

BABES IN THE CLASSROOM: REFLECTIONS ON ACCOMMODATION

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This narrative describes the influences that personal and social work values can have in determining how a college professor resolves dilemmas of accommodation that arise when students bring their infants and young children to college classes. The article discusses the impact of the reduction of childcare assistance available to college students as a result of provisions of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 and the new opportunities provided through the Child Care Access Means Parents in School Program for expansion of on-campus childcare services.

Soon after becoming an assistant professor in a baccalaureate social work program four years ago, I realized that neither my experiences as a student nor my experiences as a social worker had prepared me for the accommodation dilemmas I now face when my students bring their children to class. My university does not offer on-campus childcare services. This article discusses my reflections on the contextual and affective difficulties inherent in one professor's efforts to provide classroom accommodation of students that do not have adequate childcare arrangements. The issue of childcare, as a needed student support service is discussed, as well as the availability of federal funding to support universities in the development of support services that allow student parents to access high quality child care while they attend college classes.

The Perspective Underlying my Reflections

Prior to becoming an academician, I spent twenty-three years as a social worker in public and private sector agencies. My experiences included direct service, management, and administration. I worked within the mental health and criminal justice fields of practice. In these settings no one brought their children to work. Apparently the prohibition was implicitly understood because the practice was not addressed in any of the agency

policies and procedures manuals that governed my employment at various social agencies. Although I am aware of a trend within some smaller private companies to accommodate new mothers by allowing them to care for their infants in their offices while working, such practices are not likely to become much wider spread.

My experiences in the student role also failed to provide me with a frame of reference for the management of babes in the classroom. None of my fellow undergraduate or graduate students ever brought a child to the classes that I attended. During my doctoral studies in the late 1980s and early 1990s when a study group was scheduled at the home of a student with children, that student always arranged for childcare in order to avoid distractions from the child. Children were not even a factor during my undergraduate days at the close of the 1960s and the early 1970s. I was typical of most "traditional" students: young, naïve, and unencumbered by marriage or children. My student role began as a kindergartner in Georgia and continued uninterrupted for nineteen years until I completed my master's degree in Ohio. My academic life in those days was a happy-go-lucky good life. The nostalgic appeal of that wonderful period, coupled with a desire to have a direct impact in shaping the educational experiences of our next generation of social work professionals, made me long to return

to the academic environment after a seventeen-year hiatus. By midlife, the desire was strong enough to propel me into a doctoral program, which was necessary preparation for a career as a social work educator.

When I began my doctoral course of study, my personal life was not as simple as it had been during my earlier years as a full-time student. I was employed in a stable and well-paid position. I had been divorced for some time and did not need to worry about securing the buy-in of a spouse. My adolescent daughters were reasonably independent, busy with their own interests, supportive of my ambitions, and not at all opposed to the thought of having a mother whose full attention was no longer focused on them. The graduate school that I attended had adopted a program for doctoral study that allowed me to schedule my course work around my full-time employment. I had enough vacation leave and money banked to cover both the time and financial demands of the program.

Great karma was emanating from every front. I found myself singing a familiar 1960s song of self-determination made popular by James Brown: "I don't want nobody to give me nuthin', just open up the door and I'll git it myself." Very quickly, however, I found that getting back into a theoretical and intellectual mode of thinking was not easy. During the first few months of my doctoral studies, I felt like a cross between an aging Alice in her Wonderland and a fearful Lioness on the yellow brick road to Oz. Fortunately, I was able to reconsolidate my personal identity and reactivate my brain cells quickly enough to earn my doctorate within four years.



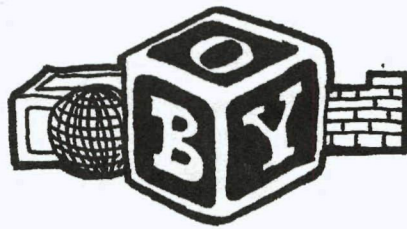
Reluctant to accept the reduction in earnings that would accompany my transition to academia, I delayed seeking a faculty position until four years after earning my doctorate. I arrived in my new position more than just a little out of touch with the current demographics and the associated needs of urban public college students. I had no frame of reference given that my undergraduate and graduate degrees were completed at private universities.

