

## Mothering and Teaching

---

### Two Practices on the Same Continuum

*While the similarities between mothering and teaching seem self-evident in that both are centered on caring for the young, practice and various cultural discourses often point to a more complex reality, in which the two are subtly conceptualized along two oppositional axes of perception: mothering is associated with the emotional realm, guided by sensory experience and feeling, while teaching is seen as taking place in the realm of the rational, based on knowledge derived through logic and intellectual deliberation. My main interest in this article is academic instruction and any other systematic form of teaching associated with a formal structure, where the perceived divisions between mothering and teaching are most common. My aim is to emphasize that all forms of teaching and mothering share similar goals, and to argue that they should be conceived of as complementary practices along the continuum of a genderless ethic of care where the division between emotions and reason is rendered artificial and of no actual value. In doing so, I will discuss two cultural factors that reinforce the perceived division between them, specifically, the professionalization of teaching and the cultural construction of experts and expertise.*

While on some level the similarities between mothering and teaching seem self-evident in that both are centered on caring for the young, practice and various cultural discourses often point to a more complex reality, in which the two are subtly conceptualized along two oppositional axes of perception: mothering is associated with the emotional realm, guided by sensory experience and feeling, while teaching is seen as taking place in the realm of the rational, based on knowledge derived through logic and intellectual deliberation. There are forms of teaching that bridge this perceived opposition by virtue of their less formal and systematic structure, such as for example, the teaching that takes place with

babysitters and in the context of coaching. My main interest here, however, is academic instruction and any other systematic form of teaching associated with a formal structure, where the perceived divisions between mothering and teaching are most common. My aim is to emphasize that all forms of teaching and mothering share similar goals, and to argue that they should be conceived of as complementary practices along the continuum of a genderless ethic of care where the division between emotions and reason is rendered artificial and of no actual value. In doing so, I will discuss two cultural factors that reinforce the perceived division between them, specifically, the professionalization of teaching and the cultural construction of experts and expertise.

The relationship between mothering and teaching has a long, complex and often ambivalent history. While in the early modern era it was assumed that the mother of a middle class or a noble family will educate her children in religious belief and moral discipline, her influence as a teacher of her male children usually ended at the boys' seventh birthday, at which time they would either be sent out to learn a trade, or male tutors would be hired to instruct them in any combination of subjects and skills ranging from reading, writing, theology, astronomy, philosophy, mathematics, to music and fencing. At the age of seven, fathers as patriarchs who 'knew best' "took over prime responsibility for sons, while mothers continued their instruction of daughters" (Heywood 103). It was also believed that the boys needed to be "weaned" off their mother's soft, feminizing and irrational influence, since mothers were considered "too indulgent with their offspring—more likely by their perceived emotional nature to spoil children than to discipline them" (Heywood 104). Girls often remained under the tutelage of their mother from whom they needed to learn what were considered specifically female kinds of knowledge, such as piety, obedience and household management, and due to their sex, their long term exposure to the mother's feminizing influence was not problematic, but in fact desirable (Heywood 105). The father's takeover of the sons' education, however, was a symbolic way to transfer the decision-making away from the mother, since most fathers never took up the opportunity to actually teach their children. Instead, "they handed the sons over to tutors or schools for formal education" (Heywood 105). Purposeful instruction was thus usually left to an outsider, or an outside body, someone who would approach children in a more detached way and impart knowledge derived mainly through intellectual deliberation rather than only through sensory or personal experience.

The relationship between tutor and charges, and later in history, governess and charges could vary significantly in terms of emotional closeness. However, it was never thought to be as potentially damaging to the (male) child as leaving him with his mother as the sole teacher since the mothers' relationship to her

children was always understood to be too indulgent, irrational, and excessively emotional. While some literate mothers did teach their children the basics of reading and writing, and the more educated mothers were allowed to teach their children music and sometimes foreign languages, for the most part more serious forms of instruction were thought to be beyond the mother's ability and intellectual scope. So mothering and teaching were seen as compatible only in specific ways and in specific situations. While mothers were seen as acceptable and often primary teachers of piety and morality-- albeit for a different length of time depending on the sex of the child-- their influence as teachers was limited by their role as women in a patriarchal society.

