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Education and the Arab 'World': Political Projects, Struggles, and Geometries of Power

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André E. Mazawi and Ronald G. Sultana

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8 Doing 'Identity Work' in Teacher Education

The Case of a UAE Teacher

Matthew Clarke

Introduction

> The functionality of identity. Reassurance in identity. Habituation to identity. Resentment and violence through identity. How could one become responsive to all these elements?
>
> (Connolly, 2002, p. 158)

The juxtapositions of modernity and tradition, the global and the local, extreme wealth and poverty, which comprise the United Arab Emirates (UAE) offers a vivid example of the notion that identity relies on difference. A paradigm case of what Findlow (2000) calls a 'willed nation', since its inception as a modern nation-state in 1971 the UAE has established a range of practices and codes that serve at once to provide a sense of national identity, and to identify differences between the local and non-local populations, as well as within the local population, for example in terms of gender. However, identity's paradoxical reliance on difference for its self-constitution often takes the form of antagonism towards those same constitutive differences. In this chapter, issues arising from constructions of identity and difference are examined in relation to teacher formation in the context of a new Bachelor of Education program, designed to prepare UAE female nationals for English teaching positions, working alongside non-UAE nationals, in UAE government schools. The notion of engaging in ongoing 'identity work' is explored as one approach to managing these issues.

The past decade has seen a steady rise in research in teacher education employing identity as an 'analytic lens' (Gee, 2000), including research that uses identity as a conceptual tool to investigate the development of teachers' professional knowledge (Alsup, 2006; Britzman, 1991, 1994; Clarke, 2008; Danielewicz, 2001; Geijsel & Meijers, 2005; Miller Marsh, 2003; Phillips, 2002; Santoro, 1997; Tsui, 2007), to explore their emotions (Evans, 2002; Zembylas, 2003a, 2003b), as well as to examine the relationship between their personal and professional lives (Day, Kington, Stobart, & Sammons, 2006; Goodson & Sikes, 2001; MacLure, 1993; Mitchell & Weber, 1999; Reid & Santoro, 2006; Søreide, 2006). Reflecting this conceptual approach that sees personal and professional knowledge as unfolding within wider socially, culturally, historically and politically shaped discursive

contexts, Varghese, Morgan, Johnston, and Johnson argue that "in order to understand [language] teaching and learning we need to understand teachers: the professional, cultural, political and individual identities which they claim or which are assigned to them" (2005, p. 22). But what particular advantages does identity offer in thinking about teaching and how people learn to teach? Here I argue that identity, through the way it embodies and reflects the paradoxical and contradictory nature of socially organized human life, assists us in making explicit, and potentially working productively with, the 'heteroglossic' tensions and contradictions that construct the teacher (Britzman, 1991, p. 111). My aim in this chapter is to explore how these complexities might be productively leveraged through the notion of doing 'identity work' in teacher education. In order to do this, the following discussion presents an initial exploration of identity, drawing on poststructuralist theorizations that have been particularly influential in thinking about the complexities of identity in recent years.

The Indispensability and Impossibility of Identity

Identity is indispensable for its role in self-definition; and yet at the same time, a full or pure identity is made impossible by its reliance on that which exceeds its scope. Identity, then, is replete with paradox and tension: a complex matter of the social and the individual, of discourse and practice, of similarity and difference, of reification and participation, of the rational and the emotional, and of the symbolic and the 'real'. Far from the mere donning of a pre-determined set of characteristics, identity is a never-completed 'work-in-progress', a project of personal formation through active participation in the living communities where practices and meanings are established, affirmed, or contested across time and space, reflecting the interplay of the past, present and future and interconnections between the global and the local. But what does this paradoxical complexity imply in relation to teaching and the process of becoming a teacher? Is recognition of the complexities through which our identities are constructed as much as we can expect to achieve? Or is it possible, despite the paradoxes discussed above, to go beyond understanding and engage in work by the self on the self? And how might teacher educators and pre-service teachers do such 'identity work'? What I want to argue here is that these very aspects of tension and paradox are sources of creative potential in our identities. This notion has affinities to what Alsup describes as 'borderland discourses', or uncomfortable, disturbing, edgy zones where disparate discourses collide, and in the process open windows onto "an enhanced consciousness, a meta-awareness of thought and action that can incorporate the personal as well as the professional, and multifaceted, contextual, and sometimes contradictory ideologies and situated identities" (2006, p. 125).

