

Critical Intentions and “Care of the Self:” Reconsidering the Role of Agency in Preservice Teachers’ Thinking

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Abstract

Using Foucault’s conceptualization of “care of the self,” this article considers the ways in which social studies methods courses can better address preservice teachers’ agency. The author considers the intentionality of two preservice teachers and uses the notion of “care of the self” to explore the preservice teachers’ thinking about individual agency and the socialized structures of schooling and the teaching profession. Initially, the preservice teachers engaged in ethical practices that constructed resistance and creative challenges to the perceived normalizing aspects of social studies curriculum; however, when confronted with the socializing aspects of the teaching profession the preservice teachers were unable to synthesize their intentions and ethical practices with the constraints of the schools. The preservice teachers’ inability to synthesize their purpose for teaching with the perceived curricular and professional norms in schools had implications for their agency. The author suggests preservice teachers must reimagine their agency as individual ethical practice to be achieved in context, and not as a regulated possession.

Keywords: *agency; preservice teachers; professional acceptance; purpose for teaching; care of the self*

1. Introduction

Several scholars have noted that social researchers tend to conceptualize agency as either heavily individualized or overly socialized (Fuchs, 2001; Priestley et al., 2012). While there have been attempts to develop a more integrated concept of agency (Archer, 1995; Biesta & Tedder 2006, 2007; Bourdieu, 1977; Emirbayer & Mische, 1998; Foucault, 2001; Giddens, 1984), there remains much debate regarding the influence of structure on an individual’s agency. Classrooms provide excellent contexts for exploring an integrated concept of agency (Ketelaar et al., 2012; Liggett, 2011; Priestley et al., 2012; Riveros, Newton, & Burgess, 2012) because teachers exercise individualized agency as curriculum developers and make decisions that negotiate the various influential structures of schooling. The constant interaction between agency and structure forces teachers to make classroom decisions that can characterize them in a binary sense as either agents of change or socialized agents of the status quo (Kincheloe, 2001). However, a teacher’s agency is much more complex than a simple binary characterization because their decisions can “variably reflect the implementation, interpretation, adaptation, alteration, substitution, subversion, and/or creation of the curriculum contexts in which they work” (Campbell, 2012, p. 183). Specifically, a teacher’s agency represents awareness of their self, their intentionality, and their capacity to make choices in the context of schooling.

The intentions behind teachers’ agency take shape well before they enter the classroom and engage with the curricular contexts of schools. Agency develops as preservice teachers begin a process of self-formation (Foucault, 1997), and start to think of themselves as teachers who are part of a professional community and the social context of schools. Teacher education provides space for prospective teachers to consider the intentions behind their individualized agency, and their “commitment to governing his or her professional practice according to deeply held values, convictions, and beliefs about teaching, learning, and epistemology” (Campbell, 2012, p. 184). This commitment to governing professional practice has been discussed recently in the literature as a teacher’s purpose or rationale for teaching (Barton & Levstik, 2004; Castro & Salinas, 2010; Darling-Hammond et al., 2005; Dinkelman,

2009; Feiman-Nemser, 2001; Hammerness, 2006; Hawley, 2010; Kosnik & Beck, 2009; Thornton, 2006; van Hover & Yeager, 2007). Several of these scholars expect teacher education to help preservice teachers develop their purpose as a means of defending their curricular-instructional choices once they are faced with the constraints of schools. While teacher education provides preservice teachers the opportunity to think about agency and develop their purposes for teaching free from the constraints of schools, preservice teachers are aware of the constraints and contextual norms present in schools from their various experiences in schools.

In this article I will examine the relationship between agency and structure in preservice teachers thinking, and address the ways in which social studies methods courses can better develop preservice teachers' agency. To examine this relationship, I will focus on the curricular intentions of two preservice teachers, the ways in which they created lessons to fit their intentions, and their considerations of the socializing aspects and structures of schools.

