

## *Autobiographical Inquiry, Teacher Education, and (the Possibility of) Social Justice*

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*When I do not know myself, I cannot know  
who my students are. I will see them through  
a glass darkly, in the shadows of my unex-  
amined life—and when I cannot see them  
clearly, I cannot teach them well.*

—Parker J. Palmer (1998, p. 2)

I am intrigued by the repeated call for self-examination of teachers as a means of achieving greater social justice in education. The notion that having greater consciousness of the spaces we inhabit and our relation to others may lead us to act more justly in the world is an appealing one, I admit, and one that has helped to shape my own teaching. I recall reading William Pinar, Madeleine Grumet, and Maxine Greene in graduate school and being enthralled by the idea of critical autobiographical inquiry, or the process of *currere*. In a course of the same name, I spent an entire semester engaged in the process of self-examination and discovery that helped me to ground my own evolving research and teaching agendas in the context of my past, that pushed me to ask new and difficult questions about my assumptions and goals, and that encouraged me to consider the value of this experience for the student teachers in my courses. The message was a resounding one in my coursework and in the literature I was reading: Teachers need time to self-examine if they are to become aware of the assumptions and purposes they bring to their work and the ways these assumptions and purposes shape their work and impact others, namely students. At the same time, I was immersed in mounting literature documenting the devastating consequences of not taking the time to self-examine (Ladson-Billings, 1994; Lareau, 2000; Rist, 1970; Valdes, 2001; Valenzuela, 1999).

My dissertation work, which looked at the various ways primary school teachers conceptualized their work as “caring professionals,” spoke to the

powerful relationship between biography, experience, and pedagogy. Teachers who claimed to care for students enacted multiple “caring pedagogies” that had much more to do with their own personal needs as *carers* (borne of their lived experience as women) than it had to do with the children in their classrooms (James, 2006). All of my participants admitted they had not taken the time prior to my study to think about the constructs of care they brought to their teaching or how they had evolved. None had considered the way their efforts to care might be perceived by others—both students and families—or the extent to which they may actually have been projecting their own needs on their students. In my concluding chapter, I pointed to the complexity of caring in education and called for autobiographical inquiry and professional development that might raise teachers’ consciousness about the origins of their pedagogies.

Since that time, I have had many opportunities to engage in conversation and reading around this very idea of critical self-examination for the purpose of better understanding how our engagement with students reflects our experience and biography as individuals. It is an idea that has been adopted in teacher education contexts where professors—many self-identified reconceptualists—are constantly challenged to prepare White, middle-class women for work in an increasingly pluralistic society. Our students’ limited experience living and working with people unlike themselves serves as a huge obstacle to our efforts to overcome the well-documented injustices in teaching and learning found in the literature. Questions of gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity, and socioeconomics tend to fall on the deaf ears of students who tend to see schools as the great equalizer. They see little evidence of injustice or inequality in schools, blaming gaps in achievement on children, families, and communities. They claim to be blind to color and objective in their pedagogical approaches.

I have sat through session after session at conferences where rooms full of faculty share their battle scars as they’ve tried to push their students’ thinking beyond the safe space of their habitual existence. Invariably the conversation turns to the need to help students of education become more aware of themselves. If they remain unaware of the assumptions and biases they bring to their work, they will forever be contributing to the problems we wish so much to address. Self-examination leads to social justice, or so the argument goes. This year at the *Curriculum e<sup>3</sup> Pedagogy* conference, I attended many brilliant talks, participated in countless thought-provoking conversations, and returned to my cabin each evening, mind spinning—as much from the stimulating discussion as from the margaritas. And yet, I continued to return to a nagging series of thoughts: To what extent *does* self-examination lead us to act more justly in the world? Can it? Under what

circumstances? When does it not? How must we conceptualize self-examination if it is to move us toward social justice in education? What is the role for teacher education in this endeavor?