Identity is about the 'I'; it is deeply personal. But 'I' only exists in relation to 'you', just as 'self' only exists in relation to 'others' who populate my/our/the world. Indeed, the initial term and the second term in each of the pairs, 'I' and 'you', 'self' and 'other', are mutually dependent upon each other's existence in order to be meaningful. So identity is at once individual and personal yet also social and relational, with language as discourse providing the link between these domains

(Weedon, 1997). In this sense my identity as a teacher is dependent upon social discourses that produce available understandings of teachers and teaching, and if I am to be recognized as a teacher, I cannot construct an identity that ignores these discourses. As Denise Riley puts it, "a category has its political life long before I sidle up to wrap myself in it, and whether my advance is made in a spirit of glad militancy or in a spirit of dejected resignation isn't material to that" (2000, p. 132). Since discourse mediates, and is mediated within and through, contingent socio-historical contexts and contested socio-political worldviews, identity becomes an unfinalizable site of tension and struggle.

This becomes far more than an abstract theoretical nicety when we relate it to concrete historical practices. For example, as a teacher, do I identify with economic rationalist discourses that view teaching as preparing students to succeed in the competitive global market, or do I retain my identification with earlier 'progressive' discourses of teaching as fostering students' personal growth and development? This dependence upon historically sedimented discourses is at once a source of constraint but also – once we recognize the contingent and contestable aspects of identity that were previously read as 'natural' or inevitable – a source of potential liberation. Returning to Riley once again, "there may be a measure of relief in tracing the extent of your own historical dispersal, rather than struggling to be able to cup some newly consolidated and satisfyingly fully rounded identity in your hands" (2000, p. 136).

Identity is about identifications and differentiations, as we define who and what we are in terms of who and what we are not; identity is always built on systems of equivalences and differentiations involving relations of similarity and difference. For example, if I say, "I am a responsible teacher who believes in standards, not an anything-goes, 'progressive' teacher", there is a paradox at work here; for while my identity defines itself in relation to what it is not, at the same time, it relies on this difference in order to be what it is. All too often, this difference, converted into 'otherness', is perceived as a threat to identity's integrity:

> Identity is always connected to a series of differences that help it to be what it is ... there is a drive to diminish difference and to complete itself inside the pursuit of identity ... a pressure to make space for the fullness of self-identity for one constituency by marginalizing, demeaning, or excluding the differences on which it depends to specify itself.
>
> (Connolly, 2002, pp. xiv–xv)

Through this process of identifications and differentiations – by which I identify who and what I am in contradistinction to who and what I am not – identity becomes implicated in ethical and political issues of power, since "every relationship of power puts into operation differentiations which are at the same time its conditions and its results" (Foucault, 1983b, p. 223). In this sense, identity does work; the differences on which identity relies not only help it to be what it is but also enable it to do what it does, for example, indicating solidarity or opposition. As a young, newly qualified teacher joining the older and more experienced staff at the school where I commence my teaching career, I am positioned in

particular ways through the differences between me and my more established colleagues ("When you've been teaching as long as we have you'll understand ..."). If I want to challenge this positioning there are likely to be consequences in terms of interpersonal conflict. Again, we are confronted by paradox in that the very possibility of our freedom is dependent upon the existence of such power relations: "in order for power relations to come into play, there must be at least a certain degree of freedom on both sides ... If there are relations of power in every social field, this is because there is freedom everywhere" (Foucault, 2003).

Identity's relations of equivalence and difference are not established and settled once and for all; identity has a dynamic, ever-changing temporal dimension, as we constantly integrate remembered pasts and imagined futures into the relentlessly moving target of our present selves. I see my older colleague slip deeper into cynicism and, glimpsing what I might become, whilst recalling the idealism of my early teaching days, I resolve to retain at least some of my optimistic and enthusiastic outlook. Even though the meanings of identity are temporarily fixed, or 'reified', in order that we and others can talk about ourselves and present a sort of synopsis of who we are, these identities are not static but involve a constant process of becoming shaped through our participation in the multiple and evolving discourses and practices that comprise social contexts of our lives (Wenger, 1998).

In addition to comprising aspects of self and other, similarity and difference, past and future, identity also involves thought and emotion. Of particular significance here is the influential work of Antonio Damasio, who challenges the Platonic–Cartesian mind–body dualism in which emotion is the enemy of reason (Damasio, 1994, 2000). He talks instead of "the feeling brain" (Damasio, 2003). As I begin to teach a new unit that I haven't adequately prepared, I feel a rising tide of anxiety and prompted by this feeling decide to change tack and spend this Friday lesson reviewing the previous unit, which in turn brings a discomforting mixture of guilt and relief. Teaching involves engaging in and managing this sort of intensive emotional work on a daily basis (Day, 2004, p. 49) and the cumulative effects of this labor comprise our identities just as much as do our beliefs.

