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Foucault and the Early Childhood Classroom

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ARTICLES

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Foucault's notion of "regimes of truth" (MacNaughton 2005, 30) provides an understanding of how some discourses operate and network together to reinforce a particular powerful view of the world. These can be in oral or written forms. Early childhood education practices are drawn on the discourse of a document developed by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) on developmentally appropriate practice. Statements made in this written discourse have been accepted as factual and produce shared language among early childhood researchers. Foucault's perspectives of discourse and terms used by him as regimes of truth are used in this article to evaluate the written document that early childhood educators have accepted as authoritative truth. Suggestions for practice include providing a discourse that calls for early childhood teachers to allow time for reflective dialogue and the recognition of multiple perspectives to inform pedagogical knowledge of the social and cultural contexts of the children they teach.

Early childhood curriculum is embedded in the political and social context of the time. As the United States enters a time of unprecedented diversity and demographic transformations, a reexamination of traditional beliefs about child development and developmentally appropriate practice is vital. The wider variety of cultural backgrounds, religious affiliations, socioeconomic classes, and language groups that now characterize early childhood students in contemporary society poses a challenge to teachers. This diversity within all levels of education

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will only grow in the foreseeable future. The 2006 census population indicated that 45% of preschool children were members of a racial or ethnic minority group. The census figures since 2000 show that the number of Hispanics and Asian children younger than five grew by double-digit percentages, and the number of African American children grew more slowly (U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Educational Statistics 2007).

An emphasis of early childhood research on the developing child precludes an analysis of the relationship between curricular practice and the sociopolitical context of the classroom and school. Few researchers (Campbell and Smith 2001; Grieshaber and Cannella 2001; MacNaughton 1998, 2000, 2005) have examined classroom discourse and early childhood education from the theories and analyses of Foucault and postmodern thinkers. MacNaughton (2005) claimed the early childhood students have not been introduced to Foucault's work because "his ideas on relationships between power, discipline, knowledge and our bodies are generally understood as radical" (p. 5).

This article presents a Foucaultian framework as a method for examination of various discourses through a written document, *Developmentally Appropriate Practice* (Bredekamp 1987; Bredekamp and Copple 1997), sponsored by the National Association for the Education of Young (NAEYC). This examination is also a tenet of postmodern thinking. Postmodern frameworks thus pose questions about what is culturally appropriate practice and about agendas for reform. Having questions about family belief systems and values, language origins and linguistic issues, communication styles, naming systems, and other relevant cultural information give teachers a head start in cultural sensitivity. Various perspectives are needed to see how knowledge is culturally constructed to help teachers have a better understanding of the social and cultural contexts of the children they teach (Dahlberg, Moss, and Pence 2004).

This article provides a brief overview of the NAEYC position regarding developmentally appropriate practices, with a focus on how this institution's written document has produced a "regime of truth" (Foucault 1980, 133) for practice in early childhood classrooms. Additionally, the interpretation of the document has created power relationships in early childhood classrooms that normalize, rather than build, communities of learners to support the changing demographics. The two forms of power—(a) sovereign power and (b) disciplinary power—that Foucault (1995) postulated are discussed as they relate to *Developmentally Appropriate Practice in Early Childhood Education Programs Serving Children From Birth Through Age 8* (Bredekamp 1987; Bredekamp and Copple 1997). Last, alternative rationales are suggested for reexamining educators practice to reflect social and political change in the future. Foucault's theories and postmodern thinking can offer early childhood communities a new awareness of how written language shapes the way people see, feel, and believe, and perhaps help in rethinking educators practices to reflect social and political changes in the future.

