

THE LANGUAGE OF TEACHING IN
DWAYNE HUEBNER'S PHENOMENOLOGY:
THE POETIC ESSENCE OF LANGUAGE FOR THE
NEW RE-CONCEPTUALIZATION OF CURRICULUM¹

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Dwayne Huebner was the first American curriculum theorist to embrace European phenomenology and identify the *emancipatory* educational value in Heidegger's conception of attunement in relation to the *ontological* and "poetic" understanding of language. Huebner does not provide an explicit definition for "ontological" in his writings, but his inquiries into the "origin," "beginning," and "essence" of learning, teaching, and language intimate, based on the phenomenological practice he adopts, a concern with the "Being" of things, entities, and the world, i.e., the *primordial* or basic meaning-structures of existence that give form to and are instantiated within our everyday modes of worldly dwelling. These so-called "ontological" meaning-structures are irreducible to either epistemological or psychological categories and give rise to "phenomenological" questions concerned with human origins and beginnings. When questioning in an *ontological* manner, according to Heidegger (1995), "we ourselves, the questioners, are thereby also included into the question, placed into question" (12-13/19). These *ontological* issues that emerge from Huebner's critical confrontation with Heidegger's philosophy are ultimately related to the understanding, or re-conceptualization, of teaching as an *originary* "conversation," which for Huebner, is grounded in the intimate and irreducible *ontological* relationship that language and thought share.

The anthology that I reference throughout, *The Lure of the Transcendent* (1999) is a collection of Huebner's work that spans the 1960s-1980s and contains both his popular essays along with other lesser known writings that originally appeared in journals and anthologies. This paper, focused primarily on Huebner's essay,

“Language and teaching: Reflections on teaching in light of Heidegger’s writings about language” (1968), is a critical exegesis that analyzes the phenomenological views of curriculum-education expressed by Huebner in terms of curriculum “conversation” developing and unfolding as a poetic and linguistic phenomenon. The common threads of Heidegger’s later philosophy (1930s-1950s), which Huebner references, are interwoven into the *ontological* fabric of my reading. Drawing from Heidegger’s thought of the “Turn” (writings of the 1930s and beyond), which marks Huebner’s (1999) fecund and productive return to and repetition of Heidegger’s original ideas for curriculum theorizing, I begin with the original question Huebner poses—and by “original,” as introduced above, I mean *ontological*—and then focus on his profound rejoinder that grounds and guides my reading:

How are we in the world as teachers? For the most part we are with others in language. As teachers, we differ from others by the care with which we dwell in that language. Language must be guarded if we are not to fall into the idle speech which covers the earth. Language must be served if a world is to be set up. The teacher is the guardian and servant of language. He (sic) must impart this truth to his students, He does so by the way in which he dwells with them in language. (156)

As is evident from this passage, Huebner’s thought encapsulates a unique understanding of “essential”² language in its original relationship to curriculum scholarship, focused on a non-representational and non-instrumental form of “poetic” language that allows us to speak *of* and not *about* the phenomenon of education, thus avoiding the metaphysical pitfall of objectifying and reifying those things we seek to better understand through our inextricable and intimate involvement with them. Because the depth and breath of his writings have yet to be fully conceptualized, I argue that Huebner’s curriculum theorizing offers important insights for the continued re-conceptualization of: the human being as phenomenological subject, language as a poetic phenomenon, and the view of transcendence/attunement, whereby through an *emancipatory* change in attitude (mood) there is the potential movement from an inauthentic (*calculative-instrumental*) view and enactment of education to an authentic (*meditative-poetic*) form of curricular “conversation.” In defense of this claim, this essay includes, *inter alia*, the exploration of *ontological* themes emerging from Huebner’s philosophy as related to language, which are further developed in light of contemporary educational concerns. Along with Huebner, I approach language as essentially poetic in nature, specifically in terms of language poetizing a revelatory mode or moment of “truth-happening.”

This includes exploring the issues of the dangers of language and the potential for human “emancipation,” or transcendence, through the re-attunement of poetic language.

History and Salient Themes:

The Relevance of Huebner's Phenomenology for Contemporary Curriculum

Pinar (1992) writes, “Dwayne Huebner introduced phenomenology to curriculum studies in the 1960s” (237). This unique accomplishment establishes Huebner's invaluable contribution to the field, for he first challenged American curriculum theorists to seriously consider the untapped potential of the European tradition in phenomenological thought to contribute to the continued re-conceptualization of the curriculum through conceptual research. Specifically, as Pinar informs us, it was in 1967 at the Ohio State University Curriculum Conference that Huebner presented the now canonical essay, “Curriculum as a concern for man's temporality.” This paper not only brought phenomenology into curriculum studies, it also, in a groundbreaking move, introduced the first highly technical and exegetically demanding philosophical reading of Heidegger's complex interpretation of “ecstatic temporality” (*Being and Time*) in relation to the curriculum-and-learning, which Huebner envisioned as an historical phenomenon unfolding through the ever-renewed practice of dialogue in terms of the “individual-world dialectic” that gives form and structure to the curriculum and our lives (Magrini, 2014).³

Huebner never wrote a single monograph. His essays appear in journals and anthologies, a fact that might seem strange to scholars unfamiliar with the form of research-theorizing popular in the 1960s-1990s, namely, the “speculative philosophical essay,” which “develops an argument shorter than a thesis” and usually takes shape in an “informal style” (Schubert, 1991, 61). Many of the most well-known and “widely-cited curriculum writings are essays” (63), and rather than “rigorous data-based or other highly rule-bound systematic forms of inquiry” (63), they are more akin to philosophical essays. However, as Schubert states, the essay is a legitimate form of research where the essayist *as* researcher interacts “with a complex and ever changing situation” and has the “latitude to continuously reshape the inquiry to relate ideas to the character of the audience” (67). This connection with the reader opens and establishes the “public space” of discourse, of “liberating dialogue and open communication” (68), thus the content and ideas of the essay live beyond the purely subjective register and establish the inter-subjectivity crucial to research. Given Huebner's phenomenological understanding of the relationship

between language and reality, it is no surprise, as Schubert (1991) observes, that the essay form appealed greatly to Huebner, as it offered the potential to “become emancipated from the fetters of positivism, technical, and managerial inquiry that too often dominates curriculum and practice” (67).

