MAKING A DIFFERENCE IN THE LIVES OF YOUNG CHILDREN: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF A PEDAGOGICAL DISCOURSE FOR MOTIVATING YOUNG WOMEN TO BECOME EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATORS

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Findings in this article indicate that training programs use a key pedagogical and ideological discourse of "teachers make a difference" to motivate female early childhood education students to enter and stay in the field. However, research in the area of workforce retention maintains that many graduates are not willing to enter and stay in a workforce characterized as economically, socially, and politically marginalized, and part of a secondary labour market. This article, which presents an alternative pedagogical discourse to account for the realities of the work, could initiate changes in professional identity formation, social relations, and economic arrangements.

Key words: training, workforce, marginalization retention

Cet article résume les conclusions d'une recherche selon lesquelles des programmes de formation se servent d'un discours pédagogique et idéologique du slogan : « les enseignants font la différence » en vue d'inciter des étudiantes en éducation de la petite enfance à s'engager dans ce domaine et à y rester. Or, des recherches sur le maintien de l'effectif démontrent qu'un grand nombre de diplômées ne veulent pas entrer et à rester dans un domaine qui regroupe une main-d'œuvre marginalisée économiquement, socialement et politiquement et faisant partie d'un marché secondaire de l'emploi. Cet article, qui présente un autre discours pédagogique rendant compte des réalités du travail, pourrait favoriser l'introduction de changements dans la formation de l'identité professionnelle, les relations sociales et les modalités économiques.

Mots clés : formation, main-d'œuvre, marginalisation, maintien de l'effectif

It has been anonymously said, "One hundred years from now, it won't matter what you were or what you achieved – what will be remembered is how you affected a child." In this article, I explore this sentiment through a close discursive analysis of dominant pedagogical discourses that circulate within college early childhood education preparation programs in Ontario. This analysis furthers an understanding of the ideological function of these discourses. In a report on New Jersey's efforts to establish a new system of preschool teacher certification, Lobman, Ryan, and McLaughlin (2005) comment that "the world of early childhood teacher preparation, in general, is under-researched, and little available evidence exists to inform practice" (p. 1). These authors suggest that current preparation programs are "based more on ideology than on what is known about effective curriculum and pedagogy" (p. 2). Without discounting that early childhood educators do assume important roles and responsibilities in the care and education of young children, the usefulness of a pedagogical and ideological discourse that calls on young women to make a difference in the lives of children appears in reality *not* to motivate young women to join the early childhood education work-force.

METHOD

The setting for this study was an urban, Ontario, two-year, early childhood education college preparation program.[1] The study sought to ident-ify across three data sources recurrent statements and wordings about the qualities, disposition, and responsibilities of a good early childhood educator (ECE): textbooks, instructor interviews, and student assign-ments. The investigation delineated a certain system of meaning, a field of knowledge and beliefs about the discursive category of the good ECE, and identified how students in a professional training program used particular discursive practices to produce a professional identity.

Ten textbooks, written by American and Canadian authors and used chronologically in one Foundations of Early Childhood Education course since 1971, were collected and analyzed (see Table 1). In the 1970s several early childhood education programs were established in Ontario

community colleges in response to a growing emphasis on caregivers "having specialized education in child development and care" and an

Table 1: Textbooks Used in Study

Date Used in Program	Title	Author(s)	Edition/ Publication Date
1971-1976	Introduction to ECE	Verna Hildebrand	US text, 1st ed. /1971
1976-1982	Introduction to ECE	Verna Hildebrand	US text 2nd ed./1976
1982-1988	Young Children in Action: A Manual for Preschool Educators	Mary Hohmann, Bernard Banet, David P. Weikart	US text, 1st ed./1979
1988-1993	The Whole Child	Joanne Hendrick	US text, 4th ed./1988
1993-1994	The Whole Child	Joanne Hendrick	2nd, Canadian, ed., Canadian adaptation of US 5th ed. /1993
1994	Becoming a Teacher of Young Children	Margaret Lay-Dopyera, John Dopyera	US text 5th ed./1994
1995	Children at the Centre: Principles of Early Childhood Education in Canada	Janet Blaxall, Kenise Murphy Kilbride, Donna McKenna, Carolyn Warberg, Marilynn Yates	1st Canadian edition, indigenous/1995
1996-1999	Developmentally Appropriate Practice: Curriculum and Development in ECE	Carol Gestwicki	US text 1st ed./1996
1999-current	Developmentally Appropriate Practice: Curriculum and Development in ECE	Carol Gestwicki	US text 2nd ed./1999
1999-2002	The Essentials of Early Education	Carol Gestwicki, Jane Bertrand	1st Can. Ed. Adaptation of US text 2nd ed./1999
2003	Essentials of Early Education	Carol Gestwicki, Jane Bertrand	2nd Can. Ed. Adaptation of US text 3rd ed./2003