DEVELOPMENTALLY APPROPRIATE PRACTICE

In 1987, the NAEYC published a position statement entitled *Developmentally Appropriate Practice in Early Childhood Education Programs Serving Children From Birth Through Age 8* (*DAP*; Bredekamp 1987; Bredekamp and Copple 1997). This position statement used a cognitive–developmental model for an early childhood curriculum. Commonly known as the "green bible," (Lubeck 1998, 286), it has been an influential document guiding the field of early childhood education. The purpose of this document was to counter a trend toward an academic curriculum, especially in preschool and kindergarten classrooms, as well as being used to guide the implementation of the NAEYC accreditation process. The first edition of *DAP* (Bredekamp 1987) was criticized for being a reflection of a specific culture's notion, that of Euro-American child development and early childhood specialists, containing what children should know and do, how adults should work with children (Jipson 1991, 1998), and as a justification for child-centered practices based on developmental theory (Kessler 1991). A revised version (Bredekamp and Copple 1997) was written in an attempt to recognize the variability in child development and learning. The revised edition drew on the theories of Vygotsky (1978); introduced the concept of community; and highlighted the importance of culture, family, context-relevant curriculum, and authentic assessment. Lubeck (1998), however, cautioned against the acceptance of incorporating new ideas into old agendas. She argued that the dominant discourse of general principles in the revised version of the document generalized research results; thus "common norms remain unchanged and unchallenged" (p. 286).

Nonetheless, *DAP* has been accepted as dogma in the early childhood community. Foucault's (1980a) notions guide one toward identifying this dogma as a practice based upon a regime of truth.

> Each society has its regime of truth, it "general politics" of truth; that is, the types of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true; the mechanisms and instances which enable one to distinguish true and false statements, the means by which each is sanctioned; the techniques and procedures accorded value in the acquisition of truth; the status of those who charged with saying what counts as true. (Foucault 1980a, 131)

Foucault (1980a) described a set of truths within a given field as a "regime of truth" that generates an authoritative consensus about what needs to be done in that field and how it should be done. Juxtaposing the NAEYC document recommendations from the revised version (Bredekamp and Copple 1997) with interviews with Foucault (1980) on truth and power from 1972 to 1977, the following question is addressed: Whose knowledge and interests are represented by *DAP* and whose interests are served by a curriculum based on such practice?

Foucault framed a social and political context both for the reformation and reeducation of individuals (by "discipline") and the management of populations ("by government;" Ransom 1997, 59). In his terms, the officially sanctioned *truth* (*DAP*) has been woven together by the *regime* (NAEYC) to govern and unify what is held to be normal and appropriate for all children. But there isn't a universally *right* way, a universally *appropriate* way to teach curriculum. Contrary to this reality, instead political institutions and organizations use their power to create and express a fiction of truth based on the knowledge of the historical time (Ransom 1997). This occurred in 1987 when NAEYC was concerned about an increase in academic curriculum within preschool and kindergarten classrooms. In an attempt to empower early childhood teachers with new knowledge and new truths, *DAP* was written. However, Foucault's theories suggest that the influence of *DAP* could undermine the confidence of the practitioners; the subject of the power relation.

DAP—WRITTEN DISCOURSE

Foucault expressed discourse in terms of bodies of knowledge. He used this concept in relation to discipline, rather than language. His concept of discourse further reveals the historically specific relations between disciplines (such as a field of knowledge like psychology or education) and disciplinary practices (forms of social control and social possibility; McHoul and Grace 2000). Each disciplinary practice or institution has sets of rules or norms that are associated with it, and Foucault (1980) called these rules or discourses "regimes of truth" (p. 132) that produce relations of domination. Within the field of childhood education, NAEYC is the largest early childhood organization. It is this organization that constructed and published the written discourse known as *DAP* (Bredekamp 1987; Bredekamp and Copple 1997).

Some discourses dominate how society defines and organizes both ourselves and our social worlds, and alternative discourses are marginalized (Foucault 1980). This idea of power and domination is a central and recurring concept in Foucault's work. He claimed knowledge that culminates in truth independent of the pursuit and exercise of power is an illusion (Foucault 1980). Power is a relationship of struggle to dominate the meanings that people give to their lives. It is a battle to authorize the truth, because truths are produced in one's struggle to construct the meanings of one's actions, thoughts, and feelings. NAEYC exercised power over the early childhood community by developing *DAP*, a standardized, prescriptive teacher's guide that was used for program evaluation. In effect, NAEYC's written discourse has produced a regime of truth within the early childhood community.

