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ADDITIONAL NOTES	

Empowering Teachers of Young Children:

Moving Students from Agents of Surveillance to Agents of Change

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Abstract

This chapter illustrates how an online early childhood teacher education program using Socratic inquiry methods inspires students to challenge habituated assumptions in the field. Academic pushdown, teacher identity, standardization, and developmentally appropriate practice are central assumptions in ECE that students challenge in their blogs and discussion board postings. The program goal is to empower students to become transformative intellectuals (Giroux, 1988) and ultimately agents of change. Student writing illustrates how students have begun the process of challenging assumptions, identifying multiple perspectives on critical issues, and articulating arguments based on self-reflection and critical analysis.

Introduction

The presence of questioning, interrogating power, and advocacy are central to our teaching practices. In many current teacher education programs, coursework is infected with standards and methodologies in response to federal mandates like **NCLB** and the conception of Highly Qualified Teachers (HQT). HQT can punctuate the higher education classroom. For example, during a recent observation, we witnessed a professor spending over an hour telling an undergraduate class the specific content standards for a subject. Forty minutes were focused on telling how this knowledge, which she often referred to as “true” and “good,” was paramount to teaching. A short time was spent with the undergraduates in small groups using a teacher-created chart to apply the teacher-generated knowledge of standards. Not

once did we hear the professor ask the undergraduates to bring in their own experiences and lives in the world. At the beginning of the lesson, the professor stated her objective concretely, “The objective of this lesson is....” Then she completed the circle of rhetoric by stating, “The objective of this lesson was and we met this objective by....” Her choice in words and actions brought to life the structures as directed by accountability standards determined by our government through *No Child Left Behind* (<http://www2.ed.gov/nclb/landing.jhtml>). Following the lesson, we heard someone comment; “Now she can prepare highly qualified teachers.” To us, all we could think is that this teacher candidate was an agent of surveillance.

Inspired by Foucault (1972; 1995), the concept of agent of surveillance emerged in opposition to inspiring agents of change, which is the desire we have in working with developing early childhood teachers. We see the current practice of *NCLB*, particularly the notion of creating HQT, as a policy that parallels Foucault’s ideas of surveillance and technologies of power, particularly hierarchical observation, a “very efficient and effective form of super-vision” (Gallagher, 1999, p. 78). Standards and accountability act as these controlling instruments in order to inflict homogeneity and compliance, ensuring the habituated assumption of being a teacher and student is enacted. We observed that professor and shuddered as she was praised and given accolades for observance to constructed expectations, the essential elements of surveillance. These agents of surveillance walk the halls of many universities and are teaching future teachers to follow federal ideals and certainly not think about the communities and children who they serve.

Our path of disruption to early childhood practices based in standards, content, and rhetoric is to inspire agents of change within the early childhood undergraduate program. An agent of change is an advocate who is aware of policy, issues of social justice, and is supported to voice resistance and question existing policies and practices. Agents of change can be seen as advocates, “speaking on behalf of others, often from within existing political, social, and economic frames of reference” (Sumison, 2006, p. 3). In some cases, agents of change can also be activists “resisting and challenging those frames of references and the power bases that support them” (Kenny, 2004 in Sumison, 2006, p. 3).

Articulated Early Childhood Program

Our early childhood teacher education Bachelors degree program, articulates with the university system Associates degree programs in Early Childhood Education based on a more mainstream perspective of early childhood focused mainly on child development. Our students are all practitioners working in the field of early childhood education. In the Bachelor's degree program, we call for critiquing practice from theoretical and cultural perspectives, interrogating power within the workplace and community, and embracing advocacy so that teacher professionalism evolves as society changes. A culminating practicum for the Bachelors degree is 6-credit course which includes an action research project. In reality, the Associates degree maintains a more conservative norm of mainstream child development while the Bachelors degree expands with more progressive and liberal orientations to the field. This creates a tension for our students as we ask our students to disrupt what they know from their Associates program and begin to rethink practice from a critical framework.