## Currere, Consciousness, and Freedom

Friday afternoon, amid the beautiful scenery of the Balcones campground, I found a quiet nook under a tree and pulled out my worn copy of Pinar's *Autobiography, Politics and Sexuality*. With nagging thoughts in mind, I returned to these familiar pages to see what I might find. I reread "The Method of Currere" and then fell once again into "The Trial," a powerful metaphorical piece about our individual resistance to engage in self-examination and the dangers of such resistance. Using *currere* as a starting point, I began to think about the relevance of such a process to teacher education. What would be the value in prospective teachers engaging in this process, working toward freedom from the past, from their habitual, conditioned existence?

As conceived by Pinar (1975/1994), the method of *currere* involves four steps: the regressive, the progressive, the analytical, and the synthetical. The regressive focuses one's efforts on that which we usually ignore—our experience, biography, and evolving habitus as it is shaped by various discursive, institutional, cultural, and relational contexts. Pinar suggests that we should write it down, "bring the past to the present" (p. 24) in an effort to enter again and make sense of that which has constituted our existence. The progressive involves one in the process of thinking forward, of "thinking of the future, of tomorrow, of next week, of the new few months, of the next academic year, of the next three years and so on" (p. 25). We are to ask ourselves about where it is we are going, and to revisit this line of thinking iteratively so that we might truly discern the pressing goals and commitments shaping our lives and work. The analytical step pushes us to look at the past, the present, and the future as captured in writing and reflective thought striving to understand their interrelations. The synthetical then asks us to put the images aside and ask about the extent to which we are free to evolve. Pinar asks, "What conceptual gestalt is finally visible? That is, what is one's 'point of view'?" (p. 27), suggesting that only by "bracketing" the conceptual can we escape it and determine its relation to who we are becoming. *Currere*, for Pinar, seems to be a process of arriving at self-determination, freedom from the determination by others, by experience, by contexts that may be out of our control—the conscious engagement with

our evolving identities and assumption of responsibility for where we will go from here.

As it is conceived, *currere* has the power to move prospective teachers toward greater awareness of their commitments and goals as educators, the origin of those commitments and goals and perhaps even the ways in which those understandings shape their practice. The process of *currere* is reminiscent of Greene's (1988) call for consciousness and freedom as enviable ends for education. She suggests that freedom exists in the "act of becoming." She writes, "We might think of freedom as an opening of spaces as well as perspectives, with everything depending on the actions we undertake in the course of our quest, the *praxis* we learn to devise" (p. 5). So too then does freedom demand continuous action and reaction to new knowledge, new experiences, and new questions. Grumet (1992) writes, "We are educated to the extent that we are conscious of our experience and to the degree that we are freed by this knowledge to act in the world" (p. 33). Implicit in the work of Greene and Grumet is the connection between self-awareness and conscious action in the world—a consciousness that many take to mean more critically aware of its positionality in relation to others, the impact of its actions on others, and the ways in which it has not just been shaped by experience and context, but itself contributes to the shaping of those experiences and contexts. Understood this way, autobiographical inquiry may very well constitute a necessary component of learning to teach for social justice. Without specific attention paid to our situatedness in relation to others, however, it may not prove to be sufficient. In what follows, I offer a discussion of how teacher education might build on the method of *currere* in hopes of moving autobiographical inquiry outward.

## Moving Outward

Maxine Greene (1971) calls for more than "introspection." Rather, she calls for *consciousness*, which "being intentional, throws itself outward *towards* the world" (p. 139), signifying the enviable end of autobiographical inquiry. With a greater sense of self, we will then go out into the world with renewed awareness, a greater sense of purpose, and a greater awareness of who we are becoming. But what is to say that the way we go out into the world (though perhaps different than before) will be any more "just" than the ways we engaged the world prior to our inquiry of self? Building on Pinar's regressive-progressive-analytical-synthetical model, what might we need to do to move toward conversations of social justice? Once we have spent time delving into our past, striving to deconstruct the meanings we

have of our work and for our work, once we have put these things on paper and interrogated them, analyzed them, and tried to synthesize what they mean for us as individuals, how do we move our thinking outward as Greene suggests? It seems that in order to move conversations of self toward understandings of our relationship to others, we must consider two additional lines of inquiry: the first having to do with consequences of our actions, the second of perspective.