A further source of tension and paradox results from the always ambiguous and incomplete relationship between the discursive definitions and social meanings that we and others assign to ourselves and the 'real', i.e. the non-symbolic order of "a pure, unspeakable, pre-representational plenitude" (Grosz, 1990, p. 71). In other words, the meaning of our identities will always exceed our capacity to 'capture' them in representational systems such as language:

> There is more in my life than any official definition of identity can express. I am not exhausted by my identity. I am not entirely captured by it, even though it is stamped upon me – and even though it enables me. This fugitive difference between my identity and that in me which slips through its conceptual net is to be prized; it forms a pool from which creativity can flow and attentiveness to the claims of other identities might be drawn.
>
> (Connolly, 2002, p. 120)

We encounter this 'fugitive difference' repeatedly in our lives, for example, in instances where we carry out a rapid assessment of an-other only to discover on deeper acquaintance that the person we had initially written-off as a typical sports-obsessed, techno-geek, also harbors passions for late-romantic symphonies and magical-realist literature and turns out to be great company. Life continuously blurs and disrupts the settled categories and conceptual nets – including our prejudices – with which we seek to grasp and capture it. If we can remain open to this un-settling, our identities may sometimes find sources of freedom and creation in this susceptibility to that which lies beyond them.

I want to think further about the possibility of doing 'identity work' (Clarke, 2009) using Foucault's notion of a 'historical ontology' of ourselves, as a basis for conducting a micropolitics of the self, or work *by* the self *on* the self, in order to cultivate what political theorist William Connolly (1995) calls an ethos of critical responsiveness that might assist in ameliorating some of the adverse effects of identity's tendency to marginalize difference. My case for 'identity work' draws on Foucault's (1983a, p. 237) argument that we can conduct such an ontological inquiry on three domains: first, a historical ontology of ourselves in relation to truth through which we constitute ourselves as subjects of knowledge; second, a historical ontology of ourselves in relation to a field of power through which we constitute ourselves as subjects acting on others; third, a historical ontology in relation to ethics through which we constitute ourselves as moral agents.

These three domains of historical ontology, i.e, knowledge, power, and ethics correspond to the three aspects of discursive construction in critical discourse analysis, i.e. systems of knowledge and belief; interpersonal relations; and intrapersonal identities (Fairclough, 1992). And while Foucault's notion of a historical ontology of ourselves is particularly valuable since it allows us to bring together the political and ethical aspects of teaching as a socio-historical practice as these converge in the identity of the teacher, critical discourse analysis offers specific tools with which to engage in this task. Moreover, in considering identity in relation to ethics as self-constitution, we can frame our thinking in terms of four aspects or axes of this ethical relationship to oneself (Foucault, 1983a, 1985). In brief, these four axes include: the aspects or domains of the self that is problematized; the source of authority drawn on in managing these parts of the self; the techniques or practices of self-formation utilized; and the telos, or endpoint, of ethical self-formation (May, 2006, pp. 121–153; O'Leary, 2002, Chapters 7 and 8).

In the following section I explain the research context within which I apply these notions of 'identity work' to discursive identity negotiations of pre-service teachers.

The Research

The research in question is situated in an English language teacher education program in the United Arab Emirates (UAE). The UAE is a rapidly changing society whose phenomenal growth since the country's establishment as a modern nation state in the 1970s has been largely fuelled by the development of its oil

reserves, although tourism and trade have been increasingly significant sectors of the economy in recent years (Davidson, 2005; Kazim, 2000). The contemporary UAE has been described as 'schizophrenic' in its dual allegiance to the discourses of 'traditional' 'Arab-Islamic' values, alongside its eager embrace of the economic opportunities offered by globalization (Findlow, 2005, p. 287). Reflecting this somewhat bifurcated outlook, is an unofficial policy of linguistic dualism, whereby Arabic is associated with religion, tradition, and localism and English is associated with business, modernity, and internationalism (Findlow, 2006; Karmani, 2005).

The data discussed here is taken from a two-year study with the first cohort of pre-service teachers to complete a new Bachelor of Education program, designed to prepare Emirati women as English teachers for UAE schools. The country's education system has experienced rapid expansion since independence in 1971 in order to support the country's dramatic economic and social development. The lack of a comprehensive education system prior to 1971, and hence the absence of an indigenous pool of available teachers, has meant that the majority of the teaching force in UAE schools has traditionally been drawn from other Arabic-speaking nations, such as Egypt, Jordan, and Palestine. The rationale for the establishment of the Higher Colleges of Technology[1] (HCT) Bachelor of Education program is to decrease this proportion, as part of Emiratization, or nationalization of the workforce. It also aims to expand the culturally acceptable work options for women and to further consolidate, through the education system, the UAE's national identity – an identity that has had to be consciously constructed since 1971 and that is actively nurtured by the government in a context where UAE nationals are a minority, comprising only 20 percent of the population (Kazim, 2000; Khalaf, 2000). However, this has inadvertently created a potential source of tensions, as the expatriate teachers are supervising the teaching placements of the very students who will eventually replace them. These potential tensions are exacerbated by a number of factors, such as the unequal conditions between local and non-local teachers, with the former enjoying superior job security, salaries, and conditions; the lack of an established culture of mentoring and teacher preparation, and hence the inexperience of many teachers in supervising pre-service teachers, which means that the HCT students are unlikely to receive the levels of expert support from schools and teachers that might well be taken for granted elsewhere; and the fact that many non-local English teachers are graduates of literature or linguistics, rather than education.

