The Contours and Possibilities of Desire in Sociocultural Research on Learning and Becoming

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Abstract: Though it has enhanced the learning sciences in numerous ways, sociocultural theory has only somewhat dealt with desire. There is some indication that desire is learned in social activity and informs identity development, which whets the appetite for conceptual elaboration. In this paper I draw from scholarship in philosophy, religious studies, and education to define and expand the concept. This work reveals how desire is directed, disciplined, and has consequences of critical concern. Conceptually, desire may also be preferable to motivation for researching and appreciating what Dorothy Holland (1992) labeled the *directive force* evident in individuals' participation within social activity systems. I refer to my own work in teacher education to illustrate how the concept frames important questions and lines of inquiry for further research.

When investigating learning within social activity systems, what are we to make of participants' expressed yearnings, motivations, aspirations, pleasures, or even dreams? Indeed, I find that an intriguing aspect of learning—*desire*—still remains underdeveloped from a sociocultural perspective. Compelling cases have been made that desire is both socially constructed (Holland, 1992) and part of identity formation (Packer & Goicoechea, 2000), suggesting that what we come to yearn for may profoundly influence the kind of people we are and are becoming, and what we do and how we see ourselves may shape the objects and intensity of our yearning. As I propose in this paper, desire is a concept that can enrich our understanding of the relationship between practice, identity, and *telos*. But just as much of our learning is ubiquitous and tends to go unnoticed (Lave, 2000), desire is likely present but unappreciated in daily activity. As I will reveal, desire is an evocative concept that can open up emotional terrain that tends to elude characterization. This may be its conceptual virtue in an era driven by post-Enlightenment rationality where feelings of desire are often treated as threats to order and stability—irrational urges to be subordinated to reason and either mastered or driven into hiding, accessible only through religion or the arts.

In this paper I argue that sociocultural theory has much to offer our understanding of desire, and the concept may prove useful to research in the learning sciences. I begin by drawing upon scholarship in philosophy, religious studies, education, and critical theory to illuminate some of desire's conceptual contours and dilemmas. From there I locate it within sociocultural theory and research. I conclude by briefly showing how desire is informing the direction of my study of teacher learning within teacher preparation programs.

Conceptual Roots and Theories

The term 'desire' comes from the Latin *desiderare* (to long for), which in turn comes from *de sidere* (of the stars) (Hollis, 2010). It would appear that our language of yearning has roots in early travelers' use of the stars to mark distance and direction. Long before Facebook or Google Maps, a glance upward to the cosmos could stir wanderlust or remind weary travelers of the comforts of far off homelands. The ancients also ascribed divine meaning to the stars, projecting onto them mythic ideals and purposes for human activity. While our mythic imagination may have waned in modern times (Armstrong, 2009), we persist in conjuring up and fervently chasing our dreams and ideals. These dreams serve an important function as a means for playing out potential futures that have yet to materialize (Simon, 1992). They situate the motion of life between points past and future, actual and possible, thereby establishing various trajectories of being (Cole, 1998; Polman & Miller, 2010). They also draw attention to our relative velocity and what we require to keep moving or keep up with others. Indeed, talking with our fellow travelers, we might wonder how our desires compare and why we find certain futures more compelling than others.

Throughout history philosophers have sought to understand desire and its function in the activity of daily life. Characterizing this large body of work, Timothy Schroeder (2009) suggests that desire is fundamentally a state of mind concerned with fulfilling a want or perceived need. He identifies several major theoretical families that have formed around various interpretations of desire's presence and purpose in our lives. *Action-based* theories define desire as dispositional, or the strength of one's inclination to take whatever action is believed will fulfill one's yearning. This tends to shortchange emotional features of having and acting on desire, which has given rise to *pleasure-based* theories focusing on the compulsion to seek fulfillment and satisfaction. Other philosophers have argued that this elevates hedonistic impulses and is dismissive of the human propensity for moral evaluation. They maintain that desire is *good-based*, which follows from the Socratic notion that people desire that which they think is good. Still others prefer *attention-based* theories of desire based on the tendency for individuals to fixate on some inclination around which they construct reasons

to satiate the fixation. Finally, *holistic theories* of desire incorporate some admixture of pleasure, morality, and attention, which are seen as overlapping and often inseparable.

