

Training the always, already failing early childhood educator:

Some contradictions of the culture of expertise in early childhood teacher education

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Prologue

Sue's Story, Part 1

My first university teaching position was in the mid-eighties, at Truman State University, a mid-sized public university in Kirksville, Missouri. I was the lead teacher and assistant director of the campus laboratory preschool *and* I was an instructor in the Child and Family Development department. Like all new members of the university community, I had multiple opportunities to meet and interact with faculty, staff, and administrators across the campus. And, as is almost always the case when people meet for the first time, we talked about our work.

What I noticed in those interactions was remarkable. If I introduced myself to a fellow faculty member as an instructor in the Child and Family Development department, I was invited into discussions about our academic interests, the nature of our students, and so on. If, on the other hand, I introduced myself as the lead teacher at the Child Development Center, I was treated to the conversational equivalent of a dismissive pat on the head (that is, unless, my conversational partner wanted my advice on how to teach her three year-old to read or what to “do about” his child’s bedwetting). I was positioned as ‘less-than’.

Fast-forward fifteen years. I’m no longer a preschool teacher, but a full-fledged, Ph.D.-wielding, teacher educator at a mid-sized public university. I don’t receive metaphorical pats on the head any more when I talk with my colleagues across campus, but am, instead, positioned as an equal, as a fellow faculty member. It’s nice to not be patted on the head anymore...but lately I’ve been wondering: Have I become a head-patter myself?

Introduction

As have others of the reconceptualist bent, we have been concerned for some time about the multiple forces that perpetuate a culture of expertise in early childhood education: in the U.S., these include the notion of Developmentally Appropriate Practice, the National Association for the Education of Young Children's Guidelines for Early Childhood Teacher Preparation, the discourses in U.S. journals such as Young Children, and so on. Because of our concerns, we want to look critically at the discourses of expertise as a lens for examining our experiences as teacher educators. As we undertake this examination, we will attempt to make our struggles, discomfort, confusion, and ambiguity transparent. We also will try to be clear about our stances, the extant power differentials, and how we came to be where we are. Last, we will explain why we think that current notions of early childhood teacher training contradict the ideals of equity, liberation, and the development of human potential.

We will explore the contradictions of notions such as expert versus novice and training versus education as we consider our work as early childhood teacher educators. (Note: The work we do is broadly conceived here – we will use the terms “professional development” and “teacher education” interchangeably.) Professional development interactions – college and Child Development Associate classrooms, in-service sessions, etc. – are sites where multiple, often contradictory, discourses come together. These complexly overlapping discourses make available the possible positions we might, or might not, take up as we interact with others (Harré & van Langenhove, 1999).

To be positioned, to take up a position, is to be located in relations of power with others; power is not equally distributed within discourses. We will argue that our

positioning as teacher educators places us in the role of experts training novices when we work with pre- and in-service preschool teachers. With our position comes power; as persons perceived as having expertise, we also have more agency. Conversely, classroom teachers, especially those working in preschool settings, typically have little power and hence little agency. They are positioned, then, as recipients of our disseminated wisdom and socially sanctioned knowledge about how to “best” work with young children.

Even when we try to resist or interrupt this model, contest these meanings, many preschool teachers are so steeped in what Foucault labeled “expert discourses” (1980) that generate particular kinds of public policies re teaching and learning that they resist our attempts at interruption. They – and we – are used to the “modes of address” (Ellsworth, 1997) that position both groups in these ways. Positionings are always created within relationships of power and knowledge and that of early childhood educators vis-à-vis early childhood *teacher* educators is no different. However, as Harré and van Langenhove (1999) remind us, we can choose to accept or resist particular positionings; we are active agents in the construction of our subjectivity (Ryan, 1999).

Ellsworth’s notion of slippage, the “difference between who an address thinks its audience is and the who that audience members enact through their responses” (1997, p.37), helps us think about how spaces might be created wherein meanings and positionings are constantly contested and negotiated. However, while we can choose to affirm or resist particular discourses, our choices are always circumscribed by who we are and what experiences we have had.

Given the foregoing and our own experiences in varying situations where we were and are positioned as early childhood experts, we will look at ways we have tried to move

beyond this model by metaphorically crossing the border into a place where preschool teachers have power and can utilize agency. We will discuss some of the ways we have tried to interrupt the culture of expertise and work as allies sharing power and agency, as well as our ideas for continuing to move in this direction – for we have just begun this journey.

Ultimately we will argue for a deep and lasting critique of the culture of expertise – indeed we will trouble the very notion of “expert” – and a move toward a participatory, inclusive model wherein power is shared and knowledge is co-constructed and continually reassessed. As Dahlberg, Moss, and Pence (1999) have argued regarding children, we will contend that preschool teachers, too, be viewed as strong and rich in possibilities – and we can’t do that unless we resist the discourse of expertise.

