**Disciplining the Teacher: The Disembodied Professional and
the Decline of Vernacular Wisdom in Teacher Education**

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The work of Ivan Illich contains frequent reference to the disabling and dominating function of professionals in contemporary society (Illich, 2005; Cayley, 1992). In particular, he criticizes the authority of the professional class to define truth and impose the implications on others. A recent book by Jeff Schmidt (2000) details how and why the people ultimately inducted into professional positions are those willing to support the status quo, thus portraying professionals as agents of the ruling class. He demonstrates that "professional attitude" trumps expertise in credentialing professionals, a process he describes as "soul-battering" for persons entering professional positions. While Schmidt's arguments are framed in terms of a social "system," a term eschewed by Illich (Cayley, 2005), their analyses of professionalism are complementary in many ways. The purpose of this paper is to "cross-fertilize" the work of Illich and Schmidt in order to provide a more detailed and comprehensive look at the social function of professionalism, particularly in education, and how it relates to the preparation of teachers for the public schools.

Theoretical framework

In Illich's philosophy, knowledge is cultural, personal, and embodied, rather than technical or critical. This view of knowledge as grounded in direct experience undergirds this paper and constitutes a standpoint for challenging prevailing myths, such as the idea that technical knowledge is "value neutral." For example, Illich challenged accepted medical practice as follows:

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They brought the patient to the hospital and, with their newly discovered diagnostic methods, they established a chart. They then treated the chart, they changed its parameters. When the chart was healthy, frequently without looking at the guy –I'm caricaturing, of course – they told him to put on his shoes and go home… (Cayley, 1992, p. 141)

This passage from an interview with Illich demonstrates the use of embodied reality to challenge technical knowledge.

Similarly, Schmidt uses first-hand accounts from graduate students, and analysis of professional examinations, to challenge the supposedly value-neutral use of tests and other induction passages in professional education. While tests based on technical knowledge are supposedly used to screen out the least capable candidates, Schmidt demonstrates that the tests (when they work) actually perform a different function that is more political in nature. Schmidt points to a case in which the true purpose of an examination was revealed when it *failed* to serve its purpose. Three graduate students in physics received low scores on their qualifying exams. Nick, Gary, and David had scores that were very close numerically, with Nick slightly above Gary and David. However, when the faculty reviewed the scores, it was Gary that was advanced and Nick that was denied (along with David). According to one of the professors, Gary had an "extremely important" quality for physicists, "discipline in work and tenacity to stick to problems. Mostly, that is what you learn in the university." As Schmidt explains, the tenacity to doggedly pursue *narrow, assigned* problems, without asking why they are being assigned, better fits the physicist for grant-driven research in the military-industrial-research complex. Nick, on

the other hand, was denied advancement on the grounds that his attitude was not appropriate for a physics career.

> During the months of intensive preparation before the test, Nick studied books, refusing to study the old tests like all the other students. He loved physics and could not bring himself to alienate himself from his subject by adopting the narrow focus of the test. …Nick's general knowledge of physics was greater than Gary's…his quiet refusal to study the old tests was both an act of self-preservation –preservation of the unalienated self –and an act of "civic courage" –where one simply behaves as if the system really is as it says it is or really is as it should be. By studying books, Nick behaved as if the examination that qualifies one to get professional credentials really is a test of one's overall understanding of the subject. (Schmidt, 2000, pp. 157-158)

Thus Nick failed the *actual* test, which was whether or not he could set aside his own curiosity and desire for meaning to pursue a narrow and meaningless task. This is another example of narrowly defined technical knowledge trumping knowledge gained from embodied (and impassioned) experience.

In teacher education in the United States, the use of "objective" testing as a part of the credentialing process has become common. For example, twenty-four states and the District of Columbia are at various stages of implementing the edTPA assessment developed by educators at Stanford and administered by Pearson (http://edtpa.aacte.org/faq#17). Preservice teachers who are being assessed with the edTPA will prepare a work sample and submit it to Pearson for scoring by trained evaluators who do not know the preservice teacher, the university that the preservice teacher attends, or the school context in which the work sample occurred. To perform

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well on the assessment, the preservice teacher should focus on a sufficiently narrow piece of the formal curriculum, called a "learning segment," and use it to demonstrate technical expertise that conforms to the fifteen or so performance rubrics that accompany the assessment instructions. While the technical knowledge being tested may be useful and worthwhile, especially in certain contexts, the focus of the assessment is on technical expertise over embodied knowledge and impassioned teaching, "teacher-child interactions" over relationships, and formal (standardized) curriculum over the curiosity and organic development of children. Passionate teachers, like Nick preparing for his candidacy exams in Physics, may find it difficult to set aside the "unalienated self" that embraces the teaching/learning relationship as a whole human being in order to focus on narrow, assigned tasks.

