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MID-SOUTH LITERACY JOURNAL

The University of Alabama at Birmingham, in partnership with The Mid-South Reading/Writing Institute, has established this peer-reviewed online journal, *The Mid-South Literacy Journal* (MLJ). This new online, peer-reviewed journal is dedicated to disseminating and extending scholarship through original research and practice articles in literacy education. MLJ highlights constructivist-based literacy theory and practice that places the child at the center of the learning process and furthers the legacy of Dr. Maryann Manning. Each journal features a focus on teachers' perspectives about issues in the field along with contemporary releases in children's literature. Utilizing a combination of real-world classroom applications and concrete theoretical framework, the journal provides bi-yearly publications each fall and spring.

MANUSCRIPT AND SUBMISSION GUIDELINES

For more information about submitting an original manuscript to MLJ, visit:
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Dr. Maryann Manning's achievements were significant, the products of her boundless energy, unfaltering determination and deep commitment to children. Dr. Manning's footprint can be seen in the many projects that the UAB School of Education is known for today. Dr. Manning authored numerous books, book chapters, monographs, and articles that have guided and inspired educators throughout Alabama and beyond. Organizations around the world esteemed her with awards and accolades. She was particularly honored and excited to serve as a future president of the International Reading Association. At the time of her death, she was working at a literacy conference in Indonesia, doing what she loved.

Overview of Issue

The manuscripts chosen for this third issue of *The MidSouth Literacy Journal* encourage literacy stakeholders to move beyond traditional beliefs about children. Featured articles compel early childhood educators to shift from a deficit model of thinking with regard to student ethnicity, culture, and socioeconomic status. In addition to viewing children's backgrounds and life experiences as sources of knowledge, two of the articles emphasize the powerful role of the teacher in selecting children's literature. Whether choosing the most recently published, quality pieces of literature or widening a child's understanding of gender, the teacher's effective selection of children's books is critical. The goals of these two articles are to broaden the early childhood educator's awareness of new books for reading aloud and to identify books for promoting different perspectives related to gender.

A Tale of Three Children is a qualitative study which explores the extent to which home and sociocultural experiences support the literacy development of three culturally diverse children. The researchers based their work on the Funds-of-Knowledge Approach, a theoretical framework for understanding students' households, family practices, and cultural resources as vantage points for the learning process. This case study utilizes interviews with the families of three young children representing different ethnicities, cultures, and socioeconomic statuses. The researchers conclude the article with specific implications for building on a student's prior knowledge and current belief systems within the early childhood classroom.

Picturebooks and Gender: Making Informed Choices for Equitable Early Childhood Classrooms is a practitioner-based article that expands upon a previous study of young children's definition of gender. The authors identify four distinct categories teachers need to understand when choosing picture books to include in the early childhood classroom. They define four categories (*gender binaries, discourses of childhood innocence, intersectionality, herteronormativity*) for expanding gender messages. The authors include two picture books within each category. This article encourages teachers to reflect on the messages they are sending to young children about gender through their choice of children's literature.

The final article in this issue, *Book Addicts' Review: 50 New Picture Books to Fall in Love With*, highlights picture books published in 2016 for use in the early childhood/elementary education classroom. The authors begin the article with a brief discussion about the importance of reading aloud in the classroom and address the role of student choice regarding opportunities for self-selected, independent reading. The authors categorize 50 new picture books and discuss the relevance of each category along with a brief summary of several recently published children's books. This practitioner-based article will revitalize the critical yet often forgotten practice of reading aloud to children of all ages.

A Tale of Three Children: A Funds-of-Knowledge Cross-cultural Perspective with an Emphasis on Early Literacy Development

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For today's early childhood educator, understanding the unique background each child brings to the classroom and recognizing its influence on his or her literacy is a pressing issue. Yet, little is known amid teachers about how to utilize a funds-of-knowledge approach to promote literacy in a culturally-diverse classroom. Therefore, the purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the sociocultural aspects of literacy development of three diverse children through a funds-of-knowledge approach. Three purposefully-chosen families were investigated to discover significant influences impacting the children's literacy development. Interviews with parents during home visitations provided qualitative data regarding familial, educational, and cultural literacy values and influences. Analysis of these data yielded two general themes: familial and parental educational influences on children's literacy development and sociocultural influences related to literacy. Recommendations are provided for teachers to consider regarding ways in which a funds-of-knowledge approach can help enhance inclusive learning environments.

Keywords: culture, early childhood education, ethnomethodology, funds-of-knowledge, literacy, sociocultural influences

"One can think of the funds-of-knowledge approach as helping to establish social relations with families to facilitate a particular understanding of them to help mediate classroom life."

Luis C. Moll

Introduction

Not only are parents the first teachers of their children; their home, community, extended family, and social networks constitute a significant portion of a child's learning environment, an environment which is becoming increasingly more diverse. The interactions of parents, teachers, peers, and communities are critical in shaping children's development and learning (Kozulin, Gindis, Ageyev, & Miller, 2003; Molfese, V., Modglin, & Molfese, D., 2003; Moll, 2014).

Vygotsky's sociocultural theory (1929) provides a framework for understanding how the intertwining familial, cultural, and educational relationships, as well as circumstances such as the intense pace of modern life, poverty, and unplanned events (e.g., divorce) can have on a child's life (Brendtro, 2006; Moll, 2014). Creating positive reciprocal relationships between a child's family's funds-of-knowledge and academic knowledge from school is paramount to the overall well-being and success of the developing student (Gonzalez, Moll, Tenery, Rivera, Rendon, Gonzales, & Amanti, 1995; Moll, Amanti, & Neff, 1992; Sugarman, 2010). This mutually-dependent relationship is underscored in Vygotsky's sociocultural learning theory which encourages the connection between a child's home influences and teachers' academic expectations (Monzó & Rueda, 2003; Vygotsky, 1929).

As the United States has become more multicultural, there has been a larger proportional cultural mix for children under 6 years of age which is expected to rise to approximately 30% of all U.S. children by 2020 (Lahaie, 2008). As a reflection of the continuous change in demographics, many children in today's public schools are likely to have a teacher from a dissimilar background resulting in the need for a multicultural approach to education (National Center for Education Statistics, 2015). The funds-of-knowledge approach provides teachers with a more complete picture to evaluate and educate the whole child instead of making judgments based primarily on test scores and reading levels (Kozulin et al., 2003; Moll, 2014). As described by Moll (2014), one of the advantages of a funds-of-knowledge approach in education is that it provides a theoretical orientation for understanding students' households, family practices, and cultural resources (Ford, 2014; Moll, 2014). As teachers take on the role of learners, the funds-of-knowledge approach facilitates their efforts to foster a sense of community within the classroom. Additionally, this approach underwrites their ability to capitalize on the diversity and uniqueness of the children and promotes more meaningful literacy experiences (Gonzalez, Greenberg, & Velez, 1994; McWilliams, 2009; Sarraj, Jiaqui, Bene, & Burley, 2015). It is the melding of children's culture with their educational experiences that fosters a holistic learning environment.

Purpose of the Study

The advantages of investing in quality educational services for children prior to school age (5 years and under) have been a primary focus for researchers (Heckman, 2006; Raikes, Brooks-Gunn, & Love, 2013; Steuerle, Reynolds, & Carasso, 2007). The effort to provide developmentally appropriate, comprehensive quality educational experiences for all children is in part an effort to combat potential educational inequities (Heckman, 2006; McWilliams, 2009). Prior research has indicated that sources of inequality include children from households in which English is not the primary language, children born and reared in homes of low-socioeconomic means and an absence or lack of adequate and supportive verbal communication experiences, and children who have experienced familial disruptions such as divorce (Coleman, 1967; Leon, 2003; Tornello et al., 2013).

Research indicates that children's construction of language and their development of emergent literacy skills, the precursors of formal reading, begin early in life (Neuman & Dickinson, 2003). A longitudinal study conducted by Tsao, Liu, and Kuhl (2004) demonstrated that children's phonetic perception played a critical role in their language acquisition in the first two years of a child's life. Moreover, the quality of early literacy experiences, such as extended conversations with parents, caregivers, and friends, singing songs, and listening to stories, contributes significantly to the acquisition of later literacy skills (Bus & Van IJzendoorn, 1988;

Canner, Knight, & Cross; 1997; Vandermaas-Peeler, Sassine, Price, & Brillhart, 2011). This was further demonstrated in the study by Sénéchal and LeFevre (2002) which found that early home literacy experiences were related indirectly to later reading performance at the first and third grade level.

In consideration of the increasing ethnic diversity in early childhood educational settings, the researchers sought to explore the sociocultural backgrounds of three purposefully-selected children. The differences in age, ethnicity, culture, and socioeconomic status of the children chosen for the study provided opportunities for the researchers to utilize the funds-of-knowledge approach to gain multiple insights on children's literacy development. The primary research question guiding this study was: to what extent do the home and sociocultural experiences support the literacy development of three culturally-diverse children?

Methods

Data Collection

The funds-of-knowledge approach, which yields information that can be utilized to enhance children's learning experiences, falls within the realm of qualitative ethnomethodological research. The social inquiry method reviews the detailed context of collected data to obtain participants' conceptions of their lived experiences (Garfinkel, 1996; Have, 2002; Roth, 2009). Our study applied the funds-of-knowledge approach via home visits, face-to-face semi-structured interviews, and informal observations. Data were gathered from three diverse households to gain insight regarding familial, educational, and sociocultural influences on the children's literacy development. To bring diverse perspectives to the project, a public school teacher, an education coordinator of a program for infants and toddlers, and an international early childhood education doctoral student interviewed parents, observed children, and communicated with early childcare providers/teachers.

