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Professional Development Grant Final Report

Modern Language Association Convention

Vancouver, Canada

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ABSTRACT

I was awarded a professional development grant to fund travel to the 2015 Modern Language Association (MLA) convention in Vancouver, Canada. MLA is the principal professional associations in the United States for scholars in literature and language and its annual conventions is the largest and most important of the year, attended by over ten thousand participants.

I felt honored to have been selected to deliver a presentation on a panel arranged by the MLA Committee on Disability Issues and the Profession. The panel, entitled “The Scholar-Parent,” explored how academic life can enhance and complicate the experience of raising a child with special needs. In my paper, “Teaching and Learning from Pablo: Notes on Professing and Mothering the Special Needs Child,” I argued against the traditional conception of motherhood as affecting professional development negatively and suggested instead, generalizing from my own experience, that the intensive motherhood required by a special needs child may open avenues for modes of teaching and scholarship that are potentially more satisfying and more consequential than other, more traditional forms.

SIGNIFICANCE

The intersection of motherhood and academia has been the subject of several collections of essays in recent years, from Elena Evans and Caroline Grant’s *Mama Ph.D.* (2008) to Maria Castañeda and Kirsten Isgro’s *Mothers in Academia* (2013). Much less explored is the reciprocal relationship of disability and academic parenting. The panel, “The Scholar-Parent,” sought to redress this lack. I was especially interested to meet the chair, Rachel Adams, a well-known cultural historian and author of a memoir on her experience mothering a Down-Syndrome child.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Because of the Professional Development Grant I received, I was able to attend the MLA conference in Vancouver and deliver a presentation that was well received by the audience. Additionally, while at the conference, I attended several other panels and was inspired by a session on adoption narratives to start researching writing about the Guatemalan adoption experience, which at this point is completely untapped territory.

CONCLUSION

I found the MLA conference invigorating. I was pleased by the outcome of my presentation and the compliments I received from the panel organizer. I was equally excited about finding a possible new avenue of research in adoption narratives, whose investigation would allow me once more to express my dual identity of (adoptive) parent/scholar.

ATTACHED DOCUMENTATION

- Text of presentation, “Teaching and Learning from Pablo: Notes on Professing and Mothering a Child with Special Needs”.
- Power Point to accompany presentation.