

(THE LOSS OF) MORAL IDENTITY AND (EARLY CHILDHOOD SCIENCE) SCHOOLING: A CONSIDERATION

Francis S. Broadway
University of Akron

Vexation

Settlage (2007) beseeches, if not demands, science education to be liberated from “chasing a impossible goal [–namely open inquiry] and redirect our collective attention to genuine problems that deserve our attention” (p. 466). While reflecting on Settlage (2007), he may be accused of what Noddings (2007) calls “when peace gives way to war ... [we make men out of] unfavored students who become ‘our boys,’ automatically ‘our heroes’” (p. 1029). In other words, is Settlage taking the unfavored content and instruction of school science and making these ways of teaching the heroes of science education? Does Settlage in his critique of open inquiry ask science education to lose, if not recraft, its moral identity? In other words, in most simple terms is science education to become science teaching and learning or is science education, unlike science, as content and instruction in schools, moral? My global vexation becomes: “is science in schools moral?” I ask, situated within the preparation of early childhood teachers, “Do early childhood teacher candidates need to lose their moral identity to teach science?”

However, I do not come with a vexation about instructional or pedagogical methods, but a vexation of moral identity, especially the loss of moral identity (Noddings, 2007), of teachers whereby moral is “honesty, compassion, open-mindedness, nonviolence, consideration, moderation, and a host of other qualities that most of us admire” (Noddings, 2005, p. 39) or a “framework of liberation, dignity fulfillment, and peace for all” (Purpel, 1998/2005, p. 190). “Identity enables us to portray how the political we had thought were located ‘out there’ in society, are lived through ‘in here’ in our bodies, our minds, our everyday speech and conduct” (Pinar, 2004, p. 30). Therefore, I speak of queering a body that is positioned and situated in acceptance and opposition to an Other and a body that must be nurtured or cared-for in order to be. However, “you do not need an identity to become yourself; you need an identity to become *like* someone else” (Delany, 1996, p. 19, italic in the original), but I vex to understand the moral identity of teacher candidates’ and how teacher candidates forsake or do not forsake their identity, especially their dignity and their loving and caring (Gaines, 1993), as they learn to teach a science that “creates forms [taxonomies, theories, frameworks, conceptual systems] through which the world [or universe] is viewed” (Eisner, 1985, p. 26)

The source of my frustration, at the least, is that I work in a world – school – that questionably would be called not moral and a world in which I have been successful as the oppressed and, in something that I would not like to be called, the oppressor. Maybe the question of my moral identity and my loss of moral identity is troublesome because I do not want to be the person that I am, but I do not know what I am until I meet what others would call my maker. Perhaps I can follow Friere (1970/2000) who offers the *n’shamah* (Gen. 2:7) that I should “perceive the reality of oppression not as a closed world from which there is no exit, but as a limiting situation which they can transform” (p. 49). In other words, what is the moral identity of teachers in *our* “country [that] needs ‘worker bees’ ... not an educated and politically astute citizenry? And those ‘worker bees’ are to be produced by teachers [gendered feminine], not ‘queen’ bees in this scheme, more like domestics help” (Pinar, 2004, p. 219)? Do early childhood teacher candidates as they learn to teach in “the nightmare that is the present state of public miseducation” (p. 5) become “victims, as well as perpetrators, suffer[ing] a loss of moral identity in situations of war or violence” (Noddings, 2007, p. 1029)?

Venture

“But all students already want to learn; it is a question of what they want to learn” (Noddings, 2005, p. 19).

