

Identity as dialectic: Re/making Self in urban schooling

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My game is the game of life. And in the game of life I use my tactics to get what I want, to do what I need to want to do. Which is what I need is what I want and what I want is what I need. If I want to need to do something then I do it.
(Shameer, African American, twelfth grade in an urban school)

Good teachers know their students, for to prepare an appropriate curriculum, they have to address their emotional, motivational, and cognitive needs. Knowing students, for example Shameer, the author of the introductory quote, poses questions. “Who are our students?,” “How can we find out about them and what their needs are?,” and “How do students understand themselves today as compared to yesterday and tomorrow?” Joanne, a white middle-class woman attending a teacher preparation program in a large U.S. metropolitan, interviews students during a yearlong internship in an urban school largely serving a poor neighborhood. Among others, Joanne is interested in the differences between African American and white experiences of schools and schooling.

- Joanne: Do you think there's equal opportunity between Blacks and Whites?
- Shameer: No. Cause, I have experienced that when I lived in New Jersey. I lived in Linden Hill, New Jersey. I went to a school that was 99 percent white. It was like I would just get B's all the time. I would I know the work, and I was just like, I was young and in my state of mind I was like “Oh, they don't like me.” I had a few white friends and you know, we was cool, they didn't see the color thing. It was like, it seemed like the teachers— I remember one time, I was in sixth grade and the teacher, he had put us into groups. It was three black people in the classroom and the rest was white. So, all right, he said we could pick the people we want to work with and there was four people to a group. I had picked, it was me, my friend Richard, Mike, and a girl named Kristen. Kristen was black, Mike was white, and Richard was black. We always worked together good. And the teacher said, “No.” He put me in the group with the other black kids. That wasn't

no problem. I didn't really see that as a problem. But as I got older I began to see that that wasn't right.

In this situation, Shameer talks about himself in a school context where there were predominantly whites. In his account, color was not an issue for his white friends, but in his experience, it had been an issue for the teacher, who has segregated them by color. Shamir says that at the time he did not recognize the segregation as a problem, but he now realizes it as lying at the roots of different social opportunities between white and African American students. Here, who Shameer is, who he can relate to in school tasks, and the opportunities he has now and in the future, are accounted for in terms of color (race) differences. Not only is he an African American student, recognizable by his skin color, but also his biographical narrative articulates and reifies these differences as part of and influencing his life trajectory.

There is more to the episode. Shameer has agreed to be interviewed, has shown up on time at the arranged meeting place, and sincerely answers Joanne's questions. Agreeing, showing up, and answering are actions that have specific outcomes. In acting, however, Shameer does more than achieving these outcomes: he also produces himself as a particular kind of student, an African American urban kid amenable to a white teacher's request, collaborating so that she can complete a university course assignment, and a participant willing to articulate himself extensively, which facilitates Joanne's task tremendously. That is, in these actions, Shameer also re/produces himself, who he is with respect to others, here his teacher, and perhaps through her, also his school. That is, he re/produces identity, an aspect of human life that has received too little attention in the scholarly literature to the detriment of our understanding what knowing, learning, and schooling is all about.

IDENTITY

Identity (from Lat. *idem*, same), who we are for ourselves and who we are in relation to others, is a mysterious phenomenon for at least two reasons. First, Shameer can point to a picture and say, “This is me when I was five, and the street I lived on— but don't nobody be on there but the drug dealers.” In this case, although there are substantial differences between Shameer and the child in the picture with respect to the physique and particulars of the body, including size, hair color, and so on, he is making an assertion about the sameness of whoever is depicted and he indexically refers to as “I.” He makes this assertion despite recognizing that he was more aggressive at some time in his life, continuously fighting with other kids, and that “[He] ha[s] mellowed in [his] later years.” Thus, who he is and was is part of a biography, a narrative featuring the same person (character) with both constant and changing character traits in the course of his life (a plot).

