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# SHIFTING FROM DEVELOPMENTAL TO POSTMODERN PRACTICES IN EARLY CHILDHOOD TEACHER EDUCATION

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*Changing times and postmodern perspectives have disrupted the taken-for-granted relationship between child development knowledge and the preparation of early childhood teachers. Despite ongoing exchanges about how best to respond to the critique of the developmental knowledge base, few descriptions of how particular teacher educators have gone about reconceptualizing their curriculum exist. Employing postmodern views of knowledge, power, and subjectivity, this article describes three pedagogies employed by the authors to enact a postmodern teacher education. After describing each of these pedagogies—situating knowledge, multiple readings, and engaging with images—an example from classroom practice is given to illustrate how these strategies come together to assist students to understand how teaching enacts power relations. The article concludes with a discussion of some of the challenges involved in trying to shift from developmental to postmodern practices in the preparation of early childhood educators.*

**Keywords:** *early childhood; teacher education; postmodernism*

It is commonly accepted that a high-quality early education is one in which curriculum and teaching practices are developmentally appropriate (Charlesworth, 1998). Exemplary programs are those in which educators use their knowledge of patterns of growth in the early years, along with an understanding of individual children, their interests, and cultural backgrounds, to set up the environment and deliver learning experiences (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997). The starting point for most early childhood curriculum making is a professional understanding of young children. The preparation of early childhood professionals has been conceptualized as a program of study that involves

learning about child development theory and research and the curricula and teaching practices that are informed by this knowledge (Bredekamp, 1996).

With the globalization of economies and cultures, contemporary social life is characterized more by hybridity rather than similarity (Luke & Luke, 1998). As a consequence, there is increasing recognition of diversity and minority groups (e.g., homosexuals, indigenous people, unassimilated migrants, those with disabilities; Australian Council of Deans of Education, 2001), and children are being raised in a range of family circumstances (extended, sole parent, gay, and step families (Dau, 2001). At the same

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time, accessible technologies such as the computer and the Internet are transforming social relations and providing children and families with new means of communicating and learning. Because of these social changes, children enter the classroom with a wide variety of experiences, making a focus on patterns of growth and what is developmentally appropriate increasingly difficult to discern, let alone apply.

Postmodern views of knowledge and inquiry have not only accompanied these changing times but are also disrupting the taken-for-granted relationship between child development knowledge and the preparation of early childhood teachers (Goffin, 1996; Zimiles, 2000). Drawing on a range of theoretical perspectives (critical theory, postcolonial theory, poststructuralism) and tools of analysis (e.g., deconstruction), postmodern scholars question the modern belief in the power of science to objectively determine the universal laws of human development (Burman, 1994). Instead, science is viewed as a social construction, imbued with the values of its creators and therefore enacting a particular set of power relations in its application (Lubeck, 1998). In the world of early education, postmodern examinations of the developmental knowledge base have shown that the research being used to frame practice has been conducted predominantly on homogenous (White, middle-class) student populations, with little attention to the ways culture and class mediate patterns of growth (Lubeck, 1994). Similarly, critical analyses of developmentally appropriate practice (Mallory & New, 1994) demonstrate that the use of a set of guidelines grounded in hierarchical theories of growth results in teachers overlooking childhood agency (Silin, 1995) and regulating children's learning to what is considered to be "normal" (Atwater, Carta, Schwartz, & McConnell, 1994; Polakow, 1989; Williams, 1994).

The world of early childhood teacher preparation has attempted to respond to these social and intellectual forces in two ways. First, in answer to what other knowledges teachers might need to know if they are to respond effec-

tively to increasingly diverse student populations and contemporary social issues, several scholars have suggested the inclusion of ideas and concepts drawn from other disciplines. In this way, teachers can be provided with an understanding of early education from historical, political, sociological, and philosophical perspectives (Silin, 1995). Recognition of the validity of practitioners' personal knowledge and the gap between child development research and classroom practice has also led teacher educators to use teachers' theories and research in their programs (Genishi, 1992). A second approach to reforming the teacher preparation curriculum has been to incorporate more contemporary knowledge and research from developmental psychology that describes children's development in context and from sociocultural perspectives (Stott & Bowman, 1996). Thus, where there has been reaction to the post-modern critique of the early childhood knowledge base, it has been to add updated versions of child development theory and research, along with other disciplinary insights on children's learning (Stott & Bowman, 1996).