I am returning home from teaching a graduate course where the learning challenges, contests and disrupts the Tylerian curriculum (Tyler, 1949) – “curriculum could be reduced to an elaborate set of behavioral objectives” (Noddings, 2005, p. 4) with a notion that curriculum is a complicated conversation (Pinar, 2001, 2004, 2006); “what is ultimately structured *in the child’s mind* – that is remembered, understood, used, and enjoyed” (Sizer, 1999, p. 163, italic in the original); or “both a producer and product of culture [sic] if we understand culture to be a system of meanings available to actors situated in shared space, time, history, and possibility” (Grumet, 1989/1999, p. 233). Again my graduate students, all licensed teachers, question why the contested and (re)conceptualized curriculum (Kridel, 1998; Pinar, Reynolds, Slattery & Taubman, 1995) is not provided during undergraduate teacher preparation. They suggests that if such had been included in their teacher preparation then a (re)conceptualized curriculum would (re)claim school as moral and educative or, more personally, prevent teacher candidates from losing their moral identity. This suggests that practicing teachers have no hope

(THE LOSS OF) MORAL IDENTITY AND (EARLY CHILDHOOD SCIENCE) SCHOOLING: A CONSIDERATION

Francis S. Broadway
University of Akron

of reclaiming their moral identity. However, what moral identity do teacher candidates have? What identity do they, once they become teachers, have?

Although an assumption in the loss of moral identity discourse is that teachers and teacher candidates are moral albeit that “conscientious teachers [see] teaching as a moral enterprise, not one in which the end justifies the means” (Noddings, 2005, p. 7), my venture is to write papers focusing on the moral identity of teacher candidates and science teachers, if and only if, the research process, ending in the publishing of papers, is educative for me. Hence, one paper examines the moral identity of teacher candidates through their a priori notion of teaching science. These teacher candidates are self-identified early childhood majors who been admitted into the program. Specifically, I will examine responses to the Application for Admission question: Why are you applying to our program of teacher education? to seek those who use value-laden and judgmental phrases such as “to help students become successful”. Could the term “successful” mean “... do they [the white world] even know or care/That we [those who learn through stories and song./Through drumming and through singing] are here, that we were there?/Do you think they care at all/About *our* ways, about *our* culture?” (Bouchard, 2006)?

With the supposition, in the standards discourse with teachers, teaching according “to the standards” is not successful *No Child Left Behind* teaching if and only if high-stakes state-mandated evaluations are not “standards” assessments, another paper explores how primary grade science teachers negotiate their teaching of standards and standards-based science teaching and learning. In other words, is the lack of rebellion by science teachers to the practice versus the theory of standards science (albeit *No Child Left Behind*) teaching and learning an indication of concordance between the moral identity of the standards and the teacher; a reconciliation of moral identities; or a negotiated and conciliatory moral identity, or is the moral identity of teachers identity (needs) of politics (physiology) and economies (safety) without the needs of love, esteem and self-actualization (Maslow, 1946/1970)? However, these papers are of little value if they do not change my practice as a preparer of science teachers.

How do I, as a (science) teacher preparer, construct a school (science) that is educative and to allow teachers (and students) to “develop their powers to perceive critically *the way they exist* in the world *with which* and *in which* they find themselves; they come to see the world not as a static reality, but as a reality in process, in transformation” (Freire, 1970/2000, p. 83, italic in the original)? How am I to become the science educator where

the [teacher] *with* [the student] mediates by the world – a world which impresses and challenges both parties, giving rise to views or opinions about it[?] These views, impregnated with anxieties, doubts, hopes, or hopelessness, imply significant themes, on the basis of which the program content of education can be built (p. 93, italic in the original);

However, if Freire insists that “authentic thinking, thinking that is concerned about *reality*, does not take place in ivory towers isolated, but only in communication” (p.77) and the reality outside the ivory tower is

different shaped bodies. Different handwriting. Only one correct answer.... We were cliquish and mean spirited and if someone did fit in he was ostracized. All you had to do was stand in the hallways and listen. This one was a loser. That one was a nerd. This one was a faggot. (Berlin, 2004, p. 80 – 81),

then can I have a moral identity? As Noddings (2007) suggests “when we push people to do things that deny their own moral identity, we have doubly hurting them – hurting them directly by our act and, indirectly, by getting them to betray their moral guideline. The second may be the great crime (Noddings, 1989)” (p. 1028). And school is war.