The salient themes that are present in one form or another in all of Huebner’s (1966; 1999) writings include: the conception of the human being in both ontological and theological (or spiritual) terms; the problem with the understanding and definition of “learning” that emerges from technical-scientific schemes for designing, making, implementing, and evaluating curriculum; the relationship between the teacher and student in terms of a deep and sustained “conversation” that shelters the potential for a “conversion,” or *emancipatory* moment of transcendence; and, as will be my focus, the manner in which language is not only conceived, but more importantly, how it is “lived,” and beyond, *how it lives through us in an authentic and poetic manner*. As I show, this is a view of language that is radically at odds with the contemporary view of language in curriculum as primarily a means for the transfer of knowledge to the students, which is a view of language Huebner criticized because it reduces the essence of language to an “instrumental” and “present-at-hand” medium for communicating ideas in an exacting manner for their precise acquisition, in a way devoid of any sense of uncertainty, mystery, and ultimately, pedagogical risk.

Huebner’s relevance for addressing the problems in contemporary standardized education, based on the ontological concerns I have introduced, become evident when considering President Obama’s 2009 initiative—*Educate to Innovate*—has drastically increased STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) programs in education, pushing forward precisely what Huebner so feared, the continued and ever-widening “technologizing” of the curriculum. Here, we must concern ourselves not only with what this indicates about the forms of knowledge we value (Slouka, 2010), but also the crucial role that language plays in giving form to the impoverished views of both students and educators (read: human beings) that the standardized curriculum produces, embraces, and is organized around, considering that everything from teacher motivation to cognitive training for student achievement is being reduced to quantitative terms (Ellis, Denton, & Bond, 2014; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2015). Indeed, this push in education for relevant quantitative data for the structuring of the curriculum and the students’ learning experience is ardently endorsed within the philosophical mission statement of AERA (American Educational Research Association). Education urgently needs, perhaps more than ever, to consider Huebner’s highly poetic and philosophical writings, which like all

relevant research are both *diagnostic* and *prescriptive* in their unfolding, offering alternative ways of thinking that might inspire and develop not only each student's intelligence, as expressed through *calculative thought/knowledge*, but also the spiritual and poetic aspects of his/her Being-in-the-world, as related to *meditative* forms of thought that are so often neglected with great peril to what Huebner deems the intellectual and spiritual (read: *ontological*) development of the student. The *meditative* and spiritual modes of Being-in-the-world, and for Huebner this also includes the modes of the ethical and aesthetic, are "ways of Being" that are heedlessly relegated to curriculum's scrap heap within both the Common Core States Standards Curriculum (K-12) and recently proposed educational reform in higher learning (Bradley, Seidman, & Painchaud, 2010).

The Poetic Essence of Language and the Open Space of Conversation

Huebner draws the notion of the "essence" of language from Heidegger's (2015; 2000; 1979; 1971) philosophy of language; with Heidegger, Huebner is concerned with language in its intimate relationship with the revelation of the human and the world. It must be noted that linguistic "naming," or revelation, of the world is also *the* "naming" of those things that remain concealed and are therefore unspoken. This *originary* power of language to "open and found" the world is its poetic essence, and "poetic" here must be understood in terms that are other than a literal "making" or "constructing," as is consistent with the Attic Greek term "*poietic*," because for Huebner, "poetic" refers to the facilitation of the appearance of phenomena in terms of "truth-happening," i.e., allowing things to reveal themselves in modes of *self-showing*.⁴ However, since language is not reducible to an object of thought, things do not simply appear and stand before us in and through language's revelatory power, rather they show up in meaningful ways. Importantly, language ushers in the human being and the world in terms of a "conversation" because it releases our *ontological* potential for *listening* for and responding to the other, and this indicates that when we *hear* language's address we properly adopting a stance (which is at once a mode of dwelling) in the midst of its beckoning. Huebner embraces the essence of language as the *ontological* "conversation" that is *always already unfolding*, which, as related to curriculum, the practice of phenomenology reveals as an authentic event of learning and education, which has been occluded by the attunement through which educators and theorists privilege instrumental, scientific, and technical modes of world disclosure. A poetic language, or *new speech*, as conceived by Huebner (1966), would be non-representational, non-instrumental, "non-ritualistic or non-conditioned" (21), and would allow educators to speak "of"

the phenomena of curricula, in terms of “poetic” intimations and gestures, and not “about” them in an objective, literal manner, which in an important way marks out the difference between *original* and *essential* language (poetic) and propositional (apodictic) language in the classroom.

