(Post)modern Teachers' Constructivist Cosmopolitan Selves
Making Sense of Soul

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THE IDEA for this exploration came from a play with ideas that began with notions of the post-modern conditions of fragmentism as they relate to the multiple roles of teachers (to care, teach, diagnose, advocate) and moved to post-modern critiques of these aspects of teaching lives (disequilibrium/relationality, learning/knowing, pathology/normality, inclusion/exclusion). These thoughts arose out of my own reflections of my life as a "teacher" of young people and as an Assistant Professor of Early Childhood Education. As I explored these ideas further and considered the gritty reality of my own personal life, what came to the surface was a metaphor of giving. As a mother and a teacher, I identify with an ethic of care, one related to "giving" (Noddings, 2002). In a very structuralist sense, this implies that someone, (real or imagined) is taking or at least asking for these things. As a followed my thoughts about the issue, discursion led me to feel that given all of the directions that I feel pulled in, "something's got to give."

The discourse of multiple responsibilities and stress related to professional and personal lives of teachers is one I hear consistently in my role as a course facilitator in a College of Education. I had been inclined to think of this role strain as a feminist issue related to structures of power which impact our lives (Hochschild, 1997) and wanted to understand how teachers think of this in terms of their identities. During open ended discussions in graduate courses, teachers often discuss the (dis)continuities of their personal/professional roles, the discrepancies between their beliefs about how to teach/care for young people and what is suggested or demanded by standards of best practices (such as the National Association for the Education of Young Children's recommendations for Developmentally Appropriate Practices), and State policies (such as No Child Left Behind). These discussions intersect with my reading of Popkowitz and Bloch's (2001), notion of the "constructivism of the new cosmopolitan self," which is "an amalgamation of different discourses and technologies directed to develop the freedom of the individual; a set of distinctions, divisions, and rules for action and participation" (p. 102).

I struggled with these concepts. I wanted to understand how a cosmopolitan self might intersect with and possibly contribute to the discourses of reform. I wanted to think more about how "empowerment" might possibly inhibit teachers. I hypothesized that these issues related to our daily lives and responsibilities as teachers who are women. I wanted to ask teachers

themselves to share the stories of their own constructivist, cosmopolitan selves so that we could think this through.

During the summer of 2004, while working with a group of undergraduate students who were studying abroad in England, I was also facilitating a Master's course on Social Justice in Early Childhood Education using an online discussion forum. With the help of electronic communication technology, I was simultaneously two places at one time. The students who were working on the social justice course were all women who have been or are currently working as professional educators of young children (ages three to eight). These teachers posted weekly reflections about course readings and their independent projects on social justice issues. Through weekly writing prompts, the teachers were encouraged to think about their own experiences as well as multiple critical viewpoints.

The course began with an exploration of critical theories/stances rooted in linguistics (for example, Barthes, 1988; Derrida, 1978; Saussure, 1986) as well as education (Ayers, 1998; Freire, 1970, 1973; Greene, 1998; Kalven, 1998; Kincheloe, 1993; McLaren, 2000; Paley, 1979, 1992; Parker, 2003; Pokalow, 2000) and childhood studies (James, Jenks, & Prout, 1998; Jipson, 2000; Klug, 2002). Before I left for England, the Master's students and I met three times in person to get the course started. During the first class meeting, we each contributed a "sign" of ourselves taken from our purses/backpacks and placed within a clear plastic container for all to see. After an item was placed in the container by each of the students, we discussed what, how, and why the items signified our "selves" at this moment. We proceeded to talk about what was signified by the object as well as what was signified by the choice to contribute a specific object over others (what is said or signified by all of the choices we did not make). Thus, we began to explore critical perspectives of ourselves and the impact of these perspectives on our identities and our approaches to social justice issues.

To meet course objectives, each student took up an independent project related to a social justice topic of their choice. They researched the scope of the problem, such as who it affected, and the current political discourses related to the issue. They took note of the presence (or lack of presence) of the issue in "the arts," such as fine arts, drama, and music, and developed a personal plan of action related to the topic. There were a range of issues that students examined such as: multicultural education, homelessness, poverty, suicide, hunger, child abuse, and media literacy. Each week the students would post an update for all of the other students to read on a web forum.

The course culminated in a final reflective piece which provoked students to consider the metaphor of give and take as well as fragmentation in our multiple roles as teachers and women. Their responses were posted to the online forum, and I asked for the students' permission to use these reflections as the data for this study, which was granted by all 19 students. The specific questions came under the title of "Your constructivist/cosmopolitan self: Everyone wants a take/something's got to give." The questions that students were asked to write about were:

- How is your life "fragmented"? What do you think this fragmentation has to do with the feminine nature of our work as teachers? How does this affect the way you work? How does it affect your social participation?
- How do you engage with standards/reforms- how do they affect the way you would like to do things as a teacher, especially with regard to the recommendations you have made in your course project?

