Actualizing Democracy:
The Praxis of Teacher Identity Construction

By Peter Hoffman-Kipp

> One of the most persistent methodological difficulties of studying thinking has to do with access to online data from thought processes. When thinking is defined as a private, individual phenomenon, only indirect data is accessible. Thinking embedded in collaborative practical activity must to a significant degree take the form of talk, gesture, use of artifacts, or some other publicly accessible mediational instrumentality; otherwise mutual formation of ideas would be rendered impossible. Collaborative thinking opens up access to direct data on thought processes. (Engeström, 1994, p. 45)

In the quest for democratic, rigorous and engaged classrooms, one of the main goals for some teacher educators is to connect teachers to the communities in which they work in order to be more conscious of the realities and identities of their students (McDermott, 1998). This quest is often hampered by the un-inspected and dominant-culture identities that prospective/new teachers bring to their work. Helping teachers reflect on their identity has emerged as a goal in my teacher education work, evolving out of a variety of experiences in my professional and personal life. These are: 1) my professional work as a classroom teacher in diverse, urban schools, 2) my professional research and practice with cultural historical activity theory (CHAT), and 3) my work with prospective/new teachers in and outside teacher education programs as a teacher education professor.

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Each of these activities has increased my focus on the importance and impact of activity on identity.

Teacher identity has been defined in different ways through different methodologies. In this paper, I use autobiographical information, based on my life as an urban teacher and teacher educator, to depict my journey, insights and experiences. In doing so, I synthesize the personal, pedagogical, and political aspects of my identity as a teacher educator. My journey provides a picture that will further enhance the understanding of teacher identity development and practice to provide insights and guidance to current education students, teachers and teacher educators. Developing new lenses through which teachers see their identities and their school communities require teacher educators to provide activity spaces within their university classrooms where effective praxis is both possible and encouraged.

Why Am I Looking at Teacher Identity Development through My Own Professional Journey?

While there is inherent bias in using an autobiographical approach as a form of investigation and reporting in the scholarly community, I believe that there is also a validity in my sharing my first-hand experiences and reflections. Self-report is very appropriate when investigating people's perceptions and reflections on their own experiences and development. I also believe that an autobiographical approach will best portray the vision of activity proposed by CHAT.

Framework for This Article

In this article, I will describe my journey around some key areas. I will start with a consideration of the challenges I faced in urban schools. I will move on to describe my journey related to insights gained in the areas of teacher identity development, social interaction, mediation, and apprenticeship, and how I grew to apply CHAT in my work.

I. Challenges Faced While Teaching in Urban Schools

When I graduated from college, I became a teacher through the Teach For America (TFA) program. I was intrigued by the challenge and hope of work with urban youth, and surprisingly TFA returned me to my hometown of Los Angeles. There I worked in public and Catholic schools for the next 6 years. My experiences in three very different schools led me to simultaneous interests in the politics of education and the challenges new teachers face.

With several years of classroom experience, and a sense of research I wished to conduct, I began graduate school while in my 6th year of teaching. This process shifted my perspective through the mediated reflection that theory and time for graduate work provided. I found there that theory could help me to understand and organize my experiences as a young teacher. Further, I found analytic tools

to unpack my experience that larger politics were at work outside the classroom that affected my work inside the classroom. In fact, this discovery led me to enter teacher education with the hope that my work could support teachers as they currently straddle the pedagogical and political roles and identities of contemporary education work. That work has convinced me of the need for a teacher education that provides the praxis necessary to develop informed and committed teaching identities that acknowledge educational politics and difference, affirm diversity, and work toward honest dialogue.

Towards a Definition of Teacher Identity

Recently, my six year old, knowing the topic of this article, asked: "Daddy, what's identity?" Not knowing exactly where to begin, I began a report on the different influences upon and parts of his identity: "Your school, being a kid, being a brother… all of these things are part of your identity." Smiling, he said: "I'm all those things at one time?!"