With this basic understanding of the essence of language, Huebner (1966) claims that language “may be considered a basic form of man’s response-in-the-world” (21). However, the form of language that holds the power to re-configure and transform our world poetically is far more than a basic form of communication between humans, for to understand the power of *new speech* or poetic non-representational language, is to see that poetic language is essential for the “creative unfolding of the world” and, as related to conversation, the “sanctity of the response-ability and speech must be recognized” (21). Poetic language “introduces newness and uniqueness into the world, and contributes to the unveiling of the unconditioned by the integrity of [the human’s] personal, spontaneous responsiveness” (21). The responses to poetic language are creative responses to the address of language, which calls forth and engenders “new speech, poetic nonritualistic or non-conditioned speech,” which is part of “the creative unfolding of the world, and demands from the other a response in kind” (21). Poetic language cannot and does not capture and convey those things that are known to us in a technical or scientific manner, rather it reveals those things as of yet unknown and in doing so is expressive of the human’s poetic character, and so lives beyond (transcends) the tendency in education to force the responses of students into “preconceived, conditioned patterns,” which inhibits the opening of new worlds in creative ways, for “limiting response-ability to existing forms of responsiveness denies others of their possibility of evolving new ways of existing” (21). For Huebner (1999), as intimated above, the mode of transcendence afforded by non-representational, non-conditioned language is prefigured by our first responding to the address of language in and through our *ontological* predisposition to *hear* and *listen* for what is on the approach from out of the essence of language. In this reconceived, creative, and *ontologically* inspired view, language lives as an “aural” phenomenon in the first instance prior to its “oral” expression, here not understood in terms of chronology or causation, but rather in terms of levels of *primordality*:

Man listens to that wherein he moves and has his being in order that language can speak through him, name that which is, and open up a world, which is to simultaneously project one’s possibilities for Being (148).⁵

In this view, language is never the mere vocalization of our ideas through the use of the tool or instrument of “speech,” which immediately sets speaking and hearing in an oppositional relationship, an antiquated and pernicious metaphysical (Cartesian) relationship of privilege grounded in the hierarchy of polar oppositions, e.g., Speech/writing, Talk/listening, Being/becoming, Reality/appearance, Cognitive/affective, etc. In calling for us to listen to and for the address of language, and beyond, to release ourselves over to language so that it might speak through us, Huebner is deconstructing the “instrumental” view of language that standardized education holds, i.e., that language is a creation and therefore a possession of the human being, and as such it is much like other “present-at-hand” artifacts and technologies of education. This complex understanding of language as poetic phenomenon is foreign but not antithetical to the standardized curriculum: it is foreign because as stated, it is concealed and occluded from contemporary educators; it is not, however, antithetical to curriculum because all forms of standardized or systematized education—forms of education that are structured by epistemological, scientific, or psychological categories—emerge from the original space opened by the power of language and its essential way of naming and revealing, in terms of “truth-happening.”⁶ Huebner’s reasoning is that education does not *come-to-presence* in terms of pre-fabricated “secondary” modes of classification. Rather, it is only after the initial revelation of the phenomenon of education through the “truth-happening” facilitated by poetic language in terms of an original “conversation” that it can be named and categorized. How we “name” it in the specific situations within which we find ourselves, how we bring it to stand through our linguistic-conceptualizations of it determines its “way of Being”: will it be as a “present-at-hand” entity or “ready-to-hand” phenomenon, returning us to our forgotten *ontological* roots? What is required by Huebner to understand this phenomenon is the realization—by means of an *awakening attunement* or *emancipatory moment* of “transcendence”—that inspires a return to an original or *ontological* relationship that we have with language, the “conversation” we have always been that has been occluded.

The curriculum conversation that poetic language engenders brings forth and reveals worlds and entities and the responsible recipient is called to “act on this information, reshape it himself, and continue the dialogue at a new level,” which indicates that the human being is never a finished being, “but is always in the process of ‘becoming,’ and hence is willing to find the new and unexpected, the awe and wonder in that which he repeatedly faces or which he partially knows” (78). Crucially, this includes a solicitous concern for and responsibility to the *other*, for

“conversation demands an acceptance and acknowledgement of the reality and value of the other person; not only his equality, but his fraternity and solitude” (78). It is the listener that “establishes the climate for conversation,” but the “listener cannot listen to satisfy his own desires. By his attitude, his interest, he listens actively; he extends himself to the other, making himself available to the other” (79). Authentic conversation, for Huebner, which is concerned with the complexity, mystery, and wonder of life, is irreducible to the “socially validated and objective usages of conventional language, epitomized by mathematical and scientific language,” which are never “vehicles for the formation and expression of the personal, the unique” (79), which for Huebner are related to the most basic spiritual and *ontological* aspects of our Being-in-the-world.

The Inherent Danger of Language and Potential Avoidance Thereof

As Heidegger (1979) claims, language is the “house of Being” (213) wherein humans dwell, grow, and project their own unique potential-for-Being. Huebner is keenly aware of language’s power to configure and re-configure the world, for the continued reconceptualization of curriculum is not only about changing the way we think “about” our educational practices, it also reflects the way we speak *of* and *give voice* to those experiences, i.e., reconceptualization is grounded in the linguistic re-configuration of the world of curriculum and this occurs by opening, through the re-attuned vision given by language, new worlds of living and learning. Language structures and, in great part, determines our complicated curricular conversations, it is responsible for configuring the educational dwelling spaces inhabited by educators and students. Consider Tyler’s (1950) technical language of objectives, the organization of the learning experience, and evaluation of said experience, which is still found today in the standardized curriculum, e.g., the *Understanding by Design* (UbD) STEM paradigm for curriculum. Huebner (1999) claims that by “framing curricular tasks in this language, the curriculum worker is immediately locked into a language system which determines his questions as well as his answers” (12). This represents the danger inherent to language, which for Huebner, manifests on two fronts: (1) there is the danger of corrupting the essence of language, which is poetic in nature, and (2) there is the danger of debasing students by means of truncating or occluding their authentic *potential-for-Being* through the misunderstanding or misuse of language.