While some things have changed, the social and cultural ambivalence about the compatibility of mothering and teaching persists, as does their gendered nature. Women have assumed the role of teachers, previously reserved mainly for men, and have in fact come to predominate in the school system. Rather than representing a gender-specific form of professional achievement, this reality accounts for the so-called feminization of teaching, a consequence of a lower professional status ascribed to a career in teaching. Somewhat paradoxically with respect to the privileging of male teachers in the past, and the perceived distance between mothering and teaching, the feminization of teaching was facilitated by the fact that teaching contains a service and a nurturing component, traits traditionally ascribed to women (Apple 1989: 57). And although scholars of feminist mothering have redefined mothering as a genderless practice of care and many more fathers are indeed doing the work of mothering, the dominant social discourse and practice still assume that most of the mothering will be done by the mother, and hold the mother accountable for her children's behavior and wellbeing. In terms of how mothers perceive themselves with regard to their ability to teach their children, the picture is varied. While there are many mothers who see themselves as teachers of their children in many areas, there are many others who are reluctant to describe themselves in this way. When it comes to teachers, only some of them adopt an explicitly mothering role toward to their students or make that perspective their guiding pedagogical philosophy.<sup>1</sup>

Much of this ambivalence is embedded within teaching institutions. Schools and the school system both create and perpetuate the separation between the two spheres of practice, mothering and teaching, by positioning themselves as the experts "who know best" against the lay parent whose domain is still described in terms of emotional and other less tangible forms of authority. A classic text on the sociology of teaching from 1961 quite baldly states that "the aims of the school and the community are often divergent" and acknowledges that "the school, as a fragment of the common life, is a prey to institutionalism" (Waller 33). Even more specifically, it notes that:

[F]rom the ideal point of view, parents and teachers have much in common, in that both, supposedly, wish things to occur for the best interest of the child; but in fact, parents and teachers usually live in a conditional of mutual mistrust and enmity. Both wish the child well, but it is such a different kind of well that conflict must inevitably arise over it. The fact seems to be that parents and teachers are natural enemies, predestined each for the discomfiture of the other. (Waller 68)

Unfortunately, this state of affairs has not changed significantly, maintaining the sphere of the mother/parent as separate from the sphere of the teacher. Many school boards publish newsletters where parental involvement in the schooling of the child is encouraged, but whose very rhetoric of invitation for involvement often subtly reinforces the division between the two areas of practice, reinforcing the view that the sphere of the mother/parent is separate from the sphere of the teacher. The participation of the school community, students and parents is “encouraged only within tight central guidelines” (Smyth 271). Thus, while in the past parental and specifically motherly involvement in education was circumscribed by the woman’s limited patriarchal role, today this involvement is conceptualized and circumscribed by the parameters articulated by teachers and the school system in the role of experts who “know best.”

Today teaching is culturally positioned as an activity that takes place outside the home and is conducted by professionals and experts, while mothering is still seen as a domestic practice of a somewhat haphazard nature, done mainly by women with varying degrees of competence. Some feminist scholars, like Marsha Marotta, for example, argue that today, in the era where the expert rules, “the normal state of mothers is incompetent” (210), not only as potential and valuable teachers of their children, but also with regard to childrearing in general. This view disqualifies mothers as teachers of their children; it perpetuates their construction as too emotionally involved with their children and their status as laypersons, ignorant of the expert inner workings of the school system. At the same time, it also qualifies them as objects of study and advice of childrearing and other experts.

The reluctance of some mothers to see themselves as teachers of their children and the reluctance of many teachers to see their role in terms of parental-like care are in part due to the complexity that comes with each of those roles, as well as the cultural forces that attempt to shape the identity of woman as mother, and the identity of teacher as ‘expert.’ The discursive dynamic of these forces is based on patriarchy as a guiding social ideology as well as Western empiricism as a particular philosophical orientation. Both ideologies construct mothers as subjective and emotional, while the experts and expertise are constructed as objective and rational. In the introduction to their recent book, *Maternal*

*Pedagogies, In and Outside the Classroom*, Deborah Lea Byrd and Fiona Joy Green point out that discussions of maternal pedagogies, or investigations of the relationships between mothering and teaching, need to be situated in a context that acknowledges “the role that systemic oppression, cultural imperialism and issues of unearned power and privilege pay in all teaching and learning situations” (3). For many mothers, assuming the role and title of teacher even in the general sense of that term represents adopting a form of authority and self-assurance they feel they do not possess. The “emergence of the takeover of childrearing by science” (Marotta 204) at the beginning of the twentieth century is equally a consequence of these discourses. These cultural forces are in part shaped by the experts themselves who attempt to “impose cultural scripts on mothers by shaping the series of practices through which mothers are governed and come to govern themselves” (Marotta 203). These scripts, as Marotta points out, “are linked to the rules and regulations that aim at making mothers socially adapted and useful” (Marotta).