The main format for our program is an online environment, moving away from the traditional in-person teaching configuration. Since our program services students on four islands, it is the first opportunity for many of our students to access further education beyond the Associate level. Through the use of an online platform supplied by the university and blogger.com, students engage with the readings and discussions based in a variety of texts. The process begins with each student writing a question in response to the readings and then writing an initial post to a blog or discussion board. Then, both the professor and peers respond back the initial post with more questions. These questions are meant to inspire deeper thinking and more questions rather than a specific answer. Our process is meant for the students to develop clarity and discomfort in order to evolve in their thought processes and teaching practices.

Students spend the first weeks of the course reviewing resources focused on Socratic ideals (including a colleague's paper on the Neo-Socratic method and the website <http://socratesway.com/everyday.html>) and the first posting on the discussion board or blog for the course is the students' interpretations of these ideas in relation to their experiences and beliefs. This experience begins the process of students becoming critical thinkers. One student shared in her posting:

...When we stop to analyze or critique something that is when we use our minds and develop our answers to what we believe in. We cannot always accept everything everyone says because to them, it means something and have created that thought because of an experience, and to say you agree but not look into the situation, you may never know what really is out there. Although professors are the ones that may know a lot of factual information on the topic of teaching, asking questions and wondering why something is the way it is allows you to have an understanding of why it is what it is instead of just accepting what they say without question because the professor may or may not be right depending on the situation.

Another student explains how the Socratic readings influence how he considers advocacy and teaching practices,

To be true advocates in the field of ECE, we all need look into ourselves and not be “sold” into one idea because it came from research or a text book. Besides the universal ECE shortcomings (wages, respect, gender equity) there are opportunities within our programs to advocate for or against something. Curriculum, training, reporting and assessment techniques are just a few aspects that differ from program to program. We need to get the facts and hear/tell the truth about how our programs can benefit or be hurt from the implementation of certain ideals.

Our choice to move beyond two-dimensional online practices like lectures and quizzes encourages our students to experience teaching as an engaging, experiential process. As they develop familiarity with the process, movement beyond static teaching techniques is a possibility, imagining and developing teaching practices based on critical theory and disruption of habituated assumptions so common in early childhood education.

Habituated Assumptions and Transformations

Giroux (1988) explains that “the category of transformative intellectual suggests that teachers begin recognition of those manifestations of suffering that constitute historical memory as well as the immediate conditions of oppression” (p. 99). When students focus on pedagogy from a teacher or curriculum-centered view, they tend not to consider issues such as oppression, suffering, or risk factors. When they consider the *lived experiences* of individual children, their families, their cultures and languages, or their social economic status, then they tend to articulate human conditions affecting the children’s lives.

Through our teaching framework, we challenge our students to think about what could be possible. As students describe looking at their selves in order to disrupt accepted curriculum practices or techniques, we are witness to their development as advocates. This advocacy is the beginning of a lifelong dialogue teachers should be engaging in as agents of change and is further illustrated as questions and reflections become the means for voice. Bringing these elements of discussion into action initiate teachers into creating “a better, fairer, more humane state of things.” For example, in one blog, a student reflects on a reading from *Making Learning Visible* (2001), sharing her questions and beginning to deconstruct power ideas surrounding truth:

...This got me thinking about my own philosophy - it's something that has been in flux for the past few years, constantly being tweaked and refined as I take in and digest new information. I know I occasionally have a hard time accepting information that seems counter to what I've learned. Like Howard Gardner wrote about on page 337, learning new paradigms isn't always so easy. How do you un-think something you considered fact? Or, a bigger question could be, “What does it mean to know something?” This line of thinking takes me back to my philosophy classes discussing the concept of what is really truly real. Are your thoughts real? Are the things you can taste and touch (etc.) real? How can we ever really know the truth of life? Is there even such thing? And what, if anything, do these questions mean when working with young children?

