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ADVANCES IN EARLY EDUCATION AND DAY CARE VOLUME 14

PRACTICAL TRANSFORMATIONS AND TRANSFORMATIONAL PRACTICES: GLOBALIZATION, POSTMODERNISM, AND EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

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TRANSFORMING IDEAS AND PRACTICES

Susan Grieshaber and Sharon Ryan

INTRODUCTION

Most of the chapters in this book depict local attempts to transform practices in early childhood education. They represent endeavors to problematize the complexities and challenges facing the field and the ways in which moves are being made in everyday classroom practice, policy, teacher education, and professional development to build a knowledge base that is grounded in empirical data and that reflects the diversity characteristic of a globalized society.

Globalization has brought economic, political, and cultural changes that have affected all dimensions of education, including the early years. Economically, workplace organization has changed, as have consumption patterns and the flow of trade, so that workers and goods cross national boundaries (Burbules & Torres, 2000, p. 14). In terms of politics, globalization has meant that the nation state has less autonomy, particularly in regard to matters of educational policy (Apple, 2001). Culturally, there is a tension between “more standardization and cultural homogeneity...and more fragmentation” (Burbules & Torres, 2000, p. 14). In the U.S., for example, education has been shaped predominantly by neoliberal approaches to globalization (Apple, 2001), which are characterized by an agenda of

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standardization that “privileges, if not directly imposes, particular policies for evaluation, financing, assessment, standards, teacher training, curriculum, instruction, and testing” (Burbules & Torres, 2000, p. 15).

Because neoliberal approaches have concentrated on the agenda of standardization, arguments about fragmentation and diversity brought about by globalization have been subsumed to the extent that engaging pedagogically with different cultures, languages, and backgrounds has been forced to take a back seat and remains problematic. According to Kalantzis, Cope, and Harvey (2003), traditional curricula

... strove to excise diversity through selective inclusion, [and] more recent curricula have focused on the celebration of difference. This celebration, however, is a superficial one. Progressivist curricula, delivered through constructivist pedagogies, may unwittingly entrench marginalisation by their failure to engage explicitly with the realities of different lifeworlds. These popular contemporary approaches are underpinned by powerful yet hidden cultural assumptions, by which assimilation to a defined mainstream is tacitly encouraged. (p. 25)

Analyses of the celebration of difference in early childhood education have exposed the limits of this approach (Derman-Sparks, 1989; McLean, 1990), which manifests itself in tokenistic displays of cultural artifacts, food, and dress in educational settings. The complication for early childhood education is that progressivist curricula have been the mainstay of early childhood education for some time. Explicit teaching is not a feature of progressivist curricula, and because of this there is some doubt that early childhood practitioners would “engage explicitly with the realities of different lifeworlds”, unless of course, they were from those different lifeworlds themselves. This cannot be left to chance alone.

Both traditional and progressivist curricula, however, are unable to provide effective means for the management of difference, let alone teach proactively about it. The way in which marginalization occurs and is entrenched in the education system has been described powerfully by Goldstein (in Darder, 2002; Goldstein, 2002):

I knew through my personal experiences as a student, teacher, female, and working class Chicano from a non-traditional family, that young students, like older students, were also silenced and coerced into blind obedience... Many were weeded out in a process so insidious that even the most well-intentioned teachers did not (and do not) recognize their pivotal role in this economic and social maintenance of the status quo. (p. 178)

We have known for some time that the rhetoric of curriculum and policy documents is not enough (Ladson-Billings, 1994; Nieto, 2004). Failure to comprehend the implications of actions that play out subsequently in the

social and economic arena reinforces that diversity is still mostly about the celebration of difference.