2. Theoretical Lens, Data, and Context for the Study

In an attempt to address the intentionality of preservice teachers' agency, I used Michel Foucault's (1986, 1997, 2001) notion of "care of the self" as a theoretical lens. The notion of "care of the self" has been used recently by Ambrosio (2008) and Infinito (2003) to discuss educational theory, and also by Ball and Olmedo (2013) and Gunzenhauser (2008) to discuss teachers' behavior in an age of accountability and school reform. Simply stated, Foucault's (1986) notion of "care of the self" encompasses a variety of activities that one engages in for the construction of the self. I use "care of the self" to examine the ways in which preservice teachers think about their formation as ethical subjects who are part of a professional community and social institution. In the Foucauldian sense, institutions such as schools form subjects through normalizing and disciplinary structures. An ethical subject, then, resists these structures as part of their ethical behavior. This ethical behavior would involve agency toward a radical freedom that is beyond the constraints of any one system or structure of beliefs. In this way, one can only practice ethics if they practice freedom (Foucault, 1997; Infinito, 2003). For Foucault (1986), the "care of the self" brings the ethical subject into being, but only with sufficient freedom because "The care of the self...ensures our freedom while forcing us to take ourselves as the object of all our diligence" (p. 47).

"Care of the self" can be cultivated and promoted in a variety of ways. Social studies methods courses can be seen as sites for the cultivation of the teaching self (Danielewicz, 2001), and in the social studies methods course that was the site of this study, preservice teachers were given complete freedom to form their curricular-instructional purpose for teaching social studies. I served merely as guide and provided activities, exercises, and opportunities to reflect and critique their purpose and perspective in creating social studies curriculum. The activities took many forms, but were centered on hypothetical curricular situations in which preservice teachers had to develop a course of action and think about the ways in which they would respond to students, colleagues, administrators, and other stakeholders. The exercises included developing a statement of purpose and four lesson plans that would fit their purpose for teaching. Opportunities for reflection took place regularly during class time, after developing each lesson, in online spaces such as Wikis and discussion boards, and in interviews. Therefore, "care of the self" can be seen as a series of technologies, activities, and reflections by which one gains self-knowledge and skill in the practice of relating to and improving oneself... The combination of critique and creation in self-care distinguishes it from other forms of 'self-improvement'" (Infinito, 2003, p. 165). Our social studies methods course comprised only a small portion of the work that preservice teachers engage in as part of "care of the self."

The data in this article only represents one semester in the preservice teachers development as teaching professionals; however, it was an important stage in their development. The preservice teachers in this study were in their last semester of coursework before entering into their student teaching experiences. Teacher education could contribute to both the constraining processes that seek to normalize preservice teachers into a profession and the productive processes that cultivate self-creation and freedom in developing curriculum (Infinito, 2003), and our methods course focused on the latter. This type of methods course can be difficult for many preservice teachers because there is no ideal model of a curriculum developer or guaranteed method for success (Kincheloe, 2001), and they must draw on their own knowledge and experiences to make decisions. To truly form oneself, "ethics as freedom means that we must fashion for ourselves a mode of being that emerges from our own history and our own critical and creative thinking and action" (Infinito, 2003, p. 160). This course was at a critical point in the preservice teachers' careers because they foresaw the amount of decision-making and agency that would be required, which prompted deep consideration of their selves, their ethics, and their freedom in the context of schools.

There were twenty-one preservice teachers' who gave consent to participate in the study; however, I am only focusing on two preservice teachers for this article, Heather and Madelyn. I chose Heather and Madelyn because of

their critical purposes for teaching social studies. Heather and Madelyn consistently stated that their purpose was to reform and change the social studies curriculum to make it more inclusive of marginalized groups, and more focused on social justice. They each used their own ethics to develop a purpose for teaching social studies that was in direct opposition to the practices they had experienced in schools. Ethical practice, Foucault (1997) noted, can develop as a result of both negative and positive impetuses. The negative form can include “our involvement in the construction of ourselves [that] can be seen as an act of resistance to the ‘unfreedom’ of normalization” (Infinito, 2003, p. 162). The positive form results in attempts to provide “appropriate regard to the being of others and our own selves, we produce a specific type of freedom. By forming ourselves as ethical beings, we activate our capacities for creation...and thereby a new and different world” (Infinito, 2003, p. 162). Heather and Madelyn each demonstrated resistance (negative) and creative challenges (positive) to normative social studies curriculum during the semester, which revealed a degree of commitment to their “care of the self.”