This continues in her blog as she interrogating ideas of community, knowledge, and democracy,

... What is a democracy? What does it mean to live democratically? We hear people talking about these topics a lot in our country (at least I do, but that could be because I tend to watch the news a lot). Does democracy mean being able to make as much money as possible and spending it on whatever you want? Does it mean spending money on programs that help others because that benefits the whole of society? Does it just mean being able to vote for your representatives? I know there are lots of varying degrees and differing points of view about democracy and democratic living. How could we talk about this with children? Does democracy mean fairness? What does it mean to be fair? Whose point of view are we looking at when we consider fairness?

The blog ends with a rethinking of the role of teacher, advocating for teachers to think deeply and philosophically, “I think now that we're discussing the idea of “big

ideas” I have to dust off my old “philosophy” hat that I tend to keep tucked in the dark recesses under the bed. Teachers as philosophers -1 could learn to like that idea.”

Assumptions and Transformations in Early Childhood Education

Academic pushdown, teacher identity, standardization, and developmentally appropriate practice are central assumptions to the discussions in our program. Readings introducing these often “grand narratives” within early childhood education are offered to the students in order for the students to have a basic background to dispute. Alternative perspectives are also shared through the readings, presenting other ways to see these assumed practices. The hope is that inspiration for students to consider how their experiences can impact the disruption of a practiced pedagogy and move them from efficient practitioner to transformative intellectual (Giroux, 1988). In the following sections we will be sharing student blogs and discussion board postings highlighting student interrogation of the habituated assumptions in ECE (see Table 1).

Academic Pushdown in Early Childhood Education

Early childhood programs have become victims of academic push-down. Politicians, policymakers, and administrators are using academic push-down as a means to ready children for upper grades, placing childhood in the margin in the name of *No Child Left Behind (NCLB)*. Campbell (2008 in Pelo, 2008) shares the story of his own daughter’s encounter in prekindergarten where the centers focused on literacy skills previously expected to be completed in the first grade are now part of the prekindergarten classroom. When Campbell brought the inappropriateness of the academic curriculum to the principal, she looked at Campbell, “rolled her eyes, and said calmly and confidently, “Well, it’s not going to do them any harm” (Campbell, 2008 in Pelo, 2008, p. 58).

Table 1. Habituated assumptions and transformative practices in ECE

Habituated Assumptions in ECE	Transformative Practice in ECE
Academic push-down has diminished play in the ECE curriculum. NCLB has forced accountability for readiness skills.	Learning occurs through play and child initiated activities consistent with the child’s home culture and community environments.
Early childhood teachers are primarily white, middle-class and motherly.	Early childhood teachers are diverse, racially, ethnically, linguistically and by gender.
Standardization of curriculum and assessment minimizes diversity and discounts oppressed population.	Teachers who are transformative intellectuals incorporate subjugated knowledge of oppressed populations in their curriculums.

One might contend the principal’s response as well as the push-down may relate to the need to complete Annual Yearly Progress (AYP), a component of *No Child Left Behind*. Yet, research indicates the failure of AYP to illustrate anything. Further, schools that may appear to be functioning well are not very different from those schools that are failing,

...AYP compares the current proficiency status of a school or district to a fixed annual target. According to this metric, schools report the percentage of students who are performing at or above the proficiency target for a given year. Thus AYP—as currently defined and used in most states—is not a measure that captures improvement, or gains in student achievement, from one year to the next (Linn, 2008 in Mintrop & Sunderman, 2009)

Part of the conversation of academic pushdown, *NCLB*, and AYP is the concept of the early childhood aged child being “ready” to learn.

While attending a conference provided by the local department of education about the current early childhood programs, the attendees received a children’s book by Rosemary Wells (2006) titled *My Shining Star: Raising a Child who is Ready to Learn*. In the pages of the text, the author shares a list of characteristics contributing to a child being ready to learn. Some of the elements offer basic life skills - honesty, respect, listening, trust - yet, among the list is reading and writing, implying the very academic push-down so prevalent in early childhood classrooms. The book ends with

how the child will become shining star if the child embodies these characteristics as suggested by the text, again implying the academic push-down. When even children's texts are exemplifying the academic push-down, how can this injustice be disrupted?