Although curriculum that celebrates difference provides only a superficial recognition of the value of diversity, it is a place to begin. Reaching the next level is somewhat daunting and while the gamut of the task has been made explicit (Kalantzis et al., 2003), realizing it is no easy task. For Kalantzis et al., transformative curriculum and pedagogy pave the way to greater engagement with diversity: it involves “learning-as-transformation – the journey into new and unfamiliar places that transforms the learner” (Kalantzis et al., 2003, p. 31). To Luke (2004), this means a focus on pedagogy and a

... reenvisioning of a transcultural and cosmopolitan teacher: a teacher with the capacity to shunt between the local and the global, to explicate and engage with the broad flows of knowledge and information, technologies and populations, artefacts and practices that characterise the present historical moment. What is needed is a new community of teachers that could and would work, communicate, and exchange physically and virtually across national and regional boundaries with each other, with educational researchers, teacher educators, curriculum developers, and, indeed, senior educational bureaucrats. (pp. 1438–1439)

As progressive and traditional teaching approaches are not enough, this new kind of early childhood teacher requires a different set of knowledges and curricular approaches. The critiques of child development (Bloch, 1992; Burman, 1994; Cannella, 1997) and developmentally appropriate practice (Hatch et al., 2000; Lubeck, 1998a, b; Mallory & New, 1994) point out the difference between curricula based on psychological theories and those that attend to factors such as race, ethnicity, and socio-economic issues, placing greater demands on the field to respond to the characteristics of a globalized world. In other words, the “social facts of mobile and heterogeneous, multilingual, and multicultural populations are calling into question conventional models of child development and their normative models of childcare, schooling, and early education” (Luke & Grieshaber, 2004, p. 8).

Spodek (1977) and Silin (1987) have both challenged the knowledge base on which early childhood curriculum is founded, condemning the total reliance on psychological criteria for making educational decisions and emphasizing that educational goals have political and moral concerns as their origins, thus making psychological theories unable to inform questions of what to teach. Over 20 years ago, Spodek and Saracho (1982) and more recently Silin (1995), called for the creation of a highly developed specialist early childhood research base that focuses on “theoretical and conceptual work within the field” (Silin, 1995, p. 107).

There is no doubt that the economic, political, social, and cultural characteristics of society have changed considerably since Spodek (1977) made his appeal for an early childhood knowledge base that moved beyond sole reliance on psychological theories. Along with calls for the creation of a specialist research base came a proposal from Goffin (1989) for the field to shift from research about the effects of early childhood programs, to a new research agenda that concentrated on the complexities of teaching and the significance of the role of the teacher. Peters (1993) also noted that teachers and what they do has not been a feature of research and this omission is echoed by Genishi, Ryan, Ochsner, and Yarnall (2001) who have argued that for most of the 20th century, research in early childhood education focused on learning and the development of young children, and "not the practices of teachers" (p. 1179).

These calls for a different kind of knowledge base for the teaching of young children have not gone unheeded. A number of scholars have been drawing on alternative and mostly critical and postmodern theories over the past 15 years (Cannella, 1997; Grieshaber & Cannella, 2001; Kessler & Swadener, 1992; Silin, 1995; Tobin, 1997), to rethink early education in response to the social, economic, and political changes catalyzed by globalization. However, some seem to prefer to insulate the field from the changing circumstances of everyday life by resisting moves to introduce information and communication technologies into early childhood curricula (Alliance for Childhood, 2002; see Clements, 1999), by banning superhero play (Hampton, 2002; Boyd, 2002), and by being reluctant to move beyond the shelter of developmentalism (e.g., Charlesworth, 1998). Others hark after what they perceive childhood has lost in this globalized world and cling to notions that position children as innocent, vulnerable, and naïve (see Cannella, 2002; Foley, Roche, & Tucker, 2001; Wyness, 2000). These resistances persist in part, because there is a lack of empirical data available that illustrate transformative approaches to dealing with diversity in early childhood education. Perhaps this is because "Critique is ... the easy bit" (Luke, 2003, p. 95) and the hard part is not so much finding those pockets of innovation that challenge the status quo, but making these ideas available to others.

The chapters in this volume are an effort to communicate some of the ongoing work that is occurring in early childhood settings, schools, and universities that is aimed at improving, and ultimately transforming practice. The authors consider some of the complexities and challenges of working with young children and their families, with community agencies, and government departments, of working in teacher preparation programs and with early childhood practitioners in professional development courses.

Although these chapters play their own part in contributing to the developing knowledge base of early childhood education, they do so on their own terms and in ways that confront traditional approaches to early childhood education. We consider that this dissensus is beneficial for the field as it adds to the theoretical and practical options available, sustains ongoing debate and discussion, and endorses the notion that there are "no scripts" to follow in these changed and changing times.