Second, as he is moving from situation to situation in his daily life, he is someone different with respect to the others surrounding him. In the episode, he is a student amenable to his teacher's request for doing an interview; he accedes to her wish and, in a sense, contributes to supporting her development as an urban teacher. But only a few months after the interview, Shameer is involved in an altercation with his chemistry teacher, which escalates to the point that he risks being suspended or even expelled. Shameer's actions and the rules of his school culture seem to be incompatible. That is, Shameer is a different person in a different situation. Who he is with respect to teachers and school is inherently frail so that a stable identity in interaction with others is the outcome of continuous reproduction.

Shameer: When I'm in the house, I curse. An' I curse, and when I'm outside I curse more. An I'm more, when I'm outside I'm more, aw'right— Like aw'right, I don't got to speak to nobody when I'm outside. But I speak to my boys, like “wha'a up” give

em a handshake. When I see my friend parents, I say aw'right, "How ya doin' Ms. Debbie. What's up Mr. Earl." Like when I speak to the lady, I say "how ya doin'?" but to the man, "What's up"? See the difference. I curse in school, just not around the teachers. Or when I do curse and it is around teachers, its probably cursin' with them. ... Like when I'm cursin' when the teacher hear me, its probably like helping the teacher out. ... The teacher probably say, "Thank you," or he say, "Don't curse, but thank you."

There are therefore at least two aspects to identity. On the one hand, a person appears to have a core identity, which undergoes developments that are articulated in autobiographical narratives of self. In this perspective, events in our lives may provide us with resources to understand ourselves differently, leading to changes in our biographies. This aspect has been articulated in terms of the narrative construction and reconstruction of Self, which is a function of the particular collective with which we identify. Second, in contrast to the contention of identity as a (relatively) stable phenomenon that is constructed in biographical narratives, the experience of the different ways in which we relate to others in the varying contexts of everyday life has led postmodern scholars to conceive of self in society as something frail, brittle, fractured, and fragmented (Giddens, 1991). We have to ask, "How can our identities simultaneously be continuous and discontinuous, context-independent and situated, stable and frail, or adaptive and brittle?" and "Why are there differences between the self in narratives and in ongoing, concrete daily life?"

By drawing on documentary materials from research in urban schools, identity here is articulated as a dialectic phenomenon and concept. As in all dialectical units, there is an inner contradiction, which expresses itself in antinomies and logical contradictions, such as the ones articulated here. This dialectical perspective on identity leads to a better understanding than other theoretical perspectives on the opportunities and constraints students from poor African American families face in the schools of a predominantly white society. In this perspective, two elements that do not or hardly exist in other

approaches take central roles: (a) human beings have physical bodies that mediate between private and public lives; and (b) the individual and collective (society, culture) stand in a mutually constitutive (dialectical) relation.

The two forms identity articulated above, despite their radical difference, nevertheless share one aspect: both are the consequence of actions: *telling* an autobiographical narrative and *doing* interviews or *telling* off a teacher. This makes it appealing to construct a theoretical account that centrally focuses on actions, in which distinct forms of identity are the *effects* of different forms of actions.

IDENTITY AS DIALECTIC

The question of identity can be articulated in terms of the contrast between two contrasts: (a) between “same” and “other” and (b) between the “material body” (flesh) and the “person” as a whole (Figure 1). The relationship between the different contrasts leads to different sets of dialectical relations articulated within different research traditions.

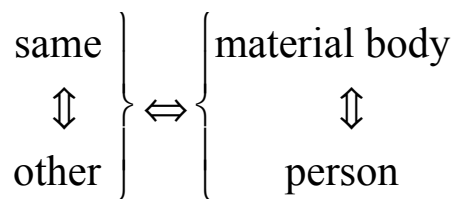


Figure 1. Different dialectical relations emerge from the contrast of same and other, on the one hand, and material body and person, on the other, both in cultural (phylogenetic) and individual (ontogenetic) development.

