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Russell, Josephine. (2007). *How children become moral selves: Building character and promoting citizenship in education*. Portland, Oregon: Sussex Academic Press.

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When I first read the title of Russell's book, *How children become moral selves: Building character and promoting citizenship in education*, the association that entered my mind was Bennet's (1993) book entitled *The Book of Virtues*. His book serves as a manifesto of sorts for conservative activists who are intent on reinforcing the hegemony of Eurocentric male morality on new generations of children. Claims in the curriculum to a central vernacular of virtues are often based upon "White, middle-class, heterosexual conceptions of character development" (Johnson, 2008, p. 67). My initial interpretation of Russell's title as part of this conservative movement was incorrect, but my reaction illustrates how conservatives have taken hold of character education in schools.

As Russell correctly points out, the banner of character education has been picked up by conservative groups that emphasize a transmission model of education. The transmission model is best described by Freire (1998) as the "banking system" of education where teachers deposit knowledge into students with little regard for the knowledge and subjectivities that students bring into the classroom. Under this model, education is successful when a teacher is able to 'withdraw' the same information from a student that the teacher 'deposits'. Within the conservative character education movement, this process translates into preordained 'virtues' that take little notice of the multiple and overlapping subjectivities that students use to mediate moral decision-making, caring, and behavior.

In contrast, constructivist models of moral education focus upon the development of knowledge through social interaction. The knowledge and subjectivities that students bring into classrooms are valued as vital components in the learning process. Prior knowledge is valued as a source to construct new knowledge. It is within this theoretical orientation that Russell reports her longitudinal study of the development of moral caring, reasoning, and behavior in a cohort of children in an Irish parochial school. She is decidedly a constructivist, which, to situate her work in a larger conversation, is also considered conservative by some. With this in mind, moral

education is a better descriptor of Russell's theoretical orientation than character education as contained in the subtitle to her book.

The fields of moral and character education have had a long history of competing visions of what a 'moral person' is and how to best help students 'become' such a person. Half of Russell's book is an attempt to illustrate the terrain of these competing visions by presenting numerous theorists, reaching as far back as Plato and Aristotle but, unfortunately, not as close to the present as the deconstructionists (e.g. Burman, 2008; Cannella, 1997). It is against this theoretical backdrop that Russell analyzes and interprets her qualitative study of the moral and civic development of a cohort of elementary school students. She collected data from the cohort when they were in second through sixth grades.

The aim of Russell's study was to examine the effectiveness of a whole class activity that is connected to a program entitled *Thinking Time – Philosophy with Children* (Institute for the Advancement of Philosophy for Children). Russell describes a program in moral education as effective if it helps students enhance "moral thinking, enabling them to become more thoughtful, respectful and responsive to others, and fostering traits of character that are central to democratic education" (p. 5). Russell found that the *Thinking Time* program aided in the development of moral reasoning and caring among both boys and girls. Other findings emerged in connection with the three themes of her book. One theme is the different ways that moral development occurs in children, one cognitive and another affective. The second theme is the way that moral development might, or might not, be different between girls and boys. The third theme is the way that moral development supports civic education. All three of these themes are connected to the concept of a 'moral self', which I detail later in this review.

The first part of Russell's book describes the methods of her study and reviews the literature surrounding moral education. Over the four and a half year period of the study, she visited a mixed-gender cohort of students that moved up in grades together. The students ranged in age from seven to twelve. The number of participants varied during the study due to transferring students, but the cohort included approximately 25 students for the duration of the study. Russell entered the cohort's classroom to conduct the *Thinking Time* activity. During the *Thinking Time*, Russell read literature containing moral dilemmas and facilitated discussions about the literature. These discussions are her units of analysis. Because of her involvement leading discussions, her study would best be described as action research.