Historically, identity has been defined as a fixed point from which the individual interacts with the world. In this paper, I define teacher identity as the intersection of personal, pedagogical, and political participation and reflection within a larger sociopolitical context. It is the scripts, tool usage, and participation that defines the actor in an activity setting. And while identity involves the individual, it is an invention of situated activity, in various communities, that both enable and limit certain identity creation and sustenance. Obviously, dominant cultural assumptions and norms do much to define and situate individual identity. Finally, identity is textual in that a text or identity is created to which both the individual and others respond.

This text, or displayed identity, is a critical component in the sociocultural and sociopolitical intersections of classroom activity (Varghese, Morgan, Johnston, Johnson, 2005), because teachers' identities are powerful factors in students' identity construction. While many teachers espouse values of democracy and empowerment, residual control ideologies present in multiple and overlapping activity systems surrounding teachers make it difficult to enact these values. In fact, the "dialectical relationship between agency and structure will rein in any individual's efforts to attain particular [goals]" (Roth, Tobin, Elmesky, Carambo, McKnight, Beers, 2004, p. 67).

I envision teacher identity as forming within classroom activity whereby identity is not fossilized in one moment with a unitary definition, but is actually shifting, routinely non-linear, and often in conflict, both interpersonal and intrapersonal. Given the active process of identity construction, I see teacher identity as a mix of values, beliefs, attitudes, approaches to interaction, and language that has been developed in personal realms (life history, family, community of origin) combined with understandings, pedagogical commitments and approaches, and routines of professional practice developed in teacher education programs and on the job.

Often teachers are making sense of their professional teacher identity in a setting foreign to the places they developed their personal identity. For example,

suburbanly raised teachers in urban settings may be surprised that "social capital is the central currency of urban schooling… [and that] urban youth are the most appropriate educators for new teachers" on issues of identity and connecting with urban students (Roth, Tobin, Elmesky, Carambo, McKnight, Beers, 2004, p. 66 and 68). Indeed, teachers can learn through the knowledge gained in other activity settings. Urban youth have developed a cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005) that informs their lives in other activity settings like school. Students are forming identities within and outside of school, and identity translation, like code switching, becomes a skill that informs teacher identity, constructed as it is on the job and often in interaction with youth. How do we, as teacher educators, prepare teachers for this process? I turn to CHAT theory to inform a set of practices that can do just this.

II. Four Central Tenets of CHAT

Working in the Soviet Union in the decades after the Russian Revolution, Lev Vygotsky was part of a small group of Soviet psychologists seeking a new psychology reflective of the material dialectic of traditional Marxism. Vygotsky's (1978) work toward a cultural psychology is the most well known foundation for CHAT. CHAT proposes that several key concepts summarize the evolution of human consciousness through everyday activity. Each of these concepts in one way or another informs my understanding of how my own identity has been formed as a teacher educator and how prospective/new teachers can be encouraged to do identity work, through praxis, in their teacher education courses. The main CHAT concepts, and their relationship to teachers' identity construction, I wish to address here are: (1) identity consciousness as a result of the praxis of goal directed activities combined with reflection, (2) social interaction prefacing internalization and appropriation of elements of identity, (3) tool mediation in the process of identity construction, and (4) the power of apprenticeship, guided participation, and participatory appropriation as praxis oriented educational method for identity work.

1. Identity Consciousness

Identity consciousness requires something similar to the advice given when trying to look at a very dim star: "don't look right at it, and you will catch a glimpse." Multiple glimpses, and you get a sense of the object. So it goes with consciousness of one's identity (McIntosh, 1992). CHAT suggests that socially-organized practical activity, or "labor" in Marxist terms, reveals consciousness because human beings can reflect on their progress toward goals (Blanton, Moorman & Trathen, 1999). Through a synthesis of ideas, plans, and physical objects, people create socially-valued outcomes, and it is both the outcomes as well as the process of their creation that reveals the identities of the creators. Goals, activity, and outcomes are a means to understanding psychological processes carried out under natural conditions and reveal the cultural and historical background that has produced the goals, ritualized activities, and understandings of the outcomes.

