literacy that was described earlier in the paper, as researchers were looking to understand the participants' levels of understanding and critical questioning as they relate to media imagery and messaging. During the transcription and coding process, researchers used overt and covert categories as a way of analyzing the data. Overt categories were composed of explicit messages regarding the impact of media on young people and the relationships participants do or do not build with media personalities. The covert categories included stereotypes depicted in reality television, as well as coveting prizes or lifestyles seen in reality television shows. The primary researcher used Carspecken's (1996) concept of low level coding to help generate themes and patterns found in the data. Additionally, before, during, and after data collection, the researcher and co-author worked together to discuss the background information of each participant, using the survey data collected from parents and guardians prior to the start of the research project.

Data Sources

Participants in this study were nine pre-teen and teenaged students in a school situated outside a major metropolitan area in the Midwestern United States. This community has experienced drastic dips in attendance due to school choice policies, which allow families to take their student out their "neighborhood school" (the school assigned to them based on their address and school district boundaries) and into other schools in surrounding areas. These policies often affect students and families of lower socioeconomic status, because families are unable to transport their students outside of the neighborhood to other schools and districts. Seven of the participants in this study reported a household income of less than $25,000 per year. One reported a household income of $25,000 to $50,000 per year and one declined to comment.

This particular school is currently a K-12 program in an urban school district with 1009 students enrolled. The school is divided into multiple programs; a K -12 honors program, a K-4 language immersion program that focuses on Spanish, and the district's program for students on the Autism spectrum. The honors and language immersion programs require students to complete an application, participate in an interview and submit a written essay. A faculty member uses standardized test scores from NWEA, WIDA, and M-STEP as part of the application process and assesses students in grades K-1 in a one-on-one setting. This school is student-centered, focusing on project-based learning and 21st century skills. Finally, one of the main goals of this school has always been to ensure a high quality education for all students and to respect and honor the diversity and background of every student and family.

Within the participating school, there are 57 staff members – 50 of whom have a Master's degree or higher. It is also important to note that due to rapid growth in this program, only two original staff members remain from its inception in 2010. This school is a Title-I school, where 100 % of the students receive free breakfast and lunch. Additionally, the demographics of the program include 73% (736 students) Hispanic, 23% (232 students) African American, 3% (30 students) Asian, and 1% (10 students) Caucasian. The nine participants who were included in the research were of varied ethnic backgrounds, as the researchers tried to model the demographics of the school.

Voices of Young People

Young people have a lot to say, especially as it relates to their own lives and identities, the various types of texts and visuals that they interact with, and the ways in which they are viewed by the adults around them. Much of what adolescents have to say focuses on elements popular culture, including music, social media sites, and television shows. While discussions with pre-teens and teenagers can act as a community building force when implemented through the lens of critical media literacy, what often happens is that educators, parents, and researchers diminish the ways in which young people engage with different forms of text and media, which results in a lack of development of critical inquiry skills, as well as a lack of representation of adults who can act as a positive force in the lives of young people. Additionally, by ignoring in the classroom what young people are interacting with outside of the classroom, we are negating not only their lived experiences, but also the people, shows, and different forms of media with which they are potentially forming connections. As educators, researchers, teachers, and stakeholders in the education of young people, we must do a better job of collaborating with them as a means of hearing their voices and centering their experiences. Historically, the effects of media and reality television have focused on adults (Ouelette, 2010; Pozner, 2010; Rose & Wood, 2005; Grossberg, 1997), with a study by Allen and Mendick (2012) being a notable outlier. This study aims to take the focus off adults and center the voices of young viewers instead.

Participants

The nine young people who took part in this study were all invested in media of different types. Keith was a 13-year-old African American male, who spent a great deal of time with video games, YouTube, and reality television. Kevin, also a 13-year-old African American male, enjoyed video games and reality television. Joey, also an African American young man, but 12-years-old, was not interested in the violent video games that Keith and Kevin enjoyed, instead spending time with reality television, to the point that he built a personal investment in some of those characters. Jeremiah, on the other hand, was a mixed race, 13-year-old young man who enjoyed "binge watching" certain shows on Netflix and spent a great deal of time on YouTube. His peer, Antoine, was the only white male participant. At 13-years-old, he also spent a great deal of time on YouTube, but checked in with reality television shows as a form of comic relief. Paulie, another 13-year-old African American male, had similar interests to some of his peers; namely, playing video games and spending time with YouTube. His peer, Devin, also a 13-year-old African American male, spent a good amount of time with reality television; in spite of the fact that his mom believed he did not watch any. Lila, the only female in the group, Puerto Rican and 13-years-old, was one of the participants who showed the greatest personal connection to reality television characters, linking their experiences on the shows to her own struggles with rumors and gossip. The final participant, Leonardo, was a 13-year-old Mexican young man who deeply believed that reality television was not real, but who spent a great deal of time with television of all types after school. All participants shared their experiences with media during our discussions, explaining how and when they interact with it, their shows and social media platforms of choice, and whether or not they would choose to be on a reality television show of their own.

Joey

When talking with Joey, it was clear from the start that he had a very personal investment in reality television shows, working to make connections with characters, while failing to question the editing or production that might be involved in the way viewers see these characters. However, while Joey did not critically question who holds the power in these shows, he did share his thoughts about the ways people on these shows construct a certain image for viewers. Joey also mentioned the influence these people have on the lives of viewers, sharing, "maybe, like, you'll be rooting for a certain person that will be like, your favorite character." Even though Joey acknowledged what he was viewing may not be entirely real (because, as he said, that would not be very entertaining), he still found himself invested in these shows, and willing to be a participant on a reality show, should the opportunity ever present itself.

Kevin

Kevin, similar to Joey, questioned the authenticity behind reality television shows. In spite of the perceived lack of reality (or maybe because of it), Kevin was invested in and entertained by the 'drama' inherent in these shows. He said, "I mean, let's be honest here, most of the most, most, popular reality shows are, they're more based around drama because, in all honesty, that's what we like to see and that serves as entertainment towards us. So, naturally, we're just drawn to it." Kevin went on to share the ways drama plays out on these shows, causing problems when there is no need for problems. As we were discussing some of what he considers 'drama', and how he might define that word, he started to tiptoe into critical waters, vaguely mentioning the idea of stereotypes, but he fell short of really digging into some big questions. While Kevin did share that he talked about some shows with his grandmother, it was only the shows they watched together. Additionally, like Joey, Kevin said that he would be willing to take part in a reality show, often mentioning the money that is a big part of some of reality shows.

Keith

From the start of my conversations with Keith, it was clear that he was different from his peers. He stated explicitly that he would never want to be on a reality show, even though he watched them regularly with his mom. However, just like Kevin, Keith found himself entertained by the 'drama' in his favorite reality television shows. Even though he described reality television as 'messy', he also told me, "I like watching it because, well, I just like the fights and all, to be honest". He went on to tell me how many of his peers are influenced by the shows that they watch, wanting to look and act like the characters they see on reality television shows. While he was not sure if reality shows were real or not, he did mention the money and fame involved in these shows, as well as the idea that the characters on these shows are likely not being their authentic selves in front of the cameras.

Jeremiah

Jeremiah was another participant who watched reality television on a regular basis. However, his response to whether or not he would like to be on a reality show in the future was more nuanced that that of his peers. Jeremiah shared that he would only be on a reality television show if it were about the fun aspects of his life, not about negative or dramatic experiences in his life. He felt the need to keep some things private, which was interesting, given the he deeply believes that reality television shows are "100% real". While Jeremiah did not seem as amused by 'drama' as his peers were, he did share that he and his mom discuss some of the shows they watch together and that they talk about how he feels some of his peers are affected by watching these shows. Additionally, Jeremiah was another participant who started to step into critical waters, bringing up an issue of racism from one show, but he fell short of questioning what might be behind the televised incident and the overly simplified way the producers handled the situation.

Antoine

Antoine, similar to Jeremiah, felt strongly that popular culture and reality television influence his peers. During his one-on-one interview he stated, "I believe people are trying to be like the people they see on reality TV shows or wherever else . . . because you see these people and you think, wow, this person is entertaining, they're funny, they're beautiful and you don't see their flaws." This was a big concern for Antoine, as he was one of the participants who felt strongly that reality television was fake, and that the people involved in these shows were only involved for the money and potential fame. Not surprisingly then, Antoine was one of the few participants who mentioned that he would never be on a reality show. He was clear in his feelings when he told me, "It probably would change me. You can't say it can't change you because fame and fortune that can make a big impact on anybody. I don't care who you are, it's gonna change you . . .I don't want that to happen. I'd rather be the person I am today than another fake person on TV."

Paulie

Paulie was a participant who seemed to have the most to say, both during one-on-one interviews, as well as during the focus groups. His interview lasted the longest out of all of the interviews, but he spent much of his time talking about the video games he loves, and how he thinks it is foolish if video games or other forms of media influence anyone. However, when we did get around to talking about reality television, he shared that reality television shows are not real and the people who participate in these shows are simply involved in them for the sake of money or fame. While Paulie did not watch a lot of reality television, he did share his opinions on the shows he sees family members watching and later shared that he would be willing to be on a show that had a competition element and prize money involved, but not on a show that was full of drama or focused on dating and relationships.