increasing demand for centre-based regulated day care (Varga, 2000, p. 82). The purpose of the historical analysis of the textbooks was to reveal empirical evidence of a collective and institutional memory of what does and does not constitute this good caregiver and to confirm that contemporary discourses "have a long past" (Hennessy, 1993, p. 118). The text-books as material objects represent discourses that have circulated at the macro level in the North American discipline of early childhood educa-tion; they are distributed across time and place and various instructors in educational settings used them to define the good ECE and ensure that their students exemplify it.

I interviewed six instructors (identified as Sarah, Laura, Patrick, Evelyn, Dara, and Marjorie) from three training programs to determine their views on the good ECE training requirements for graduation and the future of early childhood education in the province of Ontario. I asked the instructors about their own history in the ECE field and about changes they have observed in the professional identification of the good ECE. I also collected a total of 204 student assignments at the beginning, middle, and end of one training program over a period of two years, producing three sets of assignments. Students' assignments were num-bered within each data set and ordered according to the date collected (e.g., Student 34a). Although the assignments varied in structure, students were asked to record their views on the good ECE in all three, thus providing a history of their engagement with pedagogical discourses and how they came to know, represent, categorize, and identify with the good ECE.

The process of analyzing the data was much like block building, to employ an analogy from children's play. Hatch (2002) describes inductive data analysis in qualitative research as a process in which detailed specifics from the data sources are gathered and then patterns of rela-tionships between the specifics are investigated (p. 10). An analysis of student assignments served as the foundation block and generated the processes of analysis in the two other data sources and the building of a composite picture of discursive practices. However, as with block play, the data sources were moved around, connected, and triangulated in a variety of ways to produce a comprehensive historical and contemporary understanding of the good ECE who makes a difference.

This data analysis indicated that the discourses of the good ECE focus primarily on the personal qualities of passion, happiness, inner strength, caring, and alertness to an individual child's needs and interests. In total, these qualities create a teaching style or personality and demarcate what can be said about goodness in an early childhood educator. As I will described in later sections, the good ECE draws upon these qualities to make a difference in the lives of young children. The historical persistence of particular discourses that embody the good ECE suggests their inherent truthfulness. To foster the physical, emotional, social, and cognitive development and well being of young children in early childhood education settings, these qualities seem to be undeniably important. However, critical theorists maintain their very common sense nature should invite critique**.** Indeed, Hennessy (1993) contends that under the smooth surfaces of a discursive formation lurk the gaps and contradictions upon which a discursive reformulation is possible. Therefore, I will examine how a particular embodiment of the good early childhood educator functions interdiscursively and historically in relation to other elements that make up the social practice of caring for and educating young children: social relations, material practices, and power (Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 1999).

EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AS A MODERNIST PROJECT

Walkerdine (1990) contends that through early childhood and primary education[2] female teachers undertake the welfare state's modernist project to care for and construct a well-adjusted and rational individual child who is ultimately liberated from the overt control of others and prepared for future citizenship. Walkerdine maintains that this construction is connected to the modern concept of democratic government in which citizens act autonomously and rationally in pursuit of individual rights and interests. According to Walkerdine, female teachers, as nurturers, are responsible for the creation of each autonomous and rational child, built within a caring teacher-child relationship, and, thus, for the management of a particular societal goal. But this goal puts impossible demands on teachers. First, the liberation of a child, whom Walkerdine "reads" as male, does not mean the liberation of a female teacher because she remains "caught, trapped

inside a concept of nurturance" (p. 19). Moreover, this nurturance is unattainable in practice. The early childhood teacher must be lovingly responsible for meeting all the individual needs of children at every moment – her fail-ures in this task are guiltily interpreted as barriers to the realization of the modernist project. Female teachers feel particularly guilty, Walker-dine suggests, when they resort to traditional teacher strategies in the face of realities of "the impossible dream" (p. 25).