Theoretical grounding

Our thinking is informed by the theoretical perspective that the discourses in which we are situated shape and also constrain the meanings we construct. Discourses can be thought of as “socially accepted association[s] among ways of using language, of thinking, and of acting” (Gee, 1992, p. 21). As such, discourses are semiotic domains, wherein meanings are constructed differently than in other, competing discourses (Barthes, 1972; Hicks, 1996; Ryan, 1999). What is considered valid knowledge, valid ways of knowing, and valid ways of being in the world varies within discourses. As we are socialized into discourse communities, we learn the ways of seeing and being made possible by the various discursive practices of those communities (Davies, 2000).

Professional development interactions are among the many places where these multiple, often contradictory, discourses come together, and where new, complex

discourses might be interactively enacted among participants (Dyson, 1997). In this dialogic process, people position others and are positioned themselves (Davies, 2000). Importantly to our discussion, a discourse may gain a dominant position over alternative discourses in the way it is strengthened and supported by credentialed individuals and prominent organizations (Pacini-Ketchabaw & Schechter, 2002). For example, here's how we perceive the differential positioning of "professional development" (us) providers and the teachers who are recipients of such "development" (them).

<u>Us</u>	<u>Them</u>
choice about topic	topic chosen for them
choice about process	process foisted upon them
knowledge producers	consumers of knowledge
competent	needy
evaluated by self, peers	evaluated by powerful others
inquiry	training
individual	group
providers	products
understanding	improved practice

These positions, we argue, are not neutral, but are constructed through interactions immersed within the dominant discourse of expertise.

What does it mean to take up a position, to be positioned? To be positioned, to take up a position, is to be located, and to locate our selves in relation to others within a particular discourse. Discursively constructed, positions shape our perspectives and the meanings we make. Unlike the static notion of role, subject positions are understood to be

fluid and dynamic. We take up different positions within different discourses (Davies, 2000). Further, because multiple discourses overlap in given contexts, multiple positionings are available within those contexts (Berghoff, 1997). How the participants in a particular situation interpret that situation determines, in large part, the discursive practices that are enacted, and thus the positionings that the participants might take up. Here, then, is a possible space for resistance, as we will discuss later.

Discourses embody relations of power (Foucault, 1977), and so the right to position others is not equally distributed within discourses (Harré & van Langenhove, 1999). Certain individuals are privileged to take up powerful subject positions, with the right to position others in particular ways (Davies, 2000). Within the dominant discursive practices of early childhood professional development, for example, “experts” typically take up positions of power, and their right to position teachers in particular ways is legitimated by their own positioning. The positions available to teachers are shaped and constrained, although not necessarily determined, by the ‘experts’. (Of course we ‘experts’ are positioned in particular ways by the discourse, too – while we may have more agency than most classroom teachers, we are also positioned by others including regulating agencies and institutions of higher learning.)

Ellsworth (1997) uses the notion of “mode of address” to examine this process. She writes, “Each time we address someone we take up a position within knowledge, power, and desire in relation to them and assign them to a position in relation to ourselves and a context” (p. 54). Both who we think we are, and whom we think those we are addressing are shape the modes of address we enact.

As it happens, however, “all modes of address miss their audiences in some way or another” (Ellsworth, 1997, p. 37): the one addressed “is *never* only or fully who the [text] thinks s/he is” (p. 37). And as a result, “the *difference* between who an address thinks its audience is and the who that audience members enact through their responses” (p. 37) creates spaces where meanings and positionings are constantly being contested and negotiated. Rather than being passively positioned by the modes of address embedded in particular discursive practices, individuals can return the address from that contested space created by what Ellsworth terms the “slippage” between the address and the one addressed. It is this *slippage* that creates the critical space for agency, for individuals to resist attempts to position them in particular ways.

Immersed as we are in multiple discourses, multiple (though often contradictory) positionings might be available to us (Davies, 2000). Crossing boundaries between discourses creates the possibility for acting agentically; for making choices about which discourses to enact, which positions to resist and which positions to take up. It is through such boundary crossings that we are able to take a stance, to position ourselves in particular ways in particular contexts (Berghoff, 1997). And although “discourse is encompassing” (p. 9), the more critically aware we are of the discourses in which we are immersed, the more able we are to make conscious choices about how we seek to position ourselves and others. Stance, then, is about “intentional positioning” (p. 17), about being the subject of one’s life, rather than an object.

Reconceiving Expertise

Perhaps the most fertile ground for the de-construction of extant power dynamics is the border that crosses over into the inner landscape of the one positioned as expert: *us*.