Chapter 2 presents an overview of "the current debate" over moral and character education. Unfortunately, the title of the chapter does not represent the contents. Although Russell details some of the foundational theorists of moral developmental psychology, an examination of her references reveals that most references date in the 1980's and few date in the 2000's. There is an approximately 20 year lag with the present, leading the reader to wonder how 'current' Russell's portrayal of the debate is. While mainly focused upon the theories of Piaget, Kohlberg, and Gilligan, the format of her literature review follows familiar binaries: Platonic vs. Aristotelian ethics, universalist vs. particularist ethics, Gilligan's vs. Kohlberg's theories, affective vs. cognitive development, and care vs. justice orientations. A postmodern reader would be disappointed with these binaries although Russell does blur some of the traditional binaries in later chapters. For example, she briefly problematizes the care vs. justice binary as it has been assigned to gender.

In chapter 3, Russell uses the concept of the 'moral self' to reexamine traditional binaries. The concept of a moral self emphasizes the complex ways that personal knowledge and subjectivities are integrally connected to a person's identity. Russell writes, "Moral behavior depends on something beyond the moral beliefs in and of themselves" (p. 51). More important than moral reasoning (e.g. Power, Higgins, & Kohlberg, 1989) are the ways that individuals develop personal understandings of what it means to be a moral person. According to Russell and the theorists that

she cites, this personal orientation is indicative of a person's moral motivation and action. In the remainder of the chapter, Russell presents issues in moral education that emphasize different conceptions of what it means to be a moral person. This leads her back into the construction of familiar binaries such as communitarian vs. liberal values, cognitive vs. affective orientations, and transmission vs. constructivist models of learning. All of these are connected to different epistemologies concerning morality and ethics.

Russell concludes the first part of her book, in chapter 4, by presenting a theoretical framework for understanding ethical enquiry in the classroom and the centrality of social interaction in the learning process. She considers how reason and intersubjectivity are connected to moral development. Habermas (1990) built upon Kohlberg's developmental theories by emphasizing the dialogical nature of moral development. When individuals enter into discussion or argumentation they construct an understanding of morality that is not possible through monologue. Similarly, Vygotskian (1981) theories also emphasize learning through dialogue. Students learn with mediational means such as language. By participating in dialogue, students learn how to use language as a tool to think. Next, Russell points to the benefits of community enquiry in learning and promoting democratic knowledge, dispositions, and values. In addition to the development of reason, Russell cites Noddings (1984) who foregrounds caring as an important part of morality and education. Russell connects all these literatures with the use of story as a point of departure to develop moral reasoning, caring, and behavior. Finally, chapter 4 ends with older research concerning gender differences in moral orientation. Although gender difference is related to one of Russell's research questions, it is disappointing that she only uses older research and devotes only three pages to the topic. As a foreshadowing of her analysis and interpretation, I wanted chapter 4 to be expanded into three chapters with more developed conceptual frameworks.

The second part of Russell's book consists of findings chapters. Chapter 5 focuses upon the cognitive moral development of students, as well as related gender differences. Her findings largely support those of developmental theorists such as Piaget and Kohlberg. Although interpreting the class discussions through the lenses of multiple theorists (e. g. Egan, 1997; Lipman, 1988; Matthews, 1984), Kohlberg's theories serve as the lens in which most of Russell's findings are described, analyzed, and interpreted. There were a few dissonant findings from those of Kohlberg's. For example, while Kohlberg claimed that people did not occupy more than one stage of moral development simultaneously, Russell did not find this to be the case in her students. In addition, she found few differences in moral reasoning between genders.

In chapter 6, Russell examines children's understandings of concepts such as equity, racism, fairness, responsibilities, rights, and honesty as represented in student discussions of moral and controversial issues. She found that as students aged, they were better able to understand the application of moral concepts as context dependent. For example, she notes that students first advocated for a homogeneous treatment of people. This emphasis lacked an acknowledgement of differences due to social positioning and prejudice. In later grades, students struggled with these issues concerning immigration policy by examining concepts of fairness, prejudice, and racism. Other issues such as homelessness, the death penalty, bullying, and children's rights were discussed by students. Students gained empathy and understanding through discussion of moral and controversial issues. Russell attributes this to student deliberation during the *Thinking Time* activity.

