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T.A. as Text

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Sticks and Stones

One of my undergraduate students said me, "So, you're from the Caribbean? That makes you Jamaican, right?" This assumption completely negates my Trinidad and Tobago background, and it disregards the many nations of the Caribbean region. And you may read this and think: potayto, potahto—it's just a word. But, I take this to be yet another powerful reminder that often, words become labels. In assigning such labels and/or assuming them, we become confined to, and are complicit in perpetuating their very definitions. These words then become the texts of how we are perceived and how we perceive ourselves, for in adopting these labels, we all too often adapt to their definitions.

I remember reading Sonia Nieto's foreword to Howard's (1996) *We Can't Teach What We Don't Know*, and smiling fondly at her reference to an expression that I had long ago, wistfully realized to be false: "Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words can never hurt me." This childhood mantra at one time had given me succor even from the cruelest insults, as Nieto relates. However, the passing of the years during which I became an English teacher has taught me that words do have the power to do the very thing that my childhood reasoning said it could not: hurt.

Yes, words have the power to hurt and to heal, also to inform and to form my sense of self, to construct my subjectivities, and produce my identities. These words—labels—have the power to define how I am seen and how I see myself, and these perceptions inform my actions. When we take on labels, they shape our understanding of who we are and also make a statement about how we want to be represented and how we are represented. Labels also speak to what representations others have of us. Now, having removed my label of high school English teacher from Trinidad and Tobago, a Caribbean country, I take on the label of graduate teaching assistant (T.A.) in a college in the southern United States. Hence, the label of teaching assistant places me in the dual roles of teacher and student. This context, therefore, is one that invites my continued exploration of the various positions from which I view and understand my world.

Awareness that our perceived roles shape how we see ourselves and how others see us prompts me to question how my new label of *teaching assistant* helps or hurts the teaching and learning process. I believe that the labels I adopt inevitably instruct and construct my thinking and influence my subjectivities. Here, I use the term subjectivity to mean a sense of self—ways of knowing about self in the world; how we understand ourselves, consciously and unconsciously (Knobel & Lankshear, 2003). My subjectivity then becomes a conscious negotiation, shaping and reshaping of self. On the other hand, I see identity as tied to the productive power of socially constructed knowledge. It is the "product" of how I am positioned and how I position myself, and go about representing myself. Drawing on Foucault's (1995)

notion of power as productive, I hold the view that while I can consciously produce an image or identity, I am also being produced by my context in the desired image or product of a teaching assistant.

My story therefore captures my ongoing engagement in the reflexive process of examining how I shape and am shaped by my reading of the text of teaching assistant. Reflexivity, according to Schwandt (1997), points to the fact that as inquirer, I am part of the context that I seek to understand. Hence, I see my reflexive process as an ongoing way of critically interrogating and understanding the conscious and unconscious ways in which I come to know, shape and reshape myself as teaching assistant in the classroom. The various ways I see myself—whether ascribed characteristics (Black, Caribbean, female) or achieved characteristics (teaching assistant, student)—reflect the ways in which my identities are produced and inform how my subjectivities are created. By extension, the ways in which I see my students, and their views of me as a teaching assistant, also become part of the dynamic.

> *And so, as if from the depths of my subjective self, I hear the griot. The griot, from my native folk traditions of my African ancestral heritage, embodies the spirit of the oral tradition. The griot is historian, teacher, narrator, and documenter of the truths of the experiences of the individual and community. He is the storyteller who calls to the audience in talk, in chant, in poetry, in story and in song. The voice of the griot is rooted in a dialogue so powerful that his story draws you in—engages you, moves you to listen, to respond, to co-author the texts of the experience and become one with his dialogic voice.*
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> *As I move within my new learning community, I hear the griot—the chant leader and storyteller—calling. It is the voice of the "truths" of the lived experience, a compelling voice of personal and social conscience. This call of the griot engages you in dialogue, and prompts an honest telling and open critique of the story of self in the world and self in the word. It is a call that invites—nay, provokes a response. Now, as the griot calls to me to join in the true spirit of the oral tradition and tell my story, I respond in the harmony of the easy rhythm of the griot's commentary, his poem, his narrative, his song. It is a harmony that belies the tension of this reflexive process. Or perhaps it is my cathartic response to the call. And so, I respond in the spirit of the griot and I talk of the power of the word, using the power of the word…*