Although the incorporation of other knowledges about children's learning is important, this additive approach has resulted in child development retaining its prominent position in the curriculum (Isenberg, 2000). A continuing reliance on child development knowledge raises several concerns, however. The first of these is the ongoing lack of resolution about whether developmentally appropriate practice is, and can be, inclusive of all children's learning styles (Charlesworth, 1998; Hatch et al., 2002; Lubeck, 1998) and, therefore, whether it should be promoted as the base for best practice. A second and related concern is that most programs of early childhood teacher preparation currently in operation offer little, if any, coursework in linguistic and cultural diversity and the education of children with disabilities (Early & Winton, 2001). Thus, many future early childhood teachers are not necessarily learning about diversity and the limitations of a developmental lens for addressing the multiple ways

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children develop. Finally, there is an additional concern that has been catalyzed by the current policy focus on “harnessing” early education as a means to ensure children’s ongoing educational success (Schweinhart, 2002, p. 1). In an effort to shift the focus of preschool programs away from care to education, policies such as *Good Start, Grow Smart* (U.S. Department of Education, 2002) are pushing for a retooling of the early childhood professional preparation system to educate teachers who both have a command of domain-specific knowledge and are able to use research-proven practices to ensure that all children are prepared academically for formal schooling (Bowman, Donovan, & Burns, 2001).

Despite the differences between critics of the developmental knowledge base and current policy makers about the purposes of early education, the current social and political context is demanding that early childhood teachers are able to respond effectively to the diverse ways of knowing and learning that they will encounter in their classrooms. Although the problem of how to address the issue of teaching for diversity is not new to teacher preparation, we contend that by infusing postmodern perspectives into the curriculum, students and teacher educators alike are able to gain an understanding of the politics of their work as well as the roles that they and the educational system play in perpetuating educational inequities. A postmodern orientation assumes that all knowledge in its use exercises power relationships and that even knowledge of culture, disability, gender, and class can limit some students’ learning. Rather than exploring diversity as a topic in and of itself, therefore, a postmodern approach urges teachers to consider the values and interests framing classroom practices, to view teaching and learning interactions from more than one perspective, and to think about how else they might respond pedagogically. To illustrate these assertions, this article describes several strategies we have found useful in attempting to enact a postmodern approach with our students.

## POSTMODERNISM IN THE EARLY CHILDHOOD TEACHER EDUCATION CLASSROOM

According to Davis and Sumara (1997), like many other areas of modern life, learning to teach has been conceptualized as mastery of a particular set of knowledge and skills that are relevant to all contexts at any point in time. A postmodern teacher education involves moving away from this mastery model to an examination of how knowledge creates boundaries and possibilities (Popkewitz, 1999). As teacher educators attempting to enact a postmodern approach in our work, we have begun to use three strategies—situating knowledge, multiple readings, and engaging with images—that assist both students and ourselves to take a different stance to knowledge and how we approach our work with young children. Although a postmodern perspective argues that, like all other social processes, teaching cannot be reduced to isolated techniques, for the purposes of this discussion we have chosen to outline these strategies individually so that it is possible to see the links between these practices and particular postmodern ideas. A specific example from the university classroom is then used to illustrate how these strategies are also combined to produce pedagogical experiences that aim to help students understand the political effects of teaching.

