

Stories, Values, and Children's Books: Portraits of Three White Preschool Teachers Committed to Anti-Racist Pedagogy

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Purpose

The purpose of this study was to find out influences and practices of 3 white preschool teachers' anti-racist pedagogy and their use of children's books as a pedagogical tool.

Literature Review

Anti-racist education is necessary to developing a more equitable society. Within this style of pedagogy, teachers create classroom communities which directly teach children to be anti-racist (Allen et. al, 2021). Teacher factors (e.g., race, values, experiences, training) influence their approach in anti-racist education (Colker, 2008).

White teachers dominate preschool classrooms, hence centering whiteness in anti-racist work is critical in creating an equitable education for young children. White teachers must reflect on their personal biases and current practice to become effective anti-racist educators (Grierson, 2021, p. 16).

Children's books are central to anti-racist education because they act as "mirrors" that reflect the children and families in the classroom and "windows" that reflect the diverse communities of the world (Santora, 2013, p. 1).

Methodology

- Design: Multiple case studies
- Setting: Participants' classrooms
- Participants: 3 pre-sch. teachers committed to anti-racist pedagogy
- Selection: Purposive sampling
- Tools & procedure: 2 semi-structured interviews & environment observations
- Analysis: Identification of themes for each participant, and their commonalities

Results

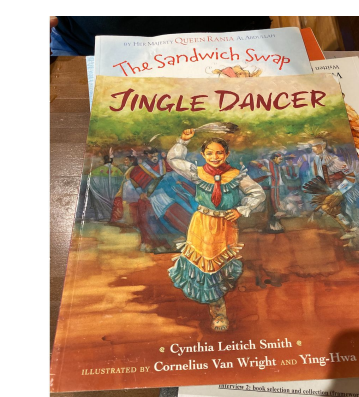
"Sadie's" Portrait

Sadie is an enthusiastic teacher who identifies as a lifelong learner. By seeking out resources and listening to outside communities, she takes steps towards inclusivity to recognize and celebrate children's identities and to dismantle all of society's "isms." Her experiences as a young mother founded her value in family partnership.

Themes

1. Lifelong Learner
2. The influence of personal experience and curriculum
3. Partnering with families

"Regardless of whatever unit we're on, there will be diversity represented."
"[When discussing race or racism] It doesn't mean you're walking on eggshells. . . it means you're asking for more information, asking questions, and you are just doing the best you can."



Sadie's Book Sample
Jingle Dancer

"Barb's" Portrait

Barb is a committed educator who takes pride in building relationships with each student and family. To Barb, respect and relationships go hand in hand. Every decision Barb makes contributes to her classroom culture.

Themes

1. Relationships with students and families
2. Relevance, familiarity, and flexibility to each class's interest
3. Influence of upbringing and its influence on intentionality

"I think it [book collection] just evolves with time, and as you get to know your groups differently and as [diversity in] your groups change, your perspectives change, and what you're looking for in your groups changes."



Barb's Book Sample
Beautiful

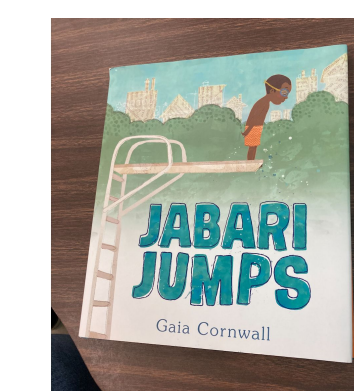
"Ellie's" Portrait

Ellie is a young prepared teacher who centers literature and restorative justice. Ellie's purpose and development as a teacher stem from her work with a more diverse population of students and families. Within Ellie's antiracist pedagogy, children's literature acts as a catalyst for conversation and a welcoming, safe classroom environment.

Themes

1. Learning from students and families – needs, priorities, etc.
2. Strengths-based practice and partnership
3. The centrality of children's literature and restorative justice

"Yes, we are all unique, and diverse and special in our way and we should celebrate that *and* there are systems and things that oppress certain groups of people that need to be addressed."



Ellie's Book Sample
Jabari Jumps

Summary and Implications

All three teachers recognized:

- The need for individualized, intentional, and reflective practice in anti-racist pedagogy.
- Classroom culture and community-based learning to create a classroom culture in which individual students' needs, interests, and backgrounds are represented and met.
- Value to family partnership, which connects to their engagement in self-reflection. Within interactions with families and students, they work to develop an awareness of their biases and social position.

*The names of the participants have been changed to protect anonymity

Implications

My research indicates that an awareness of whiteness and its influence on students guides teachers in dismantling racism and implicit biases. Early childhood teachers must adapt to the growing body of research that redefines effective practice. The three stories serve as examples of teachers who are doing the work, proving that anti-racist pedagogy is possible to integrate and practice.

This study calls for:

- Professional development in supporting all teachers, particularly white teachers who are in the classroom
- Divergent stories which call for a pause to reflect on the values & experiences that empower anti-racist pedagogy
- The importance of doing anti-racist pedagogy in areas with predominantly white students
- Listening to white teachers' stories and experiences with anti-racist pedagogy
- The need for more research on teacher education programs centering anti-racist pedagogy and their effectiveness

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