More recent educational researchers have explored how state and neo-liberal discourses produce an essentialized identity for female teachers as caregivers in a caring society and global economy. Dillabough and Acker (2002, p. 228) describe educational institutions, particularly those that focus on "social work disciplines," as identified by Bourdieu (1999), as places in which women are cultivated to be caretakers or midwives of public welfare within a neo-liberal economy. Cannella (1997) maintains that professional discourses that require and regulate female teachers "to deliver children to the state" (p. 142) through nurturance, care, and love do so at the risk of their own experiences, truths, and desires. Moss (2006) further suggests that early childhood educators are expected to become essentially technicians in which their role is "to apply a defined set of technologies through regulated processes to produce pre-specified and measurable outcomes" to meet the state's social and educational goals" (p. 35). Within an understanding of the teacher as a technician, Dillabough (1999) contends:

The modern teacher and teacher educators are not viewed as the pivotal agents of educational reform. For example, the notion of the teacher as a rational and consumer-oriented professional is heralded by the state and mainstream scholars alike as key to the success of 'education in the market place' and thereby central to the transformation of the nation as a global economic force. (p. 373)

In Dillabough's view, these rational and instrumental notions of teaching serve to constrain the formation of a female teacher identity and reproduce exploitative conditions of women teachers' work.

Textbook Analysis

A close analysis of this study's data shows that pedagogical discourses in an early childhood education teacher preparation progams reflect the

modernist project described by Walkerdine (1990) and other educational researchers. A significant number of textbook passages employ the discourse of "good teachers make a difference" and when I examined the textbooks historically, I found evidence of both continuity and intensification in this discourse. Interestingly, student readers in several textbooks are urged to remember the influence of a teacher in their own lives, thus emphasizing a collective memory and motivating students to influence a new generation of children.

Although several textbook authors point out the intangibility of determining exactly, through processes of assessment, how teachers make a difference, at intuitive and moral levels, textbook authors agree that teachers have a profound effect on children's futures. In the first textbook, *Introduction to Early Childhood Education*, Verna Hildebrand (1971), quotes Robert Maynard Hutchins (Hutchins, 1968, p. 6), a distinguished educator, who, using the linguistic conventions of the time, positions the child as a powerful male citizen invoked by Walkerdine:

About all we can say today is that the one certain calling is citizenship and the one certain destiny, manhood. . .the aim of American education in an age of rapid change should be to do what it can to help everybody gain complete possession of all his powers. (Hutchins quoted in Hildebrand, 1971, p. 22)

Later textbooks are less polemical and focus more on the social integration of children, with the aim to develop a healthy society. For example, Joanne Hendrick (1988), in *The Whole Child*, states, "if social skills are fostered, living in the group will be a good experience for all the children and a healthy foundation will be laid for a more truly integrated society in the future" (p. 291). In the next textbook, *Children at the Centre*, the authors, Janet Blaxall, Kenise Murphy Kilbride, Donna McKenna, Carolyn Warberg, and Marilynn Yates (1995), urge Canadian educators to make a commitment "to helping children acquire the skills necessary for living successfully in a society that is known around the world for its diversity, its compassion towards others and its peacefulness" (p. 12). An analysis of Carol Gestwicki's (1996, 1999) textbook, *Developmentally Appropriate Practice*, indicates a re-emergence of dis-course particular to the development of a child as future citizen. In

the section on developmentally appropriate social/emotional environments, Gestwicki provides an introduction by Caroline Pratt, who wrote in 1940 at the beginning of World War II, "we are preparing our children to be responsible citizens in a democracy, perhaps some day in a democratic world" (cited in Gestwicki, 1999, p. 165). This passage reinforces the historical continuity of the early childhood educator's societal task to make a difference in young children's lives.

The textbooks described above as well as the textbook, *Essentials of Early Education*, written by Gestwicki and Jane Bertrand (1999, 2003), represent a particular discursive shift because they employ a greater use of scientific discourses to fuel and intensified the modernist project. In the second edition of *Essentials of Early Education*, the authors draw upon the Ontario *Early Years Study, Reversing the Real Brain Drain* (Mustard & McCain, 1999) and offer numerous references to doctors, scientists, business leaders, and educational researchers who argue that the early years are an optimal learning period. This discourse is juxtaposed with state-ments about poor youth literacy rates and "Canada's inability to com-pete in a competitive world economy" (p. xvii). Moreover, Gestwicki and Bertrand (2003) state that "revolutionary new brain research [points] to hard evidence that early experiences influenced early brain develop-ment" (p. xvii) and "what children experience in early life becomes embedded in their biological and developmental pathways" (p. xviii). In short, a teacher's responsibility to make a difference has historically broadened and thus intensified from the emotional and social develop-ment of the individual child to include the inner development of the brain – the wiring of the neurons and the sculpting of excess connec-tions. The authors conclude: "every early childhood practitioner knows of some specific impact she has had on children and that impact has a lasting effect on these children's lives" (p. 119).

