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Professional Musings on Professional Development: Teacher Development in A New Key

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As a profession, teaching is different from law, medicine, accounting, and architecture. Teaching is relational, imaginative, intellectual, and moral in ways that other professions are not. To support their students' rich understandings of their subjects (and their own lives), teachers seek curricular connections to human life and culture. Successful teaching builds on how we make meaning in our lives. This is not a simple process, however. Maxine Green discusses the challenges teachers face when trying to connect what they teach to a sense of humanity:

Teachers [who give up in the face of discomfort or danger] are declaring their preference to be teachers who choose to keep order and simply disseminate as many bits of knowledge as they can. This is quite different from the choice to create a situation in which knowledge can be sought and meanings pursued. It is quite different from the choice to institute the kind of dialogue that might move the young to pose their own worthwhile questions, to tell their own stories, to reach out in their being together to learn how to learn. And it may well be that the teachers who make such decisions are alienating themselves still more from what they think of as their personal reality (Greene, 1991, p. 11).

But how do teachers learn to teach in ways in which knowledge can be sought

and meanings pursued, in which the young can pose their own questions and tell their own stories, and in which we can reach out in our being together to learn together? In short, how do teachers learn to teach in ways that are relational, imaginative, intellectual, and moral?

Approaches to teacher development from before 1980 reflected a teacher training model and were prescriptive. These models promised a "teacher proof" curriculum (Lieberman, 1994). Their intent was often to promote a prescribed curriculum, such as the New Math (Sarason, 1983). More current approaches to teacher development often reflect more of a "professional model," and can be powerful catalysts to teachers' growth. But these too may fall short of promoting a uniquely personal, "animating vision" (Reid, 1993) within curriculum.

In Washington State, for example, individual districts use an array of professional development approaches, including cognitive coaching and focused workshops. One thing that they have in common is the alignment of their approaches to professional learning goals stated by the Office of Superintendent and Public Instruction (OSPI). On its website for "Teacher and Principal Quality," OSPI states that "it is our goal to align state and federal policy and practice related to the roles and responsibilities of Washington's teachers and paraeducators to help students succeed." The on-line information further mentions that the "Title II Part A program of ESEA's No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001 is

the cornerstone of the section.” It is this stated connection to NCLB that challenges how emergent or context-specific teachers’ learning questions can be. Sunderman and colleagues state that NCLB is built on the assumptions that “(1) external accountability and the imposition of sanctions will force schools to improve and motivate teachers to change their instructional practice...; and (2) that market mechanisms will lead to school improvement.” (Sunderman, et al., 2004, p. 12). As can be seen, there is the definite possibility that forms of teacher development linked to NCLB might be defined not by teacher’s own questions, but by external standards.

So again, how do teachers learn to teach in ways that are relational, imaginative, intellectual, and moral? Part of what it means to teach in this way is found in the concept of “adaptive expertise” (Bransford & Darling-Hammond, 2005). Teachers who are adaptive experts “are prepared for effective lifelong learning that allows them continuously to add to their knowledge and skills” (Bransford, Darling-Hammond, & LePage, 2005, p. 2). Adaptive experts develop a capacity for personal and professional growth in relation to the promotion of learning of their students. Teachers, for example, build, combine, and find synergy among their practical and theoretical knowledge of pedagogical content knowledge, student diversity, different ways of learning, moral dimensions of teaching and learning, and the connections between schools’ and students’ cultural funds of knowledge. Adaptive expertise, then, involves teacher agency, imagination, intelligence, and a strategic awareness of learning possibilities. Creativity, innovation, and self-knowledge support growth of adaptive expertise.

In this paper, I contend that a form of teacher development that has the potential to promote teachers’ relational, imaginative, intellectual, and moral dimensions is a teacher-generated, constructivist form of professional

development (Richardson, 1997). In this process, teachers’ questions, dilemmas, imaginings, innovations, and problems of practice can drive their professional growth (Sawyer, 2004). Constructivist approaches to teacher development can allow teachers situated opportunities to develop agency and imagination. On the personal level, teachers’ questions, dilemmas, imaginings, innovations, and problems of good practice can form the basis for their inquiry. This process can let us “cherish – and challenge – the human heart that is the source of good teaching” (Palmer, 1998), p. 3). And on the social level, the dialogic context helps teachers to challenge the “egg-crate” model of education (Lortie, 1975) they might find themselves in. In such a setting, a teacher might experience alienation and stagnation within a Balkanized school culture (Hargreaves, 1994). New teachers, often shocked by the “grim realities” of teaching, can experience “disappointment, cynicism/blame, denial/defense, burnout as martyrs, and the acceleration of further problems” (Kwo, 2004, p. 303). In contrast, collaborative and constructivist forms of teacher professional development hold the promise to help teachers challenge narcissistic views of teaching and to develop new perspectives (Wells, 1994).