NCLB has taken away the beauty of childhood, interpreting each child as the same, meeting the same standards, without regard to culture or context (Popkewitz & Brennan, 1998). Sameness continues as those with the power, politicians, policymakers, and administrators, impose academic push-down in hopes of ensuring, ironically, that no child is left behind. Ideas of push-down echo in children's texts, further pushing childhood to the margin and placing academic push-down as the norm.

One mid-September night, when I was tucking my 5-year-oldson Eamonn in bed, the standardization madness came home to roost. With a quivering lip and tear-filled eyes, Eamonn told me he hated school. He said he has to read baby books that didn't make sense and that he was in the "dummy group." Then he looked up at me and said, "I just want to read Frog and Toad." (Quinn, 2008 in Pelo, 2008)

The story of Eamonn is quite telling as he is sharing his own frustrations with the consequences of academic push-down and *NCLB*. As children share their stories of being forced into scripted curriculum, a product of *NCLB*, educators are positioned to listen and respond in order to interrupt these current classroom practices. How can teacher education programs inspire teachers to disrupt in order to see teaching from the perspective of the children and families they work with each day?

After engaging in the same readings as shared above, one student blogs her own frustration with societal expectations of academics and the bullying of her own son by his school's administration:

I find that explaining PLAY to anyone who has not been through an ECE program, to be difficult. Many of my friends have their children perform for me; "Tell Aunty what color this is." "Tell her how you spell your name." When reviewing my intake forms I find that ninety percent of parent's answers to, "What would you like your child to gain from this program" is phonics. When in public, I often hear my-child-can-do competitive conversations. It seems as though our society is so out of touch with the importance of play. There is a common misconception that sooner is always better.

.... What will it take to turn this bus of academic bullying around? I fear for my son who used to love learning. Now I'm not so sure!

Another student discusses the victimization and rights of children from the academic push-down, referencing play and freedom:

Tests and standards hold too much weight in our schools. In fact, they are more important than the well-being of the child. What kind of logic is this? I don't understand why, when there is evidence to suggest otherwise and examples in other countries, parents and educators still insist on the earlier the better. I love Elkind's (1981/1988/2001) phrase "an assault on childhood". We are forcing our future generation to grow up too fast in a system that leads them to feel like they are failures. Imagine a future with no imagination, no creativity and little social skills. What kind of world are we creating?

...believe that we in the early childhood field need to speak with one voice and advocate for play. Children should be allowed the freedom to play. It is their human right. It is their purpose. It is what they are supposed to do... what right do we have to take that away from them?

The student accounts depicted focus on how academics for young children are perceived as both pervasive and problematic. The pressure of testing has been pushed down to kindergarteners, even though "official" assessment to meet AYP technical ly starts at third grade (the end of the early childhood years). In chat discussions through the online teaching platform, students tell stories about their friends, trained in early childhood education, who have left public school elementary teaching because the job was becoming so standardized and focused on high stakes testing. They felt they had to develop teaching identities as technicians for testing, rather than creative, child-centered teachers. Spending time with these frustrations encourages the students to begin challenging the assumed practice of academic push-down, evident as the students advocate for children's rights and question administrative actions.

Identity of Early Childhood Teachers

The development of identity is part of the becoming process for each early childhood teacher. MacNaughton and Williams (2004) contend that education is a process rather than a place and therefore it is not the institutions that make interactions educational. Anyone, regardless of gender or cultural background can teach, anywhere, anytime.

Contrast this current perspective to one by Snyder in *Dauntless Women in Childhood Education 1856-1931* (1972) based on Froebel's *Mother Play* in which teaching young children in the kindergarten (nursery school) was women's work and mothers learned from the kindergarteners (teachers). She wrote about how the teaching force needed to change, moving towards a "more responsible social role" and the development of a more heterogeneous teachers (beyond the expected "Anglo-Saxon, middle class professional and business background, ardently Christian and Protestant") (p. 376).