FOUCAULT AND DEVELOPMENTALLY APPROPRIATE PRACTICE

Foucault (1981) indicated, "my books aren't treatises in philosophy or studies in history, but philosophical fragments put to work in a historical field of problems" (p. 5). He asserted what he said needs to be taken as "propositions" and those interested are invited to participate; they are not meant as dogma that must be accepted (p. 5).

He believed that *eventalization* is a useful procedure of analysis for his propositions regarding networks of relationships that engender a reality and a history. Eventalization has two *theoretico-political* functions. The first is an examination of knowledge and practices as a breach of self-evidence. He described this in terms of the penal history within *Discipline and Punish* (1995). In earlier writings, he first illustrated that it isn't self-evident that the only thing to do with a criminal was to lock him up (Foucault 1981). The second function of eventalization offers "rediscovering the connections, the encounters, the supports, blockages, plays of forces, strategies establishing what counts as self evident, universal and necessary." (Foucault 1981, 6).

Foucault (1981) looked for a multiplication of causes to analyze an event, "causual multiplication consists in analyzing an event according to the multiple processes which constitute it" (p. 6). Although little has been said in the early childhood literature regarding his propositions, I discuss Foucault's procedures of analysis in an attempt to elucidate the relationship between Foucault's theories of "regimes of truth" and *DAP*.

PRACTICES AS REGIMES OF TRUTH

As earlier stated, the NAEYC is the largest professional organization (institution) representing early childhood education in the United States. This institution desired guidelines for early childhood practices and wrote *DAP* in 1987, then a revised version in 1997. The purpose was to provide early childhood professionals with guidelines for improving the education of children from birth to 8-years-old. NAEYC used an era in history when there was concern about the academic rigor and lack of a standardized curriculum and, in Foucault's terms, "de-eventalization their principal of historical intelligibility" (Foucault 1981, 7).

The NAEYC's document is based on cognitive–developmental theories and offers a singular approach to practice, training, and evaluation of young children. An exclusively developmental view marginalizes minority sociocultural groups that have different ways of viewing and understanding young children (Alloway 1997). If an exclusive developmental lens for teachers is provided, then the complex ways in which children learn within particular social contexts at home and in

the community is obscured. *DAP* "misses the rich possibilities for understanding the ways in which identity is socially constructed in relation to organizing features such as gender, class, race, and ethnicity" (Alloway 1997, 2).

Foucault (1981) tells readers, "Practices don't exist without a certain regime of rationality" (p. 9). Further, he said that practices are analyzed by comparing (a) codification and (b) true or false formulation. He also indicated that practices are codified, and rules and procedures are prescribed for accomplishing goals. *True* discourses are thus established that serve to justify and provide a rationale for doing things—discourses in which the practice of true and false can be ordered and accepted as a production of truth. Foucault (1981) eventalized small details of a method to compare different regimes of jurisdiction and veridiction.

> To analyze "regimes of practices" means to analyze programmes of conduct which have both prescriptive effects regarding what is to be done (effects of jurisdiction) and codifying effects regarding what is to be known (effects of veridiction). (p. 5)

An analysis of the revised version of *DAP* suggests a regime of truth in which the discourses of jurisdiction (what is to be done) and veridiction (what is to be known) are evident. *DAP* codified and prescribed best practices for early childhood educators. In analyzing the text in the beginning of the document (Bredekamp and Copple 1997), one finds words such as "shared vision" (p. 7), "core values" (p. 7), "agreed-upon standards" (p. 7), "what we want" (p. 8), "broad agreement" (p. 8), and "shared goals" (p. 8). Guidelines are presented as a common core of beliefs, values, and goals for all educators; which implies that teachers are to think and perform the same way, rather than allowing for diversity and different ways of doing things. The authors stated there was strong differences in opinion among leaders charged with the mission of drafting *DAP*, but the purpose of discussions was to establish consensus and "to work toward resolution of our disagreements" (Bredekamp and Copple 1997, vii). Working toward a resolution of disagreements, in Foucault's (1981) terms, is a discourse of jurisdiction, prescribing the way that early childhood professionals need to practice. The leaders drafting *DAP* were looking for consensus—a single perspective.