Profile of the University and Its Students

The enrollment at this metropolitan, Midwestern, state-supported university is approximately 15,700 full- and part-time students. The university distinguishes itself from other area schools by its "urban" mission and by being a university where almost all of its students commute to school from home. The University's urban mission is advanced by its policy of offering admission on a first-come, first-served basis to all graduates of the state's accredited high schools. The average age of our undergraduates is 26.5 and the average age of all students is 28.7, with the majority being above 25 years of age. Women students represent 55% of the student population. For the majority of our students, more than five years pass between graduating from high school and entering college. Between 1995 and 1999, the six-year graduation rate for cohorts of first-time, degree-seeking freshmen ranged from 25% to 30%. For undergraduate transfer students, the six-year graduation rate during the same period ranged between 41% and 46%. Our students' extended undergraduate matriculation is most often due to the need for remediation, financial problems, and other social problems that include those associated with balancing multiple social roles.

The courses that I teach are required for completion of the social work major. Consequently, all of the students enrolled in my

classes have achieved the designation of junior or senior. Our social work students range in age from 20 to 70. Over the most recent five years, women represented 70% to 86% of our baccalaureate social work graduates. Most social work students are also employed and head single-parent households. Despite this student profile, childcare services are not among the student support services offered to students attending this university.



Lack of On-campus Childcare Services

Although the growing trend among universities in the 1980s was to sponsor on-campus childcare, this university closed its childcare center in 1983 due to the "extreme stringency" of the university's operating budget. While the National Center for Education Statistics (1999) indicates that 56 percent of our sister four-year, postsecondary public institutions offer on-campus day care for the children of enrolled students, my university has not elected to reinstitute such a center. We are, therefore, among the minority of universities that do not offer on-campus childcare programs to enable parents to further their education. In 1993, the university trustees did revisit the childcare issue. However, they only decided to enter into a joint use agreement with an off-campus, privately owned and operated childcare facility. This off-campus childcare center offers care to children ages 18 months to 5 years during the traditional hours of Mondays through Fridays from 7:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. The center charges students fees of \$132 to \$142 weekly, \$29 to \$32 daily, or four dollars per hour. This arrangement does not accommo-

date the needs of evening students, weekend students, students with infants, or low-income students. This day care facility is licensed to accommodate only 24 toddlers and 54 preschoolers. In the summer months, the program does expand to accommodate 14 children at the kindergarten to third grade age level. This center may accommodate the needs of some faculty. However, due to its limited operational hours, fee schedules, and limited slots, it does not meet the needs of most student parents. Although many of our students had previously been able to secure on-campus day care services while taking classes at three of the two-year community colleges that feed students into this university, once they transfer to this university, these services are no longer available to them.

The Professor's Dilemma

When the student has no childcare for her child, she will bring her child or children to class. Since I began teaching at this university, at least once each semester one or more students arrive at the classroom with children in tow. I consulted colleagues about their experiences with the children of students and learned that they face similar challenges. I was informed that I must determine how to manage these classroom situations. Perhaps because the university does not offer students any real assistance in obtaining childcare, it has not established any policies regarding children attending classes with their parents. Rather, the responsibility for the management of these situations is deferred to each instructor. Instructors are to detail their policies regarding classroom behavior in a section of the course syllabi for each class section offered.

Although I provide a written statement within my course syllabi that clearly addresses a laundry list of prescribed classroom behaviors, I have yet to develop a policy regarding children in the classroom. Each time a parent brings a child into my classroom, I feel con-

fronted by a dilemma. Should I ignore, support, or resist the child's presence?

Appeasing Five Constituencies

After reflecting on the reasons why I have not banned babies and children from my classes, I recognized that my conundrum is consequent to my efforts to accommodate the needs of five constituencies. First, I am concerned about meeting the needs of the degree-seeking student mother. Second, I recognize that I must be responsive to the needs of all students enrolled in the course. Third, I am sensitive to protecting the welfare of the child. Fourth, I am aware of the enrollment and retention concerns of the university, as well as its desire to be perceived by the community as an institution that is easy to access and responsive to the needs of non-traditional students. Last, I must maintain classroom decorum that is conducive to my teaching style as well as to my own needs and effectiveness as the instructor. As I contemplate these dilemmas, I am aware that my thinking is influenced by both my personal history and values as well as by my social work professional values. As a result of these personal and professional frames of reference, I am burdened by sensitivity to some issues that might not necessarily factor into the thinking of other professors at this university.