- How do you feel about Developmentally Appropriate Practices (DAP) and other "Best Practices"? How do they affect the way you do things as a teacher? What are your critiques?
- What did you think of when you read the title of the assignment? How does it relate to issues of social justice?

Reading the Cosmopolitan Self

Several weeks after the Social Justice course was over, and I had returned from England, I spent time reading the teachers' narratives from a critical perspective. I cut and pasted each of the narratives into a word document file (resulting in 56 pages of double-spaced text). I recorded my personal responses to their texts and noted excerpts of the writing that resonated with my reading of Popkewitz and Bloch (2001). I thought about what was written and what was implied by what was not written in the teachers' and my narratives. As the researcher, I followed the text and made connections with philosophies and ideas that intersected with my own experience. A clear connection came with my encounters with Bahktin (i.e., Bahktin, Holquist, & Emerson, 1981) and the notion of dialogism. I began to think of the research process as a dialogic analysis—a piecing together of shared understandings with my own. What emerged was a collective story of these teachers' senses of self, situated within the context of the course on social justice, and prompted by my provocations for them to consider, write about, and share their thoughts on fragmentation, femininity, and the political nature of their work as teachers.

My reading of the collective story, via the voices/texts of the teachers who were participants in this course and my own responses as the course facilitator/researcher, is the story I share in this analysis. This story works to highlight the salient points of the collective story as they relate to my own interpretation and struggle to understand the concept of teachers "cosmopolitan selves." As such, this sharing is a starting point in a dialogue, providing points to consider rather than points of fact or resolution.

The Story

The teachers wrote eloquently about their sense of femininity and the connection between being a woman and work as a teacher of young people. Teachers' comments related to an ethic of care, as well as socially constructed ideas about teaching as women's work. Teachers consistently wrote about our ability to give:

> Women are more often seen as the nurturers. Our bodies are able to give birth to new life, not only physical birth but birth to new ideas by communicating through feelings which is a feminine quality. As a teacher I constantly use the feminine nature in my work. I am the nurse when a child falls at recess. I am the social worker between home and school. I am the mediator when I help negotiate friendships between my students. I am the surrogate mom when a child needs a hug. I am the she-wolf protecting her young at all costs. (Br[i])

In this passage we read about the gaze of a societal eye: that women are "seen" as nurtures. She speaks of the body and the life giving qualities that are implied in our femininity. She concludes with a powerful image of a she-wolf, giving protection "at all costs." We might then ask, what is the cost of feminine giving? Playing with the words, "what gives?" when we are

always (expected to) be giving? Perhaps what gives/what is compromised is our own authored sense of self:

> Indeed, it's a challenge sometimes to even *hear* our own thoughts! I often feel as if someone always needs something from me, the cliché of the woman feeling pulled from all sides. (JM)

Her words evoke a sense of hearing. While she writes of hearing her own thoughts, I wonder if a person cannot hear her own thoughts, then how can others hear them? Are we both deafened and silenced by multiple demands? What is the source of the stifling silence?

As I looked to the students' writing for an answer, I found that they each discussed time as a factor in their lives.

> I have no time for myself. I am caught in trap of trying to strike a balance between family obligations and work related responsibilities. [MS]

Reading these narratives of temporality, I made a connection between time and the soul. It called to mind a quote by Emerson from the essay "The Over-Soul" (1841):

> The soul circumscribes all things. As I have said, it contradicts all experience. In like manner it abolishes time and space. The influence of the senses has, in most men, overpowered the mind to that degree, that the walls of time and space have come to look real and insurmountable; and to speak with levity of these limits is, in the world, the sign of insanity. Yet time and space are but inverse measures of the force of the soul. The spirit sports with time,—
>
> > "Can crowd eternity into an hour,
> > Or stretch an hour to eternity." (¶ 6)

If the soul can create space within time, then perhaps we ought to search for the substance of soul (at the risk of our own sanity). Popkewitz and Bloch (2001) assert that the soul is fabricated and embodied in the cosmopolitan self. I wondered how the soul could be fabricated. I questioned how it could exist in space. Popkewitz (2001) and Popkewitz and Bloch (2001) contend that the soul is a site for struggle, as we employ salvation narratives in political strategies. Further, Popkewitz and Bloch explain the gestural qualities of the self: "No longer bound to a sense of identity built through geographical location and face-to-face interactions, the liberal freedom inscribed an identity that could move among a more abstract, anonymous relations that characterized modernity" (p. 89).