The study theorized learning to teach in terms of the development of a discursively constructed teacher identity and sought to explore the ways in which this discursive construction was being accomplished: in other words, to investigate the social and educational discourses that pre-service teachers were utilizing in constructing their evolving teacher identities. Consonant with the notion of language-as-discourse as a key site of identity construction, the research involved discursive data gathered through focus group interviews and online asynchronous discussions, in which the 75 pre-service teachers discussed topics such as teaching beliefs, critical incidents, and moral and cultural issues in English language teaching in the UAE. The data was initially analyzed in terms of the ideational, relational and identity functions of discourse, reading the pre-service

teachers' discursive comments as constitutive at the three levels of systems of knowledge and belief, interpersonal relations, and intrapersonal identities noted above (Fairclough, 1992; Phillips & Jørgensen, 2002).

I have described other findings from the UAE study elsewhere, noting in particular the tendency of the pre-service teachers to construct their identities around a series of discursively constructed oppositions, such as 'traditional' versus 'progressive' education, 'teacher-centered' versus 'student-centered' teaching, 'active' versus 'passive' learning and 'hierarchical' versus 'democratic' classrooms (Clarke, 2006, 2008). Through these discursively constructed oppositions, the pre-service teachers positioned themselves in an antagonistic 'us' / 'them' relation vis-à-vis the existing generation of school teachers in ways that are captured in the following statement from one student teacher, Nabila, during a focus group discussion: "We thought that we would be as our teachers but thanks, no. Thanks to God we are not like them". It was this pervasive tendency emerging in the UAE study – corroborated by research elsewhere on pedagogical over-zealousness and utopian tendencies in pre-service teachers (Eilam, 2003; Hinchman & Oyler, 2000) – that prompted me to think about the notion of doing identity work in teacher education.

In particular, the 'antagonism' noted in the UAE study reflects the relational nature of identities as necessarily constructed through a series of equivalences and differences, such as those seen above. As Connolly notes, "identities, in the ordinary course of events, tend to congeal of their own accord into hard doctrines of truth and falsity, self and otherness, good and evil, rational and irrational, commonsense and absurdity" (2002, p. 173). Here, using data from the online discussion forum, my focus is on the ways in which one of the pre-service teachers, Aisha (a pseudonym), while partly conforming to the antagonistic teacher identity constructed in the dominant discourse of the pre-service teachers' community, at the same time demonstrated critical tendencies that correspond to Foucauldian historico-ontological, ethico-political identity work.

However, before discussing the data I need to briefly discuss my use of notions of 'self', 'identity' and 'care of the self' in a context that culturally, and in other ways, seems so distant from the origins of these terms, deriving as they do from the Western academy. Indeed, at first glance, to analyze the reflections of Emirati women through a conceptual framework derived from such a quintessential European thinker as Foucault may seem culturally insensitive or inappropriate. However, I would like to problematize this reaction, as well as the potentially essentialist reading of 'culture' underpinning it, by offering a 'genealogy' of my own use of Foucault's later work. My interest in the potential of Foucault's ethics for thinking about teacher identity generally, and the notion of doing identity work in particular, was inspired by reading Saba Mahmood's (2005) depiction of women in the pietist movement in Cairo. In a work rich in insights, that deconstructs contemporary Western dichotomies, such as feminism/Islam, and challenges dominant stereotypes, Mahmood draws attention to the shared origins of both Foucault's ethics and Islamic piety (as well as certain Christian traditions) in Aristotelian notions of habitus and ethical pedagogy, involving the cultivation of virtue through engagement in particular practices. For my interest in the notion

of doing identity work, as with Mahmood's examination of the agency of women in the mosque movement, "the importance of these [ethical] practices does not reside in the meanings they signify to their practitioners but in the *work they do* in constituting the individual" (2005, p. 29, emphasis in original). My hope is that the following discussion of the constitution of one individual teacher might, in the spirit of Mahmood's work, unsettle certainties by providing a sense of the complexities that shape consciousness.