Going Into the World: An Example of Teacher Generated and Constructivist Professional Development

Although few teachers would think of themselves as public intellectuals, in many ways they truly are. Regardless of teaching level, they intentionally make curriculum with their students in reference to the world in which they and their students live. In this way, curriculum becomes political. For example, every teacher takes a public stance to teach for tolerance of diversity, or not; to allow students to construct content, or not; and to promote international understanding, or not. These issues require an understanding of the world,

and one's position within it.

In the summer of 2004 I had the opportunity to begin to approach some of these issues when I applied for and was accepted to go to Mexico as part of a Rethinking Schools' trip. The purpose of the trip was to let 18 educators examine first-hand the impact of NAFTA on the lives of people living on both sides of the Mexican-American border. Working collaboratively, we engaged in a teacher-generated, constructivist form of development. I have to admit, though, that while I was interested in the impact of this experience on my practice, I was more interested in its impact on the practice of others. My personal questions were in the background, while my questions about the impact of this trip on others were in the foreground. That is, I was 20 percent participant and 80 percent observer. However, by the end of the first day, I was a participant, with observation and inquiry intertwined.

Over time, I raised these questions for myself in relation to this trip: How do issues related to NAFTA impact my curriculum? As a teacher educator, I could very easily say that there is no connection. I now know that this is not true. How do NAFTA issues impact my work with other teachers? How have NAFTA issues reconnected me to my own teaching and curriculum? And, how have NAFTA issues impacted how I think about how to teach children controversial and potentially painful topics?

In this paper I discuss some of the people we met on this trip: their struggles, victories, tragedies, and collective action. What I discuss is only a fraction of the people we met and cultural encounters we experienced. In the next section I will present the stories of some of the people that I met. As I tell their stories, I intentionally leave a commentary out, in order to let the reader form his or her own ideas. In the discussion section of the paper, I then explore the value of this trip to my own professional development and my thinking about curriculum.

Community Action: A Human Face on Migration

At the airport in San Diego I met approximately 17 other educators from around the United States. We got into two white vans and drove into downtown Tijuana. At some point in the trip, someone asked our tour guide, an artist, why she moved back to Tijuana from a legal residence in the US. She replied, "I missed the dust." This trip was led by Bill Bigelow and Linda Christensen of Rethinking Schools. While a short trip—less than a week—it was more powerful than any professional development initiative I have taken part in.

One of the first places we visited was Casa del Migrante (House of the Immigrant). Opened in 1992, Casa del Migrante is part of a network of 6 shelters in Mexico and Guatemala which were founded by an Italian order of priests whose mission is to serve "people on the move," including immigrants, refugees and other displaced persons. It offers 15 days of food and shelter, clothing, personal supplies, medical care, and human rights advice. There is room for 180 men. To date, the Casa has served 136,000 people. There is a similar shelter for women and children in the vicinity.

The Casa created a sense of humanity at the crossroads of migration, cultural displacement, and global change. The actual physical structure was basic and beautiful. A three-story building constructed around an inner courtyard, its walls were white-washed. Aqua-blue, wrought-iron railings lined the four inside walls of the upper floors, with baskets of colorful exotic flowers dropping over the sides. Often in the U.S., halfway houses are not fully integrated into or even accepted by their neighborhoods. The Casa, however, was embraced by its community. For the past 17 years 45 older women who live in the surrounding area each volunteered to work at the Casa one day a week. On their day, they talk to the men, most of whom have

just been deported from the United States, cook for them, and try to reconnect them to life in Mexico.

We had a spaghetti dinner there and talked informally with some of the residents. One of the men we met was Miguel. He had immigrated illegally to southern California about 15 years ago and had been working construction jobs during that time. He was recently apprehended in a border patrol sweep and deported. Knowledgeable and concerned about the role the United States was playing in international relations, he was on his way back home to Sinaloa, having decided “no more U.S. for me.” He was not optimistic about job prospects back home. The men we met described how vast numbers of people within their country are moving—being dislocated—from the agrarian south to the more industrial north. They mentioned how people are moving in hopes of simple survival and the possibility of giving their families a better life. However, they also mentioned how these immigrants within the country have often simply replaced the agrarian poverty of the south with the stultifying factory work, the exposure to industrial chemicals and waste, and the unexpected poverty of the free-trade zones of the north.