Empathic Connections to Student Parents

As a social worker, I belong to a profession that has a defined body of values and ethics that shapes my worldview and behavior in human interactions. Part of my obligation to students is to model these values and ethics. My personal values and experiences also strongly influence how I understand and deal with students. I am a single mother, as are the majority of my social work students. I strongly identify with the struggles of my parenting students. Because most social work majors are women, these student parents are

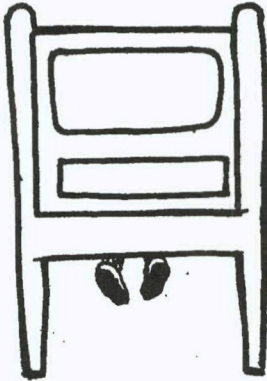
almost always mothers. As is most common in our society, these student mothers carry the greater responsibility for childcare arrangements rather than the fathers. Consequently, when childcare becomes a problem, the responsibility for the resolution generally rests with the mother.

I empathically connect with these student mothers as a result of my own experiences balancing the roles of social worker and single mother. However, I must often remind myself that my experiences as a student were very different from the experiences of the students that I now teach. I was advantaged by desegregation opportunities, affirmative action policies, and generous scholarship assistance while pursuing my own education. In contrast, my students are heavily dependent upon tuition loans and work-study commitments and often must maintain full-time employment. Yet my most recent experience as a non-traditional student has served to heighten my empathy for older students who have already learned a great deal from life experiences. I can identify with these students' frustrations upon entering the higher education arena and discovering that no credit is offered for the knowledge they have gained in the "school of hard knocks." In fact, these students may be socially and educationally stigmatized for such aspects of their personage, which may often include histories of abuse and neglect, substance abuse and addiction, incarceration, unwed parenthood, poverty, and dependence on welfare support. It is within this contextual and affective framework that I endeavor to handle the potential conflicts among these five constituent interests. I will share specific examples of these conflicts and my reflections upon them.

Invasion of the Babes

Generally, the student that arrives at my classroom with a child in tow has not sought my prior approval. These scenarios tend to unfold in several ways. I may arrive at the

classroom and notice a child seated at a desk or in an infant seat. The registered student generally does not approach me to request that her child be allowed to stay. I generally do not comment upon the child's presence. I cannot really explain why I take this avoidant approach of pretending not to see what I do in fact see. I do know that it does get easier with practice.



Recently, a social work major asked my permission to bring her seven-year-old son to each class session. She explained that she relies upon public transportation and that her son's summer childcare program closes at 6:00 p.m. My twice-weekly class was scheduled to run from 4:00 p.m. until 5:50 p.m. It was clear to me that this student needed this accommodation. I gave her permission to bring the child to class, provided that his presence was not disruptive to her fellow students. During examinations, I kept her son engaged in quiet activity so as not to disturb the other students or his mother. Once he unwittingly facilitated an unplanned opportunity for me to demonstrate to the class a point that I was making about cultural differences in methods of redirecting children's behavior.

A student bringing her child to class troubles me less than discovering that a student has left her child unattended in a common area near the classroom. This arrangement does not work well for younger children or for children with special needs. When students elect to handle their childcare problem in this manner, invariably the child interrupts the class and seeks the attention of the mother. In some instances, however, this arrangement may work with older children.

The case of 11-year-old twin boys provides one example of older children being able to wait alone in the lounge area while their mother attended class. The youngsters were contented, quiet and self-disciplined, and they

occupied themselves with games and reading materials brought from home. They never required anyone's attention during class time. I developed a positive identification with their student mother, based on the presumptive opinion that these boys' behavior was a validation that my student was an excellent parent.

A third babe scenario was attended by a bit more drama. The scene begins with a clearly distraught mother arriving with her child in tow after the class session has begun. She plops the child down in a desk, removing his hat and coat with one hand and wiping his nose with the other hand. She then sinks into her own seat and looks at me with an exasperated plea. Although some of her fellow students' attention is clearly diverted by the late arriving entourage, I feel disinclined to interrupt the flow of the class session to address the presence of the child. I do not address the issue unless the extent of the distraction requires me to address it.