So here I find myself, teaching assistant (T.A.) in a college Reading course, to a cohort of English majors. I have been assigned to co-teach this course with my professor, as part of the duties of my graduate assistantship. These students are seniors and teacher candidates who are preparing to enter their own classrooms as high school teachers. While facilitating the development of their conceptions of literacy, as their T.A., I am also poised to help them negotiate the transition from student and student-teacher to teacher. Therefore, I become part of their ongoing construction of what it means to be a teacher.

I recognize that my role as T.A. in many respects, parallels that of my students in their own preservice classroom practice with their mentor teachers. I also am a student-teacher trying to learn as best as I can and to do the best that I can under my mentor professor. Like my undergraduate students, I also have to deal with a heavy course workload in addition to preparing and teaching lessons and units. In this light, my students may see themselves as T.A.s. If we acknowledge the importance of the teacher in the teaching and learning process, then the role of

the T.A. also has pedagogical implications for the tertiary institution preparing preservice teachers.

The value placed on the roles, responsibilities and relationships of a T.A. is closely tied to the value the teacher education institution places on how theory and practice play out in field teaching practices, and in the college classroom. I believe that, through the ways in which the T.A. is positioned, my preservice teachers are being taught what is and should be valued. According to Gavelek & Raphael (1996), "social constructionists place individuals such as the teacher, other adults, and more knowledgeable peers, in the crucial role of mediating the learning of the individual" (p. 184). Consequently, in my college Reading class I am a text that can be read as one that models and prepares student-teachers how to operate in their real world classroom. The very ways in which the T.A. is presented and perceived therefore become texts—ways for preservice teachers to read their present and future classroom experiences.

Here, my concept of *text* is informed by Iser's (1980) "implied reader" and Lewis and Finders' (2002) "implied teacher" that examines assumed roles of the teacher in the learning process. Lewis and Finders (2002) use the concept of the "implied reader" as one who is positioned by the text to accept its ideology. The "implied teacher" is the inscription of what a teacher *is* or *should be*. According to Lewis and Finders (2002) "our notion of who we believe teachers to be is inscribed in our teaching practices, so too is our notion of who we believe a teacher should be in relation to adolescent learners" (p. 102). This supports the view that my conceptions of teaching and my perceptions of myself in relation to my students become texts that are imbued with ideological assumptions that shape the teaching and learning environment.

Through my actions and the ways in which I present knowledge and teach my students, I am positioning them to accept an ideology, and by extension, perpetuate a view of what a teacher is and does. Am I simply modeling the text that they read and teaching the text that they learn, a text that they, in turn will come to accept as the norm and perhaps, the "right" way? And if so, as it has in the past, *the way* (the "implied") in the present, and will then become *the* way in the future.

There are advantages to taking the concept of the 'implied T.A.' seriously if we are to better understand the power-knowledge dynamic that impact the teaching and learning context and better negotiate learning experiences and outcomes. I would argue that one distinct value of the T.A. is to provide preservice teachers with examples and insights into how the theory and the practice of teaching play out in classrooms. The T.A. helps create a real world context for their experiences in the field in their mentor teacher's classrooms. Even more so, as I engage in an apprenticeship of the academy, the text of the T.A. provides insight into the ideological assumptions of how future *teacher-educators* are being prepared. If we believe that student literacies and reading of different texts are important, then we need to look closely at how not only future teachers but future teacher educators are positioned to read multiple texts.