The dialectic of resistance requires us to recognize our privilege and acknowledge our power without flinching or re-naming it; this sort of inner work may be a valid and effective means of sabotaging some parts of the machinery even as we collect our monetary rewards from a different part of the same machine. For us the contradiction, and its resulting tension, makes for a very interesting borderland indeed.

Can we re-conceive of expertise as being developed in collaborative work rather something a select few bring to the table? To do so, we have to believe that knowledge is distributed in the early childhood community and does not reside solely in the heads of the “experts”, and we must acknowledge that our own beliefs are only one of many realities – all of which are valid. If the core of such belief is solid, the experience that flows there from will have a much better chance of leaving spaces for learners to move forward, creating their *own* paths to “best practices”.

Short of moving outside the structure of the sanctioning/regulating bodies and co-creating circles of teacher/learner/teacher/learner, this inner work may be a valid and effective means of interrupting some parts of the machinery. The dialectic of resistance requires us to not only interrogate our privilege and power, but also calls upon us to engage in a genuine struggle, fought at close quarters, with weapons of irony and integrity, consciousness and compassion, humility, courage, and faith. We present our stories, chosen because they represented different angles into doing “professional development” at different types of sites, as one possible point of entry into that site of struggle.

Lou’s story-

In the fall of 1999 I was hired by the Rochester City School District as an Instructor for two courses: Child Development Associate (CDA) I and CDA II. The subject matter of these courses was aligned with the Thirteen Functional Areas that have been identified by The Council for Early Childhood Professional Recognition as fundamental to achieving a baseline of competency in the field of Early Childhood Education. Candidates seeking the CDA credential had to successfully complete the 120 classroom hours of these courses.

By signing the contract I was immersing myself in a system with borders designed to reinforce separation and maintain positions of power. The nomenclature used (Workforce Preparation, Council for Professional Preparation) was intentional and significant. These borders were, for the most part, invisible. The gates and fences erected within the mind, but not imaginary; the guards and checkpoints disguised as teachers, texts and tests.

The CDA candidates were also immersed in this system. Working in the field of early childhood – some for less than a year, others for decades – they had received the message from those empowered to affect their paychecks that in order to move from the foothills of the non-professional to the summits of professionalism, they needed this credential. The CDA was a passport that permitted a border to be crossed. They were on a journey upward. I was a guide. That was the best of possible learning scenarios I could envision given the structure of the CDA system. I had optimism, enthusiasm, and a desire to help facilitate the genuine construction of meaningful knowledge in an atmosphere of safety, respect and equity.

I was, to be kind to myself, naïve. I failed to understand certain social and positional realities that altered the scenario and pushed the process into an even more distorted version of a learning experience than the constrained vision I had entertained at the outset. What were these realities?

I was male. I was white. I was middle class and credentialed. English was my first language. In my career I was positioned within a hierarchical system as a supervisor. I earned more money and had more perceived social standing than the CDA candidates. I was the beneficiary of linguistic, gender, race, and class privilege.

The learners were female. They were predominantly African-American and Latina. They were working-class and for some, English was a second language. They were members of an underpaid, undervalued workforce who were used to being positioned as supervisees. They experienced little, if any agency at their worksites. The socially constructed system that privileged me victimized them. The unspoken barriers erected by that system heavily influenced our ability to form a community of learning.

Employers who used the carrot of a pay increase and the stick of unemployment to cajole/coerce attendance sent the learners to the class. I know this because I asked. Without the prod of a supervisor, there would have been no class.

The message these women received about the learning experience told them, in part, that they were powerless and unimportant. The disrespect they experienced in their work life (Spanish-speaking employees forbidden to speak Spanish; preschool teachers seeking a Preschool CDA switched, mid-course, into Toddler classrooms; Assistant Teachers working in the role of, and with the responsibilities of, Lead Teachers, but

receiving Assistant Teacher pay; and so on) extended to their professional development life.

The learning environment spoke loudly and reinforced the sense of disrespect. The class was held in an austere building in a poor section of Rochester, New York. There was a sentry on duty when we entered and when we left. Students were required to sign in. Instructors were not. The classroom was on the third floor. Often, the elevator did not work. Others used the room during the day, and it was clear that we were in borrowed space. I had the use of two drawers in someone else's desk. The candidates had no space or place to store anything. Tables were long and filled the room. Chairs faced front where the source of knowledge held forth. It was difficult, sometimes impossible, to re-configure the furniture. The lighting was harsh. The ventilation/heating system was inefficient and so loud at times that conversation became difficult. Layered onto these messages of disrespect for the learner was the time of the class: Tuesdays from 4:00PM until 8:00PM, which meant that these women had to spend four hours in an uninviting environment after already putting a six- to eight-hour work day. Further, for some, there were children at home requiring varying levels of care. Many of the candidates took time during our dinner break to phone home to check on their children. Worry, distraction, and fatigue were in attendance at each class.