Devin

Devin, a participant on the quiet side, still had some clear ideas regarding reality television, and many of them echoed those of his peers. Devin made clear that these shows are full of 'drama' and that he does not understand the appeal of watching manufactured drama. He also shared that he believes people on reality television shows often put on a different persona as a means to gain attention on these shows, mentioning that most people's 'regular' lives are not interesting enough for people to watch. However, when asked if he would ever take part in a reality show, his answer was interesting. He told me that it would have to be his own show, because he would want to be able to be his own person, and not have to pretend for the cameras. Devin took issue with people he felt were pretending on these shows, as they have a great influence on young people. He described some of his peers as "trying to be like them or like, saying, oh, I want to be famous like them and live their type of lifestyle. They don't actually know what they go through to get to where they are today." When speaking with Devin, it appeared as though there was a foundation of criticality that could be strengthened, if only he had the guidance of teachers or other adults.

Lila

Lila, as the only female participant, often experienced her peers talking over her during the focus groups. However, during our one-on-one conversation, she shared the connections that she has formed with certain reality television stars, comparing their 'drama' to situations regarding rumors that she has dealt with in her own life. Like many of her peers, Lila would willingly participate in a reality television show, and she found the drama inherent in these shows as entertaining. Lila mentioned, "People think it's interesting to see people's problems," going on to share that sometimes these problems mirror the ones in her own life. Lila, like many of her peers, also believed that people on reality television shows are often not presenting an authentic version of themselves, although she did not speculate as to why that might be.

Lila was also one of the few participants who used social media often, remarking that she has both Snapchat and Instagram accounts, but chooses to use her Snapchat account more frequently, as her mom does not monitor it. When Lila mentioned that her mom monitors her social media accounts, I asked if she monitors the shows that she watches as well, or if she discusses them with her. She briefly said yes, but did not elaborate.

Leonardo

Leonardo was the only participant who did not give a direct answer as to whether or not he would want to be a participant on a reality television show. While our conversation was the shortest out of all one-on-one interviews, Leonardo did make clear that money and fame play a role in reality television, and that he feels young people are deeply influenced by popular culture and different forms of media, stating, "It's affecting them because, like, they're gonna start doing different things. They're gonna act different. They're gonna dress different. They're gonna start doing different things that they haven't done in the past." Because Leonardo felt so strongly that reality television shows are not real, he did not watch them at home, nor did he talk about them at home with family. However, he was aware of conversations that his peers had about these shows, which is the information he appeared to use in order to form his opinions about reality television shows and their influence.

Discussion

The analysis of data brings up four main points for discussion, all of which articulate a need for critical media literacy in the classroom. Two main themes emerged from the data, in addition to two supporting themes. The two main themes were articulated by all nine of the participants; namely, that popular culture and media have an impact on the lives of young people and that media influences not just how young people think about their own identities, but also how they think and learn about others with whom they may not be familiar with in real life. The supporting themes illustrated a desire to take part in a reality television show, as well as the forming of personal connections to characters on reality television shows. Just one participant was adamant that he would not choose to be on a reality television show; while two participants indicated that they did not make strong personal connections to the people they were watching on reality television. These findings support an earlier study conducted by one of the authors (Author, 2018), that there appears to be a correlation between socio-economic status and personal connection to reality television.

Other common themes arose from these conversations as well. One theme that clearly resonated with all nine participants was that reality television is entertaining, partially due to the behavior and over-the-top antics that it highlights. Reality television shows have influenced the lives of these young participants by allowing them to imagine what their lives could be if they had some of the resources the characters had. Another detail that surfaced was that families did not monitor what the participants watched or how long they engaged with reality television, social media, or video games. A question on the survey asked explicitly if parents or guardians discussed chosen forms of media with their student and six of the nine respondents said no, they do not discuss what their child views or other forms of media and entertainment. Finally, the young participants also showed a level of frustration with the reality television characters at times, indicating that the characters did not value what they had or where they came from. This was disheartening, as many of the participants in this study are growing up in families who barely have enough money to support their basic needs.

When looking at the data and the themes that emerged, it becomes clear that media not only acts as a pedagogue for young people, but that viewers are active in a process of making connections to characters, coveting lifestyles and material goods, and desiring their own role in a reality television show

one day. These processes of actively making connections to reality television shows, without having the instruction in how to think critically, thoughtfully question, and push back on potentially harmful rhetoric speaks to the need for critical media literacy in schools.

Conclusion

Educators and researchers should be aware of what Henry Giroux described in 2011; namely that the media works to cultivate fear of others and to render traditionally marginalized groups as “dangerous and unfit” for society. This type of framing is what the young participants in this study are seeing daily, without any guidance or support to make sense of different forms of media, specifically reality television. They do not see families like theirs represented on television, and when they do, they are presented often in a negative, stereotypical light. If educators are prepared in the concepts of critical media literacy, we can work to change both the rhetoric, as well as the acceptance of it.

Knowing the ways in which different forms of media influence young people, and thinking about how they interact with and interpret different forms of media holds great implications for PK-12 educators, as well as parents and other stakeholders in education. The days of mistakenly assuming that television, social media, and video games are simply mindless entertainment should be gone, and replaced with a real, deep, and lasting commitment to not only critical media literacy instruction in the classroom, but critical community building in every classroom through the use of various texts and forms of media, and partnerships among educational stakeholders. In order to build community in the classroom – especially during these divisive times – deep relationships are necessary. Teachers and students can build relationships in the classroom by interacting with students around their interests, which more often than not include media. By using different texts and media as a starting point, relationships can be built which can lead to a community of not only support, but of critical questioning, critique, and meaning-making, which all students need in order to be thoughtful members of society. These skills are imperative for students everywhere, but especially for those who are traditionally marginalized due to race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status. As educators, we can meet students where they are in order to form those bonds of familiarity and trust, and then use those same interests to help support critical thought and questioning.

The findings of this research indicate the need for critical media literacy in all schools in the United States in order to help mediate the influence of reality television on young people. With that in mind, universities and PK12 schools have an opportunity to collaborate in order to serve the needs of their students. While universities often push into schools when they need to conduct research, universities are less likely to work with communities and stakeholders in a way that might help bring outside curriculum into the schools, or even in a way that would prove valuable to classroom teachers. Experts on critical media literacy can help remedy this problem by collaborating with teachers in classrooms, which can support partnerships in order to improve instruction in this very important area. There is great power in partnerships and this research indicates that young people can benefit from critical media literacy in the classroom, which can occur by researchers and teachers collaborating to bring critical media literacy into their classrooms.

References

Allen, K. & Mendick, H. (2012). Keeping it real? Social class, young people and 'authenticity' in reality TV. *Sociology, 47*(3), 460-476.

Alvermann, D., Moon, J., & Hagood, M. (1999). *Popular culture in the classroom: Teaching and researching critical media literacy.* Newark, DE. International Reading Association.

Carspecken, P. (1996). *Critical ethnography in educational research.* New York, NY: Routledge.

Carter, B. (2010, September 13). *Tired of Reality TV, but Still Tuning In*. New York Times.

http://www.nytimes.com/2010/09/13/business/media/13reality.html?_r=0

Center for Media Literacy: www.medialit.org

Giroux, H. (2011). *Zombie politics and culture in the age of casino capitalism.* New York, NY: Peter Lang.

Grossberg, L. (1997). *Dancing in spite of myself: Essays on popular culture.* Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Kellner, D. & Share, J. (2005). Toward critical media literacy: Core concepts, debates, organizations, and policy. *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education, 26*(3), 369 – 86.

Kellner, D. & Share, J. (2007). Critical media literacy is not an option. *Learning Inquiry, 1*(1) 59-59.

Kellner, D. & Share, J. (2017). Critical media education and radical democracy. *Academia.* https://www.academia.edu/461990/Critical_Media_Education_and_Radical_Democracy

Ligocki, D. (2018). *The drama of reality television: Lives of youth in liquid modern times.* Sense Publishers. Netherlands.

Ligocki, D. & Wilkins, M. (2019). The truth we can't afford to ignore: Popular culture, media influence, and the role of public schools in mediating stereotypical imagery. In J. Mitchell and E. Vaughn (Eds.), *Participatory literacy practices for P-12 classrooms in the digital age.* IGI Global.

Ligocki, D. (2020). Everything is moving so quickly: Youth consumption of media and the need for critical media literacy in the time of liquid modernity. In P. Trifonas (Ed.), International handbook of cultural studies and education reader. Springer Publishing.

Loud family paved the way for reality TV. (An American Family). [Audio file]. (2009). In Talk of the Nation. National Public Radio, Inc. (NPR).

Macedo, D. (2009). Deconstructing the corporate media/government nexus. In D. Macedo & S. Steinberg (Eds.), *Media literacy: A reader.* New York: Peter Lang.

Marshall, E. & Sensoy, O. (Eds.). (2011). *Rethinking popular culture and media.* Milwaukee, WI. Rethinking Schools.

McCarthy, A. (2009). "Stanley Milgram, Allen Funt and Me": Postwar social science and the "first wave" of reality TV. In S. Murray & L. Ouellette (Eds.), *Reality TV: Remaking television culture.* New York: New York University Press.

Media Literacy Now: http://medialiteracynow.org/what-is-media-literacy/

Media Literacy Project: https://medialiteracyproject.org/about-mlp/

Morrell, E. (2008.) *Critical Literacy and Urban Youth: Pedagogies of Access, Dissent, and Liberation*. New York: Routledge.

National Association for Media Literacy Education. https://namle.net/

Ouelette, L. (2010). Reality TV gives back: On the civic functions of reality entertainment. *Journal of Popular Film and Television, 38*(2), 67–72.

Pozner, J. (2010). *Reality bites back: The troubling truth about guilty pleasure TV.* Berkley, CA. Seal Press.

