

Locating Living Pedagogy in Teacher "Research": Five Metonymic Moments

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For a teacher researcher, an insistent question is, "Where is living pedagogy located?" Such a question invites a Lacanian anecdote.

Jacques Lacan, a noted but controversial scholar and psychoanalyst, regards the situation of the analyst and analysand as a pedagogical situation, a site of teaching/learning. But for him such a site is not merely a topographical site of the doctor's office as clinic, not merely a social site of doctor and patient, but more so a discursive site—a site of the to and fro flow of language and discourse. For Lacan, the discourse of the master doctor and the patient is inadequate; instead, he opts for the to and fro discourse of teaching/learning. For Lacan, listening to "what" is being said requires listening to "where" the "what" is being said. The "what" can be interpreted in terms of the "where." To help understand the where, allow me to journey through five Metonymic moments.

Moment #1: Living Pedagogy Midst Curriculum-as-Plan/ Curriculum-as-Live(d)

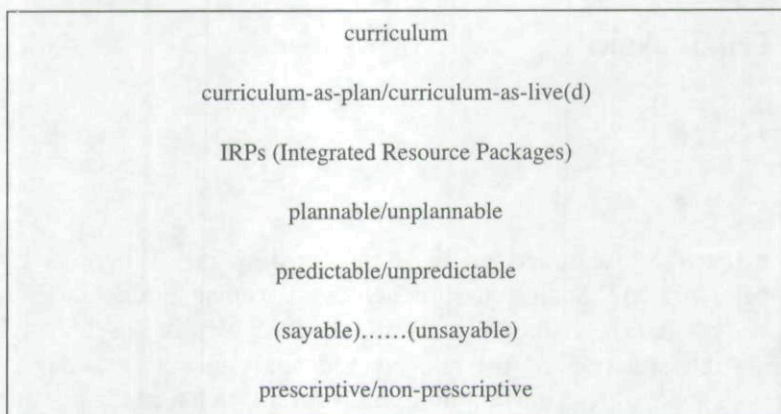
As one interested in curriculum and pedagogy, listening to Lacan's anecdote, I recall Leonard Cohen, a Canadian, who in his poem, "The Anthem," repeated the following refrain:

Ring the bells that still can ring,
Forget your perfect offering.
There is a crack, a crack in everything,
That's how the light gets in.¹

¹ Leonard Cohen. (1993). *Stranger Music*, p. 373. Toronto: McClelland & Stewart.

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Enlightenment? Where? In the middle, in the midst of mediation? Heeding Leonard Cohen, I allow the signifier “curriculum” to appear and then allow a graphic mark to crack the word.



In/through this graphic marking, “curriculum” unfolds into the “curriculum-as-plan” that we typically know as the mandated school subject, and into *curricula-as-live(d)*—experiences of teachers and students—a multiplicity of *curricula*, as many as there are teachers and students.

Here, I recall stories of thoughtful teachers who speak of their pedagogic struggles in the midst of the plannable and the unplannable, between the predictable and the unpredictable, between the prescriptible and the non-prescriptible. Their pedagogical where?—between the curriculum-as-plan and the live(d) *curricula*. Sites of living pedagogy?

Moment #2: Indwelling Midst Presence/Absence

Five years ago, Dennis Sumara and Brent Davis, then co-editors of the *Journal of Curriculum Theorizing (jct)*, asked me to ask June, my wife, for a calligraphic work to be used on the cover of a special issue.² After perusing the articles, which referred to scholars such as Foucault,

² Reference is made to *Journal of Curriculum Theorizing*, Vol. 11, No. 4, 1995.

Lyotard, Derrida, Lacan, bell hooks, and so on, we decided on (yu-mu)—presence/absence. Thinking I would be helping the editors, I scribbled a memo:

Calligraphed on the cover of this issue is (yu-mu)—yu (有) presence/mu (無) absence. Yu-mu as both “presence” and “absence” marks the space of ambivalence in the midst of which humans dwell. As such, Yu-mu is non-essentialist, denying the privileging of either “presence” or “absence,” so deeply inscribed in the binarism of Western epistemology. As the groundless ground in traditions of wisdom, the ambiguity textured in yu-mu is understood as a site pregnant with possibilities. (The calligraphic brushwork is that of June Aoki.)

Surprisingly, this appeared on the back cover.

What I have implied but left unsaid is the way discipline-oriented discourses of curriculum plans are grounded in the metaphysics of presence—privileging presence over absence. So valenced, the discourse assumes the presence of reality or truth hidden in the depth below, calling researchers to search and research, successful engagement resulting in findings that provide insights into the essence of reality. To research, then, is to represent the presence of the essence of reality. This is the language of the discourse of representation which in Western modernity has held hegemonic sway.

It is the hegemony of this discourse that Maxine Greene of Columbia University questions in her powerful article, “Postmodernism and the Crisis of Representation.”³ She calls upon us to move to the edgy edges of representational discourse, and, there, open ourselves to discourses beyond.