Unifying concepts of professionalism

Both Illich and Schmidt criticized the role of "the professions" in society. Although their choice of language differs, similar ideas surface from each writer. Illich described professions as "cartels" that control people's everyday lives by means of government-established "techno-fascism" (Illich, 2005). Using educators as an example, he wrote, "Educators, for instance, now tell society what must be learned, and are in a position to write off as valueless what has been learned outside of school" (p. 15). He further criticizes the professions as agents of the elite:

> There is a … distinction between professional power and that of other occupations. Its authority springs from a different source: a guild, a union or a gang forces respect for its interest and rights by strike, blackmail, or overt violence. A profession, like a priesthood, holds power by concession from an elite whose interests it props up. (Illich, 2005, p. 17)

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Similarly, Schmidt (2000) criticized the professions as an integral part of a social system that consolidates power in the military-industrial-research complex. He noted that, "What an expert actually does in society is most accurately determined by asking: What is the social function of the expert's *field* of work?" (p. 53) For example, in social terms, the public schools serve to sort people into various employment/income categories, even though individual teachers may operate without such intent. He explains that while almost no one educated in public schools and attending public university rises to the ranks of the elite class, the education-employment system can appear to be a meritocracy by admitting a few (submissive) members of the working class into professional fields. Illich acknowledges this function of schooling as well, describing education as a process that identifies people to be oppressed and persuades those oppressed people to accept their condition as their own fault (Cayley, 1992; Illich, 1971).

While the apparent function of the professional class is to consolidate power and control, the professions publicly claim authority on the grounds of special expertise. Schmidt (2000) offers several cogent arguments against this claim. For example, he describes several examples of non-credentialed and untrained "imposters" successfully employed in a range of professional roles. He points out that an investigation in 1984 revealed that thousands of doctors were practicing in the U.S. on phony credentials and that, "Most of the imposters would never have been exposed by their work as doctors even though they typically worked in situations where medical professionals observed their work daily" (p. 51). Schmidt also asserts that a professional's expert opinion more often serves his or her employer's interests than not. Juries have grown accustomed to expert witnesses that contradict each other, each testifying for the side that has paid for his or her testimony. Schmidt also offers numerous examples of gifted and creative graduate students being "drummed out" of professional schools through induction

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processes that favor people willing to work on narrowly defined "problems" without questioning the overall impact of their research on society.

Schmidt's critique of "professional expertise" complements Illich's description of professional judgment as undemocratic. "Now the heavy arm of the law may reach out when you escape from the care that your surgeon or shrink have decided for you" (Illich, 2005, p. 19). Illich challenges the professional's "secret knowledge" and concludes that the "scientific orthodoxy" of the professions is part of the mystification of professionalism that "turns each profession into the analogue of an established cult" (p. 20).

Professionalism and teacher education

Education policymakers increasingly resort to claims of technical expertise to justify practices in teacher education and induction. In addition, technical means such as standardized credentialing examinations and "dispositional assessments" are increasingly used to select teachers for public school certification. These practices have been championed by the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) as stated in a recent policy paper: "NCATE's focus on assessment of teacher candidate performance, since the initiation of its performance based standards in 2000, has been an important impetus in moving teacher preparation to focus on demonstrable evidence of ability to help P-12 students learn" (Cibulka, 2009, p. 3). The increased emphasis on "evidence," on closer examination, bears a remarkable resemblance to Illich's example of a doctor treating a chart rather than a patient. Teacher performance evaluations like the edTPA described earlier, while appearing to be "value neutral," actually favor those candidates willing to focus on narrow problems (a child's ability to select one of four possible answers on a multiple choice question about information that may or may

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not be relevant to the lives of either teacher or child) rather than pay attention to human relationships or the impact of schooling on children and families.

The use of technical means outside human relationships to govern teacher and child has replaced vernacular wisdom about teaching and learning, which has tended to emphasize teachers working with "their hearts, their minds, their eyes, hands, and ears" (Kohl, 2003, p. 157). While the vernacular wisdom about teaching and learning tends to emphasize mutuality, presence, and imagination in classroom invitations to learning, the prevailing use of technical performance emphasizes narrowed focus, coercion of the learner's attention, and conformity to prescribed and scripted interaction. Teacher candidates unwilling to "treat the chart" rather than form relationships with children and families, find themselves on the defensive.

The true purpose of NCATE's emphasis on "evidence" and "performance standards" becomes apparent, however, when a highly imaginative and talented teacher inspires students to the point that they outperform schoolmates on the standardized achievement tests now ubiquitous in public schools. For example, Kohl (2003) tells of a teacher who implemented a rigorous and imaginative curriculum that resulted in his students achieving very high test scores. That teacher was reprimanded and policed until he conformed to the use of the prescribed and scripted Open Court curriculum program adopted by his school.

Many young teachers must now ignore what they know to be true and behave differently than they believe sensible, in order to remain employed as teachers (Kohl, 2003). Perhaps to prepare teachers for this reality, teacher education programs now emphasize assessment, "professional dispositions" (attitude), and conformity in clinical settings (Cibulka, 2009) above imagination, social presence, and intelligence. When this is accomplished, the teacher is

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essentially "disembodied," that is, living outside his or her own reality. Illich and Schmidt would probably agree that the "professionalization" of teachers is thus complete, and both offer responses to this state of affairs.

