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RAGING HORMONES: STORIES OF ADOLESCENCE AND IMPLICATIONS FOR TEACHER PREPARATION

Narratives serve to define and constrain our social roles. The author argues that the dominant cultural narrative of adolescence constrains who middle school teachers can be in the classroom and confines notions of effective literacy pedagogy.

They have too much energy. With raging hormones and all, I don't look forward to having to tell Johnny to stay in his seat 10 times a day. I worry about liking them.

Preservice teacher

On the first day of a teacher preparation course entitled Teaching English in Middle School/Junior High, I asked preservice teachers to respond to the following prompt: What do you expect, anticipate, look forward to, and worry about in working with middle schoolers? Some of the preservice teachers responded as follows:

I worry about the maturity level, as far as being or not being able to discipline them. I'm afraid they may be too obnoxious. I'm also worried about the kinds of materials I may have to teach.

I expect this age group to be pretty wild— with hormones surging and putting them in a certain state of mind.

My greatest concern about teaching middle school students is not being able to have control of the class (student's emphasis).

The preservice teachers in my class rarely accepted my invitation to discuss what they looked
forward to in working with middle schoolers. Preservice teachers' notions about teaching in the middle were pessimistic. Only a small number of the students enrolled in Teaching English in Junior High/Middle School considered teaching in the middle a worthy option. One student explained, "I dread a position in junior high." Many feared, as one student articulated, "We'll probably have to because that's where first-year teachers get jobs." Most students enrolled in this course grudgingly, because it was a required course for all secondary English education majors at my institution.

In those first responses, control emerged as the central concern for teaching students in the middle grades. One preservice teacher reported, "In this class, I hope to learn a lot about control." In discussing her student teaching assignment in a middle school, another explained, "I'll learn more about control and less about content." Clearly, classroom management seems to be a central concern for all student teachers; at the middle school level, there appeared to be no other focus. Keen attentiveness to classroom management issues overpowered all discussions of literacy learning. Issues of social control eclipsed a focus on cognitive development. I am not suggesting that a dichotomy between the two exists, but rather that the interrelationships between them were for the most part ignored.

In order to effectively teach the middle school course, I needed to tease out the assumptions that led to such one-sided concerns. By collecting narratives from some preservice teachers as they worked with middle school students, I examined who preservice teachers perceived they could and could not be in the middle school classroom as well as who their students could and could not be. How preservice teachers think of the students that they teach or will teach is extremely important, and I hope that the study described in this article can provide insights that will prove helpful to teacher educators. First, I will provide some information on the teachers who participated. Then I will report on the stories preservice teachers told and document how these stories naturalize a way of being in the middle school classroom. Such narratives coherently authorize particular ways of seeing students, filtering attention toward and away from versions of reality.

**Study participants**

This study included a total of 60 participants (all of whom were enrolled in Teaching English in Middle School/Junior High). All were seeking certification in English education, and 58 were in their last semester of course work before the professional semester of student teaching. Data sources included the formal audiotaped interviews at the beginning and end of the semester. Other data sources included course assignments, in-class writing prompts, and journal entries. Formal anonymous audiotaped interviews were conducted by a research assistant with the consent of 16 students enrolled in the 1995-96 year. All quotes that appear in the article were drawn from student work with the written permission of those students enrolled in the course. After grades were issued at the end of each semester, students gave written consent to having their work included as part of this project. All students enrolled agreed to have their course work included. There were 45 females (41 of European American and 4 of African American descent) and 15 males (14 of European American and 1 of African American descent).

**Story as a way of knowing**

Narratives serve to define and constrain our social positions. Langellier (1989) wrote, "in a most profound way, our stories tell us who we are and who we can--or cannot--be, at both surface and deep-level meaning" (p. 267). Drawing from sociology and folklore, Sunstein (1994) described teachers' tales as the social construction of reality, and Goffman (1974) described the personal narrative as an act of self-presentation. In other words, stories allow one to construct a particular kind of world and a particular kind of self. Stories naturalize particular ways of being in the world and in the classroom. In arguing for the centrality of story in teachers' thinking processes, Carter (1993) wrote, "the stories we live by are not, of course, purely private inventions. We build them from the information provided by experience and from the inventory of stories or 'prepackaged
expectations and ways of interpreting’ (Chafe, 1990, p. 80) supplied by our culture” (p. 7).