Harsh realities. Added to which was the reality that long ago these learners had internalized a model of schooling, based on experience, that positioned the teacher as expert, and that accepted that attaining knowledge was a matter of learning the answers to questions posed by others. Further, answers were right or wrong, therefore practice was either appropriate or inappropriate, and someone (certainly not the learner) was

positioned to decide and define what was right, what was appropriate, and what must be learned so that the credential could be earned, allowing the learner to pass through the guarded gates leading to the next level (entry level) of professionalism.

If I had been aware of all these realities at the outset I might have never tried, but as I said above, I was naïve. And so, try I did, to co-create a community of learning, constructing knowledge and making meaning from individual and shared experience. I rejected the role of expert because to accept it meant reinforcing and increasing the already substantial distance between the candidates and myself. The barriers in place on the first day of class were formidable enough. I did not want to make them more impenetrable by adding another layer of separation. I wanted to explode the concept that knowledge resides “out there” and is knowable by being told what “it” is. I wanted to demystify the process of becoming a professional, demonstrate respect for what the learners already knew, and co-construct concepts based on exploration of theory and experimentation with practice.

So I provided lots of class time for talk about personal experience and how that experience related to the text’s notion of best practice. I talked openly about issues of racism, classism, and sexism as they impacted the lives of children and as they related to the lives of all of us in the class. I helped the candidates question the positions and attitudes behind the voice that was the text. We read articles that presented alternative voices. I provoked. Answered questions with questions. I tried, in sum, to share the responsibility for the learning with the learners.

Ultimately, I failed because of the realities discussed above, but also because I felt a strong sense of responsibility to help these women succeed. In order to do that I had to

put aside *my* agenda -- creation of a community of learning -- and accept *their* agenda -- pass the course, learn the answers, get the credential. Couldn't I have done both? Couldn't I have taught to the test openly and de-constructed (and de-mythologized) the entire process as I did so? I do not think so. Not, situated as we were, in the Professional Development Machine. In the end, it felt like an arrogant and privileged indulgence on my part to pursue any other agenda than that of helping these concrete, other-directed learners to succeed at a game that disempowered them even as it pretended to do just the opposite.

When your job hangs in the balance and your paycheck barely keeps you above the poverty line, there is precious little room for flights of intellectual fancy, abstract theories of learning, or even examinations of your own oppression. Those who engage in these pursuits are free to do so because they (we) are in positions of power and privilege, benefiting from the same system that oppresses the CDA candidate. In some measure, our status derives from their debasement. Nothing short of revolutionary action will dismantle that, most harsh reality. We, at least, have the power to choose. If we're not part of the solution...

Sue's story, Part 2

About a year ago I spent a semester working with a small group of preschool teachers from our campus child care center, and through that work I came to understand that even when we think we're resisting the expert-novice discourse, it's not so easy to step outside the power-knowledge relationships at the heart of that discourse.

I attended a Center staff meeting and invited teachers to join me for a teacher study group, and eight of them (four teaching teams) took me up on the offer. The Center

program director arranged staff schedules such that all eight teachers were free for the study group sessions for 90 minutes following lunch every other week.

My intention was to work with the participating teachers to create a group where teachers' inquiry was at the heart of the work. Ayers (1992) notion of "Teacher Talk" was an important influence, as was the work of many teacher-researchers (e.g., Ballenger, 1999; Compton-Lilly, 2002; and Gallas, 1995) and teacher educators who work alongside teachers in inquiry (e.g., Lubeck & Post, 2000; and Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993). Although ways of working may vary, the conviction that teachers are active inquirers and meaning makers is at the center of such work.

The task at our first meeting was to share questions and tensions around teaching practice and to decide on the overarching topic for our first study. As we shared, I recorded teachers' questions and tensions on a chart, and we spent time talking about what led them to those questions. In this dialogic process, teachers added to and elaborated on each other's ideas. Our list included stress management for teachers; dealing with "non-responsive" children; early literacy; dealing with parents'/guardians' unrealistic expectations; communication with parents / guardians; and working with children with behavior difficulties (chosen as our first topic).