Interviews

The three children who participated in the research represented three theoretically rich and diverse contexts. Mark was a 5-year-old European-American boy, who lived in poverty and attended kindergarten in a small, southern, rural community. Lama was a 5-year-old Saudi Arabian girl who moved from her native country at the age of three and was enrolled in kindergarten in a large, southern, metropolitan city. Finally, Pete was a *two-and-a-half-year-old African-American boy who lived in a large, southern, metropolitan city and received early childhood education from both a home visiting program and a childcare center, and whose parents both had prior military experiences.*

The children's parents were interviewed to ascertain significant sociocultural influences impacting their children's literacy development. Questions asked to parents during the semi-structured interviews were based on the work of Amaro-Jimenez and Semingson (2011) who also used a funds-of-knowledge approach to explore children's literacy development.

Table 1
Funds-of-knowledge Literacy Questions

<i>Did you attend preschool/childcare? What do you remember (both positive and negative experiences about your own preschool/school experiences?</i>
<i>What kind of teaching/learning support did you have at home when you were young?</i>
<i>Do you remember learning to write and read?</i>
<i>What is your favorite story or memory from your childhood that involved reading a book?</i>
<i>Do you read/play/interact with your child in similar or different ways than what you remember about your childhood? What is an example?</i>
<i>What are some activities that you do with your child to help him/her learn?</i>
<i>What are some things you do that you feel help to promote your child's literacy acquisition?</i>
<i>What are some examples of important cultural experiences or traditions that you want to pass along to your child?</i>

Results

Data analysis included triangulation from varied data sources and coding which revealed themes of parental and sociocultural influences to literacy. *In all three home environments, the parents' personal literacy and educational backgrounds impacted the various ways in which they approached literacy and learning with their children. The following three stories resulted from the data gathered using a funds-of-knowledge approach to interview selected families.*

Findings from Mark's Story

Much of Mark's life was spent in tumult, with the one constant being his mom. After his parents' divorce, he and his mom lived with her parents in a small trailer on the outskirts of a town of 13,000 people. One year later, he and two soon-to-be stepbrothers watched as his mom and new stepdad wed on a lake's shore. The year or two that followed were volatile, and following police involvement, the marriage ended. Again, Mark and his mom moved back into his grandparents' trailer. Mark liked math and Legos[®] and enjoyed his brief time in preschool before his mom could no longer afford to send him. Later, his kindergarten teacher praised Mark as a leader in the class. She was unaware he had endured such familial disruptions; however, she showed concern about his evident speech difficulties. His significant speech impairment was treated through speech therapy twice weekly at school, and when he was around his mom, she interceded whenever she thought others could not understand him. In the afternoons after kindergarten, Mark came to his divorced parents' shared small business where a study/learning area was set up. In this way, Mark's mother was able to encourage him to complete his homework and provide assistance when she was not busy with customers.

Mark's mother did not finish high school, but she did complete her GED years later, and it was important to her to be involved with Mark's education and to promote his literacy. She remembered struggling with writing, particularly writing some letters backwards when she was young. As it turns out, this was also a concern she had for her son when he began to have the same problem. She encouraged him to "sound out" words and practice writing. *She* used flash cards to help him learn words and math concepts and bought a dry erase board for him to use to practice writing and to make correcting mistakes easier.

Findings from Lama's Story

Lama was born in Riyadh, the capital of Saudi Arabia, and she heard only Arabic prior to moving from her home. When she was two, her father decided to pursue computer science studies in the United States. Her mother, who was working as a teacher, was hesitant to move. By the time the family moved to the United States, Lama was speaking understandable, limited Arabic. Once in the United States, Lama's exposure to English resulted in her acquisition of a second language, and she began to use words instead of pointing to indicate what she wanted. Although she spoke English with inconsistent grammar, Lama gained confidence to ask her teacher a question or communicate with other children in the classroom. Concerned that Lama was losing her knowledge of Arabic, her mother decided to speak only Arabic when communicating with her at home; resulting in Lama learning English and Arabic concurrently in her school and home environments. Her parents further promoted literacy through the use of charts, songs, a tablet, and smart phone, and easy access to books from a living room bookshelf.

As a child, Lama's mother attended a public elementary school located far from her home town. Each time a new school was established closer to her home, she was transferred, resulting in an overall unpleasant personal school experience. In reaction to her own childhood memories, Lama's mother was so concerned when she enrolled Lama in an English-only preschool program that she accompanied her daughter all day in the classroom during her first week of attendance.

Findings from Pete's Story

Pete was verbal for his age and developmentally on target. Pete's parents' military experiences and participation in a home visiting early childhood education program influenced the ways in which they promoted literacy in their home including access to a wide range of books and toys, storytelling, shared reading, and bedtime stories. Additional literacy-promoting tools included charts, to-do-lists, and daily family schedules with pictures to accompany the words so that Pete could begin to make the connection between familiar tasks (dressing and brushing teeth) and the words used to represent them. *His mother explained that her time in the military influenced her life and her parenting of Pete, including her expectation that as Pete grows older the use of routines should help him understand what is expected of him. His parents expressed a desire for him to become more independent; yet, his developing autonomy was also a source of frustration for them. They wanted him to acquire the necessary skills to be independent; however, behaviors such as helping himself to items in the refrigerator without asking were not welcomed.* Pete's dad described him as inquisitive and encouraged hands-on learning. *As Pete enjoyed telling stories, his parents took photographs and videos to encourage him to communicate about past shared experiences such as attending a Veteran's Day Parade. They expressed a desire for him to have a "good" childhood, and Pete's literacy was a fundamental family value.*

In common with the other two mothers, Pete's mother also faced educational challenges including difficulty learning to read and an unsupportive home environment that resulted in some early negative educational experiences. Her own mother worked in the evenings and was not available to read to her or help with homework, and she described her father as a very impatient man who became angry if she did not learn new things as quickly as he thought she should.

From a community perspective, differences existed across the three children's environments. Mark's community lacked diversity and resources: the town was 80% Caucasian, and there were no museums or zoos. The library and park were more than 15 miles from his home, and there were no children nearby to interact with *and support his literacy development.*

Lama and her family lived in a diverse multi-ethnic (Asian, Mexican American, African American, and Middle Eastern) community that included approximately 20 families from her Saudi Arabian culture, thereby providing other bilingual children with whom she could interact. Pete's family lived in an ethnically-diversified urban community comprised primarily of African American, Caucasian, and Hispanic families. Pete had many opportunities to interact with children his age and his parents' faith and their military background were important cultural and community influences.

Discussion

The purpose of this funds-of-knowledge project was to delve into the sociocultural aspects of three families' lives to gain insight and perspective regarding their core values, family background, impactful and historical family life events, and family goals specifically centered around literacy. Understanding children's home environments and families' cultural practices can significantly impact students' classroom experiences (Chu & Wu, 2010; Jordan, Snow, & Porche, 2000; Lavadenz, 2011). Making connections between home and school is the ultimate goal of the funds-of-knowledge approach, potentially resulting in a reciprocal relationship between the teacher and the child. The investigation of three different children from three diverse backgrounds yielded important sociocultural aspects of their lives that impacted each child's literacy journey.

Lama's literacy development needs to be viewed with consideration of the upheaval of her family and her move to a new country; in addition are the challenges associated with the differing exposures of spoken language at home and at school. Bialystok (2002) noted that bilingual children have less difficulties related to understanding spoken and written languages, as opposed to "building up sufficient oral mastery and reading experience in each language" (p. 191). In school, Lama readily understood what the teacher was saying, but there were times that her responses were not grammatically correct. Lama faced challenges in both languages related to sentence structure. As her mother was committed to speaking only Arabic at home, Lama's English language experiences at school were critical in her acquisition of this second language. The funds-of-knowledge approach encourages teachers to understand students' home language and engage students in actively co-creating knowledge (Lavadenz, 2011; Moll, 2014). For Lama, an emphasis on oral language particularly with peers during authentic learning activities was vitally important. According to Meisel (2011), "If children receive sustained input from second language learners, or if their onset of acquisition is delayed, this can indeed lead to incomplete acquisition" (p. 121). Bilingualism does not limit learning; however, it makes the process of perceiving languages more challenging (Bialystok, 2002). From a funds-of-knowledge perspective, gathering detailed information regarding the sociocultural and linguistic aspects of a child's home enables teachers to provide rich, culturally and linguistically appropriate learning experiences in the classroom (Carlson & Meltzoff, 2008; Chu & Wu, 2010; Gonzalez, Moll, & Amanti, 2013). Armed with the knowledge that Lama only spoke Arabic at home, the teacher can help Lama co-create the knowledge to comprehend why the languages are different.