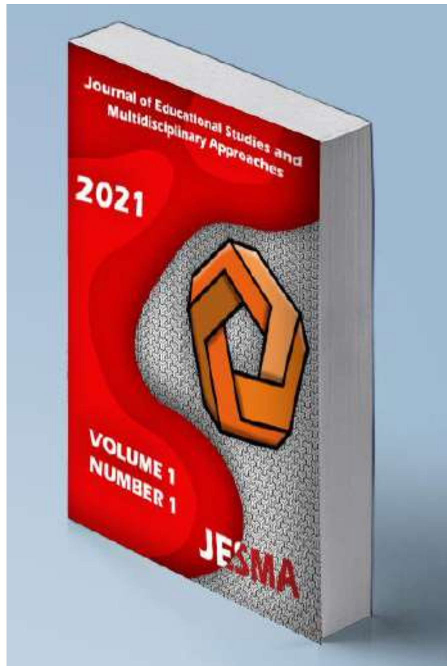
Rose, R.L., & Wood, S.L. (2005). Paradox and the consumption of authenticity through reality television. *Journal of Consumer Research, 32*(3), 284-296.

Steinberg, S. (2011). *Kinderculture: The corporate construction of childhood.* Boulder, CO: Westview Press.

Tatum, Beverly D. (1997). *Why are all the black kids sitting together in the cafeteria?*. New York: Basic Books.

The Critical Media Project: http://www.criticalmediaproject.org/resources/bibliography/

VanDerWerff, E. (2016, January 7). *750 reality TV shows aired on cable in 2015. Yes, 750*. Vox. https://www.vox.com/2016/1/7/10728206/reality-shows-how-many-peak-tv



Journal of Educational Studies and Multidisciplinary Approaches (JESMA)

www.jesma.net

An Interview with Jennifer Jordan and Amy Broemmel- Mastering the Art of Feedback for Pre-Service Teachers

Michael F. Shaughnessy [1]

To cite this article:

Shaughnessy, M.F. An Interview with Jennifer Jordan and Amy Broemmel- Mastering the Art of Feedback for Pre-Service Teachers. *Journal of Educational Studies and Multidisciplinary Approaches (JESMA), 1* (2), 135-141. https://doi.org/10.51383/jesma.2021.18

Journal of Educational Studies and Multidisciplinary Approaches (JESMA) is an international scientific, high quality open access, peer viewed scholarly journal provides a comprehensive range of unique online-only journal submission services to academics, researchers, advanced doctoral students and other professionals in their field. This journal publishes original research papers, theory-based empirical papers, review papers, case studies, conference reports, book reviews, essay and relevant reports twice a year (March and October) in online versions.

[1] Prof. Dr., Eastern New Mexico University, USA, Michael.Shaughnessy@enmu.edu

Journal of Educational Studies and Multidisciplinary Approaches (JESMA)
Volume 1, Issue 2 Year 2021 ISSN:2757-8747

An Interview with Jennifer Jordan and Amy Broemmel- Mastering the Art of Feedback for Pre-Service Teachers

Michael F. Shaughnessy

ARTICLE INFORMATION
Invited Interview
Doi:https://doi.org/10.51383/jesma.2021.18

ABSTRACT
Feedback is one of the most critical, crucial aspects of instruction and pedagogy, yet is often overlooked. There are many different types and forms of feedback and many different scenarios in which it can be provided. In this interview, two clinical teachers provide an overview of the realm of feedback, discuss ways in which it can be provided and review its use in the domain of pre-service teachers and teacher training.

Keywords: Critical media literacy, youth culture, school-university partnerships, reality television

Copyright: © 2021 (Shaughnessy) This is an open access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License, which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited.

Amy Broemmel started her career as a 2nd grade teacher in a small town in northern Illinois before making a much earlier than expected transition to higher education. After teaching at Eastern Illinois University and the University of Wisconsin-LaCrosse, she was hired at the University of Tennessee where she is currently an Associate Professor of Elementary and Literacy Education. Her research focuses primarily on teacher development, but she also collaborates with a science education colleague to use picture books to build science content knowledge with elementary students. Her work has appeared in the American Educational Research Journal, The Reading Teacher, and Action in Teacher Education. She has also co-authored a book, Learning to be Teacher Leaders: A Framework for Assessment, Planning, and Instruction with Dr. Jennifer Jordan.

Jennifer Jordan is a Clinical Associate Professor of elementary education and literacy at the University of Tennessee. She received her BA in sociology with a minor in elementary education from the University of Tennessee, Knoxville in 1998 and earned her MS in elementary education in 1999. After graduation she taught for 9 years in the Hamilton County and Knox County school systems teaching first and fourth grades. Her research focuses on the professional development of pre-service elementary teachers and in-service literacy teachers. Currently, she supervises elementary education teaching interns and teaches reading courses.

1) Feedback for pre-service teachers- how important is it?

It's critical. In general, feedback is an important part of learning; everyone needs someone to objectively provide perspective in order to help us grow. But this can't happen immediately. We find many of our students haven't received much detailed feedback, and have rarely been expected to act on the feedback, so we work hard to scaffold preservice teachers into understanding the process.

2) Corrective feedback- how should it be provided?

Carefully. Honestly, we don't use the term "corrective" when we talk about feedback. Feedback is feedback, positive, negative or anything in between. We frame it as an opportunity to continue to grow and build on the strengths they have. Regardless, for any kind of feedback to be taken seriously, there needs to be some sort of trusting professional relationship based in mutual respect, despite the obvious power imbalance between instructors and students. We work hard to model discussions in which students voice differing interpretations are encouraged in a way that values all voices.

3) What does the research have to say about feedback?

Dean, et al. (2012) says the goal of feedback is "...to give students information about their performance relative to a particular learning objective so they can improve performance and understand themselves better as learners" (p.11). We think Wiggins & McTeague (2005) provide a good definition when they say, "Feedback is concrete, specific, and useful; it provides actionable information" (p. 14).

Marzano (2001) analyzed research studies examining the effect of feedback and found an average effect size of 80.2 (range: .26-1.35) with .4 and above considered significant. Studies with larger effect sizes included feedback that was corrective, timely, criterion-referenced, and allow students the opportunity to give their own feedback.

4) Can you provide a few books that can assist in providing feedback?

Research, bridge, and practitioner. We reference several books when thinking about feedback. Texts about the research behind the importance of feedback inform our own thinking but are generally not the texts we ask our teacher candidates to read:

- The Handbook for the New Art and Science of Teaching by Marzano
- Classroom Instruction That Works: Research-Based Strategies for Increasing Student Achievement by Dean, Hubbell, Pitler and Stone

The next group of texts bridge theory and practice and are texts that influence both our understanding of feedback, as well as, out students' understanding:

- Visible Learning Series by Fisher and Frey
- The Handbook for the New Art and Science of Teaching by Marzano

The final group of texts we have our teacher candidates read at the beginning stage of their learning to build a concrete (practitioner-based) foundation.

- The Hinge That Joins Teaching and Learning by Pollock
- Learning to be Teacher Leaders: A Framework for Assessment, Planning, and Instruction by Broemmel, Jordan, and Whitsett

5) Some people see feedback as criticism and seem to be emotionally sensitive- how can you address this?

Intentionally. We know feedback can be interpreted as criticism--that's a completely normal reaction. As such, we do not direct feedback at the preservice teacher as a person; it is directed at the teaching behaviors in any given instance. We intentionally base our feedback on verifiable observation in relation to teaching standards. Going back to those two are key when there are differing interpretations, which can help remove perceived subjectivity.

6) Understanding feedback- what foundational stuff has to be communicated to pre-service teachers- and to students?

Vulnerability. We acknowledge that teaching is a vulnerable profession in that there are many critics--both those with direct influence on evaluations and those without. We model our own vulnerability by inviting feedback from our students from the beginning. And, we establish early on that the feedback should be directed at observable teaching behaviors in relation to teaching expectations. We model using the appropriate language, like critical reflection, so that they can try it on and use it in the safe environment of our classroom.

It makes an easy transition when we begin giving them feedback on their teaching, and facilitates the gradual release of responsibility model. Ultimately, we want them to come to us with feedback about their

lessons--and it usually happens! Their own reflection leads them to convey most if not all of the points of feedback before we even have a chance.

7) Concrete- specific and useful seem to be watchwords regarding feedback- can you elaborate?

It is actionable. Those three words are based on Wiggins and McTeague's definition of effective feedback. When we write "72%" at the top of a students paper or circle a "⅔" and write ".667" next to it while taking off a half a point, we are maybe being specific, but the feedback is neither concrete nor useful.

In fact, both of these demonstrate a deficit view--as a teacher, your feedback is taking away from the student's performance, but not adding anything helpful to move them forward. When all three are in play, you're providing a way for students to grow.

8) Actionable feedback- what do you mean by this?

It's additive. Actionable feedback spurs the receiver to do something that adds to their repertoire and allows them to try again in a way that might be more successful based on the additional information you have provided. We have found that providing feedback in this way compounds over time. That is, we might not see major changes all at once, but students are internalizing the small pieces in manageable chunks, which crystalize in larger ways over time. Sometimes, even we are surprised when after a few months of feedback, one of our students seemingly all of a sudden pull it all together and we see the results of all the feedback put into action.

9) Does feedback differ for teachers who are going to teach elementary, middle school and high school?

No. Not in process, though certainly the content of the feedback should change based on the teaching standards and observed behaviors.

10) How important is it to link feedback to learning objectives and rubrics?

Important. That is the basis for all that we do with feedback because it takes the emotionality out of the picture. When we give the feedback, we have the rubrics in hand and use the language of the rubrics in our conversation. That allows us to emphasize that we are giving feedback on teaching behaviors--not on the teacher themselves. We find the rubrics for teacher evaluation are a key tool in making this happen.

11) Some people think that rubrics are magic and that pre-service teachers, almost by osmosis- grasp ideas and concepts. Your reflections?