In my field notes I recorded that, with the exception of the early literacy topic, the participants located their questions/tensions as problems within others: children, families, and others at the Center. I was also, I'll admit, disappointed in the group's choice of behavior guidance as the topic for our first study. I was secretly hoping they would choose emergent literacy: after all, I'm an 'expert' in that. I also thought their choice somehow showed a preoccupation with controlling children. Here's an excerpt from my

9/20/01 notes that illustrate my response to our first meeting and **my** agenda for **their** work:

I want to complicate their notions of behavior guidance. They seem to be locating the problem within children--and I want them to begin to look at themselves, at their expectations, at classroom environments...I'm thinking that we'll want to try to examine, early on, our own beliefs about behavior, guidance, our goals for children, development, etc. This part will be rocky, I think. The notion that adults ought to oversee and control children is so ingrained. "How do we get kids to comply with what we want them to do?" I think I'll ask teachers to do some focused observations in their classrooms, and some initial analyses. In our discussion, we might try to read their narratives differently – to disrupt the readings of "behavior problem children".

It's clear that I took up – quite readily – the position of outside expert, making judgments about the teachers' topic choice, the way they interpreted their situations, the goals they have for their work. Lubeck, Jessup, deVries and Post (2001) ask if “those who assist and evaluate programs [are] open to local interpretation and invention and prepared to engage dialogically with local actors?” (p. 520). I thought I was – but my notes tell a different story.

Early on we decided (at my suggestion) that each teaching team would observe problem situations in their classroom, and then present an informal case at the next session. Our goal would be to talk about the issues, try to understand the situation from multiple perspectives, and then brainstorm possible courses of action. The following

excerpts from my 10/10/01 notes give a glimpse of my reflection on the teachers' talk and thinking.

First, Sally and Melissa talked about a two year-old little girl who started in their room this past August...The problem is that she cries throughout the day, especially, they say, when she thinks about nap. As we talked, it seemed to me that the teachers did a nice job of thinking about several possibilities around what might be behind her problems...It seemed like this was new for them...I encouraged others to ask them questions about what was going on...They're drawing on the articles we've been reading, but also on their own experiences...Don and Anna talked about John, who is physically aggressive and defiant...I was impressed at how they didn't just seem to position him as 'the bad kid.' However, in both cases, the teachers DID seem to position the parents as 'bad parents': the little girl's parents spoil her; John's mom vents her anger about the dad who abandoned them before John was born...Toward the end of the discussions, Sally and several other teachers asked me to tell them what I thought they should do. I was disappointed...

I cringe as I realize that I was locating what I perceived to be problems within the teachers – in exactly the same way I that I thought the teachers were locating problems in children and teachers! And yet, a year later as I listen to the tapes of our discussions, I'm struck by what I didn't seem to hear – or at least value – at the time. These teachers made themselves vulnerable by sharing the tensions they were experiencing in their teaching. They took each other's problems and ideas seriously, and engaged in an ongoing dialogue that drew on their own funds of knowledge, and their subjective experiences as teachers

in this center (Lubeck & Post, 2000). They began to challenge deficit discourses, and began to consider multiple possibilities. I can't speak to what, if any, changes the teachers made in their practice – but I now realize that their talk was rich, and every bit “professional”.

Leigh's story

Since I have become an “expert” in early childhood education, early childhood programs have asked me to provide staff development, teacher training, feedback, and program assessment. By virtue of my degree, my position as a college professor, and my experience (not to mention my race, class, gender, and the fact that English is my first language), I am seen as having expertise that can be used in any early childhood setting, with any teacher and any group of children. I have been empowered by the system, then, to decide what early childhood teachers “need”.

Here I will focus on my experiences at one local, private parent cooperative nursery school for which I was a contracted “educational consultant”. At this nursery school, program documents often described the teachers as having *some* power (albeit mostly in terms of implementation) as indicated in the following paragraph taken from the school's curriculum guidelines.

The teacher's role is to create an exciting environment in which the children can thrive. Using a center-based curriculum, the teacher can create a supportive environment that allows the goals and objectives that stem from the Nursery School Philosophy to fall easily into place...In a center-based curriculum the teacher is an active participant, talking with children, asking open-ended

questions, and providing materials and activities that build on children's interests and experiences.

However, my role as a paid, (very) occasional expert asked to judge how well teachers were “performing” certainly called their purported autonomy and knowledge into question. For instance, my positioning as an expert brought in to address parental concerns about one of the teachers lead to the rather critical comments below taken from one of my observations last year. Clearly this model of one-shot “expert” evaluation took the teacher’s work out of context and ultimately served to de-skill and devalue her. And it allowed me to rather freely and critically assess her practices and provide “insights” into best practices, solutions to her/their “problems”.

2/28/02 – I was asked to focus my attentions on G (which I found out later she didn't know), so that's what my notes reflect.

** By the end of the morning, I thought this [her technique] got rather “old” and suggested an expanded repertoire of attention-getting and transition techniques. I have copied and will share a couple of short articles w. G.*

** Lots of (too much sometimes, for me) positive verbal feedback is given.*

** G says to me, “we're trying. We just started [using alphabet pictures for kids to color in] Tues.” My question is, why? Why not do more age-appropriate activities with literacy learning imbedded?*

** I notice the new (I think) alphabet pictures around the top of the walls; however, I could barely see them so I doubt they're of much use to the children.*

As much as possible, visuals should be at the kids' eye level.