From a more critical perspective, I question whether I therefore am a text for "indoctrination"—a way of imposing an accepted and/or fixed notion of what a teacher is and should be. This is interesting since it opens up the possibility that if this argument holds true, then I am directly supporting and perpetuating this implied concept of the teacher. I am aware, however, that I am not acting in isolation or arbitrarily. After all, my past and the present sociocultural contexts inform my conceptions of the "effective" teacher. "In constructing texts as cultural worlds, readers are learning to interpret characters' actions within larger frameworks of worlds or activity systems constituted by cultural and ideological forces" (Galda & Beach, 2004, p. 857). Have I then been cast in the implied role and, having read its definition, embraced it and

acted out what I now come to accept as "right" or "ideal?" Consequently, my identity as a T.A. develops through the transactions between my sense of the implied T.A. and the image of the implied T.A. as presented in the context in which I operate.

This awareness prompts me to consider how I position my students and prepare them to read *their* roles. The different ways in which knowledge is presented position the students to view me, the course content, and knowledge in particular ways. "By virtue of this standpoint, the teacher is situated in such a position that he can assemble the meaning toward which the perspectives have guided him" (Iser 1980, p. 38). So, when I hear the voice of the *griot*, I cannot but respond, confronting the tensions of my realities.

> *I do accede that perhaps, I too am being disciplined into perpetuating the implied role. In an initial meeting with my professor, she expressed her wish to be a good mentor and model. I am happy that someone is willing and able to "show me the ropes." I am relieved that I wouldn't be left to sink or swim as in some of the horror stories I'd heard involving new T.A.s as Instructors of Record. And so, through this process of modeling and mentoring, I become the student, modeling what I have been taught and have learnt all my life about the "good student." I take on the role of the "implied student" and work diligently, learn the lessons, and try my best to be the good student by being the good T.A. My roles and responsibilities read like the text of the "implied teacher:" planning lessons, team-teaching with my mentor, conducting the classes in her absence, and setting and grading weekly assignments, mid-terms and final papers.*
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> *Each week, as I engage in what has become the now familiar and established rhythms of my routine: preparing lessons and audiovisual teaching aids, designing and conducting activities, updating attendance register, grading assignments, organizing interactive seating, writing tasks on the chalkboard, showing videos, printing resource materials, sending and replying to emails, conducting meetings with students…I rationalize that it sets the tone—it just makes things flow more smoothly. But I realize that I have begun to model what has been modeled: the image of the good teacher and what a "good student teacher" does and should be.*

Consequently, my role may be viewed as a socialization process—one that prepares students, through my actions, to adopt and value a particular perspective of what a teacher is and should be. It appears then that in doing the job assigned by my department, I am disciplining the minds of these preservice teachers into what it means to be a teacher, and, in a more immediate way, what it means to be a student teacher. I also recognize that I am in fact adhering to the status quo of the academy and modeling what is considered acceptable or "right" for a teaching assistant. The power that resides in these norms is also reflected in my decisions to opt into or opt out of certain practices.

In my role as T.A., I am positioned in relation to my students. I cannot claim to explore my notions of the "implied T.A." without acknowledging the tensions inherent in these very positions, for the ways in which knowledge and learning are viewed and presented affect how learning takes place. Foucault (1995) made reference to the disciplinary power of "power-knowledge" of schooling that created subjects who may live in a world of universal rights but were inured to economic, political, and cultural domination. Consequently, the assumptions,

behaviors and roles of the "good T.A." are kept in place and enforced by certain socially constructed power relations.