Mark's story exemplifies the concept of inequality of educational experiences due to socioeconomic status as well as the effects of familial disruption (Coleman, 1967; Leon, 2013; Tornello et al., 2013). Moll (2014) contended that the secret to literacy instruction is for schools to investigate and use the untapped home and community resources of their students. Knowing that both of Mark's parents work and had limited time to read and write with him, his teacher could provide take-home books that he could easily read y independently with writing response

prompts that he could write without assistance. Children from disadvantaged environments potentially have less exposure to resources that are considered facilitative to their development, and the gap in children's achievement and inequality in performance is due primarily to familial reasons rather than schools (Heckman, 2006). Mark was not currently underachieving in the classroom; in fact, his teacher described him as a high-performing leader. Yet, she and the speech therapist indicated that his speech difficulties were unique, and they were trying new interventions including asking students to correct Mark's errors with speech. Both of these stakeholders mentioned that the disruptions in his life may have impacted his speech. With limited resources, impoverished families are challenged to provide meaningful literacy opportunities. The teacher's knowledge about Mark's parents' work situation, low income, and lack of preschool experiences would indicate the need to supplement lessons by frontloading information about topics which Mark may not be familiar by using anticipation guides, virtual field trips, and picture books, for example (Gambrel, Malloy, & Mazzoni, 2014; Moll, 2014). Two fundamental resources that are important for children's education are time and money; both of which are difficult for impoverished families to provide (Xu, Liu, & Zhang, 2015).

Pete is fortunate in that his parents placed a great emphasis on learning in general and literacy in particular. Additionally, his parents had experiences with and were influenced by military service. Military families share values such as independence, self-reliance, privacy, and the need to be strong; all of which contribute to their parenting style (Lester et al., 2012; Ross & DeVoe, 2014). Additionally, military-oriented parents generally have a broad openness to adopting and developing new parenting styles (Walsh et al., 2014). For the moment, Pete's parents have managed to overcome potential educational inequalities. They make use of their modest income to provide a quality childcare learning environment while they work, and access additional free home-based early childhood educational services to help make sure Pete is achieving or exceeding his developmental milestones. The parents' military experiences help provide a structure and sense of order that they consider to be important to child-rearing.

Implications for Practice

The use of culturally responsive teaching embraces all students' cultural knowledge, prior experiences, and performance styles, and incorporates the funds-of-knowledge approach by creating an environment where students' learning is positive, appropriate, and effective (Gambrel et al., 2014). In this sense, the role of teacher is shifted as "Becoming culturally aware includes understanding characteristics that directly impact teaching and learning: values, traditions, communication, learning styles, and relational patterns" (Gambrell et al., 2014, p. 12). Culturally-aware 21st century teachers embrace students' heritages and incorporate these valuable contributions into the traditional curriculum encouraging a sociocultural climate which nurtures and benefits all learners (Gambrell et al., 2014; Keengwe, 2010; Moll, 2014). A culturally-responsive teaching style helps students gain a positive self-concept by positioning their culture and history at the center of the teaching and learning process and culturally-responsive teachers develop and create lessons that emerge and are relevant to the students' lives (McWilliams, 2009; Marx & Byrnes, 2012; Palawat & May, 2012). For instance, Pete's parents' military background could inspire his teacher to create lessons about patriotism and duty near Veteran's Day. His parents could also be invited to participate in a school or classroom tribute to veterans and share stories of their military experiences with the children. For Mark, the teacher may include a parents' day where parents come to talk about their jobs or businesses. Likewise, Lama's parents could be invited to come and talk with her classmates about Saudi Arabian

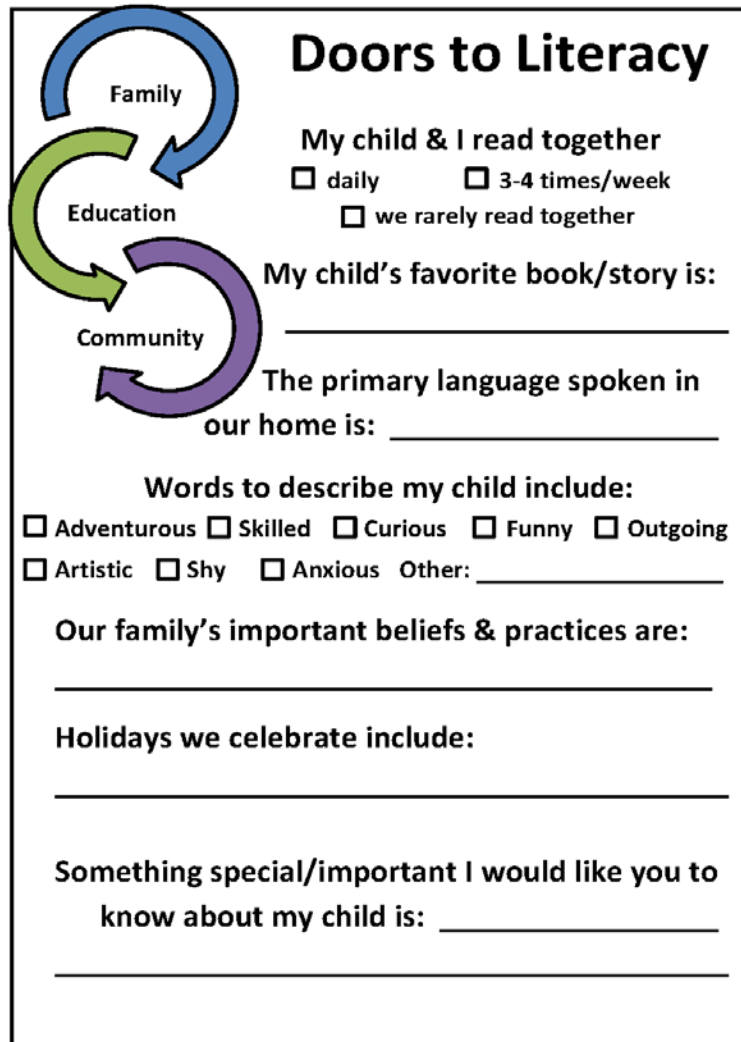
customs and traditions. In addition, through the introduction of a few Arabic words or letters, Lama's parents could introduce the children to new sounds and words.

Knowing children's culture and spoken language at home, also enables teachers to incorporate new sounds and diverse languages into the classroom (Palawat & May, 2012). By encouraging children to learn and read at their own pace through exposure to and experiences with developmentally appropriate books (Gambrell et al., 2014; Lahaie, 2008), and using books written in more than one language (e.g., English and Arabic or English and Spanish) teachers contribute to children's exposure to other languages (Marx & Byrnes, 2012; Meisel, 2011). In this manner, familiarizing diverse children like Lama with the sounds of words that they hear at home can help them *become more* bilingually literate. Additionally, multi-ethnic communities expose children to language that supports and influences literacy development and allows children to develop a phonological awareness of letters and words of other languages (Chu & Wu, 2010). Considering the sociocultural aspect of children's lives and incorporating their prior knowledge into classroom practices is a primary objective of the funds-of-knowledge approach. One method, according to Moll (2014), incorporates home visits to reveal a wealth of knowledge that teachers can use to expand the strengths from each child's cultural experiences and environment. Mark's teacher mentioned that she had no idea he had experienced so many moves and now lived with grandparents. A home visit is an excellent way to assess his access to literacy-enhancing tools and to discover his habits and family values. Children should be active learners involved in developing their own literacy, and teachers should use the information from students' funds-of-knowledge to drive innovative instruction and discover community resources at their disposal (Gonzalez et al., 2013; Gonzalez et al., 1995; Moll, 2014). For example, Lama's teacher knows her parents have sacrificed for her father's continuing education which could be a springboard for a focus on the value of teaching and learning at all ages.

Identifying implicit biases and responses to biases, as well as creating awareness of the visible (literature, crafts, art, music, technology) and invisible (values, beliefs, feelings, opinions, assumptions) cultures in the classroom are critical issues for today's early childhood and elementary teacher (Aveline, 2003; Clark & Zygmunt, 2014; Gambrell et al., 2014). Reflecting on the findings from Mark's story, building a stable, trusting, and understanding relationship with economically-disadvantaged children allows the teacher to be more responsive to potential learning inequity. Children like Mark might not have been exposed to broad family experiences that expand literacy like visiting museums, camping, or even celebrating holidays. Providing them with printed materials like picture books and magazines as well as access to computers and the internet connects them with otherwise inaccessible experiences and promotes engagement (Moll et al., 1992; Sugarman, 2010).

Within the context of education, the degree to which educators have knowledge and understanding of a family's values, past experiences, and future goals, the better equipped they are to help families scaffold their children's learning. Family practices, cultural resources, and historical events in children's lives are important aspects to consider when building an inclusive classroom learning environment (Lavadenz, 2011; Lee, 2012). Promoting the value of the funds-of-knowledge approach and the information gained through learning about children's home environments among teachers and stakeholders is a step toward educating the whole child (Johnson, 2004). Considering that teachers or students may have a propensity to be biased toward a student simply because of his or her name, for example Lama or Bubba, may be a first step toward becoming culturally aware. Pre-service and practicing teachers who seek to understand their potential biases can make inroads toward establishing a multicultural classroom

(Amaro-Jimenez & Semingson, 2011; Aveline, 2003; Chu & Wu, 2010, Clark & Zymunt, 2014). Questions that can be utilized in a questionnaire or in parent/teacher conferences to build connections between a child's home and school environments are included in the Doors to Literacy chart. Additional home survey questionnaires that may be helpful have been created by Carlson and Meltzoff (2008) and Winsler, Diaz, Espinosa, & Rodriguez (1999).



The chart is titled "Doors to Literacy" and features a circular diagram on the left with three arrows forming a loop. The top arrow is blue and labeled "Family", the middle is green and labeled "Education", and the bottom is purple and labeled "Community". To the right of the diagram are several sections of text with checkboxes and blank lines for responses.

