



ADVANCES IN EARLY EDUCATION AND DAY CARE
VOLUME 14

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

SHARON RYAN
SUSAN GRIESHABER

Editors

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GLOBALIZATION,
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EARLY CHILDHOOD
EDUCATION**

EDITED BY

SHARON RYAN

Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, USA

SUSAN GRIESHABER

Queensland University of Technology, Australia

2005



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First edition 2005

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record is available from the British Library.

ISBN: 0-7623-1238-6

ISSN: 0270-4021 (Series)

© The paper used in this publication meets the requirements of ANSI/NISO Z39.48-1992 (Permanence of Paper).
Printed in The Netherlands.

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LIST OF CONTRIBUTORS

<i>Celia Genishi</i>	Department of Curriculum and Teaching, Teachers College, Columbia University, NY, USA
<i>Tamara Glupczynski</i>	Teachers College, Columbia University, New York, NY, USA
<i>Elizabeth Graue</i>	Department of Curriculum and Instruction, School of Education, University of Wisconsin, Madison, WI, USA
<i>Susan Grieshaber</i>	School of Early Childhood, Queensland University of Technology, Qld, Australia
<i>Lucinda G. Heimer</i>	University of Wisconsin, Madison, WI, USA
<i>Shin-ying Huang</i>	Teachers College, Columbia University, New York, NY, USA
<i>Richard Johnson</i>	Institute for Teacher Education, University of Hawaii at Manoa, Honolulu, HI, USA
<i>Carrie Lobman</i>	Graduate School of Education, Rutgers – The State University of New Jersey, New Brunswick, NJ, USA
<i>Felicity McArdle</i>	School of Early Childhood, Queensland University of Technology, Qld, Australia
<i>Sue Novinger</i>	Department of Education and Human Development, State University of New York, Brockport, NY, USA

- Leigh O'Brien* Department of Early Childhood,
Elementary, and Literacy Education,
Montclair State University, Montclair,
NJ, USA
- Jenny Ritchie* Department of Professional Studies in
Education, School of Education,
University of Waikato, Hamilton,
New Zealand
- Sharon Ryan* Graduate School of Education,
Rutgers – The State University of
New Jersey, New Brunswick, NJ, USA
- Jennifer Sumsion* Institute of Early Childhood, Australian
Centre for Educational Studies, Macquarie
University, Australia
- Lou Sweigman* Department of Education and Human
Development, State University of
New York, Brockport, NY, USA
- Radhika Viruru* Department of Teaching, Learning and
Culture, Texas A&M University, TX, USA

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We thank sincerely the following people, who reviewed chapters for this edited collection. The reviewing process is often a thankless and invisible task, but we want to recognize the professionalism of these reviewers, as well as their insight into the manuscripts with which they engaged.

<i>Debra Ackerman</i>	National Institute of Early Education Research, Rutgers University, USA
<i>Susan Adler</i>	University of Illinois at Urbana Champagne, USA
<i>Jo Ailwood</i>	Queensland University of Technology, Brisbane, Australia
<i>Judith Bernhard</i>	Ryerson University, Toronto, Canada
<i>Cary Buzzelli</i>	Indiana University, USA
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<i>Mary Curran</i>	Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, USA
<i>Sue Dockett</i>	University of Western Sydney, Australia
<i>Karen Dooley</i>	Queensland University of Technology, Brisbane, Australia
<i>Alma Fleet</i>	Institute of Early Childhood, Macquarie University, Sydney, Australia
<i>Susan Golbeck</i>	Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, USA
<i>Tara Goldstein</i>	OISE, University of Toronto, Canada
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<i>Alison Jones</i>	University of Auckland, New Zealand

<i>Liz Jones</i>	Manchester Metropolitan University, UK
<i>Elvira Katic</i>	Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, USA
<i>Janice Kroeger</i>	Kent State University, USA
<i>Mary McMullen</i>	Indiana University, USA
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<i>Kerry Robinson</i>	University of Western Sydney, Australia
<i>Joe Tobin</i>	Arizona State University, USA
<i>Karen Van Der Ven</i>	University of Pittsburgh, USA