A growing body of research emphasizes how cultural stories shape classroom interactions (Carter, 1993; Ritchie & Wilson, 1993; Sunstein, 1994; Wilson & Ritchie, 1994). Wilson and Ritchie (1994) wrote of stories, "They provide us with icons, touchstones, or metaphors by which to conduct our personal and professional lives. But stories--those we tell ourselves as well as those others tell about us--can also constrain and position us in identities and roles; we often become who stories tell us we are" (p. 177).

Goddard (1990, p. 59) emphasized the importance of uncovering images and expectations that formally and informally socialize teachers in a teacher education program. Developing as teachers has been the focus of studies of preservice education (Britzman, 1991; Ciandini, 1985; Grossman, 1990; Morine-Dershimer, 1989; Shulman, 1987; Weinstein, 1989; Wildman, Niles, Magliaro, & McLaughlin, 1989; Zeichner & Grant, 1981). Most noteworthy was Zeichner and Liston’s (1987) documentation that students’ beliefs about the role of the teacher change little throughout their teacher preparation program.

Such work warrants further studies. By making visible the tacit assumptions about early adolescents, such a study might inform the socialization processes that occur throughout the teacher education program and into the professional career. However, drawing from poststructuralist theory, I would argue that preservice teachers are not simply socialized into the profession. Davies (1993) argued that people are not socialised into the social world, but that they go through a process of subjectification. ... In poststructuralist theory the focus is on the way each person actively takes up discourses through which they and others speak/write their world into existence as if they were their own. (p. 13)

She writes further, "through those discourses they are made speaking subjects at the same time as they are subjected to the constitutive forces of those discourses" (p. 13). What are the constitutive forces of those discourses at work in the teacher preparation program? By examining the discourses of adolescence, this study holds implications for the development of literacy programs in teacher preparation.

Examining views of teaching, in the middle
Since the centrality of story as a mode of knowing is well documented in teacher research (Carter, 1993), the stories that preservice teachers tell were the centerpiece of this project. I designed interviews to be open ended and conversational in order to elicit stories. Because I was most interested in seeing how stories of adolescence might serve to regulate pedagogical decisions, during interviews participants were encouraged to tell their teaching tales. The swapping of these stories at informal gatherings was audiotaped. To remove any fear of repercussions and allow students the opportunities to disagree with texts and classroom discussions, my research assistant conducted anonymous audiotaped interviews. Formal interviews focused on the preservice teachers’ beliefs about middle school students and about appropriate teaching methods.

I analyzed the transcripts to document what positions preservice teachers perceived to be available to the middle school teacher and to the student. Further assumptions surrounding the discourses of adolescence and the discourses of teaching were teased out. In this process, I collected and categorized narratives that preservice teachers tell. Examining the discourses surrounding adolescence as a life stage can lead to a richer understanding of how teacher preparation programs might better serve novice teachers.

When asked to describe early adolescents, my preservice teachers presented a consistent portrait,
which can best be illustrated by one preservice teacher’s characterization:

You know how adolescents are. They are just plain out of control. It’s a stressful time with hormones surging and all. You take a nice kid, and then puberty kicks in, and the kid becomes nothing but a bundle of raging hormones. They begin noticing the opposite sex, and they lose all ability to reason.

Bedrock assumptions about biological functions (as in the above quote) that emerge during adolescence seemed to filter attention away from understanding of social conditions. Although adolescence as a distinct stage of life emerged for social, political, and economic reasons, such notions were missing in the stories told. In order to illustrate the social construction of adolescence, I turn now to the historical invention of adolescence as a life stage. I choose the word invention purposefully. Just as we invent objects and ideas when a need emerges, so too we invent social categories. We invent categories because they serve our purposes. We invent life stages to meet the changing needs of a society.