Doors to Literacy

My child & I read together
 daily 3-4 times/week
 we rarely read together

My child's favorite book/story is: _____

The primary language spoken in our home is: _____

Words to describe my child include:
 Adventurous Skilled Curious Funny Outgoing
 Artistic Shy Anxious Other: _____

Our family's important beliefs & practices are:

Holidays we celebrate include:

Something special/important I would like you to know about my child is: _____

Chart 1. Doors to Literacy Family-Home Connection.

As the researchers began discussing the three students' pseudonyms, and the name Lama was chosen, as this is a common girl's name in Saudi Arabia, there was apprehension that readers may equate the name with Llama, a name for a South American relative of the camel and make negative connotations or assumptions based on the name. A name change was considered, however, herein the premise behind funds-of-knowledge lies: valuing diversity and embodying cultural sensitivity and understanding. Utilizing a funds-of-knowledge approach enables teachers to be mindful of cultural norms, special experiences, traditions, and events in families' lives and can change the climate of the teacher-parent relationship. In this regard, barriers between

teachers and parents are dissolved, potentially resulting in friendships which may become ongoing and permanent (Gonzalez et al., 2013).

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Picturebooks and Gender: Making Informed Choices for Equitable Early Childhood Classrooms

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We examine picturebooks through a feminist lens, understanding that children's literature and media can limit and expand how young children access gender representations. We describe four categories that increase teacher knowledge to select books with multiple and varied gender representations for children in their classrooms. These four categories are *gender binaries*, *discourses of childhood innocence*, *intersectionality*, and *heteronormativity*. We illustrate each category with two quality books that maintain and disrupt each theme. We hope teachers will find the categories useful for thoughtfully selecting books for classroom libraries, read aloud, and discussion.

Keywords: gender, early childhood, children's literature, book selection



Figure 1. Leila poses provocatively for a fashion photo.

The children in Angleton's preschool classroom are tending to their pre-nap tasks of stretching sheets over their cots and finding a book to read while they settle into rest. Leila, the child pictured in Figure 1, pulls the corner of her fitted sheet over her head and wraps it around her body. As she shifts her gaze and juts her hip into a provocative pose, she asks Whitmore, who often takes photos in the classroom, to take her picture. "Take a picture of my fashion," she says.

Our goal in this article is to share our recent thinking about gender and children's literature in early childhood classrooms. We are researchers who recognize the importance of a feminist perspective (Blaise, 2005; Davies, 2003; Jacobson, 2011) as part of creating equitable early childhood learning spaces. We recognize that our attention to gender, sexuality, and other social issues, and their influence on children's identities, is necessary to "bring about social change and improve the lives of all children" (Blaise, 2005, p. 6). Although a fair amount of research and thinking about gender and literature is available with older elementary and secondary learners (Schmidt, Thein, & Whitmore, 2013; Thein, 2005; Van Horne, 2015), we offer insights about gender and picturebooks with preschool learners.

Most much-loved children's books limit gender representations in themes, plots, and characters and maintain status quo gender categories for readers. Such problematic limitations are easily visible in classic fairy tales like Cinderella. In most versions, Cinderella is modest and obedient; she is represented as white, blonde, and beautiful, with a tiny waist and tiny feet. Although enslaved by her evil stepmother, Cinderella works hard and does not despair. She can only achieve "happily ever after" in marriage, after she dresses in a ball gown and is rescued by a prince.

What "Cinderella" lessons has Leila learned from books available for her nap time reading? How have these and other media contributed to her performance of her identity as a girl—which in the opening vignette can be described as "seductive" and "coy," and related to fashion and posing for photographs. How might early childhood teachers select books for classroom libraries and read alouds that expand how to be girls and boys; in other words, books that offer children images that are situated and fluid on a continuum of gender identities and expressions?

We recently completed a two-year qualitative research study about disrupting preschool children's working theories about gender roles with quality children's literature. Whitmore and Zuccaro worked with Angleton in her preschool classroom at a university-affiliated child development center to learn how four and five-year olds respond to literature and curriculum that interrupts typical, binaried gender representations that are common in the media. Angleton read a variety of quality picturebooks with strong gender themes and invited children to respond. Our data sources were fieldnotes, transcripts of book discussions, photographs, and scans of children's written and drawn creations. We learned in our research that our preschool informants "initially thought that gender is determined by and visible in appearance (especially clothing and hair) and activities (marriage, occupations, and toy selection)" (Whitmore & Angleton, 2017, p. 58). However, as they engaged in curriculum around the literature the children "broadened their thinking of what it means to be boys and girls" (p. 58).

Iorio and Visweswaraiah (2011) said a "teacher is positioned to be the catalyst in [gender norm] disruptions, offering children alternative ways to portray gender beyond accepted and limited societal viewpoints" (p. 72). In this article, we focus on just one of teachers' roles as

catalysts—book selection—as we share ways our awareness has grown about explicit and implicit gender messages conveyed in picturebooks.

The remainder of this article presents four categories that teachers will want to be aware of in order to offer children multiple and varied presentations of gender in children’s books: *gender binaries*, *discourses of childhood innocence*, *intersectionality*, and *heteronormativity*. Each section defines a category and describes two quality picturebooks—one book illustrates and perpetuates the challenges inherent in the category and another treats the issues in the particular category well. Our intention is not to label these exemplar picturebooks as “bad/negative” or “good/positive,” which would oversimplify complex and contextualized issues. Rather, we intend to identify and unpack some of the complexities of book selection for teachers who want to become more intentional about gender as they make book choices. This complexity includes the reality that the books we present portray gender in mixed ways, simultaneously providing readers with expansive gender messages, and perpetuating limiting ones.

Gender Binaries

The most visible and central consideration for book selection with a gender lens is how a book maintains and disrupts *gender binaries*, which we describe as “the identity limits that construct and are constructed by young children as strictly ‘male’ or ‘female’ and reinforce expectations for ways of being that govern membership in each category” (Whitmore & Angleton, 2017, pp. 49-50). Media and literature often encourage young children to be the “right” kind of “male” or “female” with a limited representation of gender identities (Wohlwend, 2012). Through such representations, boys implicitly learn to take action as white knights rescuing damsels in distress, and are encouraged to become doctors or mathematicians. They are discouraged from caretaking, art, or sewing, roles stereotypically reserved for women. Girls are encouraged to take interest in their appearance and to accept a destiny to marry and have children. They are discouraged from enlisting in the army or becoming scientists, roles stereotypically reserved for men.

Alice the Fairy (Shannon, 2004) is an example of how popular children’s literature can perpetuate gender binaries. Alice is a little girl who tells her story about practicing to be a real fairy. She dazzles readers with her magic wand and shows off her flying skills. While this story is entertaining, it maintains gender binaries by portraying little girls as liking pink and pretending to be fairies. Alice’s mother bakes cookies for her and her father, furthering the idea that a mother is the homemaker of a family.

Other stories encourage readers to think beyond the boundaries of gender binaries. *Max* (Isadora, 1984) is a boy who tags along to his sister’s ballet class before a baseball game. He participates in the class and realizes he loves to leap like a ballerina. When he subsequently hits a homerun he realizes the best way to get ready for baseball is to dance beforehand. Max’s dancing disrupts gender binaries, suggesting that boys can be ballet dancers. However, even as the book introduces us to a boy who dances, readers can be left with the impression that Max only does ballet to hit more homeruns. Like Alice, Max demonstrates the multi-layered and sometimes contradictory gender issues in many children’s picturebooks.

Discourses of Childhood Innocence

Discourses of childhood innocence refers to the idea that young children need to be protected from mature topics like sexuality, violence, family members in jail, and

nonconforming gender identities until they are older and are more capable of examining and expressing their beliefs and opinions about them. Ritchie (2017) explained that “discourses of childhood innocence create a climate of fear . . . , even though there is much evidence that children can handle the complexity and real-life issues in books that address these topics” (p. 61). Because children are capable of examining these issues, we are obligated to provide spaces for such exploration.

Children’s literature can create opportunities for discussion about issues of gender and sexuality so all children may grow up understanding and supporting the gender nonconforming people in their lives, as well as see themselves in books. Krywaczyk’s (2016) experiences as a transgender teacher allowed him to broach the sensitive topic of gender and sexuality with his students in a way that increased understanding and compassion. He explained that all “teachers have an unparalleled opportunity to foster this kind of awareness and critical thought about gender and sexuality” (p. 285). Every teacher shares the responsibility of exploring gender and sexuality, regardless of their own gender or sexual orientation.

I Love You Like Crazy Cakes (Lewis, 2000) is a beautiful, but innocent account of adoption. Through soft, colorful illustrations and tender language, Lewis described her firsthand experience adopting a daughter from China and the start of their life together. However, the background details about why Lewis chose adoption, which might include reproductive health, a lack of partner, or other mature topics, are absent. Many kinds of people rely on adoption for having children, and children are capable of understanding the different reasons to adopt a child.

I am Jazz (Herthel & Jennings, 2014) also illuminates the complexities and the challenges of sensitive family topics. The story is told through the eyes of Jazz, a transgender girl who was born a boy. Very early in her life Jazz insisted that her parents and friends treat her as a girl and participated in activities that were “girl-appropriate.” Eventually, Jazz’s parents supported her transition, involving her teachers and classmates in the process. This book introduces the word “transgender” to children. Interestingly, even while disrupting discourses of childhood innocence, Jazz’s desires to wear dresses and be a mermaid, and her love for pink, maintain a gender binary of performing the “right” kind of “female,” once again illustrating the complexity of these issues in books.

