

Opening Tensions: Stories of Difference, Dissonance and Discovery

DENNIS SUMARA & TAMMY IFTODY

University of British Columbia

Unless ... a word breathed by the hopeful or by writers of fiction. (Shields, 2002)

Existentialist, Marxist, or conservative, curriculum theories are all refusals of the common order. ... Predicated on loss, [they] replicate the rupture in human consciousness that strands us on one side, longing for the other. (Grumet, 1990, cited in Pinar et. al., 1995, p. 230)

One could easily replace the phrase “curriculum theories” in the above passage with the word “stories” and Grumet’s observation would still hold true. A good theory and a good story have much in common: Both consolidate, compel, and challenge what is believed to be true about the world. As do the papers in this issue of *JCACS*.

The first article, *Fragmenting Narratives: The Ethics of Narrating Difference*, by Darren Lund, Lisa Panayotidis, Hans Smits and Jo Towers explores the transformative power of narrative to unsettle and re-imagine curriculum and practice in teacher education. The conditions of fragmentation, precariousness and vulnerability first addressed by Butler (2004) provide the backdrop for four intersecting voices engaged in exploring the ethical tensions of narrating difference in a world where “the foundations for forms of representation, address, and action have become destabilized.” Collectively, the authors ask: How do we ensure that we are acting ethically, as teacher

educators and researchers, given the multiple “fracturing discourses” that are used to represent our work? Despite different positionings, each contributor shares a conception of difference wherein a “deep regard and responsibility for the Other” is necessary for ethical action.

Prompted by the desire to live ethically in the classroom, Panayotidis explores her tensions around the educational stories she shares with her students. She attempts to disrupt her own narrative practices by questioning not *why*, but rather *how* she tells them. How is difference “constructed and mediated” by the telling? Towers is also concerned with the ethics of narrating difference, but from a researcher’s point of view. Specifically, she considers the ethical obligations of “telling the story” of teachers work by exploring the tensions that emerge when the researcher realizes the power narratives have to not only represent others, but also to transform them. Lund provides an overview of antiracism research in Canada to argue that education for social justice requires fracturing the “narrative flow of a fragile national identity” characterized by “collaboration and consensus.” While these counter narratives may be unsettling, they are necessary to interrupt the indifference, and often complacency, that currently constrains anti-racism pedagogy.

Smits foregrounds the interconnectedness of these narratives by suggesting that each contributor is, in essence, caught up in the tenuous relationship between the self and the ethical aim (Ricoeur, 1992). For teacher educators, researchers, and curriculum theorists alike, the message is clear: how we gather the fragments matters.

In ‘*Let us say yes to who or what turns up: Education as Hospitality*, Jen Gilbert also takes up the ethics of difference, but this time through Derrida’s notion of hospitality. As a manifestation of difference, gayness typically enters education through controversy. In these cases, gayness is seen to stand outside, and even interrupt, the “ordinary work of teaching and learning.” Alternately, Gilbert draws out the social, political and psychical implications of welcoming gayness into public education through three contemporary examples: gay marriage, transgendered youth, and sex instruction. The question overriding all three examples is: Can education be hospitable? Building on the work of Derrida (2000), she defines hospitality as “a welcome, but one that resists idealization and risks ambivalence.” An ethics of hospitality suggests that such welcome cannot depend on the preconditions of comfort, understanding or knowledge. For this reason, Gilbert suggests that a “certain dream” of education must be relinquished—that is, the dream that “prejudice can be educated and identifications anticipated.” The challenge for curriculum is to “hold open the tensions” around gayness, thus allowing them to provoke the contesting conversations that are the foundation of hospitality. And as she puts it, this entails welcoming “whatever and whoever shows up.”