*Consequences.* The first line of inquiry, I suggest, emphasizes the ways in which our actions impact others around us. If I can identify a particular understanding that I have and unpack the experiences that have given rise to that understanding, I can then ask the very poignant question, “So what?”—“So what?” being synonymous for “How does this understanding influence my choices, my actions, the way I view and interact with others? What are the consequences of these actions and interactions for me and others? How do the understandings I have of myself shape the understandings I have of others?” Building on our newfound understandings of our own commitments, purposes, and beliefs, we can begin to inquire about the ways in which these understandings are represented in our actions. One purpose for such an inquiry would be to determine if we are indeed acting in ways reflective of our values and beliefs. If I say that I am committed to helping children become independent in their problem solving, then go on to intervene in an argument between two students over a toy, sending them to opposite corners of the classroom, then there may be a discrepancy between my stated commitments and my actions. I might ask myself, “Why did I do that?” “Did my response to the situation help me to move toward my stated goal of increasing student independence?” “Why or why not?” “What experiences or beliefs gave rise to that response?” “What can I make of that?” Interrogating the relationship between what I claim to value and the ways I walk in the world can provide avenues for redirecting our behaviors in ways that better reflect our beliefs.

A second purpose for an inquiry into the outwardness of our identity would be to consider the consequences of our choices on others. Regardless of the way that we respond to two children arguing over a toy, for example, we might consider the impact of our response on the two arguing children, on their observing classmates, and on the student teacher in the room. I might ask myself, “How did others perceive my efforts to resolve the conflict?” “What message did I send to the arguing students?” “To the other members of the classroom?” “What impact have my actions had on these children’s behavior and the dynamics of the classroom?” Considering the impact of our choices on others adds another layer to our analysis of self—pushing us to think not just about whether our actions seem comfortable

and appropriate to us, but about the ways in which our actions shape the experiences of others. A necessary complement to this line of inquiry, then, is to engage in dialogue with and observation of others in order to gather information about the consequences of our actions. It is to this second line of inquiry that I now turn.

*Perspective.* Moving from introspection to consciousness requires, I believe, careful deliberation of how our understandings and identities are positioned in the world, gaining perspective outside of our own experience and thinking about the consequences of our being for ourselves and others. Building still on the example of the two children fighting over a toy, I cannot know how these children or other members of the classroom perceived my actions without taking the time to ask them, to listen to their dialogue with one another, and to observe their interaction. Gathering data of this sort allows me to further consider the impact of my actions. But my inquiry cannot stop here. As critical and feminist scholars such as Gore (1993) remind us, we, as individuals, are products of our varied contexts (sociocultural, discursive, relational) and thus actors in our own socialization. These scholars question whether we can ever see those contexts (regimes of truth) for what they are and the ways in which we act on ourselves to perpetuate our relative position in the world from within them. An inquiry into the impact of our actions on others, then, must necessarily be done in community with others. Darling-Hammond (2002) writes, “The journey toward these understandings is intensely personal, and yet it is necessarily social—it has to be conducted in the company of others who teach us about their own experiences and who learn with us about how to build a common understanding that is greater than the sum of its parts” (p. 202). There comes a time when we must ask if there are other ways to understand the experience in question; an inquiry engaged with others who have varied backgrounds and experiences themselves. Darling-Hammond reminds us that,

The capacity for perspective-taking develops through participation in a community in which diverse experiences and views are constantly elicited and shared within the group. . . . In teacher education programs, as in other settings, the use of the group as an educative body requires skillful management of discussion that can often result in the assertion of one view or one set of experiences over another and careful attention to the questions of standing, entitlement, and voice in the group. (p. 204)

Henderson (1992), in his book *Reflective Teaching*, calls this multiperspective inquiry. Multiperspective inquiry demands the engagement of other perspectives, through dialogue or text, as a means of enlightening understanding beyond one’s singular worldview. He writes:

Through multiperspective inquiry, teachers become more attentive to the multiple dimensions of their work and to the thoughts and feelings of others. As they explore diverse viewpoints, they challenge their egocentric tendencies and broaden their horizons. They learn that the world does not revolve around their perceptions and that ideological diversity is a central feature of education work. (pp. 71–72)

What Henderson, Darling-Hammond, and others suggest is that coming to understand our relative position in the world demands engagement with the world outside of ourselves and thoughtful, genuine consideration of how others construct realities that may vary from our own. Such thoughtful, genuine consideration requires us to turn from traditional either/or binaries of understanding particular phenomena to the possibility of multiple constructions being valid or meaningful. It further requires that we ask after alternative perspectives because we seek to enlighten our own singular perspective and deepen the understandings we currently hold. Engaging in genuine consideration of multiple perspectives may open the door to alternative ways of being in the world; ways we may not discover on our own. Nussbaum (1999), in her discussion of the oppression of women worldwide, underscores the importance of having options and opportunities to consider alternative ways of being. She writes:

Women belong to cultures. But they do not choose to be born into any particular culture, and they do not really choose to endorse its norms as good for themselves, unless they do so in possession of further options and opportunities—including the opportunity to form communities of affiliation and empowerment with other women. The contingencies of where one is born, whose power one is afraid of, and what habits shape one's daily thought are chance events that should not be permitted to play the role they now play in pervasively shaping women's life chances. (p. 54)

Embedded in Nussbaum's analysis is the critical lens she believes we need always bring to our inquiry of self and others—always mindful of relationships of power and privilege existing in various contexts that shape our lives. Whose voices count? Whose interests are best served? How do various cultural norms and discourses perpetuate these relationships of power? In what ways do individuals and groups enact agency to challenge these relationships? Who has access? Whose access is limited? In what ways?

Encountering others provides the opportunity for us to reconsider our experience and understandings in relation to the world around us. The teacher in the aforementioned hypothetical situation, then, might engage in dialogue with a variety of others—teachers, parents, and scholars—to con-

sider multiple perspectives on her encounter with the two arguing children. She may ask, “Who are these children? What understandings and experiences do they bring to this experience? What other factors may have influenced the argument between the children? How might various contexts have shaped the ways in which the children acted and I responded? Are there other ways of understanding what happened in the classroom? Are there other ways of interacting with children that might yield different results?”

By engaging in these two related lines of inquiry—one of consequences and one of perspective—we might deepen our analysis of who we are becoming in relation to ourselves and others. The resulting freedom to act in the world, to choose a course of action, is enacted not simply in consideration of one’s own personal commitments and beliefs, but in consideration of the experiences and perspectives of others. While I believe that engaging in the process of *currere* and pursuing these additional lines of inquiry would prove to be a significant and meaningful experience for any individual, there are ethical reasons why such inward and outward autobiographical inquiry ought to be included in the professional development of teachers. I now turn to a discussion of the relevance and application of autobiographical inquiry as conceived here for teacher education.

## Autobiographical Inquiry and Teacher Education

It is one thing to engage students in public schools in critical autobiographical inquiry, to encourage students to consciously engage curriculum. But if the goal of such inquiry is freedom from determination, it seems we must be comfortable as educators with wherever our students end up. The freedom to self-determine means just that—our students, through the regressive-progressive-analytical-synthetical process may arrive at understandings that we believe run absolutely counter to our aims as educators concerned with social justice. Such a construction presents an ethical dilemma when considering the education of teachers.

When my students (prospective teachers) leave me, they will assume responsibility for roughly 20–25 children a year who may hail from different backgrounds, who represent a wide variety of experiences, whose families are as diverse as they are numerous. And so though I wish for my prospective teachers to have the freedom to determine the professional and personal identities they will inhabit, I am constantly aware of the ethical responsibility these prospective teachers have to create spaces where their students (young children) can also self-determine. The power differential between teacher and student has the potential to limit students’ ability to self-



determine in the classroom. In this way, I feel the need to hold the prospective teachers in my classroom to an ethical standard—I feel they must strive to respect all children in their classrooms, their families, their cultural and ethnic backgrounds. They must try to create inviting classroom spaces where all children are valued, where all children’s voices are heard, where each person contributes to the whole in positive ways. At times, however, this ethical standard runs head-on into students’ beliefs about what is morally right. Take the following example as a case in point.