To effectively position teacher educators for identity work requires beginning with identity consciousness, which is perceptible through the establishment of tasks that offer teachers opportunities to set goals, engage in activity, and produce outcomes. Reflection then offers a dissection of the process in order to better understand the cultural and historical influences that have created the process and the identities that were revealed. In goal-directed activity, not only is consciousness possible, but teachers transform their own and others' identities through this process.

2. Social Interaction

According to CHAT, social interaction prefaces internalization and appropriation of elements of identity. Soviet psychologists in the 1960s and 1970s observed that children, in their early stages of development, participate in activities that require skills that they do not yet have, and their participation is mediated by insufficient tools. When they come to a moment of difficulty, they turn to an adult for help. This zone of proximal development (ZPD), the place in which the child seeks the adult's assistance and is capable of accomplishing more than they could alone, is the beginning of semiotic mediation. That is, speech, first as a tool of communication and then as an inner guide, becomes internalized, so that interpersonal speech becomes intrapersonal, and inner speech emerges. Both Piaget and Vygotsky agree that once external activities are internalized, they become more powerful than the original external process. Internalization serves as the foundation for future activity, actions, operations, and interactions with artifacts, as the social and cultural internally guides the individual. The appropriation of previous lessons becomes the foundation for future participation as the activities of the past become parts of a new identity (Hoffman-Kipp, 2003).

3. Mediation

The praxis of acting and thinking is mediated by tools. Much like speech serves as a communication tool, other tools, both real (physical ones like a hammer or pen) and ideal (strategies, concepts, heuristics) help us to complete labor tasks. Vygotsky (1978) added the concept of the ideal tool to Marx's idea of material tools in arguing that it is tool-mediated activity that offers social groups the opportunity for shared thinking and negotiated meaning. Tools, by their very structure, look, and feel, demonstrate the cultures from which they emerged thus "mediating a connection between the user and the culture of prior generations" (Blanton, Moorman & Trathen, 1999). Culture can mediate social relationships in material and ideal ways if it is conceived as being manifest in tools or the meaning implicit in these tools. Language, as the tool of tools, offers ritualized ways of communicating that bespeak of the culture and identity of the speaker. Scripts, narratives, genres and discourses offer routinized claims about our identity and relative identity within a framework of relationships. We are framing the system in which we are speaking while at the same time communicating the overt messages of our utterances.

Dialogue enables the tool of speech to discursively define a contextualized identity developed out of the scripts offered in a particular context.

And while these identities can remain unique and separate in dialogue, they also linguistically accommodate and assimilate one another. While we utter what we think are unique thoughts, social languages offer us a dialogicality or multi-voicedness that Bakhtin termed '*ventriloquation*' (Bakhtin, 1981), the process whereby one voice speaks *through* another voice or voice type in a social language (Wertsch, 1991, p. 59). For teachers, this concept becomes particularly interesting as they enter different settings, communities, and dialogue under different rules of discourse. What identities are possible when the setting, community, and rules of dialogue, as well as those participating in the dialogue, change?

4. Apprenticeship

Three fundamental concepts occupy the fourth tenet of CHAT: apprenticeship, guided participation, and participatory appropriation (Rogoff, 1995). The first is one of the fundamental parts of the inter-subjectivity of learning and development in socio-cultural contexts. It is the idea of *apprenticeship*—the novice learning from experts (human, community, or institutional). Within apprenticeship as a concept lies the fundamental nature of the ZPD: the expert guiding the novice through the "edge of incompetence" to new understanding. Apprenticeship can take the form of human mediation, but it does not only occur from expert to novice. Tool usage and participation patterns of the expert lay the foundation for apprenticeship. The novice first copies the behavior of the expert, then internalizes the image of the expert, using the image as a tool for identity construction.

A second, and further development of the apprenticeship relationship is the concept of *guided participation*. Participation becomes guided not only by apprenticeship practices, but also by the norms, cultural and social values, and routine practices of the community within which apprenticeship takes place. Identity is formed by these participation patterns.

