Learning to Read Bodies in Early Mathematics Assessment Interviews

Despite the increased use of video in clinical assessment interviews in mathematics education, most research involving early childhood assessment interviews relies solely upon the analysis of linguistic data, ignoring children's bodies. This trend is particularly troubling in studies of marginalized children because transcripts limited to language can make it difficult to analyze embodied power relations between majority researchers and minority children, which can lead to overly-pessimistic descriptions of young children’s mathematical capabilities. This presentation, which is based on a large ethnographic project following 16 children from preschool to first grade, explores some theories and methods that foreground the role of the body and uses these tools to analyze video episodes from mathematics assessment interviews with preschoolers. Drawing on positioning theories, the analysis will shed light on the ways that interactions between the child-participants and the adult researcher shaped what it was possible to learn about children's mathematical thinking in the interview. The talk will also situate the assessment study within a broader research program focused on intersections among childhood, race, and mathematics education.

Amy Noelle Parks is an associate professor in the Department of Educational Theory and Practice at the University of Georgia and received her PhD in Curriculum, Teaching, and Educational Policy from Michigan State University. Her work focuses on equity issues in early mathematics education. Her scholarship engages all layers of the educational landscape - policy, research, teaching, and learning of mathematics-as she seeks to challenge discourses and practices that position students of color as struggling mathematics students. She is the principal investigator for the NSF grant, CAREER: Exploring the role of context in young children’s mathematical learning. The goal of the project has been to document the diverse resources children in a rural preschool draw on in their development of mathematical literacy.