Later we went to another community house in an old residential neighborhood. It was part garage, part storehouse, and part art gallery. In a cinderblock room, an art show was in progress. A collective had been working on a miles-long installation in Tijuana along the Mexican side of the border. The artists had constructed colorful coffins, placed up-right and attached to the white-washed border wall. There was a crucifix on each of these coffins—which popped with saturated blues, pinks, oranges, reds, and yellows. There was also a name on each coffin of a person who had died trying to cross into the United States. I talked to some of the artists. They were articulate and positive in their outlook and asked what people in the U.S. thought about NAFTA. They told me about specific

examples of collective action they and their friends had taken in response to the impact of NAFTA on lives. In the next room, about 15 young people took part in a gay support group. I was somehow surprised to see this support group in Tijuana and felt compelled to ask myself why I was surprised.

One of the artists mentioned that we should visit Colonia Chilpancingo, a workers’ village located down the hill from a car-and-boat battery recycling plant. The plant was started in the 1970s by a businessman from San Diego. It was forced to close down in 1994. Over the years, his company had trucked thousands of used batteries from California. At the plant they would open the batteries to extract the lead, mold it into bricks, and ship it back to the U.S. In the process, they scattered up to 8,500 tons of carcinogenic battery toxins—arsenic, lead, cadmium, antimony—over the hillside. The toxins had seeped into the ground and flowed into the small stream running through the village. Once clean, this stream was thoroughly polluted. We saw two young children fishing on its bank. In times of flooding, the river would rise a foot or two and seep into houses. The villagers mentioned that the incidence of miscarriages and birth defects rose dramatically in the last decade the plant was open. Since then, many babies have been born with anencephaly, a fatal defect in which babies have little or no brain. Other children have developed cancer. This is not a story of despair, though. The people in the village, primarily the women, had organized themselves and took legal action against the plant and NAFTA. Their case eventually went to the Mexican Supreme Court, where they won an initial settlement of \$800,000. This amount is approximately one-tenth of the total amount needed to effectively clean up the site but they feel hopeful that they will ultimately return the land to its earlier clean condition.

Fernando: The Freedom March in the U.S.

Towards the end of our trip, our group had the opportunity to go to the office of the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC), located in a Latino neighborhood in San Diego. We had come to the AFSC to meet and talk with Fernando Suárez. Mr. Suárez is the father of a young man, Jesús Suárez, who joined the American military and was sent to Iraq. Jesús was killed in action in the spring of 2003. Mr. Suárez's story is unique and highly personal. His love of his family and the sacrifices they made to leave Mexico to live in American underscore the pain that he and his wife have experienced at the death of their son.

A number of years after leaving Mexico, Fernando and his family became legal immigrants. After graduating from high school, Jesús decided to join the U. S. Marine Corps, which he entered shortly after 9/11. Mr. Suárez mentioned that his son entered the military to support his community and country and to pursue the American dream. For Jesús as well as other poor people, it was essential to find funding that was specifically earmarked for college. Mr. Suárez mentioned that he believed that as many as 30% of enlistees join the service in hopes of finding funding for college. After doing research about this statistic, Mr. Suárez discovered that of this 30%, only 20% or fewer end up actually receive funding for college from the government and completing their education after having completed their military obligation.

At the end of his first year in the military, Jesús found that instead of the thousands of dollars he had expected to see in his military account, he had actually only deposited a couple of hundred dollars. Both Jesús and his father thought that there must have been some mistake, as his monthly basic pay was much higher than the amount in his account and he had not made any significant withdrawals. After considerable inquiry they discovered that much of Jesús' military salary went to automatic deductions

for personal supplies. He had had to pay for his clothing and weapons. And while Mr. Suárez had a sense of outrage about this expense, he was especially upset by the violation of his and his son's trust in not being expressly told of these deductions from the start.

Jesús was sent to Iraq where he experienced extreme distress in encountering death. Still, he completed his tour of duty honorably. Getting ready to return home to the States, he discovered that his tour was being extended. It was shortly after this time that he was killed.

In the year since the death of his son, Fernando and his wife have been trying to make sense of this event, a process which has greatly altered their lives. Before this event, Fernando had never given a public speech. In fact, he had a fear of public speaking and had never even imagined himself speaking to a group of strangers. He was not educated and did not even speak English. When he was asked to talk to a few people about his and his son's experience, he at first said no and had to be persuaded. As he mentioned it, he learned that people responded to his words and he himself felt more connected to people and humanity. He learned to speak English and continued his public speaking. To his surprise, his audience grew in size and diversity until he was addressing hundreds of people at a time at a range of events, from political rallies to school assemblies. And always, while he told people his story, people he met told him their stories. While Fernando may have begun public speaking as a form of therapy, his involvement had led to activism. Recently, Fernando has started the Guerrero Aztec Project, an organization dedicated to the promotion of peace and social justice.

Why Teacher Generated Professional Development?