### *Situating Knowledge*

From a postmodern perspective, the dangers inherent in assuming that knowledge production is ahistorical and value-free requires that all knowledge be viewed as partial and context-specific (Usher & Edwards, 1994). Situating knowledge then involves examining the historical, social, political, economic, and cultural contexts that have given rise to various understandings and practices associated with the education of young children. To be able to situate the knowledge base requires using an interdisciplinary lens. By drawing on history, biography, and sociology, among other disciplines, it becomes possible for students to gain insight

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into how the interaction of differing factors at points in time have enabled particular understandings of children, their education, those who teach them, and what constitutes good early childhood practice to have become foundational to the field.

For example, by exploring the biography of Piaget, students learn how his childhood was spent escaping the irrationality of his mother through the logical and ordered world of science and reason exemplified by his father (Piaget, 1952). They are then better able to understand why Piaget focused predominantly on the development of logico-mathematical thought and not on emotional or physical development. At the same time, locating Piaget's work historically within the field of education enables students to gain insight into the social and political contexts that led to the widespread acceptance and application of his ideas to education in the United States. Although the now more accepted version of sociocultural development posited by Vygotsky (1978) was also available to the Western world in the 1960s, Piaget's theory gained precedence because its orientation toward scientific and mathematical thinking was a better fit with the desire of the United States government to lead the space race (E. Weber, 1984).

With these historical and political understandings, tracing the contexts of Piaget's theories can then involve examining how his ideas have become a primary informant for curricula approaches such as developmentally appropriate practice and the High/Scope model. Closely examining these curricula to identify references to Piaget's theoretical tenets while reading critiques of Piaget's theory (e.g., Silin, 1995) enables students to see how outdated theoretical ideas become embedded in other texts to maintain authority over what it means to teach young children in contemporary times. Through engagement with the differing contexts that have both shaped or are shaping the current knowledge base, students begin to get a sense that prescribed practices and theories are only partial stories or interpretations of phenomena. Although these ideas may have

empirical warrant, they are nonetheless not neutral or objective.

Situating knowledge is not only a strategy used to look inward on the knowledge base itself but also involves understanding the early childhood field in relation to broader educational contexts. To achieve this form of situating, it is important for students to gain insight into contemporary issues that are shaping the education field in general, and early childhood in particular. These issues must then be examined for the social and historical contexts in which they are generated and the values that contribute to their gaining attention. For example, students in a curriculum methods class might examine the assumptions framing the current push for curriculum models in early education and their relationship to the standards movement in the K-12 educational sector. Exploring teachers' roles in these various curriculum models, their theoretical and empirical underpinnings, and policy statements about what curriculum models achieve prepares students to think critically about how they might respond to contemporary reform initiatives, as well as how sociopolitical structures at the macro level of society interplay with their daily work.

### **Multiple Readings**

From a postmodern perspective, to make sense of how knowledge and power are linked—and therefore whose voices are overlooked by particular theories and practices—the knowledge base must be examined as a discourse. To assist students in making sense of the postmodern notion of discourse and the ways that discourses shape education and social life, the strategy of multiple readings is employed. This strategy involves students reading aspects of early childhood theory and practice from various theoretical perspectives to ask who benefits from particular knowledges and what other practices might be possible.

Discourses are systems of meaning that circulate through social life by individuals taking them up and speaking of them as if they were their own. Every discourse creates its own poli-

tics of truth that determines the ways people behave and what counts as valid knowledge. At any one time, there are multiple systems of meaning operating in social life, but some obtain more dominance than others and become what Foucault (1980) called "regimes of truth." The developmental knowledge base has been the early childhood teacher's regime of truth, thus multiple readings offer students opportunities to learn how to deconstruct the meanings and power relations operating within this discourse while opening them up to other perspectives and meanings that also shape relations between teachers and young children.