It is intentional. No learning happens by osmosis. We use the language of the rubrics in our teaching and in our feedback. It is intentional and scaffolded and all learners deserve to be taught about what they are expected to learn.

12) Resources and ideas- how important are they in the big scheme of things?

Crucial. We know that we are not always going to be there to guide and support our preservice teachers and that those who give them performative feedback throughout their career may not follow the same kinds of guidelines that we do.

So, in truth, our ultimate goal is to help prepare our students to give themselves the same kind of feedback through their own critical reflection that we give them when we work together. If we are going to get them to that point, we have to help them rely on resources and ideas outside of us; we cannot inadvertently teach them to depend on us for the feedback. So, we consistently refer them to resources that can serve as guides to their thinking and decision making, both now and in the future.

13) How can feedback encourage thinking? Specifically, higher order thinking?

Non-constrained. It's in the way that the feedback is phrased--not only guided, but open ended. For example, we might give feedback that says, "Think about last week's reading by Duke. What would she say about the examples you provided for students to decode in your lesson? How would she encourage you to change that portion of your lesson?" In this way, we are giving a resource and specifying the focus of the students' own reflection, but in a way that encourages them to not only think about but own the decisions they ultimately make going forward. Over time, we find that they internalize this process, and they are often doing the higher order thinking without us prompting them to do so.

14) Written vs verbal feedback- what are the pros, cons and concerns?

It depends. In most cases, both are advisable. Verbal feedback can be more "in the moment," but depending on the state of mind the student brings to the situation, may also be more easily forgotten. Following up with written feedback is always important so that there is a point of shared reference that can serve as a marker for progress, a support for learning, and a record of growth in an area over time.

15) Independent practice- how do you encourage this?

Gradual release of responsibility model. In terms of practicing giving feedback to their students, after we model and provide the preservice teachers with opportunities to practice in class with us, we ask them to collect samples of feedback they see in their classroom. We discuss the pros and cons of those samples, and then ask them to practice giving feedback independently to their students. We require them to bring samples back to class for more discussion. In our experience, this model feels safe, and by the time we ask them to share their own work, they have a deep understanding of the expectations for effective feedback.

16) How important is it for teachers to reflect on what type (quality and quantity) of feedback is provided?

Reflection is always key. We have students analyze feedback and questioning through the lens of assessing or advancing. Assessing feedback is rarely actionable, though assessing questions do give the teacher a sense of where a student is in their understanding at a given point in time.

Advancing feedback is actionable in that it supports students moving forward just as advancing questions spur their thinking to go deeper. We talk about intentionality in balancing the two, although that balance should not be equal. Advancing questions and feedback should be the predominant focus of classroom instruction, and if teachers don't take the time to reflect on how they are using these, the balance can easily get skewed in the wrong direction.

17) Some students need focus- how do you help students focus on one single objective or learning concern?

Focus is good. We actually advocate picking one objective or concern to provide feedback on at any given time. In our teaching observation conferences, we actually choose only one indicator of strength and one indicator for growth for this very purpose. We want them thinking deeply about the one area--not about the seven different indicators we might have chosen. We encourage them to follow the same model in their self-evaluations. In truth, we suspect they end up thinking about many more areas as they determine their one focus. We have seen evidence that they use this same model with their students.

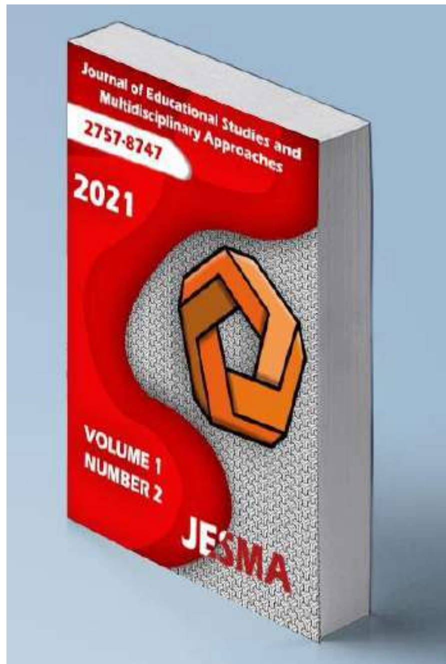
18) Questions and feedback- how are they the same, how are they different?

Questions are a subset of feedback. Feedback can be given in lots of different ways, and questioning is one of those. The questions that we focus on send a message to students about what we value. If we are consistently asking questions with one correct answer we are narrowing their thinking and

19) Do you have a PowerPoint or YouTube presentation on this topic?

https://blog.goreact.com/2020/02/04/preservice-teachers-feedback-podcast/

https://www.crowdcast.io/e/feedback-preservice-teachers/register?utm_source=profile&utm_medium=profile_web&utm_campaign=profile



Journal of Educational Studies and Multidisciplinary Approaches (JESMA)

www.jesma.net

Contemporary challenges in German schools – The potential of the implementation of inclusive pedagogical approaches

Michael Pfeifer[1]

Sarah Wieckert[2]

To cite this article:

Pfeifer, M., & Wieckert, S. (2021). Contemporary challenges in German schools – The potential of the implementation of inclusive pedagogical approaches. *Journal of Educational Studies and Multidisciplinary Approaches (JESMA), 1*(2), 142-159. https://doi.org/10.51383/jesma.2021.20

Journal of Educational Studies and Multidisciplinary Approaches (JESMA) is an international scientific, high quality open access, peer reviewed scholarly journal providing a comprehensive range of unique online-only journal submission services to academics, researchers, advanced doctoral students and other professionals in their field. This journal publishes original research papers, theory-based empirical papers, review papers, case studies, conference reports, book reviews, essays and relevant reports twice a year (March and October) in online versions.

[1] Friedrich Schiller University Jena, pfeifer.michael@uni-jena.de

[2] TU Dortmund University, sarah.wieckert@tu-dortmund.de

Journal of Educational Studies and Multidisciplinary Approaches (JESMA)

Volume 1, Issue 2 Year 2021 ISSN:2757-8747

Contemporary challenges in German schools – The potential of the implementation of inclusive pedagogical approaches

Michael Pfeifer https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9769-5686

Sarah Wieckert https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8933-5522

ARTICLE INFORMATION

Original Research Paper
DOI:https://doi.org/10.51383/jesma.2021.20
Received 30 March 2021
Accepted 21 April 2021

ABSTRACT

Although large-scale studies like PISA (OECD, 2019) and PIRLS (Hußmann et al., 2017) proved already in the beginning of the 2000s that students with a disadvantaged socio-economic background suffer from educational inequality in Germany, this situation has not changed significantly over the years: As it is evidenced by empirical educational research, those students still run a high risk to suffer from educational inequality compared to their fellow students without a disadvantaged socio-economic background (Pfeifer, 2017). But there is also a risk to experience educational inequality for students with immigrant/refugee background, as those two aspects are highly correlated, which is a challenge for schools in view of the refugees that came from 2015 on to Germany (Bogotch, Faubert, Pfeifer, Wieckert, Kervin, & Pappas, 2020; Pfeifer, 2014).

This contribution will provide a data-based insight into this development in Germany. Moreover, based on the example of the federal state of North Rhine-Westphalia an overview will be given of the structure of the German school system, which is characterized by external streaming. Finally, it will be discussed if the implementation of inclusive pedagogical approaches in schools can contribute to reduce educational inequality in German schools (Radhoff & Wieckert, 2017; Wieckert, 2013) by summarizing findings of the review of research as well as findings from a qualitative study.

Keywords: Educational inequality, Inclusion, Pedagogical approaches, Qualitative research, Refugees in school

Copyright: © 2021 (Pfeifer & Wieckert) This is an open access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License, which permits unrestricted use, distribution and reproduction in any medium, provided the original authors and source are credited.

1 Introduction

Although large-scale studies like PISA and PIRLS proved already in the beginning of the 2000s that students with a disadvantaged socio-economic background, which is highly correlated with an immigration background, suffer from educational inequality in Germany, this situation has not changed significantly over the years until now (Hußmann et al., 2017; OECD, 2019). As it is evidenced by empirical educational research, those students still run a high risk to suffer from educational inequality compared to their fellow students without a disadvantaged socio-economic background (Pfeifer, 2017).

This contribution will provide a data-based insight into this development in Germany, starting with an exemplary overview of the German school system. This is quite unique and characterized by external streaming, which can be seen as one factor for educational inequality in Germany (Emmerich, 2016). After this description a review of research concerning the reduction of educational inequality is given being followed by an insight into a qualitative study. This study has been conducted in the German federal state of North Rhine-Westphalia looking at four schools with different approaches of integrating refugee students in school life, as the large refugee arrivals from 2015 on is a current challenge for the education system (Bogotch et al., 2020). Furthermore, Germany has a long tradition in welcoming refugees even before 2015. As being a refugee leads to having an immigration background, large-scale studies summarize refugees under the construct of immigration background. In this regard, findings of studies as PISA or PIRLS – whose research sample tries to represent the population structure of the country – can be taken into account (Mang, Wagner, Gomolka, Schäfer, Meinck, & Reiss, 2019; Martin, Mullis, & Hooper, 2017).

Based on neoliberal values and ideals that are present in the society and, therefore, also effect educational spaces and practices (e.g. by giving schools the possibility of choosing educational concepts autonomously) heterogeneity is seen as given and a chance to implement understanding for one another. Having the opportunity of combining different perspectives and opinions in school and having discussions about those may contribute to widen the own perceptions of the world and may lead to more tolerance. Corresponding to this development it will be discussed, to which extent the implementation of inclusive pedagogical approaches in schools could contribute to reduce social inequality in German schools and create an atmosphere of welcoming difference (Radhoff & Wieckert, 2017; Wieckert, 2013).