There, Elvi Whittaker, an anthropologist at the University of British Columbia, questions the “thingifying” of the presence of culture in her noted article, “Culture: Reification Under Siege.”⁴

Both Greene and Whittaker are writing at the edges of Modernist representational discourse, questioning the hegemony of the metaphysics of presence.

³ Maxine Greene. (1994). “Postmodernism and the Crisis of Representation.” In *English Education*, Vol. 26, No. 4, December, 206–219.

⁴ Elvi Whittaker. (1992). “Culture Reification Under Siege.” In *Studies in Symbolic Interaction*, Vol. 13, 107–117.

**Moment #3: Interplay Midst
Representational Discourse/Non-representational Discourse**

Geography, Discipline, and Discourse

I now turn to Dr. Derek Gregory, a professor of geography at the University of British Columbia (UBC), Vancouver, Canada. On his move from Cambridge University in England, he brought with him a manuscript ready for the press. It was titled: *The Geographical Imagination*. The story goes that during his first year of teaching at UBC, he became disenchanted with the manuscript and discarded it. Over the next few years, he rewrote the book, now re-titled *Geographical Imaginations*.⁵ In the transformation, he noted the multiplicity of imaginations, and most acutely, the absence of “the,” the definite article in which is inscribed the claims of finitude, the presence of the finite. In the new title, the definite article is discarded, and in its place are indefinite articles “a...a...a...” — assuming indefiniteness and infinitude.

In the introduction to his book, Derek Gregory says he is now more interested in the discourse of geography than in the discipline of geography.

Here, I recall Trevor Barnes and James Duncan, colleagues of Derek Gregory, who published a book titled *Writing Worlds: Discourse, Text, and Metaphor in the Representation of Landscape*.⁶ Such a focus on discourse and language urges me to recall Lacan in his pedagogical discursive space. Allow me a brief excursion into sign theory.

A Brief Excursion into Sign Theory

Let's begin with de Saussure, structural linguist, who provided us with an image of a sign as a relationship between a signifier (S) and a signified (s), between a word and a concept of reality. For de Saussure the signifier (S) has access to the signified (s) because the bar between them is transparent.

(S) = signifier
Sign = (transparent bar)
(s) = signified

⁵ Derek Gregory. (1994). *Geographical Imaginations*. Oxford: Blackwell.

⁶ Trevor J. Barnes and James S. Duncan (Eds.). (1994). *Writing Worlds: Discourse, Text, and Metaphor in the Representation of Landscape*. London: Routledge.

But de Saussure added that such an understanding of relationships is arbitrary.

Next, let's acknowledge Roman Jakobson, a Russian American linguist, who claims that language has two axes—the vertical (metaphoric) and the horizontal (metonymic).

Lacan with his psychoanalytic interest in language, recognizing the arbitrariness of de Saussure's representational verticality, provided us with a horizontal image, in which signifiers (words) are horizontally arranged in a signifying chain:

S...S...S...	(signifying chain)
=====	(opaque bar)
(s)	(s) is erased/absent

For Lacan, the bar between signifier and signified is opaque, erasing the signified(s).

Thus, for him, signification is enacted in the spaces of differences between signifiers. Meanings are constituted in the inter-textual play midst signifiers. Here, language participates and performs to constitute effects. It is a discursive world of floating discourse, non-representation, with risks of anarchism and relativism. It is suggestive of the floating world of hypertext with its virtual realities.

Here, we must not forget our key question: Where is living pedagogy located?

Midst the Vertical and the Horizontal

I suggest that the site between representational and non-representational discourses is the site of living pedagogy. This is the site that postcolonial literary scholar Homi Bhabha calls the "Third Space" of ambivalent construction:⁷ the site that Trinh Minh-ha, a postcolonial feminist, calls "a hybrid place."⁸ It is the site that David Jardine, University of Calgary, calls a site of original difficulty, of ambiguity, ambivalence, and uncertainty, but simultaneously a site of general possibilities and

⁷ See Jonathan Rutherford (1990). "The Third Space." An interview with Homi Bhabha. In J. Rutherford (Ed.), *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference* (pp. 207-221). London: Lawrence and Wishart.

⁸ See Judith Mayne. "From a Hybrid Place." An interview with Trinh Minh-ha. In T. Minh-ha, *Framer Framed* (pp. 137-148). New York: Routledge.

hope—a site challenging us to live well.⁹ It is a site that David Smith, University of Alberta, writes about, in his book titled *Pedagon*,¹⁰ pedagogy in the site of agon(y). It is the site Derrida speaks of in his recent book, *Aporias*.¹¹ It is the site in which Marilyn Low and Pat Palulis describe in their article, “Teaching as a Messy Text: Metonymic Moments in Pedagogical Practice.”¹² For Bill Doll, it is the site of chaos in which dwell transformative possibilities. As for me, it is a site of Metonymy—metamorphic writing, metonymic writing.