There are omissions from the texts in this volume in the sense that gaps in knowledge remain. Plugging them all seems a somewhat pointless endeavor, given the rate of change in the knowledge society. What we do need is more examples of those who are on the edge, that is, playing around with innovative ideas in their practice and developing unique approaches to the diverse educational circumstances that confront early childhood educators. The chapters that follow are efforts that respond to an array of issues that have been intensified or created by globalization. For the most part, they draw on empirical data to explore the relationship between globalization, postmodernism, and transformation.

POSTMODERNISM, GLOBALIZATION, AND TRANSFORMATION

Postmodernism is generally associated with a critique of science but its tenets (if it can be said to have any) remain the subject of much debate within and among postmodernists themselves, as well as among critics of postmodernism. This debate extends to this book, where readers are encouraged to engage in their own judgments of what postmodernism is, and how the following chapters slip and slide around being categorized as "practicing postmodernism." The debate has been ongoing between us as editors, with contributors to this volume, as well as being raised by some of the reviewers of the chapters in this book. Nevertheless, for Spiro (1996), the postmodernist critique of science

consists of two interrelated arguments, epistemological and ideological. Both are based on subjectivity. First, because of the subjectivity of the human object, anthropology, according to the epistemological argument, cannot be a science; and in any event the subjectivity of the human subject precludes the possibility of science discovering objective truth. Second, since its much-vaunted objectivity is an illusion, science, according to the ideological argument, subverts the interests of dominant social groups (males, whites, Westerners), thereby subverting those of oppressed groups (females, ethnics, third-world peoples). (p. 759)

There is a large quantity of literature that stems from the postmodern critique of science and discusses positions, theorists, and critiques of postmodernism (which are not reiterated here).

Instead, we focus on the everyday practices that are described in the various chapters and their potential to transform early childhood education; practices that are associated specifically with oppressed groups. And this brings us to the point of the relationship between globalization and postmodernism:

Postmodernity concentrates on the tensions of difference and similarity erupting from processes of globalization: the accelerating circulation of people, the increasingly dense and frequent cross-cultural interactions, and the unavoidable intersections of local and global knowledge. (Bishop, 1996, p. 993)

Many of the tensions that postmodernism elaborates stem from power relationships and the ways these relationships are enacted in everyday life. For early childhood education, this involves being marginalized because the field is associated primarily with women and children, and therefore positioned less powerfully. For those subjugated in society by virtue of race, ethnicity, class, ability, and so on, marginalization within early childhood education aggravates the situation even more. In exploring the "tensions of difference and similarity that erupt from processes of globalization", the chapters in this volume speak to relationships of power, and some to facets of domination in classrooms for children and adults in a range of contexts.

This discussion opens with Lucinda Heimer's chapter, *Voices at the Table: An Analysis of the Policy Process for a Local Preschool Initiative*. Investigating the preschool policy formulation process in one mid-western town in the United States, Heimer shows how the calls for collaboration in preschool policies disguise the ways in which the agency of participants is tied to social and economic circumstances. While the collaboration involved a range of participants from district, Head Start, community child care directors, and the city office for childcare, Heimer data show that the question of who speaks for teachers, children, and families, and how these opinions are translated into the policy process are attached firmly to those who are positioned via networks and institutions to have more authority. Heimer exposed the myths involved in the constructs of "collaboration" and "voice" attached to the project, concluding that collaboration is not possible without constant interrupting of the institutional forces at work that simultaneously empower some over others in policy initiatives. Moving from the policy table to the classroom, the next set of chapters explore new ways of thinking about and responding to diversity and difference in curriculum and pedagogy.