The invention of adolescence as a life stage

Nowhere in the stories that these preservice teachers told was the awareness of adolescence as a socially constructed life stage. While biology has long been cast as the villain in the dominant cultural narrative of adolescence, adolescence as a life stage emerged from a particular set of sociopolitical conditions. Yet, adolescence is generally regarded as a part of the "natural" life cycle that is biologically determined: "It’s a stressful time with hormones surging and all."

The concept of adolescence did not exist before the last 2 decades of the 19th century (Klein, 1990). As the industrial era advanced, it created a demand for more skilled workers who were not merely taking on the professions of their parents. Klein wrote:

Thus, formal education beyond the grade-school or apprenticeship level—theretofore a rare occurrence—was deemed necessary. Since society was, at that time, ill-equipped to enable young people to obtain more than a few years of education, yet another life stage had to be created to accommodate this need. This stage was adolescence. (p. 453)

Klein (1990) succinctly described the creation of adolescence based on social and economic factors in the following manner:

Basically, industrialization occurring during the later 1800s created the need for a stage of adolescence; the Depression created the legitimized opportunity for adolescence to become differentiated from childhood and adulthood; and the mass media influence/blitz of the 1950s crystallized this stage by giving it a reality all its own. (p. 456)

Similarly, Palladino (1996) attributed the arrival of adolescence as a life stage to the Depression. She wrote:

The Great Depression had finally pushed teenage experience out of the workplace and into the classroom. By 1936, 65 percent were high school students, the highest proportion to date. In the process, adolescence had become an age group and not just a wealthy social class, a shift that helped to create the idea of a separate, teenage generation. (p. 95)

She argued that it was this mass coming together in a school setting that solidified adolescence as a distinct age group. In other words, it was the school setting where most teenagers spent the majority of their day together that gave birth to adolescence. To keep adolescents out of the work force during the Depression, we needed to create a period of incompetence; ironically, the institution of schooling served that purpose. The economic conditions of the time created the need,
and thus the life stage was created. The emergence of adolescence as a life stage had as much to do with the economic conditions as it did with "raging hormones," the theory popularized by G. Stanley Hall.

In the United States, Hall became known as the father of adolescence with the publication of his 1904 two-volume set Adolescence. He conceptualized the period of adolescence as biologically determined, with little consideration for any social or cultural influences (Santrock, 1993, p. 13). With the arrival of adolescence came the creation of the first junior high schools in 1909. Everhart (1983) described two factors that explain the evolution of schooling to include junior high schools: the perceived need for student retention and the growing recognition of adolescence as a separate stage in the life cycle.

Hall's view of adolescence as a period of Sturm und Drang ("storm and stress") characterized as "a turbulent time charged with conflict and mood swings" (Santrock, 1993) persists, with hormonal factors accounting for the marked fluctuations in adolescent behaviors (Brooks-Gunn & Reiter, 1990). Coleman's (1961) landmark study in the 1950s grew out of this storm-and-stress model and led to a construction of adolescence as a subculture sharply distinct from adult culture. Unlike other "cultures," adolescence is denied diversity. A homogeneity appears to drive the discourse surrounding adolescence. Early research on aberrant behavior generalized that stress during adolescence was a sign of normality. Such studies, it should be noted, drew exclusively on male participants.

Often, understanding of the historic, economic, social, and cultural complexities that shape the lives of adolescents disappears. Biology prevails as the villain in the cultural narrative to maintain the life stage as a period of incompetence. But it was the economic conditions rather than biological forces that necessitated the creation of this period of incompetence. "Out of control" as one identifying trait of this period of life serves to solidify the period as a period of incompetence. It is not by accident that hormonal surgings are the markers for arrival into adolescence. The mind/body dichotomy so prevalent in the narrative construction of adolescence serves to justify the need to keep adolescents in school, under control, and out of the work force. We needed a period of incompetence, and so we created adolescence. A holding facility was needed; junior high schools were created.

Recent scholarship that problematizes many commonly held assumptions about adolescence (Feldman & Elliott, 1990; Fidler, 1997; Fine & Macpherson, 1993; Takanishi, 1993), has not reached the larger culture, and rigid assumptions of this period appear to have hardened into "truths," which circulate about in the stories we tell. I turn now to those stories.

