Making (Some) Sense of Feminist Poststructuralism in Environmental Education Research and Practice

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Abstract

Given that feminist poststructuralism disrupts countless notions many of us have been "raised" with, conceptualizing what feminist poststructuralism might mean for understanding and enacting environmental education research and practice can be difficult. This paper articulates understandings and assumptions of poststructuralism and explores how it has enabled me to come to know in a way that I would not otherwise. I am not claiming that feminist poststructural research necessarily produces better knowledge, but that it produces different knowledge than that undertaken by positivist, interpretivist or critical approaches. Linking theoretical discussion to on-the-ground examples, I examine notions of subjectivity, agency and the constitutive nature of discourse. I then discuss what is particularly feminist about this work and finally, close with a brief discussion of how these notions have prompted a shift in the kinds of questions I am asking in my doctoral research.

Résumé

Étant donné que le féminisme post structuraliste perturbe un grand nombre de notions avec lesquelles plusieurs d'entre nous avons été « élevés », la conceptualisation de ce que le féminisme post structuraliste peut signifier, dans la compréhension et la disposition des recherches et des pratiques en éducation environnementale, peut être difficile. Cet article exprime bien les entendements et les suppositions du post structuralisme et explore comment cela m'a rendu capable d'en arriver à connaître d'une façon que je n'aurais pas pu comprendre autrement. Je n'allègue pas que la recherche sur le féminisme post structuraliste engendre un meilleur savoir, mais elle donne lieu à un différent savoir que celui assumé par les approches positivistes, interprétatives ou critiques. En associant des discussions théoriques à des exemples pratiques, j'examine des notions de subjectivité, d'agence ainsi que la nature constitutive du discours. Je discute alors de ce qui est particulièrement féministe au sujet de ce travail et finalement, je termine par une brève discussion sur comment ces notions ont incité un changement de cap dans la sorte de questions que je me pose dans ma thèse de doctorat.

Recent papers in this journal (e.g. Gough & Whitehouse, 2003; McKenzie, 2004b) and discussions elsewhere (e.g. Bell & Russell, 2000; Gough & Sellers, 2004; McKenzie, in press, a, b; Whitehouse, 2001, 2002) have pointed to both the value and challenges of feminist poststructural theorizing for environmental education. "Poststructuralism," according to Elizabeth St. Pierre and Wanda Pillow (2000), "offers critiques and methods for *examining* the functions and effects of any structure or grid of regularity that we put into place, including those poststructuralism itself might create" (p. 6). It takes up the postmodern notion of "incredulity towards metanarratives" (Lyotard, 1979/1993, p. xxiv) but in doing so, does not assume that narratives are never shared. Instead, it does claim that shared cultural narratives, or discourses, are social constructions and that their processes of production are worth examining. Poststructuralism does not assume to replace the structures of modernism or suggest a linear progression from modernism to postmodernism and structuralism to poststructuralism. Instead, through deconstruction, poststructuralism "posts" both modernist and postmodernist structures for viewing and analysis.

Poststructural analysis reveals ways in which dominant discourses can trap us in "conventional meanings and modes of being" (Davies, 1990, p. 1). It enables us to see ways in which cultural narratives and structures of notions such as humanism, critical theory/pedagogy, modernism, and scientism are produced, regulated, and productive of the subject. Poststructural theorizing questions that which is assumed to be normal or common sense (Kumashiro, 2004; Weedon, 2004). Embedded within discourses of postmodernity,[1] poststructural theorizing helps make visible the constitutive force of discourses and their relations with subjection and desire (Davies, 2000b). It is a "mode of analysis [that] shifts attention from individualism to subjectivity, from text to discursive practices, and from signifier to signifying practices. Its focus is on how language works, in whose and what interests, on what cultural sites and why" (Kelly, 1997, p. 19). Discourse and the ways in which it produces subjects, is a central focus of poststructural theorizing, and as such, so is an analysis of power.