RESPONDING TO DIVERSITY AND DIFFERENCE

Dealing with diversity and difference in today's classrooms is just one component of teachers' work but is made more complex because of the intersection of educational, market and historical factors. For example, Luke (2004) described the flow on effect of policies such as *No Child Left Behind* as the commodification of textbook products because such policies have "translated educational practice into a form of commodity fetishism. That is, it [they] predicate[s] the efficacy of educational policy, the practice of teaching, and particular versions of student outcomes on product use" (p. 1434). As Luke sees it, part of the problem stems from the way in which teachers are connected both historically and in the present to the "regularities of industrial, modernist capital" (p. 1440). These regularities are the circumstances in which teachers are inscribed; they are positioned as commodity fetishists in a "model of performativity that...thereby implicates them in the production and reproduction of what appear to be increasingly outdated forms of human capital in the face of new economic, social and cultural dynamics" (pp. 1440-1441). Even though early childhood teachers might not acknowledge the macro economic, political and social factors that play out in everyday classroom contexts, they are not immune from these consequences of globalization. They tend to struggle with the more obvious, immediate and material effects of standardized testing, increased accountability measures and the like, and are more attuned to the everyday realities of having to deal with the expectations that children for whom English is an additional language complete standardized testing successfully. But Luke's point is that what happens outside the classroom necessarily impinges on what gets done inside. He advocates rebuilding the "symbolic capital of teachers and teaching", and reckons that it "requires an engagement with and redefinition of new material and economic conditions" (p. 1441). We turn now to early childhood education, to some who have contemplated what is going on both inside and outside classrooms from the vantage point of different material and economic conditions, to consider the intersections of curriculum, pedagogy, diversity and difference.

In considering the limits of traditional developmental approaches to early childhood education through investigating children who were identified as "different" by having readiness risks, Beth Graue (Chapter 3: *(De) Centering the Kindergarten Prototype in the Child-centered Classroom*) critiques one of the "truths" of early childhood education, the notion of child centeredness. There is no doubt that child centeredness is an enduring and fixed entity in early childhood education. In fact, it could be said that it is a revered concept.

However, Graue manages to turn it on its head and show the restrictions implicit in this construct for a sample of 14 children in a variety of settings across two school districts. The marking of these children as “different” seemed to have the effect of making them imperceptible to teachers, thus isolating the children from sustained interaction and engagement with the very professionals who were charged with remedying their “at risk” status. This pedagogical segregation sanctions maturational approaches, but at the same time makes a mockery of the reasons children were spending an additional year in a preschool setting or a second year in kindergarten.

Concentrating on her practice as a teacher of first grade children in Australia, Felicity McArdle (Chapter 4: *Teaching Notes*), delivers an enchanting array of stories that illustrate how sensitive children are to difference and their acute awareness of the intersection of difference and impropriety: “Children notice it, they remark on it, they fear it, they correct it, they worry about it, they seem to be forever vigilant when it comes to difference and transgression” (p. 63). McArdle’s analysis invokes multiple readings of taken-for-granted practices that go with the territory of attending school. The accepted school rules and rituals are sources of mystification and estrangement that work to distance these first time school attendants and mark them as unknowing, until their bodies and minds have learnt and come to know their “place” in the regime of things. Disrupting these discourses of difference and how they do their work is McArdle’s aim, but she has a bigger picture in mind as these cases are used to argue that instances of difference cannot be treated as “add-ons” to traditional early childhood curricula and must be used to teach children to engage critically with difference. The point is that the complexity of daily classroom life provides many pedagogical opportunities for teachers to do this with children.

Resources have always been considered essential in early childhood programs and over the years have evolved from the materials used by Froebel and Montessori to recent examples of what could be termed a “chicken and egg” interplay of market forces and perceived curriculum demands that are a legacy of globalization. What has resulted is a plethora of resources that enable teachers to deal with particular aspects of our globalized world, including representations of racial and ethnic difference through use of props such as “The Asian family” and “The Native American family” dolls, puzzles, and other play materials. Rich Johnson (Chapter 5, *The Amorphous Pretend Play Curriculum: Theorizing Embodied Synthetic Multicultural Props*) examines these appealing and “multicultural” artifacts of visual culture to trouble the way in which early childhood educators accept unproblematically the normative representations they embody. Quite apart from questions

about the pedagogical limitations of tourist-oriented curriculum associated with the use of these play materials, Johnson makes a case that they symbolize the “classic child(ren) of early childhood education – that romantic, natural child, the unthreatened, enlightened being” (p. 106). These static images of visual culture play a significant part in perpetuating the status quo, because their very existence seems to excuse any necessity to teach explicitly about difference and diversity, that is, about other lifeworlds.