Intersectionality

The term *intersectionality* refers to a focus on one aspect of identity (i.e., gender) while ignoring others (such as race, class, economic status, body type, or ability). When, for example, an author creates a character who is implicitly or explicitly disrupting predictable gender roles but maintains all other aspects of identity that are privileged as “normal,” there exists a lack of intersectionality. A typical problem with books with strong gender themes is that they showcase children who appear to be white, middle class, thin, able-bodied, and uphold the beauty ideals most often portrayed in media.

One of our favorite books with a gender theme, *The Paper Bag Princess* (Munsch, 1980) is an example of a lack of intersectionality. It tells the story of Princess Elizabeth, who is attractive, blonde, able-bodied, and prior to losing her clothes and castle, well dressed and “presentable.” While Elizabeth’s heroic journey to rescue Prince Ronald departs from the “damsel in distress” narrative, her appearance—even in her dirty, ash-covered state—does not reflect the wide population of readers and listeners in many classrooms. Princess Elizabeth’s tale

is one that can be problematized for its lack of intersectionality while at the same time viewed as an exemplary book that pushes against a narrative that says girls cannot save themselves.

Conversely, *The Princess and the Pony* (Beaton, 2015) is an example of a book that disrupts some of the “norms” that are prevalent in children’s literature. It tells the story of Princess Pinecone, who considers herself a warrior princess. For her birthday, she wants nothing more than a horse fit to be the stallion of a warrior. Instead, she receives a plump, stinky, tiny pony. In this tale, the heroine is dark-skinned, plump, and not waiting to be rescued. Pinecone is a problem solver who is full of agency and determination. Just as with the other books we describe, Pinecone presents conflicting images, however. In the midst of Pinecone’s story, women warriors are portrayed in scanty clothing, including one in fishnet stockings. We recognize the important work this book does to address intersectionality, and regret that it also sexualizes secondary female characters.

Heteronormativity

Heteronormativity refers to normalizing heterosexual pairings and families (one man and one woman, one father and one mother) as the standard and regarding others as deviant. Even when a main character is gay, lesbian, or transgender, background characters are likely to be straight, married, and performing activities within stereotypical gender expectations. We agree with Robinson (2016) who said:

Even ideas and messages presented in texts that seem culturally and behaviorally normative *can* and *should* be called into question...All texts are snippets of the greater dialogue—and how we speak back to these texts shapes the course of that dialogue. (p. 12, emphasis in original)

Speaking back to heteronormative portrayals in books can offer children the opportunity to think critically about the images they encounter (Van Horn, 2015).

Olivia and the Fairy Princesses (Falconer, 2012) is an interesting example. Olivia fights against the assumption that all girls must like princesses, but her family—a mom, a dad, Olivia, and her two brothers—implicitly conveys the ideal of the heterosexual family unit as the norm. Although Olivia does much in this story to disrupt the idea that there is only one “right” way to be a girl, her nuclear family—as background characters—maintains heteronormativity.

In contrast, *A Tale of Two Mommies* (Oelschlager, 2011) disrupts heteronormativity by departing from the ubiquitous hetero family dynamic. In it, a young boy answers his friends’ questions about his two-mother family. The illustrations depict the family engaging in everyday activities, such as riding bikes and eating dinner. This book also serves to disrupt gender binaries, as the mothers engage in stereotypically masculine activities, such as fishing and camping. Additionally, it accomplishes intersectionality with a main character who has dark skin, and disrupts discourses of childhood innocence as the main character is a very young child and the board book design is appropriate for toddlers and preschoolers.

Conclusion

We recognize there are many criteria for teachers to take into account when selecting children’s literature for early childhood classrooms, and that most important criterion is the overall quality of the books. All children deserve books that are beautiful and engaging, that evoke curiosity and inquiry, and in which they see themselves reflected in the images and words. We further recognize that all children’s literature carries various degrees of implicit and explicit

gender messages. The books in this article are just a few that we appreciate for their gender informative themes that also call attention to the need for more books that offer the stories and images that support equitable early childhood curriculum. We offer teachers the filters of gender binaries, discourse of childhood innocence, intersectionality, and heteronormativity as means to further monitor the book choices they make for the children in their classrooms.

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Book Addicts' Review: 50 New Picture Books to Fall in Love With

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Today, more than ever, teachers need to be supported in their efforts to read aloud to their students. In the busy lives of educators, time for researching new picture books is hard to find. In this article, we hope to provide teachers with a list of brand new picture books, released in 2016, that can be used for reading aloud, adding to classroom libraries, and offering to children for independent reading. We provide a rationale for each genre and topic of texts, a summary of the book, and ideas for connecting to curriculum.

Keywords: children's literature, picture books, reading aloud, early childhood and elementary literacy, reading

Introduction

When you ask a teacher, "What's your favorite book?" (s)he is more likely to give you a list of beloved books rather than a single title. Most educators have a few cherished books that they read aloud to their students every year. However, in the current educational climate, policy makers are far more concerned with reading assessment results than positive, proven practices that will lead to real improvements in reading. In many classrooms today, teachers are mandated to use scripted reading programs, most of which offer very little choice in text for teachers or students. However, choice in text matters...for both teachers and children (Allington, 2009; Guthrie & Humenick, 2004; Hunt, 1970; McRae & Guthrie, 2009). In this article, we hope to provide teachers with a list of newly published texts that can be used to select books for reading aloud, adding to classroom libraries, and offering to children for independent reading.

Read Aloud

Reading aloud to children is critical, today more than ever. Reading aloud has come under attack, but has been well defended by researchers and practitioners in the field (Layne, 2015; Miller, 2009,2014; Trelease, 2013). Reading aloud is a powerful part of the ceremonies and rituals that help to create a strong classroom community (Patterson, 1992). Laminack and Wadsworth (2006) suggested starting every day with a read aloud. During read aloud we help children learn more about themselves, each other, and the world. Carefully selected texts promote critical conversations that push children's thinking or help them experience the joy of laughter from reading humorous text.

Classroom Library

After reading a book aloud, children need to have access to the book to revisit, reread, and continue to revise their thinking about the text. The best place for this access is in the classroom library. Effective reading programs are supported and sustained by large classroom libraries (Routman, 2003). While researchers and practitioners cannot agree on the number of books needed in a classroom library (suggestions range from 200 to more than 2,000), we do know that the more books you have the more books children have access to read! Classroom libraries need to offer a variety of genres (we discuss this more later) and need to be well organized. Teachers should continually update their classroom libraries to remove outdated titles and add new ones, like those suggested in this article. In addition, children need to be able to see themselves and connect with the books that are offered.

Independent Reading

Children need time to read every day. While this time may be referred to as independent reading, silent sustained reading, free and voluntary reading, and many other names, the key is that children have time to read books THEY want to read. Research findings clearly indicate that independent reading leads to improvements in reading (Krashen, 2007; Nakanishi, 2014; Manning, Lewis, & Lewis, 2010; Manning & Manning, 1984; Gambrell, 2007; & Gambrell, 2009; Samuels & Farstrup, 2011). Offering new books to children is yet another way to get them excited about reading. Even if you do not have time to read aloud every new book before placing it in the classroom library, take time to show it to the students and provide background information about the book.

In the remainder of the article, we identify newly published picture books organized by genre and/or topic. We realize that many of the books can fit within multiple categories. We include a rationale for using the books as well as curriculum connections for most titles. All books presented here have 2016 publication dates. While we do not claim this to be a comprehensive list, the list represents some of our new favorites, and we hope they become some of yours too!

Children's Literature

Literature plays several important roles in the lives of children. First, the use of children's books helps to build a classroom community where students are growing together to understand the world around them (Serafini & Moses, 2014.) A rich classroom conversation after reading a good picture book or hearing a child chime in with a verse from a class read aloud demonstrates the unifying power of the read aloud experience. Children's literature also provides vicarious experiences allowing children to empathize with others and better understand their own lives (Aerila & Ronkko, 2015). This vicarious experience may be a child's first journey outside of his or her immediate world, and fortunate are the teachers willing to travel this journey with a child (Hillman, 2002).

Groovy Joe: Ice Cream & Dinosaurs by Eric Litwin (author) and Tom Lichtenheld (illustrator)

If you love Pete the Cat, then you will love Eric Litwin's new character, Groovy Joe. This rhythmic story begs you to sing along as you explore friendship, sharing, and making something out of nothing. Groovy Joe is a singing, guitar playing, ice cream loving pup! He is enjoying his tub of doggy ice cream, when in burst a few dinosaurs! So, what does he do? He shares, of course! But what happens when the tub is empty?

Little Bot and Sparrow by Jake Parker (Author and Illustrator)

Jake Parker beautifully crafted a heart-warming story of an unusual friendship. Little Bot is thrown out with the garbage and lands in a strange new world. Fortunately, Sparrow took Little Bot under her wing and taught him what it was like to have a true friend. Through their adventures, Little Bot learns many lasting lessons.

This sweet story of friendship certainly has a place in your classroom library. Children often have difficulty with saying goodbye to friends. As children leave your classroom to move on to other places, this is the perfect story to read to discuss friendship, saying goodbye, and keeping memories close to your heart and alive in your dreams.