Instructor Interviews

Although instructors concurred with textbook authors that the early years are a critical learning period in which teachers can make a real difference, they questioned the current use of scientific discourse. For example, Laura commented:

It is interesting, the *Early Years Study*, which came out a few years ago and people all sat up and they did a paper and patted themselves on the back and said, that was great we've come up with all this new stuff. And I went, "It really isn't new stuff. We've been telling you this for years; the early years are crucial. We have believed and advocated it for years." (Laura, instructor interview)

She concluded that early childhood educators, unlike scientists, "just don't have the same kind of clout" to receive recognition for the difference they make in young children's lives. Sarah, another instructor, made a similar point about the new scientific discourses: "We in ECE have known that *forever*." Marjorie noted that "the general public is becoming aware of how important and valuable the first five years are," and for this reason, her early childhood education candidates appear to know this discourse prior to entry into the program; it does not have to be taught. Overall, the instructors suggested that their students use personal qualities such as passion and love, not scientific knowledge, to undertake the modernist project of making a difference in the lives of young children.

Student Assignments

Early childhood education as a modernist project also permeated many of the student assignments. In the first assignment distributed at the beginning of their program, students invoked the modernist project in their responses to open-ended questions (e.g., I want to be. . . . I want to believe. . . . I don't want to believe. . . .):

I want to be able to provide a solid and high quality foundation from which children may grow further and to have an overall positive influence on their lives. (Student 42a)

I want to have a lasting impact on the children, to nurture their growth to the fullest potential. (Student 34a)

Another student's response echoed text from *Essentials of Early Childhood Education* (Gestwicki & Bertrand, 2003):

A good teacher is first and foremost a person who makes a striking impression on children's futures; I believe participating in early education contributes to

their later school success and social adjustment and children who participate in early education programs tend later to complete higher levels of education and have fewer social problems and more easily find employment. (Student 14a)

Data from the third set of assignments completed at the end of the program (another self-reflection paper that asked students to consider changes in their practices and the role of the ECE in Canadian society) suggest that more students have taken up the modernist project. Out of 50 assignments, 34 students made direct reference to "making a difference" and nine made indirect references (e.g., "the government doesn't see the ECE job as important"). Student 9c stated that in her placement "society expected nothing less than success. Failure was not an option." Another student wrote, "I think that it is our responsibility to help change the world and make it a better place for all those who live in it" (Student 32c). Some students linked childhood experiences to success in adulthood: "As an early childhood educator, we need to raise the public awareness – we are important to the parents, society, and the future of the country" (Student 39c).

Students described early childhood educators as serving a higher purpose (Student 49c) and as "primary builder[s] of our nation's future" (Student 30c). Some students used scientific discourses to support their views. For example, one student referred to research conducted by the Canadian Council on Social Development that demonstrates that "low income children are more likely to have lower functioning levels of vision, speech, mobility, dexterity, cognition, emotion and pain" if early intervention is not provided (Student 15c). Another student's growth in articulating the value of the modernist project is evident in the following example:

My outlook on the program was very positive and although the past two years were difficult, my opinion stays the same. I learned more and more how import-ant my role (as an ECE is). Society still sees ECEs as "babysitters" but what they don't realize is that we prepare children for the world. We are enrich[ing] their early development and help them to grow into individuals. I have so much more confidence explaining this to people after my experiences at my four placements. (Student 8c)

MANAGING THE REALITIES OF ECE WORK THROUGH THE
MODERNIST PROJECT

Data from this study indicate that the discourse of the modernist project
is also recontextualized in relation to ECE work to counter the challenges
of its material realities. Descriptions of ECE work are frequently
juxtaposed with the discourse of the modernist project to motivate and
in-spire those graduates who possess certain qualities such as inner
strength and passion to cope with the challenges of ECE work and who
can articulate the modernist project. Conversely, the juxtaposition seeks
to remove (through attrition) those students who lack the necessary
qualities to manage the material realities and to engage in personal
advocacy. In Hildebrand's (1976) textbook, the juxtaposition of ECE
work and the modernist project is evident. She states:

Teaching young children is challenging and rewarding, though at times
frustrating. It is an awesome responsibility to influence the lives of children from
day to day during their most formative years. This is a profession in the truest
sense of the word, and anyone looking for a nine-to-five job should look
elsewhere. (p. 3)

Although Lay-Dopyera and Dopyera (1994) in *Becoming a Teacher of
Young Children* focus their discussion on a career as a classroom teacher
(e.g., kindergarten teacher), the authors note, "the alarming state of
affairs that day-care personnel, who have important responsibility for
children in terms of type of care and long hours, are paid so poorly" (p.
10). The authors then identify the "total personal commitment" required
of teaching (p. 5). They frequently pose rhetorical questions to make sure
the student reader understands the nature of teaching and makes a
conscious decision to undertake its challenges. For example, they ask
"Can you be satisfied doing your best, knowing that your best is
inadequate to the need?" (p. 15).