For mothers, these scripts have become internalized “ideologies that create expectations for identity construction” (Swanson and Johnston 63). The ideology of intensive mothering, as defined by Andrea O’Reilly in *Rocking the Cradle*, participates in this cycle in that it “dictates that mothers must turn to the experts for instruction” (43). The implication is that mothers are incapable or deficient when it comes to providing the conditions for the optimal development of their children, and as such they “relinquish authority to others and lose confidence in their own values” and abilities to mother competently (Ruddick 111). Even when scholars of teaching acknowledge that there are overlaps between mothering and teaching based on their shared objective, they are quick to point out that the “methods employed to generate the requisite behavior and knowledge are very different” since “teaching a toddler to walk is very different from imparting the fundamentals of a differential calculus” (Hegarty 451). Reducing the teaching that takes place at home to helping children gain a skill they will eventually master themselves anyway devalues the teaching that takes place at home and reflects the dominant view that all relevant forms of instruction happen outside the home and under the guidance of experts.

The increasing professionalization of teaching and the social role of the school and education in general are implicated in this dynamic. The professionalization of teaching refers to identifying “a research-base and formal body of knowledge that distinguished professional educators from lay persons” (Cochran-Smith and Zeichner 44). In so far as teachers are experts in particular subject areas and thus have specialized knowledge to impart to students, the separation between teaching and mothering seems justifiable. This perspective, however, accounts only for the “technical” side of teaching. Teaching is a complex interpersonal process in which the teacher’s subject

matter expertise plays an important but not a singular role. The separation between mothering and teaching may be equally justified in cases where for various reasons mothers are unable or unwilling to engage with their children in ways resulting in teaching that promotes their wellbeing. In these cases, however, the issue may not be the lack of beneficial teaching alone, but also neglect, that is the lack of “care-taking of a child’s emotional, social and physical needs” in a more general sense (Siegel AI 54).

The construction of the teacher as expert extends beyond specialization in subject matter, as it participates in broader cultural discourses concerning expertise. From a broader historical view, and consonant with the dominant values of professionalization and western empiricism, the aim of education has been defined as developing in human beings their distinctive capacity to reason, in the belief that knowledge proceeds only from gathering and analyzing data based on observable phenomena; this particular form of intellectual training has been traditionally accomplished through education in the liberal arts and classically informed principles that are seen as “the tools and truths of reason.”<sup>2</sup> Since the teaching of religion and its moral and spiritual values have ceased, the rationalist orientation of education has strengthened and increased. The cultural perceptions according to which mothering and teaching are seen as incompatible thus rest on deep-seated assumptions about the inherent opposition between reason and emotions, thinking and feeling, as well as between the philosophical categories “objective” and “subjective,” impersonal and personal. According to these perceptions, teaching is a practice aligned mainly with thinking, rationality, objectivity, and impartiality, while mothering is a practice informed mainly by partiality, emotions and subjectivity.

Because expertise is discursively linked to objectivity and rationality, in order to enact their expertise teachers are culturally encouraged to distance themselves from teaching practices that may be perceived as subjective, emotional and hence, irrational. Rational knowledge, derived from intellectual and deductive deliberations, is culturally always positioned as more certain, desirable, and inherently superior than any form of knowledge based on sensory experience that may sometimes be uncertain and therefore inherently inferior (cf. Markie). Experts traditionally maintain their status partly by asserting a cognitive distance from non-experts and by guarding the perceived boundaries of their expertise that separate them from laypersons and amateurs. Thus the role of teacher is still more often than not synonymous with a disciplinarian, one whose primary goal is to control and manage the classroom and/or the students and be “in charge” at all times, as well as to combat children’s “erroneous” or problematic behavior patterns set at home.

The reality that is rarely acknowledged, however, especially in the context of expertise, is that complete objectivity is impossible to attain. What we have

come to regard as rationality is in many complex ways linked to emotions and emotional responses. A new wave of research in neuroscience increasingly points to the fact that far from being obstructed by emotion or being superior to it, our rational capacity is in fact influenced and directed by emotion.<sup>3</sup> New definitions of the mind identify it and its functions of feeling and thinking as “embodied in an internal physiological context and embedded in an external relational context” (Siegel xxv). They make it clear that “one can never remove emotion from information processing—or what is sometimes called ‘*cognition*’ or ‘thinking.’ There is no separation of thought and cognition from feeling and emotion” (Siegel 32-7). This means that both thinking and feeling are rooted in the body and its processes, and shaped through interactions with others. The construction of emotions as separate from the rational capacity is itself an aspect of Western empiricism and the rise of objective science as the master narrative of Western societies. In this view, the dominant belief is that only objective science can most truthfully and accurately explain human thought and experience. To become an expert one is trained to strive for objectivity and to focus on restricted areas of behavior, often disregarding the context of the whole, or to focus on a narrow body of knowledge that by virtue of its limited scope can be mastered fully and objectively, that is beyond uncertainty. This mastery, if it is to assert its inherent superiority, is then to be enacted in the form of being in “control” and “in charge” at all times.