2 The German school system and educational inequality

In this section an overview of the structure of the German school system, at the example of the federal state of North Rhine-Westphalia, is provided. This is important with regard to socio-economic challenges in schools, since the German school system is characterized by external streaming. After that a data-based insight into aspects of educational inequality of the German school system will be given.

2.1 The school system of Germany at the example of North Rhine-Westphalia

Describing the German school system is not easy, especially as there is no common German education system. In Germany, primarily the federal states are responsible for their education policy. They have the so-called cultural sovereignty, so that the state governments can largely independently decide how they shape their education systems. This applies in particular to the design of the general education system, but there are also some differences between the federal states in the other education sectors (Edelstein, 2013).

In addition to many differences between the federal states, there is a significant commonality in the education system: In all federal states, there is the Primary School, to which a variety of secondary education school types follows (external streaming). Since the data collection in the context of the study – which is being discussed in section 4 – took place in the federal state of North Rhine-Westphalia, the school system of this federal state is described in more detail below.

2.1.1 The structure of the school system of North Rhine-Westphalia

After four years of Primary School, students attend one of the following secondary education schools of the North Rhine-Westphalian school system (MSW NRW, 2015; Studienkreis, 2018):

- Secondary Modern School (Hauptschule) – Grades 5 to 10
- Intermediate Secondary Modern School (Realschule) – Grades 5 to 10
- Secondary School (Sekundarschule) – Grades 5 to 10
- Comprehensive School (Gesamtschule) – Grades 5 to 13
- High School (Gymnasium) – Grades 5 to 12 (G8 – eight study years) or 13 (G9 – nine study years)

In addition to these school types there exist Special Schools focusing on different special needs. They can include grade 1 to 13, but there are various options how this is organized.

The educational path of a child begins in *Primary School* including grades 1 to 4. The children are individually supported from the beginning, their personal requirements and interests are taken into account. Basic skills like calculating, reading and writing as well as attainments and values are taught. Based on the achievements of the students in grade 4 the Primary School teachers make an individual recommendation for the school type following Primary School for every child.

The *Secondary Modern School* gives students basic general education. The lessons are highly practice-oriented and prepare students in particular for vocational training. During company apprenticeships students learn about the requirements of the field of work. In addition, the company apprenticeships prepare for career choice and vocational training.

The *Intermediate Secondary Modern School* imparts extended general education and lays the foundations for further vocational and academic education. In the classroom, practical and theoretical skills and attainments are equally promoted. Accordingly, the lessons are practice-oriented but also offer academic points of view.

In *Secondary School* students with different skills and abilities can learn together for a longer period of time. This school type prepares students for vocational training as well as for transition to Comprehensive School or High School after grade 10. From the beginning, the lessons

also offer High School standards and cover the grades 5 to 10. Each Secondary School has some kind of cooperation with at least one Comprehensive School or High School. This can help to simplify transitions to one of these other school types and make joint activities possible.

The *Comprehensive School* prepares in a differentiated teaching system for vocational education as well as for university education. Therefore, students with different learning abilities can learn together. There is no assignment of the students to the educational programs like the Secondary Modern School, Intermediate Secondary Modern School and High School. In order to meet the different knowledge and abilities of the students, the lessons in some subjects are offered at two levels (basic level and advanced level).

The *High School* provides a deepened general education. Students acquire knowledge and skills that are prerequisites for higher education or advanced vocational training. In a continuous education course, it comprises both – the lower secondary education (grades 5 to 10) and the subsequent two to three-year upper secondary education.

Students, who require special educational support due to disabilities or a lack of learning ability, can attend a *Special School* at the request of their parents. There are seven different types of special needs with corresponding Special Schools: Emotional and Social Development, Hearing and Communication, Language, Learning, Mental Development, Physical and Motoric Development, Vision.

The following figure illustrates the structure of the school system of North Rhine-Westphalia.

Figure: The structure of the school system of North Rhine-Westphalia

<table>
<tr><td rowspan="2">Secondary II
Grades 10 to 13</td><td colspan="3" rowspan="2"></td><td rowspan="3">Comprehensive School
(Gesamtschule)</td><td>G9</td><td rowspan="4">Special Schools</td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="2">G8
High School
(Gymnasium)</td></tr>
<tr><td>Secondary I
Grades 5 to 10</td><td>Secondary Modern School
(Hauptschule)</td><td>Intermediate Secondary Modern School
(Realschule)</td><td>Secondary School
(Sekundarschule)</td></tr>
<tr><td>Primary
Grades 1 to 4</td><td colspan="5">Primary School
(Grundschule)</td></tr>
</table>

2.1.2 Inclusion concerning special needs

As mentioned before, the external streaming of the German school system can be seen as one factor that causes educational inequality. Therefore, the development of creating more inclusive learning environments will be discussed because those can help to reduce such disadvantages.

Since 2014, inclusion has been enshrined in North Rhine-Westphalia's Education Act as follows: The school promotes the unprejudiced encounter of people with and without disabilities. At school, students are generally taught and educated together. Students, who are dependent on special educational support, are specially fostered according to their individual needs in order to enable them to achieve the highest possible level of educational and occupational integration, social participation and independent living arrangements (MSW NRW, 2014). Learning together of students with and without need of special support is the general rule. If special educational needs are identified, the school inspectorate must designate at least one suitable general education school for the student to attend. The parents have the choice between the general education school and a suitable Special School (MSW NRW, 2016).

2.1.3 Planned developments

With the change of the federal government in 2017, various plans for the educational landscape were decided in North Rhine-Westphalia.

On the Primary School level this includes, among other aspects, an effective substitute reserve and smaller classes for inclusion and integration. Core competences such as spelling should be strengthened. The English lessons in Primary School will be re-examined, which means that it will be discussed, from which grade on they should be part of the curriculum. In addition to religious instruction, ethics lessons at Primary Schools should also be available for students to study.

At the Secondary Schools the vocational orientation should be expanded. For High Schools one of the most important decisions is the planned return to G9 as general rule. Starting in the 2019/2020 school year, High Schools will have the choice to return to G9 (grade 5 to 13) or continue G8 (grade 5 to 12). In the past, High Schools had nine study years (G9) and were forced to reduce the study years to eight (G8).

2.2 Educational inequality in German schools

From the previous section it becomes obvious that North Rhine-Westphalia has a school system, which is characterized by external streaming. The official rationale concerning this external streaming is that each student should be supported in her/his development in a learning environment that has enriching effects for her/his specific needs without demanding too much or too less from a student. But findings from research studies show that especially students, who attend the Secondary Modern School, may suffer from educational inequality (Bos, Tarelli, Bremerich-Vos, & Schwippert, 2012; Bos, Wendt, Köller, & Selter, 2012). Since the economy tends to demand higher degrees of education of their future employees, many parents prefer to send their children to the High School, especially parents, who have a high aspiration towards education. This might lead to a situation, in which Secondary Modern Schools experience a lack of a stimulating learning environment, as there might be a lack of students with higher capabilities

because the parents of these students tend to send them to the High School. Therefore, there is also a development that many Secondary Modern Schools have to close down because they experience a lack of students (Rösner, 2007).

It has been proofed by large-scale studies (e.g. TIMSS and PIRLS) that students at the High School tend to have higher skills (e.g. in mathematics and reading), compared to students of the other secondary education school types, especially to students in the Secondary Modern School. But the same studies also prove that the strongest students of the Secondary Modern School have the capabilities of the weakest students of the High School (Bos, Tarelli, Bremerich-Vos, & Schwippert, 2012; Bos, Wendt, Köller, & Selter, 2012). This is one indication, which can imply that the external streaming does not function as it should be. But despite these findings it is a fact that many students of the Secondary Modern School, no matter which real capabilities they have, are seen as less abled by teachers. This might be the case because the Secondary Modern School is seen as the lowest secondary education school type, and their students are seen as the students with the lowest abilities compared to the students, who attend another secondary education school type. Thus, often school marks of those students are not corresponding with their real abilities (Hußmann et al., 2017; Wendt, Bos, Selter, Köller, Schwippert, & Kasper, 2016). In section 5 some ideas will be given how teachers, not only in Germany, can prevent such errors of assessment.

As it becomes clear, external streaming does not work properly in German schools: Students in school classes in the Secondary Modern School are not homogeneously low performing, and students in school classes in the High School are not homogeneously high performing as it was and still is intended by the educational policy and authorities in Germany.

Besides, the Secondary Modern School and, of course, also other school types, for example the Secondary School or the Comprehensive School, can have challenging circumstances (e.g. high number of students with a low socio-economic background), and, thus, as mentioned above, their students may experience educational inequality, too. But it also depends on the headmasters and teachers of each school how they support the students' learning development. Muijs, Harris, Chapman, Stoll and Russ (2004) for instance emphasize that it is important that teachers of schools with challenging circumstances have high expectations towards the learning development of their students and foster them in a reasonable but also challenging way (neither underestimation nor excessive demands). In section 3 a closer look will be taken at aspects that may have the potential to support students in schools with difficult circumstances. But before that an insight into more detailed findings to which extent students in Germany experience educational inequality will be given.

2.3 Findings from large-scale studies on educational inequality in Germany

Although the topic of educational inequality has been discussed in Germany for a longer time (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1971), the attention of the public and the educational policy towards this issue raised in the early 2000s: After the first cycles of PISA it became clear that Germany is one of the countries where the link between the socio-economic status of the parents and the academic achievement of secondary education students is strong in comparison to the OECD average (OECD, 2019). To a lesser extent, this linkage also emerged from studies in Primary Schools (e.g. TIMSS and PIRLS), which have also been carried out regularly since the beginning of the 2000s (Hußmann et al., 2017; Pfeifer, 2014; Wendt et al., 2016).