Researchers (Dahlberg et al. 2004; Lubeck 1998; MacNaughton 2005; Williams 1994) have questioned the values reflected in *DAP*. "When a professional organization takes a stand regarding excellence in education, the resulting document will embody the values of its writers or, in a larger sense, the values of the culture(s) that influence those writers" (Williams 1994, 156). Foucault's (1981) notions question the values or truths of having guidelines written to improve practice that are a discourse of veridiction, a discourse of Anglo-American perspectives. Given this, we as educators need to question whether we can hold diverse views within a shared vision. How does developmentally appropriate practice reflect worldviews and experiences? Whose knowledge and interests are represented by developmentally

appropriate practice? Can educators ultimately use the same criteria for evaluating all national early childhood programs, regardless of local understandings and intent?

THE CULTURAL PERSPECTIVE

The discourse of *DAP* prescribing "what is to be done" (effects of veridiction; Foucault 1981, 5) can disrupt cultural values and practices. Many societies value acting on behalf of one's family, community, or group, rather than thinking and acting for oneself. Williams (1994) addressed three assumptions underlying *DAP*: (a) the prominence of the individual in the *DAP* guidelines, (b) the value accorded to independence in the construction/acquisition of knowledge, and (c) valuing overt expression of language (p. 159).

In the context of the NAEYC community, the values of this document sometimes do not intersect with those underlying the childrearing and educational practices of some culturally and/or linguistically diverse groups. Uttal's research (1996, 1999) indicated that professional standards, like *DAP* can be a compromise for parents of color who "recognize that child care arrangements are an important site that influence their children's understandings of their cultural heritages" (p. 56). Other researchers (Chan and Lee 2004; Hildebrand et al. 2000; Penn 1997; Williams 1994) found that children may find it difficult to adjust to opposing values of self-centeredness and implementation of a child-centered curriculum prescribed by the guidelines from *DAP*.

The words "shared vision" (p. 7) and "broad agreement" (p. 8) in the revised version of *DAP* (Bredekamp and Copple 1997) are values that are inconsistent with an understanding of how culture enters into the complex ways that children learn within particular social contexts at home and in the community. It would seem that applying the *DAP* guidelines in programs of child and early education without an awareness of possible differences in value systems would, in Foucault's (1980) terms, create a regime of truth that runs contrary to the beliefs held by culturally and linguistically diverse children. From a Foucaultian analysis of events, it does not appear to be self-evident that prescribing to *DAP* guidelines supports the challenges facing teachers in their practice. These guidelines need to address the "multiple processes which constitute" (Foucault 1981, 6) working with young children in early childhood programs.

Not only does the *DAP* document reflect consensus with words that value conformity, the written discourse in *DAP* operates in terms of binary opposites with words "[developmentally] appropriate practices" (*DAP*) and "[developmentally] inappropriate practices" (DIP; Figure 1). Such classificatory practices are examples of what Foucault (1995) called dividing practices methods of manipulation that combine the mediation of a science and the practice of exclusion. Dividing

FIGURE 1   Appropriate and inappropriate.