Huebner is acutely attuned to the misunderstanding and misuse of language in education, a danger to the human’s Being in general that perpetually lives as a

possibility. Because the human dwells “in language,” the potential of falling into disassembling modes of encountering phenomena through language manifest as an ever-present danger. Language also brings with it the ultimate danger, the threat of non-Being or death, the most radical possibility of our finite existence, i.e., the ultimate possibility of *not-being* at all. Huebner also recognizes the type of danger inherent within the essence of language of which Heidegger (2000) warns, namely, language's inherent danger to itself in potentially becoming “common” or devolving into inauthentic “idle talk.” For example, in Huebner's (1999) phenomenology of curriculum, language holds that even the “essential word” holds the danger of degenerating into a *present-at-hand* medium for rote and instrumental communication, here “the reliability of the ready-to-hand can wear away, be dissipated or atrophy” (151). For Huebner, the *essential word* is the poetic speaking “of” as opposed to “about phenomena. Thus, the *essential word* “names” the difference between the *ontological* manner of a being's unfolding, i.e., the “how” of its *ontological* historical and temporal stretching out, and the brute and *ontic* fact “that” it is this or that particular “present-at-hand” entity, which can be determined by scientific and technical means. To continue this line of thought, Huebner eloquently philosophizes the danger of reducing language to the register of the “present-at-hand” which is antithetic to revealing and fostering the human's potential for Being in the following passage:

Discourse involves hearing and keeping silent. Listening to one another is a way of being open to another. In being with others, however, there is the possibility that talk will become “idle talk” in which man's own possibilities are passed over and discourse [conversation] becomes groundless and gossipy. As idle talk, discourse no longer discloses man's being in the world, but covers up entities and closes off possibilities. (147)

To concretize the *ontological* understanding of the danger of language in Huebner (1999), bringing phenomenology down from its so-called “theoretical” and “abstract heights,” let us consider the six distinct categories of language Huebner identifies in education and curriculum: *descriptive*, *explanatory*, *controlling*, *legitimizing*, *prescriptive*, and *affiliative*. Drawing from Huebner's analysis, it is possible to state that in contemporary *standardized* education, language is for the most part restricted to the following fourfold functions: (1) it is used to explain or “give reasons for what occurs, to establish causes,” and this is *explanatory language*; (2) it is used to control, to “construct and manipulate things, events, phenomena and people; we use it to

predict what might happen,” as this is *controlling language*; (3) it is used to rationalize and legitimate behaviors, theories, and is “common to scientific and technical endeavors,” and this is *legitimizing language*; and (4) it is used to establish an affiliation among parties and institutions as a “symbol of cohesiveness...in the increased use of the behavioral science language in curriculum it can be interpreted as an attempt by curricularists to belong to the social scientific community,” and this is the *language of affiliation* (217). Huebner states that often the “use of slogans in education also symbolizes solidarity and membership in a given community” (217), e.g., Huebner’s analysis relates directly to national educational programs and mandates such as *Nation at Risk* (1984), *Goals 2000, No Child Left Behind* (2002), and *Race to the Top* (2008). Missing are the categories of *descriptive* and *prescriptive*, language that Huebner links with poetic, aesthetic, and ethical values, which are phenomena related most intimately with the essential view of language as *poietic*.⁷ Huebner brings our attention to the fact that language lives in a multiplicity of ways; the manifold manner in which language gathers and communicates its meanings defies the tendency in *standardized* learning to envision language in terms of univocal meanings that, with nomological regularity and certainty, classify phenomena in universal and objective terms.

To offer another practical and curricular instantiation of language as a *symbol of affiliation*, Lipman (2011) points out that “Race to the Top” is a federal initiative that emerges out of education’s concern with markets, choice, privatization, and “efficiency oriented, ‘performance based’ public management that characterizes the neoliberal state” (60). Lipman goes on to state that the “Race to the Top” stimulus indicates the drive toward replacing school boards with “mayoral control,” and this has become a “U. S. Department of Education priority” (60). In a deceptive and highly disingenuous manner, the control and management of education is actually in the hands of “appointed boards, ‘experts,’ and managers,” all the while giving the impression of uniformity and solidarity because this initiative is being advanced at a national level through the U. S. Department of Education. As related to Huebner’s original scholarship, Taubman (2009) also brings our attention to the language of affiliation at work in education by focusing on the language of educational policy, where he finds the “quotidian reminders about collecting data, aligning syllabi with standards, and developing instruments to monitor performance [are] frequently justified with appeals to the ‘national conversation’ on educational policy and practices” (55). Again, the language of *affiliation* through advancing the idea of solidarity and ecumenical educational goals through a collective national conversation belies the rhetoric of deception at work in the neoliberal milieu of

“standardized” education. The dangers of such *affiliative* rhetoric are evident in education as Pinar (2013) reveals in relation to NCLB and Race to the Top: “In 2011 a new study made clear that the administration’s statistics – that under NCLB criteria 82 percent of all U. S. schools were failing – were mistaken” (22). This indicates that over a decade of radical school reform had been and continues to be based on inaccurate quantitative data. As Huebner (1999) stresses, based on this information, “Curricular language must be continually questioned, its effectiveness challenged, its inconsistencies pointed out, its flaws exposed” (9), and its privileged status and supreme reign critically put into question.

Teaching and Learning in the Authentic Conversation that Language Inspires

Teaching for Huebner is an attuned form of “conversation” unfolding within an inquiry into the possibilities of Being that emerge, as they are released from concealment, for both educators and students when they are attuned by the power of original language. For Huebner, “learning” is in the first instance about the return to the human’s original and now lost relationship to language. Above, I spoke of attunement, and for Huebner, as for Heidegger (1979), we can’t simply think our way through or past metaphysics, for thinking only “overcomes metaphysics by climbing back down into the nearness of the nearest” (254) and when returning to dwell primordially with language, the human is returned to its original dwelling place, its original abode, its home ground. “Language is the house of Being,” as introduced earlier, and “in its home man dwells. Those who think and those who create with words are guardians of this home” (Heidegger, 1979, 217). Heidegger really elucidates two issues, and to unpack these points for the reader it is necessary for me to go into some detail regarding Heidegger’s original thoughts inspiring Huebner’s thinking in its relationship to language as set within the overarching unfolding of concealment-unconcealment (i.e., the unfolding of Being). Heidegger writes that it is thinking, attuned in its relationship with and dependence on language that “accomplishes the relationship to Being to the essence of man,” however, it does not “make or cause the relation,” rather it “brings this relationship to Being solely as something handed over to it from Being” through the sounding, or more accurately, the reticent call and address of *originary* language (217). It is possible to imagine the essence of “conversation” in terms that emerge from Huebner as an authentic form of education, as a learning to dwell in language, through our listening and responding to language. In this *ontological* form of learning it is possible to envision four unified moments: “(i) preparing for or cultivating a kind of thinking and/poetizing, which (ii) brings being to language and preserves