** The adults rotate between centers. I look for but see little use of “constructive questions” designed to push thinking or create cognitive dissonance. G makes observations (e.g., “I see you’re...”), asks questions, and comments on activities. I wondered why not ask, “why do you think that is?” instead of telling child.*

I cringe re-reading this. Although some of my suggestions may have been useful – for example, placing visuals so children can see them seems reasonable – my tone comes across as so superior. I clearly bought into my positioning, and perhaps even enjoyed dispensing advice – without fear of being challenged. No wonder the teachers seemed wary of me. Who can blame them for questioning whether my insights were really valuable? Why was I not surprised when they subtly and relatively passively resisting my “suggestions” as people with limited power usually find ways to do (e.g., O’Brien, 2003; Winograd, 2001)? They were experiencing the fundamental unlivability of the subject position of the always, already failing teacher. The discourse of early childhood expertise denies the possibility of success on any terms other than those defined by contemporary U.S. images of what it means to work with young children (Bailey, 2002), and I was the one paid to say just what it was the teachers should do; I was the one with power. In this discourse, the teacher is formulated merely as an object of control, rather than a knowing subject (Phelan, 2001).

Reactions to our stories/Inner work/Contradictions

Obviously our stories differ, but there are some connections between them as well.

For instance:

- We were each uninvited guests, at least from the teachers’ perspectives;
- The agency’s or professional developer’s agenda was the focus, not the teachers’;

- There were extant though unacknowledged power differentials between ‘us’ and ‘them’;
- Upon reflection, we all felt that we had arrogantly, without questioning, used our privilege; and
- We were embarrassed (Leigh and Sue both “cringed” re-reading their own notes) because we had not lived up to our internal idealized images of ourselves as egalitarian, etc.

Although we like to think we are self-aware, because of our reactions we know we still have lots of inner work to do. We need to be always asking ourselves, Who do “they” think “we” are? Why? To whom do we think we are speaking? Why? Who is being “hailed” (Althusser, 1971)? Who is responding? Why? How have we both been positioned? Why? Can we resist such positioning? How?

In the assumptions we make, we imply certain ways of being and “technologies of self” or forms of self-regulation. We thereby engage in a process of governing subjectivity, or regulating the very being of teachers (Gore & Morrison, 2001). The central problem with the expert discourse model is that teaching is seen as a role, a composite of functions that teachers fulfill on behalf of others, rather than an identity that speaks to the who the teacher is: her or his own investments, beliefs, commitments, and desires (e.g., Palmer, 1998). The teacher’s integrity is thereby challenged. Ultimately, when this view of teaching is sanctioned, teacher education (or training or consultation or professional development) simply reinforces the type of knowing and being already in place. It functions then to merely maintain and accommodate the status quo, as is intended.

We are opposed to “the notion of knowledge given antecedently and independently of knowers” (Regenspan, 2002, p. 72), and believe, in fact, that the very concept of privileging certain kinds of knowing must be challenged. In this Western, male model, the mind is severed from the body, and theory is privileged over “practice” (e.g., McWilliam & Taylor, 1998). This model has a long history in the U.S. and is rarely challenged; from at least the early 1900s, the culture has valued and rewarded those considered to be experts in their fields, dismissing grounded knowing as being “folk lore” or worse (e.g., Miller, 1997). This well-entrenched and seldom questioned model will be extremely difficult to dislodge, requiring a huge paradigm shift wherein we begin to imagine a more equitable world where many kinds of knowing are valued, and theory and practice stand together.

How might we resist or contest this approach? How might we frame teacher education as a dialogic process wherein teachers begin to construct and re-construct themselves as subjects? If we reject the meta-narrative of expertise, if we are opposed to the necrophilic, banking model of education (Freire, 1986), how might we create an organic, generative, life-affirming model of adult education? Even if we create sites where learners can take a stance that provides them with agency, even if the intention of the “expert” is to empower the learner to create his or her own truth, the very superstructure that houses and regulates the site (college or university, state governing body, accrediting agency, etc.) pre-configures an unequal power relationship that co-opts an authentic experience of equity. How can this dynamic be de-constructed?