My perspective in preservice teacher development assumes that education can be viewed as a distinct process of ethical self-creation (Ball & Olmedo, 2013; Foucault, 1997; Gunzenhauser, 2008; Infinito, 2003), and in this way education can be viewed as a productive form of power that “creates or makes people” (Marshall, 2001, p. 84). Teacher education courses could focus on preservice teachers’ ethical self-creation, if teacher educators are devoted to preparing preservice teachers to address the constraints of the schooling context. Constraints, in Gunzenhauser’s (2008) description of Foucault’s formulation of power, are in direct opposition to creation because the self-creation of the subject is itself an exercise of power over normalizing practices. The positive exercise of power through self-creation, and the continuous “care of the self,” is vital to the comprehensive formation of the self. Many preservice teachers focus narrowly on the negative or repressive modes of power, which can weaken any means of ethical resistance to normalization that may be constituted in the self. Self-creation and self-care contribute to a positive mode of resistance, one that resembles a practice of freedom, by resisting normalization and creating new ethical practices. Gunzenhauser (2008) described that because “normalization for Foucault is so effectively achieved through self-discipline, Foucauldian resistance is not limited to what may immediately come to mind: questioning authority, protesting, or refusing to participate. Nor is this resistance necessarily resistance to standards, testing, or accountability” (p. 2231). In this way, resistance to constraints requires positive ethical practice based upon “care of the self” because according to Foucault, “while simply refraining from causing harm may keep one blameless, it does not define an ethical existence” (Infinito, 2003, p. 158). Resistance, then, requires positive or productive forms of agency to move beyond simply resisting social norms.

For this article, Foucault’s (1997) “care of the self” represents preservice teachers’ agency as “an exercise of the self on the self by which one attempts to develop and transform oneself, and to attain to a certain mode of being” (p. 282). Foucault explained that individuals could avoid the normalizing tendencies of social constraints by asserting their productive or positive agency. This form of ethics allows individuals to think about ways in which they can “transform deeply ingrained customs, habits, dispositions, sensibilities, and ways of perceiving that limit the exercise of freedom” (Ambrosio, 2008, p. 265). Ethics as “care of the self” requires consideration of the socializing aspects of a context (schools) in the development and formation of the self as an ethical subject (preservice teachers) who creates and continually pursues radical freedom in order to engage in ethical practice (agency).

3. Methodology

I used a qualitative case study design (Yin, 2009). Case study methodology does not set aside specific procedures for data collection (Merriam, 2008) and it has often been labeled “eclectic” (Basse, 1999, p. 69) and specific to the context and judgment of the researcher. Central University, a public research university in the Midwestern United States, was the site of the methods course and study. The students were part of the main secondary teacher education program at Central University, which represented the most common path to secondary social studies teaching. Therefore, the sample was both purposeful and convenient because of my role as instructor of the students’ social studies methods course.

I utilized the constant comparative method as a qualitative data analysis procedure (Creswell, 2002; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Merriam, 2008), which allowed me to compare the various data sources collected in this study and identify related themes across the data sources. I analyzed the data of each participant in four distinct stages. First, I began by analyzing the participants’ statement of purpose for teaching social studies and identified initial codes that would be used to analyze the rest of their data sources. Second, I used the codes established in the participants’ statement of purpose to analyze their lesson plans, lesson plan reflections, and in-class activities. This demonstrated that the participants understood how to articulate their purpose for teaching social studies in their activities, exercises, and

lesson plans. Third, I initially analyzed the interviews as a means of triangulation to verify the participants' statements of purpose and their further articulation of their purpose in their course work. The analysis of the interviews also produced new codes, which were compared across participants and narrowed to codes that were found across each participant's data sources. Finally, the codes that emerged from the interviews were used in the last stage of analysis to re-analyze the other data sources. I chose Heather and Madelyn due to their critical stance toward social studies curriculum, and their resistance to the normalizing practices of schools. While many preservice teachers demonstrated resistance in a negative sense, Heather and Madelyn also demonstrated resistance in the positive sense. This clearly distinguished them from the other participants.

4. Findings

Heather and Madelyn demonstrated intentions for ethical practice. They each demonstrated a critical perspective toward the social studies curriculum currently in schools. Heather and Madelyn developed purposes for teaching that utilized their critical perspectives and drew upon their resistance and creative challenges to the normalized social studies curriculum. Their perspectives demonstrated the possibility for both negative and positive forms of ethical practice and the potential for agency through an ethic of self-care.

