



UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA AT OMAHA

Learning Through Play: An Anti-Racist Perspective

KERRY-ANN ESCAYG

Assistant Professor

Department of Teacher Education



Theoretical tenets of Anti-Racism

-Addresses both institutional and individual racism

-Advocates for the saliency of the “subjugated voice”

Contextualizes contemporary inequities by paying attention to historical and social processes

Exposes, interrogates and problematizes white privilege and power

Recognizes other ways of knowing, experiential knowledge of the oppressed

Interrogates knowledge-power interface in relation to racial ideologies that support and maintain racism



Applying Anti-racism to Play-based learning: Theoretical connections

- The literature reflects whose perspective of play? (Knowledge-power intersection) What are the underlying assumptions of such knowledges?
- Play-based environment supports or challenges racial ideologies that “other” non-white bodies (the saliency of race)?
- How do children use play to express racial knowledge?
- Are play-based environments reinforcing white privilege by not engaging students in discussion about race/racism, and/or by not examining children’s play for racist beliefs and actions? (white privilege and power)



Materials are not enough! Towards anti-racist approaches

- Lane (2008) advised:
- “Alone (dolls and books) cannot counter racism- talking about issues is likely to be more effective in changing attitudes than having resources reflecting our multicultural society which no one plays with” (p. 204).



Anti-racist play based learning: Summary

1. Integrate other conceptualizations of play; Is DAP the only framework to understand children's play?
2. Analyze children's play from more than just developmental perspectives (post-colonial, anti-racist).
3. Create an environment that is diverse, but supplement such approach with critical discussions on race and racism.
4. Recognize that children are not "racially innocent." A large body of data confirm children's competence in enacting the racial discourse specific to their social context
5. Children use play to perform racial identities and racial attitudes.
6. Teacher Training: Teachers must be willing to examine their own racial awareness/attitudes/knowledges; anti-racist early years pedagogies require critical self-reflection.