Deconstruction involves reading social life as though it were a text, for what is both said as well as not said. Reading classroom life in this way, according to Davies (1994), means examining first what teachers and children say to identify the meanings being used and then looking at the ways these discourses are practiced or enacted by classroom participants. By making the discourses visible, it then becomes possible to see the way in which "social structure, power relations, the different positions of each of the participants, and the desires and life histories of each individual are made real" in a given setting (Davies, 1994, p. 5). Multiple readings allow this deconstructive work to occur by providing students with more than one perspective (e.g., teacher research, critical theory, sociology of childhood, poststructural theory, postcolonial theory) on a classroom scene, case study, curriculum, or teaching strategy and in so doing help make the meanings and politics of the developmental discourse, among others, more apparent. No matter what the topic being explored, developmental readings as well as at least one or two other theoretical readings are provided.

For example, when looking at constructivist and student-centered curriculum in early childhood education, students first learn about the theoretical tenets of Piaget (1952) and Vygotsky (1978) in situated ways. They then read such texts as the *Guidelines for Developmentally Appropriate Practice* (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997) and watch videos of this kind of approach being implemented. Throughout these explorations, the emphasis is on understanding why particu-

lar learning experiences are deemed more appropriate than others. Like many other teacher educators, we get students to apply these ideas in practice by planning learning experiences and devising curriculum projects based on developmentally appropriate principles. From these experiences, students are constructing their own understandings of the roles of the developmentally appropriate educator and the student as an active agent in his or her learning.

To deconstruct the developmental discourse at work, students then spend time examining the classroom scene in Figure 1 from a feminist poststructuralist perspective (Walkerdine, 1990) and from the point of view of a teacher-researcher (Gallas, 1997). These theoretical readings provoke students to rethink the image of the child created in the developmental discourse as one devoid of gender who innocently and busily constructs an understanding of the world. However, in offering a differing interpretation of this classroom scene, each reading also provides students with alternative sets of practices from which to choose. The feminist poststructuralist discourse outlined by Walkerdine (1990) foregrounds the gendered interactions of the boys, showing how they exercise sexist interactions with Annie and their female teacher. In doing so, Walkerdine's feminist poststructuralist reading deconstructs the position of teacher as facilitator in the developmental discourse, arguing that as child-centered teachers tend to view children as less-formed and innocent beings, they do not interpret children's interactions as gendered. Because the developmentally appropriate teacher is supposed to support children's play, the most appropriate pedagogical response is to redirect the boys to less "silly" play. As the sexist behavior of the boys is the primary focus of a feminist reading, this discourse urges teachers to think about how they might intervene to challenge the boys' sexist overtures. Alternatively, Gallas (1997), as a teacher-researcher, offers a different view of "bad boys," claiming that they often act out because they are under-challenged and misunderstood in the classroom. This reading suggests that the best peda-

Annie takes a piece of Lego to add on to a construction she is building. Terry tries to take it away from her to use himself, and she resists. He says:

Terry: You're a stupid c\_\_t, Annie.

The teacher tells him to stop and Sean tries to mess up another child's construction. The teacher tells him to stop. Then Sean says:

Sean: Get out of it Miss Baxter paxter

Terry: Get out of it knickers Miss Baxter

Sean: Get out of it Miss Baxter paxter.

Terry: Get out of it Miss Baxter the knickers paxter knickers, bum.

Sean: Knickers, s\_\_t, bum.

Miss B.: Sean, that's enough, you're being silly.

Sean: Miss Baxter, knickers, show your knickers.

Terry: Miss Baxter, show your bum off.

(they giggle)

Miss B.: I think you're being very silly.

Terry: S\_\_t Miss Baxter, s\_\_t Miss Baxter.

Sean: Miss Baxter, show your knickers your bum off.

Sean: Take all your clothes off, your bra off.

Terry: Yeah, and take your bum off, take your wee-wee off, take your clothes off, your mouth off.

Sean: Take your teeth out, take your head off, take your hair off, take your bum off. Miss Baxter the paxter knickers taxter.

Miss B.: Sean, go and find something else to do please.

**FIGURE 1: Classroom Scene for Multiple Readings**

SOURCE: Walkerdine (1990, p. 4)

gological response might be to create specific learning opportunities that would stretch these boys intellectually and creatively so that similar kinds of interactions do not occur.