We can make changes in small ways, paying attention to how we name ourselves, and how others are named; how physical environments are structured and who structures

them; how learning is assessed, and by whom; and how success or failure are defined, and by whom. Examining and changing our modes of address and our literal and figurative locations is a concrete strategy for being part of the solution, for acting as saboteurs from within a system that disempowers not just preschool teachers, but all of us in education. Because the crisis in early childhood professional development isn't located in the *teachers* – it's located in the machine, in the very discourse of ECE in which professional development is immersed. Further, there are many privileges accorded and rewards that accrue to those of us who benefit from the system as is, as well as many risks to trying to dismantle it. And as we all know, the rewards almost always trump the risks (see, e.g., Novinger & O'Brien, in press). What are we willing to give up? How much are we going to risk?

Border pedagogy

We believe there are some sites where slippage might occur *now*, “third spaces” (e.g., Bhabha, 1994; Soja, 1996) where we may be able to cross borders...where

- Binaries and dichotomies can be dismantled
- Boundaries can be blurred
- Doors can be opened a crack
- Vistas can be widened

If we really want the teachers with whom we work to “read their worlds”, we must be in dialogic relationship with them: teacher as student and students as teachers (Freire, 1986).

This position argues for long-term support being provided as needed in areas that *teachers* find most important. We are now trying to bridge the gap between the “ivory tower” and preschool settings by crossing the border from the land of expertise to a place

where all are valued for what they bring. This means we who have been designated as experts, need to work beside teachers, as allies, as they take ownership of their teaching (e.g., Lewis, 2002). We need to live principles of democracy, egalitarianism, and critical inquiry in our work with preschool teachers if we are to have any hope of making teaching truly world-changing work.

We are arguing then for an approach where we look for openings, small spaces in which to transform the standard hierarchical and technical-rational approaches and interpretations of our roles as teachers into reciprocal, equitable, and collaborative forms (Miller, 1997). We are working to create a model of teacher development that is the antithesis of indoctrination, which views teaching as a complex, challenging, social and intellectual task. The work we do, then, might prepare "...teachers to be observers and documenters of children and researchers of learning rather than consumers of dicta for practice" (Darling-Hammond, 1996, p. 12) and should challenge us to ask not what is 'true' but rather what best fits the situation (Lubeck, 1996, p. 159).

"In communities of practice, teachers might then explore a range of alternatives tailored to specific situations" (Lubeck, 1998, p. 289). A view of teacher as learner via collaborative and action-oriented classroom research positions teachers very differently than the expert discourse does: it puts them in charge of their own learning, and most of us recognize that we learn by engaging with something we want to learn. Early childhood teacher educators have long held the conviction that children need to construct their own understandings (e.g., Bredekamp & Copple, 1997; Fosnot, 1989), but we have not often brought those connections into the college classroom or in-service workshop.

Further, the ways in which we make sense of our worlds cannot be separated from the context in which we operate; context always matters. Any attempts at change must consider local conditions, norms, and goals. This we too rarely do, other than rhetorically. What if we were to deliberately diminish status differentials and see knowledge as jointly created in dynamic interaction – with others and with specific environments? Suppose, as Lubeck (1998) argues, that we did not judge and prescribe, but rather helped teachers address concrete and practical dilemmas, and that roles were blurred and that the opportunity to collaborate did not become a guise for indoctrination in the model/approach chosen by the “expert”? Suppose we respected differences, and had the flexibility to try new ideas, blend approaches, and innovate over time? Suppose learning communities were assembled from the strengths and capacities of the educators who come together willingly to make changes they perceive as important? (Lubeck & Post, 2000; McGhan, 2002) What then would this mean for teacher education?

The three of us have made a few stabs at changing our work to reflect these notions with varying degrees of success. For instance, in her early childhood classes Leigh has used K-W-L charts (What do you know? Want to know? What did you learn?) to guide the semester’s work, has co-constructed syllabi with students, asks students to “talk back to the experts” in their speaking and writing, and frequently asks for and responds to student input as to the direction in which the class is going. In both her consulting and supervision of practicum students, she now always asks the teachers first, “How are things going for you?” She adds, “Here’s what I saw; what, if anything, do *you* want to do with this?” In these tentative ways, she hopes to resist the idea of teacher training and highlight the notion that different views and practices are a teaching

resource. She wants to use the “funds of knowledge” that teachers – even novice teachers – bring to build a learning culture that respects differences and is able to try new things, blend ideas, and innovate over time (Lubeck, 1998; see also, O’Brien, 2000 a, 2000b, 2002).

Most likely because of her positioning as an ‘expert’, Sue was asked to serve on the Rochester (New York) City School District’s Universal Pre-kindergarten Program Advisory Board. It became quickly obvious that that Board and the Professional Development Committee to which she was assigned were made up of other fellow ‘experts’: researchers, program directors, district administrators, and community leaders. Sue’s first efforts were to advocate for the appointment of District and community pre-kindergarten teachers to the Board and its various committees. Her ongoing efforts on the Professional Development Committee are focused on shifting professional development experiences away from external mandates and assessment and toward the questions and topics teachers themselves want to pursue. Along with Leigh, she is working with the District to support early childhood teachers as they form collegial learning circles in which their own expertise is valued.