The first contrast articulates the difference between a being caught up in and *practically understanding* the world, from which it is not distinguished (“same”), and a being that experiences itself as different, “other” than the world and its objects that are

the targets of their intentional and explanatory actions (Buber, 1970). It is a being that does not reflect on its own relation with the world, a being that simply relates to other things and other people without objectifying them. When Shameer in the heat of the moment says to a teacher, “See man this is why I don’t like y’all, I don’t like y’all teachers or y’all school,” he relates to the teacher in an unmediated way. Upon reflection, which objectifies the situation and its participants, he might regret having made the comment or understands it in context and knows that he would not make it with the principal present. When Shameer is mad at his chemistry teacher and walks out of the classroom after hearing he has a sixty-five on his test, Shameer is simply relating to his world, including the teacher. When he later says to the teacher, “I just got mad [at you] because it wasn’t my paper that you read of your sheet,” he is in a mediated relationship to the foregone events and situation. He conceives of the teacher as another person, who became the object of his anger. When anger, grade, and teacher are conscious entities, the relation to the world is no longer direct but mediated, explicated, and objectified (Heidegger, 1977).

The second contrast opposes the material body of a human being with its personhood. Through the materiality of the human body comes the continuity in, and accumulation of, our experience. The human body continuously changes both as the result of the actions that it brings about and as the recipient of the actions of others. It is because Shameer has a body that others on the street can make him a target of their violence (“Like, yo these bunch of dudes tried to roll on us, they’d be like how many of them was there and what size was they”) and teachers can “screw him” (“I always get screwed by the teachers”). It is this body that is adorned, coiffed, and put in relief by means of special clothing. The body, carrier of emotions, is central to identity, aspirations, and identification of the youth. This body is so important, because it is the “mediator between the self and a world which is itself taken in accordance with its variable degrees of practicability and so of foreignness” (Ricœur, 1992, p. 318). The body is not merely the seat of knowledge—

“wet ware” in computer speak—but importantly the central structure that gives shape to what and how we know (Merleau-Ponty, 1945). At the same time, human beings are more than their bodies: they are persons who relate intentionally to other things and beings, who see in others reflections of themselves, that is, beings who have intentions and experience themselves as persons.

When the dimension of *same* is applied to the material body–person contrast (Figure 1), we arrive at the dialectic of *sameness* (material body of the human subject) and *selfhood* (human being as a person). Thus, Shameer’s experience of his continuity through time, his pointing to a childhood picture is a consequence of sameness, whereas his changing selfhood is apparent when he asserts being different (e.g., in different relations, through time). When the concept of *other* is applied to the material body–person contrast (Figure 1), we arrive at the *otherness* of things (material objects, signs) and persons (human beings). It is because they have bodies that are different from mine that we both can understand others and yet be different from them. It allows Shameer to both understand his teachers (“I was givin’ [the teachers] reasons, I was givin’ them more and more reasons to make ’em do make ’em suspend me and that’s probably what they wanted”) and be different from them.

The experience of the otherness of things and people is neither innate nor does it come by itself: it requires social mediation, as research with very young and older deaf-blind children has shown (Mikhailov, 1980). That is, the human capacity for communication and reflection is founded on otherness: both the signs (language) used in communication and the things signs denote are different from (other than) the persons expressing and *explaining* themselves. Applied to the material (body), the same–other distinction leads us to a dialect of the acting subject as distinct from the object of its actions. Applied to the person, the same distinction leads us to selfhood and otherhood (otherness of other people), which is at the heart of the dialectical relation between individual and collective (community).

Different traditions use different elements from this over-determined collection of relations as the starting point for their reflections. In hermeneutic phenomenology, the foundational dialectics required in theorizing identity are selfhood|sameness, selfhood|otherness, and understanding|explaining (Ricoeur, 1992). In cultural historical activity theory, the foundational dialectics required in understanding human activity are subject|object, individual|collective, and unconscious|conscious, the three dialectics arose together with the division of labor and the associated societal mediation of activity, each dialectic presupposing the other two dialectics (Holzkamp, 1983). So, too, the three dialectics arise in individual development, when children discover themselves and the otherness of their parents, the otherness and permanence of objects surrounding them, and cause and effect relationships (explaining), which already require their practical understanding of how the world works. Common to both approaches is that any of these relations can only be pondered in relation to concrete material actions and activities. To understand actions, a closer look at the agency|structure dialectic is required.