**Narratives of middle schoolers**

With the onset of puberty, nice, well-behaved children suddenly became out of control, the stories tell us. Hormones are the villains in these tales. Only time will save the early adolescent who cannot restrain the biological turmoil that has taken over like an alien body snatcher. Biology cannot be overpowered.

The predominant story that I heard about teaching middle school students cast the middle schooler as either an uncivilized beast or as a disembodied hormonal surge. In interviews and classroom discussions, preservice teachers identified the dominant cultural traits of adolescents as driven by hormones, devoid of intellectual curiosity, rebellious, and resistant to authority. I heard such comments as, "raging hormones," "a bundle of quivering hormones," and "They're wired to go off." Adolescents were constructed as mindless entities, as detached hormones tied to uncontrollable bodies that reject the existence of intellectual capabilities.

The mind/body opposition is nowhere more prevalent than in the construction of the adolescent.
Biological functions were thought to govern their social and intellectual capacities. One student reported, "They are just a bundle of quivering hormones, you can't read anything that even hints of romance." In addition to hormonal metaphors, early adolescents between the ages of 12 and 15 were regularly described as squirrels, monkeys, and horses. Stripped of context and culture, adolescents were constructed as void of "all ability to reason."

If one accepts this narrative, what positions become available to teacher and student? A consequence of such a severe and rigid story line is that the adolescent is cast as a character who has "lost all ability to reason." The student has lost intellectual capacities for a period of time, the middle school curricula become empty exercises, and the teacher is rendered powerless.

The term adolescent created a narrative filter that deflected attention away from viewing the complexities of the experiences of any individual. Adolescence as a life stage created a particular narrative construction ("Nothing but a bundle of raging hormones") into which all students between the ages of 12 and 15 were force-fit. How do such metaphors work? Burke (1990) explained how language works like different colored photographic lenses, creating filters that draw our attention toward and away from versions of reality. The dominant metaphors of early adolescents created such filters, filters that (a) denied diversity, (b) neglected personal history, and (c) disregarded observations. In what follows, I provide examples of each.

**Metaphoric filters deny diversity**
The adolescents who populated these stories were most often characterized as "traveling in packs." Stories generally began, "You know how adolescents are." One young woman's first field observation included, "There was a herd of girls heading right for me." Such stories of the collective early adolescent deny diversity. Most often characterized as a group, early adolescents were clearly cast as nonindividuals. Some of my preservice teachers even commented on the similarity of dress and hair styles, causing them difficulty in telling individuals apart physically.

Perceived as a group, the early adolescents who populate these stories seemed to be constructed without regard to race, class, or gender. Metaphors of packs and herds further denied an adolescent's experiential background beyond race, class, and gender. This created an indefutable image of a homogeneous adolescent.

**Metaphoric filters neglect personal history**
None of the preservice teachers whom I interviewed questioned the homogeneity of adolescence even when faced with multiple conflicting images. "I wasn't typical" was the most common beginning when my research assistant pushed preservice teachers to discuss their own junior high experience. "I wasn't typical" allowed a way into these cultural narratives without disrupting the incontestable icon. Yet, preservice teachers had multiple narratives that contradicted the singular adolescent image. Students reported, "Well, I'm not your typical teen because I liked to read," "I wasn't typical because my mom and I were always very close," "You can't use me as an example because I was very quiet and shy," and "I guess I must have been a late bloomer because I wasn't interested in boys."

Preservice teachers disregarded their own autobiography in their rigid adherence to the dominant cultural construction. For many of the preservice teachers, middle school experience had been only 6 or 7 years ago; yet, the invented adolescent rather than their own life experience seemed to govern views of the middle school classroom. One preservice teacher reported, for example, "Well, I loved to read, but kids today won't read anything." Another commented, "I was a serious student, but you can't expect much from kids today. They just aren't interested in anything except one thing."