In the textbook, *Essentials of Early Childhood Education* (Gestwicki &
Bertrand, 2003), this contrastive positioning of the positive and negative
aspects of ECE work is offered at a conscious level: "We will juxtapose
the positive aspects of a career in the early childhood workforce with the
challenges faced by the early childhood workforce in Canada today" (p.

141). In this textbook, the reasons why a group of graduates "accept the task" (p. 117) of ECE work are then identified as enjoyment of children, making a difference to children and families, variety and challenge, and demand for early childhood practitioners. The challenges identified are extensive: poor compensation, health and safety issues, unpredictability, frustrations, changing times, attachment and loss, adult isolation, lack of tangible products, and limited respect and recognition. In the Gestwicki and Bertrand textbook, a parable is also employed to illustrate the qualities that can be called upon to combat the challenges and, as the authors comment, the "subtle and not-so-subtle pressures . . . to give up the ideas of caring for and educating young children, and to leave it to someone else to change the world" (p. 158). The story in this text unfolds when Christie S. decides to undertake training in early childhood education and faces great disapproval. Her parents and friends wonder why she did not choose a profession that was "more important," provided "better pay," and "made better use of her intelligence." Finally, Christie finds a practitioner who, in spite of frustrations and stress, still feels satisfied with her own work and Christie is "reassured that her decision [to become an early childhood educator] was a good one" (p. 158). This story is told much like a morality tale in which the heroine, embodied with feminine virtues of passion and commitment, and much like the ECE missionary envisioned by Finkelstein (1988), is confronted with many challenges on her journey to becoming a good ECE. In their textbook, Gestwicki and Bertrand (2003) tell the student reader: "Think long and hard about the difficulties involved in ECE. There is a long line of early childhood practitioners, past and present who hope you, too, will decide this is worthy work and that you will take the challenge" (p. 158).

Intensification in the descriptions of poor working conditions was evident in later textbooks, perhaps because, as contemporary textbook authors note, progress in the remediation of these conditions since the 1970s has been minimal. At the same time, discourses of the modernist project upheld by new scientific discourses (e.g., the Early Years Study, Mustard & McCain, 1999) were more evident in the later textbooks. To a certain extent, these scientific discourses, as symbolic resources, serve to measure progress in the field as an increased awareness of the

importance of the early years rather than as a change in the material resources of the workforce.

Like most of the textbook authors, the instructors described the material realities of ECE work and then summoned the capacity of the good ECE to cope with them. Overall, instructors seemed to expect graduates to intensify their caring work, to be passionate and highly commit-ted, charged with the moral and ethical dimensions of caring. Evelyn stated:

I think that we're. . . .losing people because they can make more money you know working at the Bay than they do caring for children. And yet their passion and their love are for what they're doing. It's kind of almost a luxury, to be able to work and have joy when you do the work. (Evelyn, instructor interview)

In addition, the field placement serves as a kind of test, much like the tests that Gestwicki and Bertrand (2003) described for "Christie S." who was facing a difficult journey in becoming an early childhood educator. To pass the trial of field placement, students must endure hard work and long hours, yet still uphold and demonstrate the qualities of the good ECE. Dara explained in her instructor interview what happens to some students who cannot pass this test: "They say I can't do this. I can't do this from 9-5 every day. It's too much. So I think people do realize that and some will drop out because of it."

Instructors expressed an urgent need for personal advocacy in light of the current situation of ECE in Ontario. An underlying concern was that students are not doing enough or are having difficulty using the discourse of the modernist project as a central discursive script in their social relations. Marjorie, for example, asked students to reflect on "what kind of attitude" about early childhood education they are "perpetuating" if they are not "professional" in their actions and discourses. Dara talked about the need for graduates at a grass roots level to educate others about early childhood education and to change outdated percep-tions:

It all starts, I tell my students, it all starts with you. It starts with what you tell your parents, what you tell your brother, what you tell your neighbour. It all starts. . .when someone says to you, oh, isn't that just babysitting. You have to be

able to articulate and have a rational explanation why it is not. (Dara, instructor interview)

Sarah also maintained that early educators educators "are not good" at advocating on behalf of their profession. She states:

They are often blind sided when people say, "Well aren't you just babysitters or what are you doing?" They need to be able to defend what it is and why they do it and that they care and educate and that they are teachers of the early years and talk about some of the knowledge and skills they have and be proud of what they do. (Sarah, instructor interview)

Students in their third assignment, written in the last semester of the program, also discursively juxtaposed the material realities of ECE work with their commitment to the modernist project. Out of 48 responses, 24 students described other people's perceptions of early childhood educators as a "babysitter," "a glorified babysitter," a "professional babysitter," or as "inferior." One student commented that her "parents [had] never been more against something that I've done" (Student 49c). Only one student discussed the support she received from her family. She wrote "in a society ruled by a government which thinks early childhood care and education are frivolous and an unnecessary expense, my family has seen the importance of the work I do and has chosen to be behind me 100%" (Student 2c).