The findings of TIMSS from 2015 exemplify for the primary sector that overall social disparities have not diminished over the years. For example, in TIMSS 2015 students with a socio-economically disadvantaged background achieve 39 points less, compared to students, who have not a socio-economically disadvantaged background. These 39 points have a practical meaning of about one school year (Wendt et al., 2016). Compared to the findings from TIMSS 2011 (39 points) and TIMSS 2007 (41 points), it is clear that there is no statistically significant change in this respect. Thus, students with a socio-economically disadvantaged background are still disadvantaged in their mathematics achievement by just over one school year (Pfeifer, 2017).

This is also supported by findings from in-depth analyses, which were calculated as part of PIRLS 2006. The following risk factors for a weak reading performance could be determined by means of logistic regression analyses (Valtin, Hornberg, Buddeberg, Voss, Kowoll, & Potthoff, 2010):

1. Immigration background (at least one parent) *(Odds ratio 3.82*)*
2. Socio-economic background *(Odds ratio 2.32*)*
3. Level of education of the family *(Odds ratio 1.97*)*
4. Sex: Male *(Odds ratio 1.30)*
   *(*p < .05)*

As shown above, students with at least one parent born abroad are almost four times more likely to become weak readers than students with both parents born in Germany. For students with a disadvantaged socio-economic background this probability is more than twice as high, compared to students without a disadvantaged socio-economic background.

Also, findings of PIRLS 2016 proof that students with immigration background achieve 48 points less than students without an immigration background. This has a practical relevance of more than one school year (Hußmann et al., 2017).

From the findings described, it emerges that there is still an urgent need for research and intervention with regard to equal support for students with an immigration background and/or with a disadvantaged socio-economic background, especially if those students are taught in schools with challenging circumstances.

Therefore, in the following an overview of important influencing factors that have been shown to be relevant in empirical studies to reduce these disparities in schools will be provided.

3 Reducing social inequality in German schools – A review of research

In this section at first a broader data-based insight will be given about what headmasters and teachers can do to reduce social inequality in German schools. In this regard, findings from relevant research studies will be discussed.

After that related findings from an international research project on the integration of refugee students/newcomers in German schools in North Rhine-Westphalia will be presented.

3.1 Approaches of leadership

With regard to schools with a socio-economically disadvantaged or otherwise challenging context Stoll and Myers (1998) emphasize, that there are generally no quick and easy ways to help the students in such schools. But in theory-based as well as in empirical publications the following strategies at the school level have been proven to be effective looking at disadvantaged schools (Muijs et al., 2004; Pfeifer, 2014):

- Focus on teaching and learning,
- Decentralized (distributed) / instructional leadership,
- Creating an information rich learning environment,
- Creating a positive school culture and learning environment,
- Having high expectations on teachers, students and parents,
- Sustainable professional development.

But it is important to consider the stage of development of a school and its specific strengths or weaknesses. For example, while decentralized leadership is appropriate for successful, effective schools, schools in challenging circumstances may require a more top-down style of leadership to build basic structures first (Muijs et al., 2004). Other aspects also depend on the developmental stage of a school, such as the extent to which a school needs to focus on providing basic knowledge to the student body, despite a more sophisticated curriculum or in how far external support needs to be mobilized (ibid.).

Schools at an early stage of development or even so-called Failing Schools may require significant external support. In doing so, an authoritative leadership style can be supportive, so that basic structures can be created or improved in the school. For schools that already have this basic developmental step behind them and have already achieved some degree of effectiveness, decentralized leadership and more ambitious goals in developing the school structure, such as establishing professional learning communities, can be beneficial (ibid.).

As can be seen from this section, there are aspects on the school level that are adequate for schools with challenging circumstances, but overall the state of research concerning approaches of leadership for schools with challenging circumstances is still inadequate (Pfeifer, 2014; van Ackeren et al., 2016).

3.2 Approaches of classroom teaching

In the following also teaching related aspects will be focused, as common empirically based models on school quality, such as the Dynamic Model of Educational Effectiveness (Kyriakides et al., 2014), indicate that teaching related aspects may be influenced by leadership behaviour and can have a direct effect on the learning success of students.

In a meta-analysis of empirical studies on learning-promoting factors for students in schools with a socio-economically disadvantaged context Muijs et al. (2004) emphasize the importance of teaching related cooperation between teachers but also between the headmaster and teachers. It is stated that such cooperation can improve teachers' competences in teaching related activities, such as joint teaching development, collegial support or evaluative analysis and, thus, the quality of teaching (Pfeifer, 2014).

Regarding the workload of teachers, Muijs et al. (2004) summarize that in schools with a challenging context teachers have to work much harder and more committed than their colleagues in schools with more favourable contextual conditions. It also becomes clear that these efforts need to be sustained, as positive developments can be short-lived and unstable, especially in such difficult conditions (Holtappels, Webs, Kamarianakis, & van Ackeren, 2017; Whitty, 2001). In this regard, Webs and Holtappels (2018) as well as Chapman (2007) emphasize the importance of institutionalized forms of cooperation, as they have a structural effect and can, therefore, be expected to be sustainable. To that effect, it is of central importance that teachers are able to cooperate with their colleagues. In this respect, Pfeifer and Holtappels (2008) as well as Ainscow, Muijs and West (2006) note that teachers need to have enough time to cooperate effectively. This, in turn, requires supportive headmasters but also additional working time quotas and additional resources (Connell, 1996; Guthrie, Guthrie, van Heusden, & Burns, 1989; Seeley, Niemeyer, & Greenspan, 1990). Harris, Muijs, Chapman, Stoll and Russ (2003) also stress that a relentless focus on teaching and learning is characteristic for effective and successful schools with a disadvantaged context. In particular, the focus on the students' achievement, on teaching methods that contribute to classroom interaction and the adaptive development of existing teaching methods have proved as key components of effective schools (Helmke, 2017; Meyer, 2016).

With regard to students with a disadvantaged socio-economic background, Reynolds, Sammons, de Fraine, Townsend and van Damme (2011) emphasize that a climate of warmth and support can prove beneficial in the classroom (O'Brennan, Bradshaw, & Furlong, 2014; Spitzer, 2007). To value students and to make them feel that the school is not only a place of learning but also a place of life proves to be characteristic of effective and successful schools, too (Beutel, Höhmann, Pant, & Schratz, 2016; Connell, 1996; Lein, Johnson, & Ragland, 1997; Maden & Hillman, 1993). Harris et al. (2003) add that the positive reinforcement of students, the teaching of lesson contents in small units as well as giving students the opportunity to ask questions are further positive factors in this respect.

In addition, lessons in such disadvantaged schools should be more strongly influenced by direct instruction (Stockard, Wood, Coughlin, & Rasplica Khoury, 2018) and as close as possible to the real school context as well as demonstrating the practical, extracurricular benefits of learning (Henchey, 2001; Hopkins & Reynolds, 2002; Kember, Ho, & Hong, 2008; Montgomery, Rossi, Legters, McDill, McPartland, & Stringfield, 1993).

4 Findings from an international research project: Education of students with immigrant/refugee background in Germany

The following findings are based on classroom observations and interviews with 20 headmasters and teachers in schools in North Rhine-Westphalia, Germany (Faubert, Bogotch, Pfeifer, Wieckert, & Arar, 2019). The studied secondary education schools in North Rhine-Westphalia have challenging contexts, as a high amount of their students has a low socio-economic background and/or an immigration background. The study focuses on demands and methods concerning the integration of refugee students into school, as the refugee movement from 2015 on is challenging for schools in general (Bogotch et al., 2019). A content analysis of the data has taken place (Mayring, 2014).

When being asked about how to deal with students, who came from Syria to Germany, the teachers did not give any direct answers. They focused much more on the individuality of each student irrespective of her/him being a refugee or not. Based on the developments in the German school system, this is not surprising, since precisely questions of heterogeneity and inclusion are currently highly discussed and seen as important issues (Beauftragter der Bundesregierung für die Belange von Menschen mit Behinderungen, 2018; Wieckert, 2013). Student groups are becoming more and more heterogeneous, which means that the needs of the different students are, of course, very individual, and the teachers have the task to respond to this individuality as well as possible. The utopia of homogeneous learning groups is gradually being set aside. In this respect, the teachers try to see each student in her or his uniqueness and find out what each person needs to make learning processes as beneficial as possible. After longer exchanges between the researchers and the teachers, it becomes apparent that for another reason, teachers are not specifically looking at the group of Syrian students as one, which needs specific attention. They reported that most of the Syrian students in particular are motivated to learn, to acquire the German language and to find their way around the school as well as in society. Thus, the teachers also experience them as very inquisitive.

From the point of view of some teachers, other groups of students, specifically students from countries such as Albania, Bulgaria and Romania, are less motivated to learn the German language and to participate actively in school life. This is quite understandable, since the reason for immigration is often – at least as the researchers were told in the studied schools – that the parents, mostly the father, is in Germany to find a job, earn as much money as possible and then finally go back to the country of origin. As a result, some students from these countries of origin may see little sense in learning the German language or joining the school association. For this reason, precisely these students require a lot more attention from the teachers as the students, who fled Syria and came to Germany.

It should be noted, however, that these are, of course, individual statements of teachers, which cannot be generalized, as each learning group is different, and every child or each adolescent behaves differently in school and teaching contexts.