Referring to the 19th century industrialization in American society, Cannella (1997) describes the feminization of early childhood practitioners, pointing out that women had few work opportunities outside the home. "As women were constructed as the moral foundation of the family and the instrument whose identity is inextricably tied to the child, teaching was declared the natural responsibility of women. In the name of motherhood, women were claimed to be the best suited to educate children" (p. 141).

If we compare and contrast the previous quotes by Snyder and Cannella and pay attention to the historical context of their writing, we might conclude that early childhood teachers develop identity within practices of stereotyping, limited job opportunities (not to mention inequities in pay), and a myth that being maternal is somehow connected (and possibly a necessity) for teaching young children. Luckily, as MacNaughton and Williams describe the many ways of being a teacher, a door opens to the possibilities for many types, backgrounds and genders of early childhood teachers. Within our teacher education program, the development of identity is part of inspiring agents of change.

Gender Identity of Early Childhood Teachers

The gendered view of the nurturing female early childhood teacher is considered the norm by many of our students. One female student shared:

We have a male assistant teacher that we just hired. I thought some of my parents might feel objected to the situation and worried how the children might take to him. But everyone is happy that we have him and he brings a different aspect to the profession than my past female co-workers.

This female teacher's statement plays into the societal expectation that teachers must be female and nurturing, evident in her statement discussing parental and student perspective. This is further illustrated in another female student's posting discussing males performing assumed female tasks is abnormal, "I believe it is important to have the male figure in our classroom, but because of the precautions and "scare" about abuse and molestation, rubbing backs etc. men don't want to run the risk of being in the classroom."

This student's blog outlined some of the main fears that both male and female teachers of young children face. Her phrase "don't want to run the risk..." emphasizes the fear of societal sanctions. Gender is often not readily challenged or critiqued and assumed conceptions of teacher identity are reinforced by the female students. The challenge comes from a male student,

I want to discuss an issue that hits close to home, gender equity in ECE. Being a male in this field isn't easy. People don't see males as the nurturing type and are quite confused as to what to think when their child has a male teacher. In this day and age, the female plight towards equality has made great strides but male rights in ECE have been going backwards. Fear of lawsuits and accusations place fear in the hearts of male teachers and their administrators. Should male staff be allowed to change a child? Should they be allowed to be the last staff member alone with the children at closing time? Should children be allowed to sit on their laps? My answer to these questions is yes but I understand when administrators don't feel the same. It's difficult because a part of me wants to say, "If we give in and don't allow equality then views on this matter will never change" but at the same time, is the risk worth the reward? I would hate to be accused of or have any of my male staff accused of wrong doing especially if there are no other staff members present to justify our account of what did or did not take place. Yes, there are predators out there and statistically they are majority males but this type of prejudice is unfair. I do not want to work in fear. What can all of us do as advocates to change people's views on males in ECE? Is there any hope?

Through this student's posting, the females in the course began to see another side to their perspectives. One female student responded to this blog by recognizing the power of a male teacher in her own experiences as a student and a teacher,

Working with children I've learned that they respond to male figures better than us women teachers Also as I grew up in school, a majority of the teachers I favored and

most remembered were males. If we advocate more about how male teachers do have positive impacts on children, I do feel people will view this matter differently.

Another student identified the impact of having a male as a teacher on the students:

My first year of teaching I had about 9 boys in my classroom and out of that only 4 had positive fathers involved in their life. I think having a positive male figure in their life would be very beneficial and they have some references on how to be positive guy.