Questions Under Poststructuralism

Operating under the assumptions of postmodernity, a poststructuralist inquiry is not concerned about interrogating the nature, limits, and possibility of knowledge, but rather asks, as Sherene Razack (1993) puts it, "how we know what we know" (p. 95). Poststructuralism attempts to gain some understanding of ways we have come to understand ourselves, questions the legitimacy of these understandings, and brings previously marginalized discourses to the fore (Burr, 1995). Questions interrogating the production of contextual meanings replace questions of knowledge or truth. Such questions

include: "How does discourse function? Where is it to be found? How does it get produced and regulated? What are its social effects? How does it exist?" (Bové, 1990, cited in St. Pierre, 2000, p. 485). They also include: "What dualistic thinking was evident in [a person's] discursive practices? What storylines are being made relevant? What discourses are being mobilized? Whose interests are being served by these discourses?" (Davies & Harré, 1991/92, cited in Barron, 1995, p. 109) and "In what specific contexts, among which specific communities of people, and by what textual and social processes has meaning been acquired? … How do meanings change? How have some meanings emerged as normative and others have been eclipsed or disappeared? What do these processes reveal about how power is constituted and operates?" (Scott, 1988, cited in St. Pierre, 2000, p. 484).

Language

Poststructural perspectives reject a correspondence theory of language (Sarup, 1993), claiming words do not mirror the world (St. Pierre, 2000). Words do not carry meaning in and of themselves, but only as they occur within particular cultural narratives. Furthermore, meanings are always plural (Weedon, 2004), produced through the discursive and interactive processes of everyday life (Davies, 2000a). Furthermore, as Weedon (2004) reminds us, a great amount of effort, and often money, is put into producing particular meanings. Language, then, is productive and shapes our understandings of ourselves, others, and what is or is not possible.

I draw on the following reflection on my work as a young teacher doing pond studies with grade five students—not to advocate for the policing of language to construct experiences and confine students' meaning-making of them—but to illustrate how language can produce experience in particular ways. To begin the lesson, I would gather the youngsters in a close circle, citing certain words that could not be used during the pond study: words like "yuk!," "gross," etcetera. In their place, I asked them to find words like "wow!," "cool," and others. Although I knew nothing of poststructural theorizing at the time, I did know that when holding a pond critter in one's hand and saying "wow!," students' bodies tended to moved forward, peeking at the critter with what seemed at least like curiosity, if not wonder. Yet if they were saying "yuk" or "gross," their bodies would most often recoil, hand held out as far from their noses as possible. The language they had available to them attached certain meanings to the pond critters and produced a particular experience of them.

Through the language we[2] use, we create fictions every day, often presenting them as reality—the reality that is comfortable for us, or that we wish to live (see Gough, 1991). Fiction, perhaps, offers one of the most powerful possibilities of speaking in ways that are not yet available to us through lived

discourses (Davies, 2000b) and may also be particularly useful in acknowledging and engaging non-languaged forms of communication often sidelined by poststructural emphases on language (see Bell & Russell, 2000; Russell, in press).

Discourse

While in my role as teacher, I had been working to produce a particular experience of pond critters for students, I was simultaneously being produced by discourses of environmental educator—ones that led me to see myself as an instructor who works to develop a "sense of wonder"[3] in my students. Within poststructuralism, discourse is conceived as a set of beliefs and understandings, reinforced through daily practices, which frame a particular understanding of the ways we are in the world (Weedon, 2004). Discourse is not specifically a language or text, but is the effect of language practices. Language practices produce shared cultural narratives, or discourses, which are "'a historically, socially, and institutionally specific structure of statements, terms, categories, and beliefs,'" that organize the ways in which we can think and act (Scott, 1988, cited in St. Pierre, 2000, p. 485). Discourse is embedded in notions of identity (what it means to be a girl, boy, student, teacher, canoe trip guide, environmental educator, or activist), the meanings we attach to the words (signifiers) we use, and the rules we use to determine what "makes sense" or is possible.