Illich seemed to address the situation of the disembodied teacher when he said, "We cannot be careful enough in refusing to act as splitters or in refusing a split life… And yet, in many circumstances, we cannot avoid acting as economic men of our time, performing certain professions and thus maiming our hearts." (Cayley, 1992, p. 128) Similarly, Schmidt (2000) wrote, "A person's flashy diploma or job title… brings to mind the degree to which the person has been processed by the system, is trusted by the system or is concerned about keeping the system's trust." (p. 276) However, Schmidt argued that abandoning one's professional position would not help society, but actually place a person of conscience in a less powerful position. He argues that professionals should hold onto their positions if they can do so honorably, but act as "radical professionals," defined as people who: 1) think of themselves as radicals first and then as professionals, 2) hold very critical views of their social roles as professionals and of the institutions that employ them, and 3) act politically to make a difference.

Together, Illich and Schmidt might advise teacher educators to stay put and undermine technical control and oppression, by acting as "radical professionals." Schmidt offers 33 concrete suggestions for how to do that. These suggestions are primarily ways of 1) organizing colleagues and/or finding allies; 2) resisting an imposed identity; 3) resisting ideological colonization; and 4)resisting pressure to be loyal to the institution or the profession rather than the public. For teacher educators, these points of resistance are important both in the higher education setting and as we mentor candidates into responsible professional behavior in schools. For example, just

as teacher educators learn to seek out colleagues who can be allies in faculty meetings, they teach candidates how to identify and form relationships with parents, fellow teachers, and others who are willing to step out of the norm to provide meaningful learning experiences for all children.

There are inspiring examples of resistance by teachers and teacher educators who have "stayed put" and acted as radical professionals. Place-based education practices (Gruenewald & Smith, 2008; Smith & Sobel, 2010) connect children, teachers, and teacher educators with indigenous knowledge, local cultural practices, embodied experience, and community values. Another group of educators (González, Moll, & Amanti, 2005) has focused on the richness of learning opportunities for children, families, and teachers when strong webs of relationships reveal the "funds of knowledge" available in local families and communities. Courageous resistance can take many forms.

Schmidt's recommendations for acting as a "radical professional" could support Illichian social values. Put into action, they loosen learning from its mooring in consumer society and open new possibilities for unique learning relationships in de-standardized, de-professionalized, and non-compulsory schools and universities. However, there are differences in emphasis between Illich and Schmidt, if not differences in substance. While both affirm the value of the collective, Schmidt puts more faith in collective action and in instrumental strategies, such as union organizing and some kinds of institutional reform. While Schmidt might see these activities as yielding short-term benefits, he would support them because they strengthen the collective and weaken the power of the system to oppress people. In fact, Schmidt read *Disabling Professions* (Illich, 2005) while writing his book, but found it ultimately less useful

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than Antonio Gramsci's more political approach to undermining system-wide and culturally reinforced oppression (personal communication, Jeff Schmidt, January 19, 2010). Illich, especially nearing the end of his life, saw this kind of instrumental activity as ultimately alienating, but would agree that professionals must disavow any loyalty to the social order. In the final set of interviews that Illich granted (Cayley, 2005), he said,

> We are in a situation in which the disembodiment of the I-Thou relationship has led into a mathematization, an algorithmization... It has seemed to me during the last couple of years that the main service I still can render is to make people accept that we live in such a world. Face it, don't try to humanize the hospital or the school, but always ask, 'What can I do, at this very moment… in which I am? What can I do to … feel free to hear, to sense, to intuit what the other wants from me, would be able to imagine, expects with a sense of surprise, from me at this moment? I think that many people have very reasonably withdrawn from trying to improve the social agencies and organizations for which only twenty years ago they felt responsible. They know that all they can do is to try… to behave an-archically, as human beings who do not act for the sake of the city, but because they have received the ability to respond as a gift from the other. (pp. 222-223)

For teacher educators, weary of accreditation reports and data-driven classroom interactions, the thought of responding to students and colleagues as human beings is like salve to a wounded heart. But if we as teacher educators abandon oppressive technicality, without abandoning our posts, we are stepping into a new place, traveling without insurance. We have no idea where this moment-to-moment, embodied living will take us.

Interestingly, the publication of *Disciplined Minds* led to Jeff Schmidt's dismissal from his position as editor of *Physics Today*. According to executives of the American Institute of Physics, which owns the journal where Schmidt had worked for 19 years, Schmidt was dismissed for working on his book during hours he should have been working for the journal. Schmidt fought the dismissal in the courts, defending his right to free expression, and won a "very favorable" monetary settlement as well as symbolic reinstatement. (A few hours after being reinstated, Schmidt resigned.) Similarly, for those of us who have access to professional privilege, whether to "stay put" and resist or de-professionalize and live more an-archically is a decision that we may have to make over and over as we evaluate our the opportunities for resistance that emerge in our lives.

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