

As I have read the texts for this class, I first think in terms of my research and my experiences. In the case of Maxine Greene's The Dialectic of Freedom, I mainly drew on my strong individualist streak and the emphasis that I put on each individual in my classroom. Our class discussions typically fall out around students in the classroom. Although I jotted down the question, how would achieving "freedom" in Greene's sense of the word affect classroom teachers, I was still thinking in terms of their dealings with their students. It was not until this week that I began to think of Greene's idea of freedom in terms of the teachers themselves.

In the wake of announcements from Pat Forgione regarding the implementation of a new research-based instructional focus for teachers as well as the highly publicized changing from block schedule to traditional schedule for next year, various AISD teachers have given me a shove into the emancipatory camp. As a result, I think I am feeling more comfortable with The Dialectic of Freedom.

Greene's point seemed to be that on an individual level we recognize our lacks of freedom, but in order to change what is lacking, we must work together as a community.

This is the very thing that I have observed in a variety of schools over the past three weeks. Teachers throughout AISD are learning of announcements (perhaps pronouncements) from the superintendent. These teachers have an immediate individual response to the news and then talk to their colleagues

about their response. Already, they are beginning to carve out their freedom in a Maxine Greene-like way. As groups of teachers get together, they begin to create a space for themselves in which they can carry on conversations about what they have sensed is a curtailing of the freedom.

I was lucky enough to watch a group of teachers hold an initial conversation regarding changes to their school. At a recent inservice these teachers had been introduced to the educational principles, which had been adopted by AISD, coming out of Lauren Resnick's Institute for Learning in Pittsburgh. From what they discussed, it seems that the main principles at work here are that all students can learn and that instruction should be geared to do just that. Most teachers with whom I work viewed these "new" principles as common sense, although that may explain their relationships with the University.

In my various capacities at UT, I am fortunate to work with several groups of teachers. This was not the first time that one group of these groups had talked about AISD's adoption of Resnick's work and one meeting in which I was a fringe participant was not called for the purpose of discussing these new principles. What emerged out of the group meeting were an analysis of Resnick's work, application to their school's environment, and an evaluation of it in respect to other elements of school which are also emphasized by AISD, namely TAAS. The teachers realized that a disconnect was present between this new instructional and curricular emphasis for their

classrooms and the importance of their work in preparing students for a standardized test which would be reported in terms of passing and failing rather than in individual improvement. This synergy was a perfect example that “freedom, like autonomy, is in many ways dependent on understanding these ambiguities, developing a kind of critical distance with respect to them” (Greene 9). These teachers were working to find their freedom within the school district.

Greene (13) mentions that not “much is done to empower students to create spaces of dialogue in their classrooms, spaces where they can take initiatives and uncover humanizing possibilities.” I am left to wonder whether adults are always in an empowered position to take initiative for them. As with everything else in life, this seems context dependent rather than being a given. The teachers that I observed admitted that some members of their newly formed community were in a better position to take action on their ideas due to contextual factors. For example, one teacher who is married with no children felt that she had more freedom to actually do something than did a teacher who is supporting two children as a single mother. Similarly, one teacher who plans to leave the teaching profession (perhaps temporarily) seemed to feel the greatest freedom to act and even discussed meeting with her principal and even the superintendent to help them see the disconnect discovered by the teachers’ perspective.

A ribbon ran through these teachers' reflections on their newly identified disconnect. In the midst of this conversation, these particular teachers were also reflecting on the difficulties of teachers both getting together to discuss issues like this and taking action to ameliorate the disconnect. The teachers recognized that, in many cases, these conversations seem to be a one-time affair, but in others, action is planned and carried out. Greene (17) calls for "a coming together of those who choose themselves as affected and involved." It seems to me that, while all groups are hearing the call to arms, the speed and agility they show in taking action is quite varied. Some teachers carry a fear of being labeled "troublemakers." Other teachers have expressed a concern that fellow teachers may not share their values and priorities. For instance, when thinking about organizing a group of teachers to express their concerns to the administration at her school, one teacher was worried that some of her colleagues may not share and value the same issues as she does. For example, she was incensed about the disconnect between the instructional principles and the emphasis on TAAS but felt that many teachers may have more pressing concerns such as wanting a longer lunch period.

So now where is the power in the culture of teachers? Does it rest with the individuals who align themselves along issues? Will those communities of teachers be powerful enough to affect change or must teachers look to a large union to find power?

I am most curious to see what comes out of the five teachers whom I observed. I wonder if their numbers will grow within their school and beyond. Based on my experiences as a teacher, I fear that after the meeting each individual will think back over the meeting and make an individual choice regarding her level of involvement. One or two might decide that they are incensed enough to take a leadership role and continue to seek freedom in this area. The others might look at the task and the power of the culture already in place in their school and view their quest for freedom as too daunting a task. Luckily, over time, I will be able to find out the answers to my questions regarding the teachers' actions. This experience may even shed some light on the possibility of how teachers could more easily facilitate the naming of their obstacles and the course of action that might follow.