Not only did students write about negative perceptions of their role and their impending lack of status upon graduation, but many expressed concerns (in some instances, referencing the textbook, *Essentials of Early Childhood Education*, Gestwicki & Bertrand, 2003) about low wages, lack of job security, high staff turnover rates, pay inequity, funding cuts, drop-out from the profession, and long hours of preparation. One student remarked, "I …will work in a daycare after I graduate but I am sceptical whether I will get the recognition and remuneration because in Canada, the early childhood workforce struggles to be recognized" (Student 22c).

Students wrote about these perceptions and working conditions just weeks away from graduating and entering the ECE workforce. Although they recognized the material realities of the work, the students were kept

buoyant by their love of children and their belief that they could make a difference. One student articulated the belief of many of her peers: "we have one of the most important jobs in society, a big part in raising the people of the world" (Student 29c)

In their third assignment, 19 students out of 49 wrote about the need to advocate for more funding, for the value of early childhood education, and, in some cases, for better working conditions. Nevertheless, these data mean that 30 students did not address the need for advocacy even though they completed the assignment for a course titled *Policy, Legislation and Advocacy*. This finding appears to be consistent with instructors' views that a significant number of early childhood education graduates do not choose to use and do not have the discourses to defend their profession. Those students who plan to advocate for the profession employed two discursive strategies: to correct a misperception or to focus on their important role in the development of young children.

Overall, however, the general tone in these final self-reflection assignments suggests the graduates' deep worry and concern about the challenges that they will face in their work with young children and their families. For these graduates, hope lay in the belief that they will make a difference in a child's life; they did not believe that they could make a difference in their own working lives. One student articulated these beliefs and questioned the futility of the workforce's advocacy efforts. She wrote, "I do not like the fact that society as well as the government does not take our line of work seriously. We have one of the most important jobs in society . . . and we're being treated as if we don't know what we're talking about" (Student 29c).

THE DISCOURSE OF MAKING A DIFFERENCE AS IDEOLOGY

The data analysis presented in the previous section indicates that the discourse of early childhood education is ideological, a modernist project in which female early childhood educators undertake a societal task to produce a self-regulating and rational individual child for the modern state. According to Chouliaraki and Fairclough (1999), ideologies are "constructions of practices from particular perspectives (and in that sense 'one-sided') which 'iron out' the contradictions, dilemmas and antagonisms of practices which accord with the interests and projects of

domination" (p. 26). A key feature of the discourse of early childhood education as a modernist project is that speakers and writers use it without self-knowledge or reflexivity. In other words, the discourse is articulated as common sense and as "accumulated popular knowledge, the thought embodied in everyday living" (Kenway, 2001, p. 51). Hennessy (1993) describes this knowledge as "preconstructed" in that the discursive formation produces the effect of always having been there in the past and of always being there in the future. The ease with which the discourse of the modernist project came to the forefront of instructors' and students' views demonstrates this effect. All participants employed the discourse without questioning to any great extent its underlying value or problematic nature as part of women's and marginalized work.

Furthermore, Chouliaraki and Fairclough (1999) describe a process of colonization in an ideological construction so that one discourse colonizes another to keep a particular subject category stable and intact, in this case the good ECE. Thus, discourse that claims that teachers make a difference in children's lives is employed also as a discursive resource to manage the material realities of ECE work. The female early childhood educator continues to be ideologically viewed more like a mission-ary motivated by a calling (Finkelstein, 1988) and a heightened sense of responsibility to change the world. Although the non-discursive is not hidden in pedagogical discourses, ultimately other discourses attempt to persuade the graduate to believe that she will not be constrained by material realities if she consistently calls upon her personal qualities. In other words, the project of making a difference in the world depends on a female teacher's changes in her individual feelings and qualities and in her increasing level of commitment.

Student participants appeared to identify with the good ECE, constructed by the ideological discourses of the modernist project, to become servants to the state and public good as service providers and to try their best to manage their access to limited resources. According to Dillabough and Acker (2002), within these social processes, these graduates may abdicate autonomy for responsibility within a stratified gendered labour market instead of becoming "professionals in their own terms" (p. 238).