### Curricular Example: What Is Family?

In an effort to help my students make the connection between their personal predispositions and their pedagogical decision making, I routinely engage them in inquiry about content, asking how each of them anticipates addressing specific topics with children. This past year, I engaged students in an inquiry of “family” as a core topic in early childhood social studies curriculum and an example of content that may be (although unknowingly) controversial. I began by asking students to engage in a version of the regressive-progressive-analytical-synthetical process described by Pinar, which focused on their evolving constructs of “family.” Students spent a week reflecting on their understandings of “family,” what experiences may have given rise to these understandings. They wrote short reflective pieces, which they then brought to class to share in small groups as they felt comfortable.

Next, I distributed copies of a piece titled, “Parenthood and Pregnancy: The Journey of a Lesbian Couple and Their Children,” by Tamara J. Stone and Katherine R. Allen (1999). The piece tells the story of a lesbian couple’s decision-making process as they planned to have a family, the steps taken to bring a child into their family, and some of the challenges they faced along the way. I explained that despite our varying personal opinions about same-sex relationships, as teachers we shared an ethical responsibility to respect all children and that we needed to wrestle with our own comfort levels with including all families in our teaching. I asked students to read the piece and then reflect on the following questions individually:

- How does this story make you feel? What is your initial reaction to it? Why do you think so? What personal experiences have you had that may impact your reading of this piece?
- What responsibility (if any) do you think a teacher has to include this understanding of “family” in a study of family with kindergar-

ten and first graders? Why do you think so? (Please strive to be as open and honest as possible.)

- How do you envision engaging in a study of family with young children? What might be some challenges you will face as a teacher (regardless of how you answer this question)?

The next day, I invited students to meet in small groups (again, as they felt comfortable) to talk about the article and their reactions to it. During this time, I joined a table with seven students while others met in groups of two to three around the room. The discussion that ensued at our table began with Rowena, who shared that she had reacted first as a parent who would be uncomfortable with a teacher discussing the content with her young children. Though she was open to the idea of talking about this topic with her own children, she wasn't sure it had a place in the public school classroom. Anne shared that she had found the article to be informative. She shared that her upbringing as a Christian had taught her that homosexuality is a sin, and so she wrestled a bit with the topic personally. Conversation continued with an outspoken student, Toni, who shared her personal experience of losing a parent at an early age and her belief that having parents who love you is a gift, regardless of gender. As an African American woman, she explained that she has experienced a great deal of intolerance and prejudice, and so felt it imperative to model respect for all people regardless of gender, race, socioeconomic background, sexual preference, or ability.

Once everyone had shared, a powerful discussion ensued about teachers' ethical responsibility to invite all students' experience into the classroom, model tolerance and respect for students, and open children's eyes to experiences other than their own. We had a lively debate in which students challenged each other about how much teachers ought to talk about same-sex marriage and other "nontraditional" families in the classroom, how parents might respond to their decisions, and what it was about our personal leanings that shaped our views. Lori, for example, stated that she would definitely include same-sex families as one example of what a family could be. She was challenged, however, by Roni, who said that if Lori were teaching her child, she would be the first to show up at the school and file a complaint with the principal. For Roni, the prospect of a teacher engaging this content contradicted her religious beliefs about homosexuality. Just then Andrew intervened to suggest that omitting same-sex families in a study of family may unknowingly devalue the experience of children in the classroom and underprepare students for the world around them. "Like it or not," he said, "same-sex families exist and your kids are likely to run into one or two in their lifetime."