INTRODUCTION

Volume 14 of the *Advances in Early Education and Day Care* provides Sharon Ryan and Susan Grieshaber the opportunity to present current scholarship about early childhood education and care that reflects postmodern perspectives. This series has consistently intended to serve the field by providing multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary perspectives. Early childhood practices have drawn on ideas from child development, curriculum studies, social work, nursing, sociology, anthropology, and other fields that inform us about children, their care, and the settings in which we implement our programs, an effort that should by its nature require diverse perspectives. *Advances in Early Education and Day Care* has always attempted to respect the necessary diversity of perspectives that can inform the field, and to support work that may not fit in a tidy disciplinary nook.

This volume is dedicated in its entirety to postmodern perspectives that have appeared only on occasion in earlier *Advances* publications. Grieshaber and Ryan have gathered scholarship from around the world to illustrate the significance of, as they say in Chapter 1, “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.” If one begins with the assumption that a globalized society has multiple meanings for education, and that local contexts present complexities where those multiple meanings play out, then the doors for new scholarship from various points of view are opened. Ryan and Grieshaber are dedicated to showing the ways that empirical analyses that emerge from these assumptions can be part of transformation of the field. Part I of this volume (Early Childhood Education, Globalization, and Postmodernity) introduces and elaborates these ideas, with “Transforming Ideas and Practices” by Grieshaber and Ryan and “Voices at the Table: An Analysis of the Policy Process of a Local Initiative” by Lucinda Heimer.

Part II of the volume (Diversity and Difference in Early Childhood Classrooms) takes what seem like familiar topics in the field (child-centeredness, difference/diversity, play, and cultural curriculum) and

shows the many ways that particular settings can “trouble” our understandings. While dealing with more or less familiar phenomena, Elizabeth Graue, Felicity McArdle, Richard Johnson, and Jenny Ritchie provide a palette of new dimensions that seem necessary for understanding practice. The merits of their perspectives contribute to earlier work and calls for new knowledge related to practice that appeared in earlier *Advances* volumes (e.g., Campbell, MacNaughton, Page, & Rolfe, 2004; Cannella & Bailey, 1999; Williams, 1996; Lubeck, Jessup, & Jewkes, 2001; McBride & Grieshaber, 2001; Reifel, 1999; Reifel & Brown, 2001, 2004). This section brings detailed life to these matters. Notions of “the child,” “diversity,” “play,” and “culture” can no longer be easily defined.

In Part III (Teacher Education and Professional Development) connects these matters to teacher preparation and development. Viruru, Genishi et al., Sumsion, Novinger et al., and Lobman bring us data and thinking about how early childhood teachers can become practitioners in the global society. As Grieshaber and Ryan tell us in Chapter 1, “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.” We can now see what forms that knowledge might take, and the power struggles that teachers and teacher educators encounter as they deal with it. Again, these matters have been presented in earlier *Advances* (e.g., Chafel & Reifel, 1996; Ackerman, 2004), but now we have a collection of voices that make their argument even stronger.

Arguments supporting reconceptualizations of early childhood education have appeared for some time (e.g., Kessler & Swadener, 1992; Mallory & New, 1994; Grieshaber & Cannella, 2001). What we have not had is an effort, like Ryan and Grieshaber have created here, where the call for empirical work has been heeded. The ideas about postmodern reconceptualization of early education that have been proposed elsewhere have here been made concrete. This volume collects empirical work and demonstrates why this work is important and some of the ways research can be done. My gratitude to Sharon Ryan and Susan Grieshaber is profound. An important step can now be built on.

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PART I:
EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION,
GLOBALIZATION, AND
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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

Practical Transformations and Transformational Practices:

Globalization, Postmodernism, and Early Childhood Education Advances in Early Education and Day Care, Volume 14, 3–17

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ISSN: 0270-4021/doi:10.1016/S0270-4021(05)14001-4

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