REJECTING THE MODERNIST PROJECT

Yet, this study's findings show that, in reality, graduates reject the call to serve the welfare state's modernist project because they are not prepared to enter a workforce that Canadian researchers have identified as marginalized and as part of a secondary labour market (Cleveland & Krashinsky, 2001; Doherty, Lero, Goelman, LaGrange, & Tougas, 2000). Findings point to a tension between participants' objectification and idealization of the "good early childhood educator who makes a difference" and the realities of workforce retention. The tension lies in many participants' admission that a significant number of ECE graduates, who possess all the right personal qualities for making a difference in the lives of others, either will not enter the workforce upon graduation, or will leave it within three years (Canadian Child Care Human Resources Sector Council, 2002). In the textbook, *Essentials of Early Childhood Education*, Gestwicki and Bertrand, (2003) described the state of the workforce:

In Canada each year, a few thousand women and men enter the field of early child development through college ECE programs. But, the truth is, many do not end up working in early childhood settings, and many others who begin a career in child care centres, kindergartens or family child care programs leave their work for other employment. Why do they come or decide to leave? (p. 117)

The effectiveness of the modernist project discourse then dissolves in the material reality of frequent staff turnover and occupational dropout after three years. Retention problems in the ECE workforce confound a commonsense understanding that female early childhood education graduates will be passionate about and committed to nurturing and caring for young children in spite of the realities of the profession. Thus, as a pedagogical discursive resource, early childhood education as a modernist project has limited sustainability for motivating graduates to enter the ECE workforce and for maintaining a stable workforce. Nevertheless, a historical review of the textbooks suggests that the ECE graduates' responsibility in making a difference in a child's life through her personal qualities has been heightened and intensified over time through various discursive resources. This ideology suggests there is a

significant and deepening crisis in this ideological discourse (Hennessy, 1993).

Indeed, the discourses that are employed interdiscursively to support early childhood education as a modernist project also work against job retention. In the same way that early childhood educators prepare individual children to thrive in a knowledge-based, neo-liberal, global economy, this future offers the ECE the possibility of another and a better job. ECE graduates are subject to the same discourses that describe a child as an autonomous individual who is self-made – individuals who, with aspirations and a desire to do better, can re-invent themselves over and over again in a quest of life-long learning (Walkerdine, Lucey, & Melody, 2001). In the new global economy, self-help manuals (including to a certain extent ECE textbooks) advise self-made individuals that they can remake themselves to obtain the necessary social and economic rewards. Data samples from students' writings indicate their felt anxiety and fear about their future in early childhood education. Instructors reported that many students wanted to become elementary school teachers, a position regarded as a more promising career choice with more respect and recognition. Thus, although a training program may be initially attractive to applicants because it is concerned with young children, the program does not serve for most graduates as training for entry into a workforce but as a stepping-stone onto a better job.

AN ALTERNATIVE PEDAGOGICAL DISCOURSE

I have proposed that the pedagogical discourse of early childhood education as a modernist project functions ideologically to motivate graduates to undertake the welfare state's neo-liberal agenda. Yet in reality, many graduates will reject this undertaking unless the material conditions of the project change. Certainly, in the long run, a publicly supported, universal system of early care and education offers the possibility of better working conditions, but my data suggest that those who train future early childhood educators face a more immediate problem of educating and preparing graduates to work in the field. Is there, then, an alternative pedagogical discourse, one that could potentially counter the prevalence of an ideological discourse and

provide ECE graduates with another discursive resource to create a professional identity "in their own terms," one that might encourage retention and initiate a transform-ation of discourse, social relations, and economic arrangements? To begin a dialogue across this problematic (Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 1999, p. 96) and to recognize that discourses can be a dynamic terrain of contestation (Ryan, 1999) wherein meanings can be altered, I offer a pre-liminary answer to this question.

In considering an alternative discourse of criticality for the good ECE, I have drawn upon some of the participants' own views as well as scholarly works that provide a critical perspective of the early childhood education field and reconceptualize its future (e.g., Cannella, 1997; Moss, 2006; Osgood, 2006). One of the instructor participants in my study referred to a good ECE as being "politically savvy" and textbook authors, Gestwicki and Bertrand (2003), identified "worldliness" as an important ECE quality. In addition, ECE graduates, to a certain extent, already use the discourse of criticality, expressed in their rejection of the modernist project, although often this criticality becomes diverted and suppressed in ideological discourses. Burbules and Berk (2001) describe why ideological discourses are so appealing and entrenched and define criticality:

What causes this decline into reification and stasis is precisely the absence of reflexiveness within ideological thought, the inability to recognize its own origins and limitations, and the lack of opportunities for thinking differently. In the sense we are discussing it here, criticality is the opposite for the hegemonic. (p. 61)