CONTINUOUS RE/PRODUCTION OF IDENTITY AS CONSEQUENCE OF AN AGENCY|STRUCTURE DIALECTIC

Fundamental to recent sociocultural theories is the dialectical relationship that makes agency and structure two mutually constitutive aspects of the *same* unit of action (Sewell 1992). Concrete actions, such as *uttering* “I was young and in my state of mind I was like ‘Oh, they don’t like me’” as part *telling* of a biographical narrative or *saying* “eff off” and *showing* the middle finger as a way of “*dissing*” (disrespecting) a teacher, require structures. Without a body, there are no vocal cords to produce utterances and no middle fingers that can be pointed upward. These material (bodily) structures are *resources* that enable actions. Other resources for action are social structures, such as those between teachers and students, which, in the case of “dissing,” have not been reproduced in their

standard form. There are embodied structures (*schemas*) as well, for without them, sentences and signs could neither be produced as part of social action nor recognized as the social actions of others. What the relevant sociomaterial resources are and which embodied schemas are enacted in a specific situation cannot be known in advance but are after-the-fact empirical matters. Thus, although Shameer, as an “A” student, may have the intention to follow (school) rules, whether he does can be established only a posteriori. Although Shameer only wants to ask his chemistry teacher why he has received a D despite answering all the questions, he in fact starts an altercation. That is, he does not merely *ask a question*, but this same action *is starting an altercation*.

Social structure provides resources to action, and therefore resources to the re/production of identity. Whether Shameer will utter a particular phrase takes into account the resources he finds in a situation, such as the institutional position of the other person. Shameer would not say to his principal, “See man this is why I don’t like y’all, I don’t like y’all teachers or y’all school,” but he “might say that to a teacher.” Whether he actually says it to the principal or a particular teacher is again an empirical matter:

Shameer: [With] certain teachers I do certain things– You can’t play the same game with all the teachers, ‘cause it not the same teacher. So its certain games you gotta play. If you wanna play– It’s like goin’ to, it’s like goin’ on to a basketball court, there certain ways you gotta play with certain teams.

For human beings, schema and sociomaterial resources historically co-emerge in and as a result of activity. Thus, early in life, a person does not recognize an action as a social action—Shameer did not perceive his teacher’s request to join other African American students as an act that was *reproducing* racial segregation and social inequalities. It is only now, after appropriate schemas have developed as a result of participating in the world, that he *perceives* racial segregation and the production of inequality when they occur. He has learned to perceive and respond to actions that re/produce particular forms

of social structure while participating in various forms of activity, including schooling. That is, participating in various forms of sociomaterial life has formed his body and therefore aspects of his identity such that he can now perceive what he previously was unable to perceive. In addition to bringing about intended results, actions form and are inscribed in human bodies as traces.

Human beings can be the recipients of the actions of others, such as when Shameer became the target of “a bunch of dudes that tried to roll on [him].” But in such situations, human beings are not just recipients (“patients”) of the actions of others; rather, the results of actions are co-determined by subsequent actions. Whether the dudes roll on him or whether they just tried depends on Shameer’s own actions. Or, to take another example, the institutional relation between an elementary teacher and African American student were reproduced when Shameer and the three other black students arranged to work together in the new group. Shameer’s actions thereby contributed to stabilizing rather than questioning, disrespecting, and disrupting the traditional authority-based teacher-student relation. In the instance with his chemistry teacher, where he questions the cause of his “D” grade, his actions question not only teacher authority but also school rules, with the result that he was almost suspended or expelled. A suspension or expulsion, in turn, would have contributed to the reproduction of lower attendance rates of urban students.

It is important to note that the same student action can actually achieve two different outcomes. For example, with the action of uttering “See man this is why I don’t like y’all, I don’t like y’all teachers or y’all school,” Shameer not only produces disrespect for the teacher, but also produces (and gains) respect among his peers. What is the source of these opposite but simultaneously produced meanings? Some social theories distinguish actions that realize the goals of human subjects (individual or group) from activities that pursue collectively (society) formulated motives (Leont’ev, 1978). Activity and actions, however, mutually constitute one another: they are dialectically related. One the one

hand, it takes concrete human actions to bring off an activity—the activity is constituted by an appropriately sequenced series of specific actions. On the other hand, an action is produced in the service of a specific activity. It is only in relation to a specific activity that an action obtains its sense. In the present situation, Shameer is participating in two different forms of activity, pursuing two different motives: *schooling*, with the articulated motive of producing student learning (cultural capital), and *relating to peers*, with the motive of generating social capital.

