

POSTSCRIPT

The Dimensions of Reflection: A Conceptual and Contextual Analysis

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When one of the editors of this journal asked me to contribute a piece, I was very happy -but also wondering what I'd send in. Luckily, the editor in question was also interested in "reflection" and there was an old paper not published elsewhere, which seemed to have some ideas useful to his own research agenda, partly around issues of "reflection". Little did I know that this process of retrieving the paper, now 17 years old, would also retrieve memories of the whole process of learning to do academic writing, of becoming a professor, (including thoughts on why the paper has not until this time been published}, and of how one of the strongest relationships in my life began to be constructed.

Revisiting this article after so many years seems strange. But the editor assures me that my comments might be useful, and my appraisal of the current "reflective teaching" literature affirms that what we said then as graduate students is still relevant today. The latter issue will remain with the readers (I've made only minor modifications to reflect a few of the helpful comments we received so long ago, as well as just to locate to article as solely in reference to the 1980s literature). What I want to focus on here is partly an exploration as to why the paper stayed as an "unpublished" conference paper for so long. The quality of the paper is not an issue I address. That might be a logical question, but my concern is rather with our journey with this paper. My thoughts are about context and structures rather than about the merits of the arguments themselves.

My dear colleague, co-author, and friend, Marie Brennan, and I did the work many years ago while we were graduate students together. We wrote the paper together, after doing individual papers as part of a 1988 AERA symposium on reflection. It was one of the first of many pieces of our relationship that have emerged continuously since that time from our shared commitments to action research, to collaboration between schools, universities, and communities, and to each other. I had not thought about that paper in quite some time. I'd even forgotten that we submitted it to a journal, and as I look at them now, received 2 out of 3 positive reviews with very useful suggestions (the third one really "trashed" our work) and there was a very encouraging letter from the editor encouraging us to make the revisions and resubmit the paper. That was in December of 1988. When I looked further in the file, there was also a follow-up letter from the editor from November of 1989, still interested in the paper, wondering if we were going to send it in again. There was also a copy of the paper, literally full of comments and suggestions from my then mentor and colleague, Catherine Cornbleth. As I look at the latter today, I am really conscious of how much I learned from her careful attention, even if we never revised the paper.

So why didn't we follow up on this opportunity for a "refereed journal article", already half "in the bag". Some of it is related to material conditions. I was not present at the 1988 AERA as my husband and I were awaiting our daughter, who arrived on June 1 of that year (and later referred to Marie as her "other Mommy"), the last year of our graduate study. In the summer of 1989, we both left UW-Madison. Marie had defended her dissertation (with some

revisions to do) and returned to her position in the Ministry of Education in Melbourne. I still had almost half the dissertation left to write, but was taking up a position at SUNY-Buffalo. The children (aged almost 9 and almost 1 ½) came with me. My husband stayed in his position in Madison, coming once a month for about a week. (The “commuting” continued for almost 3 years). Needless to say, both of us were pretty busy with things other than this article (We did both eventually complete our degrees, of course). While others under similar circumstances might have completed the submission, I/we did not.

Beyond issues of material conditions, though, the process of “non-publishing” also seems to me to be an example of how we as academics live some of the very concepts we seek to explore. Both of us spent our years of graduate school immersed in concepts like “habitus” and “cultural capital”, “intensification of labor”, not to mention addressing aspects of “gender”. Ironically, all of these clearly played roles in the “story” of this paper, as well. (Here, I want to remind readers, that this is Sue speaking. Marie may not agree.). The obvious ones have to do with understanding “how things work” in the academy. I had a wonderful group of supportive colleagues in Buffalo, ones who really helped me to understand that “Revise and resubmit” meant that you had your foot in the door, and also showed me how to address reviewers concerns (not always to comply, but to respond). I was able to use this in getting the second article I submitted accepted, but went on to other projects and didn’t get back to the reflection piece.

In some ways, I was really lucky. I came into the academy just as “the bar” was being raised; having done major conference presentations and having a book chapter in the works sufficed for getting a job. For many graduates now, a “publication record” is often required before a position can be secured, although it seems to me to be antithetical to having time to really find the connections (intellectual and material) to develop depth of both research and its ethical and political implications. And what of gender? I’ve struggled with that one since the 1960s (Marie and I recently did a book chapter on our relationship with the term, “feminist”, Noffke & Brennan, 2004). All of the “isms” are alive and well in the academy and do influence our career trajectories, not to mention our personal well-being. But perhaps such categories also propel us in our work. For me (perhaps) it was the work I did in those early years in Buffalo, thinking about collaborative work with teachers (women) in terms of feminist ethics and epistemology, which took me away from the earlier work. Who knows? But I also think that this part of who I am has propelled me most strongly into thinking about issues of race.

And still we are not reducible to any of these material conditions or fully explained by any social theory. I am still me, responsible (procrastinating, reading slowly, avoiding writing, being an activist-researcher not always in “good” balance, still not understanding how to be a professor...) for my own “productivity issues”. Despite the relentless efforts of some misogynists, and with the steadfast support of some really great folks (husband and friends), I am still “here”. “Agency” wins? I don’t know on either a theoretical or practical level, but I do know that I want to be there with Gramsci and R. Williams as part of “optimism of the will”, and “politics of hope” crowd.

Revisiting this paper also evokes the relationship that crafted it. When I pulled out the folder, there were the two individual papers each of us did, as well as lots of handwritten notes

from both of us. Our relationship, still strong and yet different after all of these years, was built out of all of those bits and pieces of work together – intellectual work, yes, but also of building an enduring friendship through sharing much of our lives, personal and political. We have written (and published) many works together in the intervening years, each one seems to me almost like a marker of a new turn in our lives and relationships. I do hope that “young” scholars work to create such relationships, across distance, difference, and the many barriers that the “university community of scholars as structured by capitalism continues to erect.

I hope that people find this “postscript” useful, and/or the paper. I also hope that other grad students/young faculty will not take so long to get their ideas “in print”, but may they also continue to believe in themselves and the political agendas they foster through their scholarship.

-Sue

Noffke, Susan E., & Brennan, Marie. (2004). Doormats and feminists: Who is the “community” in action research? In: Mary Brydon-Miller, Patricia Maguire, & Alice McIntyre (Eds.), *Traveling companions: Feminisms and participatory action research* (pp. 97-113). Westport, CN: Praeger.