As I was leading the pond study, I was positioned within a discourse of environmental educator as one who helps construct experiences of "nature" which foster an ethic of care. In another instance, I may be positioned, or position myself, within discourses of environmental educator as one who motivates students to take action. I am constantly performing environmental educator in particular ways, depending on the discourse from within which I am acting. Yet at the same time I am acting from within an existing discourse, I am producing others—social and psychological realities which then become institutionalized at "the disciplinary, the political, the cultural, and the small group level" (Davies, 2000a, p. 88). The process is both cyclical and ongoing. In my performance of environmental educator, I am both producing and reflecting discursive practices. In other words, discourses are both constitutive of and by me as I speak and teach.

Discourses tell me what is possible, yet often produce versions of reality that appear incompatible. For example, as an environmental educator, I may be positioned as one who fosters an ethic of care or motivates students to act, yet am simultaneously positioned within dominant hegemonic notions of teaching as an act which demands one be unbiased or neutral (McKenzie, 2004a; Sammel, 2004). Negotiating these conflicting discourses can be the source of considerable angst (Newbery, 2003; Sammel, 2004)—an angst into which feminist poststructural theorizing, and notions of subjectivity, can lend useful insights.

Subjectivity

An important distinction between a modern and poststructural stance is their respective notions of the subject. From poststructural perspectives, there is no fundamental or essential self, but instead, "we speak ourselves into existence within the terms of available discourses" (Davies, 2000a, p. 55). Rather than coming from an independent consciousness or core, essential self, notions of who one is and what a person is supposed to be and do are socially constructed. Conceived of under poststructuralism, people are "subjects of" cultural narratives, or storylines. As such, they are always being produced and cannot claim a core nature that is theirs alone. To signify this focus on one being made subject through discursive practices, poststructuralists speak of subjectivity rather than identity. Subjects cannot claim to be authors of their ideologies (Weedon, 2004). Instead, it is ideologies that construct one's subjectivity, understandings of oneself and of what is both possible and permissible.

Categories and Category Maintenance

A useful way to explore subjectivity is to examine the notions of categories and category maintenance. With each speaking and acting, the poststructural self takes up discourses available, and in doing so, is constantly (re)inscribed as a subject within a category. Yet even while, and perhaps because these categories are fluid, shifting and "uncontainable" (Kelly, 1997, p. 111), subjects perform "category maintenance work," asserting through peer and institutional pressures and self-disciplining acts, what acceptable membership (i.e. behaviour, dress, etc.) in the category looks like (Davies, 2000a).

In order to successfully belong to the category of science teacher, for example, I speak and act in ways that are regulated by discourses; some things are allowed and others are not. More specifically, in order to be an acceptable science teacher within particular dominant hegemonic discourses of high school science teaching in Canada, I am pushed to produce myself as an objective evaluator—something which is particularly difficult to do if I conceive of my job as fostering an ethic of care or motivation to act. Yet to not construct oneself as an objective evaluator is to risk condemnation by colleagues, administrators, parents and students (see Barrett, Hart, Nolan, & Sammel, 2005), people who are also produced and regulated by discursive practices and active in maintaining the category of science teacher as objective evaluator.

While dilemmas about how to evaluate students and their work are certainly not new, poststructural notions of subjectivity and discourse help understand these quandaries differently. Assuming that the teacher is subject to the cultural narratives of science teaching to which she has access, that she is continually being (re)produced by these narratives and pushed by others to perform appropriately within the bounds of a particular socially constructed

notion of science teacher, allow us to focus on the social structures, discursive practices and associated power relations which work to construct and maintain certain categories and subjectivities. Rather than blaming the teacher for not "getting it right" or trying to remediate the situation by delivering professional development workshops for alternative evaluation strategies—a process which could easily reinforce the idea that evaluation can and should be objective—poststructural assumptions push educators and researchers to ask different kinds of questions. These include: "How does [the teacher] make sense of 'doing teaching well'? What does this encompass for her and how did she come to have this knowledge? What structures and privileges do the processes of objective evaluation support? What kind of knowledges does it privilege? Who does it allow to succeed? For whom does it ensure failure?" (Barrett et al., 2005, p. 525). One could also ask: how have we come to know what we do about evaluation, and what other discourses of evaluation might be possible? Instead of continuing to reproduce existing categories and reinscribing subjectivities, these questions attempt to open up discourses, making them and the power relations within them visible and thus accessible for examination and possible revision.