4.1 Negative Forms of Ethical Practice

Heather and Madelyn both revealed their resistance toward the normalized social studies curriculum in schools. They each demonstrated this throughout the semester and took an oppositional stance toward the perceived status quo in social studies classrooms. For example, I asked Heather to describe her purpose for teaching social studies and she replied simply, "I think kind of looking at...or adding things to the curriculum that they haven't ever seen before...I definitely don't want to teach like any of my social studies teachers" (Interview). Heather's purpose could be seen throughout her work in the social studies methods course. For example, she described a lesson in her interview, "when I did the rise of the second KKK lesson, people in the feedback they gave said, 'Oh, I never even talked about this ever in school.'" She noted the relevance of this lesson to the current social studies curriculum and added "if their teachers were anything like mine, they didn't talk about the KKK beyond just mentioning it...let alone how racism can manifest itself in society on that level...then and now" (Interview). Heather thought that the disciplinary processes of normalization in the social studies curriculum limited students' exposure to issues concerning racism and hate speech, and she wanted to change the curriculum to fit her own ethical stance.

Heather also wanted to introduce new perspectives into the curriculum, and raise awareness about issues that pertained to social justice in her students' local, national, and global communities. An example of this could be seen in her lesson about poverty. Heather wanted her students do a problem-based inquiry into the causes of poverty. Heather's purpose for teaching social studies and her resistance to normalized practices could be seen specifically in her lesson plan reflection:

I believe that the topic and other components of the lesson...address an issue that is not often mentioned in a government classroom. At least I never talked about my role as a citizen in fighting poverty in my government classes, and I think it is an important aspect of working towards equity in society. (Reflection: Lesson Plan Two)

In her interview, Heather commented further on her lesson plan and said, "I think my teachers were too busy teaching about wars to ever consider poverty or justice" (Interview). Heather consistently developed lesson plans that covered topics not typically found in textbooks or curriculum, and addressed issues that were important for the well being of her students and others.

Madelyn, similar to Heather, wanted to "add things" to the social studies curriculum. She also based her resistance to normalized practices on her devotion to raising awareness about social issues and introducing new perspectives for both historical and current issues. Madelyn thought that introducing perspectives was the most effective way to differentiate her teaching from the status quo in schools. In her interview, she commented on her perception of common practices in schools and said:

I think I just want to give them information that they necessarily hadn't had before because I remember like, especially in History, you got the same things like multiple times. And I want them to see different sides of the stories... I tried to develop activities and lessons that did that and like gather readings and things that would give them the multiple views on things. It's a lot of work, but I gotta do something different. (Interview)

Primary to Madelyn's purpose for teaching social studies, and her oppositional stance to normalized practices, was

her intent to use resources that blurred the traditional narratives found in widespread social studies curricular materials.

Madelyn's oppositional stance toward the traditional historical narrative was also part of her effort to raise her students' awareness about social justice. Madelyn wanted to blur the traditional narrative because she thought it would help her students understand social justice. Madelyn demonstrated this in a reflection on her lesson plan about gender roles and the treatment of women during WWII:

I think this lesson contributes to my overall purpose in teaching because it helps students see that society has so much control over who they are, whether they think it does or not. Introducing them to the roles that society assigns them with or without them realizing it, I hope that they will be able to decide whether or not these roles are something that they are comfortable fulfilling, or whether they are something they want to change. I think that there are aspects of Sociology that are essential for students to learn if they are to understand how and why things work the way they do as a result of history in this country, and I believe that the study of gender roles is an excellent place to begin. (Reflection: Lesson Plan One)

Madelyn wanted to utilize her background in sociology to infuse the social studies curriculum with new content and contribute to her oppositional stance toward the traditional historical narratives.

While Heather and Madelyn's indictments of the normalized social studies curriculum are confined to their own experiences in schools, their experiences played a significant role in the construction of their purpose for teaching social studies. Their experiences defined their perception of normalized practices in schools and provided a foundation for defining their own ethical practice.