Schroeder also highlights additional dilemmas that appear in theoretical discussions of desire. One is making sense of multiple desires. Indeed, he notes that humans have many different desires and expressions of desire that feed into one another. Imagine a person standing on the shore of a cool lake on a hot day: that person can feel the urge to jump into the lake (a desire for pleasure) and also want to be the kind of person who acts on such impulses (a desire for recognition). Another challenge is what to make of relative intensity, or situations where a desire is erratically enacted despite its consistent and unwavering presences in a person's life. For example, teachers often have bad teaching days, but that does not necessarily signal a faltering desire to ensure their students' welfare. Also, certain desires may increase or decrease in intensity with respect to circumstance and social conditions.

Schroeder (2004) helpfully distills these theories into three major components that he argues should be examined in any exploration of desire: pleasure (and displeasure), motivation (and inhibition), and reward (and punishment). *Pleasure* is evident in a sense of satisfaction, specifically the experience of having our expectations at least met, and preferably exceeded, within a given situation. *Motivation* is the conscious focus on goal attainment—the fixation on a particular outcome and how persistent a person is to attain it. And *reward* is the feedback or stimulus received in response to activity. As I interpret them, each component evokes a suite of reflective questions:

- *Pleasure*: What do I require to be satisfied? What do I enjoy about an activity I am engaged in? How does it compare to my expectations?
- *Motivation*: What preoccupies my mind? What am I after? Why do I choose to take certain actions? What do I hope to accomplish through those actions?
- *Reward*: How did it feel to take certain actions? What feedback keeps me pursuing my goals? Why do I avoid some situations but seek out others?

How we answer these questions may reveal how our desires permeate, shape, and direct who we are and what we do. Schroeder observes that the components overlap and inform one another. In fact, he argues that reward is underappreciated in contemporary discussions of desire because it is seen as invoking the ghost of behaviorism. And yet, he contends that acknowledging rewards and feedback is crucial for understanding how desire is learned, and he points to recent neurobiology research on the brain's reward centers to support his claim. Whether or not one buys the biological argument (for a dissenting view, see Latham, 2006), Schroeder's suggestions that desire is both experienced bodily and is learned have important implications for how the concept is framed and studied, especially when examined through critical and sociocultural lenses. Before taking up this examination, I want to offer additional conceptual insights from the humanities.

Desire as Directed and Disciplined

Discussions of desire in the humanities tend to highlight three key conceptual features: 1) the object toward which desire is directed, 2) the ways in which desire is focused and disciplined, and 3) the intended and unintended consequences of enacting desire. For example, in his assessment of whether or not sports develop character, Mark Edmundson (2013) refers to Plato's notion that human's possess an inherent desire for glory that necessitates reason to control it. Edmundson concedes that sports can offer an outlet for this desire by permitting a disciplined pursuit of the object—glory—without violating the rule of law and moral sensibilities. But he argues that the positive consequences of playing sports are debatable, as deeper and more insidious desires for power and individual recognition often lie hidden beneath the cloak of concern for character development.

