
Response to the Presidential Address

ASSERTING THE POSSIBLE:
GUNZENHAUSER'S "ETHICS OF THE EVERYDAY"

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In his Presidential Address, "Ethics for the New Political Economy: What Can It Mean to Be Professionally Responsible?" Michael G. Gunzenhauser defines, names, and proposes a professional ethics for educators: an *ethics of the everyday*.¹ Neither an ethics of collective action nor an ethics of protest, ethics of the everyday concerns how human beings daily treat each other and, specifically, in the context within which Gunzenhauser writes, how educators daily regard and behave toward each other, students, parents, and school staff. Practicing ethics of the everyday within schools and other public educational settings does not mean working to transcend school, district, state, and national structures but transforming one's individual practice so to assert the possible while attending to dangers, especially the eminent danger of foreclosing students' and one's own possibilities. Asserting the possible means transforming children's daily lives in schools—their learning and social experiences, their claiming knowledge and educations—and means creating a facilitating environment² through which children reclaim themselves as individuals and individuals in community. Educators' first step toward embracing Gunzenhauser's ethics of the everyday is a step many educators neglect, ignore, or never think about at all, a step even teacher educators fail to take, work through with their students, and require their students to formulate: their philosophies of teaching and of education. Through formulating a philosophy that grounds one's teaching practice in ethics of the everyday, teachers would be bound to include this element of possibility where Gunzenhauser argues power, politics, relationships, and ethics converge.

Originally theorizing his ethics of the everyday using a Foucauldian frame,³ Gunzenhauser now at once retains that frame, questions it, and builds an outer frame or at least a neoliberal economic context through which to

¹ I thank Stacy Otto for her thoughtful critique and helpful feedback during the writing of this article-response and the copyediting process and for her continuing service to the educational community as journal editor.

² Donald Woods Winnicott, *The Maturation Processes and the Facilitating Environment: Studies in the Theory of Emotional Development* (1965; repr., London: Karnac, 2005); Donald Woods Winnicott, *Home Is Where We Start From: Essays by a Psychoanalyst* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1986).

³ Michael G. Gunzenhauser, *The Active/Ethical Professional: A Framework for Responsible Educators* (New York: Continuum, 2012).

examine the ramifications of educators embracing neoliberal economic ideals rather than ethical ones, specifically the ethical ideals he names in his ethics of the everyday. Charging educators to base their practices on possibility,⁴ an act that in itself would resist normalization and establish conditions to facilitate students' resisting it, Gunzenhauser asks educators to build their professional lives around possibility. Gunzenhauser reads contemporary accountability policy rhetoric emerging from *No Child Left Behind (NCLB)* through the Foucauldian lens of normalization, especially normalization through one "means of correct training,"⁵ the examination (comprised of hierarchical observation and normalizing judgment),⁶ and identifies educators' professional ethics gone awry as one side effect of the normalizing process. Within this context some stumbling blocks or at least "dry spots" become visible in Gunzenhauser's ethics of the everyday. First, Foucault's history and analysis of normalization is incomplete when considering US institutional power structures partially because Foucault grounds his analysis in French history and culture. While Foucault's theory and analysis perfectly anticipates and exposes disciplining mechanisms at work in US public schools, the contemporary normalizing process in US schools impinges upon teachers and students from even more angles than Foucault imagines or identifies.

Neither Foucault nor Gunzenhauser consider how students, parents, and community use Foucault's means of correct training:⁷ hierarchical observation to identify teacher-teaching abnormalities or pathologies; judgment and punishment to normalize or cure; examination to achieve unobstructed visibility to know and to assure "the hold of the power that is exercised over them."⁸ That is, students, parents, and community members exercise disciplinary power from every angle to make docile, normalize, and control teachers even as they normalize institutions' disciplining structures themselves to create particular kinds of school cultures, teacher-subject/objects, student-subject/objects, and adult citizen-machines. Students' complaints about the amount and/or difficulty of work; complaints about rules of behavior, excuses for having breached them, and antics to escape consequences for their actions; their demands for attention; their lying to parents, teachers, and principals often transferring blame from themselves to teachers all result in punishment for teachers (not students) ultimately disciplining teachers into compliance. Similarly, parents registering complaints about these same things, "saving"

⁴ For more about possibility and resisting normalization within public schools, see Virginia Worley, "Revolution Is in the Everyday: *Métissage* as Place of Education," *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education* 27, no. 4 (2006): 515–531.