Positioning and Subject Positions

If we accept the notion of the non-unitary subject and that there are a multiplicity of discourses constructing us and our understandings of the world, then we can begin to question and undermine the power of discourses that were previously unquestionable (Davies, 2000c). Making visible the dominant and constitutive forces of language practices and the ways in which they inscribe and position us, we can use the power of discourse to disrupt its effects and reposition ourselves (Davies, 2000b). Positioning within a discourse is different from taking on a role; roles are public, speak more about function than investments and commitments (Britzman, 1992) and can be stepped into and out of at will. In positioning, personal and public selves merge.

From a given subject position, only certain versions of the world make sense (Davies, 2000b); thus the way we are positioned, and position ourselves within a discourse has implications for how we read people and experiences. For instance, in the context of a science education conference, those whose subjectivities have been produced by discourses of "science as truth" and "teacher as dispassionate deliverer of objective information," may position the passionate environmental educator as illegitimate Other. Conversely, at an outdoor education conference where educators have had access to the notions of environmentalism and passion as acknowledged and legitimate cultural narratives, the same individual may be positioned as a leader in the field.

Yet positioning is constantly being negotiated (Britzman, 1992) and shifts from moment to moment as we interact (Davies, 2000a). The cultural narratives, or discourses to which we have access, make certain subject

positions available, and others inaccessible. With each utterance or action, we take up particular subject positions within or in relation to discourses that are available. At the same time that we attempt to (re)position ourselves, we are positioned by others. I return to the above example. Instead of making an impassioned call to "save the planet," the environmental educator at the science conference may attempt to negotiate her position as legitimate by drawing upon the discourses of scientific knowledge and "facts." In doing so, she reinscribes the discourse of science as legitimate and places herself within it. Yet she is also operating within the discourses of woman, and as such, is infrequently accorded legitimacy within the cultural narratives of science. Thus, she may call on her doctoral degree (discourse of mastery) to inscribe herself as one having authority. In this example, the educator is constituted by discourse, positioned by her colleagues within multiple discourses, and draws on these same discourses to negotiate her positions within them (Davies, 2000a).

Desire

Why do we take up these multiple positionings, particularly when they may be contradictory and/or oppressive? We desire to correctly constitute ourselves within the discourses available, argues Davies (2000a), and this may mean taking up "subject positions that no one would ever rationally choose" (p. 74). The poststructuralist subject is a production of desire and is an effect of language. Our desires are both constituted through and regulated by available discourses (Kelly, 1997). One of the tasks of feminist deconstruction is to make visible the patterns of desire that have trapped us into particular ways of being and acting (Davies, 1990). As a woman and outdoor educator, for example, I desire to be feminine while also being physically strong. Yet physical strength is not always commended or desired within the discourse of heterosexual woman, and within the discourse of outdoor educator (canoe trip guide in particular), being a woman and feminine are both often suspect (Bell, 1993, cited in Newbery, 2003).

   Consequently, some of my desires constituted within the discourse of outdoor educator conflict with some of those belonging to discourses of woman —particularly those notions of woman that carry the most cultural capital. If I am pushed, as I am within the modernist discourse of individualism, into constructing myself as a unitary subject, living with these conflicts can be quite painful. Within common North American discourses of canoe trip guide and woman, I can be a strong canoe trip guide but lose currency as a woman, or I can rank highly as a woman and have little credibility as a guide. This is not to say that discourses that associate woman and physical strength do not exist, but they are less frequently available, and when taken up, risk challenging the power relations that reinscribe masculinity and femininity (Newbery, 2003).[4] If, however, I am able to acknowledge that I, and my desires, are produced

through the discourses available to me, and that I will take up some and not others, in different ways, and at different times, then the contradictions embedded in particular discourses of woman and canoe trip guide may not be as painful to embody.

