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## The Importance of Visibility in Curriculum and Teaching Practice

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### Recommended Citation

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**The Importance of Visibility in Curriculum and Teaching Practice**

Jasmine Bailey

Art of Teaching

Sarah Lawrence College

Submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Science in Education  
Sarah Lawrence College  
April 30th, 2021

**Abstract**

I am arguing that it is absolutely necessary for all teachers and administration to see the importance of making all children visible and valued and that they should include this idea into their curriculum plans and teaching practices. Despite the focus on representation, visibility in the curriculum is still lacking. I will detail how visibility is affected by the differences in how children learn, children who have experienced trauma and power dynamics and oppression.

This thesis will aim to express and display the value that all children should be made visible in the classroom. This includes all backgrounds and ethnicities and honors the individual stories of each child and their families. The research I have completed will describe what it looks like for all children to feel seen, valued, and understood through the power of emergent curriculum, the descriptive review process and lastly inclusive curriculum planning. This paper will give an overview of why it is important for all children to be visible inside of the classroom by their teachers and their peers. I will also dive into my own personal history with feeling invisible in school. And lastly, I will conclude with how I plan to create classrooms where all children are made visible.

### **Acknowledgments**

First, I would to thank Diana Berman and Sheila Hanna. Diana, you are the first teacher to truly see me and make plans for me. Thank you for making me visible after years of being invisible. Sheila, thank you for pulling me out of my shell and showing me that I am not only a teacher of children but adults as well. Thank you both for your endless amounts of love and support. You both have planted the seeds that began my teaching journey. Thank you for believing in me and for teaching me how to love children.

I would also like to thank my professors, mentors and friends at Sarah Lawrence College. Rue, thank you for being the most thoughtful teacher I know. Thank you for knowing me more than I know myself. Thank you for all of the ways that you make time to support me. Patricia, thank you for always empowering me to be true to who I really am. Thank you for noticing the threads in my work and giving me the space to unpack my childhood experiences. Denisha, thank you for teaching me how to talk about hard topics. Thank you for advocating for the children who are so often made to be invisible. Sarah, thank you for trusting me to lead, and thank you for always seeing me as your partner in the classroom. I will never forget the year that we experienced together and how deeply we relied on each other. Lorayne, thank you for being so warm, accepting and loving. Thank you for checking in on me and for truly seeing me for who I am. Thank you for being a shoulder to cry on. Thank you for loving my music and for your never ending support through the good and the bad times. Also to my cohort, thank you for the group chat.

Next, I would like to thank my family. You are my greatest supporters. To my Mom and Dad, you are my whole world! Thank you for believing in me when I did not. Thank you for

seeing the greatness within me and for always drawing it out. Thank you for your endless sacrifices that led me to this very place. Thank you for being my constant source of support and strength. This work is for you. To my sister Janay, thank you for listening to me without judgement. Thank you for trusting in my advice and always seeing me as a teacher. To Earl and Zoe, thank you for believing in me. Earl, you told me I was a teacher and I didn't believe you. Zoe, thank you for being the new sister and dear friend that I have always needed! Thank you both for knowing me and supporting me. To Kaelan and Kaia. My greatest gift is being your aunt. I will be there for you every single day of my life. Thank you for all that you have taught me.

Michael, thank you for being the best thing to happen to me in 2020. Thank you for cheering me on and knowing me so well. Thank you for all of the ways that you continue to show your love and dedication.

Lastly and most importantly I would like to thank God for calling me to teach. You planned this before I could even comprehend. I will never stop striving to see people the way that you do. With the deepest love imaginable.

## Outline

### I. Introduction

- A. I will be teaching you all about why visibility in curriculum is important. I am arguing that it is absolutely necessary for all teachers and administration to see the importance of making all children visible and valued and that they should include this idea into their curriculum plans.
- B. Despite the focus on representation, visibility in the curriculum is still lacking in terms of the differences in how children learn, trauma sensitive teaching and power dynamics and oppression.
- C. I am aiming to express and display the value that all children should be made visible in the classroom. This includes all backgrounds and ethnicities and honors the individual stories of each child and their families. My hope is to describe what it looks like for children to feel seen, valued, and understood through emergent curriculum, the descriptive review process, and thoughtful and inclusive curriculum planning.
- D. My presentation will give an overview of why it is important for all children to be visible inside of the classroom by their teachers and their peers. I will dive into my own personal history with feeling invisible in school. I will share extensively my interactions with children in my field placements. I have hopefully successfully woven my personal pedagogy throughout this presentation. I will share how I plan to create classrooms where all children are made visible. And lastly I will ask everyone here today to join me on my mission to create spaces where children are visible, deeply known, cared for and treasured.