Sue is also engaged in self-study of the modes of address she uses in her own work—and what that might mean for the teachers and students with whom she works. For example, through a critical analysis of a pen pal writing project used in a literacy course she teaches, Sue came to realize that she was immersing pre-service teachers in discursive practices in which traditional teacher-child power relationships and positionings were reproduced. This analysis paved the way for a radical revision of the project in the following semesters (Novinger, in press).

Lou no longer teaches a CDA class for the Rochester City School District. However, his job responsibility as Program Director for a campus-based childcare center includes the supervision (a revelatory noun) of all teaching staff. It is at that juncture, where organizationally generated hierarchy (external structure) intersects with his goal of equitable and reciprocal relationships with teachers (internal belief system) that the dialectic plays out. Questions created around this tension include: Can the one who surveils be, in any meaningful sense, an ally to those who are surveilled? Can the one who evaluates job performance also be seen as an authentic colleague? Can recalibrating the *feeling* of interactions slow the momentum of the machine? The answers Lou has come up with are: sometimes.

The spaces that exist for resistance can be filled with assumption-busting behavior, but always with a greater expenditure of energy than would be the case if the organization itself pivoted on a hub of shared expertise instead of being driven by a chain of command. To that end Lou is working to change the structure of his workplace. While not an easy task, the possibility of engaging in meaningful dialogue with those empowered to make structural change in an organization as small as the childcare center is real.

Epilogue: The journey continues...

Of course when we open that door a crack, allow for some slippage, try to create spaces for true dialogue, we risk losing some of our power. But we think that's okay. We must be willing to do both the inner and outer work of resisting the current model of expertise. If we can challenge ourselves to be honest and acknowledge the contradictions of the culture (cult?) of expertise, maybe we can stop training the always, already failing

early childhood educator. Maybe we can move from a deficit model wherein early childhood teachers are seen as “needy” to a place where they are viewed as competent, strong, and powerful.

In order to do so, we might ask teachers, Which discourses do *you* find authoritative and difficult to reject? Why? What are the discourses that are internally persuasive to *you*, and why? We might ask (and really mean it), What do you need? What do you want me to do – if anything? The tricky part seems to be how does one lead, or guide without imposing or disempowering? We must ask, what, in fact, makes *me* the leader? Do we really even need a “leader”? Can power be shared more equitably? What will I have to give up in order for this to happen?

We are suggesting that this is not an either/or matter with a tension existing between two diametrically opposed binaries: either we’re experts or we give up all pretense of having some knowledge about ECE. Rather, we are arguing that we must take multiple perspectives into consideration whenever we consider teaching practices. While we who “do” teacher education/professional development have a fair amount of book learning as well as some experiential knowledge of the field, and therefore a degree of expertise, most if not all teachers are the true experts on the young children with whom *they* work. When we are called in to observe and comment on teachers’ teaching because they’re new or when “problems” occur, or to provide an amount and type of training someone else has determined that the teachers “need”, our expertise is being validated while the teachers’ is being devalued or even dismissed.

Suppose instead, as Nel Noddings (1992) suggests, that we really believed that warm and caring relationships are central to teaching and learning, and understood that

this only occurs over extended periods of time, and so we focused on long-term, mutually beneficial experiences of all sorts? To create humanizing relationships we need time: time to get to know one another, time to hear all voices, time to lessen power inequalities and to develop a sense of autonomy for all, and time to work free from pressing immediate concerns. Could we then attempt to build Maxine Greene's vision of a humane and playful community, "at once beautiful and just" (1994, p. 459)? Might these altered frames not help us negotiate and dismantle externally imposed and ultimately unnecessary and limiting borders?

Of course the power elite (Mills, 1956) finds it much more efficient – not to mention easier to control – to provide instant expertise in the form of workshops and one-shot in-services, so this is something else for which we have to fight. Because school reform must be linked to social reforms that equalize wealth and power (Counts, 1932; Goodlad, 1997), ultimately we would like to see a re-thinking of the very structure of U.S. society wherein a more egalitarian, less hierarchical power dynamic is at work. (We believe this will require a change in our economic system as well, for capitalism is premised on the material success of a relative few; we therefore support a more socialized system that views each member of society as the logical recipient of its goods...but that is another, long story (see, e.g., Novinger & O'Brien, in press)). In such a society, all contribute and the contributions of some are not elevated above the contributions of others. All of us in education have a role to play in such a society; those of us currently positioned as "experts" will need to share power with others who are experts in *their* domains so that we can begin to dismantle the culture of expertise in early childhood education.

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