> The *griot's* call challenges me. I see myself in the classroom and I respond. *Whenever I dare to push the boundaries, I pause. When I want to challenge the norm, I pause. I think: how dare I try to push old limits or even set new precedents? How dare I challenge the accepted view of what is "right," and "appropriate" knowledge and method? And I stop—not wanting to break with policy and tradition (especially in a class that is not mine). I know my place. But then, this decision gives me pause, for I recognize that I am surrendering ownership of my craft, yielding to how my identity as T.A. is being positioned and produced as I submit to the "powers that be." Why am I cautious, hesitant to try new things? Why is it that I continue to see innovation as subversion? And yet, in playing it safe and doing what I have been told is right, I validate what is accepted in this environment.*

In examining my practice from the position of the implied T.A., I therefore continue to confront the tensions of the power-knowledge dynamic and to question my use of power in the teaching and learning process. I question whether, as Knobel and Lankshear (2003) suggest, in such instances and contexts it is possible for less restrictive representations to be constructed, circulated and validated given that we recognize, obey and, eventually normalize these regulatory practices and structures about what is acceptable, proper, or valued. This "training of behavior" and "acquisition of habits" that shape obedient individuals (Foucault, 1995, p.129) can represent the exercise of inherent power relations, specifically between my professor and me and, in general, mentor-teacher-student interactions. Consequently, based on my awareness of my "role" in the teaching and learning context, it is clear that I make conscious decisions to adapt to the inscribed definitions and represent the views of those in power by conforming to and working within the larger system of discipline (Kendal and Wickham, 2000).

I also accede that the teacher-student relationship has issues of power, inherent in the conception of the teacher as holder of knowledge and the student as seeker of knowledge.

> *Here I was, busily grading assignments and diligently writing comments that urged my students to always challenge and be creative despite the demands of the curriculum, the administrative pressures and societal censure. But am I? Do I practice what I preach? The inherent hypocrisy jars me. I stop, pen in hand, papers with students' assignments lying askew…and instead I read the text of my implied self—the text that perhaps I want my students to read. I question whether the text I am writing is fiction: that I am, in fact, consciously producing my identity of the implied T.A. and that my performances simply construct an image—a representation—of the implied teacher. If so, then perhaps my role is all staged: part of a grand production.*

This is a harsh reality. It is a possibility I would much rather not confront, for in doing so, I face the fact that my "reality" may have already been created for me—one which, in yielding to it, I perpetuate. Is everything then about the T.A. and teaching scripted: just there for me to read?

Maybe this is a script that I have read many times in my past experiences with former teachers who inspired me to the extent that I have used their models to develop my own. Hasn't each one of us, at some point in our lives, consciously followed the lead of our own "model" teacher, if only because we believed that this was a "good teacher?" Perhaps we have all been taught and have learnt the lessons of the images of a "good" and "bad" teacher. Yet, this standard may have well been determined by the status quo. Such is the power of the 'implied'—one that we continue, admittedly or not, to impose and perpetuate.

I also contend that the ways in which I formulate my concept of the T.A. inevitably socialize me into compliantly internalizing the imagined and/or perceived 'role' of TA. In adopting and adapting to my new label, what may have been designed to reflect my context, eventually comes to define my context. Hence, I act and react from my implied position.

> *During class, I was told by one student that she had not submitted the weekly assignment because she had had a "busy week." Upon sharing her comments with my professor, the "teacher" in me shook my head sadly at what I perceived to be the "typical" student's poor time management and attitude to studies. In the implied role of the T.A., I just knew all the solutions to that student's problems. And yet, some weeks later, I find myself locked in my room during Fall Break, feverishly and sleeplessly, struggling to finish two papers, countless readings, while still juggling the grading of my students' weekly assignments and midterm papers, and anguishing over this very article. Near breaking point, frustrated, paper blank and mind even more so, the "teacher" in me had no solutions to my own problems. Touché.*