Each of these scenarios typically occurs as a result of some type of breakdown in the student's childcare arrangements. Perhaps the usual childcare provider cancelled. Or there may not be any accessible childcare resources available to the student who is taking evening, weekend, summer, or intercession courses. The student may not be eligible for assistance provided through Federal childcare funds. Further, The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 has served to make childcare assistance unavailable to low-income college students because the pursuit of higher education does not count towards satisfying the Act's work requirement (Snowe, 1997).

Regardless of which of these scenarios confronts me, I recognize that each student felt that her best available alternative for childcare was to have the child accompany her to class. When this happens, I feel rather like the hostess at a dinner party when invited guests bring along their uninvited friends with-

out calling ahead to warn the hostess or gain her consent. Being socialized to be a good hostess, I feel that I should be as gracious as possible and "make do." Like the dinner hostess, my class preparations are made based upon the registered students. Not all of my college-level lecture content and teaching materials could pass a "general audience (G)" rating. When such adult fare is planned, I do find my spine, take a firm position, and ask the student to take the child out. When such discussion occurs spontaneously, I leave it to the parent to deal with any questions the discussion might generate for the child.

Often as she appeals for my forbearance of the child's presence the student stresses her desire not to miss class sessions. Class attendance does impact a student's final grade. However, regardless of the nature of the appeal, my conscience is always pricked by my identification with the role conflicts inherent in her status as a non-traditional student. My experiences as a working parent certainly have included the distress associated with a failed childcare plan. In my current role as an educator, I want to make allowances for the differing needs of my students and I want to facilitate the success of each one. As a social worker, I want to assist each student to develop her highest potential and to ensure that she has equal access to a career in social work. I want to be supportive and non-judgmental of the student. For these reasons I almost always allow the child to stay, either by assenting or by declining to object.

The Erosion of My Empathic Responses

When the child is able to sit through class, causing only minor or no disruptions, I feel comfortable that all five of my general constituent concerns will be reasonably satisfied. However, when a baby starts crying or a young child gets restless, I am forced to make a decision that is going to displease one or

more constituents. On these occasions, I have observed that I become judgmental in my view of the student as a mother. One insidious creep to judgment comes when, based perhaps upon a single observation, I engage in a highly subjective analysis of the student's parenting skills. I begin to reflect upon my experiences in managing the behavior of my own children (now young adults) in public settings. As a single parent, I, like many of my students, had a very limited informal childcare support network. My own children had to accompany me to many professional and civic meetings where no other children were present. Of course, *my recollection* leads me to feel cocksure that I trained my children to behave properly and thus I was able to take them with me almost anywhere I went without infringing upon any other adults who might be present. I was reared within the context of a traditional Southern African American extended family and these experiences heavily influenced my own ideas about childrearing techniques. I frequently ask myself: "Why can't these young mothers control their children as I did my own?" After all, is it not true that "good" parents can effectively control their children at all times? These factors, perhaps in combination with my current stage of life development as an "empty nester," serve to reduce my tolerance of behavior in children that many others now consider to be acceptable.

I could excuse my thoughts as simply selective memory or I could claim to be experiencing "senior moments," but of course I know that I am being inexcusably ethnocentric and judgmental. I am blaming the victims. These student mothers put me in positions that force me to own a decision that is indeed mine to make but which I would prefer not having to make. I have to consciously work in order to achieve the level of tolerance and understanding that I feel I should *naturally* have consequent of my position, professional training, values, and ethics.



Modern technology, i.e., the student mother's cellular telephone, can bring children into the classroom even in instances when the children are not physically present. I view the cellular phone as America's new number one device of nuisance, now that smoking inside public buildings is largely banned. I refuse to own one. The ringing of telephones in class, with their nauseatingly "cute" melodies, is an annoyance that I have chosen not to forebear. I have added the ringing and use of cell phones to my printed list of proscriptive classroom behaviors. I recognize these phone calls are for some students a vital link to latchkey children during times when adequate adult supervision is unavailable or when emergencies arise. However, I do feel that the needs of both the student and her child could be adequately met if calls were made and received before or after classes or during break times.