### II. What Does it Mean to be Visible?

- A. Sarah Lawrence Reflection
- B. Who is Visible?
  - 1. Who is curriculum made for?
  - 2. Who do we see in the media?
  - 3. Who is in power and who is oppressed?
  - 4. How does this show up in the classroom?
  - 5. White, males, middle class, non-disabled people, white American history, high test scores, outspoken children.
- C. Who is Invisible?
  - 1. Who's voices are not heard?
  - 2. Who is missing?
  - 3. Who is underrepresented in society?
  - 4. Black and Latino boys, marginalized Groups, racialized groups, children who have experienced trauma, persons living in poverty, children living with mental health struggles, Asian American Pacific Islander communities, children with learning and/or physical disabilities, undocumented Americans, multilingual children.

**III. Authentic Listening**

- A. Cornelius Minor quote
  - 1. Listen to children
  - 2. Ask questions
  - 3. Give students multiple opportunities

**IV. Emergent Curriculum**

- A. Teachers thoughtfully plan the environment and make space for children's questions. Classroom offer many visible choices, based on the children's interests, skills and needs. Teachers conduct observations and plan based on their observations and conversations with children.
- B. Purple Circle Early Childhood Center
  - 1. Emergent curriculum that I witnessed
  - 2. Rebecca's picture

**V. Descriptive Review Process**

- A. How else can teachers make their students more visible to themselves and others?
- B. Sarah Lawrence College Early Childhood Center
- C. Introduction
- D. Description of Thomas

**VI. Visibility at The Ella Baker School**

- A. How can teachers make children visible during difficult times?
- B. The Ella Baker School
  - 1. Introductions and description of my experiences
  - 2. How can we make students visible over zoom?
  - 3. How were children made visible during 2/3 Math?
  - 4. Example of visibility: Adam
  - 5. How were children made visible during 2/3 morning and afternoon meetings?
    - a. Speed meetings
    - b. Highlighted celebration
    - c. Zoom Recess
    - d. Immigration stories
    - e. Examples of stories read aloud that made children visible

**VII. What Have I Learned?****VIII. My Visible Classroom**

- A. Books that reflect the world, diversity, all kinds of families, LGBTQIA+, respect for pronouns, emergent curriculum, individuality, anti racism, time for play, and storytelling

**IX. Conclusion: What Am I Asking of Teachers?**

- A. Search for who is missing
- B. Talk about race
- C. Teach history unlike your own
- D. Defend your values
- E. Remember SLC
- F. Consider visibility

### Quotations

“Education has done very little to shift power or to distribute it evenly. Rather, it has functioned to ensure that power stays where it has been—among the wealthy, among the men, among the white people.” (Minor, 2018, pp. 25)

“Poverty. Race. Gender. The deck is stack against many of my students. How can I disrupt the systems that govern my classroom?” (Minor, 2018, pp. 18)

“Anytime an operating system—like a school or a curriculum—consistently fails a specific subset of people, there is not something wrong with the people (in this case, the children). There is something wrong with the system—the institution or the curriculum.” (Minor, 2018, pp. 36)

“Because of what I’ve heard, how can I make active and longstanding adjustments to my classroom community, to my actual teaching, and to how department, grade, or school operates?” (Minor, 2018, pp. 17)

“Developing curriculum in which the teacher draws on the interests of the students.” (Schwartz, 1992, pp. 24)

“If we are going to build our instruction out of kids’ questions—whether these arise from a required curriculum or emerge from children’s free-range curiosity—we need a system. To create a culture of questioning and investigation, we need to solicit and record topics kids wonder about, make time for them, pursue them, and keep track of kid’s efforts along the way.” (Daniels, 2017, pp. 43)

“The Prospect descriptive processes provide a philosophical and political basis for informing the work of teaching by: making visible the strengths and capacities of all children as learners and thinkers making valuable the knowledge of teachers and parents making vital the democratic values underlying public education.” (Himley & Carini, 2002, pp. 5)

“I find this kind of recollecting of children refreshing and renewing of my faith in our humanness. I hope you will too. It is always easy to criticize and find fault with children (or other adults), to point out what they can’t do and how problematic they are. It takes more time and patience to paint a fuller picture in which the person is understood to be not the sum of unchanging traits but in process, in the making. Understood as active and open-ended, each of us is at any moment in our lives, and in all taken together, a complex blend of failings and virtues, of strengths and vulnerabilities. It seems to me that this is what makes us interesting and what makes education (and not merely training) a possibility. I hope you will find the time it takes to look at children (and adults) this way worth the patience it requires.” (Himley & Carini, 2002, pp. 19)



“A positive appreciation of the differences among us, and the contribution they make to the texture and quality of life, we can develop our capacity to describe and to draw upon those differences.” (Carini, 1986, pp. 17)

“Given the attitudes currently dominant in our society, I believe that it is important—indeed crucial—that those of us deeply concerned with children and childhood learn to be attentive to and to draw upon, children’s strengths (and our own) in order to modify and counteract these adverse influences. This requires vigilance in guarding the rights of all children to an environment conducive to growth and to education. It also requires the ability to observe and build from children’s strengths as thinkers learners and persons. Finally, it requires us to create classrooms and other environments that are responsive to the broad and diverse range of children in terms of interest, potential, and needs.” (Carini, 1986, pp. 16)

“It is, I think, only from a firmly grounded knowledge of children’s strengths that we will be able to offer effective attorney alternatives to current and proposed school practices that undermine children’s long-term potential for growth.” (Carini, 1986, pp. 16)

“Change the way you do school so that kids have more opportunities to succeed.” (Minor, 2018, pp. 41)

"It is important that all of us who touch the lives of children do all we can to educate the American public about the needs of children and the social and moral responsibility of our society to care for children." (Casper, 2010, p. 444).