Aisha's Evolving Teacher Identity: Knowledge and Beliefs

The pre-service teachers' community in the UAE study was characterized by a system of knowledge and beliefs about teaching that produced a dichotomous divide between what the students saw as 'traditional' teaching approaches, embodied by past and current generations of (largely expatriate) government school teachers, and the 'new' or 'progressive' approaches that they saw themselves as embodying. Not surprisingly then, on a number of occasions, Aisha outlined beliefs about education and teaching that aligned with this dominant 'progressive' discourse. Typical is the following statement, written in response to another student teacher's posting entitled 'Different learning styles': "I believe that children do have different learning styles and multiple intelligences. Therefore, teachers should respect each child as an individual with his/her own learning abilities". Similar themes are evident in the following extract from a posting appropriately called 'My beliefs about teaching and learning', which employs a discursive strategy that became a genre with the pre-service teachers, that of contrasting the 'traditional' beliefs of their past with those they had since embraced: "When I was still a student at school, I did not know that the teaching strategies and methods used by my teachers were outdated. I know the difference now. I know that their teaching methods were so traditional. They did not introduce activities that met different needs, intelligences and learning styles". This discursive strategy of metaphorically drawing a line in the sand between past and present served to distance the pre-service teachers from what they saw as undesirable 'traditional' practices. However, in the process of consolidating their identities as 'new' teachers embodying 'progressive' pedagogical approaches, the community members inadvertently worked to marginalize, demean and pathologize the government school teachers, against whom they defined themselves, in ways that have unsettling echoes of colonial discourses (Shields, Bishop, & Mazawi, 2005, p. 2). What's more, this discursive practice was all the more pervasive and potent because, as we will see below, the construction of particular ideational meanings was reinforced through a specific set of discursive strategies operating at the interpersonal level.

Aisha's Evolving Teacher Identity: Interpersonal Relations

The strongly held beliefs that characterized the pre-service teachers' community required constant maintenance and monitoring if they were to be sustained by the community members. This requirement was reflected in a number of strategies employed by the pre-service teachers in their interpersonal communication,

including: statements of strong agreement with messages espousing the community's beliefs; the confessional nature of many postings, particularly when reporting on experiencing difficulties in the classroom, and the evaluations of these confessions against the standard of their progressive tenets; and agenda-setting statements to rally and inspire the community members with regard to their future mission of spreading progressive teaching practices to English teaching in UAE government schools and classrooms.

In her correspondence with other community members Aisha often positioned herself as someone capable of giving advice and commentary to her peers. We see this in the following response to a fellow student teacher's posting 'Difficulties dealing with challenging behaviour': "As you stated, shouting at students or beating them is not the solution. Try not to let your SST's (supervising school teacher, i.e. mentor teacher) attitude influence you in a negative way. If you believe there are other ways to manage the students' behaviour then you should look for them." The sequence of declarative statements implying universal truth ("is not the solution"), followed by two pieces of advice, one using the imperative ("try not"), and the other implying obligation ("should"), combine to position her peer as requiring moral bolstering and support in order to maintain the community's mission. In other postings, Aisha adopted a distinctly evaluative role vis-à-vis her peers' performance as agents of change:

> I find the fact that you identified some of the areas (communication skills and your use of the English language) that you still need to improve for your professional life quite good. It means you are reflecting on your professional development as a teacher … Moreover, I liked what you said about wanting to improve your English so you can model its use in a good way to your students. What you said reflects that you really understand your role as a teacher and illustrates clearly that the students' learning and progress is your main concern.

In this response to a fellow student teacher's reply to her posting, in which her peer 'confessed' to a number of challenges she was still experiencing in the classroom ('a positive change'), Aisha assumes the higher ground. Her chosen combination of first person voice ("I find"; "I liked"), judgment ("quite good") and explication ("It means you are reflecting"; "What you said reflects that you really understand") serves to construct a mentor–mentee relationship that individuates her respondent ("*you* identified"; "*you* responded"; "*you* said"; "*you* really understand") and measures her against aspects of the community's knowledge and belief system ("students' learning and progress is your main concern"). Discursive 'truths', interpersonal power relations, and social identities are thus simultaneously established and maintained through reinforcement, reiteration and evaluation strategies that combine to support the normalizing judgment of disciplinary power.

Aisha's Evolving Teacher Identity: Ethical Self-Formation

In the above excerpts we see the co-construction of discourse and community as Aisha constitutes herself as a subject of knowledge, and as a subject of power acting on (and being acted upon by) others, in conformity with the dominant ideology of the pre-service teachers' evolving community of practice. This process involved the community constructing itself and its members' teacher identities as agents of educational change and reform, whose mission was to supplant the 'traditional' teaching approaches represented by past and existing government schoolteachers. Yet the strength of the pre-service teachers' discursively constructed community was only possible through an equally strong 'otherization' of these 'traditional' teachers, who were viewed antagonistically as blocking the full fruition of the community's 'progressive' identities.