Finally, a novice's changing participation within the apprenticeship and guided participation practices allows for a form of *participatory appropriation*. Participatory appropriation actuates Vygotsky's (1978) statement about participation preceding development in the sense that shifts in participation behavior reveal internal shifts in development. For identity, this means that novices must be given the opportunity to participate as well as to shift their routine forms of participation within an activity. New opportunities for participation rely on past participatory experiences and moments. Novices, as do all people, enact prolepsis - the action of the present being mediated both by a remembered past and by a hoped-for future (Hoffman-Kipp, Artiles, Lopez-Torres, 2003).

III. Applying CHAT in the Teacher Education Classroom

During my dissertation (Hoffman-Kipp, 2003), I realized that, although CHAT

offers effective ways to analyze activity and consciousness, it did not produce the kinds of changes in identity or social justice consciousness in teachers that I had expected. I realized very quickly that prospective/new teachers, especially those like my participants who were in the middle of their student teaching experience, need more than awareness of the power of CHAT concepts in order to question their identity. Indeed, awareness alone cannot supercede the fact that nationwide teacher education programs are overwhelmingly white, monolingual, with students who come from a rural or suburban community with very little direct intercultural experience (American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education [AACTE], 1987, 1989; Gomez, 1994; Irvine, 1989; LaFontaine, 1988).

Prospective/new teachers benefit most from concrete activities in which they (1) create texts about their beliefs and practices; (2) share those texts with others; (3) investigate theory as a tool for understanding those texts; and (4) do all of this with the support of a facilitator who has done their own identity work and gained some self understanding. I began to wonder how successful I was at demonstrating the kind of praxis that I was expecting from my student teachers. My personal commitment to living, working, and educating my children in a economically and culturally-diverse community has exposed me to the need for very personal identity work, and has motivated me to seek and create some professional activities that could mediate identity in similar ways as my neighborhood does for me.

Teacher educators have long been interested in the most effective ways for their prospective/new teachers to become conscious of, reflect upon, and even change their personal/professional identities in ways that support their students. However, the road to doing so has been fraught with research that suggests teacher education is a weak intervention (Feiman-Nemser, 1990, p. 229). In response, CHAT and my own experience mentioned above have demonstrated to me the power of reflective goal-directed tasks, social interactions, and mediated learning specifically on identity formation. Toward that end, I offer some activity settings or strategic fictions (Cole, 1995) whereby teacher educators can offer the possibility to their students of the interpersonal moving to the intrapersonal.

In fact, activity settings and identity formation are an implicit fit if the individual subject is thought to construct their identity socially. It would be impossible to understand the individual without a view of the primary settings in which they formed their pedagogic identity. That is why stories are so important, and why the reflection on those stories, with the help of theory, is vital. For my own teacher education students, I offer the opportunity for them to function as:

> […] identity researchers[, who] are directed to study identity in local activity settings where participants are actively engaged in forming their identities; to examine the cultural and historical resources for identity formation as empowering and constraining tools for identity formation; to take mediated action as a unit of analysis; and to examine the variation in cultural resources for identity formation […]. (Penuel & Wertsch, 1995, p. 1)

Thus many of the seven following CHAT-based activities offer the chance for teachers to create texts which can be deconstructed, debated, analyzed, questioned, and so on in an effort to deepen their understanding of their own identity formation through the mediation of others, theoretical concepts, the writing process and so on. I organize these activities by those that activate the learner, those that create a text to be analyzed or provide tools of analysis, and those that situate the learner within a cultural, temporal, and sociological context.

Activation

1. Theater of the Oppressed

Augusto Boal's (2000) work on the activation of the typically passive audience in theater, serves teacher education by offering a way to activate often passive students to new forms of participation. In one activity, Boal offers audience members the chance to "freeze the play," take on one of the roles of the characters, and to try to change the direction of some oppression occurring on stage. In another activity, "scenes" are constructed through the "sculpting" of bodies (moving them into particular positions independently and in relation to others) to articulate certain oppressive relationships. Like many activities that require students to collectively navigate a solution to a problem (Blanton, n.d.), these activities offer students a way not only to "see" with new lenses, but also to experience the empowerment of shifting their participation, relationship to others, and challenging normatively passive responses to "the way things are."