(i.e., houses) it there, (iii) thereby accomplishing the manifestation of being itself, which in turn (iv) engages the essence of human beings" (Lysaker, 2010, 198).

This "thinking" that shares an intimate and ineluctable relation with Being is transformative, *meditative*, and attuned through language to new ways of revealing the world of the curriculum and, as stated, in Huebner (1999) it is instantiated authentically as an *emancipatory* form of "learning" through the original (*ontological*) unfolding of curriculum as "conversation." For Huebner (1966), this relates to the revelatory and *emancipatory* potential of language to open new worlds beyond the dominance of *metaphysical instrumentalism*, which frees the educator from the confining structures of *technical-instrumental* language. In this moment of *emancipatory* attunement, a new possibility of life is revealed as it is "captured and heightened," and this opening stands apart from the world of "production, consumption, and intent" (18). As Huebner (1999) observes, attunement is a change to the way language manifests, the manner in which it speaks through us. When no longer viewed and used as a "present-at-hand" instrument for "efficient" communication, language can potentially slide into the (*ontological*) register of the "ready-to-hand," and this facilitates the opening and establishing of a "clearing within which that which is can shine forth," and within this "clearing, in the open, which is held open by language as poetry, the student can project his being as potentiality" (153). Through the attunement of poetic language, "the curtain of the everydayness is rent and that which is, is named and stands forth" (153-154) in ways that transcend the *technical-instrumental* reification and re-presentation of the educator and student,⁸ which ultimately facilitates the openness of the human being to the mystery of the world, the complexities of other humans, and the unpredictable *potential-laden* nature of learning in all of its multifarious and unique manifestations.

Huebner (1990) reasons that within and through this change of attunement, the classroom can "become a place where purity and beauty of knowledge may be enjoyed for itself," and the "student can be freed to use knowledge and heighten his[her] own significance" (165). Through our participation in and facilitation of this attuned curriculum "conversation," which embodies the pursuit of our *potential-for-Being* in authentic "conversation" with *others*, the "near infinite possibilities of knowledge and knowing can be hinted at, and the mysteries of the world can be pointed to without the need to reduce them to problems to be solved" (Huebner, 1966, 25). It is in this authentic moment of learning that the teacher "serves the thoughts of thinkers by laying out language to prevent erosion of the uniqueness by idle talk," thereby outstripping one of the dangers inherent to language, and such

thinking lays out the “language of the thinker to make possible an exegesis which unearths the thinker’s world and which encourages the rethinking and regathering of all that is cared for by man [sic] today” (155). This represents for Huebner the reconceptualization of learning in and through the “conversation” that we all already are as granted and bestowed by the essential opening and sway of language, it is “teaching as being with others conversationally,” and this demands that the educator must be aware, and beyond, attuned, to the “truth” that language as “ready-to-hand, as opening into or setting up of a world, as thought, provide different possibilities for the student’s being in that situation” (156). The educator understands that “these possibilities would be articulated differently in each situation, and as a consequence the form of conversation in each situation would be different” (156), as it is inspired in the first instance by the educator releasing herself over to call of language that moves through and emerges from the student’s Being—*from out of the indeterminate future of learning*. Thus, the approach and stance the educator adopts in such instances of authentic learning changes in response to the possibilities of the student’s Being that are always on the approach, manifesting in unique ways, at unique times, in unique one-of-a-kind situations of learning in “conversation” with others.

Although my primary focus is on education and curriculum, beyond this concern, language for Huebner (1999), “grounds man [sic] in his history, in the past which is present”; to lose sight of this *ontological* understanding is to reduce language to the “commonplace, and thus to project our possibilities for being without thinking or thanking” (146). There are undeniable “ethical” elements of gratitude and “thankfulness” bound up with human life that Huebner takes over from Heidegger (2000). This indicates that our lives, histories, destinies, and ways of Being-in-the-world are not simply wrested and possessed through violent and willful acts of appropriation. Rather, our Being-in-the-world is given to us in advance as a “gift” in terms of a “vocation” (e.g., *as* educators) that is first made *as* possibility through the respectful, beholden, and attuned stance we take in the *presencing* of language, and our modes of “thinking” (i.e., teaching and learning), if they are authentic from a phenomenological perspective, are simultaneously a form of “giving thanks” to those aspects of human existence that are always recalcitrant to our epistemological advances, standing beyond full disclosure shrouded in primordial mystery.

As is obvious from these remarks concerning gratitude and “thankfulness,” this view of the human that Huebner embraces as a linguistic being denies that the human is the master of language, where language is slavishly subjugated to

instrumental and utilitarian needs, for importantly language is never under the complete and unadulterated control of the human. For it is not that the human uses poetic language to express poetic thoughts and emotions, rather the poetic essence of language—“truth-happening” as revelatory transformation—ushers into the open that which was once concealed. This indicates for Huebner that the human *should* be respectful of and beholden to language as a primordial gathering force giving form to its life and world. This calls for the human to assume the role of the guardian of language, understanding the fragile potential of language for misuse. For Huebner (1999), returning to thoughts on authentic curricular “conversation, or thought as it unfolds as it is brought to language in its intimate relationship to Being, it is the educator who must assume the greatest responsibility for the guardianship of language, for according to Huebner, educators “differ from others by the care with which [they] dwell in that language” (145), and this is because they do so in ways that are beholden to their students’ own most potential-for-Being. In this renewed relationship between teachers, students, and language, grounded in the reception of language and the emergent and generative concern for the human’s “potential-for-Being,” the *ontological* transformation of teachers and students is occurring as they open new and potentially unforeseen worlds in the curriculum through dialogue.