Moss (2006) suggests that the time may be right for promoting a pedagogical discourse of criticality in early childhood education programs:

Periods of major socio-economic change can destabilize existing norms and open new directions. The heightened policy attention given to early childhood services, especially in liberal welfare states, may be driven by a highly instrumental and calculative liberal discourse: but change creates opportunities to con-test the structure and understanding of the workforce, and this is further enhanced by the diminishing supply of women prepared to do childcare work for low levels of pay and training. (p. 39)

At a pragmatic level, course work in a college preparation program can promote a discourse of criticality in a number of ways. Typically, coursework begins with the significance of the individual adult-child relationships in care and education. One justification for this approach (beyond its hidden ideological reason) is that students at the beginning of their program lack the competencies and confidence to focus on group needs and more global issues. Thus, courses on working with families, social policies, and advocacy are introduced in the second year when teacher educators believe that students have mastered the capacity to develop strong individual relationships with children. However, my research outcomes indicate that students do not significantly broaden their social horizons beyond this dyad after taking second-year courses. One of the instructors interviewed commented that "students [upon graduation] don't understand how connected we are to the bigger picture." Therefore, providing a course on critical thinking skills in the first year could potentially offer students the intellectual tools to critically evaluate their roles within various social and cultural contexts and to develop their professional identification out of their own experiences with theory and practice. In her recent deconstruction of profession-alism in early childhood education in the United Kingdom, Osgood (2005) also suggests that "critical reflexivity" must be at the heart of a training program and recommends pedagogical activities that "enable practitioners to develop and extend their expert knowledge and wisdom and to critically appraise, not just themselves as professionals, but the social and political context within which they are located" (p. 11).

This research has been extensively concerned with various educational processes such as textbook selection and classroom instruction that reinforce the preparation of ECE graduates for a marginalized social position in women's work. This finding indicates that these processes need to be implemented with a more critical and reflexive stance. For example, when reviewing textbooks, instructors could consider several questions. What does the textbook author say about early childhood educators? In what ways can these discourses be read as ideological? How are men's and women's reasons for entering the ECE workforce critically explained? What discursive strategies are used to defend the material realities of ECE and women's work? If

textbooks cannot be found that take a critical stance towards commonsense discourses, then an instructor must work with students to thoughtfully examine textbook content. Instructors can also infuse their instruction with a critical orient-ation to open discussions on the common sense qualities of the good ECE in relation to the material realities of ECE work. Self-reflection assign-ments can be explicitly linked to more global issues and used as oppor-tunities for students to articulate how their qualities, skills, and compe-tencies can potentially transform perceptions of the early childhood educator. Through classroom instruction, an ECE graduate may find in a new discourse a more powerful voice to inform, persuade, and transform perceptions and to gain greater validity and legitimacy. Nevertheless, adequate classroom time is required for students to engage with and articulate a new discourse. The time constraints of typical two-year, ECE preparation programs may serve only to entrench the discourses of the modernist project and to limit possibilities for contesting it.

A discourse of criticality may enable new ECE graduates to examine how they represent themselves and are represented by others in social relations. Dillabough (1999) describes "the capacity of teachers to reflect critically upon their social positioning as gendered subjects within the state" (p. 387). Drawing upon an intersubjective theory of teacher identity formation, Dillabough describes teachers as "embedded in relationships between active subjects" (p. 387):

The 'embedded' subject is one who communicates, negotiates, and acts upon difference in relation, and response to meaningful social interactions with others. This social position of the 'embedded subject' is thus said to be situated 'intersubjectively'—in social and dialectical relation to others. (p. 387)

Thus, a discourse of criticality can potentially affect the ECE graduate identity, social relations, and position. Criticality encourages early childhood educators to look outward as a social and political sub-ject and worker rather than just inward as a psychological subject with gendered qualities and feelings, and to explore issues of dilemma, ideology, social position, contradictory values, and competing sources of discourse. The capacity to be critical moves ECE graduates into a public

world in which individually and collectively their actions can make a difference in their own work.

NOTES

[1] The larger project from which this study stems employed a critical discourse analysis (Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 1999) and the feminist standpoint theories of Hennessy (1993) and Smith (1999) to develop a fuller understanding of the discourses of "the good ECE." An underlying premise was that discourse is everywhere in the linguistic space of an educational institution – it is, as Smith (1999) calls it, a "textual world" in which listeners, readers, and writers function in a "virtual" form of consciousness (p. 50)

[2] In Canada, early care and education programs include centre-based child care, family-home child care, nursery schools, preschools, family support, and kindergarten. Primary education includes grades one to three.

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