Religious scholars and writers inquiring into the human condition have much to say on the nature of desire. In his fourth century text, *Confessions,* St. Augustine chronicles his efforts to discipline and direct his desire for pleasure. He recalls the sexual exploits of his youth and how he eventually tired of his insatiable appetites and turned to God for comfort and direction. Exploring this text, Margaret Miles (1992) observes how Augustine presents a contradictory framing of pleasure. On the one hand he sees pleasure as something worth maximizing through sustained intensity. But on the other he admits that perpetual bliss is impossible, which his own story makes clear. Augustine resolves the contradiction by vowing to only desire God, in whom he believes pleasure is readily and endlessly available without the consequences of guilt or hangovers. He thereby finds an object for his desire that is suitably beyond his comprehension yet compelling enough to warrant his devotion. Thoreau (1854/2001) reaches a similar conclusion in *Walden* while pondering his experiences in nature. He expresses a firm Puritanical belief that hard work develops divine character, suggesting that such character is more easily maintained when the body is too exhausted to be lustful. Like Augustine, he argues that desire must be controlled and directed toward a higher ideal, a purity of being focused on an incomprehensible natural beauty. He worries that his more earthly desires will spoil his devotion to nature and its Creator. For Thoreau the solution is clear: turn one's attention to God so "the spirit can for the time control every member and function of the body, and transmute what in form is the grossest sensuality into purity and devotion" (p. 514).

The challenge for contemporary devotees is disciplining one's desire within a consumer-driven culture. For Vincent Miller (2004) "[i]t is clear that our desires are shaped, encouraged, and manipulated" by our daily participation in a society fixated on consuming (p. 109). He sees the formation of this desire as happening through two devices: misdirection and seduction. *Misdirection* is a tactic whereby individuals become convinced that they can fulfill their innermost desires—those reflecting deeply held values and beliefs—through their consumptive activity. Savvy merchants cleverly associate the purchase of their products with popular causes, such as cancer research and environmentalism. *Seduction* keeps individuals in a state of perpetual hunger and convinces them that the ideal state of being is one of constant dissatisfaction. Elaborating this point, William Cavanaugh (2008) observes that consumer culture focuses attention on choice and cultivates a sense of pleasure in the yearning for things. Happiness is having options, leafing through catalogues and combing through websites. The moment of decision—of actual consumption—feels oddly unsatisfying, thereby initiating the drive to pursue other desires and choices.

Miller contends that seduction and misdirection generate a stunted and dispersed form of desire that promises much but offers little. He argues that from childhood onward we learn to repress our desires and engage in consumptive activity to relieve the "ocean of desire seething beneath what can be directly said or demanded" (p. 125). But consuming fails to address the depths of that ocean. It merely skims the surface, converting the rich cultural textures of human activity and meaning into comparable units—commodities—that diminish their possible effects on our lives. Such cultural commodification leads to a shallow appropriation of cultural and spiritual symbols, languages, and identities. More significantly, it deludes individuals into believing that symbolic possession can bring about cultural and spiritual ideals that require thoughtful and sustained work. When symbolic consumption inevitably fails to prove transformative, people come to see such ideals as illusions, and visions of happiness, peace, justice, and the fullness of God are written off as utopian fantasies. The yearning for such ideals thus wanes, and the resulting vacuum is filled with a "closed, disenchanted universe… of technological planning and pragmatic rationality in which expectation plays no role" (p. 131). Living is thereby reduced to seemingly endless oscillations between cool, levelheaded practicality and hot, impulsive consumer indulgence. Miller contends that breaking this pattern and realizing broader ideals requires vocational practice within communities that nurture a "commitment to a particular form of life and to the transformation of the self in order to sustain that commitment" (p. 137).

James Smith (2009) suggests that Christian educators interested in cultivating vocation should focus less on transmitting a worldview and more on directing desire. To this end he poses the following questions:

> What if education … is not primarily about the absorption of ideas and information, but about the formation of the hearts and desires? … What if education was primarily concerned with shaping our hopes and passions—our visions of "the good life"—and not merely about the dissemination of data and information as inputs to our thinking? What if the primary work of education was the transforming of our imagination rather than the saturation of our intellect? And what if this had as much to do with our bodies as with our minds? (p. 18)

As with sociocultural learning theorists, Smith challenges the view that an education is primarily a cerebral affair—a matter of belief, view, or knowledge. He also places a premium on learning environments and sees a strong connection between teaching and ontology, noting how "behind every constellation of educational practices is a set of assumptions about the nature of human persons—about the kinds of creatures we are" (p. 28).