One of the results of denying the interdependence between reason and emotion in professional circles is that despite training that relies on scientific methods of and objectivity, experts do have biases and so called “special interests” (areas where the link between reason and emotion becomes evident). However, while most experts are aware of their existence, in professional circles these areas are either politely denied or ignored. Acknowledging the interdependence of reason and emotion, feminist philosopher Virginia Held writes, “there are no firm, precise and lasting boundaries between the symbolic and the material in human affairs” (9). The emotional and the rational, however, were not always perceived as being always mutually exclusive. Even as late as the sixteenth century, for example, before the rise of science as the master narrative of developed societies, the word “education” was used almost synonymously with “childrearing.” The etymology of the word “education” supports this usage, in that to educate in Latin is synonymous with the actions “to bring up, raise, rear, train” and “support” (*OED*). All of these activities imply a clear moral dimension, a degree of carework that depends not only on rational and impartial principles, but also on a responsiveness in an interconnected network of needs, care and prevention of harm, as well as an ethic of trust and human bonding within complex categories of obligation (cf. Gilligan; Baier). In short, the true meaning of education resides within the perspective of care and carework.

So then rather than adopting the binary between reason and emotion, and defending women's and mother's ability to be either rational or emotional, it may be more constructive in the current context to acknowledge the continuities between these two forms of cognitive experience. With respect to pedagogy, when it comes to the implicit aspects of teaching (those qualities that make one a good teacher) and the implicit aspects of mothering, the separation between teaching and mothering becomes more tenuous. There is a lot of teaching inherent in the work of mothering, just as there is a lot of mothering involved in the practice of teaching. It is helpful to consider both practices as existing along the same continuum of the ethic of care, a theory focusing on the interdependence of all individuals and the contextual details of moral and other situations to promote the specific needs and interests of those more vulnerable (cf. EIESL). Both teaching and mothering involve unequal relationships where there needs to exist a clear awareness of the needs of others and their particular circumstances, the unique ways they fail and succeed and the paradoxes that may govern their actions and responses (cf. Allen, Klein, and Hill). The perspective of care, when applied to teaching, acknowledges that "contextual response, attentiveness to subtle clues" and the nurturing of relationships is often more valuable and contributes to greater learning than the standpoint of detached fairness (cf. Beauchamp and Childress). This kind of moral alertness to others "often come from the emotions more than reason," demonstrating that emotions also have a "cognitive role, allowing us to grasp a situation that may not be immediately available" to one approaching solely from a detached and objective standpoint (Beauchamp and Childress 89). When considered in the context of the ethic of care, the aims of teaching and mothering appear intertwined.

Both mothers and teachers are "socializing agents expected to define and reinforce behavioral, moral and cultural values" and both are "charged with teaching content and process, skills and ideologies" (Holmes and Bond 102). The interactions that take place between mother and children are in most cases and in most cultural contexts conditioned by and result from what Sara Ruddick calls "attentive love" and Fiona Joy Green terms "the patient loving eye of attention" (52). Rather than being defined in terms of pure emotion, this attentive love is a combination of the mother's cognitive capacity for attention and her human ability to love (Ruddick 121). This form of engagement with one's children is "akin to the capacity for empathy," which is "the ability to suffer or celebrate with another as if in the other's experience you know and you find yourself." This form of attention strengthens "a love that does not clutch at or cling to the beloved, but rather, lets the beloved grow" (Ruddick 122). Rather than being a vague, amorphous feeling that comes and goes with no discernible pattern, the love of mother for her children thus understood



constitutes a set of interrelated actions that depend on “a combination of care, commitment, knowledge, responsibility, respect and trust” (hooks 131). Defining mothering in these terms helps disassociate it from the woman’s body and the female reproductive system and places it within the genderless context of the ethic of care.

There are overtly “teacherly” aspects of mothering that result from and encompass attentive love. These aspects, while acknowledged in some recent feminist theory, have yet to penetrate the dominant cultural perception of what mothers do. Mothers—to borrow Maureen Linker’s words—“explain the world” to their children and offer guiding principles for a diverse set of experiences. Feminist mothers in particular are aware that “respectful investigation can occur between two parties who are unequal in terms of social power” (Linker 147), and they practice this on many levels of interaction with their children. The family, and most often the mother, is the one who gives children a sense of what learning means and the value of education. Mothers influence children’s ways of knowing and learning by interacting with them based on the mothers’ own assumptions about knowledge and knowing (cf. Holmes and Bond 102). Mothers are the child’s most important and most influential teachers—a fact that demands conscious awareness and acknowledgment both by mothers and by teachers. Because of their unique emotional and physical proximity to their children, mothers teach even when they do not think they do, because of the unique power of their person to act as model to their children whether mothers like it or not.