These discursive readings not only enable students to understand how multiple and competing discourses shape pedagogy but also assist them to understand how each system of meaning exercises differing effects of power among students and between students and teachers. Although the developmental discourse positions the teacher and Annie with little agency to prevent the boys' sexist overtures, the feminist poststructuralist reading brings attention to bear on Annie and the female participants in the classroom and calls for the teacher to confront the boys' verbal exchange. The Gallas (1997) reading of "bad boys," on the other hand, reverts the gaze to the boys, but instead of seeing the interaction as non-gendered as in the developmental discourse, argues from a pedagogical base for a different interpretation and response to the boys.

The purpose of constructing these multiple readings is not to confuse students but instead to help them to recognize the competing systems of meaning operating in classroom practice. In learning how to use deconstructive techniques, students are then able to pull apart the values underpinning these different systems of meaning and thus to determine which might be the better pathway for action at that point in time.

### ***Engaging With Images***

Programs of teacher preparation tend to present teacher identity as singular in nature (S. Weber & Mitchell, 1995). This occurs by endorsing a particular approach to being an early childhood educator such as the developmentally appropriate teacher. From a postmodern perspective, however, teachers do not have a static function devoid of context, history, or biography. Instead, identity is produced through discourse, and consequently, teachers

have multiple subjectivities depending on the discourse and social context in which they are located at a particular point in time. This means that teachers can be located simultaneously in multiple positions: They may enact aspects of a developmentally appropriate curriculum by being “nurturing, caring, supportive, and responsive to the needs and interests of individual children” (Grieshaber, 2001, p. 60) and at the same time draw on understandings of gender and class not found in the guidelines that may lead them to act in ways that are not supported by the approach to developmentally appropriate practice described by Bredekamp and Copple (1997). The differing discourses shaping teacher identity, therefore, also offer differing meanings as to what it means to be a “good” early childhood teacher.

To help students understand this view of their professional identities, we use visual images. An image is not simply an illustration but is also socially and politically constructed (Fischman, 2001). What is shown in a visual representation and how the people are portrayed reflects particular values. Images of early childhood teachers are produced and reproduced through such media as television, film, literature, and art as well as in research and academic texts. Because these images offer insights into the political effects of knowledge and reflect aspects of contemporary life, they provide an accessible means for students to understand postmodern views of subjectivity and its implications for their work as teachers.