At the end of that session, we all left thinking. We were challenged to consider perspectives outside of our own and to think through the ramifications of pedagogical choices we would likely have made before taking the time to think about the relationship between personal and professional understandings around the topic at hand. Competing understandings about the responsibility of the teacher to prepare students for participation in society surfaced: Ought teachers recognize the diversity of families in society and introduce students to as many as we can, given that students are likely to encounter these families at some point in their lives? Can we engage in such conversation without passing judgment on the different families we discuss? Or, rather, ought teachers be mindful of the various beliefs represented by the families in their own classrooms (including those who believe families should be heterosexual) and show respect for these varying beliefs by omitting nontraditional families from their study, thus modeling respect for religious freedom?

At the close of the study, students created reflective pieces on this unit of study. Some wrote hypothetical letters to parents that they might use in the classroom before embarking on a unit on family, preparing parents for the inclusion of all types of families in their forthcoming study. Others continued discussion about some of the more problematic issues discussed in reflective writing pieces, suggesting that they would likely discuss same-sex families only if students brought them up in class. One student submitted a reading list of children's literature she would use in a unit on family, writing, "I don't see this issue as controversial, so I'm struggling with the extent I need to make it be." Some drew pictures and made collages reflecting their evolving understandings of family. Many shared that they were still unsure about how they would approach the issue of family in their own classrooms, but agreed that the time taken to think deeply about their own personal beliefs and the connection between their beliefs and their teaching was valuable.

Studies such as this one on "family" reflect my commitment as a teacher educator to open space for dialogue about the ethical and moral dimensions of our work. Ultimately, I am driven by a desire for students to feel free to articulate their beliefs while thoughtfully considering those of others. My hope is that such an encounter will allow them to not only consider how their predispositions may influence their relationship to subject matter and students, but model for them what a thoughtful, genuine consideration of content might involve. I have found such studies to be powerful opportunities for self-examination in relation to others. My efforts, however, have not always gone as smoothly as I would have liked them to. Nor have they always yielded the results I'd hoped for. What I find to be the greatest challenge is fostering in students the *will* to engage in genuine, thoughtful

inquiry for purposes of deepening and enlightening their own understandings. Without will, the inquiry is relegated to a mere academic exercise. I turn now to a discussion of this dilemma.

### The “Joseph K.’s” in Our Classrooms: Why Critical Self-Examination Must Necessarily Be Invitational and Voluntary

In “The Trial,” Pinar (1994) describes the main character of this story, Joseph K., as being arrested by his own unwillingness to engage in critical self-examination. He is unable to free himself from his past, to interrogate his very being and unearth the “taken for granted.” Pinar writes, “The beleaguered ego does not accept its own new information. It insists on converting new experience into terms created in past experience. This condition is arrested development” (p. 42). In other words, the “Joseph K.’s,” who are unwilling to examine their own reality but rather fit all new understandings into old ways of knowing, are not likely to reach new levels of consciousness. It has been my experience that many of the prospective teachers with whom I work are themselves, Joseph K.s. They half-heartedly engage the process of self-examination and dialogue that I ask of them, without the sort of genuine will to grow that I expect. And when I push them to step outside of their comfortable space, they resist my efforts in a multitude of ways—by shutting down, by dismissing my efforts as irrelevant to their work as prospective teachers, by displaying anger toward me and others in the classroom. Such resistance signifies to me an absence of the “will” or “intent” that Pinar and Greene suggest one must have in order to yield any fruit from self-examination. Greene says, “One cannot make his own ‘primary consciousness’ background so long as he clings to his box; nor can he actively interpret his past experience” (1971, p. 143).

Take Anne, from the curricular example included, who is fully aware of how she arrived at her understandings about homosexuality. She walked back through her lived experience and pointed to the places where she has been taught that same-sex relations are sinful. In her initial discussion, she revealed that she believed it was her responsibility to “save” others from their sinful ways and saw her role as a schoolteacher, a perfect outlet for her missionary zeal. She has demonstrated that she was conscious of her beliefs; she understood how these beliefs shaped her interactions with children and families, and how they were connected to her personal goals as an educator. She made the familiar strange enough to look at it. She engaged the regressive-progressive-analytical-synthetical process (at least superficially) as I’ve asked her to. She wrote her reflective pieces and shared in small groups.