It is the early childhood professor's responsibility to challenge the habituated assumptions about gender relating to practice. As part of the blog process, one professor (Jeanne) posted these questions in response to the male student's blog in order to deepen the conversation for all students, male and female, in the course:

Your discussion about gender in early childhood education is so important. I wonder how much of the discrimination is related to societal assumptions about early childhood education. Have people in power (administrators, policymakers, etc) created a discourse in early childhood education depicting the expected early childhood teacher—a female, nurturing, loves children? How can an administrator disrupt this discourse? Is it based in hiring, support, ensuring a space for male educators? Sometimes I wonder if it relates to the male children always seeing females as teachers? Has our profession become so female, males do not even consider teaching a suitable profession?

Through an active discussion between peers, Cannella's "feminization" of the field of ECE begins to be challenged. The experiences and perspectives of both the female and male teachers is part of the discussion, encouraging the development of a new perspective on what it means to be both male and female in the classroom. The professor's questions are meant as a challenge to the accepted ideals of identity from the viewpoint of gender and as a means of articulating identity beyond gender.

Racial/Ethnic Identity of Early Childhood Teachers

I (Susan) am an American of Asian heritage and phenotype, and as a teacher-educator of color, I have always been cognizant of how others (administrators, parents, students) saw me, ascribed identity to me. In the years of public school teaching I have been asked where I come from and why I speak English so well. There were also

questions of how and where I was trained as a teacher from a mainly homogeneous central U.S. and Midwestern population. I had to reflect on my own identity, while thinking that I was no different from my students (a colorblind perspective). But once I studied multicultural education, I became cognizant of the need to address my identity in relationship to cultural diversity. Ooka Pang (2005) writes, “Identity is a core component of who we are” (pp. 41-42). Identity includes race, ethnicity and culture. Race is a sociopolitical construct, while ethnicity refers to cultural aspects of a particular ethnic heritage group. As immigrant groups come in contact with a host culture, or in the U.S. mainstream middle class European American culture, the ethnic identity may change as students acculturate. “The designation of American is generally reserved for those who are White and English-speaking,” says multicultural education scholar, Nieto (2000). She continues, “Others, even if here for many generations, are still seen as separate” (p. 334). Identity also reflects one’s worldview, which develops from one’s family and community norms. Au (2007), in her article on culturally responsive instruction, points out that there are worldview differences between students in mainstream and multi-ethnic or diverse classrooms. A mainstream “American” worldview focuses on individual effort, competition, and personal achievement, while a diverse worldview is characterized by working with others, cooperation, well-being of the group, and interdependence (p.11).

Teachers on the U.S. mainland are predominantly white and middle class but in Hawaii, many teachers are of Asian heritage (mostly Japanese). To illustrate this diverse worldview, the following students describe themselves as racial/ethnic beings within their home/community cultures and illustrate the diversity of Asian identities. One student wrote about her practice and cultural lens in regard to her identity:

Being in Hawaii, we do have to keep in mind that although a person is of Asian culture, does not mean that they are exactly like most, or any, other Asians. Take me, for example. I was born and raised in the Philippines. I exhibited the same behaviors as other Asians, such as avoiding eye-contact, kept personal matters within my family, and folded my arms across my chest. When I came to Hawaii and attended school, these behaviors suddenly became signs of defiance or disrespect. All I knew at the time was this is how I was raised and this is how we behaved in my home. Now there is this divide between the home and the school. What is appropriate at home is not always at school.

Whether we like it or not, we are all guilty of some kind of stereotyping or disrespect to another culture. Whether our intentions are good or bad is another thing. Just last week one of my children, a three-year-old boy who is Spanish, but speaks both English and Spanish, had difficulty playing in a group. He started to hit and yell so I thought it best to remove him from the classroom altogether, away from the noise, and took him outside where we could talk. I went down to his level and talked to him and the entire time he was not looking at me. Naturally, I took it as disrespectful so I firmly told him to look at me. When it dawned on me that this behavior was a part of his culture, I just felt like such an ass. I saw flashbacks of how he responded when his mother spoke to him and all times he did not make eye contact. He was not being disrespectful; rather, he was being respectful and doing what was natural when an adult spoke to him. I excused my behavior and apologized to him (yes, I know he's only three but he is a person and I respected him nonetheless).

