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VEXATION

Like a glue sniffer who's lifted her head up out of the bag long enough to look around, I feel disoriented. I fear that the focus on work at my teaching institution has changed me far more than my work's focus has changed it. Issues of equity, advocacy, and social justice remain central to the way I teach, but keeping these issues at the center of my research is becoming more problematic. My sense of self, the pride I take in my work, the belief that I could make a difference — these begin and end between the classroom walls. These feelings, however, are not alive for me: not in the field, not in the literature, not in the discipline.

This sense of loss is what brings me here today. The catalyst is my inability to publish a paper using the concept of social capital to consider the identification and value of classroom participation to Latina/o adolescents. This work-in-progress builds upon research looking at the intersections of gender and participation that I published in *Teachers College Record*. The current work is an effort to reconceptualize how we think about classroom participation and to consider how following the rules may not result in the same benefits for all students. The first paper had seemed rather easy — a submission that resulted in a request for a revision. A revision that resulted in acceptance. Acceptance that resulted in publication. Little has been that "easy" since.

Clearly, the source of my frustration is myself, but it is now encapsulated in a single over-worked manuscript (manuscript!) and the multiple requests to revise and resubmit it: a highly unusual *two* requests for revisions from *Sociology of Education* before the manuscript's ultimate rejection, and now yet another request for revisions from yet another journal. My unresolved vexation has resulted in a paralyzing lack of confidence in my ability to adequately express a cogent understanding of the uses of social capital— along with an ever-increasing feeling that my own social capital is withering in the process.

Let me begin by describing my understandings of social capital. Social capital is recognized as a form of power that can be used, exchanged, invested, or cashed in towards a particular goal (Foley and Edwards 1999; McGonigal, Doherty, Allan, Mills, Catts, Redford, McDonald, Mott, and Buckley 2007). It is important to state, however, that its use value is determined by the context in which it is considered (Côté, 2005; Lareau, 1987). We must also acknowledge that just as social capital can work for some people, it can also work against others (Bourdieu 1986; Portes and Landolt 1996). Some traffic in social capital; others, however, are comparatively impoverished.

This nuanced understanding of social capital recognizes that communities can make claims on members that impede rather than support opportunities for upward mobility (Morrow, 1999). Neglecting the multivalent capacity of social capital may result in the obfuscation of the ways in which race, class, and gender are differentially impacted by its development. Lin (2000) argues, for example, that communities partitioned along race or class lines suffer a network homogeneity that reinforces inequalities. Due to a lack of diversity — in terms of information, resources, and norms — access or even exposure to the types of social capital that are valued will be limited and limiting. Social capital's inequities are evident in the very construction of the networks necessary for its development.

Conceptually, what vexes me is how an amorphous construct such as "social capital" can be instrumentalized in ways that result in systemic changes that benefit those students traditionally marginalized from education processes — the same students most marginalized from science education. There is clearly a political component to

my scholarly work, which makes my publication frustrations all the more vexing. Practically, what exacerbates this scholarly vexation is my own vexing scholarliness. I fear I am sinking to the depths of my institution, not floating, swimming, or bubbling up to my capacity. I fear, as Lin has argued, that my institutional network is dragging me down.

VENTURE

What social capital I may have had in graduate school has dissipated in my years as a faculty member at a teaching institution. I was cautioned against taking a position at a teaching institution, but I did not want to leave the city I was raising my son in, nor did I think the workload would be a problem. Teaching comes easily to me, and my work had been generously supported by the Spencer Foundation, a Fulbright, and other grants. I thought I could do it. Now I am not so sure.

My years to tenure have turned me into another cog in an educational machine, a credentialing contraption that churns out teacher candidates like Starbuck's™ pours coffee. My time is spent on teaching, maintaining and developing instruction, supervising teaching candidates, serving on committees, and squishing in writing whenever I make the time (and I feel as if I don't do this often enough). Research, I was advised at my hiring, is best completed in the courses I teach, with the students I teach. But not in the field – because the 4-4 teaching schedule just doesn't allow it.

How to deal with this vexation? The first step for me is to participate in this conference, to lay everything bare, and hope for the best (even as I tell my students that “hope” is so last year, this year is about the work we do to keep that hope alive). The second way is by offering the following as points for discussion:

- 1) How might we better establish meaningful inter-institutional scholarly relationships and collaborations? What are some ways we can identify and reach out to our peers in other learning institutions? In other words, how can we purposefully handcraft the networks we require to accumulate social capital?
- 2) How do we explore specific research difficulties in mutually supportive ways and short-circuit peer review competitiveness?
- 3) Must employment (let alone tenure) in a teaching institution cripple one's research? In other words, what do you do in a dollar economy with a handful of pennies?