However, we will gain a different perspective by exploring Aisha's identity construction in relation to the third dimension of Foucault's historical ontology, involving the practices of ethical self-formation through which we constitute ourselves as moral agents. We can think of this third dimension in terms of Foucault's notion of 'the care of the self' (1986), which at the same time encourages an ethos of care for others: "The care of the self, then, is always at the same time concerned with care for others" (Olssen, 2006, p. 166). As Gore notes, 'care of the self' is not about self-absorption but rather, "suggests an ethic of self-disengagement and self-invention" (1993, p. 129). There are a number of instances where Aisha focuses explicitly on her own self-formation as a teacher, yet at the same time links this to her capacity to work with others. The following extended excerpt from her posting, 'A positive change', is one such instance:

> Teaching has changed my life in so many ways. It made me more professional in the way I deal with different people and different personalities and contributed to developing my communication skills. Five years ago, I would have avoided working or interacting with people whose opinions and ideas were different to mine. However, since I joined the B.Ed program and started going out to schools (especially in the last two years), I have begun to discuss different issues and ideas with my SSTs, principals, other teachers and sometimes my peers. I am more willing now to share my ideas and point of view with them even if they do not agree with me (which is the case most of the time). In fact, having a good understanding of educational theories and putting them into practice encourages me to negotiate things with different people from different backgrounds and with different perspectives. I try to let them understand that my beliefs about teaching and teaching strategies might be different to theirs but that does not mean that they are meaningless or not as effective as theirs. I have also learned that the way we discuss subjects plays a role in persuading others of our point of view. Moreover, I believe that teaching reinforced my sense of responsibility and punctuality positively. I feel responsible for each child in the classroom and I try as much as I can to respond to the students' individual differences. I like the fact that I make the children my main concern and think of their learning as a priority ... Teaching helped me work on fostering my creativity. I am not a very creative person but teaching motivated me to surf the net, read books or even ask for other peers' support so I can use good teaching strategies and resources that get the students interested and motivated. Teaching enhanced my critical thinking skills. It made me a reflective person who reflects constantly on everything, not only on the incidents that take place in school but also on every article I read or program I watch. I just feel that reflection deepens my understanding of certain things and strengthens my beliefs about teaching. I know that what I am going to say might seem odd to some of you, but I feel that reflection, somehow, makes me a better person! Yes, teaching has changed my life and when I look back on the things I have learned in the last four years, I realize it's been a positive change.

In discussing this posting, I will use Foucault's four axes of ethical self-formation as a matrix for analysis (Foucault, 1983a). The first ethical axis refers to the 'substance' of ethics, or what part of teacher identity is problematized. Aisha highlights her growing professionalism, and in turn relates this to her developing interpersonal communication skills in handling difference with other educators in a constructive manner, and also to her sense of responsibility, which encourages her to focus on the learning of her students. She also highlights her developing creative skills, which enable her to develop more effective teaching resources, and her critical thinking and reflective skills, which, she says, "deepens my understanding of certain things and strengthens my beliefs about teaching ... reflection somehow makes me a better person".

The second axis concerns what Foucault calls the mode of subjection, involving the sources of authority I recognize and am guided by in my life. Here Aisha refers to the significance of her experiences of learning, both in college and in schools, and also to the educational theories that she has been able to put into practice and that have increased her confidence in discussing educational issues with other educators.

The third axis concerns the techniques and practices I use to fashion and shape myself. Aisha's reference to her practice of discussing different issues with her mentor teachers and school principals, as well as with other teachers and her peers, is clearly a self-practice that has had an educative effect ("I have also learned that *the way* we discuss subjects plays a role in persuading others of our point of view") and occupies a significant role in shaping the teacher she is becoming. Another self-practice has been working "on fostering my creativity" which, as we have seen, she feels has helped her develop a more effective learning environment for her students. And clearly, her self-practices of critical thinking and reflection – she describes herself as "a reflective person who reflects constantly on everything" – have been significant self-shaping practices.

The fourth axis concerns our telos, or ultimate endpoint, goal, or purpose. In the context of teacher identities, we can think of our telos in terms of the question: What is my ultimate guiding purpose as a teacher? Aisha's statement that "I like the fact that I make the children my main concern and think of their learning as a priority" is indicative of one such guiding purpose for her as a teacher. She

also talks about the value of fostering her creativity in terms of developing "good teaching strategies and resources that get the students interested and motivated". Implicit in the importance she attaches to critical thinking and reflection as sources of deepening understanding, strengthened beliefs, and becoming "a better person", is the ultimate value she places on her own ongoing self-development as a teacher, both personally and professionally.