There is a Tribe of Kids by Lane Smith (Author and Illustrator)

Caldecott Honor-winner, Lane Smith brings us more of his captivating illustrations. This beautifully illustrated text follows a child's journey home as he encounters various animals and nature. Smith does an outstanding job of integrating vocabulary and illustrations. A smack of jellyfish, an unkindness of Ravens, a crash of rhinos, a sprinkle of lightning bugs...what a beautiful journey. Read the story to follow him all the way to his tribe of kids.

This enchanting story provides an amazing opportunity to build oral language. There are so many possibilities for vocabulary acquisition and use of Tier II words (colony, formation, and rubble, just to name a few). The Common Core State Standards requires second graders to use collective nouns (L.2.1.A); this authentic text is the perfect source for teachers to support this standard.

Thunder Boy, Jr. by Sherman Alexie (Author) and Yuyi Morales (Illustrator)

Sherman Alexie, National Book Award-winner and Yuyi Morales, Caldecott Honor-winner, offer a wonderful father-son story. Thunder Boy, Jr. is named after his dad, Big Thunder, but he does not like his name. He wants a name that is all his own and represents the cool things he has done. He offers up names such as: "Not Afraid of a Thousand Teeth," "Star Boy," and "Full of Wonder," but he DOES NOT want to be "Little Thunder." In the end, he takes the name "Lightning" representing the loud and bright love between father and son.

What a wonderful book to celebrate diversity, culture, and heritage. Learning classmates' names, and the story of their names, helps to build a stronger classroom community. Many young children do not know how they got their name. This provides a perfect opportunity to build stronger bonds at home and share those stories in the classroom.

Twenty Yawns by Jane Smiley (Author) and Laruen Castillo (Illustrator)

This sweet story by Jane Smiley, Pulitzer-Prize Winner, recounts the details of Lucy's fun-filled day at the beach with her family and her bedtime routine later that night. Caldecott Honor-winner, Lauren Castillo, beautifully illustrates this bedtime story. Lucy is exhausted from her day, but needs her teddy and a few other friends to share some yawns with before finally falling asleep. Encourage children to read this book to discover the purpose of the title, *Twenty Yawns*. This is a wonderful story to share at bedtime or naptime.

What a Beautiful Morning by Arthur A. Levine (Author) and Katie Kath (Illustrator)

Noah and Grandpa have a wonderful relationship filled with singing, French toast making, and outdoor adventures. But on one visit Noah notices that Grandpa is starting to forget how to do some of the pastimes they love. Later, Grandpa forgets who Noah is. Although

Grandma steps in to continue the adventures, Noah finds a way to reconnect with Grandpa. This is a relevant story, especially for children who have older loved ones with dementia or Alzheimer's disease.

What Do You Do With a Problem? by Kobi Yamada (Author) and Mae Besom (Illustrator)

The creators of the National Best Seller *What Do You Do with an Idea*, are back with more! Mae Besom's pencil and watercolor illustrations are absolutely enchanting. The author helps us explore how to deal with a problem through the experience of the character. The child was faced with a problem, he did not know why it was there or from where it came, but he certainly wanted it to go away. He tried to ignore it, but typical of problems, it just kept getting bigger, causing more and more anxiety. Finally, he realized he had to face the problem, but was met with an unexpected discovery. This is a magnificent story to teach children about persistence, problem solving, and opportunity.

More Children's Literature to Explore:

How to Track a Truck by Jason Carter Eaton (Author) and John Rocco (Illustrator)

I'll Wait, Mr. Panda by Steve Antony (Author and Illustrator)

The Moon's Almost Here by Patricia MacLachlan (Author) and Tomie dePaola (Illustrator)

The Princess and the Warrior: A Tale of Two Volcanoes by Duncan Tonatiuh (Author and Illustrator)

Wordless Books

Wordless picture books are defined as books whose story is relayed solely through the series and sequence of illustrations (Dowhower, 1997). These types of picture books may lack written text but they do not lack in complex content or narrative structure. Salisbury and Styles (2012) referred to wordless picture books as grand displays for the art of visual storytelling. Although books in this category cannot be "read" in the traditional sense, they are a storehouse for a wealth of meaning and promote rich, deep conversations among viewers of all ages.

Du Iz Tak? By Carson Ellis (Author and Illustrator)

Carson Ellis, creator of the wordless book *Home*, provides readers with yet another captivating book to explore. Although the book is not completely wordless due to the invented bug language, Ellis weaves a story through superbly detailed illustrations. It all starts with a plant shoot and two insects peering and pointing in wonder. They soon call on Icky, a pill bug, along with others and build a fort. As seasons change, the plant begins to wilt, taking the fort down with it. Each time you return to the text, you find yet another story to explore in the illustrations.

Flora and the Peacocks by Molly Idle (Author and Illustrator)

Caldecott Honor-winner, Molly Idle, brings us another story with the beloved Flora. *Flora and the Peacocks* is a follow up to *Flora and the Flamingo* and *Flora and the Penguin*. As Flora is fan dancing with two peacocks, jealousy and anger creep in among the triangle of friends. In their fight over Flora's attention, the two peacocks destroy her beautiful fan, but did they also destroy their friendship? Can they put their friendship back together again? Children will be enthralled with this lift-a-flap picture book.

Teachers can certainly draw from this book as we work with young children on how to balance multiple friendships and inclusion of others. There are endless possibilities for

discussions on problem solving as children are developing social emotional competence. In addition, there is a wonderful opportunity for a mathematical connection, examining how the author uses symmetry and asymmetry to tell the story.

More Wordless Books to Explore:

The Whale by Vita and Ethan Murrow (Authors and Illustrators)

Return by Aaron Becker (Author and Illustrator)

Beloved Authors, Illustrators, and Characters

This category is built around the powerful connection between the reader and the story. Children's responses to text are quite complex because readers bring their own experiences, beliefs, and interpretations with them when they open the cover of the book (Cullingford, 1998; Rosenblatt, 1983, 1985). There are many factors involved in a child's attraction to a specific author, illustrator, or even character. These factors relate to the child's personality, cognitive and social development, age, and level of maturity (Norton, 2011). On the other hand, Galda, Liang, and Cullinan (2015) identified style, form, point of view, text complexity, and genre as being a few critical text-related factors for shaping a child's response. Awareness of the reader along with the books provided in this section is a great place to start making the perfect book-reader match.

Duck on a Tractor by David Shannon (Author and Illustrator)

We all love Shannon's *Duck on a Bike*. Now he brings us a new adventure and Duck is up to his normal shenanigans! He has moved on from the bike to bigger and better things on the farm...a big red tractor! He is joined by the other farm animals for a wild ride through the middle of town. Shannon employs his stylistic, bright, and bold illustrations to bring together Duck's newest escapade.

In Plain Sight by Richard Jackson (Author) and Jerry Pinkney (Illustrator)

This heart-warming story of a little girl and her grandfather provides a context to explore family history. Every day after school, she comes home and tries to find what Grandpa has "lost" that day. Each missing item leads her to a connecting piece of family history. The charming illustrations from Caldecott Award-winning Jerry Pinkney pull you into the story and invite you to stay a while on each page.

The Thank You Book by Mo Willems (Author and Illustrator)

This final book in Mo's Elephant and Piggie series finds Piggie feeling extremely thankful and setting out on a "THANK-O-RAMA" to thank everyone important. Piggie thanks the snake for playing ball and continues on to thank all the other animals. Pigeon even has a cameo in the book, but is quickly told he cannot be in their book. But Piggie is forgetting someone very important. Read this playful dialogic text to find out who!

Mo Willems offers us a variety of text structures to explore within the text: dialogue bubbles, bold text, font changes, and purposeful text placements. This is a wonderful mentor text for children as they begin to explore how to weave dialogue and humor into their own narratives.

We Found a Hat by Jon Klassen (Author and Illustrator)

Two turtles happen upon a white hat. The hat looks good on both of them. But there are two of them and only one hat. One friend is very tempted by the hat and has to make a difficult decision between the hat and his friendship. This is Klassen's third in the Hat Series, preceded by *I Want My Hat Back* and *This Is Not My Hat*. Just like the other Hat books, children are enthralled with the characters, the story line, and the story progression.

This is a wonderful book to encourage children to predict and make inferences as they read. Draw attention to turtle's eyes and have children infer what he might be thinking. Ask children why he made the choice that he did? Would they have made the same choice? This also provides the perfect opportunity to discuss friendship and, sometimes, choosing friends over something that we want.

More Beloved Author, Illustrator, and Character Books to Explore:

Bad Kitty: Scaredy Cat by Nick Bruel (Author and Illustrator)

If You Give a Mouse A Brownie by Laura Numeroff (Author) and Felicia Bond (Illustrator)

For the Love of Books

The books in this category feature characters who are readers or writers. Fountas and Pinnell (2001) explained the importance of instructional practices promoting autonomous, lifelong readers and writers. Building a classroom environment where students read often, self-select books, and regularly make book recommendations engages students in the real work of readers. In combination with authentic reading experiences, books that feature characters who are active literacy learners provide reading role models right inside the text (Storey, 1986).

A Child of Books by Oliver Jeffers (Author) and Sam Winston (Illustrator)

Sail across this sea of words and be whisked away with a child of books. Oliver Jeffers beautifully crafts a story for us to celebrate the joys of reading and highlights classic books. He reminds us that we can explore, discover, escape and lose ourselves within a book. Sam Winston artfully integrates the words of classic books into the captivating illustrations.