Like teachers, mothers also teach on the level of subject matter. Mothers engage in teaching children from the moment they are born or whenever the work of mothering begins. The subjects of this motherly teaching can range daily and perhaps even hourly from teaching washing hands before eating, using a spoon, feeding oneself, covering one’s mouth when coughing, using the potty, cooking, dance, the names of colors, names of people and objects, names of letters, to the power and significance of words in general, the importance of reflecting before speaking, the importance of speaking one’s minds and speaking the truth, not being afraid of asking questions. Some mothers teach their children a different language, how to prepare for a math or English exam, the complex meaning of justice and the various forms of domination and oppression. Many mothers teach respect for self and others, forms of media literacy, inequalities related to gender socialization, the interdependence of all life, empowerment and confident self-governance, attentive listening, etc. All mothers teach their children values, behavior, and attitudes and accompanying subject matter they deem important.

Mothering is thus a complex web of teaching practices aimed at ensuring children’s wellbeing on many different levels and honoring their selfhood.

Writing of feminist mothering, Andrea O'Reilly points out that motherhood can also be a "political site wherein mothers can affect social change through the socialization of children, in terms of challenging traditional patterns of gender acculturation through feminist child rearing and the world at large through political-social activism" (O'Reilly 45). "Maternal work ... demands that mothers think; out of this need for thoughtfulness, a distinctive discipline emerges," which disciplined reflection Ruddick calls "maternal thinking" (24). A myriad of analytical decision-making takes place hourly while mothering. Acknowledging the rational aspects of mothering, Ruddick highlights that "[l]ike a scientist writing up her experiment, a critic pouring over a text, or a historian assessing documents, a mother caring for children engages in a discipline ... which like other disciplines, establishes criteria for failure and success, sets priorities, and identifies values that the discipline requires" (24).

Mother-work, according to Ruddick, is characterized by the preservation and protection of children, the nurturance of emotional and intellectual growth in children, and the training and social acceptability of children (83, 21). This complex practice, whether it is practiced by men or women, in short, represents teaching, in the sense of showing, instructing, supporting, guiding. What is important about this motherly teaching is that it deconstructs the separation between subjective and objective, rational and emotional, personal and impersonal, as it empties them of their long-standing discursive meaning.

An equal deconstruction is yet to take place with regard to teaching. The widely accepted belief in most cultures is that teachers teach subject matter, and like all subject matter experts they are supposed to embody the culturally-dominant values associated with expertise, of being rational and objective. Relatively recent phenomena such as the demise of the teachers' professional autonomy, managerialism on the part of administrative bodies and the top-down control of their work in the context of producing expected results for increasingly standardized forms of instruction all contribute not just to teacher burnout but also to their adopting teaching methods relying on a detached standpoint that simply gets the job done (Naidu 3). The school system is an environment increasingly laden with bureaucratic tasks and routinization. Additionally, issues such as the large number of students in the classroom and increasing workloads for teachers (cf. Apple 1982; Gonzales, Stallone Brown and Slate) often enhance authoritarian and detached models of teaching and reinforce the conceptual divisions between teaching and mothering. This form of increased institutionalism "causes the school to forget its purpose; it makes the school give education for education and teaching for teaching ... in short, it makes an end of what is logically only a means to an end" (Waller 33).

Numerous studies show that many teachers are unhappy about a set of re-

forms aimed at constructing teaching personnel who conform to the policies by producing standardized results based on “predetermined criterial indicators of performance,” about being routinely excluded as active agents from “shaping their work identities,” and not “being involved appropriately in solving school problems from the inside” (Smyth and Shacklock 8; cf. Forester). Devolution, that is the administrative decentralization of educational bureaucracies to regional boards and local schools, makes the tensions between the local administrative bureaucracy and the school governing body great (Barcan 95). The pressures of devolution involve the “ongoing atrophication of educational skills” through the incorporation of the skills and ideological visions of management, which means that teachers lose pedagogic skills and gain student policing skills (Apple 1982: 256).

In this environment, any kind of interaction that does not fit into the expected productivity model is seen as problematic. In a research project conducted by the Centre for Marketing Schools, which surveyed 850 teachers in 17 schools in the U.S., one of the biggest work-related problems reported by the teachers was the “discipline problem” and the “stress associated with unchecked bad student behavior” (Vining 20). The most negative outcome for education of all of these pressures combined is that the burnout and cynicism teachers feel may contribute to a situation where they begin “to abhor and hate students” (hooks 15), in a complete perversion of the true function of education. Failing in their role of the distant classroom “manager” many teachers cannot envision an alternative form of engagement with their students.