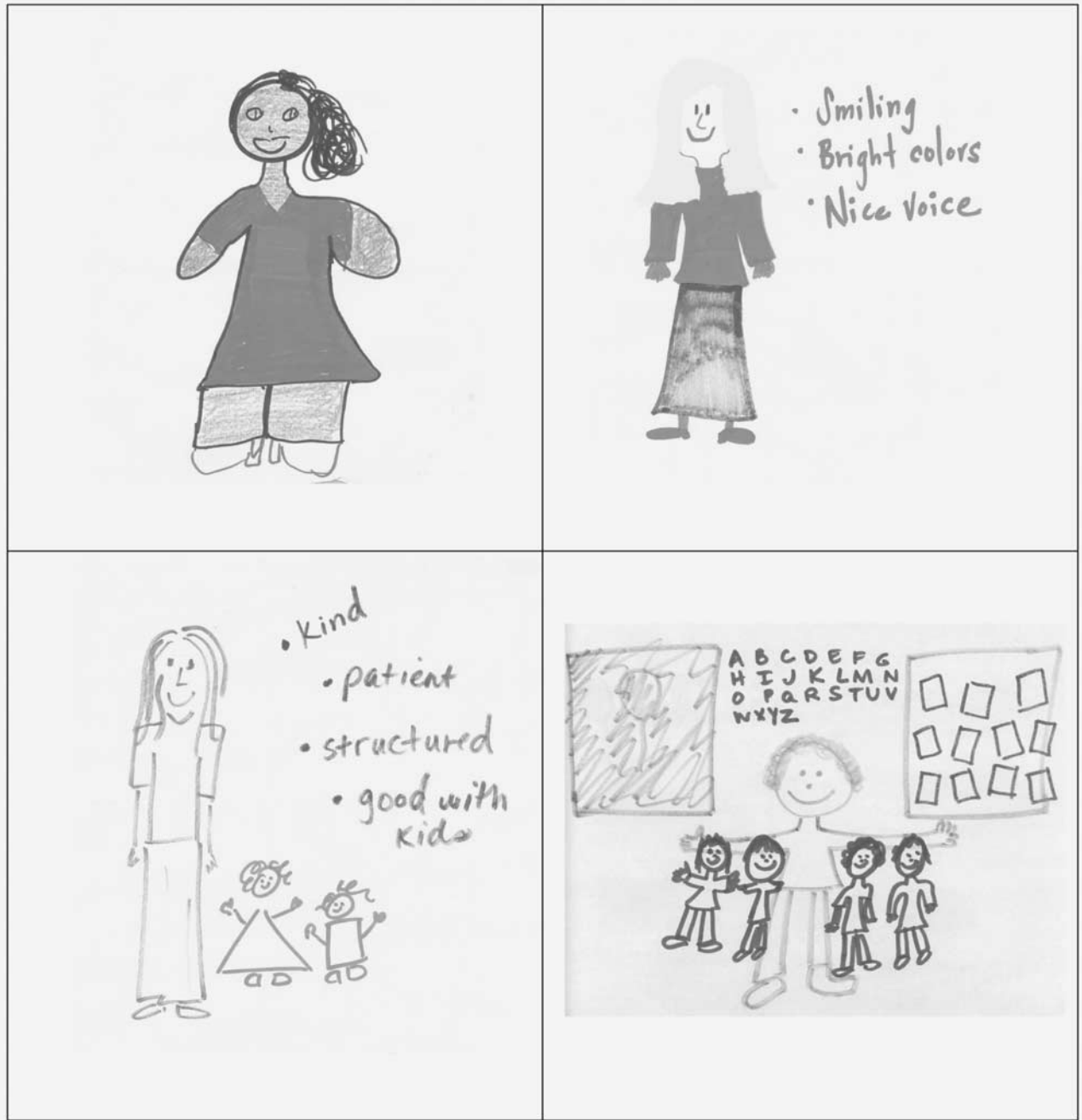
One way to do this is to ask students to draw their own images of early childhood teachers. Figure 2 shows four drawings produced by a group of students in their 1st year of a 2-year postbaccalaureate teacher certification program in early childhood education in the United States. To begin examining these images as texts that reflect particular values about the identities of early childhood teachers requires looking carefully both within and across these illustrations for points of tension and for both what is included and what is missing. In this group of drawings, three of the images appear to be of female teachers attired in long skirts or modest clothing; all of the teachers are standing up and

smiling, as are the children. Where children are depicted, the teachers are drawn in close proximity, and the words used to describe the teachers are positive adjectives that refer to warm interpersonal attributes. One of the most obvious differences in these drawings is the fact that only one teacher is not Caucasian, and one appears not to be female or is androgynous because he or she is dressed in trousers and has shorter hair. Of the words used, only the word “structured” seems to refer to teaching in any explicit way, and there are no references to intellectual characteristics teachers might possess.