The invented adolescent, it seems, sets a standard by which to measure one's own lived
experience. Although Britzman (1986) emphasized the importance of examining one’s institutional biography, students’ recollections of their own lived experiences did little to shatter the predominant view of adolescence as a monolithic stage. Students spoke of their inability or refusal to meet the rigid standards of “normal” adolescent behavior. Presenting the self as the exception to the normalized view of the imagined adolescent was often conveyed with pride (“I didn’t have time for all of that adolescent crap”) or embarrassment (“I guess I must have been kind of a nerd because I was a reader”). These preservice teachers did not confront competing images of their own lived experience and of the herd.

All characterized themselves as “the exception and the norm.” Often, students presented themselves as the exceptions to the dominant image: “I wasn’t your typical kid.” At other times, these same students seemed to recast their personal stories to match the cultural construction of “normal” adolescent behavior, re-creating their histories as normal adolescents. For example, the student who reported that she was not typical because she liked to read also characterized herself as normal because she enjoyed playing “sink the sub,” a school-based game in which students tried to embarrass and humiliate a substitute teacher. Her presentation of self as a “normal teenager” because she had indeed rebelled by defying the institutional expectations to respect a substitute teacher, stands in contrast to other parts of her autobiography: “I wasn’t typical because I was a reader.” Even when faced with a personal life history that refuted assumptions of the normal adolescent, preservice teachers did little to question the construction of adolescence as a monolithic life stage.

Metaphoric filters disregard observations
The dominant image was so persuasive that it filtered observations away from accepting the multiple ways that middle school students interact with teachers, texts, and one another. When reporting on classroom observations, these preservice teachers kept the dominant cultural narrative as a backdrop. Preservice teachers measured themselves and their students against the singular standard. When their actions matched, they described the actions as “normal” and “typical.” When actions did not match, rather than treat the assumptions as problematic, these preservice teachers described the behaviors as “extraordinary” and “amazing.” After a classroom visit, for example, one student reported with amazement that seventh-grade students were “actually engaged in discussion about a novel. They were like completely into it.” Another asked her classmates, “Did you notice what some of those kids were reading? I couldn’t believe it. One actually had a copy of The Bluest Eye. Do you believe that?” Multiple observations of students engaging with texts in productive ways were held up as quite remarkable exceptions: “I couldn’t believe those kids today. They were so into it.” Active engagement with a text often surprised these preservice teachers who characterized such practices as, “not your normal middle school behavior.”

Here, as in the retellings of their own experiences as early adolescents, preservice teachers cast the dominant cultural narrative as the singular standard for behavior. When observations matched the standard, these preservice teachers characterized the action as typical. Regardless of the number of counterexamples, when particular behaviors did not fit the standard, they were regarded as quite exceptional.

The maintenance of adolescence as a period of incompetence denied one’s lived experience and disregarded direct observations. Characterized as driven by hormones and devoid of intellectual curiosity, the invented adolescent becomes an indisputable image, a much more powerful representation than one’s own experiences. The unified construction was not interrogated. This unexamined construction of the adolescent, of course, also ignored how the teacher was positioned and how such constructions influenced what could be taught.

Who they can and cannot be: Domesticating adolescents
The maintenance of adolescence as a period of incompetence governed classroom practices. Such narratives defined and limited social interactions in the classroom. Expectations of middle school students were reductive: "They are totally unleashed." When a group of students was viewed as a pack of wild animals, the role of the teacher was thus limited to "bridling that energy." The function of schooling was reduced to domesticating them. If we simply look at the list of metaphors collected in the stories these preservice teachers told, a middle school teaching position is hardly attractive ("Herdl 'em," "Rein them in," "Corral," and "Tether" emerged as the central tasks of the teacher), and neither is it surprising then that the preservice teachers wanted to develop classroom management plans rather than challenging literacy lessons.

This monolithic construction of adolescence legitimizes a focus on classroom management plans severed from content. The word energy appeared repeatedly in interviews and classroom discussions: "They have too much energy," "You'll have to harness that energy." Energy levels for early adolescents were always perceived to be extremely high and were always cast as negative. High energy levels (something one might think would hold promise for an engaging literacy classroom) were perceived to be obstacles rather than opportunity. The focus was on controlling energy levels rather than tapping them.