Secular scholars of education have similarly found purchase in linking teaching to desired futures and ways of being. Jacqueline Cossentino (2005, 2006) has documented how the Montessori teaching tradition has deep roots in a specific cosmic vision of the good life that gives meaning and purpose to its practices and practitioners. And Jim Garrison (1997) notes how Dewey framed teaching as fundamentally driven by educational commitments to particular values and visions of society. Garrison contends that great teaching requires educators to directly engage these visions and the often intensely felt passions they foment. This is why, he observes, the ancient Greeks saw romantic desire—*eros*—as vitally important to education. What stars to follow and why were considered significant matters because "[w]e become what we love. Our destiny is in our desires, yet what we seek to possess soon comes to possess us in thought, feeling, and action" (p. xiii).

Dan Liston (2004) sees such passion as the lure of learning—*eros* manifested in a desire to experience the awe and wonder of the 'grace of great things'. For teachers this desire can find expression in efforts to connect children to the world and the various ways it can be understood and experienced. Christine Downing (2009) gives voice to this sentiment when she says of her own teaching,

> …I want to communicate my love—not exactly of my students, though not exactly *not* of my students—but more explicitly my love of the books, the authors, the ways of looking at the world that have moved and inspired me, and my love of the process of inquiry that brought me

> to those books, those writers; I want to encourage my students to find what might move them in the same way—and come to love looking for it. (italics in original, p. 153)

Mark Edmundson (2005) expresses a similar fondness for books and their usefulness for deciding how and why to live one's life in particular ways. By situating the activity of reading within a dynamic exchange between love and identity, both Downing and Edmundson acknowledge the power of narrative to inform passion and purpose. Liston (2004) suggests that without desire teaching and learning are lifeless endeavors, and students are unlikely to inherit a love of learning. He observes that teachers who build their practice upon a love of learning maintain a heartfelt connection to their work. They come to appreciate how teaching can be an artful instruction not only in ways to acquire knowledge but also in how to love and cherish that knowledge in particular ways.

Despite its promise, an engagement with passionate desire is arguably rare in contemporary U.S. schools. Jennifer Logue (2012) suggests that this is because rosy portrayals of educational *eros* tend to overlook the darker side of desire. Less discussed is how desire can drive people to defensiveness and obsessive, hysterical behavior. Indeed, in teaching, unfulfilled desire can be deeply disheartening (Liston, 2000). Logue suggests that educational institutions are designed to prevent desire's ill effects. They require order and predictability to function smoothly, which breeds a preference for more sanitized and measurable forms of learning. Erotic desire threatens this order as a force that upends certainties while feeding radical possibilities. According to Logue, "The unruly, unpredictable, and unconscious aspects of eros render the school or university's attempt to mold and monitor a knowable, disembodied self, a self measured by predetermined skills and predictable outcomes, impossible" (p. 73). As such, *eros* is often confined or scrubbed from formal educational settings, though not without costs.

Desire through a Critical Lens

Within the activities of directing, disciplining, and instructing desire are issues of privilege and power that warrant critical interrogation. I will briefly offer a feminist examination of desire, though critical race and class analyses would be illuminating and are certainly necessary to appreciate the lived experiences of the concept.

Judith Butler (2004) maintains that our desires are interwoven with the norms of enduring gender narratives. Because these narratives originate externally to us, we can assume that the desires coded within them also originate externally. Miles (1992) similarly observes how "desire is always marked by the particularities of individual lives, by socially constructed gender assumptions, expectations, and roles, by social location, institutional affiliation, class, and race" (p. 135). She points out that Augustine's unchecked privilege as a heterosexual male leads him to define desire as something both egocentric and ravenous, which in turn leads him to prescribe the authoritative disciplining of religious practice. Miles observes how, in his writing, Augustine builds excitement with tantalizing and titillating details only to switch suddenly into chastisement and the necessity of finding fulfillment in God. He thus frames a choice between desiring earthly objects and desiring God—a choice that was and arguably still is a privilege of men, whose desires are publically sanctioned. This indulgence/repentance tension is problematic from a critical perspective in that it permits men, and those in privileged positions of power more generally, to excuse their excesses and establish their pleasure as something only God has the authority judge.