Anne Kinsella also takes up the notion of “holding tensions open” as a way of conceiving curriculum. In her article, *Poetic Resistance: Juxtaposing Personal and Professional Discursive Constructions in a Practice Context*, she explains that in both health care and education, notions of control, certainty, and measurable outcomes continue to influence research, practice and policy. This often means that the desire to form caring relationships with others that likely draws health practitioners and teachers towards their respective professions is silenced by a professional discourse that values objective ways of knowing and technical efficiency. With this irony in mind, Kinsella describes the technique of *poetic resistance* as reflection on practice through poetic form and offers a personal example of how it may be used as a mode of critical discourse analysis. Poetic resistance unveils the tensions created by professional discourses steeped in the language of accountability and evidence-based practice. Kinsella further argues that reflection on practice rooted in poetic form not only illuminates such tensions, but also evokes previously silenced experiences, creates new interpretations of practitioners’ life worlds, and thus may inform decisions about curricular design. To resist the hegemony of objectivity, Kinsella suggests health practitioners (and teachers) have a responsibility to tell the intimately subjective stories that represent the partiality of knowledge and ultimately give shape to the communities of practice to which they belong.

Not unlike Kinsella, Pauline Sameshima seeks new understandings and insights through the poetic form. Describing the relationship between reader and poem as a complicit one, she argues that poetry as research text troubles the boundaries of form, and in doing so, becomes a generative, rather than purely representational, space. In her poem, *A Household at the Shore: A Marshall McLuhan Metaphor*, she employs the tetrad figure (described as four points of change on a continuum) as a metaphor to represent the inter-relational and complementary melding of body, head, heart and spirit. Specifically, she seeks to “draw attention to the often ignored body, heart and spirit which are historically ‘othered’ by the head” and in doing so, reveal that the body speaks in ways that we must learn how to recognize. She suggests that attending to the *Acoustic Space* in which poetry dwells is one way of experiencing learning as dynamic, contingent, and ultimately dependent on the complicity between representational form and learner.

In *Art Interrupting Advertising: A Critique of the Educational Paradigms of ‘Lenny the Guinea Pig and Dora the Explorer,’* Alyson Huntly draws on complexivist thinking to explore how the ways in which we express our knowledge affect what can be known about the world, and she adds a hermeneutic twist. She draws on popular culture, specifically children’s television programming, to make the case that most of it is bound up by a metaphysical understanding of knowledge and knowing that in turn serves to perpetu-

ate the core assumptions of consumption-based educational structure. The popular *Dora the Explorer* is juxtaposed with the more “interstitial” program *Linny the Guinea Pig* to make the argument that imagination is necessary to interrupt the isolating effects of mass consumerism in Western society. In Dora’s world, knowledge is a possession and learning is sequential and measurable. This educational structure is built into the plot of each show. In Linny’s world however, possibility reigns. To illustrate this distinction, Huntly outlines a “hermeneutics of Linny,” highlighting that unlike Dora’s world, here knowing and learning are necessarily partial, temporal and contextual. There is no map to consult and no sequences to follow. While Dora “epitomizes the persistence of metaphysics,” Linny interrupts these “dead” assumptions by introducing engagement, imagination and possibility. Contrasting the ideologies of each program, Huntly presents both a compelling critique of Western society’s reluctance to abandon metaphysical attitudes, and a convincing case for curriculum as hermeneutic inquiry.

In *Learning the Ropes, Resisting the Rules*, Anna Kirova, Fauza Mohamed, and Michael Emme document and analyze the methodology of fotonovela as it was used to explore immigrant children’s understanding of the formal and informal curriculum of lunch time. As a research tool, the fotonovela is considered to have liberatory effects in contexts where “varying literacies create inequities and representational disparity.” Informed by a theory of power as it addresses the structure of adult-child relationships in institutional contexts like schools (Giddens, 1984; Foucault, 1979), the authors posit that the fotonovela format allowed the embodied nature of school rules to be represented along with the sometimes hidden contradictions between the “docile body” and the “true” intentions of the person who is embodying it. Identified as one of the most confusing routines facing new students, participants developed the *Lunchtime* fotonovela. Although the series of comic-like narratives were designed to introduce new students to the rules and routines of the school, researchers found that they also created spaces for questioning, and even resisting, these rules. The authors argue that these acts of resistance represent immigrant children’s agency in negotiating their multiple identities as they relate to mealtime routines both in and out of school.