From their perspective, these preservice teachers reduced the teacher's position to controlling those surges of energy and helping students gain comfort during this stress-ridden time. In every interview, preservice teachers characterized the responsibility of the middle school teacher as providing control. In none of the interviews was intellectual capacity or curiosity mentioned. None of the preservice teachers mentioned subject matter except in one comment: "I'll learn more about control and less about content." Even those preservice teachers who chose teaching at the middle level reported that providing comfort was their primary goal ("I think at this age, the teacher's main job is to make kids feel comfortable").

Tethering these savage beasts was perceived to be beyond the abilities of all but the most experienced teachers. To save them from their own self-destruction or to rescue them from perils was nearly beyond all possibilities. The hero in these stories was the teacher who could keep students "in line" and "on track." My agenda to teach students to construct engaging literacy lessons clashed directly with preservice teachers' perceived needs for the middle school course. Because early adolescents were characterized as void of intellectual capabilities, my duty as teacher educator for the middle school years was perceived to be to impart some secrets of control and dole out classroom management strategies that would allow the student teacher to realize the position of hero within the story rather than that of comic buffoon.

Immersed in the cultural discourses, these preservice teachers embraced the images and expectations available within the dominant narrative. Given all of this, it is hardly surprising that junior highs are most commonly viewed as wastelands or holding pens. These preservice teachers drew from the larger cultural context to develop a teacherly position; so when they began working with early adolescents in the school context, the narratives of adolescence filtered what could and could not be seen.

**Reading our stories: Implications for curriculum**

The stereotyped image of the early adolescent was so pervasive that when I discussed this singular image with others, the most common reaction was "Well, it's true." "Raging hormones" came up in virtually every conversation I have had about early adolescents. While adolescence as a distinct stage of life emerged for social and economic reasons, such reasons have long been forgotten or perhaps are hidden by the stories we tell. How might one break through such pervasive stereotypes? How might beliefs about the positions of the teacher and student be changed through the teacher preparation program?
More, earlier, and longer field experiences are generally regarded as sound pedagogical approaches for a teacher education program. Teaching English in Middle School/Junior High had a practicum component at my institution. Yet, preservice teachers' observations were predominately whole-classroom observations, which did little to disrupt notions of "the pack." Clearly, this component did little to challenge the dominant views of middle school students. In fact, the field experience most often reinforced the commonly held views of "normal" adolescent behavior. Disruptive behaviors of two or three students were most often generalized to an entire class: "You know how junior high kids are. They act like squirrels." On the other hand, active engagement was not generalized. Preservice teachers in this study came back armed with practical suggestions for classroom management, lists of "safe" novels and short stories to teach, and more stories of adolescence that reinforced the confined range of "normal" adolescent behaviors.

Even when placed with the most competent middle school teachers, preservice teachers came away with a very narrow view of effective pedagogical approaches. The structure of the school day with limited time to meet for extended periods of time with their mentor teachers left preservice teachers to their own devices to examine what "worked in my classroom." Preservice teachers went looking for effective methods of control and found them.

Examining one's autobiography as a middle schooler is an important component. Yet, clearly this alone is not enough to subvert such deeply embedded beliefs. Left to their own devices, preservice teachers have little more than a set of prepackaged expectations and ways of interpreting supplied by our culture. It is no simple task to disrupt this story line.

How might beliefs about the positions of teacher and student be changed through the teacher preparation program? We must examine how we come to "read" pedagogical practices and student behaviors. Our cultural stories so naturalize particular ways of thinking and seeing that we are unable to confront the disjunctures between the lived experience and our cultural narratives of adolescence without direct and repeated intervention. The lived experience too is shaped by the available discourse. Yet we are unable to see an individual's story as constructed and constrained by the dominant discourses. The individual's narrative is not a random individual history, but constituted by social and collective histories.

I advocate that we explore how our assumptions of adolescence ("with raging hormones and all") and of pedagogical competence ("You can't read anything that even hints of romance") serve to define who and where we are within the institution of schooling. While control emerged in virtually every conversation about teaching in the middle school, the dominant narrative of adolescence denies the social conditions of schooling and renders invisible the multiple relations of power operating within it. Unquestioned, the narratives of adolescence deny the cultural practices in operation that maintain the circulation of these stories.

