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Students & Staff Talking About Research (SSTAR)

On “Doing” a Foucaultian-Inspired Genealogy as an Ethical Care of the Self in Teacher Education

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Abstract: Jana Sawicki reported that after submitting her doctoral dissertation of Michel Foucault’s critique of humanism, she had the opportunity to attend portions of his (Foucault’s) lectures at the University of Vermont (See Martin et al., 1988). At one of his lectures, Sawicki informed Foucault that she had just completed her four-year doctoral study on how to appropriate his ideas to feminism.

I told him that I had just finished writing a dissertation on his critique of humanism. Not surprisingly, he responded with some embarrassment and much seriousness. He suggested that I do not spend energy talking about him and, instead, do what he was doing, namely, write genealogies (Sawicki in Macey, 1993, p. 450).

Foucault’s response to Sawicki raises important questions about how he viewed his own scholarly work, what he hoped for from his readers, and what he believed about the potential practical impact of the genealogy. In short, his response offers insight into Foucault’s pedagogical style (Osborne, 2008). The primary problem with Foucault’s admonition to Sawicki is his apparent unwillingness to supply relatively little guidance to his students on how to proceed to carry out a genealogical study. Foucault sprinkles methodological points and precautions throughout his extensive oeuvre, but neglects to give a methodology or a historiography (Ball, 2013; Ball and Tamboukou, 2003; Baker, 2001; Donald, 1992; Hunter, 1994; Lesko, 2001). Instead, he trusts his readers to find their own way in the genealogical field. The purpose of this paper is to argue that the genealogy for Foucault engendered a certain on going care of the self. Completing a genealogical study inspired and induced a practice of self-fashioning. One in which fostered ways of escaping the self, producing ecstatic thinking, and moments of freedom (Bernauer, 1990). This paper explains how the genealogical analytic was a practice of freedom for Foucault by examining his own studies, and by describing how completing a book-length genealogical study precipitated an on-going self-fashioning. The presentation concludes by claiming that genealogies produce fictions and fictionalize the self and by offering avenues for research in the field of teacher education.