Despite these critiques, Miles finds it unfair to hold Augustine accountable for assumptions and transgressions exceeding the social consciousness of his time, especially if it leads to the outright rejection of his work. For Miles, *Confessions* still offers keen and arguably timeless insights about the human condition. Even so, she advises greater caution when reading it than has been typical of religious scholarship over the centuries. This body of work has helped establish the dominant norms and conditions for gendered identity, with men as the desiring beings and women the objects of their desire. Miles notes the conspicuous absence of the voices of women in Augustine's text; without these perspectives we cannot fully appreciate the constructive moments between friends and lovers where desire is formed. Nor can we understand what the women made of the situation. How did they participate in a masculine narrative where women are considered pure, their earthly desires severely limited and controlled? We can reasonably assume that it was difficult, and probably joyless. Even today young women are denied a publically acceptable means for exploring embodied desire and crafting certain identities and possible futures (Fine & McClelland, 2006; Tolman, 2012). According to Butler (2004), any woman or person identifying as gay, lesbian, or transgender who challenges these arrangements is forced to ask

> If I desire in certain ways, will I be able to live? Will there be a place in my life, and will it be recognizable to the others upon whom I depend for social existence? (p. 3)

Butler maintains that both desire and social norms are important features of human thriving and civility. As such, the conscientious resistor should articulate a new vision of being and desire and the necessary conditions for its enactment. According to Michelle Fine and Sara McClelland (2006), this requires a more

holistic view of desire—a "thick desire"—that "situates sexual well being within structural contexts that enable economic, educational, social, and psychological health" (p. 301). The liberalization of the modern economy, with its promise of personal freedom and self-formation, would seem more conducive to a thicker form of critical, embodied desire. While arguably an improvement, Miller (2004), evoking Foucault, contends that the liberal shift is somewhat illusory, as the injustice of confessional monitoring has given way to the injustice of self-monitoring. In a liberal society, individuals are expected to proclaim their desires and accept full responsibility for their misdirected desires. Significantly, this leaves externalities and social conditions out of the conversation. But such conditions are indeed present and serve as crucial resources for constructing desire, which a sociocultural lens helpfully spotlights.

Desire from a Sociocultural Perspective

Sociocultural theory dissolves firm distinctions between individuals and social conditions. Through its development, the theory has challenged the prevailing model of learning as acquisition and transfer (Sfard, 1998; Rogoff, 1997; Packer, 2001) giving way to conceptions of learning as social activity situated within communities (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998), undertaken in complex figured worlds (Holland, Lachiotte Jr., Skinner, & Cain, 1998), profoundly influenced by history and culture (Gutiérrez & Rogoff, 2003), and ultimately organized toward possible futures and identities (Cole, 1998; O'Connor & Allen, 2010; Polman & Miller, 2010). In formal educational settings, researchers have applied the theory to upend problematic views of students, teaching, and learning. Hand-in-hand with a postmodern, critical perspective, sociocultural theory has developed with a desired outcome (*telos*) in mind of a just and equitable society (O'Connor & Penuel, 2010).

By treating individuals as situated within and constitutive of social conditions, the theory offers ample conceptual groundwork for observing and interpreting how desire takes shape and is learned. It provides helpful tools for empirically analyzing questions such as *How do our desires form?*; *How do we come to prioritize some 'objects' of desire, including some imagined futures, over others?*; and *How do we come to understand and pursue our desires in certain ways?* I would point out that these questions and their underlying concerns have been raised in the sociocultural literature by the mention of a drive to take action or participate in communities of practice. In the first paragraph of their seminal text, Lave & Wenger (1991) refer to the novice's "*intentions* to learn" as initiating their engagement with a particular community of practice (italics mine; p. 29). And Barbara Rogoff (1997) suggests that evidence of learning can include a person's "changing purposes for being involved, commitment to the endeavor, and trust of unknown aspects of it (including its future)" (p. 280). We might therefore ask how and in what ways these intentions and purposes form and influence participation within social activity systems.