**Redefining literacy in teacher preparation courses**

As a teacher educator, I advocate explicitly examining our packages of expectations, our story inventories. Learning to read these stories of adolescence as cultural constructions can serve to open up literacy instruction in the school. It can help us to change our beliefs about the narratives of teaching. I am suggesting that we expand what counts as "reading instruction." We must redefine literacy instruction to include teaching children to read for assumptions, attitudes, and values implicit in all texts. We must provide opportunities and models for examining the social, historical, and cultural constructions of particular positions available--in texts, classrooms, and the larger culture. Cherland (1994) wrote

What needs to be modelled for children is a critical stance that grows out of the teacher's awareness of the influence of both language and culture upon our lives. This critical stance ought then to inform the study of literature. The foundation of this critical stance is the teacher's
realization both that texts are constructed in ways which represent certain vested interests, and that readers are positioned, by cultural discourses of race and class and gender, to read and respond in certain ways. (p. 211)

Similarly, Walkerdine (1990) argued

The text has to be actively read in order to engage with the way in which images and other signs, verbal and non-verbal, are constructed. In this sense, then, we can say that texts do not simply distort or bias a reality that exists only outside the pages of books—in the "real world"—but rather that those practices are real, and in their construction of meanings create places for identification, construct subject-positions in the text itself. So we need not point to some untainted reality outside the text, but should examine instead how those practices within the text itself have relational effects that define who and where we are. (p. 89)

Literacy instruction then must shift to focus on, in Walkerdine's words, how texts "create places for identification." Cherland's (1994) call to model a critical stance depends upon teachers' awareness of the influence of both language and culture upon their lives. This demands a transformation of the content of university courses in preparing literacy teachers. Since literacy is enmeshed within sociocultural webs, I am advocating a teacher preparation program that calls for what Moss (1995) referred to as an "ethnography of reading." Moss advocated a pedagogical approach that calls for an ethnography of reading that would replace a personal response to reading and "stress the role diverse social and cultural practices play in shaping how texts get read" (p. 163).

In teacher education programs, communicative competence is most often taken as an unexamined given. Lewis (1997) argued

Classroom context, nested within broader social networks, is created through a set of discourses and rituals promoted by the classroom teacher but performed in various ways by all members of the class. Rituals, such as read-aloud time, served as an enactment of life in the classroom, with particular emphasis on what it meant to have social and interpretive competence. (p. 196)

Lewis goes on to argue for a pedagogy that "keys into the intersecting network of social relations within and beyond the classroom, one that makes available to students new roles to take up, new ways of constructing a self in the classroom culture" (p. 200). This presents a new agenda for teacher education programs. As teacher educators, we must provide opportunities and models for examining what counts as social and interpretive competence in our language arts programs. Teacher educators must model a critical stance that deepens preservice teachers' understandings of the influence of both language and culture upon their lives and their classrooms.

Courses that prepare students to teach English in middle school must examine the sets of discourses and rituals available to classroom teachers. What constructions preservice teachers bring to their education program become the centerpiece of the course. Rather than leave the "texts" of adolescence unexamined, we need to teach preservice teachers to explore how such texts constrain classroom practices and how such texts construct a self in the classroom culture.

We must examine the discursive positioning at work with teachers and texts. I want preservice teachers, especially literacy teachers, to become aware of the ways in which they are controlled by the language, to see that the language in fact controls them as much as they control the language. Not only will this open up possibilities in working with adolescents, but perhaps more important this will serve them as language teachers, providing them with strategies to make discourses visible to themselves and their students.

In search of the typical teen: Disrupting the discourse
The dominant discourse of adolescence constructed it as a period of incompetence, which constrains who and where we are in the middle school. A teacher education program must provide ways to view and revise a discourse that positions students as incompetent. Since this study was conducted, I have designed specific activities to help preservice teachers uncover the discourses of adolescence and then to disrupt the monolithic image of the invented adolescent. In addition to examining their individual institutional biographies as middle schoolers, students read about the emergence of adolescence as a life stage (e.g., see documentation of the historical emergence of adolescence in Klein, 1990; Santrock 1993; and the shifting conceptions of adolescence in contemporary society in Schlegel & Barry, 1991; Takanishi, 1993).