Looking at this posting in terms of these four axes we can get a strong sense of Aisha's concern for her evolving teacher identity. Yet at the same time, she seems to be aware that her engagement in practices of 'care of the self' may have paradoxically distanced her from the pre-service teachers' community, whilst simultaneously nurturing a critical and ethical responsiveness to the contingent differences upon which the community's identity has been built. This is implicit in the preface, "I know that what I am going to say might seem odd to some of you", that she provides for her comments on the changes brought about by reflection.

'Identity Work' as Care of the Self and Care for 'Others'

I noted above that my interest in considering the notion of doing 'identity work' was prompted by the powerful identities the pre-service teachers' community constructed upon a foundation of differences between themselves and the otherized UAE government schoolteachers and the pervasive antagonism that was manifested by the pre-service teachers towards the schoolteachers as a result. In particular, I am interested in the extent to which an explicit focus on identity, conceived as a practice of care of the self, might lead towards a heightened sense of care for others and so diminish the tendency for identities to congeal and harden around established 'true' beliefs, whilst treating difference with circumspection and resentment: "To possess a true identity is to be false to difference, while to be true to difference is to sacrifice the promise of a true identity" (Connolly, 2002, p. 67). My hope is that critical encounters with the self might foster a sense of contingency and fragility in our identities, leading to the possibility of our being more open to encounters with others, to exploration of others' ideas and to the unsettling of our pedagogical certainties. In this way, critique becomes linked to self-transformation:

> Critique, I believe, is most powerful when it leaves open the possibility that we might also be remade in the process of engaging another's worldview, that we might come to learn things that we did not already know before we undertook the engagement. This requires that we occasionally turn the critical gaze upon ourselves, to leave open the possibility that we may be remade through an encounter with the other.
>
> (Mahmood, 2005, pp. 36–37)

This statement reflects Foucault's notion of the care of the self being linked to care of others, as part of a critical ethos involving the self in "the endeavor to know how and to what extent it might be possible to think differently, instead of legitimating what is already known … to explore what might be changed, in its

own thought, through the practice of a knowledge that is foreign to it" (Foucault, 1985, p. 9). We have seen that Aisha engages in practices of active encounters with others' ideas through discussions and negotiations with mentor teachers, principals and other teachers in her teaching placement schools and that she also engages in self-practices of ongoing reflection on whatever ideas or practices she encounters. To what extent did these self-practices of 'care of the self' translate into care for others? We have seen that Aisha placed great emphasis on the care of her students. But what about care for others in terms of a softening of the antagonistic stance the community members generally adopted vis-à-vis past and current UAE teachers? Consider the following excerpt from one of her postings:

> You asked what we think an effective learning environment is. I think an effective learning environment is an environment that encourages interaction and fosters the students' skills not only linguistically but also interpersonally … On the other hand, I want to draw your attention to another issue. We were taught how to create a positive learning environment and we got the chance to see the effectiveness of using child-centered activities through going out to schools and teaching. We were introduced to many educational theories and got the opportunities to put them into practice. Government school teachers did not get that chance though. If we did not join the B.Ed program, do you think we would have had these strong beliefs about teaching? Maybe we would have taught our students the same way we were taught.

Aisha's views as to what comprises an effective learning environment (and some of the details are elided here for the sake of space) are aligned with key tenets of the community's 'progressive' educational belief system. Aisha pauses and metaphorically steps into an-'other' space, as she empathetically places herself in the position of the government teachers. In response to Nabila's comment, noted earlier, thanking God that "we are not like them", Aisha reflects on the fragility and contingency of that fate that could so easily have turned out 'other'-wise. In so doing she takes a crucial step towards, to cite Mahmood again, "the possibility that we may be remade through an encounter with the other" (2005, p. 37). This leads her, in the same posting, to think beyond the celebration of a pure identity that, in Connolly's words cited above, "is false to difference", and to consider the real challenges of working through future encounters with difference as the community members try to implement their vision of an effective learning environment:

> We can always start with our own classrooms and then try to help other teachers in the school to see our point of view, but what is next? How will we change a procedure that has been followed step by step for so many years? And what if our ideas were completely rejected and we were put under pressure to change our beliefs about teaching when we start working as full-time teachers? I am not saying that I will throw what I learned away. I am only thinking ahead and trying to find ways to deal with the challenges that we surely are going to face once we start working as English teachers! Let me know what you think.