⁵ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage Books, 1977), 170–194.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 184–194.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 170–194.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 187.

their children from the consequences of breaking rules, normalize teachers into treating everyone not equitably but equally: everyone does the same things; everyone “gets” rather than “earns” good grades; everyone gets rather than earns awards. Coaches too work to normalize teachers and the system itself by pressuring teachers to comply with coaches’ demands concerning athletes or be punished thereby driving the way disciplining mechanisms work to normalize and control teachers within US public schools. Principals, coaches, parents, and students thereby actively keep teachers in line. After adding the prime mover—federal disciplining mechanisms—and emphasizing the examination as means of correct training, one comes to Gunzenhauser’s critique that accountability for test scores currently conflates with responsibility for children and therefore with educators’ professionalism and professional ethics.

Gunzenhauser defines accountability as a distortion of teacher responsibility. I suggest that it is not so much a distortion as a different focus. Accountability is teacher- and teaching-focused; responsibility is student- and learning-focused. Accountability concerns *how* and *why*; responsibility concerns *meaning and value*. High-stakes accountability is non-human; responsibility is human. Examining high-stakes accountability as scientizing education and a distortion of scientific methods and truth claims illuminates these differences.

High-stakes accountability may not at first come to mind as scientizing education nor may scientizing education at first seem bad, particularly since one metaphor for teachers is “teacher as scientist”; one way of defining education is “education as science.” One proudly claims educational research and teacher education to be sciences. One is to apply the science one has learned from educational research and teacher training-preparation-education programs in one’s future classrooms—whether they be teacher education classrooms or public, common school classrooms. Teachers *do* science; teacher educators *do* science; educational researchers *do* science because only science holds value in the current political, economic, social, and school climates. The focus is not upon the learner and learning but on the teacher-scientist doing scientific teaching with mathematically measureable, accurate results that offer a single, straightforward interpretation of the knowledge claims built into the measurement instruments. Much of society and many administrators and educators allow themselves to believe in and value high-stakes accountability’s numerical shorthand, to believe that shorthand reveals the *how* and the *why*. Positivism underlies the design, purpose, implementation, and evaluation of high-stakes, end-of-instruction, benchmark, and high-school graduation exams. Positivist evaluation and positivist, high-stakes accountability instruments in particular are not designed with the individual in mind and not designed to sort out or reveal complexities.⁹

⁹ Virginia Worley, “Beyond Myths, Fetishes, and Checklists: Discovering Diversity’s Place in Education, Evaluation, and Accountability,” *Educational Studies* 47, no. 1

Quantitative data is meant to omit outliers, eliminate diversity, and control complexity by “weeding out” to reveal the norm. It is how one *treats* the data and the weight of that data’s ensuing knowledge claims that matter. High-stakes accountability means treating the data as infallible, interpreting it in a single way, using it as the only register—not even of students’ learning or success but of teachers’ teaching. It means vilifying teachers whose students do not all fit neatly within the norm and means pathologizing and warehousing ill-fitting students in the same way Foucault talks about separating, enclosing, and containing lepers.¹⁰ Dissociated from the students themselves, high-stakes accountability measures effectively render every student the same.

Interpreting this singular shorthand for understanding scientific, positivist knowledge claims also means investing this system, this equation, and their numbers with ability to exercise power to change the course of schooling, teaching, learning, curricula, and therefore public education as well as US presidential elections. Through the examination as the means of correct training, high-stakes accountability’s anonymous powers empirically observe (scientifically), judge, discipline, and punish in order to normalize and control far beyond school walls into all society.¹¹ Although dressed in the human garb of helping teachers teach effectively, accessorized with baubles glittering with caring for students, their learning, and their present and future well-being, high-stakes accountability measures are not human but part of the machine that separates knowledge and politics from ethics, teachers from teaching, learners from learning, teachers from students, and the *how* and *why* from *meaning* and *value*. Proponents portray high-stakes accountability measures as part of an irrefutable mathematical knowledge equation yielding a single interpretation that tells the *how* and the *why* that has become separate from and more powerful than meaning and value—and therefore amoral.