Taking the marriage of image and text to another level, Chloë Brushwood Rose envisions a virtual curriculum that draws on the aesthetic experience and epistemology of digital gaming. In *Virtual Curriculum: Digital Games as Technologies of Aesthetic Experience and Potential Spaces* she argues that prevailing linear structures in curriculum resemble the layout of a board game: players progress through a series of tasks toward the achievement of pre-determined goal. Digital games, on the other hand, necessitate “self-directed participation” that encourages players to learn by immersing themselves in

a particular environment that rewards taking risks and making mistakes. In either case, games and curriculum both provide a particular “structure of experience” that delimits what learning is. Intersecting object relations theory and the aesthetic experience of digital gaming, the key question Brushwood Rose poses for curriculum studies is this: “How might the object relations of digital games elucidate the relations of curriculum?” Drawing on her own game playing experiences and aesthetic theory, she characterizes digital games as immersive and exploratory structures that provide intermediate areas of experience (or “holding environments”) where tensions between the real and the imaginary are revealed and reconciled. To further elucidate a theory of learning in these intermediate spaces, Brushwood Rose turns to object relations theory and Winnicott’s (1989) notion of playing. Abandoning the cognitive model of the subject, object relations theory suggests that learning is far from linear and predictable, but rather, emerges as an interminable process of renegotiating tensions between external and internal realities; a process marked by idiosyncrasy and affect more than intellect. Digital games encourage learning in these terms as they offer temporary “sites of creative illusion” where the psychic experience of playing takes precedence over the content of the game. In the context of both digital gaming and curriculum then, Brushwood Rose seems to suggest that *what* is learned is not necessarily more important than *how* it is learned.

The importance of play is implicit in Naomi Norquay’s autobiographical inquiry entitled *How Playing the Banjo Helps Me Think about Curriculum*. Norquay uses playing the banjo as a metaphor for engagement with curriculum arguing that in both cases, a “structuring grammar of identity formation” is created. The banjo stories she shares present a curriculum that is dynamic and relational, always and already racial, and inherently embodied. Juxtaposing her banjo stories with stories about learning to play the piano as a child, Norquay critiques formal curricular structures where “officially sanctioned content” is preserved to reproduced by the learner “regardless of who the learner is or the context of the learning.” An undercurrent of her argument is Pinar’s (1993) suggestion that curriculum mirrors who we think we are and who we want our children to be.

Norquay also identifies the four phases of “currere” as they emerge in her narratives about the banjo and banjo playing. Currere, as Pinar (2004) has described it, seeks to understand the intricate relationship between one’s academic studies and one’s autobiography. Norquay makes the case that a cultural artifact like the banjo serves as a focal point from which to engage in the regressive, progressive, analytic and synthetic phases of autobiographical research. Inspired by currere’s ability to frame “an ongoing project of self-understanding,” Norquay has given us an autobiographical account that, in the end, is clearly “mobilized for engaged pedagogical action.”

In *Building an 'Island of Rationality' around the Concept of Educational Differentiation*, Luc Prud'homme, André Dolbec, Monique Brodeur, Annie Presseau, and Stéphane Martineau demonstrate that the concept of differentiation is ubiquitous yet over-determined in the language of educational reform. In response to this nebulousness, the authors attempt to build an "island of rationality" around the concept in order to encourage conversation and debate. As an intentionally temporary representational technique, this theoretical approach avoids presenting "static visions" of what differentiation is. Instead, the authors present an extensive review of literature detailing the evolution of differentiation as an educational agenda, and in the process, reveal how this one concept has come to represent a variety of initiatives in education. The authors conclude by presenting an initial (convergent) definition of differentiation in terms "a collaborative model of teaching practice centered on diversity" that aims to encourage social justice

Curriculum, like language, is a moving form; conceived as an aspiration, the object and hope of our intentionality, it comes to form and slips, at the moment of its actualization, into the ground of our situation. (Grumet, 1988, p. 131)

"Sooo-ooo-ooo!"

That's what people say when they are about to introduce a narrative into the conversation or when they are clearing a little space so that you can begin a story yourself. It can be sung to different tunes, depending on the circumstances. (Shields, 2002, p. 74)

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