Safeguarding the Rights of Other Students

The rights of the other students enrolled in the course must take precedence over the needs of the parenting student, especially when the visiting child is not able to exhibit the necessary classroom decorum due to physiological, developmental, or psychological reasons. I am sure there are students who object to the presence of children in the classroom, but none has ever taken the social risk of verbalizing an objection. It is my responsibility, as the instructor, to ensure that these students' rights are safeguarded. I consciously stay attuned to students' nonverbal expressions, noting any indication that the presence of a child in the classroom is bothersome. The student mothers are seldom oblivious to the disruptions caused by their children. Most mothers gently escort their children out of the classroom without my having to instruct them to do so.

Generally, I have observed that fellow

students identify with and desire to accommodate the needs of their peers. Many times the students are more aware than I will ever be of the nature and extent of the problems that caused the student to bring the child to class. In one such instance, I observed that the same infant arrived at the classroom fairly regularly but was brought in variously by four different women. It was several weeks before it was clear to me which of the students was the mother. The other women were part of an informal cooperative on-campus day care service for the infant's mother. Based upon their availability, they helped the mother by taking turns caring for the infant throughout the day. However, they all had my class at the same time and this common scheduling made it necessary that the infant be brought to class.

The child usually slept through the class sessions; with two notable exceptions. The first incident occurred during one of the peer evaluations of my teaching. These evaluations are one of the requirements of my tenure review process. I had prepared the class and students were exhibiting their best student behaviors. I was skillfully employing all the techniques known to modern pedagogy when the baby awakened and began to co-lecture. The mother and child quickly exited without any direction on my part. The occurrence of this brief disruption by the child was noted in my teaching evaluation. Although the comments were supportively and empathically phrased, I felt some anxiety upon seeing the incident recorded in print. I wondered how the departmental and college peer reviewers, and ultimately the dean, might view my allowing children to be present in my classrooms. The second incident occurred when the infant began to cry during an examination session, perhaps in response to her mother's test anxiety. The other anxiety-laden students, being too big to cry themselves, immediately shot daggers at the mother. Fortunately, there was a vacant adjacent classroom to which I

suggested that mother and child make a hasty retreat. Consequently, the mother and her fellow students were able to complete their exams without anyone committing homicide or *hara-kiri*.

Beyond the Campus Classroom

The problem of childcare for social work student mothers can also extend beyond the campus classroom. A critical component of social work education is the field practicum. Most of our students must balance their practicum requirements with full-time or part-time employment, other coursework, and family responsibilities. The most unpleasant conflict that I have experienced with a student concerning the presence of her young child actually occurred at a field practicum agency. I had come to the agency in my role as field liaison. A meeting had been scheduled for the purpose of developing the student's learning contract. When I arrived for my appointment with the field instructor and the student, I observed a child trying to answer an agency telephone while in an unoccupied office. It quickly became apparent that this was the student's child. The student indicated that she brought her preschool-aged child to the agency because the child had a medical appointment later that day. The student had not sought prior approval from her field instructor to bring the child to the agency. My assessment of the situation was that the student had exercised poor judgment and inadequate problem solving in planning, given her multiple responsibilities. She had not successfully balanced her requirements as a mother with those of her student role. At the time of our scheduled meeting, the student instructed her child to wait outside of the conference room. As could be expected, the child was at the door almost as soon as it was closed, requesting to be escorted to the restroom. The student was expressively annoyed but did take the child to the restroom. Although she returned to our meeting without her son, the child was soon

at the door again. When the exasperated student began to raise her voice at the child, I intervened and suggested to the student that the child might be more comfortable remaining in the conference room while we met. Initially the mother was not inclined to accept my suggestion, however she became persuaded by the field instructor and me to relent. When the child came in, I modeled behavior that I hoped would set an appropriate tone for both mother and child. I explained the purpose of the meeting to the child in developmentally appropriate language. I told him how I wished for him to behave. I gave the child a pad of paper and a pencil. The meeting was not very long, as the student had not prepared for her role in the conference. The child was well behaved and at the conclusion of the conference relished in the praise he received from me. In this instance, the incident of the student's bringing the child to her field placement was one of a series of progressively serious problems that ultimately resulted in the student's dismissal from the program. However, the student did not go quietly. Rather, she filed a grievance against me, stating that I had treated her with prejudice and failed to appreciate the necessity and priority of her efforts to take proper care of her child. Although her grievance was dismissed, somehow I did not feel better. Yet even after this very unpleasant experience, I am still not inclined to make a rule that unilaterally bars children from my classes.

