
Title	Images of preschool teaching in Singapore: Making the familiar strange through multimedia web representations
Author(s)	Sirene May-Yin Lim, Chee Hoo Lum and Xiaolei Zhou
Source	<i>American Educational Research Association (AERA) Annual Meeting, New Orleans, Louisiana, 8-12 April 2011</i>

This document may be used for private study or research purpose only. This document or any part of it may not be duplicated and/or distributed without permission of the copyright owner.

The Singapore Copyright Act applies to the use of this document.



From the

AERA Online Paper Repository

<http://www.aera.net/repository>

Paper Title Images of Preschool Teaching in Singapore: Making the Familiar Strange Through Multimedia Web Representations

Author(s) Sirene May-Yin Lim, National Institute of Education, Singapore; Chee Hoo Lum, National Institute of Education, Singapore; Xiaolei Zhou, Nanyang Technological University

Session Title From Design to Practice: Current Issues in the Development and Use of Multimedia Websites in Teacher Education in the United States and Singapore

Session Type Session Paper

Presentation Date 4/11/2011

Presentation Location New Orleans, Louisiana, USA

Descriptors

Methodology

Unit Division K - Teaching and Teacher Education

Each presenter retains copyright on the full-text paper. Repository users should follow legal and ethical practices in their use of repository material; permission to reuse material must be sought from the presenter, who owns copyright. Users should be aware of the [Ethical Standards of the American Educational Research Association](#).

Citation of a paper in the repository should take the following form: [Authors.] ([Year, Date of Presentation]). [Paper Title.] Paper presented at the [Year] annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association. Retrieved [Retrieval Date], from the AERA Online Paper Repository.

Images of preschool teaching in Singapore: Making the familiar strange through multimedia web representations

Background, Purpose, Theoretical Framework

In Singapore, preschool teaching is often stereotyped by the public as child minding and many laypersons and student teachers have difficulty locating the specialized knowledge and mastery that is required in exemplary early childhood teaching (Fromberg, 2003; Genishi, Ryan, Oschner & Malter, 2001). This is because quality early childhood education often looks playful and effortless; and in Singapore, the professional requirement for early childhood teachers is lower than that for teachers working with children in primary and secondary schools. However, as educational research in the early childhood field is still scarce in Singapore, there is much to be learned about what “good” preschool teaching looks like beyond the trendy images of play-based activities that have been marketed by the commercial entities of almost half of the preschool sector. In Singapore, preschool education in the form of half-day kindergarten programs or full-day child care programs is not compulsory although it is popular and much-needed by families, as evidenced from high enrolment. As a private good, preschool education is provided for by either commercial or non-profit organisations with minimal licensing regulations by the Ministry of Education or the Ministry of Community Development, Youth and Sports.

Thus, we had set out to learn more about how preschool teachers go about their daily teaching and how they plan for and interact with different kinds of children in their classrooms. We also set out to explore ways to harness the affordances of web technology to create rich multimedia ‘texts’ that might challenge public stereotypes about teaching and provide beginning teachers with the opportunity to identify otherwise discrete theories and be able to enquire into the real-world complexities of teaching children from diverse backgrounds within particular

settings (Hyun, 2007). In our effort to investigate how a few exemplary preschool teachers catered to learner differences, we also set out to document and present reflective interviews and videoclips of authentic teaching situations in the classrooms of three Chinese language preschool teachers working with 3-to-6-year-olds.

The purpose of this presentation is to share some of the experiences we have had in managing two parallel goals: a) generating data for our case studies of individual teachers and their teaching; and b) creating an “Images of Teaching” website containing a selection of raw data (e.g., videoclips, excerpts from interview transcripts) for public viewing.

Methods and Data

In this project, affordances refer to the perceived properties of the website that we have created, and the usability of the website given our knowledge of the cultural knowledge of our target audience (Norman, 1999). We aimed to build case studies of teachers and their teaching, as well as to take advantage of the affordances of a multimedia website to create publicly shareable representations comprising classroom videos, accompanying artefacts created by the teachers, and their own words as descriptions and explanations of what their students are like, choice of methods and materials, and the rationale for the way in which they taught (Hatch & Grossman, 2009).

We invited preschool teachers who were exemplary in their teaching – nominated by their principals and/or awarded accolades by the Ministry of Education. We obtained informed consent from the teachers and the parents of children in their classrooms, and assent from the children. Documenting the work of each teacher over a period of at least three lesson observations (April – Oct 2009), we conducted post-observation interviews (and email follow-ups) and gave each of them the flexibility of deciding when to videotape their lessons. We

encouraged them to select lessons and activities in which they felt confident in conducting with their group of children and explained that we would not be editing the videos much in order to preserve the authenticity of the teaching situations. We also constantly deliberated on how *other* teachers as end-users might navigate and interpret the myriad images and texts that we had put together. We wanted an end-product that would not reify or support stereotyped images of preschool teaching, but would allow the public and beginning teachers to appreciate the complexities of teaching and learning with young children.