For many teachers, teacher educators and facilitators of professional development programs for early childhood practitioners, enacting a bicultural early childhood curriculum comes with a complex set of challenges and struggles. In New Zealand, the bicultural curriculum *Te Whāriki*, affirms the importance of the indigenous people and involves the provision of corresponding Māori language and content alongside “western” knowledges in all dimensions of early childhood curriculum. In Chapter 6, *Implementing Te Whāriki as Postmodernist Practice: A Perspective from Aotearoa/New Zealand*, Jenny Ritchie contemplates some of the bicultural requirements of *Te Whāriki* and how those in the field are dealing with decentering the “mainstream” curriculum and repositioning themselves “alongside Māori whānau (families) and Māori colleagues who remain the repositories of Māori knowledge” (p. 111). Ritchie uses extracts from participant transcripts to depict how power relations work at the local level, privileging particular practices in everyday routines and creating tension in places where several ethnic groups are present. Besides revealing the potential of *Te Whāriki* to transform practices, Ritchie details the way in which *Te Whāriki* is a “work-in-progress” alternative to the accepted and normalized version of early childhood curriculum that endorsed the cultural knowledge of the dominant group in New Zealand.

These chapters in the first section of the book consider aspects of curriculum and pedagogy as they are enacted in early childhood classrooms. The next section shifts the focus to teacher preparation and professional development programs, retaining the emphasis on power relationships, and agency.

EARLY CHILDHOOD TEACHER EDUCATION AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Even though national policy documents (Bowman, Donovan, & Burns, 2001; Hyson, 2003) require the addition of content that addresses working with children and families from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds,

recent research has found that 2- and 4-year early childhood pre-service teacher education courses in the U.S.A. provide little course work about educating children from such backgrounds (Early & Winton, 2001). The dominance of child development theory in teacher education has meant that many teachers are not necessarily prepared to work with children from backgrounds dissimilar to their own (Ryan & Ackerman, 2004). A small group of teacher educators have been experimenting with introducing different kinds of knowledge to their students with the intent of helping them to consider the ways in which their agency and that of the children they teach is simultaneously constrained and enabled by various assumptions about best practice in the early years.

One perspective that is advantageous when engaging with issues of power and agency is postcolonial theory. In Chapter 7, *Postcolonial Theory and the Practice of Teacher Education*, Radhika Viruru brings together these two highly contested domains. She argues that there are similarities between the two and that both can benefit from each other. Working through examples drawn from her classes as a teacher educator, Viruru employs postcolonial theory to interrogate some of the "basics", binaries, and stereotypes that litter the field of teacher education. Students discuss these issues as they relate to their own lives, including the taunts they are subjected to as a result of the "easy" major that they have selected (teaching). Being positioned as an easy major may serve as an introduction to the marginalization of the field, and for Viruru, is one of the ways of pairing postcolonial theory and teacher education to engage students in critical analyses of macro and micro issues of diversity and difference.

How pre-service students grappled with issues of race, class, gender, and life experience in a Language and Literacy course was the topic of an action research project undertaken by Celia Genishi, Shin-ying Huang, and Tamara Glupczynski (Chapter 8, *Becoming Early Childhood Teachers: Linking Action Research and Postmodern Theory in a Language and Literacy Course*). As instructors and researchers of the course, Genishi et al. drew on the institution's National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) conceptual framework to analyse two written assessment tasks submitted by students in the course. They were interested in knowing to what extent the students demonstrated "an understanding of issues of race, class, gender, language and ability" (p. 174); how the teacher education students were being prepared to "act sensitively and effectively with students whose life experiences are most often very unlike their own" (p. 174); and "To what extent did we and the students in this course construct 'counter narratives,' little stories that talked back to grand narratives, whether local

or national?" (p. 187). Although this self study sought to link research and theory in the context of a teacher education course, it is ultimately about improving teaching and learning, and prefaced on a revisioned understanding of diversity and difference. The counternarratives created by the students, instructors, and researchers reinforced the multiplicity of positions, responses, and layers of meaning that are necessarily caught up in the complexities of teaching and learning for both adults and children.

In the final chapter that deals exclusively with teacher education, Jennifer Sumsion (Chapter 9, *Putting Postmodern Theories into Practice in Early Childhood Education*) gives three examples of her own "continual rereading and rewriting of ourselves and our practices" (p. 202). Like Genishi et al., this involved changing assessment practices, as well as the practicum component of the course. Further, as project leader charged with redressing the level of generic skills acquired by graduates from her department of the university (this was construed as a competitive weakness by university management), Sumsion tells how she worked with students and other teacher educators to produce an outcome that resisted dominant instrumentalist discourses. Aimed ultimately at transformation through being able to remove oneself from entrenched practices and standpoints to conceive anew, Sumsion argues for reflexivity, imagining, and hope, not only for teacher education, but also as constructs for a transformed society.