Because teaching involves the close daily interaction with children and young adults, if it is to be rewarding and successful, it can never be a purely rational practice that takes place from the standpoint of detached sense of fairness. Interacting with young minds on a daily basis needs to be informed by the care perspective, guided by contextual responses and attentiveness to subtle clues in the acknowledgment that each teaching situation, just like the daily realities of mothering, calls for a unique set of responses. Even positivist accounts of teaching that use the rational and detached language of expertise note that “different situations need to be approached with different sets of insights, which need in turn to be completed in different ways,” referring to this skill as the teacher’s “intelligent behavior” (Hegarty 261). The next step in broadening the vision of teaching as a profession would be to reconcile the language of objective rationality that is being used to train new teachers with the language and practice of the ethic of care. This new language would make visible and relevant the often invisible work of care, which in teaching just as in mothering, involves “the often spontaneous, informal and unregulated emotional work invested in the ability to see or hear the needs of others, to take responsibility for them and negotiate if and how they should be met” (Allen,

Klein and Hill 22). Feminist scholar bell hooks argues for teaching with love, pointing out that “emotional connections tend to be suspect in a world where the mind is valued above all else, where the idea that one should be and can be objective is paramount” (127). The prevalent rationalist orientation in the practice of teaching has reductionist tendencies as it dehumanize that practice, just as relegating mothering to the sphere of the domestic, subjective and therefore irrational dehumanizes mothering.

Just as many mothers have interiorized culturally dominant views concerning their role, many teachers—including those that are also mothers/parents—have interiorized assumptions about teaching. It may be argued that it is these assumptions, or the practice of teaching ‘without a heart’ that are mainly responsible for the sense of hopelessness and burnout many teachers experience, especially in public schools. Like mothering, teaching is a complex web of practices that involves daily interaction with other human beings—a process that is always fraught with many different emotions. Also, like mothering, teaching is “endless” in that there are no definite or final results: whenever the child has mastered one concept there is always something else to be taught and learned. Pretending that it is not the case, or seeking to make it less emotionally and cognitively demanding can only result in a sense of dissatisfaction, futility or anger.

From my own experience as a student, and from the decade-long experience with my son’s schooling, I have known many good teachers who in their teaching practice repudiate the reductionist, binary logic that is supposed to govern their profession, and teach from a place of “attentive love,” where love can also be understood as bell hooks defines it, as “a combination of care, commitment, knowledge, responsibility, respect and trust” (131). They know that, in hooks’ words, “the courage to teach is the courage to keep one’s heart open in those very moments when the heart is asked to hold more than it is able,” so that teacher, students and subject matter, “can be woven into the fabric of community that learning and living require” (19). They know that “education at its best—the profound human transaction called teaching and learning—is not just about getting information or getting a job” (hooks 43). Education in its most beneficial form, like mothering, is about healing and wholeness, empowerment, liberation (hooks). Good teachers are good not only because they are experts in a particular subject area, but also because they are personally interested in the well being and growth of their students, and they embody “attentive love” in their practice.

Education, like mothering, can affirm “healthy self-esteem in students and promote their capacity to be aware and to live consciously” (hooks 72). Like mother-work, ideally education should be characterized by the desire for the preservation and protection of children, nurturance of emotional and intellec-

tual growth in children, and the training and social acceptability of children (Ruddick 83, 21). Most teachers acknowledge that they play an important part in the task of “preparing children for life” in the general sense, but also in terms of teaching more particular social values seen as desirable, such as respect for others, good manners or tidiness (cf. Pollard 111). The process of preparing children for life entails a great deal more than the simple imparting of empirical knowledge. Compassion and care, or what feminist scholar Marilyn Frye calls “science of the loving eye” play a significant part in teaching the whole person. The “science of the loving eye” allows for and demands a plurality of experiences and subjective knowledge, critical reflection and the creation of new meaning for the teacher as well as student (76-9). Writing about caring teachers, bell hooks reminds that when both teachers and students in later life evaluate their own learning experience and the teacher(s) that made the most difference in their lives, no one gives testimony about how much they learned from distant and dissociated teachers, but from teachers who directly or indirectly nurtured the whole student, emotionally and intellectually (129-130). Just as mothering can be practiced by men, so can compassionate and loving pedagogical approaches transcend gender and be practiced by all teachers (Green 206).

