

Shifting from Developmental to Postmodern Practices in Early Childhood Teacher Education

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Abstract

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 paper describes three pedagogies employed by the authors to enact a teacher education for “new” times. 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 paper 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.

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). As the starting point for all 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). Changing times and postmodern perspectives, however, are disrupting the taken-for-granted relationship between child development knowledge and the preparation of early childhood teachers (Goffin, 1996; Zimiles, 2000).

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 (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 time, accessible technologies such as the computer and the internet are transforming social relations providing children, and families with new means of communicating and learning. In these new times children enter the classroom with a wide variety of

experiences therefore a focus on patterns of growth and what is developmentally appropriate is increasingly difficult to discern, let alone apply (Zimiles, 2000).

Accompanying these complex social changes shaping contemporary childhood and family life, have come postmodern views of knowledge and inquiry. 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 student populations (White, middle class) 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 that view children's development as moving towards adulthood, results in teachers overlooking childhood agency (Silin, 1995) and regulating children's learning to what is considered to be "normal" development (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 effectively to increasingly diverse student populations and contemporary social issues, several scholars have suggested the inclusion of ideas and concepts drawn from other disciplines so 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 utilize teachers' theories and research in their programs (Genishi, 1992). In response to the critique of developmental research and theory, 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 (Goffin, 1996; Stott & Bowman, 1996). Thus, where there has been reaction to the postmodern 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). This continuing reliance on child development knowledge is concerning given the current policy aim of "harnessing" early education (Schweinhart, 2002) as a means to ensure all children are prepared to succeed in school and beyond. These policies, most notably the Federal initiative, *Good Start, Grow Smart* (U.S. Department of Education, 2002) are trying to shift the focus of early childhood programs, and preschool in particular, away from care to education. Consequently, there is a push to retool the early childhood professional preparation system to educate teachers who have a command of domain specific knowledge and are

able to teach children from multiple cultural backgrounds the kinds of academic knowledge and skills necessary for ongoing school success (Bowman, Donovan, & Burns, 2001). To be sure, enhancing children's language, cognitive, and early reading skills are important for early childhood teachers to know but if they are to be able to respond effectively to diverse student populations then it is also necessary that they have an understanding of the politics of their work and the role education has in creating socially productive persons (ACDE, 2001). That is, teachers also need to have the analytical tools offered by a postmodern perspective if they are to be able to recognize and address the ways in which the knowledge they use and the actions they take in the classroom can also marginalize and limit children's learning.

As there are few descriptions available of how teacher educators have tried to alter their curriculum to address the limitations of developmentalism (for a notable exception see O'Brien, 2000), the purpose of this paper is to describe several strategies we have found useful in attempting to enact a postmodern approach with our students. After elaborating on these practices in the next section, the paper concludes with a discussion of some of the challenges that need to be addressed in efforts to reconstruct early childhood teacher preparation programs to include postmodern perspectives on knowledge and action.

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) and why some knowledges achieve status as the primary informants for teaching young children. Thus, the aim of a postmodern teacher education is not simply to supplant child development foundations 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 and understanding the same situation, while also assisting them to conceptualize what other practices might be possible (Usher and Edwards, 1994).

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 teaching like all other social processes cannot be reduced to isolated techniques, for the purposes of this discussion, we have chosen to outline these strategies individually first 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 politic effects of teaching.

Situating knowledge

From a postmodern perspective, the dangers inherent in assuming that knowledge production is ahistorical and value-free require that all knowledge be viewed as partial, context specific, and potentially normative in its purposes (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 others, it becomes possible for students to gain insight 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 1960's, 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 (Weber, 1984).

With these historical and political understandings, tracing the contexts of Piaget's theories can then involve examining how his ideas have been taken up by early childhood educators and become an 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 at the same time 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 of the current knowledge base in this way, 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 positioning of the early childhood field in relation to broader educational contexts such as K-12 schooling. This form of situating is an important part of understanding how and why we have the early childhood services and programs we do today, and assists students to make sense of the ways in which constructions of childhood and teaching are linked to social, political, and economic change locally and globally. 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. As with the example used previously, these issues must be examined for the social and historical contexts in which they are generated, and the values that are contributing to their gaining attention. By examining how socio-political structures at the macro level of society influence teachers' work at the local level of the classroom, students are prepared to think critically about how they might respond to contemporary reform initiatives.

Multiple Readings

From a postmodern perspective, knowledge and power are inextricably linked and exercised through discourses. In order to make sense of whose voices and perspectives are overlooked by particular theories and practices necessitates examining the knowledge base as a discourse. To assist students to make sense of the postmodern notion of discourse and the ways 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 them as if they were their own. Every discourse creates its own politics 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) calls “regimes of truth.” The developmental knowledge base has been the early childhood teacher’s regime of truth therefore, multiple readings offer students opportunities to develop the analytic tools to be able to deconstruct the meanings and power relations operating within this discourse, while simultaneously opening them up to other perspectives and meanings that also shape relations between teachers and young children.

Deconstruction involves reading social life as if 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, 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 doing so helping to make the meanings and politics of the developmental discourse more apparent. No matter what the topic being explored, a developmental reading as well as at least one or two other theoretical readings is provided.