3- THROUGH 5-YEAR OLDS	3- THROUGH 5-YEAR OLDS	3- THROUGH 5-YEAR OLDS
	Appropriate Practices	Inappropriate Practices
Creating a caring community of learners (cont'd)		
Promoting a positive climate for learning (cont'd)	• To develop children's self-confidence and positive feelings toward learning, teachers provide opportunities for them to accomplish meaningful tasks and to participate in learning experiences in which they can succeed most of the time and yet be challenged to work on the edge of their developing capabilities	• Planned activities often present no real challenge for children, such as when children are engaged in pasting precut forms. •Teachers' expectations and requirements of children repeatedly exceed their developmental capabilities. For instance, 3-year-olds are expected to write their names legibly.
Fostering acohesive group and meeting individual needs	• Teachers know each child well and design activities based on their knowledge of individual children's differing abilities, developmental levels, and approaches to learning. Responsiveness to individual differences in children's abilities and interests is evident in the curriculum, adults' interactions, and the environment (where photos of children and their families and children's work are displayed and spaces are provided for personal belongings).	• Teachers attempt to move all children through the same subskills in the same timeframe, although some children have already mastered them and others are not ready for them yet. •The curriculum and environment are essentially the same for each group of children that comes through the program, without adaptation for the identities, interests, or work of that group of individuals.
	• Teachers use many strategies to help build a sense of the group as a cohesive com- munity. The children sometimes work on group activities that all can identify with such as creating a mural for the classroom or planning a surprise event for parents. Teachers engage children in experiences that demonstrate the explicit valuing of each child, such as sending a "We miss you!" card to a sick classmate.	• Teachers' behaviors and techniques undermine a sense of community, for example, encouraging or allowing chronic tattling, scapegoating, teasing, or other practices that turn children against each other; or setting up games or situations in which the same children are always chosen and less-popular children are left out.
	• Teachers bring each child's home culture and language into the shared culture of the school so that children feel accepted and gain a sense of belonging. The contributions of each child's family and cultural group are recognized and valued by others. Children learn to respect and appreciate similarities and differences among people.	• Cultural and other individual differences are ignored. Some children do not see their race, language, or culture reflected in the classroom, so they do not feel part of the group. •Differences among children are stressed to such an extent that some children are made to feel that they do not fit in.

practices and the related methods of scientific classification have come to be a form of language that serves both to include and exclude through claiming to measure what is good and bad, normal and nonnormal, right and wrong (Foucault 1995).

Foucault's (1995) notions indicate that the statement divides and classifies developmentally appropriate guidelines between developmentally inappropriate guidelines. "*Developmentally appropriate*" (defined by guidelines) takes a child development position emphasizing the whole child (physical, social, emotional, and cognitive) and is organized around child-directed play, with an emphasis on child choice and interests, and expressed in the context of independent actions on the environment. In comparison, "*developmentally inappropriate*" has been characterized as employing worksheets, direct instruction, and with little integration of content areas and concrete experiences (Bredekamp and Copple 1997, 124).

From the perspective of the African American community, programs are reluctant to fully endorse *DAP* and feel it necessary to provide didactic instruction for children that includes reading and writing (Sanders, Deihl, and Kyler 2007). Delpit (1988) argued that low-income African American children may benefit from more explicit instruction that teaches children the codes needed to participate in mainstream society. She did not argue for drill and skill, but for instruction that assumes that there are multiple practices, culture-free and class-free, which enable all children to learn.

These discourses legitimate particular constructions of the child or teacher and simultaneously constitute and configure the child or teacher outside of these edicts in terms of a deficit or lack. In doing so, they make programs wrong for incorporating practices aligned with community and cultural contexts—because they are not complying with what is normal: what is appropriate. Foucaultian analysis illuminates these terms that regulate children and teachers and reinforce narrow, stereotypical truths about early childhood practices that do not take into account cultures that lie outside of white, middle-class, Anglo-American cultures (Delpit 1988; Jipson 1991, 1998). These children may need more direct, explicit instruction and procedures for positioning themselves within an early childhood classroom.

Using Foucault's theories for an analysis of early childhood practices, the discourses that NAEYC used in *DAP* (Bredekamp and Copple 1997) codify the way that early childhood educators should teach young children. The text is accepted as a regime of truth so that views, opinions, and beliefs are prescribed, unquestionably accepted, and implemented into practice. Further discussion in this article examine the document as it relates to power relationships. These types of relationships that have been created in early childhood classrooms normalize, rather than build, communities of learners that provide for multiple perspectives of knowledge to support the changing demographics in the United States today.

