

## Literature Synthesis

### Lesson Cycle 2

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In lesson study cycle 2, my group wanted to challenge ourselves and focus on play. We wanted to define play, look at play in elementary classrooms, and see how teachers use play to teach children. As a class we were looking at cycle 2 with a culturally responsive lens. This led to my group investigating how elementary students develop sociopolitical consciousness. We wanted to allow for a rigorous experience for all students, while allowing children to play authentically in the classroom. Having had some experience in Reggio Emilia schools, I began my research by reading about Reggio Emilia approaches and constructivist theories. To begin, the definition of play must be identified. Play is defined as “child-centered” where the teacher’s role is to provide meaningful interactions that are familiar to children (Smith & Chao, 2018). We further investigated how we could allow for authentic play in the classroom, while still exploring how students can develop sociopolitical consciousness.

### **Culturally Responsive Pedagogy**

Culturally responsive teachers provide opportunities for students to engage with the world around them by using student-to teacher-to real world connections. These conversations of inequality and inequity can and should begin in elementary school. Culturally relevant teachers utilize students’ culture as a vehicle for learning (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Culturally responsive teaching allows for students to engage the world and others critically by allowing students to critique cultural norms, values, and institutions that create inequalities (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Although this lesson will be completed in a kindergarten classroom, students are already aware of inequalities around them. Although they have not fully developed the academic vocabulary, students are more than aware of when things are fair and unfair (language used in Addy’s kindergarten classroom).

When looking at our lesson with a culturally responsive lens, we hope to provide opportunities for students to explore issues of equality and equity through open ended play, then students will begin to develop their sociopolitical consciousness. We will further examine our equity goal: Kindergarteners will recognize, grapple with, and generate solutions for unfairness through unequal distribution of resources.

## **Play-Based Education**

Children are building autonomy and practicing social emotional skills when they play. Students are also developing an identity through play. Play-based education often gets a bad wrap, however play-based education is more developmentally appropriate and connects critical learning with children's exploration of their identity (Smith & Chao, 2018). Using play as a tool in elementary school classrooms allows students and teachers to learn with each other by identifying student interests, curiosities, and questions important to them. It also allows for the connection of content to be used as tools for empowerment, agency and access for learners, their families, the school community, and the surrounding neighborhood (Smith & Chao, 2018). After reading several research articles, it is apparent that new teachers do not believe in play-based learning and therefore our education system has seen a decrease in play in elementary school classrooms. Play is often not thought of as a way to build skills, however there are a plethora of skills that students learn while playing. When students are playing they are using their imaginations, negotiation skills, and social interactions to practice their linguistic ability (Cavanaugh et al., 2017). When children are playing they intuitively learn how language is used (Cavanaugh et al., 2017). Our school system is data-driven from standardized testing and developmental needs of children are put to the side and play-based learning is often a forgotten approach.

## **Finalizing the Lesson**

With a strong love for play-based learning, my group worked hard to decide how students can authentically play, while having critical conversation. A play-based approach is student driven, and this is where we ran into a problem. We struggled to figure out how five and six year olds were going to have critical conversations about inequities with little to no teacher support. We had a difficult time letting go of the idea of student-driven play, but were aware of giving students exposure to critical conversations in their first year of schooling.

It took time, but the group came to a conclusion to allow for a play-based lesson guided by the teacher. Through careful planning, we came to the conclusion that authentic play can be done in the classroom, however a lesson about inequities with five and six year olds needs teacher direction.

The lesson will hold onto important aspects of play from journals we have read and our own classrooms experiences with authentic child-centered play. Addy (the host teacher), will conduct a literacy and math filled lesson that explores unequal amounts of blocks. Addy will facilitate the discussion in a way where the math problem will turn into a real-world math problem. Students will grapple with

the task at hand and be given an opportunity to discuss what they have found and noticed. Addy will conduct a discourse about unfairness and possible solutions to tackling similar real-world problems.

As a group we are excited to observe this play-based lesson with our equity and content goal in mind. Afterwards, we hope that our reflections allow for improvements in our own classrooms and schools.

## References

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Ladson-Billings, G. (1995). But that's just good teaching! The case for culturally relevant pedagogy. *Theory into practice*, 34(3), 159-165.

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