4.2 Positive Forms of Ethical Practice

Heather and Madelyn took advantage of the freedom provided in the social studies methods course and created lessons that distinctly fit their purpose for teaching social studies and challenged the normalized social studies curriculum. Heather and Madelyn each developed lessons that reflected their ethical self and demonstrated their regard for others with hope of creating a new and different world. For example, Heather demonstrated that social justice was a primary focus in her teaching and wrote, "The social justice aspect of my class will focus on community engagement.... Students will choose and design means to engage in relevant community issues, while connecting them to the general concepts found in that particular course" (Purpose Statement). During the semester, Heather focused her lesson development on issues such as justice, racism, poverty, and prison reform concerned with the societal view of victimless crimes. The purpose of these lessons was to raise awareness and develop a deeper understanding of social justice. Heather noted this in her reflection about her lesson plan on poverty and wrote, "I also promote social justice by having students investigate whether citizens are responsible for addressing poverty in their communities and nationwide." Heather intended for her students to consider their own responsibility to their fellow citizens living in poverty and created lessons that allowed students to critique their society and themselves as citizens.

Heather valued inquiry as a tool in many of her problem-based lessons. She thought that her inquiry lessons would be more impactful if she would challenge her students' thinking. Heather described her ethical role in a reflection on her poverty lesson plan and wrote, "Americans do not have critical conversations about poverty. I believe my expected outcomes will result in students engaging in this often uncomfortable discussion about inequality in this country, which will then lead to their inquiry questions" (Reflection: Lesson Plan Two). In the same lesson, she asked her students to think specifically about how communities responded to issues of poverty. Heather reflected on the assessment for this lesson and wrote:

The assessment, especially, ties to the goals of critical assessment of poverty. Rather than having students research the causes of poverty, I have students question whether the community as a whole must act towards addressing poverty. In this way, students are already engaging with a question that will come up in the political process throughout their adult lives. (Reflection: Lesson Plan Two)

Heather ultimately intended to raise awareness about social issues to better prepare her students to make ethical decisions about these issues in the future. Through her lessons, Heather demonstrated her regard for others, including her students, in trying to transform her society.

Social justice was also of primary concern in Madelyn's lesson development. Madelyn intended to expose her students to multiple perspectives and challenge their understandings of historical and current issues. Madelyn described one aspect of this challenge in her interview and said:

I think exposing kids to like the perspectives about what's happened here and what we've been involved in and what our role was. We weren't always the good guys and just exposing them to that I think needs to be something to change...students need to understand how others are affected by our country's actions.

Madelyn intended to use historical situations to help students understand current issues. In a classroom discussion of the American Civil Rights Movement, Madelyn noted the power of learning about such events, especially for their connection to current issues and issues of social justice in the present. For example Madelyn wrote, "There is so much in the media today about the LGBTQ movement, so students need to be able to identify it with perspectives from the civil rights movement to understand how people are still working toward social justice today" (In-class Activity). Madelyn understood the value of using multiple perspectives to develop ethical regard for others and hoped that it would guide her students thinking about issues of social justice, both in history and in the present.

To better address issues of social justice, Madelyn intended to challenge the content of traditional social studies subjects by using topics from other subject areas, such as sociology. Madelyn demonstrated her interdisciplinary intent by developing a lesson plan on gender roles during World War II. In her lesson plan reflection, Madelyn hinted at the challenges of mixing subject areas and wrote, "The most challenging aspects of developing this lesson were coming up with an activity that would foster the kind of thinking needed to implement a successful discussion about gender roles in a historical setting...that took into account the societal norms of the time" (Reflection: Lesson Plan Two). In another lesson plan, Madelyn again used the topic of gender roles. Madelyn chose the topic "Slut v. Stud" to expand the traditional content of discussing the social and civic movements of the 1960's and 1970's. Madelyn's lesson development illustrated her regard for the well being of others and her intent to transform her students' thinking about the past, present, and future through her ethical practice.

4.3 Losing sight of "Care of the Self"

Throughout the semester and during the interviews, I asked the preservice teachers in our methods course to consider their purpose for teaching, as well as the lessons they developed, in the context of schools. While Heather and Madelyn's intentions for teaching social studies were among the most robust in their course, when they were asked to think about the constraints of the schools, Heather and Madelyn described themselves and their ethics quite differently.