She respectfully turned her attention to others while they shared their experiences and perspectives.

In her final reflective piece, Anne writes that she could never discuss homosexuality in her primary school classroom because she does not value this “life choice.” Her decision is a reflection of her self-awareness on two levels: First, she does not believe that same-sex families constitute a valid form of “family,” so resolves to omit it from any study in her classroom. Second, she realizes that she could not engage in a discussion of same-sex families without conveying her beliefs to students and so decides she is better off not trying. While we might be comforted to know that Anne will refrain from trying to “save” students in her classroom, I might suggest that her self-examination has moved her only slightly closer to teaching for social justice. Her unwillingness to genuinely consider alternative perspectives as equally valid to her own, to consider the consequences of her decisions for others has left her sitting rather comfortably in her familiar space. Explicit or not, Anne continues to harbor prejudice that will likely influence her teaching.

It probably should not surprise us that some of our students lack the will to genuinely engage in self-examination. Going down this road means opening oneself to the possibility of rejecting some part of self. Considering new ways of being in the world necessarily means considering the possibility that old ways are not sufficient, not appropriate, not ethical or moral in light of new information. It can be a scary thing to open oneself to such scrutiny. Complicating our efforts as teacher educators are, no doubt, the power relationship implicit between professor and student, the lack of worldly experience of our students, and the short amount of time within which we have to do such “thoughtful and genuine” work. So what are we to do?

Paolo Freire (1973) reminds us that we cannot empower others. We can only create opportunities for them to engage in critical reflection of their current and past circumstances in an effort to make sense of them. Within these opportunities lie the seeds of possibility for freedom, consciousness, and, I have to believe, maybe even social justice. By pushing at the boundaries of students’ comfortable spaces, we invite them to consider the limitations created by their decisions to sit comfortably in familiar spaces. We also encourage them to think about the consequences of their choices for others—namely students, parents—whose experiences and beliefs run contrary to their own. The inviting, I believe, and creating space for engaging in such inquiry, is an important part of our work in preparing new teachers.

As we engage in this work, however, we will always be reminded that such critical self-examination is necessarily voluntary, as time and again our students resist; something I (admittedly) have a hard time accepting. What

makes the accepting particularly difficult for me is that I am constantly thinking about the children who will sit in my students' classrooms someday. I am pulled back to the work of Ray Rist (1970) and others who remind us that teachers' expectations and biases necessarily shape their interactions with students. I am challenged to find new and better ways to engage prospective teachers in genuine autobiographical inquiry and to help them foster a lifelong commitment to growth and renewal. And so once again, as is always the case with scholarship and theory, in attempting to answer one set of questions, I have opened up another. How might we help to foster students' will to engage in genuine autobiographical inquiry? What professional responsibility do we have as teacher educators to address students' refusal to engage? What experiences might we create to support students' critical self-examination? What research might we conduct to further understand students' engagement with (or resistance to) this process? How might we learn from our own autobiographical inquiry to inform our work with prospective teachers? For me, at least, this will be food for thought until we meet again in Georgia.

## Postscript

One of the resounding themes of my conversations at the C&P conference this year was understanding the relationship between theory and practice, deconstructing what we mean by theory and practice and who we are as theorists and practitioners. I have attempted in this piece to revisit some classic works of theory and consider their practical application for teacher education, by asking questions about what such application might involve and what dilemmas/challenges may rise as a result. In such a way, perhaps I have pushed back on the theories themselves, demanding thoughtful and genuine inquiry into why and how they might be informed by practice. As a teacher educator in a curriculum department, I often feel as if I am walking atop thin wall between what we would like to see in education and what is really there. I am trying to keep my students in balance as I guide them along the wall saying, "Look! Look there! A wonderful idea that should inform our practice!" And them looking back as if to say, "How in the world?" One thing I know is that I cannot ask of my students what I do not ask of myself. Alongside our theorizing, we must consider the relevance and application of theory to the improvement of education in real time. And we must support one another in the process. It is my hope that this piece has contributed in some way to this ongoing effort.

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