Living Contradictions

As Davies (2000a) suggests, acknowledging that the contradictions emerge from within available discourses rather than from contradictory, essential selves does not mean giving up on any sense of ethics, but instead, makes it "possible to examine the contradictory elements of one's subjectivity without guilt or anxiety and yet with a sense of moral responsibility" (p. 71). The science teacher can still believe that teaching students to care and take action are most important, but recognize that her struggle to simultaneously produce herself as objective evaluator is located within discourses of educator which have produced her. Similarly, the passionate female environmental educator who vehemently believes that science will not save us, can look differently at her "decision" to call upon the discourse of science during her conference presentation. The female canoe trip guide, too, can acknowledge her desires to be both feminine and strong.

   The notions of subjectivity, category maintenance, positioning and desire help us recognize that being contradictory does not mean being hypocritical. By acknowledging that we are positioned within and constantly reposition ourselves within discourses available to us, that these discourses are often conflicting, and that each positioning holds power differently depending on the context, we can begin to give ourselves permission to be contradictory without as much pain or guilt. Additionally, we can start to recognize that where a discourse invests one with power, it produces desires which work to maintain it. Desire produced within the frameworks of white and male privilege, for example, maintains those frameworks of privilege (Kelly, 1997). While a critical perspective would examine who holds the power, who is oppressor and who is oppressed, a feminist poststructural stance asks how subjectivity is constituted through desire (Newbery, 2003) and what desires are enacted to hold the frameworks of privilege in place.[5] A feminist poststructural perspective would also examine the role of language in producing and maintaining privilege.

Agency

The notion of agency is also important to examine. Agency, as conceived by feminist poststructural theorists, is closely linked to the process of subjectification and involves a tension between speaking the self into different subject positions while simultaneously "being subjected to the meanings inherent in the discourses through which one becomes subject" (Davies,

2000a, p. 27). Poststructural subjects are constantly shifting and can change positioning within discourses, but cannot be agents outside of the discourses that produce them (see Butler, 1993). Neither are they individuals with independent consciousness who can exercise free choice, but rather are always produced through discourses available. Poststructuralist agency does, however, acknowledge that we may be able to take up discourses that disrupt hegemonic cultural narratives, and given that language and practice produce structure, words and actions can be turned against those very structures they produced (Davies, 2000a).

Yet agency cannot exist outside the discursive, since the object claiming (or claimed to be) exempt from discursive production will always require "prior delimitation" to establish itself outside of discourse (Butler, 1993, p. 11). This process of setting boundaries itself requires and occurs from within a discourse. We cannot escape its constitutive power. Freedom does not lie outside discourse, but in disrupting dominant discourses, and taking up unfamiliar ones. It is about seeing things that heretofore remained invisible in order to make them revisable (Davies, 2000b). By making visible structures, their effects, and ways in which structures are produced and regulated, we can begin to acknowledge that discourses are social constructions, not fundamental essences nor descriptive tools (Davies, 2000a), and thus are open to the possibility of change.

Taking Up a New Discourse

The process of talking up new discourses, however, is complex, and has significant implications for education. It is not enough to introduce students or teachers to counter-hegemonic discourses and assume they will adopt them (Barron, 1995). In environmental education, for instance, replacing the common resource management discourse with one that is more ecocentric does not mean that the students will take up the new discourse "as their own" (p. 117) since in many cases a more ecocentric discourse runs contradictory to cultural narratives that are powerfully producing the student as male, human, student, and so on. To follow this line of thought further, an ecocentric discourse which suggests "nature" has intrinsic value, challenges the desire to have mastery over the environment and to be a provider (both part of a masculinist, patriarchal discourse in which much of Western culture is deeply invested). An ecocentric perspective also challenges hierarchical dualisms that place individualism over holism, men over women, and humans over nature.[6] Since we are produced by the discourses available to us, taking up a new discourse means taking up new subject positions. This is not a rational linear process, and often never complete (Davies, 2000c).