FORMS OF POWER

Foucault's (1980) writings on power are related to the production of knowledge and truth. He links power relations with discourse producing truths we accept in our social institutions (McHoul and Grace 2000). The early childhood community has accepted the guidelines of the NAEYC position statement and they are used in the accreditation of early childhood programs. Foucault (1995) analyzed two forms of power: (a) sovereign and (b) disciplinary power.

He described sovereign power as a form of power expressed in recognizable, visible ways through particular and identifiable individuals (Foucault 1980). When sovereign power operates, people know that they have been acted upon, in what ways, and by whom. "Foucault criticized reliance on one concept of power, sovereignty, with its model of power as a simple dualism of ruler and ruled, master and slave, colonizer and colonized" (Dahlberg et al. 2004, 28). It is a confrontation between two adversaries involving direct force. Foucault helps one to understand the sovereign power in early childhood programs. In early childhood settings, sovereign power is employed between NAEYC and early childhood programs, supervisors and classroom teachers, classroom teachers and teacher assistants, as well as teachers and children. These individuals are visible agents of sovereign power.

Contrastingly, he identified disciplinary power as diffuse in operation and less visible than sovereign power (Foucault 1980). Disciplinary power "shapes individuals neither with nor without their consent" (Ransom 1997, 37). Disciplinary power is used to train and normalize individuals. It is not a confrontation between two adversaries like sovereign power, but a matter of guiding one to a desired outcome. This type of power is found in early childhood classrooms as teachers train young children to be quiet while they or other classmates are speaking, or to walk hallways in a single file.

According to Foucault (1995), the power of the norm appears through the disciplines: "The Normal is established as a principle of coercion in teaching with the introduction of the *ecoles normales* [teachers' training colleges]; it is established in the effort to organize a national medical profession and a hospital system capable of operating general norms of health; it is established in the standardization of industrial processes and products" (p. 184). This normalization has happened in the early childhood community with the NAEYC guidelines to evaluate teachers and to use for accreditation of early childhood centers.

Foucault (1995) leads readers to recognize that a power of normalization is created through using the terms *appropriate* and *inappropriate*. Early childhood classrooms become members of a homogenous social system that are classified based on what is appropriate. A developmentally appropriate classroom is the norm, and thus NAEYC becomes the institution of regulation and standardization. As previously stated, *DAP* guidelines are used in making decisions regarding

licensing programs for NAEYC accreditation, which in turn is equated with program quality. Lists of these NAEYC accredited programs are available to parents on the internet (NAEYC 1998). Those centers that follow the "green bible" (Lubeck 1998, 286) are part of what Foucault (1995) called a "disciplinary regime where power becomes more anonymous and more functional" (p. 193).

Similarly, disciplinary power is present and invisible (Foucault 1980) as supervisors and evaluators commonly enter classrooms, fill out rating scales or observation protocols, and then briefly indicate what was right and what needs to be improved. Inherent in this process, supervisors normalize programs through the use of a right versus wrong standardized measurement (Lubeck 1998). Teachers then conform and, in essence, accept the invisible power of the guidelines of *DAP* (Bredekamp and Copple 1997). The discourse of *DAP* transmits and produces power and can thus be identified as a regime of truth. Foucault (1980) believed that regimes of truth exercise power over people's thought by governing what they see as the truth, as well as by excluding alternative ways of understanding and interpreting the world. Classroom teachers may interpret what they are doing differently from their supervisor or an NAEYC evaluator, as there may be many ways of understanding what is happening in a given situation. However, the evaluator has the power to designate what is right and what is wrong. Whose knowledge and interests are represented by developmentally appropriate practice? If knowledge and power of experts silence those who have knowledge of specific children and communities (Delpit 1988), then what can early childhood teachers do? The following section offers suggestions for practice to encourage and support teachers' reflections on the relationship between their efforts and the needs of the larger society. In doing so, one may avoid the institutionalization of knowledge about childhood as one discovers multiple possibilities for responding to young children's diverse competencies, needs, and potentials.