As Germany is a democratic state, students should get into contact with democracy and the concept of democracy in various ways while being in school. For many years now, a debate has been taking place about democracy education in Germany and the question of how democracy can be lived in school (Beutel & Fauser, 2011) considering those aspects. Students should be able to experience what it means to live in a democracy at school. The school offers itself as a kind of small society with democratic structures as a field of practice, since all the growing-ups visit this institution. In concrete terms, democratic fields of experience can be, for example, student councils, through which students can also participate with their perspectives at school meetings. In many schools, there are class councils, in which the students can discuss together for instance about conflicts, problems, upcoming acquisitions or even excursions concerning the class. Central to this are the idea of participating in school life and the opportunity to contribute one's own views. This should enable the students to accept the opinions of others, to think about them and to enter into a (controversial) exchange. For example, during a classroom observation a German lesson took place, which was mainly characterized by playing games and singing songs focusing on the language. Thus, classical language teaching, for example by writing down vocabulary or giving theoretical explanations of grammar rules, was not performed – at least not in this lesson. Rather

the students were given the opportunity to use the language in practice. This relaxed classroom atmosphere, which the researchers observed, can play a positive and playful role in conveying what it means to be part of a democratic society, to be taken seriously and to be able to bring in one's own thinking into discourses. The fact that lessons, which are as motivating as possible and characterized by humour, can be extremely helpful for the creation or maintenance of the joy of learning and the concomitant progress in learning is supported by study findings (Spitzer, 2007). In other lessons the teachers made sure to give the students space for discussion, to see controversies and to look at different perspectives concerning the topic.

In the studied schools two different approaches could be identified. In some schools there were classes initiated, in which only refugee students were learning together. The aim was to foster learning German as good as possible so that the students could follow the various lessons afterwards in mixed classes (MSB, 2018). The other schools used the so-called GO-IN-Model (Bezirksregierung Arnsberg, 2016). In this model the refugee students attended usual classes from the beginning. Of course, at first there was a certain language barrier in understanding the lessons and communicating with the other students in the class, who did not seek refuge but are familiar with the German language. This approach follows the idea that contact to German students can help finding German speaking friends as soon as possible, and, in this regard, the German language can also become a part of life outside the classroom more easily.

5 Conclusions and recommendations

As can be seen from the previously discussed aspects of the review of research in section 3, there is still a gap in the state of research on teaching and school aspects, which can be helpful for fostering competences of students with a disadvantaged socio-economic background.

The awareness of researchers and practitioners has to sharpen in order to be able to consider priorities in research and intervention projects to identify conditions for success at classroom and school level, so that students with a disadvantaged socio-economic background can be adequately supported concerning their learning process at school.

Of course, teachers should try their best to assess students' performances in school as objective as possible. Knowledge about the socio-economic background of the students should not have an influence on this process. When teachers give recommendations at the end of Primary School for the secondary education school type, which fits the best for the student, the achievements of the student should be the main focus. Considerations of teachers that parents may not be able to help the child with school tasks or that they will not be able to finance private tutoring if needed should not have a negative effect on the school type in favour, for example by recommending a lower school type as the achievements would suggest in order to prevent the student from experiences of failing because of an assumed lack of support.

Moreover, possible errors of assessment – which have been mentioned earlier in section 2.2 – should be known and minimalized as much as possible. For example, if a teacher tends to assume that a student will not be able to achieve good results in tests because the parents did not achieve higher education the expectations will be low, and the process of grading might be not as objective as it should be. Therefore, tests could be graded with the names of the students covered, other teachers could be asked if they could have a second look on tests in question and the tests could be reviewed again after some time elapsed. Being aware of errors of assessment and reflect

the own process of giving grades can help to develop an environment, in which students can really display their potential and widen it. This does not mean that some teachers try to hinder students from getting the education they are capable of on purpose. Sometimes, they may not be aware of it or think they are acting for the student's best. Hence, it is important to sensitize teachers accordingly. Errors of assessment need to be discussed during teacher training and the reflection of the educational practises should become a fixed part of cooperative exchange (Radhoff, Ruberg, & Wieckert, 2019).

A current international initiative in order to get an insight into practices of teaching refugee students is the research project Education and Immigration, also mentioned in section 4 (Faubert et al., 2019). As refugee students come into an unknown environment and mostly do not speak the language of the welcoming country, they need to get the chance to become a part of the society. Teachers face the challenge of integrating students into school, whose language skills need to be developed, while having to follow the normal course of the curriculum. In inclusive learning environments, in which external streaming is not in focus (e.g. following the GO-In-Model), students can help each other and become aware of the heterogeneity of the group and, moreover, the individuality of each student. Lessons, which try to meet this heterogeneity, for example by giving students the opportunity to learn at their own speed and by choosing tasks from different degrees of difficulty, can help to create an open learning environment, in which everyone can support the other. Therefore, lessons should also include joint activities, which can strengthen the social class structure. In times of trying to implement inclusive environments, schools are places, in which heterogeneity can be valuated, as individuals can show their special abilities and enhance the school life by bringing those together.

Last but not least, it is essential that education policies take into account the findings that emerge and enable their implementation in practice, thus, contributing to reducing educational inequalities.

References

Ainscow, M., Muijs, D., & West, M. (2006). *Using collaboration as a strategy for improving schools in complex and challenging circumstances: What makes the difference?* Manchester: National College for School Leadership, University of Manchester.

Beauftragter der Bundesregierung für die Belange von Menschen mit Behinderungen (2018). *Die UN-Behindertenrechtskonvention. Übereinkommen über die Rechte von Menschen mit Behinderungen. Die amtliche, gemeinsame Übersetzung von Deutschland, Österreich, Schweiz und Liechtenstein*. Retrieved from http://www.behindertenbeauftragter.de/SharedDocs/Publikationen/DE/Broschuere_UNKonvention_KK.pdf?__blo-b=publicationFile [30.03.2021].

Beutel, S.-I., Höhmann, K., Pant, H.-A., & Schratz, M. (Eds.). (2016). *Handbuch Gute Schule. Sechs Qualitätsbereiche für eine zukunftsweisende Praxis*. Seelze: Klett/Kallmeyer.

Beutel, W., & Fauser, P. (Eds.). (2011). *Demokratiepädagogik. Lernen für die Zivilgesellschaft* (2nd ed.). Frankfurt am Main: Wochenschau.

Bezirksregierung Arnsberg (2016). *Schulkonzepte*. Retrieved from https://kommunale-integrationszentren-nrw.de/schulkonzepte [30.03.2021].

Bogotch, I., Faubert, B., Kervin, C., Pappas, D., Pfeifer, M., Silliman, E., & Wieckert, S. (2019). *Democratic Values and Practices: Educating Syrian Newcomers in Two Regions of Canada and Germany*. Paper presented at the 2019 annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association (AERA). Retrieved from http://www.aera.net/Publications/Online-Paper-Repository/AERA-Online-Paper-Repository [30.03.2021].

Bogotch, I., Faubert, B., Pfeifer, M., Wieckert, S., Kervin, C., & Pappas, D. (2020). Political and economic gamble: why two jurisdictions in Canada and Germany made the right decisions in welcoming Syrian newcomers, 2015-present. *International Journal of Leadership in Education, Special Issue: Understanding Leadership for Refugee Education, 23*(1), 57-69.

Bos, W., Tarelli, I., Bremerich-Vos, A., & Schwippert, K. (Eds.). (2012). *IGLU 2011. Lesekompetenzen von Grundschulkindern in Deutschland im internationalen Vergleich*. Münster: Waxmann.

Bos, W., Wendt, H., Köller, O., & Selter, C. (Eds.). (2012). *TIMSS 2011. Mathematische und naturwissenschaftliche Kompetenzen von Grundschulkindern in Deutschland im internationalen Vergleich.* Münster: Waxmann.

Bourdieu, P., & Passeron, J.-C. (1971). *Die Illusion der Chancengleichheit. Untersuchungen zur Soziologie des Bildungswesens am Beispiel Frankreichs*. Stuttgart: Klett.

Chapman, C. (2007). *Federations: A Policy of Collaborative Rescue for Failing Schools?* Paper presented at the conference Schools in Trouble: Schools facing Challenging Circumstances.

Connell, N. (1996). *Getting off the list: School improvement in New York City*. New York: New York City Educational Priorities Panel.

Edelstein, B. (2013). *Das Bildungssystem in Deutschland*. Retrieved from https://www.bpb.de/gesellschaft/kultur/163283/das-bildungssystem-in-deutschland [30.03.2021].

Emmerich, M. (2016). Differenz und Differenzierung im Bildungssystem: Schulische Grammatik der Inklusion/Exklusion. In V. Moser, & B. Lütje-Klose (Eds.), *Schulische Inklusion* (pp. 42-57). Weinheim: Beltz Juventa.

Faubert, B., Bogotch, I., Pfeifer, M., Wieckert, S., & Arar, K. (2019). *Leading by Inclusive Ideals: Educators' Experiences in Both Canada and Germany on How to Successfully Integrate Student Refugees Into Schools.* Paper presented at the European Conference on Educational Research (ECER). Retrieved from https://eera-ecer.de/ecer-programmes/conference/24/contribution/47828/ [30.03.2021].

Guthrie, L. F., Guthrie, G., van Heusden, S., & Burns, R. (1989). *Principles of successful Chapter 1 programs: A guidebook for rural educators*. San Francisco: Far West Laboratory for Educational Research and Development.

Harris, A., Muijs, D., Chapman, C., Stoll, L., & Russ, J. (2003). *Raising attainment in schools in former coalfield areas*. Nottingham: DfES Publications.

Helmke, A. (2017). *Unterrichtsqualität und Lehrerprofessionalität. Diagnose, Evaluation und Verbesserung des Unterrichts*. Seelze: Klett/Kallmeyer.