The Rethinking Schools' trip to Tijuana and San Diego deeply underscored

the need to go beyond stereotypical views of people and examine how people see themselves and how they try to control their own destinies in the face of powerful historical currents and movements. In terms of my own growth as a teacher and a teacher-educator, the trip allowed me to surface a key question for my work: How have I internalized ways of thinking and understanding that are similar to those of the border patrol? In fact, how do I guard a version of the border patrol in my curriculum? To begin to approach this question, I found it helpful to try to unpack the colonial underpinnings of my work. One way to do this is to highlight images and aspects from the trip that seem counterintuitive and strange. What I found strange and in some ways hard to grasp is the level of agency and grassroots democracy we saw in Mexico. In the U.S., we don't expect the poor, the uneducated, and the homeless to play an active role in democratic processes. Someone else does that. We live in a culture of labels and stereotypes promising power or the lack thereof. In Mexico, in contrast, I found a vibrant grassroots culture of participatory democracy, art, protest, and community engagement. The Mexicans we met—many of them poor, uneducated, and homeless—all engaged in collective action. They considered themselves responsible in some way for the economic and cultural changes unfolding in their country, and they worked to bring about a greater degree of equality between the poor and the rich, the powerful and the disenfranchised. Life in the United States seems sanitized, controlled, and compartmentalized compared to what we found in Mexico.

On this trip we had formal opportunities to compare life in Mexico as we saw it and life in the U.S. We met in a large room in our motel in Tijuana to formally discuss the relationship between what we were wondering about and our views of our teaching. Many of us talked about how the new perspectives that we were being exposed to forced us to rethink how we

viewed our work. These new perspectives were destabilizing and undercut many of our assumptions about not only the moral and social context in which we teach, but even our "content." I began to ask myself how I could teach not from the established narrative of an event, but from its edges and margins. We talked on the trip about our wish to move away from an abstract and lecture-based curriculum to one that begins to capture the dilemmas, hopes, and meaning of real people, placed within a context of broad societal issues. We wish for our students to begin to empathize with the plight of others, as well as to find hope, compassion, and even agency through their resistance and successes in the face of adversity. On the trip, as we grappled with our own dilemmas and questions, a process we wish to model for our students as they work on complex and personally meaningful constructions of knowledge.

Working with each other in Mexico, we left our comfort zones to experience "outsider" knowledge and interpersonal meaning. At times the trip was exhausting and images began to blur. We got to experience firsthand a dialogic view of learning situated within real life experiences, challenges, collective action, and progress. This process brings to mind the words of the philosopher Bakhtin. Bakhtinian theory emphasizes a view of the self and identity as fluid, multi-layered, and contradictory (1981). As Holland and colleagues (1998) state, "People's representations of themselves in the stream of everyday life reveal a multitude of selves that are neither bounded, stable, perduring, nor impermeable" (p. 29). The recognition that individuals, including teachers, embody multiple and changing selves supports a dialogic view of meaning-making, one which places the individual into situational webs of often-contradictory interactions and meanings. A dialogic view of meaning and growth can, as Holland and colleagues say,

explicitly free us from the idea that we as a group or as individuals can

hold only one perspective at a time. Humans are...blessed by their dialogic nature - their tendency to encompass a number of views in virtual simultaneity and tension, regardless of their logical compatibility. (1998, p. 15)

Within this tension, "persons develop through and around the cultural forms by which they are identified, and identify themselves, in the context of their affiliation or disaffiliation with those associated with those forms and practices" (Holland, et al, 1998, p. 33). In short, as teachers from the United States, we were forced to challenge our prior knowledge of the impact of NAFTA on lives and our understandings of what that process meant to us as teachers. This process was aided by the frequent opportunities we had as a group to discuss our emerging understandings and confusions, relating them to our work and to our curriculum.

Conclusion

In this paper, I contend that teacher-generated, constructivist forms of professional development can contribute to how teachers understand and enact the relational, imaginative, intellectual, and moral dimensions of teaching. These dimensions contribute to teachers' roles as public intellectuals and to their charge of modeling connections between classroom curriculum and real life. Helping to bring curriculum alive, they are as important as more standardized and defined approaches to student and teacher learning. Furthermore, teacher-generated professional development promotes a professional stance in teachers, allowing them to define and study their own learning goals. As an illustrative example of a constructivist approach to teacher development, I described a Rethinking Schools' trip to Mexico. On this trip teachers together studied the impact of NAFTA on the lives of people along the border and generated real-world issues and dilemmas, around which we developed

curriculum. Some of these teachers were only able to attend this trip due to the financial support of their districts. Seeking to promote their teachers as professionals, other districts may consider ways that they too can fund their teachers' self-defined learning journeys at home or abroad.

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