Doing so from a socioculturally informed perspective provides conceptual inroads into aspects of learning that have been predominantly defined by cognitive psychology in terms of motivation, which is treated as something that resides within individuals (cf., Stipek, 1993) to be altered through intrinsic or extrinsic means (cf., Ginsberg, 2005; Middleton, 1995). In their sociocultural take on student motivation, Robert Rueda and Luis Moll (1994) challenge this view and define motivation as situated in social interactions within specific cultural contexts. They note how this reframing permits a more dynamic understanding of individual student participation and its relationship to the (de)motivating conditions of classrooms. They argue that such a view can aide teachers in personalizing the classroom learning experience such that it cultivates students' motivations.

Instead of an exclusive focus on motivation, Dorothy Holland (1992) opts to study desire in her investigation of college women's pursuit of romance. She refers to desire as a *directive force* that is not natural but cultural, something learned through social participation. Holland maintains that "thoughts and feeling, will and motivation, are *formed* as the individual develops" (italics in original, p. 63). This formation is accomplished through social activity and engagement with cultural resources, and it serves to direct and discipline one's thoughts and feelings in particular ways for particular purposes. For the women she studied this involved learning various discursive moves from peers to deflect unwanted attentions from some suitors while eliciting attentions from others. Holland observed how the resulting world of romance was formed and reinforced by the women's behavior, with rules for participation and penalties for violations. Living within this world directed the women toward particular outcomes and a particular vision of the good life. Through their participation in this world, the women came to forge an identity rooted in some desired futures but not others, with potentially harmful implications for their academic participation and professional opportunities in college and beyond (Holland & Eisenhart, 1990).

Holland's decision to focus on desire instead of motivation is noteworthy. Of course, evoking romantic love—*eros*—invites entry into a family of concepts that includes passion and desire. Significantly, though, Holland did not treat romance as a factor affecting some inherent conception of motivation, but rather positioned romance as an organizing object giving shape and purpose to the women's social activity and identities. Studies of motivation, even when socioculturally framed, tend to take motivation rather than its various targets as the primary focus of inquiry. Holland organizes her study instead around understanding the object of the women's

interest—romance—and how it takes hold within a social activity system. Thus, so-called individual motivation is not only situated socially, it is situated within the future-oriented, future-creating character of participation within communities. As I see it, acknowledging this shifts the focus away from assessing individuals' relative motivational strength and draws attention to conflicts in desired future outcomes, such as achieving romantic fulfillment versus a high-status professional identity. Those futures, while crafted through and from the experiences of sociocultural, embodied activity, exist in the imagination. And, as Schroeder (2004) points out, it is possible for people to do nothing to realize imagined futures—to show no clear signs of being motivated—yet still desire them.

Holland's sociocultural treatment of desire arguably passes on the modernist tendency to presume foundational origins of human activity in favor of a postmodern understanding of activity and its drivers as socially constructed with respect to imagined futures (Packer, 2000). Doing so offers insights into objects of sociopolitical importance formed within and across communities, like identity (Urrieta Jr., 2007). Martin Packer and Jessie Goicoechea (2000) assert that identity is a construct formed through social participation "in relationships of recognition and desire" (p. 228). They note how participation is complicated by power, politics, and the fact that people tend to move between communities. They maintain that, as individuals try to make sense of this movement and their participation, a desire for recognition emerges and drives the quest for a meaningful identity. As they explain, this "desire directed toward another person … seeks recognition that gives not just consciousness of self but self-consciousness" (p. 233). Thus, we do more than form an identity in relationship to others; we form the desire for an identity and the desire that others acknowledge it.

Framing a Research Agenda

Through a sociocultural framework, desire can invigorate familiar conceptual terrain by highlighting the direction of participation, practice, and identity formation. It does so by invoking the *why* questions encoded within social activity systems: Why is action taken? Why are some goals elevated over others? Why do individuals seek to become certain kinds of people? It encourages inquiries into the imagined futures and directions, whether intended or not, of social activity and how individuals are helping to establish those futures and directions and ensure that progress is made. It also permits us to take seriously not just emotions, but experiences of pleasure.