Thus, within the context of my redefining high-stakes accountability from a distortion of responsibility to the polar opposite of accountability in focus—from teacher- to student-focused from teaching to learning, from numbers to humanity, and from punitive to facilitating—Gunzenhauser’s “ironic effect” of the accountability policy no longer seems ironic because accountability does not concentrate on learners but on teachers teaching in a particular way and because it does not emphasize teachers’ or students’ learning to be responsible to and for themselves and others and then to be accountable to and for themselves and others. Being accountable to self and others based upon one’s responsibility to self and others may have high stakes,

(2011), 3–25; Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things* (New York: Random House, 1970); Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*; Michel Foucault, *This Is Not a Pipe*, trans. and ed. James Harkness (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983).

¹⁰ Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 198–199.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 170–194.

but those high stakes are typically self-selected and relationship-driven rather than imposed, numbers-driven, and punitive.

I move now to Gunzenhauser’s critique of educators conflating test-score accountability with professionalism and professional ethics. Gunzenhauser contends teachers are less responsible for students’ educational progress now than prior to *NCLB* because accountability policy has destabilized teachers’ notions of their own professionalism. While I agree these problems are philosophical ones that require educators to rethink the meaning and value of education, I nevertheless stumble over Gunzenhauser’s particular use of “professionalism” and “professional ethics,” for I maintain the meaning and value of education are neither logically nor causally related to professionalism and professional ethics; the meaning and value of education are not included in the concept “professionalism”; professional is not included within the concept “education.” Moreover, even now, in many circles, public school teachers do not have professional status since two years of post-baccalaureate training is the traditional requirement for one to move from occupation to profession. Furthermore, even without this sometimes-disregarded, traditional requirement, Gunzenhauser needs to define what he means by professionalism and professional ethics. Michael Davis, Professor of Philosophy, Illinois Institute of Technology, and Senior Fellow at the Center for the Study of Ethics in the Professions, defines a profession as

...a number of individuals in the same occupation voluntarily organized to earn a living by openly serving a *certain moral ideal* in a *morally permissible way beyond* what law, market, and morality would otherwise require. Professions organize all, or part, of a single occupation in a certain way.¹²

Thus, according to Davis, those sharing an occupation may choose to join together, serve a moral ideal beyond what society around them requires, and therefore create a profession. Building upon this definition of profession, Davis identifies professional ethics as “the special standards defining the (morally permissible) way the would-be profession is to pursue its moral ideal.”¹³ Davis, then, clarifies individuals in a given profession serve the same moral ideals; professional ethics concerns the standards for how individuals in the same occupation voluntarily come together to pursue those ideals.

For anyone not a member of the profession in question (or not thinking as members of that profession), professional ethics will seem a sort of social ethics—and the chief question will

¹² Michael Davis, “Five Kinds of Ethics across the Curriculum: An Introduction to Four Experiments with One Kind,” *Teaching Ethics* 4, no. 2 (2004): 8, emphasis added.

¹³ *Ibid.*

be whether [one] should allow such organizations or what restraints [one] should put on them.¹⁴

Using Davis's definitions as a framework for thinking about Gunzenhauser's ethics of the everyday, one realizes Gunzenhauser's first step—individual teachers creating their philosophies of education—should not be the first. One further ascertains that Gunzenhauser's assertion, an ethics of the everyday is not about collective action, also goes by the wayside, for if this ethics of the everyday is to be part of public school teachers' professionalism, part of their professional ethics, then educators must come together and collectively arrive at educators' moral ideals, the standards for how educators will realize these ideals, and how educators will examine special problems using the moral standards they have identified. Only after collectively deciding upon the moral ideals and standards for how to realize those ideals would individual teachers then build upon them first thinking through the meaning and value of teaching and of education—that is, thinking through their individual philosophies of teaching and of education—and then committing to what they have defined and assigned value by translating their philosophies into their everyday classroom practices. Gunzenhauser's ethics of the everyday—within which possibility is so important—belongs to the profession's moral standards upon which teachers would then build their individual philosophies.