To open and set up a new world, as Huebner stresses, “language must be served,” and it is the educator as both the guardian and servant of language who “must impart this trust to his students. He does so by the way in which he dwells with them in language” (145). Thus, educators must approach language with “care and respect, articulating [their] own understanding of the world, and conveying it openly with others” (149). This notion of conveying to others the nature of language must not be understood in terms of students imitating the educator’s stance in the midst of language. Rather, this conveying of the respect for language as a poetic phenomenon occurs through what I have referred as a change in attunement. Again, as related to the nature of language, this is not the mere reconceptualization of our educational practices, because importantly it demands a change in practice, a change in our mode of comportment, occurring in and through a re-configured understanding of education that comes as a revelation, and in line with Huebner’s understating of the spiritual aspects of the curriculum, as indicated above, it occurs only when educators are transformed and transported in *ek-static* modes of attunement through which they “stand out” from and exist beyond the influence of *metaphysical instrumentalism* through the opening up of new worlds for potential appropriation. As presented, such modes of attunement (*transcendence*) are possible when curriculum is approached as a phenomenon that is sensitive to embracing and

facilitating the *ontological* aspects of human being that *Social Efficiency Ideology* in standardized education has devalued.

When education returns to "conversation" as a form of the poetic, which returns curriculum and learning to *ontological* roots, it provides the opportunity for educators and their students to think and speak themselves and the world in new ways through language that *shows forth* the re-conceived experience of their world.⁹ Huebner (1999) understands "conversation" as an activity that consists of listening, hearing, and "keeping silent" for the *other*, "listening to another is a way of being open to another," and this *being open* for the *other's* call in response to the address of language inaugurates the "conversation" we always have been as humans (147). It is only when listening for and responding to the reticent call and address of language that education holds the potential to instantiate in an essential manner the "uniquely human endeavor of conversation," and in the authentic "conversation" between teacher and pupil there occurs "the giving and receiving of the word at the frontiers of each other's being," opening the possibility that the world they share "can be revealed in new forms of gesture" (Huebner, 1967, 20).

When understood and enacted in accordance with the view of language presented throughout, as dwelling in "conversation" that is nested within and draws its strength from a forgotten relationship to the poetic power of language, education embodies the relationship between teacher and pupil that is beholden to language in all of its rich and unassailable mystery, in all of its concealed potential for reawakening educators to the transformative and *emancipatory* powers it harbors. Teaching is a dwelling in language where educators and students speak and, most importantly, allow language to speak through them: "The teaching situation," according to Huebner (1999), "must be interpreted not only as the laying out of language and as conversation among teacher and student, but as both teacher and student letting himself be in, and perhaps taken over by language" (156). In such moments when educator and student are "taken over by language" they are released to and "absorbed in that which is most 'thought provoking' and are caringly attentive to their world" (156). This is because, as stated, when opening a world, or the space of the curriculum, language releases the human to the most original possibilities of its Being. If education and curriculum are grounded in the relationship to language that is authentic, i.e., true to the human being's *ontological* potential, the opening of a new world returns the human to a form of thinking that is inextricably nested within Being's primordial unfolding. Teaching that unfolds as authentic "conversation," heeding the call of language, demands that the educator is

attuned in advance, given over and released to, the *ontological* possibilities of his/her students, and this is how the teacher “serves language by listening for and welcoming the poetic and thoughtful speech of students” (156). Here, the authentic possibility exists for educators to *learn* from their students, in that the students’ speech might “disclose that which is hidden from the teacher, or might gather that which remains *unthought* in the teacher’s own thought” (my emphasis, 156).

This might be imagined in the classroom in terms of the reciprocity between students and educators where learning transcends the “totality of instruments and involvements” that impede and weigh down their world, contributing to “shaping their projects and moods [modes of attunements], making demands or asking questions of them, guiding cooperative action” (Huebner, 1999, 151). As related to teaching, such a view of language would demand that educators forego rigid and pre-determined goals and aims for the learning process in advance of the unfolding of the “conversation” within the classroom. For the possibility exists that when educators release themselves over to the call of language and the address of the students’ *potential for Being*, what might be termed *ontological pathmarks* for learning might emerge because they are already immanent in the educational experience as understood by Huebner. This is a far more precarious and risky endeavor than relying on the safety of the “scripted curriculum” or pre-fabricated schemas emerging from the educational logic of *technical-scientific* curriculum engineering, but it might prove to be a beneficial alternative in that the activities and artifacts of the learning experience, as reconceived by Huebner, would take on an intimate, familiar, and welcoming countenance in relation to the personal meaning-structures unique to both educators and students, thus outstripping the one-size-fits-all standardized view of education and the individual. And while this form of learning is “integrative” as opposed to “additive” and undoubtedly nested in the “subjective” register, there is also, and this for Huebner is the “historical” aspect of language and learning, a crucial intersubjective component, which facilitates cooperative learning that transpires in terms of communally dwelling in the “conversation” that was first made *as* possibility through the phenomenological understanding of poetic language. It must be noted that in Huebner’s most difficult essays that borrow heavily from Heidegger, he rarely attempts, as I have done, to concretize phenomenological speculations in terms of *how such themes might play out in educational praxis*. By attempting such a move I am well aware of the potential danger that exists for the interpretation to slide into the register of the “present-at-hand,” i.e., to talk “about” educational issues as opposed to speaking “of” them, as Huebner prefers. I invite readers to ponder what I have presented and work, each in

their own way, toward potential conclusions regarding the value of Huebner's phenomenology for their own unique pedagogy.