Even if students have access to different cultural narratives, taking up discourses not considered normative requires social risk and careful negotiation (Whitehouse, 2001). For instance, asking students to engage in environmental

action projects may require them to take up subject positions they either do not have access to (McKenzie, 2004b, in press b) or which may strip them of power (Walkerdine, 1990). The acts of taking a stand and speaking out may challenge students' positioning as proper student or teen and thus position them as illegitimate Other in relation to their peers, parents, or teachers (Whitehouse, 2001). By reframing our thinking about change in these ways, we can begin to look more closely at the discursive barriers that may be getting in the way of our best attempts to do counter-hegemonic educational work, rather than continuing to blame students or teachers for lack of success (Sammel, 2004).

Feminist Perspectives

People frequently ask what is feminist about this work. A feminist stance brings a political agenda to poststructural theorizing (Davies & Banks, 1992; Lather, 2000, 2001; McKenzie, in press a; Weedon, 2004) and focuses on its reconstitutive possibilities. It works to expose power relations and oppressions associated with gender, race, class, able-bodied-ness, and sexual orientation, resisting claims that poststructuralism and its deconstructive practices are nihilistic, relativistic, non-agenic, amoral and lead to paralysis (Burr, 1995; Gough & Whitehouse, 2003; Kelly, 1997). By providing ways to examine socially available discourses and ways in which people take them up (Davies, 2000c), feminist poststructuralism opens up the possibility of change. Yet by demanding that we examine our complicity in maintaining social injustice (St. Pierre, 2000), it does not let us off the hook. "We are ethically bound to pay attention to how we word the world" claims St. Pierre (p. 484). By paying attention to our language/practices and making discourses visible, we can re-envision and revise what has hitherto been assumed natural or common sense and therefore unchangeable (Gough & Whitehouse, 2003; Kumashiro, 2004; Weedon, 2004) and begin to think the unthinkable (Britzman, 1995). For example, by naming gender as a social construction and troubling normalized notions of gender, we can open ourselves up to new ways of being a man or a woman. Similarly, by acknowledging that normalized notions of environmental education are not fixed, but have been socially constructed to support particular interests, we can begin the process of exposing that production and the interests it has served.

Feminist theorists who draw on poststructuralism also tend to embrace the materiality of the body and seek to make visible ways in which bodies are produced through discourse. To say that everything is constituted through discourse does not deny the materiality of bodies and non-living entities, but claims notions of that materiality and how we experience bodies are formed through discourses available. For instance, since bodily experiences are read through different discourses, men and women experience carrying a canoe

very differently (see Newbery, 2003). Read through the discourses of woman as physically weak and men as strong, solo portaging a canoe makes me a superwoman, while for a man it is simply doing what is expected. Within this discourse, for me there is no shame in not carrying; for a man, there often is. These kinds of understandings have significant implications for how we think about the ways we teach and what we assume to be students' experiences of our pedagogy. If we admit that experience and interpretation of experience is produced through cultural narratives, we can no longer draw on experience as a guarantee of truth or a guide to action (Weedon, 2004).

Troubling Knowledge Production

Once we let go of our desire for unitary subjectivity and acknowledge the constitutive role of discourses, including those of finding the truth, achieving mastery, and "pinning down" the subject once and for all, we open ourselves up to interrogating the ways in which we have been producing knowledge. Using a feminist poststructural lens, we can begin to see how knowledge produced under the auspices of positivism, interpretivism, and critical social science have been confined and confirmed by their own discourses. We can also see the social, political, historic, and economic influences that construct and define categories.

I am not claiming that feminist poststructural research necessarily produces better knowledge, but that it produces *different knowledge* and is based on different assumptions of what we can know. As Lather (2000) suggests, feminist poststructuralism does not aim for mastery or "victory narratives," but instead, is "a kind of self-wounding laboratory for discovering the rules by which truth is produced" (p. 305). It allows for different ways of knowing, includes the body as a site of knowledge, and questions the researcher as one who might ever know. By troubling the limits of knowledge, feminist poststructural research makes knowledge and its production the problem of inquiry. It aims for a "less comfortable social science" (p. 285), one that is undeniably political, but able to turn its gaze inward, examining its own discursive production.