In chapter 7, Russell focuses upon children's understandings of relationships with special attention to the differences between the ways that the boys and girls in her cohort understood relationships with peers. Generally, her findings mirror the previous chapter's findings. Children in younger grades made few distinctions between types of friendship or the contexts of friendship. As the children in Russell's study advanced in age, they were better able to identify different types of friendship and situations in which friendship is manifested and threatened. Although there were many similarities in the ways that boys and girls understood friendship, Russell found differences in how boys and girls expressed themselves in public. Her findings agree with Gilligan's (1982)

claim that around the age of adolescence girls begin to lose their willingness to express themselves in a mixed-gender setting. While the girls in Russell's study were comfortable expressing themselves at young ages, as they aged, they experienced hostility and ridicule from boys. As a result, the girls began to withdraw from public conversations in mixed-gender settings.

In the concluding chapter of her book, Russell discusses her findings in chapters 5-7. It is in this final chapter that a curious dissonance in her findings emerges. While she claims that students in the community of enquiry gained trust throughout the study, other findings, mentioned in chapter 7, indicate that girls experienced a hostile public space for voicing their thoughts. Habermas has been criticized by feminist theorists (e.g. Fraser, 1992) because of his idealization of the public sphere. A similar criticism might be leveled against Russell. Her findings fail to appreciate the dissonance between an idealized public sphere within her classroom and the experiences of female students who were in that sphere. The following quotes illustrate this dissonance. Russell states, "Trust, which developed gradually, enabled the children to take a risk, to question, to back-track from an entrenched position and take on board the views of others" (p. 172). Later, Russell refers to a conversation that she had with female students concerning mixed-gendered classrooms,

The reticence of girls after age ten to partake fully in discussion and their willingness to allow the boys to dominate raises a question about the value of mixed-gender classrooms as they exist in Ireland where class teaching is largely the norm and the competitiveness of boys in such a system has an inhibiting effect on girls" (p. 181).

Russell leaves the dissonance illustrated in these quotes relatively unexamined. I couldn't help think that Russell missed an important opportunity to answer her research question about gender differences, and at the same time, address current questions in the field of democratic education. These questions problematize the concept of an idealized public sphere by examining the influence of gender, race, culture, and history on inequality of voice in the public spaces such as classrooms.

In conclusion, while an interesting addition to the literature, Russell's book lacks focus. Returning to the title of her book, *How children become moral selves: Building character and promoting citizenship in education*, I am struck by the ambitiousness of her project. She delved into literature in the areas of moral development, character education, and citizenship education. Unfortunately, rather than choose one theoretical lens to interpret her study, her book becomes lost in a sea of theories, fragmented by competing interpretations. This fragmentation could have been used productively by deconstructing some of the traditional binaries within the literature. This is another missed opportunity. Russell does not give sufficient attention to ideas concerning the role of social context in constructing knowledge about gender identity in public places (e.g. Baxter, 2002; Butler, 1999). A powerful example of this absence is found in her lack of attention to the context in which the study takes place, a parochial school. As a result, her analysis and interpretations are somewhat dated and perpetuate rather than deconstruct traditional binaries. Although the concept of the 'moral self' could have been applied fruitfully along these lines, Russell fails to make this connection. Russell's book is valuable as a descriptive account of a cohort of elementary level students as they experienced the *Thinking Time* activity, moral development, and civic education. Unfortunately, her book lacks the analysis and interpretation (Wolcott, 1994) necessary to examine the multiple identities and subjectivities that students bring into classroom. With this in mind, her book would be of value to educators who are considering activities such as *Thinking Time*, but offers little new to researchers in the areas of moral, character, or civic education.

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