I must therefore return to Gunzenhauser's original, Foucauldian lens for analyzing high-stakes accountability within the contemporary, US, neoliberal economy and Gunzenhauser's questioning his own attraction to Foucault's care of the self. After revisiting the last two volumes of Foucault's *History of Sexuality*,¹⁵ one can only observe Gunzenhauser's ethics of the everyday—in which possibility is key and in which individuals, relationships, and the public are critically important—does not conflict with Foucault's care of the self, for Foucault's method of inquiry into self care is “thinking with attitude”: “thinking with attitude . . . generates the conditions of possibility necessary for subjects to cha[ll]enge their identities,”¹⁶ in this case, their teacher-teaching identities. Thinking with attitude has two steps. Before ethical inquiry comes problematization—a deconstructive goal: “it is this process of

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 9.

¹⁵ Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, trans. Robert Hurley, vol. 2, *The Use of Pleasure* (New York: Vintage, 1990) and vol. 3, *The Care of the Self* (New York: Vintage, 1988); see also Michel Foucault, “On the Genealogy of Ethics: A Work in Progress” and “Polemics, Politics, and Problematizations,” in *The Foucault Reader*, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: Pantheon, 1984).

¹⁶ Moya Lloyd, “A Feminist Mapping of Foucauldian Politics,” in *Feminist Interpretations of Michel Foucault*, ed. Susan J. Hekman (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996), 244.

denaturalization—problematization—that grounds the politics of refusal”;¹⁷ “its aim . . . is to make facile gestures difficult, to render alien modes of thought and behavior that we accept as normal and everyday.”¹⁸ Thinking with attitude through problematization means critiquing “what [one is] saying, thinking, and doing.”¹⁹ Only after having questioned established truths and developed alternative accounts or critical analyses and coming to know not one but many truths does one come to the second part of thinking with attitude, ethical inquiry, through which Foucault experiments with the kind of relationship one ought to have with oneself, how one constitutes oneself as a moral agent, how one creates oneself as a piece of art, and how one creates opportunities to conceive and enter into positive subjectification—subjectification through which one empowers the self. While Foucault talks about self, self-creation, and moral agency, this self-creation and agency do not preclude relational factors. Creating the self may certainly include relationships and the public. After all, relationships with others greatly contribute to one’s care of the self, to one’s mental and emotional well-being.

Finally, in thinking about Gunzenhauser’s ethics of the everyday as a moral ideal for the teaching profession and opening possibilities for children as one of the ethical standards within this moral ideal teaching professionals would embrace and implement, I recall the ethical charge in place for teachers since ancient Greek times, the now legal and ethical charge to teachers and schools: *in loco parentis*.²⁰ *In loco parentis* is the ethical imperative for all schoolteachers, administrators, and “systems” to act in the place of good parents: harm no child. The idea of harming no child moves beyond physical harm to intellectual, emotional, mental, and psychic or “soul” harm. How is it that makers, proponents, and implementers of *NCLB* and its accompanying high-stakes accountability measures, policies, and procedures have not recognized their harming of children and children’s learning? Here is where philosophies of education are key—for what is the meaning and value of education, teaching, and teacher responsibility? What is the meaning and value of harming no child? To whom are education, teaching, teacher responsibility, and harming no child of value? For Gunzenhauser, answers to these educational questions of meaning at least include teachers asserting the possible in order to transform children’s daily lives in schools so children can

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Michel Foucault, “What Is Enlightenment?,” in *The Foucault Reader*, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984), 45.

²⁰ Blaine E. Hatt, “Heart In is Heart of Teaching,” *Ecclectica* 4 (2002), retrieved from <http://www.ecclectica.ca/issues/2002/4/hatt.asp>; E. Klein, *A Comprehensive Etymological Dictionary of the English Language* (Amsterdam: Elsevier, 1971), 501, 383; *The Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology*, vol. XI, ed. C. T. Onions (London: Oxford University Press, 1998).

claim themselves as individuals, individuals in community, and individuals able to move into the public world living his ethics of the everyday and spreading the message of possibility to those who may not know what possibility means. Answers to these questions of value at least involve teachers facilitating each student's creating his or her creative, educated self whose interactions with self, others, and the public are integral to self-creation and behaving well towards oneself and others every day.

Michael G. Gunzenhauser clearly challenges educators at every level to take action to transform children's daily lives in schools and thereby help today's children fashion themselves as people they want to become, to open themselves to futures they may not have known are possible, to become actors themselves who help others claim themselves, their educations, their possibilities.