Most social and psychological theories consider emotions and motivation separately from cognition (e.g., intentional actions). However, both emotion and motivation function as valuations of actions and plans with respect to their potential of increasing individual agency: they are integral to cognition and practical action. Emotions and motivations are not merely aspects of personal identity, something individuals experience just like that and by themselves. They are inherently socially mediated experiences, which human beings learn in the course of their upbringing and therefore has both bodily (momentary, accumulated) experiential and cultural characteristics (Holzkamp, 1983). Emotions are therefore integral not only to the subject|object dialectic, but also to the individual|collective dialectic, constituting emotional possibilities at the collective level, always concretely realized, produced, and reproduced in particular form at the individual level. Thus, the action of “dissing” the teacher is inherently related to Shameer’s personal emotional state and motivation, itself themselves constitutive of and reproducing collective (peer group) emotion, motivation, and solidarity. It is only from the perspectives of school and teacher that Shameer may appear unmotivated and his actions understandable without considering individual and collective emotions. Both motivation and emotion, again, are integral aspects of identity that requires a material body.

THE RIDDLE OF SELF: NARRATIVE IDENTITY AND DIS/IDENTIFICATION

One of the fundamental riddles of identity is the continuity and stability of self in the face of the material and personal changes we undergo from situation to situation in and across different periods of our lives. Thus, although the narrator Shameer is no longer the same as the protagonist self-reflectively denoted as “I” anywhere in the following account, and although the protagonist has changed even within this account, Shameer and the different “I’s” are also held to be the same.

Shameer: I used to get in trouble. I was the biggest problem. I was the teachers’ nightmare. Like when it came down to it, I did do the work but I had a temper and a behavior problem. This was in elementary school. Me and my friend called Sabee used to beat people up. We used to roll on people. Then when me and my bul separated from beating people up, I retired.

When I moved to New Jersey I was what they wanted. They wanted to get me mad. I was in a school with all Caucasians and there was prejudice. I was a fool cause I was like playin’ they game. I would feel like I was getting mistreated different from another student and instead of going to the teacher and talkin’ to ’em I would just get mad and throw stuff which mean I’d get suspended and I’d get pink slips and all that. I don’t know why I got back to Philly. I was like that and then I just changed soon as I got to seventh grade. I just changed. I started getting good grades. I was on honor roll and stuff and it just went from there ever since.

Here, the continuity is re/produced by means of language and the narrative format, associating a character (“I”) with a changing personality and a plot (from behavior problem to fool of Caucasians and ultimately honor student). It is through such narratives, which require language as a tool, that the continuous and constant aspects of self are (consciously) produced (which allows for change) and reproduced (which allows for stability and continuity) in the face of change (Ricœur, 1988). The narratives have as their main elements a character and a plot, which are the tools for constructing continuity

(character) in the face of an unfolding plot (Roth, in press). Others can understand Shameer's autobiographical narrative, because of the general nature of the genre. Language and narrative format of autobiographies are the crucial resources for bridging the time, from past to present and future. These resources provide us with a sense of continuity and stability in the face of continuously changing worlds and selves. Without language, humans would not be able to have the particular experiences that make them distinct from other beings. These narratives, therefore, do not describe Self as such, but always Self in relation to other things and people. Who we are, therefore, is the result of interactions with otherness (things, people) constructed and reified in autobiographical narratives, with which we consciously identify. Generally, these narrative identities are continuously augmented by accounts of new experiences; but, sometimes, new experiences can also lead to a reconfiguration of previous narratives. Thus, Shameer would have told different narratives of self at an earlier time—for example, he now tells what happened to him in the New Jersey school in terms of the color differences between him and his peers, and racism among the teachers, whereas the color differences were not an aspect of his identity earlier in his life.