Another student described her Japanese American identity:

I'm Japanese, but I feel like a fake Japanese. I don't speak Japanese, even though I tried to learn a number of times. I feel like sometimes people that are of a certain culture don't practice that culture is because their parents and family don't practice it. My parents don't speak Japanese so I feel like that is a small reason why I don't. We don't do some practices because we don't know how. Like pounding mochi, we don't do it, but my 2nd and 3rd cousins do. Their parents and grandparents passed down those practices to them, but if your parents don't know the practices, it might be a little hard for them to explain it to you if they really don't know about it themselves. Hike that you're very passionate about your culture, but I feel like sometimes people might not practice their culture because maybe they are shame. Like I feel like my grandparents raised my parents more "American" than Japanese, because during the war, they felt like they didn't want their children to be picked on, so they tried to make them "American" so they might fit in better.

The students' postings describing their own racial/ethnic identities viewpoints challenged a conception of teachers as White and middle class. Identity is shaped by one's home culture which reflects a family's worldview. Although these student postings illustrated more specific cultural characteristics such as eye contact, the Asian influence was reflective of Au's diverse worldview. For example, the Filipino student spoke of how she was raised and "behaved at home" which is based upon worldview, the student from Japan spoke about interdependence between parent and child, which is shown by respect for adults, and the "fake" Japanese student spoke about "fitting in" to American norms, yet this is a strong Asian expectation. Further, as recognition

of racial/ ethnic identities as part of the course discussion, the identity and culture of the children and their teachers became important disputing the societal and habituated assumptions of a generic teacher.

Standardization versus Subjugated Knowledge

Our goal is to empower students to engage in “critical pedagogy” (Giroux’s term). When students focus on pedagogy from a standardized, teacher or curriculum centered view, they tend *not* to consider issues such as oppression, suffering, or risk factors. When they consider individual children, families, or social economic status, then they tend to articulate human conditions affecting the children’s lives. They become aware of subjugated knowledge of the oppressed. The concept of subjugated knowledge refers to what critical multiculturalists Kincheloe and Steinberg (1997) describe as the living body of knowledge open to different interpretations from the dominant society. It emerges from an understanding of the perspective of the powerless oppressed and is expressed as *subjugated knowledge* (p. 47) When students have been indoctrinated to accept a given norm of the dominant culture, they may find it challenging to see through the lens of those who are not part of that “norm”. But when they choose to seriously consider teaching to meet the needs of all children, then, they must consider subjugated knowledge as well.

The following student started her discussion posting with a study from the text. As she critiqued it, she began to interrogate the educational consequences of oppression:

An issue that bothered me was the number of children who were qualified for special needs. The book mentions that the number increased 40% in the 10 year period from 1989-1999. This may not seem like a big percentage, although to me it feels like it is still big. I wonder what the percentage of children who were qualified for special needs now is like. From looking at the number of students who were put under in the different types of disability, it came to me in a shock. I wonder why it’s so high the numbers. The disabilities that were mentioned were from hearing impairment to developmental delay. How are all these children qualified for special needs. What is making them have all these different disabilities? Could it be the fact that it’s heritage? Are mothers who are pregnant not getting enough nutrition? Where are these mother coming from that produce these babies? I wonder where this study was done.

Another student expressed her understanding of the oppression of poverty through her own experiences and in response to the Diss and Buckley (2005) text,

A point raised in the Diss and Buckley textbook is the importance of understanding poverty (pg. 43). The authors talk about the effects of poverty on children in school. When limited financial resources must be spent on meeting basic needs for survival, those children don't get to have the extras that our materialistic society unfortunately places great value on. I experienced this as a child. Children can be very mean! I think this applies more to school-age, even older school-age, as was my own experience. Not fitting in at school and among peers has negative consequences not only on self-esteem but also on social skills. Children who don't fit in don't really have friends. There are no playdates or sleepovers; even if there are friends to ask over, parent (s) are working a lot and notable to supervise, especially in a single-parent home. Social skills go by the wayside when there is little opportunity to use them. Another negative effect, again especially in a single parent home where the parent is at work a lot, and then busy doing household chores when at home, is the lack of relationship between child(ren) and parent(s). I also experienced that; my mother hardly talked to me when I was a child because she was too busy managing life. Thankfully, even though I am now a single rather poor mom, I have time to devote to my daughter. We read, talk, snuggle, play games, go places, we do a lot together and our relationship shows that. Although she is only in preschool so far, we are blessed that she doesn't have to face the negative effects of poverty on social skills that many children in poverty do face.