Heather considered the controversial topics that were at the center of her lessons and which she expected her students to discuss. She was very aware of how she may be perceived by her community, school administration, and colleagues. Heather wrote about this in her purpose statement even before she had created any of the lessons for the course. She was very aware that her purpose for teaching did not mesh well with the status quo in schools. Heather demonstrated her concern over the topics she wanted to cover and the reaction they may receive in her victimless crimes lesson plan reflection. Heather wrote:

Challenges could be from the administration or parents as a result of the topics. They may feel the topics, particularly covering prostitution and sodomy, are inappropriate for the students. They may also be concerned that talking about decriminalization may encourage students to engage in the discussed behaviors, which are considered deviant. (Reflection: Lesson Plan Four)

I asked Heather about this lesson in her interview and specifically how she would handle the challenges. Heather responded, "I would teach it [the lesson] regardless. The common views that disagree with my teaching, just demonstrates that they do not understand the issues or the goals of the lesson...which is why it should be taught" (Interview). Heather's comment demonstrated her commitment to her own ethics and what she perceived as ethical practice. She was willing to maintain her resistance to normalized views of curricular content.

While Heather was aware of the context in schools and how her purpose and curriculum decisions conflicted with the status quo, she did not feel any pressure to conform or necessarily feel a strong need to be accepted by any of the community, administrators, or colleagues. For example, when Heather was asked about acceptance she responded, "If I was teaching, I would rather be fired and leave a school that's not going to support me in what I want to do than to suck it up basically...like if they're not having the same purpose as me" (Interview). It is important to point out that Heather did value the school community and its support. She wanted to make this point about acceptance in the interview and commented:

I'd like to feel like I belong somewhere. But at the same time, like, I'm one of those people that I'd rather feel that sense of not belonging and not compromise something that I feel really strongly about. So it's like a balance between that. But I feel like if I were to teach, I would want to teach in a school that I felt that kind of acceptance anyway when I went...if I went to the interview and I think I could feel that right away.

If I didn't [feel accepted] I might be reluctant to take that job if they were to offer it. (Interview)

Heather could not move beyond her resistance to the normalized practices of schools, and did not want to teach at a school unless she thought that her purpose for teaching would be fully accepted.

Madelyn thought very differently about professional acceptance when compared to Heather. Madelyn was equally aware of the concerns of the school community, administrators, and colleagues; however, she was compelled to gain their acceptance. Madelyn discussed her need for acceptance briefly in her interview:

I think at first, like I mentioned earlier, just having approval from the other teachers and administration will be big constraints for me....Yeah, I think at first I'll just try and do, like, what I know I'm supposed to do and I'll do what I know is okay to do. And then, like, kind of after I've got my foot in the door and settled down and gotten more comfortable in a situation, I'll probably branch out and do what I want to do and not necessarily what I should do, so...like, things that are more in line with my goals and my purpose will have to wait.

Madelyn also thought about resiliency in a very different manner from Heather. Madelyn viewed resilience as something primarily needed outside of the classroom to deal with authority figures. When Madelyn was asked if she saw herself being resilient in her future classroom, she responded:

I have thought about it a lot because I'm kind of not one for confrontation. So a lot of times if people tell me that I shouldn't do something, I don't really want to go against what they tell me not to do. So I kind of struggled with like how am I going to...if I really believe strongly in something, how am I going to go ahead and, like, do it without like losing my job or offending anybody. So that's something I've kind of worried about, I don't know if I can. (Interview)

Madelyn demonstrated her complacency when it came to authoritative figures and her avoidance of confrontation. She faltered in her resistance and creative challenges to the normalizing practices of schools when confronted with the constraints of schools.

5. Discussion

Heather and Madelyn each considered the normalized aspects of schools and were able to construct their self, in a curricular sense, by employing their own ethical perspective and engaging in ethical practices that embodied "care of the self." In thinking about curriculum, Heather and Madelyn were able to rely completely on their own ethical purpose and ethical practice. They were each able to demonstrate resistance to normalized practices in schools and engage in positive ethical practice to create curriculum that supported their resistance. In this way, Heather and Madelyn each demonstrated individualized agency by engaging in "care of the self" as aspiring curriculum developers. They also demonstrated intentions to continually engage in "care of the self" as means to maintain resistance and freedom to engage in their ethical practices.