This is a perfect book to springboard conversations about why we read. So often, when we ask children why they read, they respond with, "To get better at reading." We want to help children understand the many purposes of reading. Perhaps you can try asking the question, "What can reading do for you?" This will lead the discussion in a completely different direction!

The Story Book Knight by Helen Docherty (Author) and Thomas Docherty (Illustrator)

The creators of *The Snatchabook* are back again! This time they introduce us to a loveable mouse through this rhyming picture book. Leo is a gentle knight who does not much care for fighting, but he does enjoy reading. When his parents send him off to fight dragons, he arms himself with a shield, a sword, and a stack of books. He tames a griffin and a troll by reading aloud to them. But what happens when he encounters a fearsome dragon?

More Love of Books to Explore:

Also an Octopus by Maggie Tokuda-Hall (Author) and Benji Davies (Illustrator)

Surf's Up by Kwame Alexander (Authors) and Daniel Myares (Illustrator)

Just for Laughs

Who does not love a good laugh? One thing we know for sure is that children do! For centuries, readers of all ages have been drawn to books containing humor. There is great value in reading these books with children. First, researchers have identified humor as a pertinent component for developing and maintaining a variety of relationships (Shiota, Campos, Keltner, & Hertenstein, 2004). Another important benefit of sharing a hearty laugh around a good picture book is the association between the enjoyment of the text and the joy of reading (Serafini & Coles, 2015). Humorous books foster connections within the literary classroom community, a critical component for successful relationships in life, and helps readers associate reading as an enjoyable experience.

Hensel and Gretel, Ninja Chicks by Corey Rosen Schwartz and Rebecca J. Gomez (Authors) and Dan Santat (Illustrator)

“Once upon a menacing time...” a fox was up to no good. This hilarious play on words and twist to the traditional tale will have you laughing out loud with each rhyme. When the fox plucks their father, Hensel and Gretel set out to find and save him, but must use their ninja skills to keep from getting chicken-pot-pied in the process. This is a book children will want to read again and again, so you may want to have a couple of copies!

Common Core reading anchor standard nine (2010) calls for children to “Analyze how two or more texts address similar themes or topics in order to build knowledge or to compare the approaches the authors take” (p. 10). Have children compare this version with the original Hansel and Gretel story and some of the other variations of this tale. After analyzing and discussing several versions, children can create their own version. Although simply writing their version is a great way to extend the learning, drama can be just as purposeful and powerful. Once children create the scenes, act it out. They can divide into cast and crew, ensuring each person plays a critical role in the production!

How This Book Was Made by Mac Barnett (Author) and Adam Rex (Illustrator)

Mac Barnett offers us a hilarious rendition of how books are made. You will, quite literally, laugh out loud as you read this! Books start with ideas and those ideas take many drafts, sometimes 21, to be exact. Then there are those editors with all of their advice to revise this and that, but what every writer wants to convey to the editor at some point is, “You’re not the boss of me!” But writers and editors must come to a compromise, just as they do in this book! Next, the book is off to the illustrator and that can sometimes take a while; so long that the waiting author can grow a full-length beard. Then it is off to print. But even when it is finished, a book is not a book, until it has a reader!

This is an excellent book to help children understand the writing process from initial ideas, all the way to the 21st draft! You can also use this to support peer editing. Just like Mac, as authors, young children do not have to accept all of the advice they get from others about their writing. They can learn to take advice, and think critically about each revision.

In addition, you may try to use this text as an introduction to “How To” writing. This provides a nice bridge from narrative writing to procedural writing. You may also want to bring in *How to Track a Truck* (mentioned earlier) for this same purpose!

Memoirs of a Parrot by Devin Scillian (Author) and Tim Bowers (Illustrator)

Scillian offers us a new book in the Memoirs series. Brock, the parrot, can hardly stand the triviality of Wilber's Pet Shop. Just when things cannot get worse than another day of shoppers asking, "Polly want a cracker," Brock is purchased by Todd. Todd and Brock do not hit it off! Todd cannot even get Brock's name right. Neither thinks the other is all that smart. Then, as disaster strikes, the pair finds a way to communicate and realize that having a friend can be a good thing. The sarcasm from an undeniably brilliant bird makes this book absolutely irresistible!

Snapsy The Alligator (Did Not Ask to Be in This Book!) by Julie Falatko (Author) and Tim Miller (Illustrator)

Poor, Snapsy! This alligator is just misunderstood! Snapsy the alligator is going about his normal day when a pesky narrator steps in and adds a menacing twist to the story. Is Snapsy really on the prowl for defenseless forest animals or just on his way to the store to buy some food? Snapsy plans a party to make his boring day more interesting, but will he invite the slanderous narrator? Read the book to find out, just be ready for fits of giggles as you follow Snapsy through his day!

The Common Core State Standards requires children to assess how point of view shapes texts. This kid-friendly story provides the perfect opportunity to analyze contrasting points of view about single events in Snapsy's day.

More Just for Laughs Books to Explore:

Hotel Bruce by Ryan T. Higgins (Author and Illustrator)

King Baby by Kate Beaton (Author and Illustrator)

This Book Is NOT about Dragons by Shelley Moore Thomas (Author) and Fred Koehler (Illustrator)

Social Studies/Civic Education

Children's literature enriches the social studies curriculum in the early childhood/elementary education classroom. Picture books provide opportunities for children to learn more about themselves and others. Columba, Kim, and Moe (2009) posited a teacher's careful selection of quality literature enables students to stimulate unique emotional responses supporting the foundational goals of civic education. Krey (1998) identified a number of benefits of incorporating children's literature into the teaching of social studies. Children's literature can offer insight into the emotional aspect of a historical event, provide varying perspectives for understanding the multi-faceted, complex nature of humanity, and build a learner's knowledge of social studies concepts (Almerico, 2013; Krey, 1998).

This Is Me: A Story of Who We Are and Where We Came From by Jamie Lee Curtis (Author) and Laura Cornell (Illustrator)

Have you ever thought about what it would be like to move to a new country? This story begins with a teacher telling her students about her great-grandmother's journey to America. After sharing the actual suitcase and the items that she brought with her, the teacher challenges her class to think about what they would pack in the suitcase if they were leaving their home. The reader experiences the children's struggle as they try to decide what treasures to bring and

what to leave. The moral of the story reminds us that who we are is defined by so much more than our material possessions.

Share this book to engage students with the topic of immigration. Challenge them to “pack” their most prized possessions in an actual bag and share why they selected the items. How did it feel to leave behind your material possessions? How did it feel to go to a new place where you did not speak the language or know anyone? By creating scenarios that tap into empathy we can help our students connect to the human experience, complex problems, and multiple experiences in history and current events.

Are We There Yet? by Dan Santat (Author and Illustrator)

There are four words that every parent hates to hear on a road trip: “*Are We There Yet?*” In this realistic tale, author, Dan Santat, explores the past, present, and future through the eyes of a bored child in the backseat of a car on a road trip with his parents. The detailed images and unique layout of the book capture the reader’s imagination from the very first page. In today’s world we often move from task to task at a rapid pace, making time to read bits of information in 140 characters or less. This book is a wonderful reminder to live in the moment and practice patience to truly experience the world around us.

A Bike Like Sergio’s by Maribeth Boelts (Author) and Noah Z. Jones (Illustrator)

Have you ever wanted something really badly? How far would you go to get it? Would you take something that was not yours? Would you lie? This story presents a moral dilemma that forces kids to examine the difference between right and wrong in a context they can understand. The main character, Ruben, is envious of all his friends who have bikes. When a lady at the market drops some money, he quickly stops to pick it up before anyone notices. After taking the money home, he realizes that what he thought was one dollar is actually \$100. This is enough money to buy a bike! How will he justify buying the bike? Where will he tell his parents that he got the money? Will a chance encounter with the lady who lost the money back at the market force him to return the money?

According to the C3 Framework, applying civic virtues and principles, considering multiple perspectives, and thoughtful deliberation are all critical for civic engagement (NCSS, 2013). What are the character traits of a good citizen? How do we balance our individual needs and wants with the common good? This story provides a rich example for students to examine and consider multiple perspectives.

Steamboat School by Deborah Hopkinson (Author) and Ron Husband (Illustrator)

This powerful story is based on true events that occurred in Missouri in 1847. The story begins with the main character, James, preparing for his first day of school. James is not very interested in going to school because he thinks the outside world is much more exciting than sitting in the dark basement of a church. All of that changes as soon as he meets his teacher, Reverend John. Unfortunately, as soon as James begins to see the value of education, the state of Missouri passes a new law that forbids African-Americans to attend school. Fortunately, Reverend John, a problem-solver, renovated a steamboat into a floating school on the Mississippi River. This was a brilliant solution because the river was considered federal property, which made the Missouri law irrelevant. The story reminds the reader that acts of courage and bravery come in many different forms.

More Social Studies and Civic Education to Explore:

Seven and a Half Tons of Steel by Janet Nolan (Author) and Thomas Gonzalez (Illustrator)

Biographies

Biographies have a long history in children's literature, being that they were one of the first types of nonfiction to be written for children (Russell, 2012). Reading quality biographies builds student knowledge of historical and present-day people, places, and events, making the stories surrounding the lives of famous and infamous figures unforgettable. Also, biographies provide models of endurance, problem-solving, and achievement (Travers, B. & Travers, J., 2008). Biographies can move children away from an egocentric view of the world to viewing the world from the perspective of others. Whether reading about a historical or contemporary figure, this genre makes a tremendous contribution to all of our lives.