Caught in the tension of my two implied positions of teacher and student, I move between these identities. But, it is this very movement that forces me to confront how these identities affect my subjectivities. How do I deal with this apparent dichotomy? It is in troubling these roles that I begin to understand their dichotomous relationship. In this reflexive process, I realize that it is easy—from the outside—to say that as T.A., I am poised to actively bridge that gap: find a happy medium, one that facilitates the shifting of positions from the binary of "and/or" to a more inclusive conception of "both/and." I find that the reality, however, is not so easy. It is evident that negotiating the transition from student to teacher—as is expected of preservice teachers—is fraught with such challenges of having to redefine one's perceptions of teaching and learning including roles, responsibilities and expectations, authority, and the conceptions of what knowledge and competencies are valued. And yet, despite this knowledge, in the role of the implied T.A., I have often failed to acknowledge such tensions. Gee (1996), talked about adapting and using the Discourse of the context and then moving and switching among them. I contend however that through that very "movement," I move *away* from one *to* another, I *suppress* one to *highlight* the other. And so, in moving toward the implied teacher, I move away from the implied student. At such moments, when interacting with my students, I find myself embracing the authoritative discourse of the more experienced and knowledgeable teacher while removing myself from identifying and empathizing with the realities of what the *students* value and consider to be meaningful. As T.A., while I do have knowledge of the "other" (student), it is in the very act of "othering" that I separate myself and distance it.

When changes in teachers' roles are suggested, it often seems as though we are faced with a series of either/or choices: teacher-controlled versus student-controlled, convention versus

invention, whole class versus small groups (Gavelek & Raphael, 1996). I feel that we must begin to see literacy, the teaching and learning process, and roles not in terms of binaries or dichotomous relationships, but in terms of the richness and diversity of choice and variety that invite different foci in diverse contexts. I have compared Iser's (1980) use of the 'implied reader' in literary texts to that of students as the implied readers of the T.A. as text. Iser states that "the interpreter's task should be to elucidate the potential meanings of a text and not to restrict himself to just one" (p. 22). In accepting the strict dichotomies of roles, I in fact operate as if there can only be one or the other; a dominant and subordinate. It is important to realize that in looking at things in binaries, we limit our potential. In privileging one voice, we silence another (Alexander & Fox, 2004). There have been occasions where, guided by the students, the discussions have returned to previously-discussed topics. Their probing exchanges indicated that they were "getting" the very concepts that they had previously *claimed* to have understood—often in response to a prompt that signaled my intention to move on to another topic. At such times, I recognized that in accepting the roles of teacher and student as dichotomous, I imposed certain restrictions on who determined the pace, direction and nature of the instruction. Learning is not a linear process and so the strict definitions and structured performances imposed by society's labels—that of student and teacher—restrict the creative process and, by their very presence, impose limitations on what and how learning takes place. Consequently, the types of knowledge valued, how knowledge is constructed, and whose interests shape curriculum and guide instruction are informed by the ideologies inherent in such labels.

I have thus continued to speak of the T.A. as a text that informs the pedagogical process. In my specific classroom context, texts are created and read. Consequently, reflexivity helps me to interrogate how knowledge is presented to my students and how this, in turn, shapes how and what they know. Gavelek & Raphael (1996) point to the importance of *more* and *different kinds* of language interactions between teachers and students and among students as they talk about the texts they read and those they create. Like Gee (1996), I see literacies and learning as a social, integrated and interactive processes and, in so doing, I acknowledge that all aspects of classroom context impact learning.

> *I am excited to be a T.A. working with a professor in a class that acknowledges student literacies and fosters interaction, discussion, and critical thinking in the very organization, content and use of multimedia. A major part of the course includes small group discussions, video and interactive online activities that I consider valuable learning tools. And so, it was a rude awakening when, upon inviting students' comments, I learn that many see the internet activities as "busy work" (the students' standard term for unnecessary or burdensome assignments).*
> *Their comments resonate and I am struck, not by the candidness, but the disparity of opinion and divergent perceptions of the work between the students and myself. I am brought face to face with the reality that perhaps I am only able to see through the lens of the distinct position from which I operate. It is then that I question how much in touch with my own "student" self am I as T.A.? It is clear that I continue to function in my implied role of T.A., assuming from the "teacher" perspective, what I think my students will like or find useful. Such situations only serve to highlight the divide that exists between teacher and*

student perspectives, and I question the extent to which, as a T.A., I can truly bridge the gap.