"Because children cannot vote or speak to policy makers for themselves, they need knowledgeable adults in their lives, such as early childhood educators, to speak on their behalf" (Casper, 2010, p. 455)

“As a classroom community, our capacity to generate excitement is deeply affected by our interest in one another, in hearing one another’s voices, in recognizing one another’s presence” (hooks, 1994)

“Looking for places where individuals and groups of children are active, invested and engaged; where their interest and imagination are fired; where they sustain themselves energetically.” (Schwartz, 1992)

“U.S. history lessons: as foreigners or national security threats, as opposed to people who have lived and worked in America and have challenged it to live up to its ideals of equality for all.” (Waxman, 2021)

“Georgia’s state social studies standards for what fifth-grade students are expected to know list Japanese aggression in Asia and the Pearl Harbor attacks, but not the incarceration of Japanese-Americans in the U.S.” (Waxman, 2021)

“They’re able to kind of see we don’t learn this because we either don’t think it’s important enough to learn, or it just kind of puts the U.S. in a bad light,” says Chu, “and so it’s better to talk about other countries and their wrongdoings than it is our own and to be reflective of our own past mistakes.” (Waxman, 2021)

“Scholars agree that one of the reasons a full history of Asian Americans has not been incorporated into core U.S. History curricula in K-12 schools is because it doesn’t portray America in a positive light.” (Waxman, 2021)

“Attention to teaching histories and realities of racialized marginalized groups has always been reactionary instead of proactive in U.S. K-12 education,” Wu says. “Historic moments such as the murder of Vincent Chin, the Japanese- American Redress Movement, the destruction of Koreatown, 9/11 and targeting of South Asian Americans did not engender interest in AAPI histories and curricular re-evaluation in K-12.” (Waxman, 2021)

“Noreen Naseem Rodríguez, an Assistant Professor of Elementary Social Studies at Iowa State University, says that many of the teaching candidates she supervises have not had exposure to a wide range of historical perspectives, and might hesitate when it comes to instructing them. In the 2017-2018 school year, about 80% of public school teachers were white, compared to 2% who were Asian.” (Waxman, 2021)

“I see this real terror that they’re going to say or do something that will upset parents and end their careers, so they don’t want to talk about race,” Rodríguez says. “They want books that have diverse characters, but they don’t really want to talk about racial discrimination or stereotypes, unless it’s through a simplified context of bullying. So when teachers are trying to emphasize notions of being nice or kind rather than being anti-racist, not being unjust, that’s why we’re not ready as a society, or particularly as K-12 educators, to deeply engage with these topics because perhaps we ourselves haven’t done that learning. (Waxman, 2021)

“It is always easy to criticize and find fault with children (or other adults), to point out what they can’t do and how problematic they are. It takes more time and patience to paint a fuller picture in which the person is understood to be not the sum of unchanging traits but in process, in the making.” (Waxman, 2021)

### **Process Paper**

The topic of visibility has been on my mind since I was a child. The moments within my educational experience that stand out to me the most are the ones in which I was excluded from curriculum. My thoughts and ideas and who I was as an individual were never truly valued or known until I entered into college. I believe that the topic of visibility in curriculum and teaching practice is important for educators to hear because of my own personal experiences with feeling lost and undervalued in my elementary classroom. These experiences combined with what I have witnessed in my teaching practice have blended to create deep passion within me for visibility. I believe that I have firsthand insight and that empowers me to share with others. I will never forget the first days of emergent curriculum class where I boldly spoke about being invisible in second grade. When I reflect on that day I realize that I have been talking about the same thing for a while now. Children need to be made visible and they will not forget the moments where they felt invisible.

The process of working on my thesis was a beautiful one. It was difficult at times but overall taking the time to find connections and weave together the work that I have been creating has been such a complete and powerful experience. I realized that I have so much experience and have spent so much time and dedication in order to become a teacher that I can be proud of. This process was hard at times though because I continued to second guess myself. I have really learned to trust in all that I know, all that I have learned and all that I am ready to share with the world.

This work with children teaches me every single day. I know now that the classroom should be a place where all children are visible. This means that all children, in their unique ways, are active participants in their classroom. This looks like children's ideas, thoughts and wonderings being heard and considered by teachers and other students too. This requires teachers to place observation and recording as a high standards for their practice. The teacher will in many ways let the children lead. The teacher will dedicate themselves to truly knowing their students in order to provide the kind of space that would be unique to their individuality. I learned that this process of reflecting on my experiences has been healing work. I was silent before but now I am bold. I really believe in what I have shared with you. Also, I see the ways in which I am being seen by taking the time and learning how to see others. My experiences have made me a more empathetic teacher and this is what empowers me to provide it to my students.

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