In my research on teacher education I am using the conceptual language of desire to understand teacher learning as framed by reformers arguments for *what* works in schools and *who* should be tapped to do the work. In the U.S. there is a growing call for a practice-based approach to teacher training and assessment that reformers believe will bolster the teaching profession by grounding it in research-supported best practices (Zeichner, 2012). There has been a concurrent push to identify inherent traits and desires for the work of teaching to guide teacher selection and training (Richardson & Watt, 2006; Watt & Richardson, 2008). To this end, personality instruments like the TeacherFit Inventory are being used to identify teaching applicants by how well their characteristics match those considered necessary for the work. Some practice-based reformers contend that such efforts are misguided and distract from the work of identifying effective teaching practices (Hiebert & Morris, 2012). They maintain that nobody is born a teacher and the practices of effective teaching must be learned (Ball & Forzani, 2009). Of course, the prospective teacher must be somebody who is willing to learn those practices and accept certain definitions of effective. Stated differently, they need to be comfortable with developing particular desires for the work of teaching.

Indeed, seen through the lens of desire, any educational reform proposal can be interpreted as an effort to set the conditions for job satisfaction, directing teachers' attention to particular goals for their work and establishing what counts as worthwhile feedback. That some teachers may be turned off by these conditions while others find them invigorating could be interpreted as a matter of fit between individuals and the work of teaching. But seeing such reactions as a matter of differing desires for teaching—for what it is, does, and should accomplish—encourages a more nuanced inquiry into those conditions and what drives and sustains them. It begs questions such as: Why are certain experiences of job satisfaction considered more acceptable than others? Why are some goals deemed more worthy of pursuit than others? Why are some kinds of feedback offered over others? Pointing out purported school realities to answer such questions may be inadequate. Cleo Cherryholmes (1992), referring to Dewey's pragmatic critique of a fixed social reality, notes, "Not everything that works is desirable, not every belief that is 'true' is to be acted upon" (p. 14). The error may be thinking that "true beliefs" about teaching only reflect school realities rather than construct them (Berger & Luckmann, 1966/1991). As a consequence, what is desired of teaching may become limited by self-fulfilling ideas about what it can accomplish, while dreams of what it could (or should) accomplish are cast aside and left unexplored.

In an effort to understand desire in teacher learning, I am currently employing grounded theory methodology (Charmaz, 1995; Charmaz & Belgrave, 2003) to investigate beginning teachers' participation within their teacher education programs. Similar to Holland (1992), I want to understand how certain objects of desire, including imagined futures, emerge from and give shape to a social activity system and individuals' participation within it. I am curious to know what the beginning teachers yearn for—what they come to desire

and how they pursue their desires—as they interact with one another, teach children, talk with mentors, receive feedback, and engage programmatic practices, norms, and rituals.

Conclusion

In this paper I have merely scratched the surface of the many ways desire is discussed and can illuminate the transformative texture of learning. To explore its conceptual features I have turned to humanities scholarship concerned with desire's role in crafting the kinds of people we are and are becoming. I have also brought in a critical view to interrogate a particular narrative of desire that limits its expression and enactment. I have suggested that desire is often overlooked in daily activity, its visibility likely requiring engagement with the imagination and the wishes, dreams, and futures developed therein. Just as sociocultural theorists have constructed definitions of learning for specific purposes, I want to establish desire as a conceptual construct based on sociocultural assumptions about the nature of human activity such that various expressions and experiences of yearning are analytically accessible in research on teacher learning. Humanities scholarship and studies such as Holland's have laid the groundwork for investigating desire's presence and consequences within specific contexts of social activity, like teaching and teacher education. This paper represents a next step in conceptualizing desire, and empirical research is needed to further establish its contours and analytic usefulness within the learning sciences.

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