Reflection Increases Understanding

As I reflect upon these situations, I have come to realize that in trying to be supportive of students, I may at times be skidding down a slippery slope towards enabling the student to delay developing the problem-solving skills necessary to satisfactorily resolve personal issues. As a supporter of students, I try to provide what Kegan (1982) refers to as a "bridging environment" for each student (p. 186). I recognize that students who are car-

rying babes along with their textbooks can be expected to struggle. Such students need time and support to develop the problem-solving skills necessary to achieve the sense of psychological and lifestyle balance that become necessary for the effective management of their student role. This view is supported by Madden (2000) in his observation that "even a junior-level student who is absorbed with personal issues [will commonly have] difficulty in class and field placement. With support, however, many of these students gain the ability to manage their own issues..." (pp. 145-146).

I feel that I should do my best to offer "bridging" support to students, whether working with students in my role as their classroom instructor or as their field liaison. I have allowed students to bring their children into my classrooms. How then can I, when functioning in the capacity of field liaison, justify becoming critical of students' judgment if they show up at their field practicum with children in tow? The field practicum courses are required for social work majors. However, field instruction is not conducted within the more casual university environment. Rather, field instruction is conducted in a host social service agency that maintains a professional decorum. Students are required to spend between sixteen and twenty hours each week during the semester at an assigned agency in order to learn the practical application of social work theory and interventions. By contrast, students spend only three to four hours per week in class for each course. I am beginning to think that I should seize every opportunity, whether in my role as a classroom instructor or as a field liaison, to prepare students in our pre-professional program to better manage their personal issues and to conduct themselves in a manner that would be expected of professional employees. Students need to be assisted early in this program of study to effectively problem solve and negotiate systems so that both the care require-

ments of their children and their own career objectives are met.

The Dilemma of the Child's Best Interest

I also must consider the welfare of the child in weighing my decision about whether to allow him or her to stay in my classroom. Student mothers have brought children who were clearly ill to class; often the student was equally ill and/or very exhausted. In such instances, it is easy to anticipate that little learning would take place but that quite a few germs would be circulated. In these instances, cloaked in the ardor of humanitarianism and playing the role of "the kind and wise grandmother," I experience no dilemma. As quickly as possible, I excuse the parent and encourage her to take the child home or for medical attention. This protects not only the welfare of mother and child but also the health and welfare of the other students and me. Everyone is happy.

I recognize that my position on sick children may run counter to contemporary trends among parents in the workplace. For example, a report from the Bush White House indicated that Vice President Cheney's press secretary had "her sick two-year old daughter sit in on three vice-presidential interviews, waiting until [her mother] could take her to the doctor for her ear infection and fever" (Williams, 2001, p. 7-B). I believe the Vice President should have insisted that his press secretary take her child for medical assistance rather than remaining at work while the child possibly was getting sicker and certainly spreading her germs to others.

Another value-laden dilemma involving the welfare of the child occurs when I am cast in the role of "censor." In that role, I feel a responsibility to assist the parent in developing an appreciation of the reality that some college-level lecture content, discussion, and films could be rated as "Parental Guidance Suggested" (PG). When confronted with this

situation, I make it a point to conduct the discussion about a need for parental guidance in open classroom. I indicate to all of the students what my thoughts are about the importance of parental screening of what children hear and view and what factors I consider in reaching a decision regarding the child's presence. A parent occasionally disagrees with me, but I always advise the parent at what point I will be requesting that she leave with her child. In all instances, the parent has taken the child out. Perhaps compliance generates from concern by the mother that she will be judged negatively as a mother. I do view these discussions as consciousness-raising opportunities for all students and not just for the focal student mother.