2. Bafa Bafa

One activity I have used with my prospective/new teachers, is known as "Bafa Bafa" (Simulation Training Systems, n.d.). In this cultural simulation, two separate "cultures" are created with their own communication systems, practices, economies, and philosophies of a meaningful and successful life. "Visitors" from one group visit the other for a brief period of time and report back to the other culture. In a very short time, students can see their stereotypes both about the culture visited and the impact of the interactions of the visitors. On several occasions, I found that this activity, more than any description or discussion, brought home the difficulties of crossing boundaries and participating in worlds where the rules of cultural interaction are other than one's own. Specifically, this activity challenged normative assumptions about how philosophies of a meaningful life would logically evolve into routine, everyday practices of communication, economic exchange, and so on.

3. Culture Shock

The culture shock, as designed by Andrea Neves of Stanford University and Sonoma State University, is designed to challenge the learner to enter an unfamiliar setting and to

> help prospective/new teachers address their stereotypes and anxieties about a particular cultural group about which they have negative feelings, to learn how to deal with culture shock, and to apply the concept of culture shock to the classroom. The goal is to experience and observe one's reactions to the discomforting feelings of disorientation to a cultural world that is strange (i.e., many of the familiar cultural markers have moved or are absent)—an experience familiar to many K-12 students. (Lea, 2006)

Vital to the exercise is students' honesty about their own preconceptions, stereotypes, or negative feelings. The conversation inevitably begins in the glib, comfortable platitudes that none of us actually have stereotypes. However, we all do, and the exercise inevitably profits the trust and communication of the group both before, during and after the actual activity. The exercise also creates overlapping activity systems in which the prospective/new teacher must straddle the university/community divide. Finally, the exercise offers a distinct text of an experience, as participants are asked to write about their feelings before, during and after their entry into the field experience.

I find that the problem with the assignment is that selected communities, groups, locations, and activities are almost always falsely construed as "representative" of the selected group (e.g., an African-American church is selected as representative of THE African-American experience). Toward exploding this myth, participants are asked to focus on themselves and their own feelings of anxiety before, during, and perhaps after the experience with the hope of honesty and dialogue about their own cultural comfort zone. The results of such an experience are that teachers realize they find it hard to have negative stereotypes about those with whom they have shared such a personal experience.

My own experience with this activity in my own life is that more often than not, crossing boundaries where one retains unspoken stereotypes is hard for anyone. In fact, this activity is most effective with instructor participation. My own move to a multi-ethnic/mutli-class often provides this type of personal story, and inevitably, I share some of the stories in which I have recently felt myself crossing or resisting to cross a cultural boundary within my own community.

Text and Analysis

4. Cultural Portfolio

In one assignment created by my colleague, Virginia Lea (2006), a "Cultural Portfolio" encouraged students to write stories on their experiences with culture, race, class, gender, and sexual orientation. The first step was for students to focus on one experience and remember as much as they could about it. After creating the text, students were encouraged to analyze the story with theories introduced in the class. By peeling back the layers of these stories using theoretical concepts taught in the class, students were able to relive, reinterpret, and deepen their understanding of ways in which their identity had been shaped by pivotal experiences, and

the resultant interpretation, in which they engaged often when very young. These stories would then be shared with the mutivoicedness (Bahktin, 1981) of the graduate student, person who wrote/experienced the story, and theorist. These stories with commentary provide avenues for our prospective/future teachers to engage lived experience in the light of new theory/knowledge. As a "shared text," these stories, when shared with the class, offered a site for further multivoicedness with the class analysis.

5. Vocabulary

I have discovered the power of vocabulary in my own courses on multiculturalism and educational foundations. I often now provide vocabulary lists with definitions (Leistyna, 1995; McLaren, 1999; Gramsci, 1971) to my students with the syllabus and course readings. These lists become texts of their own over which we debate not only the meanings of the words, but the experiences in our lives that are named by those words. Vocabulary helps us name our experiences with theory thus enabling us to communicate the stories and lessons in universal language and providing the empowering experience of being able to name our world (Freire & Macedo, 1987).