Supporting the assertions of Popkewitz and Bloch (2001), references to physical or cultural geographies only appear in the writing of two teachers in this group. These two women mention more than one place as influencing their identities. For example, one teacher explained that she was tri-cultural, American, Puerto Rican, and Panamanian:

> As an adult, I continue to have the beliefs and practices I learned as a child. I approach life with the mind set of all three of my cultures, and they do continue to clash. Sometimes I do have trouble making a decision because my cultures move me in different directions. But they are all equally important. They are all the anchors of every

part of my life, including my dreams, morals, and goals. I must still balance and adjust them. (L)

In her narrative, we read of her feelings of passivity in relation to her cosmopolitanism. She notes that she is "moved" in different directions by three distinct cultures or locations. It is a movement not without labor: the cultures "clash" and they are her "anchors," perhaps she feels the nausea of the movement and she casts her cultures deep to keep her sense of self stabilized.

More often, teachers related their identity to multiple role demands that exist outside of a geographically defined space. The following is typical of the teachers descriptions of their work and family lives:

Making time for all [of my responsibilities/roles] and **fitting in some time** to take care of my body is a constant struggle everyday. My days consist of waking up (usually **late**), walking my dogs, **then rushing to** work with a coffee in my hand, about to spill. Then from **8:00 to 4:00** I am trying to teach, be a role model, and keep my boss happy. **After work,** I walk my dogs and play with them, then I either **go to** a graduate class, or I **go to** the gym to run and reduce some of my stress. **By the time I'm done** with those events, I have to walk my dogs again,   eat, and try to be the best daughter, sister, and friend by making phone calls and keeping in touch with those who are important to me. **By the time I am done with all of that,** I am about to pass out and **before I know it, it is another day and my fragmented life starts again.** (S)

I have added emphasis to illustrate her references to time and movement. She both makes time and fits time into her life. Her narrative shows movement and highlights the importance of her relationships. She/we seem to be governed by time.

Why is time such a pervasive concept in our lives? Philosophers from various traditions have taken up the implications and meanings of time (for example, Aveni, 1989; Bender & Wellbery, 1991; Benjamin, 1968; Bhabha, 1994; Cowan & Jackson, 2003; Forman & Sowton, 1989; Grosz, 1995; Kristeva, 1981; Levine, 1997; Pinar, 1988). These philosophers contribute to an understanding of the salience of time as a construct and a characteristic of human thought and experience. Adding to these theoretical understandings, what I am reading in the texts of these teachers is that we have a reliance on the concept of development as the basis for our fund of knowledge about children and the basis for our work. Development exists in time. We base our thinking on how children change over time, creating a temporal bias in the way we view ourselves, which in turn serves to govern our soul(s). Take for example, how this person explains the knowledge needed to be successful in her profession:

Teachers need to learn that children's development takes place over a continuum and that all children do not progress through the same stages at the same time. As a teacher, I strive to make learning meaningful so that my children see the connection between what they are doing in school and what they can do in the real world. (MS)

The notion of progress is mentioned, a characteristic of the modern. Linear developmental trajectories are held as a gold standard in the work we do as teachers, particularly for early childhood educators. With that in mind, how do teachers engage with reforms, standards, and "best practices" which afford us with a temporal disposition to our work? My reading of the

teachers' narratives brought forward a set of overlapping discourses: Reforms seen as an imposition from outside, best practices seen as an imposition from the inside, and best practices seen as a mediator between children and reforms. This teacher expresses her frustration with the impositions she feels are placed on teachers:

> Standards and reforms in education affect me because as a teacher, I am the one who is expected to implement the reforms and prove that they work; even if they don't. It seems those in power, those who make the decisions, don't always realize how their decisions are going to affect the children. As a teacher, we are constantly compromising our philosophies, standards, experiences, etc. to please those in charge. (E)

Why are we compromising our philosophies to please those in charge? Why do we not raise our voices in protest to what we view as levied against us? Have we not enough strength left, because we are working to reconcile our "cosmopolitan self"? What do we use to protect ourselves from standards? Typically, we employ other sets of standards. For example, in the field of Early Childhood Education we have Developmentally Appropriate Practices (DAP), which rely on a temporal understanding of how people grow, and carry with them the implication that there is an "end to the means". By employing the temporal bias of DAP, we welcome in the imposition from within. As Popkewitz and Bloch (2001) posit: "The construction of being makes resistance and revolt more distant and less plausible as it is the self's capacities and potentialities that are the site of perpetual intervention (see Boltanski 1993/1999; Rose, 1999)" (Popkewitz & Bloch, p. 106). Yet, despite the imposition, some teachers are using DAP as a mediator between children and state reforms:

> I believe that Developmentally Appropriate Practices (DAP) make sense and help children learn especially in today's high stakes testing society. I think that DAP is important because today's teachers feel the pressure to drill their children to prepare them for the tests that they are required to take. Children need meaningful experiences in which they are able to engage in learning activities that incorporate varied instructional strategies. (MS)

M's thoughts about DAP as the answer to the problems associated with the current high stakes testing environment begs the question, are there other tools we can use to support the rationale for wise practices? This is an issue of philosophy, and as such, philosophies with the most currency or those most aligned with the traditions of the ruling class seem to be the ones we look to. Rarely are philosophies such as DAP examined by practitioners in the field. In our time governed lives, where teachers are challenged by the demands of their cosmopolitan selves, we quickly grab the most accessible device to keep us afloat.

My purpose here is not to provide an argument against DAP, as thoughtful critiques are provided elsewhere in the reconceptualist tradition (see Diaz Soto & Swadener, 2002), but to better understand how teachers engage with it. I want to understand if/how the principles of DAP are examined by teachers so that as a teacher educator, I can facilitate critical thinking about the work of teaching and provide the conditions that will lead to a critical vigilance with regard to social justice issues.

I consider teaching to be a public profession, and as such, teachers need to participate in the decision making regarding their own work and the impact it has on the young people they work

with. We must be able to raise our voices and share our perspectives about the policies and practices which affect children. I use this belief to guide my work as a university teacher. In doing so, I am beginning to see my role in the construction of the teachers cosmopolitan selves, which "operates from self-interests and with the values of self-reliance and autonomy that are accomplished in plural communities and in a self-accounting of oneself as an ethical actor" (Popkewitz & Bloch, 2001, p. 104). As a teacher who is a researcher, am I contributing to the development of these students' cosmopolitan selves with my provocations? Am I just adding another layer of perpetual intervention by insisting teachers speak out on educational reforms while critiquing best practices? Am I just adding another demand? Upon reflection, I conclude that I am. As a teacher educator, I am contributing to the teachers' cosmopolitan selves. I am encouraging perpetual intervention. I am adding another demand. For now, it is a choice I make—a risk I take because I believe there is a hope for our voices to be raised and heard. But this hope and these voices begin with our own confidence in our selves as critical thinkers and advocates. How can we say what we feel if we are juggling so many demands, fighting against the constraints of time, and struggling with the expectations of our culture for us as women? How can our voices be heard if we are apprehensive about our roles as advocates? As this teacher commented:

> I worry that if I step up, I will over commit myself and not be able to live up to personal expectations that I have for giving to a cause. In addition, I am desperately fearful when it comes to speaking my mind. I am confident teaching a class of five and six year olds, but I lack all confidence when it comes to facing peers. These are both personal limitations that have prevented me from engaging in social action. (Kt)

This teacher describes advocacy efforts as a "stepping up," which implies that these efforts are located somewhere above where she is working now. She notes the apprehension about overcommital, which implies that there already exist multiple demands. Yet from the narrative we see the possibilities—that if only she could feel confident amongst peers, this barrier to her social action might be removed, and she can be free to navigate those "new territories of [the] individual [that] make resistance and revolt… more distant and less plausible" (Popkewitz and Bloch, 2001, p. 109).

Thoughts to Continue the Dialogue

The connections I am making as the researcher, the outside observer, who has an inside perspective as a teacher herself, are related to the essential qualities that these female teachers brought forward in their narratives. Their vision (and the gaze of the other)—how they see themselves and how they are seen as women who are teachers. Their voices (and their listening)—wanting to be heard but at times not even being able to hear themselves. Their balance (and disequilibrium)—while negotiating multiple demands in the context of time. Their resistance (and passivity)—to forces that exert pressure. Their fortitude (and exhaustion)—while enduring the wearing and tearing on the body and the mind. Their confidence (and self-doubt)—which fuels and extinguishes empowerment. Their subjectivities (and objectivities)—the choices they can and cannot make in their personal and professional lives. Are these the substance of a constructed soul? At our core, there appear to be pervasive intricacies of our temporal bias as teachers of young children. When we work toward a critical vigilance of the structures of power which impact our lives, we must remember that time is not (naturally) on our side.

NOTE

1. The letters that appear in brackets at the end of the block quotes represent the initials of the name or pseudonym selected by the course participants.

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