Occasionally, a child in class becomes a delightful presence. I had one twelve-year-old who regularly attended classes one summer. He enjoyed the content and looked forward to listening to the students' discussions when permitted to stay. His most favorite class session was the viewing and discussion of the classic film, *Lord of the Flies*. The youngster was, however, very agreeable to leaving the classroom when I conveyed that any day's material would not be age-appropriate. I must admit that I viewed this boy's interest as very refreshing. However, this child had two younger siblings who always needed to sit out of the classroom. Their student mother frequently had to leave the classroom to attend to the pairs' behavior in the common area. Since it never appeared to occur to this mother to seat herself near the door, at times she was as disruptive in her leaving and returning as was the children's activity.

When by the middle of the summer semester this student mother had not made an alternative childcare arrangement for her three children, I engaged her in a brainstorming process. My goal was to assist her in resolving her childcare crisis. Despite our best efforts to generate alternatives, I had to finally acknowledge that she truly had no support sys-

tem. She would have to drop the course if I did not allow her to bring the children. I was aware that she was trying to graduate before the expiration of her family's welfare eligibility.

Although I truly hope not to be confronted with making such a decision again, I do not regret deciding to allow this student to bring her children to class. My decision was based on three factors. First, it was clear to me that her classmates wished to help her and did what they could to accommodate the children's needs. The students brought treats and games for the kids, and chatted with them before the start of each class session.

Second, from my position as a social work educator, I felt an obligation to provide the support she needed to remain enrolled in my class. I am very much aware that under The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996, recipients of funds through the Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) Act are being discouraged from completing higher education. TANF allows States to count only one year of education as "work" (Sturnick, 1999). The negative effects of this Act on students who are seeking higher education are documented. According to an August 1998 report of the American Council on Education's Office of Women in Higher Education:

Since the 1996 federal welfare reform law went into effect, thousands of recipients have had to withdraw from higher education because they do not have the time or other resources to meet the new work requirements and carry out their school obligations at the same time (Hoffman, 1998, p. 1).

I certainly believe that this young mother would stand a better chance of sustaining her family without public financial assistance if she were to complete her Bachelor of Social Work degree. As reported in analyses of the

1990 Bureau of the Census data: 1) the average income of employed high school graduates was just under \$18,000, 2) workers with one to three years of college earned an average of \$24,000, and 3) workers who had college degrees earned an average of \$31,000 annually.

The third factor that figured into my decision to accommodate this student and her babes was deeply personal. This young woman's struggle to achieve a professional degree reminded me of my mother's struggle to earn her undergraduate degree in elementary education while balancing the roles of wife and mother of four elementary school-aged children. As there was no local college in our town, my mother took the majority of her coursework through the local extension campus program. However, she was required to complete her final year "in residence." In order to allow my mother to complete her degree, my parents had to temporarily disband our family. She moved to the nearest college town, taking with her my two brothers because she knew she'd have no childcare and they'd have to occupy themselves after school on the playground while she was in her classes. She viewed such an arrangement as too risky for girls, so she placed my sister and me under the protective care of our maternal grandmother. Our father remained in our home, working and renting out the rooms in order to generate the funds needed to pay my mother's college tuition. My mother was able to achieve her goal largely due to the support of my father and grandmother. My student had no such support system.

The Dilemma of Maintaining Enrollment and Retention

Every faculty member and staff person working for any university is aware of the importance of recruiting and retaining students. Institutions of higher learning are engaged in a vigorous and very open competition for students. Data reported by the states of New

York and Massachusetts indicate that the implementation of The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 has already had a devastating impact on the postsecondary enrollment of welfare recipients (Hoffman, 1998; Sturnick, 1999). My university is also facing the additional challenges of severe financial stress due to decreased government subsidies, limited alumni contributions, and significant unanticipated expenses stemming from the introduction of a campus-wide computer software system. Despite these fiscal challenges, the university must keep tuition affordable for its target pool of students. We are very concerned about maintaining student enrollment as tuition and state subsidies represent our bread and butter. At the departmental level, the social work budget is based upon the number of majors we have and the number of students we can retain as full-time enrollees from semester to semester.