Throughout my reading of this reflexive process, I have noticed that I continue to see myself moving to and from the role of the implied T.A.: stepping away from or stepping into the role. I am prompted to critically examine this observation.

Two papers, readings, midterms and weekly assignments later (and article still pending), I smile bitterly at the irony of how easily, and the fluidity with which I move within my roles of T.A. and student, and how I confine and define myself by my immediate role. Why is it that in my role of the implied T.A., I forgot how frustrating and overwhelming our student workload can, at times, become? Why is it that I was so comfortable adopting the position of the "knowledgeable teacher?" Is it perhaps to hide or compensate for the weaker and more vulnerable "other?" Or perhaps I embrace each role so fully that I put on the myopic lens of that implied role and try to become all that I think, and have been told, it is and should be. Perhaps I have learnt the norms of this context and have read the text of the implied T.A., not wisely, but far too well. Undoubtedly then, I am, at such times, particularly aware of the dichotomous roles—the divergent identities and related subjectivities.

How then do I negotiate the apparent duality? Admittedly, I see the potential of the T.A. as a means of bridging the gap between teacher and student. Ideally, as a T.A., I can offer my preservice teachers ways to positively view and negotiate their transition from student to teacher, facilitate the construction of knowledge, and critically examine their practice. I also have the opportunity to help students develop facility with and ownership of a range of literacy practices through the curriculum, and through my actions and our interactions. As a student teacher myself, I can help facilitate more effective instruction by providing a viable link between professor and student. My role reminds us that in the academy, we should see the T.A., not as the substitute who is a means to an end, but as a *preservice teacher educator*. In this way, my role offers teacher educators viable opportunities to look at how they represent their roles to their students (T.A.s), and their students' (re)presentations of these roles.

Lewis and Finders (2002) present an interesting assertion: the ways that teachers envision their adolescent learners have everything to do with how they will teach these learners. Consequently, as T.A., my vision of my learners and the ways in which I construct these learners, reflect how I perceive and try to meet their needs.

I smile as, sitting with one of the groups, a member directs a question to me, and a peer volunteers an answer, while another gives a supporting view and example. Great! They're learning from each other and using their knowledge. I value such exchanges, the engaging of minds that allows me to facilitate, puts me in the supporting role. By allowing them to construct meaning, I adopt a crucial role in mediating how they, as preservice teachers, perceive their craft and form their conceptions of what their roles should be as well as, how their own students' literacies should and can be developed via organization of class, the content of curriculum and the interactions.

I am aware however, that the pressures of that very context can also dictate how and what interactions and constructions occur. My students enjoy small group discussions that are intended to help develop critical thinking, construction and negotiation of meaning. Often, in dealing with issues and topics, their discussions take on personal applications. While I see the relevance, and allow and encourage this, my own self-censuring reminds me that I should perhaps bring them back to the task at hand. But, are they not learning from each other? Are they not making intertextual connections and relating these issues to their lives, which is the general intention of these exercises? Do I draw the line and, if so, where? How could I let them know that I, "the teacher," actually enjoyed these exchanges, did not see this as "off-task" and would not interrupt?
But am I really the "teacher" at that moment or the "student?" For, just as I decide I would not interrupt this relaxed engagement, out of the corner of my eye, I see my professor—and in my head I can hear her gentle reminder to "be sure to keep them on task." And I shift back into my implied teacher role, prepared to do the "right" thing.
My students also, are ever-aware of the distinction of our implied roles, for I generally notice their eventual exchanges of surreptitious looks and nudges, and moments of discomfort as they anticipate a reminder to "focus on the chapter." And so, with a collective sigh, the animated discussion trickles to a halt and I am spared the pain of uttering those very words. Often, when I critically reflect on such moments, I still question: "right" for whom? At such moments, I am aware of how the "implied T.A." is defined, for the very act of policing by both myself and the students demonstrates that we associate my role with certain behaviors and attitudes.