Situating the Learner

6. Schooling: Personal and Historical Focus

In this exercise, students are asked to write a history of their own schooling experiences detailed with the kinds of pedagogy, classroom management, curriculum, student-teacher relationships, and expectations in their schools. They then place these experiences against the backdrop of Jean Anyon's (1980) models of schools. Also, students are asked to record important historical moments in education reform in the time span represented in their history. In this way, students become aware not only of the class orientation of their schooling experience, but also the historical events taking place that may have influenced their personal experience of school. These connections help students to challenge the impressions that their schooling experience is normative, and to see that all schooling experiences are unique to the learner, community, and historic time period.

7. Culture Bag

A powerful way for prospective/new teachers to become aware of their cultural selves is to present a "culture bag." In this activity, they present a few items that represent their culture. I specifically leave the definition of culture open, and I leave the number of items to about 4-5. I find that it is imperative that the physical item is there, as it becomes an artifact that mediates the conversation and the perception of those in the room. I usually write down how folks have defined culture in their reports on their artifacts and read these definitions back after the whole class has presented. My report usually reveals how widely we define culture, from ethnicity,

to family history, to age, to practices, foods, and different forms of participation in the world. This exercise, usually early on in the class, allows prospective/new teachers to see that culture can be defined in many different ways, that it is a filter they use to appropriate their world, that they do have vocabulary to contribute to their K-12 students' understandings of their own cultural artifacts, and that "doing cultural work" can be as easy as asking students to share a few touchstones, listening carefully, and playing back what they hear with the goal of helping students to see that all cultural norms are arbitrary (Bourdieu & Passerson, 1977).

Recently, I shared my culture bag and included 2 pictures of my great grandfathers on my mother's side of the family. I had hesitated to do so because of the tradition of privilege on that side of my family. Both pictures are of old, white men in suits, and both are framed in dusty old, but expensive frames. I found that my teacher education students were enticed by my honesty and the organic and genuiness of my response, rather than judgmental of my background. In fact, I found that my story about my move to my current community became much more real to my students given my personal history with privilege.

Conclusions

Since identity formation occurs in social contexts, our teacher education classes offer a significant social context in which to further the identity construction process. Learning to reflect requires a consciousness of mediation (Hoffman-Kipp, Artiles, & Lopez-Torres, 2003). We need tools to reflect on something as profound as the ground we stand on: our identity. The activities offered here suggest some ways of doing so, but there are many others. In the end, if the activity centralizes a focus on a teacher's own story, and interrogates that story with the assistance of the many good artifacts our profession has developed (theories, strategies, activities), then there is the possibility of helping teachers to realize their own cultured self, and to see what that self can offer in the classroom.

Teachers can be the subjects of the process of identity development, but not without critical reflection (Hoffman-Kipp, Artiles, & Lopez-Torres, 2003). Often their experiences with professional identity are limited by the constraints of the ideologies of their superiors, mentors, students, communities, teacher education programs, and other school/community constituents who see teachers in a particular light. Part of my job as a teacher educator is to help teachers make conscious the ways that they have the power to change, redirect, or reject the ways in which their professional identity has been made for them and to reclaim the power to build that identity themselves based upon their ideals.

If we hope to be involved in the debate surrounding the importance of teacher education, centralizing identity in our work offers a way to reprofessionalize both our work as well as that of our prospective/new teachers. Teacher education is built upon both content and pedagogical knowledge, and the interplay between the two

has been the focus of countless government and academic attempts at reform to the discipline (Newman, 2006; Nation at Risk, 1983; NCLB, 2000). Within the debates is an inherent assumption: that the personal and professional identity of the teacher either matters or it doesn't. For those who have long subscribed to a transmission perspective on learning (Hirsch, 1988; Bennett, 1996), the equation is simple: identity doesn't matter; it's the unaltered content, the great books and ideas, communicated, directly and efficiently, to students that does. This form of "technical literacy," isolated from any sociocultural influences, makes the act of knowing and learning autonomous from the ideology of the society that creates the context (Street, 1985). Identity, however, offers a construct that can bridge the sociocultural context with the act of knowing. This process is unique and different for each teacher in our classes, and for that reason, our knowledge of how to create the kinds of praxis environments where identity work can take place is our professional journey.

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