Henchey, N. (2001). *Schools That Make a Difference: Final Report. Twelve Canadian Secondary Schools in Low-Income Settings*. Kelowna: Society for the Advancement of Excellence in Education.

Holtappels, H. G., Webs, T., Kamarianakis, E., & van Ackeren, I. (2017). Schulen in herausfordernden Problemlagen – Typologien, Forschungsstand und Schulentwicklungsstrategien. In V. Manitius, & P. Dobbelstein (Eds.), *Schulentwicklungsarbeit in herausfordernden Problemlagen* (pp. 17-35). Münster: Waxmann.

Hopkins, D., & Reynolds, D. (2002). *The past, present and future of school improvement*. Nottingham: DfES Publications.

Hußmann, A., Wendt, H., Bos, W., Bremerich-Vos, A., Kasper, D., Lankes, E.-M., McElvany, N., Stubbe, T. C., & Valtin, R. (Eds.) (2017). *IGLU 2016. Lesekompetenzen von Grundschulkindern in Deutschland im internationalen Vergleich*. Münster: Waxmann.

Kember, D., Ho, A., & Hong, C. (2008). The importance of establishing relevance in motivating student learning. *Active Learning in Higher Education, 9*(3), 249-263.

Kyriakides, L., Creemers, B. P. M., Muijs, D., Rekers-Mombarg, L., Papastylianou, D., van Petegem, P., & Pearson, D. (2014). Using the dynamic model of educational effectiveness to design strategies and actions to face bullying. *School Effectiveness and School Improvement, 25*(1), 83-104.

Lein, L., Johnson, J. F., & Ragland, M. (1997). *Successful Texas schoolwide programs: Research study results, school profiles, voices of practitioners and parents*. Austin: Charles A. Dana Center, the University of Texas at Austin; U.S. Dept. of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement, Educational Resources Information Center.

Maden, M., & Hillman, J. (Eds.). (1993). *Success against the odds: Effective schools in disadvantaged areas*. London: Routledge.

Mang, J., Wagner, S., Gomolka, J., Schäfer, A., Meinck, S., & Reiss, K. (2019). *Technische Hintergrundinformationen PISA 2018*. München: Technische Universität München.

Martin, M. O., Mullis, I. V. S., & Hooper, M. (Eds.). (2017). *Methods and Procedures in PIRLS 2016*. Boston: Boston College, TIMSS & PIRLS International Study Center.

Mayring, P. (2014). *Qualitative content analysis: theoretical foundation, basic procedures and software solution*. Retrieved from http://nbn-resolving.de/urn:nbn:de:0168-ssoar-395173 [30.03.2021].

Meyer, H. (2016). *Was ist guter Unterricht?* Berlin: Cornelsen Scriptor.

Montgomery, A., Rossi, R., Legters, N., McDill, E., McPartland, J., & Stringfield, S. (1993). *Educational Reforms and Students Placed At Risk: A Review of the Current State of the Art*. Washington: US Department of Education, OERI.

MSB NRW (2018). *Integration und Deutschförderung neu zugewanderter Schülerinnen und Schüler*. Retrieved from https://bass.schul-welt.de/18431.htm [30.03.2021].

MSW NRW (2014). *Schulgesetz für das Land Nordrhein-Westfalen (Schulgesetz NRW – SchulG)*. Retrieved from http://www.schulministerium.nrw.de/docs/Recht/Schulrecht/Schulgesetz/Schulgesetz.pdf [30.03.2021].

MSW NRW (2015). *Das Schulsystem in Nordrhein-Westfalen*. Retrieved from https://www.berufsorientierung-nrw.de/cms/upload/pdf/Flyer_Schulsystem_deutsch.pdf [30.03.2021].

MSW NRW (2016). *Verordnung über die sonderpädagogische Förderung, den Hausunterricht und die Schule für Kranke (Ausbildungsordnung sonderpädagogische Förderung – AO-SF)*. Retrieved from https://bass.schul-welt.de/6225.htm [30.03.2021].

Muijs, D., Harris, A., Chapman, C., Stoll, L., & Russ, J. (2004). Improving Schools in Socioeconomically Disadvantaged Areas – A Review of Research Evidence. *School Effectiveness and School Improvement, 15*(2), 149-175.

O'Brennan, L. M., Bradshaw, C. P., & Furlong, M. J. (2014). Influence of Classroom and School Climate on Teacher Perceptions of Student Problem Behavior. *School Mental Health, 6*(2), 125-136.

OECD (2019). *PISA 2018 Ergebnisse. Was Schülerinnen und Schüler wissen und können. Band I*. Bielefeld: wbv Media.

Pfeifer, M. (2014). Einfluss von Unterrichtsfaktoren auf die Verringerung sozialer Disparitäten – ein Überblick zum aktuellen Forschungsstand. In H.G. Holtappels, A. Willems, M. Pfeifer, W. Bos, & N. McElvany (Eds.), *Jahrbuch der Schulentwicklung. Daten, Beispiele und Perspektiven. Band 18* (pp. 183-205). Weinheim: Beltz Juventa.

Pfeifer, M. (2017). Theoretische Fundierung empirischer Schul- und Unterrichtsforschung unter besonderer Berücksichtigung des sozioökonomischen Kontextes. In M. Radhoff, & S. Wieckert (Eds.), *Grundschule im Wandel* (pp. 71-80). Hamburg: VDK.

Pfeifer, M., & Holtappels, H. G. (2008). Improving learning culture in all-day schools: results of a new teaching time model. *European Educational Research Journal, 7*(2), 232-242.

Radhoff, M., Ruberg, C., & Wieckert, S. (2019). Die Gewissheit der Ungewissheit. Zur Professionalisierung angehender Lehrkräfte im Kontext von Inklusion. *heiEDUCATION Journal. Transdisziplinäre Studien zur Lehrerbildung, 2*(4), 25-33.

Radhoff, M., & Wieckert, S. (Eds.). (2017). *Grundschule im Wandel*. Hamburg: VDK.

Reynolds, D., Sammons, P., de Fraine, B., Townsend, T., & van Damme, J. (2011). *Educational Effectiveness Research (EER): A State of the Art Review*. Paper presented at the International Congress for School Effectiveness and Improvement (ICSEI).

Rösner, E. (2007). *Hauptschule am Ende – Ein Nachruf.* Münster: Waxmann.

Seeley, D., Niemeyer, J., & Greenspan, R. (1990). *Principals speak: Improving inner-city elementary schools. Report on interviews with 25 New York City principals*. New York: City University of New York.

Spitzer, M. (2007). *Lernen. Gehirnforschung und die Schule des Lebens*. Heidelberg: Spektrum.

Stockard, J., Wood, T. W., Coughlin, C., & Rasplica Khoury, C. (2018). The Effectiveness of Direct Instruction Curricula: A Meta-Analysis of a Half Century of Research. *Review of Educational Research, 88*(4), 479-507.

Stoll, L., & Myers, K. (Eds.). (1998). *No quick fixes. Perspectives on schools in difficulty*. London: Falmer Press.

Studienkreis (2018). *Das Schulsystem in Nordrhein-Westfalen*. Retrieved from https://www.studienkreis.de/infothek/bundeslandinfos/schulsysteme/nordrhein-westfalen/ [30.03.2021].

Valtin, R., Hornberg, S., Buddeberg, M., Voss, A., Kowoll, M. E., & Potthoff, B. (2010). Schülerinnen und Schüler mit Leseproblemen – eine ökosystemische Betrachtungsweise. In W. Bos, S. Hornberg, K.-H. Arnold, G. Faust, L. Fried, E.-M. Lankes, K. Schwippert, I. Tarelli, & R. Valtin (Eds.), *IGLU 2006 – die Grundschule auf dem Prüfstand. Vertiefende Analysen zu Rahmenbedingungen schulischen Lernens* (pp. 43-90). Münster: Waxmann.

van Ackeren, I., Bremm, N., Eiden, S., Neumann, C., Racherbäumer, K., Holtappels, H. G., Hillebrand, A., Kamarianakis, E., & Webs, T. (2016). Potenziale entwickeln – Schulen stärken. Forschungs- und Entwicklungsprojekt für Schulen in benachteiligten Standorten in der Metropole Ruhr. *SchulVerwaltung Nordrhein-Westfalen, 27*(2), 41-42.

Webs, T., & Holtappels, H. G. (2018). School conditions of different forms of teacher collaboration and their effects on instructional development in schools facing challenging circumstances. *Journal of Professional Capital & Community, 3*(1), 39-58.

Wendt, H., Bos, W., Selter, C., Köller, O., Schwippert, K., & Kasper, D. (Eds.). (2016). *TIMSS 2015. Mathematische und naturwissenschaftliche Kompetenzen von Grundschulkindern in Deutschland im internationalen Vergleich.* Münster: Waxmann.

Whitty, G. (2001). Education, social class and social exclusion. *Education and Social Justice, 1*(1), 2-8.

Wieckert, S. (2013). Self-Concept Development in Inclusive Classroom Settings focusing on Children with and without Visual Impairment. *Journal of Systemics, Cybernetics and Informatics, 11*(6), 1-3.

Journal of Educational Studies and Multidisciplinary Approaches

Journal of Educational Studies and Multidisciplinary Approaches (JESMA) is an international scientific, high quality open access, peer viewed scholarly journal provides a comprehensive range of unique online-only journal submission services to academics, researchers, advanced doctoral students and other professionals in their field. JESMA publishes original research papers, theory-based empirical papers, review papers, case studies, conference reports, book reviews, essay and relevant reports twice a year (March and October) in online versions.

ISSN: 2757-8747

jesma.net