Research has demonstrated that student parents with childcare have higher graduation rates, have higher retention rates, and have a higher grade point average (National Coalition, 2001). Therefore, the provision of on-campus childcare would be an excellent recruitment and retention strategy. However, it is unlikely that such services will be instituted at this university due to fiscal constraints, lack of facility space, and liability and management issues.

The Fifth Constituent

I see myself as the fifth constituent, one who is experiencing the strain of trying to please many masters. As a junior, yet-to-be-tenured faculty member, I strongly identify with my university's concerns. I have a vested interest in making sure that the student grapevine conveys positive communications about my classes so that students will sign up for my course sections and write positive evaluations of my teaching. I also have a vested interest in helping to ensure that students' de-

mand for classes stays high so that I can remain employed. Sometimes I feel as if I should have taken instruction in the art of tightrope walking.

I must struggle to avoid giving short shrift to my own feelings about having children in my university classes. My elementary and secondary educational experiences occurred during the age of the "closed classroom." During that period, every classroom had four sturdy walls, a ceiling, and a door that remained closed. I was taught that all students had a responsibility to maintain a level of order that promoted an atmosphere in which all could learn. A large component of such an environment was understood to be silence. At home I was encouraged to select a quiet atmosphere when doing homework or studying; there were to be no distractions from radio, telephone, television, or stereo. This early conditioning places me at a disadvantage in many contemporary learning environments. I experience cognitive dissonance when placed in a classroom that is noisy or in which others are behaving in a distracting manner. I must admit to being rather easily distracted by such environmental factors and to having a low natural threshold for selectively disregarding simultaneously delivered auditory and visual cues. Many of my students, however, were educated in "classrooms" open to the sights and sounds of the areas adjoining their classrooms. These are students who cannot study without having some steady form of stimulating external auditory input. What I find to be a distraction often is desirable or of no consequence to these students. While I do cater to my own preferences in my personal space, I am aware that the classroom is not my personal space but rather a learning environment that should be structured to meet the educational needs of the students. As I abhor the stereotypical image of professors as persnickety old codgers, I have consciously worked to strike a better balance between my needs and the needs of my students. I have also

striven to increase my ability to understand and work through minor disruptions with good humor and without suffering a reduction in my effectiveness as a teacher.

Conclusion

My dilemma would be most satisfactorily resolved by the development of a range of university-sponsored childcare services for use by student parents. To provide these types of student support services as a matter of university policy would shift the issue of on-campus childcare away from professorial discretion and back to its proper place. The university cannot continue to declare its urban mission while standing firm in its position that it is fiscally unable to sponsor on-campus childcare services. To continue this stance places the university in a position of turning a deaf ear to the needs of students who must care for their children while attending this university.

My university is eligible to participate in but has not applied for the funds that became available with the passage in October of 1998 of the Child Care Access Means Parents in Schools Act (CAMPUS Child Care Act). This Act amends the 1965 Higher Education Act and authorizes \$45 million nationally to support the startup or operation of campus-based childcare services. The purpose of the law is to support the participation of low-income parents in postsecondary education through the provision of childcare services (H.R.6, SEC.410, Subpart 7, SEC. 419N.). This university should join the ranks of 87 other colleges and universities in helping low-income student parents attend postsecondary schools by providing them with campus-based childcare services.

The University has failed to accurately address its students' need for on-campus childcare. No professor should have to accommodate babes in the classroom, except for laboratory purposes. The institution's failure to take leadership and ownership in this

critical component of student support services serves to shift the issue from its rightful position as a university policy making function to an ill-placed position as a classroom management function.

However, the current reality is that babes in the classroom will continue to be a classroom management function. I will not be able to look to someone else to resolve this problem for me. I do not expect that I will ever develop written proscriptions against children in my classrooms. I will, however, in the process of my initial contracting with students, include a discussion of my preference that children not accompany parents to class. I will also state clearly my expectation that requests for individual exceptions must be discussed and resolved with me in advance of the start of the class period. I will continue to do what I can do to balance the needs of the five constituents impacted by my decisions regarding accommodation of babes in the classroom. In a small way, achieving this balance may help my students to better understand and deal with the conflicts in values and ideals that they will surely encounter when they enter the social work profession. It is my expectation that as they learn to become effective advocates, they will help to shape childcare policy changes that will decrease the need for student parents to bring their babes to the classroom.

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