When Heather and Madelyn thought about their agency in a socialized context, their "care of the self" diminished. Madelyn was unable to imagine her ethical self actually resisting normalized practices that were directly governed by others in the school context, due to her perceived need for professional acceptance (Clark, 2013, 2015). Although Heather maintained her resistance to normalized practices and would presumably continue to create curriculum to support her resistance, she refused to work in a school context that would not support her ethical purpose and practice for teaching social studies. Heather thought that the majority of schools and colleagues would limit her freedom to the point where her ethics would be unrecognizable in her teaching. Foucault (1986), however, thought that "care of the self" constituted "not an exercise in solitude, but a true social practice" (p. 51). Engaging in "care of the self" required strengthening our relation with ourselves and others. This type of strengthening "would add to our freedom as persons and would open up possibilities for selfhood" (Infinito, 2003, p. 165). In their resistance to normalized practices and socialized others in schools, Heather and Madelyn each failed to locate space for the continued development of their self as an ethical subject.

In developing their own resistance to normalized practices, Heather and Madelyn each defined their self by the same normalized practices they had resisted. As Infinito (2003) described, "To accept the 'self' defined by such outside forces limits one's freedom in the sense that one is unable to transgress the given, to create oneself as something 'other' according to one's own inclinations" (p. 158). Heather and Madelyn could not imagine themselves as teachers without being accepted by their colleagues. Without the support of the socialized members of their future school context, Heather and Madelyn thought that there was little possibility for them to practice "care of the self" as continued self-development in the context of schools. From Foucault's perspective, and in the examples of Heather

and Madelyn, the socialized aspects of agency are necessary for the continued development of individualized agency practiced through “care of the self.”

6. Implications

I use Heather and Madelyn’s work to inspire my current preservice teachers and help them understand the possibilities for their work in our social studies methods course. The findings from this study allowed me to reflect on the implications, and reconsider the ways in which I engage preservice teachers in activities and exercises to better define their teaching self.

It is undoubtedly important for teachers to have clear and robust purposes for teaching; however, Heather and Madelyn made me question the role of purpose in preservice teachers’ thinking, and the sustainability of a purpose for teaching that was constructed apart from the beholder’s actual teaching context. Kincheloe (2001) referred to analysis and synthesis as the “martial arts or self-defense for the 21st century teacher” (p. 196). While Heather and Madelyn were able to analyze the normalized practices in the social studies curriculum and construct their own purpose from their analysis, they were unable to synthesize their purpose with the existing structures of schools. The ability to synthesize one’s purpose would need to begin in teacher education, and be a continuous process throughout a teacher’s career. This type of continuous synthesis would require agency in the form of “care of the self” to use their ethical practice to transform their teaching context. I am suggesting, then, that teacher educators need to help preservice teachers develop the capacity to synthesize their purpose with the normalized practices in schools and develop ethical practices that allows for self-creation within their school context.

The socializing structures of schools had already influenced Heather and Madelyn in both positive and negative ways. The influence of the socializing structures could be seen in both their resistance/analysis and in their acquiescence toward professional acceptance. Foucault’s (1997) “care of the self” would suggest that preservice teachers be able to synthesize these influences into their creation of their self, as a form of positive or productive agency. This productive agency would require students to identify and confront the socializing structures they have experienced, and then conceptualize the existence of their purpose for teaching within these structures. Synthesis goes beyond critical reflection because it requires preservice teachers to engage in self-creation based upon their notions of ethical practice. The students’ synthesis would ideally reflect ethical decisions, which often encompass risks, but for Foucault it would also reflect an exercise of power that can unfold possibilities for new institutional or social practices.

The development of preservice teachers’ ability to synthesize their purpose for teaching with the socializing structures in schools could also help them conceptualize their own agency as an integration of individualized and socialized aspects of agency (Priestley et al., 2012). Heather and Madelyn understood their agency as heavily individualized; however, as Biesta and Tedder (2006) warn, “agency should not be understood as a possession of the individual, but rather as something that is achieved in and through the engagement with a particular temporal relational situation” (p. 18). The notion that agency is *achieved* fits very well with Foucault’s notion of “care of the self” because both notions represent a process of ethical engagement with socialized structures. A preservice teacher’s ability to engage in synthesis, then, would require them to leave teacher education understanding that their purpose for teaching is not static, and is instead something to be achieved in context. Teacher educators should help preservice teachers define and maintain their ethical selves within the normalized practices and constraints of schooling, while developing preservice teachers’ openness to inquiry into ethical practices to achieve positive agency and redefine normalized practices – simply because Heather and Madelyn could not envision their agency as ethical practice within the norms of the teaching profession.

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