THEORY TO PRACTICE

Foucault (1980) called for a new way of understanding knowledge, which translates into abandoning the idea that there is a unity of knowledge. This means abandoning the thought that there is an orderly and systematic world, similar for all. To live in a society free from the prevailing truths means that people need to adjust to a high degree of complexity and diversity, as well as to continuous change. This requires individuals to free their thoughts regarding what is necessary in early childhood classrooms that subscribe to a developmentally appropriate curriculum; a setting in which normalizing, disciplinary power is exercised. Suggestions to question regimes of truth that can help educators identify forces at work in their classrooms follow.

Reflective Discourse

One important need within early childhood programs is the allocation of more time for reflective practice. Reflective practice is defined as "looking back" at practices to rethink them (MacNaughton 2005, 6). MacNaugton (2005) felt that educators need to be more inquisitive about what is happening in their classrooms and about whether they have the right answer to their questions. More time in a school day is needed to dialogue. These conversations include conversations between teachers and supervisors, teachers and teachers, teachers and teacher assistants, as well as teachers and researchers. Teachers and supervisors need to engage in reflective conversations and work together over time to understand and resolve classroom issues. Teachers and teacher assistants need time to plan curriculum together, to observe their students and reflect on what was seen and heard to gain insight into ways that they can support their children. Shared meaning and multiple perspectives can be acquired through discussions. Reflection and multiple perspectives allow teachers to question and problematize existing taken-for-granted discourses such as the *DAP* document.

Action Research

The research agenda in early childhood education needs to conduct collaborative action research projects with early childhood teachers. Schools of education are filled with professors eager to apply their college textbook or research design and analysis skills to problems and questions that they consider to be important. Often, researchers observe behaviors without talking to teachers when they are conducting studies and sorting practices into codes and categories (Lubeck 1998). Such a methodology does not consider that classroom teachers are faced, on a daily basis, with questions that puzzle and concern them in their interactions with children. Resultantly, an ideal collaborative partnership is for an early childhood teacher to partner with a college researcher. Alternatively, together they can explore a relevant topic and share pedagogical knowledge as well as discuss and evaluate diverse views and perspectives.

With similar goals, several action research studies have been funded, through grants and departments of education in Australia, to promote social change in early childhood programs (MacNaughton 2005). Twenty-six early childhood teachers participated in a research project in 2001 to create and sustain critical reflection and innovation in the field of early childhood. Detailed vignettes, interviews from participants, and empirical data from this project were summarized by MacNaughton (2005) for discussion, reflection, and possible replication. MacNaughton's (2005) action research participants rejected developmental truths of the child through critical reflective practice and classroom research.

Multiple Perspectives

Standards and documents need to include the social contexts within which children develop in relation to gender, class, race, and ethnicity. Privileging child development exclusively does not give teachers tools for understanding the range of social practices that children acquire before school and use at home. Children come to school with very different knowledge and arrive ready to learn in very different ways. Family language and literacy practices differ, so each child's language and literacy enculturation is unique. Some families read religious materials such as the Bible or Koran daily; other families attend cultural events such as festivals, powwows, or community leadership, where they share materials related to these activities. Postmodernism puts everything into question and interrogates a worldview (Dahlberg et al. 2004).

Early childhood educators must not rely on prescriptions to inform pedagogical knowledge of the social and cultural contexts of the children they teach. Foucault's (1980) propositions and postmodern thinking implies that there may be little that people know and believe to be true, but by knowing the dedication and strength of the early childhood community, it is possible to disrupt the regimes of truth and power that exist in early childhood classrooms through critical reflection and conducting action research projects. This can only be done, however, by seeking out those whose perspectives may differ most, by listening to one's own words and the words of the children they teach, and by understanding one's own power.

NOTE

NAEYC is presently working on a revision of *DAP* that considers best practice rather than a polarized either/or stance. You can visit their website: http://naeyc. org.

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