Moment #4: Midst Self/Other

A few years ago, I was immersed in reading *The Malaise of Modernity* by Charles Taylor of McGill University.¹³ He boldly claimed that within Western Modernity, the greatest malaise is “individualism.” I was pondering about his remarks when Dr. Jan Walls, of Simon Fraser University in Canada, invited me to a luncheon. I told Jan what Charles Taylor said of “individualism.” He told me a story.

When over a century ago, Commodore Perry of the U.S.A. “opened up” Japan, the Japanese linguists were puzzled by the notion of a person as an individual—an individual entity, a self unto itself with its own identity. For the Japanese, a person is graphically textured as 人 (hito), the two strokes saying that it takes at least two to make a person, self and other together. The Japanese linguists were puzzled by the notion of the undivided individual.

Moving into the space of interlanguage and intercultural difference, our Third Space, they allowed intertextual play and coined a new word, 一人 (ko-jin), supposedly meaning “individual.” Graphically, the 一 in the first character expresses a past that can be isolated and boxable,

⁹ David Jardine. (1992). “Reflections on Education, Hermeneutics, and Understanding.” In W. Pinar and W. Reynolds (Eds.), *Understanding Curriculum as Phenomenological and Deconstructed Text* (pp. 116–127). New York: Teachers College Press.

¹⁰ David G. Smith. (1999). *Pedagon*. New York: Peter Lang.

¹¹ Jacques Derrida. (1993). *Aporias*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

¹² Marilyn Low and Pat Palulis. (2000). “Teaching as a Messy Text: Metonymic Moments in Pedagogical Practice.” In *Journal of Curriculum Theorizing*, Vol. 16, No. 2, Summer, 79–80.

¹³ Charles Taylor. (1991). *The Malaise of Modernity*. Concord, Ontario: House of Anansi Press.

reflecting the isolated self of the individual. But, on the left, they placed **イ** (a radical of 人) and they added 人 (hito), combining to constitute **イ固人** (ko-jin).

To us **イ固人** (ko-jin) looks Japanese but it is not strictly Japanese. There are elements in it of both English and Japanese; indeed, this is a hybrid constituted in the Third Space.

Such an interpretation suggests that absolute translation is an impossibility, that translation is always incomplete and partial, and further that ongoing translation is always ongoing transformation, generating newness in life's movement.

Moment #5: A Double Reading of a Zen Parable

A few years ago, I was invited to teach at McGill University a course titled "Curriculum Foundations." I replied accepting the invitation, providing I could change the title to "Curriculum Foundations Without Foundations." They agreed.

In the course, we included an article titled "Haiku: Metaphor Without Metaphor,"¹⁴ by German philosopher Günter Wohlfart, who interprets Basho's haiku with the help of a well-known Zen parable:

For those who know nothing about Zen, mountains are but mountains, trees are but trees, and people are but people. When one has studied Zen for a short time, one becomes aware of the invalidity and of the transitoriness of all forms, and mountains are no longer mountains, trees are no longer trees, and people are no longer people. For while the ignorant believe in the reality of material things, those who are even partly enlightened can see that they are mere apparitions, that they have no lasting reality, and that they disappear like fleeting clouds. Whereas—as the parable concludes—(he) [sic] who has gained full understanding of Zen knows that mountains are once again mountains, trees are once again trees, and people are once again people.

Midst all this, my son and his wife, both University of Alberta fine arts graduates, invited me to visit the famous art gallery at the foot of the mountain down University Street. They guided me through the chambers of paintings to a special exhibit—an installation of two paintings by

¹⁴ Günter Wohlfart. (1997). "Haiku: Metaphor Without Metaphor." A talk presented at Simon Fraser University, Burnaby, British Columbia, Canada.

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Gerhard Richter, a postmodern German painter. And there, I faced two paintings on adjacent walls (see Figures 1 and 2).

After a moment of silence, my son asked me, "Why are you positioned in this way when you are looking at the paintings?" I responded intelligently, so I thought. I gazed in concentration at this painting on the left (see Figure 1), then shifted to gazing at the other (see Figure 2), trying to make sense of the paintings. Then, he suggested, "Place yourself in the space between."

So located, I tried doubling: listening to the Zen parable and viewing the paintings simultaneously.



Figure 1: Gerhard Richter, *Wiesental* (1985)

Located in between with my eyes leaning to the left I heard, "For those who know nothing about Zen, mountains are but mountains, trees are but trees, and people are but people." Then, following my eyes leaning to the right, I heard, "For one who has studied Zen for a short while, mountains are no longer mountains, trees are no longer trees, and people are no longer people." So enlightened, one eye to the left and the other eye to the right, I listened: for those who understand Zen, "mountains are once again mountains, trees are once again trees, people are once again people."

Son engaging father in teaching/learning? Locating living gazing?
Locating living pedagogy?



Figure 2: Gerhard Richter, *Mediation* (1986)

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