Six Dots: A Story of Young Louis Braille by Jen Bryant (Author) and Boris Kulikov (Illustrator)

The story of Louis Braille is captivating. After learning how Louis Braille loses his sight in an accident as a young child, the reader also discovers how the influence of Braille's family and prior life experiences led him to develop a system that made reading and writing accessible for the blind. The author does a wonderful job capturing the emotional journey and hardships that Louis Braille endured throughout his life. This story is particularly engaging for children because of Louis Braille's age when he invented this extraordinary resource that has changed the lives of people all over the world. Additional resources including a Question and Answer section, the Braille alphabet, and French pronunciation guide are all bonus features in this book.

With an increased emphasis on the inclusion of engineering in elementary and middle school curriculum, classroom teachers across the country are searching for meaningful ways to integrate this discipline into the content areas. The story of Louis Braille is a wonderful example of a child inventor who used engineering design practices to solve a real-world problem. Read this book and challenge students to identify the five steps from the Engineering Design Process Model provided: asking, imagining, planning, creating, and improving, that Louis used when he invented Braille.

Some Writer! The Story of E.B. White by Melissa Sweet (Author and Illustrator)

This text reads more like a coffee table book than a traditional biography. The book is filled with original artwork, photographs, handwritten letters, and other primary source documents that bring to life one of the world's most adored authors. The information in the text provides the reader with "behind the scenes" stories that clearly chronicle E.B. White's journey and passion as a writer.

This biography would make a wonderful addition to an author study of E.B. White. Samples from the book could also be used as mini-lessons for reading and writing workshops.

More Biography Books to Explore:

Preaching to the Chickens by Jabari Asim (Author) and E. B. Lewis (Illustrator)

Radiant Child: The Story of Young Artist Jean-Michel Basquiat by Javaka Steptoe (Author and Illustrator)

Science

Researchers have long supported and encouraged the use of informational texts with children in the early childhood/elementary classroom. Exposure to informational text builds student background knowledge and supports a deeper level of understanding within the content areas (Duke & Bennett-Armistead, 2003; Mantzicopoulos & Patrick, 2010; Walpole, 1999). Quality informational texts also familiarize students with the language and discourse associated with a discipline (Pappas, 2006). However, Yopp, R., and Yopp, H. (2012) investigated the read-alouds of 1,144 teachers, preschool through third grade, from a variety of school districts and regions to find that 77% of the books read aloud to children were narratives and only 8% of the read-alouds were informational texts. Literacy experts recommend teachers keep a read aloud log and review their read aloud choices regularly to ensure that the students in their classrooms are being offered a steady diet of quality informational texts as part of the read aloud experience (Atkinson, Matusevich, & Huber, 2009; Yopp & Yopp, 2012; Windschitl, Thompson, Braaten, & Stroupe, 2012). The books provided in this category offer a beautiful starting point for increasing information read-alouds within your classroom.

Ada Twist Scientist by Andrea Beaty (Author) and David Roberts (Illustrator)

Ada Twist is the charming story about a curious little girl who is full of questions about the world around her. Her questions always lead to more questions and her investigations often result in chaos and mess. A central theme of the book supports the idea that powerful lessons often follow failure, which leads to bigger and better questions and ideas. The text also captures the initial frustration that her parents and teacher feel as a result of Ada's quest to make sense of the world around her. At the end of the story, Ada's parents realize the power of her inquisitive nature and vow to support and nurture her passion. The reader is left wondering what adventure Ada will embark on next in her quest to answer her most burning questions.

The Next Generation Science Standards call on K-12 teachers to support and nurture scientific practices such as questioning in the classroom in order to help students observe, analyze, and interpret data from the world around them. This text supports the power of questioning through an inquiry-based student-centered approach. This would be a wonderful book to share with students at the beginning of the year to begin nurturing a risk-taking environment that supports student-led questioning and autonomy.

Listen to Our World by Bill Martin Jr. & Michael Sampson (Authors) and Melissa Sweet (Illustrator)

Bill Martin Jr. and Michael Sampson introduce the reader to different species of animals who live in a variety of habitats around the world. Readers are encouraged at the beginning of the book to observe the sounds of the world. The text is full of descriptive language, that include details such as the sounds animals make, the type of food they eat, and how they interact with their environment. The illustrator, Melissa Sweet, is a Caldecott Honor Artist so the pictures capture a realistic portrayal of each habitat with colorful and intricate details that support the text. At the end of the book there is additional information about each animal and its habitat.

This book supports the Next Generation Science Standards for K and 2nd grade: *Interdependent Relationships in Ecosystems: Animals, Plants, and their Environment*. The text could be used as a read aloud or independent research source for students in grades K-3. The reader is encouraged to observe the sounds of the world around them, a process skill that scientists use every day to help them make sense of their environment. The descriptive and

detailed text is a good model to support the language that is required for clear and detailed observations.

Flying Frogs and Walking Fish: Leaping Lemurs, Tumbling Toads, Jet-Propelled Jellyfish, and More Surprising Ways Animals Move by Steve Jenkins (Author) and Robin Page (Illustrator)

This non-fiction picture book explores interesting and surprising ways that animals move in their environments. The animals that are introduced in this book are unusual and have unique external parts that help them to navigate their environment, catch their prey, and escape from predators. The structure of the text and the illustrations make the book visually appealing and inviting for young children in grades K-3. There is an appendix in the back of the book that organizes all of the featured animals according to their movement. Small images are provided, along with a brief description and location of their habitat, their size, and their prey.

This book supports Standard 1-LS1 from Molecules to Organisms: Structures and Processes. The use of this text would address Science and Engineering Practices: *Obtaining, Evaluating, and Communicating Information*, Disciplinary Core Ideas: *Structure, Function, and Information Processing*, and the Cross-Cutting Concept of *Patterns*. This book is a grade appropriate read aloud or independent source for students to gather scientific information about animals in their natural world.

More Science Books to Explore:

Ancient Earth Journal: The Late Jurassic: Notes, Observations, and Drawings from.

by Juan Carlos Alonso and Gregory S. Paul (Authors)

Giant Squid by Candace Fleming (Author) and Eric Rohmann (Illustrator)

Math

Children's literature offers a wealth of mathematical opportunities because so many stories emphasize children's problem-solving abilities (Ward, 2005). Researchers have also identified a connection between language proficiency and proficiency in mathematics; students exhibiting low levels of language proficiency often exhibit lower mathematical proficiency also (Cocking & Mestre, 1988; MacGregor & Price, 1999). In both reading and mathematics, students use similar strategies flexibly to construct meaning (Halladay & Neumann, 2012; Shatzer, 2008). Proficient readers and mathematicians make predictions, build connections, determine importance, synthesize information, and self-monitor for understanding. Therefore, reading books from this category with children helps build a child's mathematical thinking and literacy learning.

City Shapes by Diana Murray (Author) and Brian Collier (Illustrator)

The author and illustrator use colorful language, watercolors, and collage to capture a variety of city scenes from a bird's eye view. In addition to a variety of geometric shapes and diverse sounds, this book also reminds the reader that there are multiple perspectives to consider when learning about the people and the world around us.

Take your students outside and observe the shapes and sounds in your community. Can they find the intersection between nature and art? Does everyone notice the same thing?

Elephant and Piggie Like Reading! The Cookie Fiasco by Mo Willems (Author) and Dan Santat (Illustrator)

The beginning of the book features two of Mo Willems most lovable characters, Elephant and Piggie, as they prepare to read a book together. In this book, four animal friends must figure out how to divide three cookies equally. After working through a variety of possible scenarios the animals finally agree on a fair solution. The book concludes with another potential problem: dividing up three glasses of milk.

Read the first few pages of the book to introduce the problem. Pause and encourage students to try and come up with a solution. Share the rest of the text after students have a chance to solve the problem, pausing after each solution to analyze why or why not the solution is fair. In addition to fractions and problem solving, this book also raises issues of equity and justice.

A Number Slumber by Suzanne Bloom (Author and Illustrator)

The book begins by asking the reader about his/her nighttime rituals before bed. Next, the author counts down from 10 to one by describing the rituals of different groups of animals as they prepare for sleep. The use of alliteration, rhythm, and rhyme make this an excellent read aloud for young readers. Students can also practice counting objects in a set.

Ten Kisses for Sophie by Rosemary Wells (Author and Illustrator)

Sophie the mouse is back! In this latest story Sophie and her mother bake 10 chocolate kisses for her Aunt's upcoming birthday party. Of course, Sophie wants to devour one of the delicious treats immediately, but her parents insist on waiting until the party. This almost proves to be too much for poor Sophie, so she sneaks out of bed in the middle of the night to make sure there will be enough of the delicious treats to go around at the party. After counting the treats and making place cards for each guest, Sophie is delighted to discover they made just enough. However, when another family member shows up to the party at the last minute, Sophie's greatest fear comes true. How will they divide the treats equally among the guests?

This book is a great springboard for a math lesson on counting, one to one correspondence, addition, and subtraction. This book addresses the Common Core Math Standards for counting and cardinality and operations and algebraic thinking.

Conclusion

There is limited time available each school day, but an infinite number of choices and instructional decisions to be made by the teacher. We know for sure that reading aloud to children yields high returns in reading achievement, but it is not just reading aloud that matters. Teachers must choose quality books, including recently published ones that children will find riveting. We hope that we have introduced you to many excellent choices to energize and revitalize your classroom read-alouds.

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