For example, when looking at constructivist and student centered curriculum in early childhood, students first learn about the theoretical tenets of Piaget and Vygotsky in situated ways. They then read curriculum manuals like 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 particular 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/her learning. To deconstruct the developmental discourse at work, students then spend time examining the classroom scene in Figure 1 from a feminist poststructural 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.

[Figure 1]

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 view children's interactions as gendered. As the developmentally appropriate teacher is supposed to support children's play, then 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 pedagogical 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. While 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 with students is to help them to recognize the competing systems of meaning operating in classroom practice, and to be able to utilize deconstructive techniques so that pedagogy, becomes a matter of making choices between different discourses and the relations of power they enact.

Engaging with Images

Programs of teacher preparation tend to present teacher identity as singular in nature (Weber & Mitchell, 1995). This occurs by endorsing a particular approach to being an early childhood educator such as the developmentally appropriate teacher made explicit by setting particular texts (e.g. Bredekamp & Copple, 1997). 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 DAP curriculum by being "nurturing, caring, supportive, and responsive to the needs and interests of

individual children” (Grieshaber, 2001, p. 60), while, simultaneously drawing on understandings of gender and class not found in the DAP guidelines that may lead them to act in developmentally inappropriate ways. The differing discourses shaping teacher identity therefore, also offer differing meanings as to what it means to be a “good” early childhood teacher.

One way to help students understand this view of their professional identities is to 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, the people represented, and how they are portrayed reflect particular values. Images of early childhood teachers are produced and reproduced through popular culture such 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 begin this work 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 first year of a 2-year post-baccalaureate teacher certification program in early childhood education in the United States. One way to begin examining these images as texts that reflect particular values about the identity of early childhood teachers is to look carefully both within and across these illustrations for points of tension, for 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 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 s/he 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.

[Figure 2]

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) where Miss Honey, like Miss Nelson, is the caring and supportive teacher depicted as a Caucasian, slim, single, attractive, female with blonde hair and a sweet voice. The antithesis of Miss Honey in this story is the cruel headmistress Miss Crunchball, who like Viola Swamp is a heavy woman, dark in appearance, and cruel to students. Juxtaposing these images with John Pringle, 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. Although he is not positioned as unattractive, like Miss Crunchball and Miss Viola Swamp, John Pringle begins as a gruff and overbearing

teacher, but by the middle of the movie he has turned into a caring but tough 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 (Weber & Mitchell, 1995). The competing images offered by popular culture, among other sources, assists students to not only pull apart some of the stereotypes associated with teaching young children but 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 more likely to be used in combination as together they shed light on the interrelationships between postmodern notions of the power and knowledge relationships between teachers and children; ways of analyzing the dominant images of early childhood teachers, and understanding how knowledge is socially constructed. 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 and teacher educators alike to explore further 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 early childhood field (like other sectors of education) saw men leaving classrooms with the industrial revolution 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 (cf. 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 (see 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 and 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 multiple readings, the aim is not only to challenge these belief systems with relevant research knowledge, but to also provide students with tools to be able to interrogate the social and political relations of knowledge that give meaning to their professional identities. In other words, instead of perpetuating the ideal image of the good early childhood teacher (who teaches according to DAP), our intent is to prepare teachers who are aware of the multiple and competing discursive possibilities for their work and can draw on this knowledge to respond equitably to issues of diversity in their practices.

Challenges to a Postmodern Teacher Education

A postmodern teacher preparation involves enacting pedagogies in which teacher educators and their students examine the political relationships among knower, knowledge, and action. The emphasis is not only on learning a new set of theories but on working with students to recognize and act on the multiple, always partial, and conflicting meanings that shape practice. In this paper we have outlined three strategies that we have found useful for actualizing postmodern ideas as teacher educators: that is, teaching students how to view and analyze knowledge, images, and practices from several perspectives. Although we are committed to a postmodern teacher preparation, the practices we have described in this paper remain for the most part isolated within the specific courses that we teach. If teachers are to be prepared to work in these new times, then attention must also be given to reform at the programmatic level. Drawing on our own experiences we see two challenges to those wanting to pursue such change.

The first of these challenges is the continued isolation of postmodern perspectives to a minor part of 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 (Early & Winton, 2001), students learn

that psychology should be the main source of wisdom for practice. It is not surprising therefore, that we have encountered students who are reluctant to engage with ideas outside of child development theory and research. 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 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 multi-disciplined 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. Such conversations will enable teacher educators to begin to inquire into their own practices and how coursework might be altered to reflect the changing knowledge base of the field.

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 thirty 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. Postmodern theories provide students with techniques for analyzing knowledge that enable them to see how knowledge exercises power and therefore offer new insights into addressing issues of diversity. The tensions these ideas raise among colleagues and students do not need to be 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 postmodern times.

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Figure 1.

Classroom scene for multiple readings

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 cunt, 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, shit, 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: Shit Miss Baxter, shit 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.

(excerpted from Walkerdine, 1990, p. 4)

Figure 2.
Student images of early childhood teachers