Aisha's remarks demonstrate a willingness to think beyond the rhetorical statements of antagonistic opposition to 'traditional' teaching approaches that characterized so many of the pre-service teachers' comments. She steps back and thus moves away from the community's stance in order to gain a new perspective and, in doing so, possibly risks her relationship to and membership in the community. For her questions push the community out of its preferred pedagogically 'fundamentalist' comfort zone (and as Connolly, 1995, p. 106, notes, "all of us have strains of fundamentalism flowing through us"), within which its identity is seemingly secure, and evince a will to engage with thorny issues of managing, rather than marginalizing and demeaning, difference. In a later posting in the same discussion thread, Aisha elaborated on this same theme:

> If you graduated from an art college with a degree in English literature and were placed as a teacher in a school, would your beliefs about teaching have been the same? If you were not a B.Ed student, would you TRULY have had the knowledge you have now about teaching and learning? Most of the English teachers in our government schools graduated with degrees in English literature. They were not introduced to the same kind of information and theories we were introduced to. Most of the feedback they get on their teaching is from principals and Zone Supervisors [school inspectors] who are (generally speaking) very traditional. If we put ourselves in their positions for a minute we might understand why they are very reluctant to change their teaching styles even if they had professional development sessions.

Aisha uses rhetorical questions, followed by detailed explications which address them, in order to dislodge the sedimented assumptions of the community regarding the naturalness of their knowledge and their identities. In delineating the constructed nature of both the pre-service teachers' and the government schoolteachers' knowledge and understanding and tracing these back to particular discrete and contingent experiences out of which they have been constructed, Aisha is in effect conducting a genealogical inquiry. In the process, she unsettles and contests the community's congealed identities in relation to each of the three ontological domains of knowledge, power relations, and ethics, and she evidences two key ingredients required if we are to resist normalization and engage in ethical self-formation, namely critical reflection and intersubjective engagement (Gunzenhauser, 2008, p. 2234). Her acknowledging the validity – in the sense of their legitimate right to exist, which is not the same as their correctness – and the historical reasonableness of different perspectives, illustrates how "new possibilities for the negotiation of difference are created by identifying traces in the other of the sensibility one identifies in oneself and locating in the self elements of the sensibility attributed to the other" (Connolly, 1993, p. 382). In this way, "an element of care is built into contestation and of contestation into care" (Connolly, 1993, p. 382).

Conclusion

Identity is an indispensable resource for teachers in thinking about what they believe, what they stand for and what they do: in short how they define who they are. Yet identity is replete with tension and paradox, stemming from its dependence on relations of similarity and difference, its individual and personal yet simultaneously social and relational character, its ever-frustrated efforts to capture and define the plenitude of life that always exceeds these attempts, as well as its intermingling of elements of past and future, thought and emotion, actuality and desire. However rather than proving an insurmountable obstacle to ethical agency, I have argued in this chapter that by drawing on Foucault's notion of a 'historical ontology' of ourselves, these tensions can be seen as offering potential points of focus for conducting work *by* the self *on* the self, or a micropolitics of the self. This possibility has been considered via an exploration of the case of one UAE pre-service teacher, Aisha, and her efforts to cultivate an ethos of critical responsiveness.

The evolving community of practice that the UAE pre-service teachers established was one of hegemonic 'progressive' teacher identities. These nascent teacher identities were constructed through the strategy of affirming their difference from, and opposition to, the 'traditional' identities that were simultaneously attributed to the existing UAE schoolteachers, and reinforced through particular social maintenance and monitoring strategies, such as bolstering, evaluation and reinforcement, as part of the discursively constructed system of interpersonal relations. We have seen how Aisha's system of knowledge and belief in many ways conformed to the key tenets of this discursively constructed 'progressive' identity. However, we have also seen how the resulting antagonistic relations vis-à-vis the government schoolteachers was undermined and mitigated to at least some degree by Aisha's identity work of ethical self-formation, and in particular how her micropolitical practices of 'care of the self' may have prepared the ground for the 'care for the other' she evinced in a number of her postings:

> When the self makes itself an explicit site of micropolitics, it becomes a domain to be worked on cautiously and experimentally *by* the self in response to the identifications and performances through which it has acquired its current shape. By working patiently on specific contingencies on oneself, one may become more appreciative of the crucial role of contingency in identity and desire. And this in turn opens up new possibilities of ethical responsiveness to difference.
>
> (Connolly, 1995, p. 69)

There is no guarantee that such critical responsiveness will result from such micropolitical identity work on the self, but that is no reason not to pursue it, for as Connolly notes, "reflection on the contingencies of identity does not provide a key to the resolution of every ethical paradox and dilemma. Since no other ethical orientation has passed such a test, this orientation need not achieve such purity either" (Connolly, 2002, p. 183). What I have tried to outline here is how one pre-

service teacher engaged in such identity work and how, within the context of a remarkably coherent community with a passionately held set of pedagogical beliefs, this micropolitical identity work may well have contributed to the ethos of critical responsiveness to difference she demonstrated. Whether such outcomes can result from more deliberate attempts to foster this sort of critical responsiveness through doing identity work in teacher education is surely a worthwhile topic for further research.

Notes

1 The Higher Colleges of Technology is one of three government-funded providers of tertiary education in the UAE, along with the United Arab Emirates University and Zayed University.

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