In acting (saying, manipulating), we not only do something to the world, but also re/produce who we are with respect to others. Thus, when Shameer “disses” his teacher, he also gains respect in his peer community, where others recognize his actions as something familiar, something they might do to themselves and recognize as basic emotion that they also experience. In recognizing Shameer's action as part of their action possibilities, Shameer's peers inherently constitute themselves as members of a collective with which they, upon reflection, may also consciously identify. As part of an activity system, individual and collective are always dialectically related. However, individuals may identify or not identify with the collective motive of the activity. Identification and disidentification (as it is commonly called in organizational studies) and emotional tonality (positive, neutral, negative) are correlates—positive and negative emotions in

interactions with others are associated with identification (solidarity) and disidentification, respectively (Collins, 2004). Identification and disidentification not only are the consequences of structural relations between individual and collective, but also are (a) the outcomes of reflective processes that relate self and collective and (b) are re/produced through shared (solidarity) symbols. It is at this point where an antinomy can appear between structural identification, based on the re/production of institutional practices (e.g., through their actions, students contribute to reproducing schools and schooling), and personal disidentification, which is the result of emotional and motivational alignment with a different activity.

When Shameer says to his teacher in the presence of peers, “See man this is why I don’t like y’all, I don’t like y’all teachers or y’all school,” his utterance (action) articulates and expresses an emotional stance which many of his peers unconsciously sense and with which they can (consciously) identify, an emotional stance that they co-produce, for example, by shouting “YEAH!” In the first instance, Shameer’s actions re/produce particular structural relations characteristic of urban schools, including resistance to being instructed in a way that normally works for white middle-class students. Much like “taking part in an ethnic riot is not simply a way of acting out a preexisting ethnic identity, but a way of strengthening it, re-creating or even creating it” (Collins, 2004, p. 82–83), taking part in resistance to instruction acts out, strengthens, re-creates, and creates (ethnic) identity among the students. Depending on the emotional toning, students consciously dis/identify with the current activity. Thus, within the activity of schooling, Shameer disidentifies with the collective motive, which is articulated and expressed in his utterance. At the same time, he identifies with his peer groups, within which the same utterance is associated with a positive emotional toning.

In this situation, Shameer and his fellow students re/produce *themselves* and their peer community while participating in the re/production of (shared) *emotional tonalities*, which, in its positive incarnation, constitutes their solidarity, and in its negative

incarnation, expresses the relation to the (oppressive) school system and its representative, the teacher. Their actions are inherently motivated in this way, though they may not appear so within the activity system defined by schooling and school. However, Shameer and classmates also re/produce themselves as members of their peer group through the public and private identification with symbols, which, when they are shared, characterize solidarity within and of a group. Shameer begins a Powerpoint™ presentation about his school life (“Life and Times of Shameer”) with a title page containing a collage of photographs featuring championship wrestlers, rap artists, and professional athletes (football, basketball) players. Several photographs feature persons showing one or both middle fingers and testy facial expressions; in his presentation, Shameer also highlights the strength and attitude of several idols.

In presenting these images, he not only makes statements about himself, who he identifies with, articulating shared symbols of power, attitude, and aptitude, but his statements are recognized and identified with by his peers. In making the statements, he publicly re/produces shared symbols and, in this, also re/produces his own membership in the peer group. Such conscious identification infiltrates articulations of Self with respect to school subject. In the following conversation, Shameer talks about his answer to a question another research had asked him about “science and I.”

Shameer: It was science is everything, no, science is everything and I’m science. The world and everything in it is science. And I’m science so the world is mine. It’s L. L. Cool J.

Interviewer: Really? Does he say science?

Shameer: No he say, he say, “Hip-hop the streets and I’m hip-hop, so the streets is mine.”

In this episode, two different relations are integrated. Shameer directly relates to the interviewer and both collaborate to produce a narrative that constitutes him as a particular student. He relates to the interviewer, but the production of this social relation, and

therefore the production of his identity, is not thematic in the interview transcript. More so, Shameer does not just say something about his relation to science, but co-articulates identification with the rapper L. L. Cool J.