Concluding Reflections on Huebner's Phenomenological Approach to Curriculum

In line with the aim of this paper, my recent scholarship (2014; 2015; 2015a, 2016) opens a dialogue across the disciplines of philosophy, philosophy of education, and curriculum theorizing to bridge the past and present, revealing the continued potential of this type of research for re-conceptualizing and re-configuring a view to the human being, education-curriculum, and the teacher-pupil relationship in the age of standardized education. It is clear from my interpretive reading of Huebner that the point of curriculum theorizing is not to produce theories with predictable outcomes, programmatic curriculum schemas, or objective, a-historical generalizations for rigid, a-temporal classification. In addition, in reading Huebner's complex and poetic phenomenological essays, we see that there is much more to the human being than can be captured in theories of a scientific or social scientific nature, in behavioral, cognitive, or neurological terms. My goal in approaching Huebner was to attempt to open a form of curriculum conversation that is *emancipatory* in and through its intimate connection with the phenomenological sense of the "poetic" in language. Further work on the themes contained herein will demand the formulation of new questions and the re-formulation of perennial questions concerning the essence of education and curriculum, which were central to Huebner's ever-developing phenomenological research.

However, such questions posed by Huebner in phenomenological and *ontological* terms are foreign to curriculum workers focused exclusively on quantitative research. For this requires the "re-focusing" of their concerns, and beyond, the re-attunement of their Being-in-the-world. This I have stated elsewhere requires the transcendent move from *epistemology* to *ontology*—from the *calculative* (instrumental) to the *meditative* (poetic) in curriculum. As was my focus, I believe that such a move is possible through a return to Huebner's vast corpus, which speaks the language of phenomenology. The poetic process of "naming" anew, might allow us to bring to language, bring to *presence*, the forgotten *ontological* aspects of our Being that have been occluded by the technical-instrumental language and attunement of contemporary standardized education. It would undoubtedly require a radical linguistic "turn" in research to the poetic language of Huebner (1966), which would open the space for phenomenology as a form of legitimate conceptual, theoretical, and philosophical research. Phenomenological inquiry, as evidenced throughout,

harbors the potential release from the ensnarement within the existing “technical” web of curriculum and educational language, for it is “specifically poetry,” and the mode of the poetic that empowers and enables the human “to break out of his verbal prison and to achieve a ‘victory over language’” (8) as it now holds him captive.

Phenomenology as a practice concerned with poetic revelation is irreducible to rote introspection, or worse, metaphysical solipsism. For it is a legitimate way in which to inquire into the manifold ways in which we inhabit (“embody”) our existence that are irreducible to the realm of the “cognitive” and the domain of apodictic truth, because as Huebner argues, as poetic and linguistic beings, we reside and dwell most intimately in the place or *space* of the “affective,” which is a dwelling opened and sustained by the original poetic power of language. It is precisely this affective domain of *knowing-and-living* that is maligned or ignored in education’s push for the tangible, the explicit, and the quantitative aspects of learning that can be gauged, measured, and categorized. Phenomenology, according to Huebner (1999), “by emphasizing the significance of man’s relationship to man and the primacy of the communion, conversation, dialogue, or participation with his fellow man, makes it possible for man to value more strongly these personal encounters and provides a language to legitimize conversational acts” (90). Perhaps, by seriously adopting a reinvigorated form of phenomenological-*ontological* inquiry, as I have done in this critical exegesis of Huebner’s thought, the formulation of new concepts intimated in a poetic form of language might inspire our *living* and *learning* in new ways, and the re-conceptualization of *curriculum as contemporary phenomenological text* might become a unique and welcome possibility (once again) in both present and future curriculum research and theorizing.

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Notes

¹ I am thankful to both Patrick Roberts and Susan Mayer for their valuable and constructive critique of earlier versions of this paper. Their creative input was essential to the re-presentation, re-organization, and the re-conceptualization of several of the themes within the essay.

² It is far beyond these thoughts to enter into a discussion concerning Huebner's understanding of "essence" as it emerges from Heidegger's use, especially in the latter's 1935 lecture course, *What is metaphysics?* There Heidegger (2001) deals with the crucial historical issue of the Latin mistranslation of the original Attic Greek terms that contributes to the "technologizing" and subsequent downfall of Western philosophy. Huebner uses the term "essence" interchangeably with such Heideggerian terms as "origin" (*Anfang*) and "beginning" (*Beginn*). Huebner's usage, however, glosses over the subtle complexity associated with these terms for Heidegger. Essence, it is possible to state, for Huebner, especially in the essay concerned with the "poetic origin and beginning" of language, refers in a basic way to that which makes the phenomenon of language what it *is*. Huebner is careful to avoid conflating "essence" with "substance" (*substantia*), which gives the erroneous impression that "essences" are hypostatized and reified transcendental paradigms or signifiers, e.g., Platonic Forms (*eidei*).

³ It is necessary to say a few words concerning the manner in which Huebner's phenomenological approach to curriculum theorizing differs from the "phenomenological" work of William Pinar (1994), James McDonald (1995), and Ted Aoki (2005). Pinar's now famous "autobiographical" method of *currere* emerged from decidedly psychoanalytic roots, although it certainly unfolded as a modified phenomenological method. McDonald theorized an innovative view of curriculum and education within the "transcendental developmental" model, which according to McDonald grew from an "ontological and phenomenological grounding" (77). Aoki practiced a "non-technical" form of phenomenology; the tacit influence of Husserl, Heidegger, and Merleau-Ponty is detectable in Aoki's theorizing. Huebner practiced a highly complicated form of what I call "philosophical phenomenology" and was inspired by the highly technical and dense writings of Heidegger, which emerged through close "formal" readings of the primary texts.