Kinsler and Gamble (2001) have made the point that the vast majority of professional development for teachers leads to no significant change in classroom practices, and Fullan and Stiegelbauer (1991) has shown that "one off" sessions and sequential workshops are ineffective without appropriate follow up support. These and other limits of traditional approaches to professional development are well known (Knight, 2002). Consistent with recent moves toward adopting alternative approaches to professional development (e.g., Burbank & Kauchak, 2003; Groundwater-Smith, Mockler, & Normanhurst, 2002; Knight, 2002), Sue Novinger, Leigh O'Brien, and Lou Sweigman (Chapter 10, *Challenging the Culture of Expertise: Moving Beyond Training the Always, Already Failing Early Childhood Educator*) scrutinize their own positions as "experts training novices". That is, they dissect their positions as teacher educators and providers of professional development programs for pre-and in-service teachers. Novinger et al. analyse discourses of expertise to expose their own experiences of struggle, disquiet, and uncertainty associated with the culture of expertise and in the process take apart the power relationships and agency involved in their daily work. The powerful stories in this chapter illustrate the multiple and changing positions of those who engage in professional development. Their efforts

are directed toward a participatory and inclusive model where power and knowledge relationships are re-negotiated and continually reassessed.

Interested in improving teachers' interactions with children, Carrie Lobman (Chapter 11, *Improvisation: Postmodern Play for Early Childhood Teachers*) takes the unique view of teachers as improvisers and relates details of a research project that involved seven early childhood practitioners as they worked through ways of creating new performances in their lives. The ultimate aim was for participants to understand a different way of relating to children that is not prefaced on or by developmental pathways. Drawing on Vygotsky's work, Lobman argues that although Vygotsky's work has been used in early childhood education to "import 'culture'" (p. 251), this addition has made little difference to traditional conceptions of child development as a series of linear stages. However, the key is Vygotsky's activity theory, which for Lobman, has the potential to transform daily practice through techniques such as teaching early childhood practitioners how to use improvisation. The "in the moment" notions of improvisation sit comfortably with theories of the postmodern, and the introduction of a lesser known aspect of Vygotsky's work as a postmodern possibility is food for thought.

TRANSFORMATION AND TRANSFORMATIVE PRACTICES

Although the effects of globalization are experienced in a similar fashion to those in other areas of education, in early childhood education, there is little recognition of these effects beyond debates about the negative impact of testing and that conservative quick fixes and market-oriented reforms are not the answer. At the same time, many in our field remain committed to a developmental perspective, which while progressive in comparison to traditional or more "direct" forms of instruction, is nonetheless a standardized curriculum approach. Uniform approaches, however, are no longer adequate if teachers are to be able to respond individually to the range of experiences and understandings that children bring with them into early childhood programs.

The chapters contained in this volume offer some insight into the transformation of daily practices that can and will contribute to the revisioning of teaching and pedagogy that is called for in a global and postmodern world. Most of these accounts locate transformation at the local level, initiated by

teachers, supported by teachers, and focused on specific classroom issues. That is, teachers are being exhorted to "push the boundaries of the social fields of teaching" in new ways (Luke, 2004, p. 1441). However, given the marginalization of early childhood education, and the diversity of formal education and professional experiences of the workforce, teachers will also need to be supported in their endeavors to transform practice and for these endeavors to be heard and seen by others. Luke (2004) argues that one way we might harness this support is through the creation of teacher "intercultural capital" (p. 1441) that would:

...constitute the kinds of embodied skills, competences, and knowledges that are requisite for modeling for students an agentive engagement in flows across cultures, geographies and sites. (p. 1441)

While the chapters in this book serve as models of this "agentive engagement" in a number of geographical locations, they will remain nothing more than isolated examples unless readers take up their challenge and continue with this transformative work. To do otherwise is to risk remaining mired in outdated ideas and practices that can only result in the perpetuation of educational inequities and missed opportunities to actually create spaces for change and improvement in the lives of young children.

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