It is clear then, that I must first look at the boundaries that I have between my teacher-self and student-self. Because each position is imbued with certain values, assumptions and expectations, I believe that this idea requires that I take a more collaborative approach and a different perspective on the power-knowledge dichotomy. In order to facilitate this, I also need to examine my willingness to change the nature of teacher leadership in the class through the decentralizing of the conventional role (Gavelek & Raphael, 1999; Wiencek & O'Flahavan, 1994). In many ways, my attempts to help enhance student and teacher literacies serve to develop a sense of who I should be and what I see my students to be.

Have my teaching identities already been inscribed materially and reiterated (Butler, 1993) through the discourse of schooling and teacher education? I believe that in defining ourselves by too rigid a definition, we pigeon-hole ourselves and widen the gap between the two groups. "Obviously, the total potential [of the text] can never be fulfilled in the reading process, but it is this very fact that makes it so essential that one should conceive of meaning as something that happens, for only then can one become aware of the factors that precondition the composition of meaning" (Iser, 1980, p. 22). Such a stance demands that I be willing to continually redefine my reading of the labels of "teacher" and "student" and the ideologies that create boundaries of power, knowledge and world views.

In order to be faithful to the truth of the experience, I need however, to always step back and look closely at it, and critically interrogate its meanings. If in fact I am trying to develop learners who are active seekers of meaning, who are predisposed to progressively construct their

conceptions of the teaching and learning context, then the ways in which I help them conceive and construct their roles have far-reaching social and pedagogical implications. Consequently, if I am aware of what I am doing and what it implies, then my actions are deliberate. I am consciously creating a text for my students to read—a text that promotes the hegemonic view and positions them accordingly.

In talking about my actions and interactions in the classroom, I have used the word "role"—a problematic term that is commonly used to describe the teacher in the teaching and learning process. It is an interesting metaphor to see the teacher as an actor, moving through the scripted identities of her character, having so embraced the part, playing it so powerfully, that the audience identifies with her and engages in dialogue with her character. Such may be the reality of the teaching and learning process, and it is only in recognizing that the public stage and space of schooling have ascribed and inscribed certain characteristics to the teacher that we see how the process shapes how she perceives herself and how she is perceived. Collins and Blot (2004) argued that "identities are built, constructed with the discursive resources which are our birthright, our 'mother tongues', but also with other competing discourses of street, school, and workplace" (p. 119). The discursive space of the classroom, therefore, helps construct the nature of roles and all that it implies. In turn, the persons operating in that space—in order to do so effectively—assume the "roles" that the labels signify.

My reflexive process therefore, forces me to confront these ideologies and their related performances. Perhaps in borrowing from both "classrooms" in which I operate, I can better negotiate and connect, and bring multiple voices to the space of the college classroom, the construction of subjective self, and the production of my identity as a T.A. This conversation does not seek to propose a solution, for the very word suggests there is "one best way" to deal with the issue. I take the position that appropriate approaches and possible perspectives are relative and dependent on the contexts.

What I hope my story does is continue to increase our awareness of how our labels and fixed notions, understandings, and actions are formed and informed. Perhaps then we can better recognize how teacher and student perspectives are normalized, identities and roles produced, and subjectivities created.

> *As I find myself in the process, I try to find myself in the process. A dear friend once told me: If you don't get lost, how will you ever find yourself? Do I need then, to lose my produced identities and subjective selves in order to find the "I" in T. A.? I believe that growth and change are fluid and I know that I continue to create new texts from and out of my experiences, and within and without the confines of the "implied" labels. I will continue to embrace the inherent tensions of all texts, labels and words...*
> *I know my story has been told—in the dorm rooms, in the grad halls and mentor groups. I know my story will continue to be told: different sticks, different stones… But, I know my story must be told—if only to heal the hurt. And so, like the griot, I continue to tell my story—calling for a response.*

…And, in answer to that undergraduate student's question, I responded just as casually, "And you're from North America? So, that means you're Canadian, right?" What's in a word, right? After all, it's not sticks and stones…

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