The previous student discussions on special needs children and families living in poverty illustrate both an understanding of the subjugated knowledge or the “view from below” as well as the causes and inequities faced by parents and children in these life circumstances. These students were trying to understand the perspectives of the oppressed in order to advocate for them, evident in sharing their own stories and developing questions to consider. If teachers stuck to the lens of their own upbringing, they may not be able to develop the empathy and understanding of “others”. The concept *subjugated knowledge* that Kincheloe and Steinberg (1997) present is key to students challenging, critiquing, and changing existing school policies and curriculum to meet needs of all children. A comprehension of these ideas offers our student a perspective necessary to acting as agents of change.

Practicing as Agents of Change

The culminating event in our early childhood program is our students completing a senior practicum experience and an action research project. Action research includes action, thought, and inquiry through a cyclical and spiraling process. Teachers act as researchers, engaging with the daily classroom practices in order to rethink the possibilities within the act of teaching. Lewin (1946) coined the phrase action research noting this research would be a means for social change. This is further reflected in the work of Freire (1973) as he believed the community can take its own action positioning teachers as agents of change. Through action research, teachers can voice and add awareness of identity in developing their own understandings of teaching practice (Britzman, 2003) and realize issues of equity (Caro-Bruce, Flessner, Klekr, Zeichner (Eds.), 2007). The process offers both moments of reflection, doubt, and transformation - all part of being an agent of change.

One student's action research project contemplated this question: Will Openness in Teaching and Learning Help Empower Children's Learning Experiences? Previously, this student assumed it was the teacher creating the atmosphere and activities which offered opportunity to a holistic experience. Self-reflection upon videotaping herself teaching became an a-ha moment when she saw how she was manipulating the children into believing they were important in the curriculum, illustrating herself as a teacher with all the power. The change she immediately enacted was sharing power with the children and letting her own power go as the teacher. This student engaged as an agent of change and continues to explore these elements as both a graduate student and director/head teacher of a local program. Entering a classroom as an agent of change empowers each of our graduates to be positioned to create evolving teaching practices, not held to programmed methodologies or "bag of tricks" defined outside of the teaching context. Self-reflection and teacher identity as well as a strong knowledge base on different curriculum set the foundation for teachers as life-long learners. It is mutually beneficial for teachers and students.

Conclusion

Often we are held to established (state and national) content standards and student learning outcomes (as well as department/division and institutional learning outcomes) that syllabi become standardized and prescriptive. In order to entice

students to think critically and examine multiple perspectives on issues, teacher educators need to have the freedom to be flexible and engage in meaningful discourse with students. Though we may write a student learning outcome as “to demonstrate critical thinking”, how that is scaffolded or allowed to evolve naturally depends upon the instructor’s ability to open the door to inquiry.

As teacher educators we have opened our students’ minds to an early childhood program in which they reflect upon their practice, interrogate ideas, engage in critical thinking, and take and defend intellectual positions. Our goal has been to empower our students to become transformative intellectuals and ultimately agents of change. In this chapter we have identified four habituated assumptions in early childhood education and provided examples of student writing illustrating how they take positions, provide rationale and challenge established ideas. We then further this positioning by sharing our students engaging as agents of changes as they develop and practice action research, grappling with their own pedagogy in a systematic and meaningful way, while learning techniques of effective research. Our program framework inspires our students will continually engage in democratic practice and social justice.

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