Linking these explorations with the teacher images circulating in popular culture illustrates how the assumptions framing students’ drawings also pervade contemporary social life. In addition to the common portrait of a White, female, and caring educator, popular culture also offers other representations of teachers of young children. For example, in the children’s book *Miss Nelson Is Missing* (Allard & Marshall, 1977), the image of the good, White, blonde, beautiful, and caring Miss Nelson is contrasted with the cruel, dark, ugly Miss Swamp. Similar images are found in the film *Matilda* (Devito, 1996), in which Miss Honey, like Miss Nelson, is the caring and supportive teacher, depicted as a Caucasian, slim, single, and attractive female with blonde hair and a sweet voice. The antithesis of Miss Honey in this story is the cruel headmistress Miss Trunchbull, who like Viola Swamp, is a heavy woman, dark in appearance, and cruel to students. Juxtaposing these images with John Kimble, the policeman-turned-kindergarten teacher portrayed by Arnold Schwarzenegger in *Kindergarten Cop* (Reitman, 1990), breaks the gender stereotype and shows students how teacher identities also shift to include more than one way of being a teacher. John Kimble is both a gruff and overbearing teacher but also a caring educator whose concern is for his students.

By incorporating visual culture into the curriculum, students have access to images of early childhood teachers often excluded from programs of teacher preparation (S. Weber & Mitchell, 1995). The competing images offered





**FIGURE 2: Student Images of Early Childhood Teachers**

by popular culture, among other sources, assists students to not only pull apart some of the stereotypes associated with teaching young children but also to recognize the multiple and sometimes contradictory professional identities that comprise their work.

***Combining Visual Culture, Multiple Readings, and Situating Knowledge***

The three strategies we have outlined are preferably used in combination, as together they shed light on postmodern notions of the

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ways in which knowledge is socially constructed, how different systems of meaning enable children and educators to take on multiple identities, and the power and knowledge relationships that shape interactions between teachers and children. Continuing with the example of student-drawn images of teachers, it is possible to see how engaging with images, when used in conjunction with the strategies of multiple readings and situating knowledge, assists students to further explore the politics of dominant images of early childhood teaching and to consider the possibilities offered by other systems of meaning for their professional identities and daily practices.

Comparing the students' images to those of popular culture has enabled them to begin to tease apart some of the dominant assumptions framing the identities of early childhood teachers. By situating these images in relation to the history of the field itself, it then becomes possible to trace some of the social structures that have led to the generation of these images of teachers of young children. This situating might begin by looking at gender to illuminate how the industrial revolution saw men leaving classrooms to take up more lucrative and attractive leadership positions in schools and elsewhere. Implications of the feminization of the early childhood field could then be examined, such as the ongoing lack of status and the accompanying low compensation and working conditions that maintain women's unequal social positioning to men (Cannella, 1997). Similarly, situating the identities of early childhood teachers would also involve examining how child development came to play such a prominent role in educating children and the way its values have positioned early childhood teachers as nurturers and protectors of the young (Silin, 1995). This situating might be grounded through explorations of constructions of early childhood teachers prevalent in the pictorial images of practitioner journals. As with the student-drawn and popular culture images, examining the ways these images are constructed; the colors, dress, and mannerisms in which teachers perform their work; the words used to describe teaching; the activities that teachers are shown to participate

in; and the diversity of cultural backgrounds presented enables students to probe the values ascribed to being a "good" teacher.

Along with this situating, multiple readings that deconstruct dominant images of early childhood teachers enable students to delve more deeply into the politics of particular discourses for their professional identities. Although it is not possible to outline all of the readings that could be conducted, one starting point for this work could be to focus on the gendered aspects of teaching by employing cultural feminist (e.g., Goldstein, 1997) and queer theoretical perspectives (e.g., Silin, 1997) alongside a developmental reading (e.g., Bredekamp & Copple, 1997). Whereas historically a developmental discourse marginalized women's ways of knowing in favor of a science of education, a cultural feminist discourse validates the relational and caring aspects of knowledge that women use to make sense of experience (Goldstein, 1997). Employing an ethic of care, teachers enact an early education framed around loving relationships. Alternatively, queer readings challenge the dominance of the heterosexual discourse altogether and the notion that there are distinct identities associated with the gender categories of male and female (Silin, 1997). This perspective argues that male teachers are marginalized in early education and, to some extent, barred from caring for children by the emphasis on teaching as the domain of women (Johnson, 2000). If men are early childhood teachers, then it is assumed that they are either gay or perverts (Silin, 1997) who get some abnormal pleasure out of working with young children. These readings urge students to reconsider their own sexist assumptions about early childhood teachers as well as the implications of the dominant discourse of early childhood teaching as women's work for the field, young children, and their own identities as teachers.