I am not suggesting that teachers who teach from within the care perspective practice are always invariably successful, happy or even unanimously well-liked by their students. The job of raising children is complex and often contradictory and mothers’ own feelings about their children are often ambivalent. Similarly, teaching is a complex process that may often be fraught with ambivalence in teacher as well as students. However, good teachers, like most mothers, become accepting of areas of ambiguity and ambivalence because the processes of childrearing and teaching often involve forces beyond one’s control (cf. O’Reilly 133). Those who teach with care continue to do so because consciously or not they acknowledge the interdependence between knowing and feeling, and knowing and doing, or making the knowledge one’s own. Both mothering and teaching are forms of carework, understood as a “pragmatic practice” founded upon what individuals do, think and feel, and encompassing both prosaic tasks and cognitively more demanding aspects (cf. Allen, Klein and Hill 20-1). In so far as the mothering on which I base my comparisons with teaching is rooted in feminist principles, the teaching practice I envision could be called feminist pedagogy, whether the practitioners identify themselves as feminist or not.

The rich area of similarities between teaching and mothering, and a more fluid understanding of either role as existing on the same continuum of activity and emotion do not mean a diminishment of the teachers’ expertise, nor do they mean that teachers should abandon their evaluation criteria because they are caringly interested in the wellbeing of their students. Acknowledging the area

of overlap and similarity would honor both practices as being interdependent in the complex web of human experience and as being necessary for the well-being of mothers, teachers and children (and fathers, too, proportionate to the amount of “attentive love” they provide to children). It would lead, on the one hand, to a more self-aware, empowered mothering that in O’Reilly’s words, “affords and affirms maternal agency, authority, autonomy and authenticity and which confers and confirms power to and for mothers” (47), and on the other, to a more deeply committed, satisfying and empowered teaching practice that in itself constitutes a form of social and political activism based on personal and professional integrity. This kind of teaching practice would in many ways work against the continuing bureaucratic attempts to define the skills of teaching as a set of objectively determined competencies and to standardize student and teacher testing (Apple 1982: 187). Continued reflection on the interdependence between mothering, parenting and teaching will ensure that these two practices begin to inform one another in meaningful ways. Critical engagement with this interdependence will also ensure that teaching with compassion, love and care is seen not as a gendered task, synonymous with a sentimentalized and stereotyped vision of women and motherwork, but as a practice infused with distinctly human capacities brought to bear on the important task of raising and educating the young and those young at heart.

<sup>1</sup>The responses of mothers and teachers reported here are based on my experience as chair and then member of the Advisory Committee for Equitable Learning Outcomes with the Halifax Regional School Board for over six years. In this capacity I have been able to observe that the relationships between parents and teachers are often strained at best and antagonistic at worst. I also draw on my own experience as a parent who wants to remain involved in the education of my children and my profession as a teacher.

<sup>2</sup>Thayer and Levit, p. 37. Philosophers make a distinction between Rationalism and Empiricism, based on their respective positions regarding the nature of knowledge. Rationalists believe that knowledge is arrived *a priori*, through the use of reason. Empiricists believe that knowledge is constructed *a posteriori*, based on the experience of gathering data on observable phenomena through our senses. While this distinction is relevant to philosophy, in the present context I am interested primarily in the following: 1) both schools of thought have crucial bearing on Western ideas about knowledge and its construction, and by implication, about education and its purpose 2) both schools of thought agree that there are proper bases of knowledge, and emotions are not part of those bases for either position 3) both schools of thought assume that truth and knowledge are to be found by an exercise of the rational capacity; for

Rationalists through the use of reason, and for Empiricists, through rationally ordered experience.

<sup>3</sup>For a more detailed account on the relationship between reason and emotion, see Crain (118-136), and more recently, Damasio, and Mayer, Salovey and Caruso. Also see the work of Daniel Goleman aimed at a wider audience, mainly *Emotional Intelligence* (2005), and *Social Intelligence* (2006).