Preservice teachers are often surprised to learn that adolescence as a life stage did not exist before the turn of the century. Such readings may lead students to an understanding of the social, historical, and economic circumstances that surround the emergence of adolescence as a life stage. Reading about the emergence of adolescence as a life stage creates a tiny tear in the seamless packaging of the dominant cultural narratives of adolescence.

Second, I ask students to work closely with individuals within this age group. The purpose of these projects is to emphasize marked differences in terms of race, class, gender, or sexual orientation. They are designed to help preservice teachers gain deeper understanding of the historic, economic, social, and cultural complexities that shape the lives of adolescents and to make visible that adolescent experience is shaped in many ways by family, peer, and institutional influence. In other words, they are designed to disrupt the homogeneity that surrounds adolescence and to contextualize adolescent experience. It is my intent to assist students in gaining understandings of diverse experiences. For example, my students tutor at a local middle school.

In addition, students in this course are required to create an ethnographic portrait of a "typical" middle schooler. I encourage preservice teachers to observe early adolescents in an induced natural context. This often occurs by the university student taking the middle schooler to a favorite hang-out, such as a video arcade, gym, park, or home. Preservice teachers then conduct a series of interviews with a "typical" adolescent in and outside the school context. The ethnographic portraits created by this assignment are then analyzed by the entire class to look for common elements of adolescent behaviors. I guide students to look at how their language choices privilege particular behaviors of the adolescents whom they observed. Together, we locate within their papers what I call a "language of exceptionality" used to gloss over diversity, and we discuss how particular language choices reinforce taken-for-granted assumptions of adolescence. We locate specific words and phrases that treat the assumptions of adolescence as unproblematic (i.e., exceptional, typical, normal). Students compile a concrete inventory in which they make a list of identifying characteristics from their stories and a second list from their lived experiences. Left to their own devices, preservice teachers will not be able to unpack the prepackaged expectations of working with early adolescents. The goal of this exercise is to make visible the discourses from which they draw.

In the first set of interviews, no preservice teacher discussed effective pedagogy. Fear and displeasure characterized the students' assumptions about working with middle schoolers: "I'm afraid they may be too obnoxious. I'm also worried about the kinds of materials I may have to teach." No preservice teachers mentioned a novel they had read as an early adolescent or one they might teach. Not one characterized middle schoolers as readers, writers, or thinkers. There simply was no "content" conversation circulating in the university classroom or in the field-based experience. In the end, no longer focusing their attention exclusively on control, these preservice teachers began to understand the interrelationship between social and cognitive development. They began talking about appropriate material selections and teaching strategies. Conversations that began "You can't read anything that even hints of romance" shifted to how you might engage in a discussion of how romance stories position adolescents.
Clearly, this is only a beginning. At the end of the term, students still held to a somewhat narrow view of normal adolescent behaviors. The discursive filters remain powerful. My goal in revising this course was to deepen understanding of the sociohistorical constructs of this particular life stage and in turn to disrupt the taken-for-granted pedagogical approach that follows from it. It is no simple task, disrupting this story line. Immersed in a rigid set of beliefs, one can only begin to revise this story. Even when biases and misconceptions are confronted explicitly, preservice teachers, who are continually bathed in a particular set of cultural norms for adolescents, will face difficulty integrating disjunctions into the fullest possible understanding.

Two students' end-of-term comments reveal how working with individual middle schoolers and directly confronting the assumptions surrounding early adolescence modified their views of teaching for "this age group." One wrote

I'll admit I was a little disappointed when I found out that I was student teaching for eighth graders, but now I'm looking forward to it. By talking and hanging out with Amanda, I've noticed how vulnerable this age group is. They are on the verge of becoming men and women, and it is a confusing age. I've also noticed how fun this age group is. Amanda and her friends really are neat people. I never even saw them as people! But Amanda taught me a lot. She's sensitive and caring and thinks a lot about a lot of things. This age group may not be so bad after all.

Another reported, "I know what you mean about the language and all, but still they're just way too squirrely for me."

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