In summary, like most teacher educators, we use images to make sense of the values and beliefs shaping students' understandings of teaching young children. However, by employing the teaching strategies of engaging with images, situating knowledge, and using multi-

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ple readings, the aim is not only to challenge these belief systems with relevant research knowledge but also to provide students with tools to be able to interrogate the social and political relations of knowledge that give meaning to their work. In other words, instead of perpetuating the ideal image of the good early childhood teacher (who teaches according to developmentally appropriate principles), our intent is to prepare teachers who are aware of the multiple and competing meaning systems that offer possibilities for their work and who can draw on this knowledge to respond equitably to issues of diversity in their practices.

### **CHALLENGES TO A POSTMODERN TEACHER EDUCATION**

The aim of a postmodern teacher education is not simply to supplant the child development knowledge base with a range of postmodern theoretical ideas so that a new foundation for practice is created. Instead, a postmodern teacher education seeks to provide students with a set of analytic tools (something like a theoretical toolbox) that they can use to view practices from different perspectives, providing alternative ways of seeing, understanding, and acting on the same situation. We have outlined three strategies that we have found useful for helping our students to recognize the multiple, partial, and always competing meanings given to teaching young children. The practices we have described, however, remain for the most part isolated within the specific courses that we teach. If postmodern perspectives are to be incorporated into programs of teacher preparation then from our experience, two challenges must be met.

The first of these challenges is the minimal use of postmodern perspectives across the teacher preparation curriculum. The dominance of developmental psychology in early childhood teacher preparation programs means that most students have few experiences with any other theoretical positions. Constructivist views of children's learning permeate their coursework, whether it is about science, mathematics, literacy, or the psychology of learning. When coupled with the fact that many

programs do not have specific coursework addressing diversity and equity issues where postmodern perspectives are more likely to be incorporated, students learn that psychology should be the main source of wisdom for practice. A postmodern teacher education necessitates some continuities between the content and form of coursework so that students have time and multiple opportunities to grapple with the complexities and implications of differing theoretical frameworks. This is not to suggest that students should only encounter postmodern ideas in their coursework but that every class present students with the range of knowledges informing practice so that postmodern perspectives are not isolated encounters.

A second and related challenge is the lack of scholarship written for and by teachers that specifically addresses the use and relevance of postmodern ideas in daily classroom practice. Consequently, there is not a lot of information available that can assist students and teacher educators to access postmodern ideas in the context of teaching young children. Exacerbating this issue further is the marginalization of these theoretical frameworks in scholarship on early childhood teaching (Ryan, Ochsner, & Genishi, 2001). Researchers and teacher educators alike tend to separate themselves along critical or developmental lines. Clearly, if we are to achieve a multidisciplinary knowledge base so that there are concrete examples of the implications of postmodernism and developmental perspectives, among others, for teaching young children, then alliances must be forged across these differences.

Reform is never an easy task. But given that we are no closer to achieving equity for all children in our programs than we were 30 years ago, those of us who prepare early childhood teachers cannot afford to overlook the limitations of our child-centered practices and the developmental knowledge base that grounds them. Because postmodern theories provide students with strategies to analyze the ways in which all teaching interactions exercise power so that some children are empowered whereas others are not, it offers new possibilities for thinking about how to address equitably the

multiple experiences and understandings that children bring into the classroom. Given that the preparation of early childhood teachers is currently a focus of policy makers, it is crucial that the tensions postmodern ideas may produce among colleagues do not become barriers. Rather, these differences should become the starting point for teacher educators to begin to generate new knowledges and new visions of what it means to teach young children in a global society.

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