⁴ The power of language to open new worlds is a theme Huebner locates in Heidegger's (2015; 2000; 1979; 1971) philosophy of language as the "saying of the unconcealment of beings," which is a "projective" form of saying that "in preparing the sayable, simultaneously brings the unsayable as such into the world" (1979, 199). Hence the power of revelation inherent in language is traceable to *Dichtung*, which Heidegger (2015) indicates relates "to the same root as the Greek δεικνυμι [*deiknumi*].

It means to show, to make something visible, to make it manifest, not just in general, but “by way of a specific pointing” (30). Language in its *poietic* essence is *Dichtung* in the essential sense, and as such, it is a primordial way of wresting the world and entities from concealment, bringing them for the first time into the open clearing of truth as *aletheia*, which occurs through a naming that is at once a pointing. Lysaker (2010) explains that the essence of language as I have already introduced it is inextricably bound up with the question of how language claims the human being: “Heidegger’s observation is that language comes to pass by pre-reflectively informing thought and speech,” however, Heidegger does not render language in terms of an object of thought, rather he “seeks its essence in occurrence, and he locates that occurrence in how language claims human thought and speech” (196). This for Heidegger (2000), in his deep reflections on Hölderlin’s poetry, is always already occurring since the “primal event” that “disposes of the highest possibility of man’s being” (56), namely, in terms of the “conversation” we have been. “Conversation, however, is not only a way in which language takes place,” states Heidegger, “but rather language is essential only as conversation” (56), and how this conversation unfolds in terms of an event of learning and education in Huebner’s phenomenology will later be explored.

⁵ This talk of the primal aurality of language over orality is taken over by Huebner from Heidegger’s analysis of language. Huebner’s writings present what appears as a consistent and coherent treatment of language as it is found in Heidegger’s philosophy. It must be noted that this gives the disingenuous impression that the works of Heidegger that Huebner cites espouse a consistent interpretation of what might be called a “Heideggerian view of language.” It must also be noted that the writings that Huebner incorporates range from 1927 through the 1950s, and there is no acknowledgement of the radical changes that Heidegger’s view of language undergoes during that time period, i.e., as Heidegger moves from the *fundamental ontology* of *Being and Time* through the later works (of the “Turn – *Kehre*) on art, poetry, and meditative thinking his view of language changes – primarily because the “ontological distinction” falls from his philosophy. It is far beyond this essay to address the issue of the “Turn” and language in Heidegger, but if the reader wishes to pursue the topic, see Powell, J. (2013). *Heidegger and Language*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University.

⁶ This phenomenological view of language flies in the face of many modern views of language including the “nominalist” interpretation of language we find in Ferdinand de Saussure (1954), where language is reducible in an arbitrary manner to the “sign,” which is composed of the “signifier” and “signified.” Huebner would classify this view of language as a “secondary” categorization of the “primary”

phenomenon of language opening up spaces where the entities and the world first manifest for appropriation. Indeed, this view is not uncommon in the reading of *curriculum as phenomenological text*, e.g., Aoki (2005) also offers the reader rich descriptions of the educative experience and then masterfully teases out the phenomenological, or ontological, meaning structures—“first-order” (primordial) ways of knowing – underlying those descriptions that are instantiated within “second-order ways” of knowing/acting characteristic of the *natural attitude*, which include science, psychology, and the social sciences. Although Huebner does not mention Saussure, the “nominalist” view of language represents the precise type of “objectified” and “instrumental” language that phenomenology should seek “deconstruct,” for the “nominalist” view reduces language to social convention while at once embracing the explicit function of “instrumentality” pervading this view of language.

⁷ The reader must be aware of the following: Although Huebner does not explicate this issue, the six categories of language that he identifies are derivative upon and emerge from the originary saying, naming, and revelation of the poetic phenomenon of essential language, which holds the potential to open and reveal beings and the world in new and unique ways. This is however, intimated in Huebner's phenomenology, for he recognizes that the categories we employ to give structure to the educational experience are always thematized generalizations that must be understood as such. It is when these generalizations and categories defining teachers, students, and the learning experience become reified and elevated to the status of indelible and legitimate ways-of-Being (e.g., the materialist view of learner as neurological-cognitive processing unit), that we fall victim to the dangers inherent in language.

⁸ For the reader interested in tracing this notion of “attunement” to its Heideggerian origins, it must be noted that although Heidegger's (1962; 1979; 1995; 2000; 2012) focus changes from the fundamental ontology of Being and Time to that of “Time and Being” when attempting to understand the human's relationship to the “essence” of the truth of Being— when Heidegger moves into the 1930s—he never abandons his original position regarding the power that transformative and primordial moods (as modes of attunement – *Befindlichkeit*) play in altering *Da-sein's* historical and temporal Being-in-the-world and the ways that it is released over to its approaching “vocation” for the potential appropriation of its destiny.

⁹ I want to make the reader aware that “conversation” for Heidegger (2000) already presupposes a sense of the historical “Being-with” (*Mit-sein*) others in a way that Huebner's phenomenology does not express in identical terms. This is because Heidegger's notion of “conversation” emerges from his extensive interpretations of

Hölderlin's poetry, and not from observations and descriptive phenomenology focused on learning and the curriculum. "We are a conversation," claims Heidegger, "and that means we are able to hear from one another," and this also indicates that "we are *one* conversation," the unity of which "consists in the fact that in the essential word there is always manifest that one and the same on which we agree, on the basis of which we are united and so are authentically ourselves" (57). We are "one" in original conversation because of our intimate relationship to Being to which language harkens, it is in and through dialogue that our Being unfolds.