Among students, the body plays a central role with respect to identification. Many of Shameer's peers donned cornrows similar to the basketball star Allan Iverson. Here, haircut and hairstyle are symbols leading to and being result of solidarity, and therefore symbols of individual and collective identification. It plays an additional role as a symbol of group solidarity through individual|collective identification with a sports figure, who thereby becomes "an emblem for those who have seen this person in the focus of a collective ritual" (Collins, 2004, p. 85). Hoods are also symbols of solidarity: Wearing hoods and engaging teachers in a game of putting the hood over the head and being asked to take it off increases the solidarity among students, not in the least because "hood" sounds like "'hood," short for neighborhood, the way in which these urban students refer to where they live. Whereas the teacher instruction "Take your hood off!" may lead a student to take off the hood, the interaction itself leads to a reproduction of his identification with the "'hood." Hair style and adornments therefore serve as additional symbols that both create solidarity among students and define the boundaries that exclude teachers and school administrators: "Sometimes you get the evil stares, like 'Oh, he's bad, get got graffiti on his jacket and a big fro' or if I had braids, 'Oh he bad news, he a gangster or somethin'"."

IDENTITY, EMOTIONS, AND SCHOOLING

There are both continuous and discontinuous aspects to the human experience of identity, both intimately related to the experience of self with respect to the other and the result of mediational processes. The dialectical nature of identity, integrally related to emotional toning, presupposes the human body as the producing and experiencing agent.

Although experience is inscribed in the body, which, at any moment, is the result of all prior experiences, it requires reflection and language as a mediational tool to construct and experience the constant and continuous aspects of identity. Emotional toning and solidarity, available in shared actions (practices) and symbols, allow and constitute dis/identification. Identity and emotions are not stable or personal features of human existence but are continuously re/produced, individually and collectively.

Dis/identification and associated motivations are the outcome of underlying dialectic processes rather than constituting internal contradictions. The degree of identification is a function of the relationship between the contribution to the ongoing collective activity and the contribution to enhancing individual possibilities and the individual's capacity to understand this relationship. The identity of the "unmotivated" urban student is re/produced in the lack of a relationship between working for school and getting ahead, or the failure to recognize that doing well can lead to getting ahead despite all odds associated with being an urban kid.

It may be surmised that teachers in urban school often do not know their students, which mediates the preparation of appropriate curriculum. These teachers neither experience nor participate in producing solidarity, which inherently creates barriers to producing positive emotions and conscious identifications with schools and schooling. The values embodied in the students' root culture are different from those embodied in the white, middle-class culture that characterizes schooling (Eckert, 1989). This affects the re/production of emotional toning, interactions in the native and school cultures, and publicly and personally sustained identifications through shared symbols (cultural icons). As a result, school culture is not only an anathema to the students' home culture, but the difference is continuously reproduced as such.

Change will require processes that allow students and teachers to develop solidarity, which can only come about through mutual focus, collective action, and shared emotionality. Our work in urban schools gave rise to a praxis that has exactly these

features: cogenerative dialoguing (Roth et al., 2004). In cogenerative dialoguing, students, teachers, and administrators (if applicable) get together to talk about and theorize events at the school in order to better understand them and bring about changes together. All members of the newly formed collective contribute, are heard, and enact responsibility for the present and future events. In all participants, this gives rise to a sense of being in the situation together and a positive emotional toning that are associated with the experience of solidarity. It had been such a cogenerative dialogue involving Shameer, his chemistry teacher, a preservice teacher, a postdoctoral fellow knowing him well, and two researchers that the main protagonists of the altercation over a grade were able to come to a common understanding of the situation and of the other—which had the consequence that Shameer was not suspended.

CODA

Most discussions in schools and universities uncouple cognitive issues (what is the curriculum to be like) from the emotional and motivational, as if students were computers in which to put information. Identity ought to be more central in considerations of knowing and learning, including emotion and motivation as core elements, without which cognition cannot be understood. Identity, emotion, and motivation are both cultural (collective) and personal (individual) so that they cannot be understood unless we take into account the dialectical relation between collective and individual.

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