Results and Ethical Considerations

We share some key learning points from this ongoing work: a) Differing interpretations of ECE discourse; b) teaching is context bound; c) dilemmas of going public with raw data.

Through our data generation process and ongoing analyses of the case studies, we have found differences in these teachers' individual interpretations of common terms used in contemporary early childhood education discourses – namely, “diverse learners,” “child-centred curriculum,” “interaction,” and “play-based learning.” The teachers may all use the same terms when describing their teaching approaches, but when we juxtapose their teaching videos and their verbal or written descriptions and explanations, it can be disorienting. We are reminded of how teachers construct understandings of teaching over time and within situated perspectives that exist in their school contexts (Feiman-Nemser, 2001; Putnam & Borko, 2000).

The second key learning is related to how “quality” in teaching is closely aligned with the organization and culture of school settings. As much as we were able to learn to appreciate each teacher's approach within the socio-cultural context of their school setting and the families that they served, we were made acutely aware that whole-school expectations of young children in terms of behaviour and learning have a huge impact on how the individual teachers conducted

themselves, built positive relationships with children, and on the kinds of learning experiences they invited children to participate in. Although all these teachers are known to be exemplary in what they do, and all seem to talk about letting children learn through play in an experiential manner, their individual interpretations of these notions are all situated within their teaching and learning contexts and communities (Putnam & Borko, 2000). Each teacher's theorizing and practices vary based on their school's culture and community practices (e.g., timetabling, curricular plans and objectives, how teachers share teaching responsibilities, how frequently teachers get to share about their teaching, if teachers are all involved in curriculum planning, how children are assessed), as well as their own personal and professional histories.

Finally, as researchers co-constructing the public web representations with the teachers, we needed to make choices about the 'who', 'what', 'why,' and 'how' in our representations, in order to create 1) authenticity of voice, 2) ethical representation, and 3) clarity in complexity. These issues emerged in our multiple conversations with each teacher in-between videotaped lessons. One of the dilemmas that we faced in the construction of the webpages was this: Would the teacher look "bad" in comparison to the others? How can we organize the raw material so that the teaching process does not lose its complexity? Clearly, as educators, we had our own biases about what "quality" teaching should look like and often, had to bracket out those preconceptions to understand the individual teacher's situated perspectives and school context. We decided not to over-edit video clips so that viewers would see them as authentic teaching situations. And we had to take extra care in ensuring that the teachers and their principals (and colleagues) would be satisfied with the teaching images represented in our website and our way of organizing the text and videos. This meant giving the participants plenty of time to comb through the draft version of the web pages.

Significance and Limitations

Since early childhood education research is still emerging within the local community in Singapore, we think that our case studies of these preschool teachers and their teaching will be a significant contribution to bridging theory, research, and practice. Our web representations would contribute to enriching perspective in early childhood teaching (Genishi, Ryan, Oschner, & Malter, 2001) and strengthen the professional image of preschool teachers in a marginalized field within the education system in Singapore. We look forward to extending this research to investigate how our website will enhance and generate professional learning discussions within the early childhood community.

References

- Borko, H. (2004). Professional Development and Teacher Learning: Mapping the Terrain. *Educational Researcher*, 33(8).
- Feiman-Nemser, S. (2001). From preparation to practice: Designing a continuum to strengthen and sustain teaching. *Teachers College Record*, 103(6), 1013-1055.
- Fromberg, D. (2003). The professional and social status of the early childhood educator. In J.P. Isenberg & M. R. Jalongo (Eds). *Major Trends and Issues in Early Childhood Education: Challenges, controversies and insights* (2nd ed) (pp. 177-192). New York: Teachers College Press.
- Genishi, C., Ryan, S., Ochsner, M., & Yarnall, M. M. (2001). Teaching in early childhood education: Understanding practices through research and theory. In V. Richardson (Ed.), *Handbook of research on teaching* (pp. 1175–1210) (4th ed). Washington, DC: American Educational Research Association.
- Hyun, E. (2007). Cultural complexity and early childhood: Images of contemporary young children from a critical perspective. *Childhood Education*, 83(5), 261-266.
- Norman, D.A. (1999). Affordances, Conventions and Design. *Interactions* 6(3), 38-43, ACM Press.
- Putnam, R. T. & Borko, H. (2000). What do new views of knowledge and thinking have to say about research on teacher learning? *Educational Researcher*, 29(1), 4-15