Posing Research Questions

In closing, I would like to illustrate one way the assumptions and questions discussed above can play out in outdoor/environmental education research. To do so, I turn to the research questions I posed for my doctoral dissertation. My research explores the experiences, thinking, and philosophies of teachers in integrated high school outdoor/environmental education programs. Drawing on narrative inquiry, and working under modernist assumptions about the self, knowledge, and power, I began my doctoral studies asking:

- *What does it mean to be a teacher of an intensive interdisciplinary outdoor/environmental education program?* What do these teachers do? What is it like? What are the joys, frustrations etc. in teaching such a program?
- *Why do teachers of integrated programs choose to teach the way they do?* What are their motivations, beliefs, values and goals, their philosophies about teaching and learning, their relationships to the environment, etc.?
- *How did they get there?* What were the historical influences in their lives, including experiences, people, education and socio-cultural contexts, that led them to develop and teach an integrated program?

Influenced by poststructural perspectives, I am now asking different questions. Rather than looking for the meaning or essence of an experience, I am asking how particular meanings have been acquired and (re)produced in a specific place, time, and context. I want to know what discourses are at work, what they are doing (Wood & Kroger, 2000), and how they came to be; I am curious how they are being taken up by the teachers in my study, about their material effects, including the subjectivities they are producing, and how these subjectivities are enacted in teachers' talk, thinking, and practice. Also, given that power is not just invested in teachers' material and institutional positions, but also in the discourses through which they are constituted (Walkerdine, 1990), my research has become an investigation into the constitution, operation (see Scott in St. Pierre, 2000, p. 484) and effects of power (see Goodson, 1995; Middleton, 1992; Weiler, 1995). In sum, my research has become an examination of how environmental education that espouses change is taken up and enacted within conservative tendencies of public education. More specifically, I will examine:

- *how discursive framings of teaching, learning, and nature work to constrain and enable environmental educators*; and
- *how teachers' subjectivities have been produced by these framings*.

And, from a methodological perspective, I will also examine:

- *how narrative inquiry within a feminist poststructural framework can be useful in addressing these questions*.

Modernist positivist, interpretive, or critical assumptions would not have led me to these questions which foreground issues of power and relations among discourse, desire, agency, and the subject. My hope is to generate an analysis that "allows the description of socio-cultural discursive practices that would otherwise be absent from the environmental literature" (Gough & Whitehouse, 2003, p. 40). More specifically, I aim to generate more complex understandings of ways in which teachers are limited and limit themselves as they engage in environmental education, particularly in situations like my

research sites where the typically named barriers such as school subject boundaries, short class periods, and opportunities to work outside the concrete walls of the classroom, have been removed. Stay tuned for what happens next.

Notes

[1] Assumptions of postmodernity include incredulity towards metanarratives, challenges to the privileging of rational thought, notions of a fixed, unitary subject, foundationalism, and truth as correspondence.

[2] In the context of this paper, "we" refers to the readers of this paper, engaged in thinking about poststructural notions of the subject.

[3] See Rachel Carson (1965), *Sense of Wonder* for a powerful example of a discourse which, among others, has produced my subjectivity as an environmental educator.

[4] In her research with female canoe trip guides, Newbery (2003) observed a range of ways in which women who showed physical prowess were disciplined and disciplined themselves to undermine that strength through "displays of heterosexual attractiveness," thus reinscribing themselves as the weaker sex and re-establishing "normal" relations of power (p. 210).

[5] These poststructural questions would also be asked with a different notion of power in mind—one that is not held by individuals or institutions, but one that is fluid, moves in webs (Foucault, 1977/1995), and is accessible to all.

[6] See Barron (1995) for a discussion of the ways in which common discourses of male and female and of nature make it difficult for elementary school students to take up counter-hegemonic discourses of environmentalism.

Notes on Contributor

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