## References

- Allen, Sarah, Shirley R. Klein and E. Jeffrey Hill. "Framing Carework: Contexts, Processes and Outcomes." *Caregiving and Carework. Journal of the Association for Research on Mothering*. 10.1 (2008): 20-32. Print.
- Apple, Michael. "Curriculum Form and the Logic of Technical Control: Building the Possessive Individual." *Cultural and Economic Reproduction in Education*. Ed. Michael Apple. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1982, 247-273. Print.
- Apple, Michael. *Teachers and Texts: A Political Economy of Class & Gender Relations in Education*. New York: Routledge, 1989. Print.
- Baier, Annette, C. "What Do Women Want in a Moral Theory." *Noûs* 19.1 (1985): 53-6.
- Barcan, A. "The Ambiguities of Devolution." *Discourse* 13. 1 (1992): 95-111.
- Beauchamp, Tom, L. and James F. Childress. *Principles of Biomedical Ethics*. 5th ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011. Print.
- Byrd, Deborah Lea and Fiona Joy Green. "Introduction: Maternal Pedagogies: In and Outside the Classroom." *Maternal Pedagogies: In and Outside the Classroom*. Eds. Deborah Lea Byrd and Fiona Joy Green. Toronto: Demeter Press, 2011, 1-20. Print.
- Cochran-Smith, M. and K. Zeichner, eds. "Executive Summary." *Studying Teacher Education: The Report of the AERA Panel on Research and Teacher Education*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2005, 37-68. Print.
- Crain, W. C. *Theories of Development*. Ann Arbor: Prentice-Hall, 1985. Print.
- Damasio, Antonio. *Descartes' Error: Emotion, Reason and the Human Brain*. New York: Penguin, 2005. Print.
- EIESL "Ethic of Care." *Ethics of International Engagement and Service-Learning Project Web-Based Guidebook*. September 25, 2012. Web. March 10, 2013.
- Frye, Marilyn. "In and Out of Harm's Way: Arrogance and Love" *The Politics of Reality: Essays in Feminist Theory*. New York: The Crossing Press, 1983, 52-83. Print.
- Gilligan, Carol. *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982. Print.
- Goleman, Daniel. *Emotional Intelligence*. New York: Bantam Dell, 2005. Print.

- Goleman, Daniel. *Social Intelligence*. New York: Bantam Dell, 2006. Print.
- Gonzales, Liza, Michelle Stallone Brown, and John R. Slate. "Teachers Who Left the Teaching Profession: A Qualitative Understanding." *The Qualitative Report* 13, 1 (2008): 1-11. Web.
- Green, Fiona Joy. "What's Love Got To Do With It? A Personal Reflection on the Role of Maternal Love in Feminist Teaching." *Journal of the Association for Research in Mothering*. 5.2 (2003): 47-56. Print.
- Hegarty, Seamus. "Teaching as a Knowledge-Based Activity." *Oxford Review of Education*, 26.3&4, 2000: 451-465. Print.
- Held, Virginia. *Feminist Morality: Transforming Culture, Society, and Politics*. New York: Free Press, 1984. Print.
- Holmes, R. Tabitha and Lynne A. Bond. "Maternal Pedagogies as a Function of Mothers' Ways of Knowing." *Maternal Pedagogies: In and Outside the Classroom*. Eds. Deborah Lea Byrd and Fiona Joy Green. Toronto: Demeter Press, 2011, 102-113. Print.
- hooks, bell. *Teaching Community: A Pedagogy of Hope*. New York: Routledge, 2003. Print.
- Linker, Maureen. "Explaining the World: Philosophical Reflections on Feminism and Motherhood." *Mothering and Feminism. Journal of the Association for Research in Mothering*, 8.1/2 (2006):147-156. Print.
- Markie, Peter. "Rationalism vs Empiricism." *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. 2008. Web. March 10, 2013.
- Marotta, Marsha. "Relentless Rebuke: 'Experts' and the Scripting of 'Good' Mothers." *Mothers Knows Best: Talking Back to the 'Experts.'* Eds. Jessica Nathanson and Laura Camille Tuley. Toronto: Demeter Press, 2008, 203-212. Print.
- Mayer, J. D., P. Salovey, and D. R. Caruso, "Emotional Intelligence: New Ability or Eclectic Traits." *American Psychologist* 63.6 (2008): 503-517. Print.
- O'Reilly, Andrea. *Rocking the Cradle: Thoughts on Motherhood, Feminism and the Possibility of Empowered Mothering*. Toronto: Demeter Press, 2006. Print.
- Pollard, Andrew. *The Social World of the Primary School*. London: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1985. Print.
- Ruddick, Sara. *Maternal Thinking: Toward a Politics of Peace*. New York: Ballantine Books, 1989. Print.
- Siegel, Daniel, J. *Pocket Guide to Interpersonal Neurobiology: An Integrative Handbook of the Mind*. New York: W.W.Norton & Company, 2012. Print.
- Smyth, J. "Teacher's Work and the Politics of Reflection." *American Educational Research Journal* 29 (1992): 267-300. Print.
- Swanson, Debra, H. and Deidre D. Johnston. "Mothering in the Ivy Tower: Interviews with Academic Mothers." *Mothering in the Academy. Journal of the Association for Research in Mothering*. 5.2 (2003): 63-75. Print.



Thayer, V. T. and Martin Levit. *The Role of the School in American Society*. New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1966. Print.

Waller, Willard. *The Sociology of Teaching*. New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1961. Print.