

Learning with Abeyance Gesturing toward Worlds and the Spaces around Worlds

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Just as the moon can only shine when the sun is not shining, only when the foregoing consciousness is no longer prevalent, can a fresh consciousness arise. (Vigata Paccayo)

It is that willing suspension of disbelief for the moment which constitutes poetic faith. (Samuel Taylor Coleridge)

Abeyance is often used in relation to transitory times. A sentence like, ‘Her academic journey was held in abeyance’ implies a sense flux as well as “expectancy” and “suspension” (OED, 2012). It conjures images of someone waiting, lost in reverie. Moments I know well: having forgotten the fastening holding the frame is un-locked, a connection arises with opening the door, feeling the breeze and allowing myself to suspend further.

Abeyance, an Old French word from which abeyance derives, brings the light of “aspiration, (and) desire” to the scene. It is a noun of the condition of *abeer*, “to expect, look, gape”, from *ba(y)er*, “to open wide” in “remembrance, expectation and contemplation” (Merriam-Webster, 2012). Interestingly, its root, *baer* is also the source of “recessed space”.

Modern connotations of abeyant latency hold on to 1520s interpretations, when the Anglo-French word *abeiance* emerged with particular reference to lawsuits concerning a person in hope of receiving property; implying ownership as a desired outcome. Around the time of the British Union with Wales in 1536 and 1543, for example, there were numerous properties in a state of abeyance in *Y Mers* or the Welsh Marches, a place featured in this paper.² Many cases lasted hundreds of years – a problem being the indefinable nature of the area and the difficulties in reconciling differences between Welsh and English legal and social norms. Its “perceived hybridity and disorder” by politicians requiring definition, “led to its isolation” being seen as neither one nor the other, “but a distinctive and problematic borderland” (Morgan and Power, 2009, p. 105). This has persevered into recent times, with the Marches omitted from most contemporary maps, despite being widely referred to in everyday conversation.

In storying my current relationship with abeyance, this paper plays with the ambiguity of the word; giving up on one right definition. In so doing, it holds back from being everything it can be, and creates possibilities for relating with the world and its “muffled middle” in intimate and ultimate ways (Thomas, 1954, p. 1). By learning to suspend the self from the ego’s tendency for divisiveness, being with abeyance is receptive to life’s way – revealing projections of selfhood, acknowledgement of difference, and the reality of oneness.



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Stories speak to moments of centred-openness in learning, from where it is possible to converse in ways that suspend disbelief. Gestures of awareness accompanying these moments of difference ripple through stories with a consciousness of continuance. Consequently, stories hold within them hope that the part of me that is looking for an identity defined by what has been given, will acknowledge, on a cellular level, that it is not everything; necessary, though, if I'm to work creatively with moments of fertile emptiness as a conscious teacher-learner, and to relate, through living processes of abeyance, with what may emerge.

Abeyance gesturing as form

Three gestures of abeyance give form to stories – form that is empty of itself and, therefore, full of everything else. Gestures derive from Natalie Depraz, Francisco Verala and Pierre Vermersch's description of the act of becoming aware, and are based on the phenomenological way of *epochè* (1999). The opening story, *Beet love*, describes my phase of consciously settling the mind and suspending habitual thought. Memories of learning to harvest beets in the Welsh Marches offer a quality of presence favourable for further suspension. This is followed with *The Problem of Chembakolli*, storying a teaching experience in southern India and describing my redirection of attention from the exterior world to an interior one. A third story brings these memories into conversation with my current situation as a doctoral student. *One plus one equals three* is shared through gestures of letting go and is suggestive of how learning with abeyance may emerge within the “enabling constraints” of classrooms (Sumara, Luce-Kapler & Iftody, 2008, p. 238).

It became clear during my writing process that the structural dynamics of Depraz, Verala and Vermersch's work on *epochè* resonates with my experiences of learning with abeyance. Characterised by its enaction, *epochè* is itself embedded within a process whereby something comes into consciousness, “something which inhabited me in a way which was confused, opaque, affective, immanent; something which is pre-reflective, and eventually becomes part of shared, inter-subjective knowledge” (Depraz et al., p. 3). *Epochè* complements processes of *Currere* (Pinar), “mindfulness” (Thich Nhat Hanh), a “reflective act” (Heidegger), and “phenomenological reduction” or “bracketing” (Husserl), to name a few.

All of these processes share a contradictory nature in that they clarify phases of awareness while simultaneously dissolving distinctions through lived experience. In similar gestures, not dissimilar to the Welsh Marches, they at once, turn attention inward while rising to a world of their own volition. This paradox brings a sense of playfulness to stories, and perhaps, as Doll suggests, “more dancing, [and] less marching” (1989, p. 4). Choosing to dance also speaks to courage involved in learning with abeyance, peculiarly as it opens itself in surprising ways, involves all of our being, and is never complete.

Abeyance gesturing as contiguity

The words of inspiring educators', flow through stories, bringing a sense of spaciousness to experiences. They converse with the interplay of pieces and gesture toward less fear and more space for suspension in learning. Stories engage with a description of experiences, as “only this allows moving forward in refining past work, and ... confirm(ing) or invalidate(ing) past descriptions” (Depraz et al., p. 2). This, as the following tells, has little to do with fixed identities and everything to do with cumulative cycles of openness.

Full immersion in the creative flow is easier said than done, and frequently meets with a fascinating array of resistances. “There's something provocative” in these resistances, says



Elizabeth Ellsworth, “about learning’s proximity to discredited things such as trauma, surprise, discontinuity, tickling, the unconscious, paradox, magic, silence, obsession, invisible and unrepeatable events” (1997, p. 194). Negotiating the psychic gaps that exist between the desire to learn with abeyance and “the difference between conscious and unconscious knowledges, conscious and unconscious desires” (p. 41) intensify from time to time.

Relating abeyance as contiguity is primarily concerned with new ways of facing and releasing energies, particularly insidious traumas associated with global inequity. Consequently, difficult and distracting energies ruffle through stories, as I find myself in the uncomfortable territory of life not-on-my-terms. Occasional displays of divisiveness do, in places, gesture toward a surrendering of self-protection – and the change of tone and suspension accompanying these moments inhabit qualities of stillness, further dissolving the “operational, procedural or performative” dimensions of *époque* (Depraz et al., p. 2).

In Maurice Merleau-Ponty words, “I cannot understand the function of the living body except by enacting it myself, and except in so far as I am a body which rises toward the world” (cited in Thompson, 2004, p. 393). This, along with Gregory Bateson’s work, attunes theory with its surroundings by showing how the bodies of living beings, in art and science, are secreted from process, which is life. William Doll’s work reveals how complexity theory may have a strong influence on teaching and learning. He considers schools as open systems and fractal in nature, like the society of which they are part. Open and complex, they are “sensitive to initial conditions and have emergent properties ... therefore, they are dependent on feedback” (Varbelow, on Doll, 2012, p. 86).

Story one: Beet love

I am a correlate of this world. (Madeleine R. Grumet)

We should do better to fully accept the notoriously different and more difficult situation of existing in a world where no one in particular can have a claim to better understanding. (Francisco Varela)

This is a story of beetroot harvesting in *Y Mers*, the Welsh Marches of the United Kingdom. It draws on memories, mostly from teenage years, of working with my family after we’d arrive home from school. I remember feeling frustrated with my parents, grandparents, and their friends and neighbours’ ways of not needing to know everything, and with my insistence to find out.

Late summer evenings, like³. Trying all ways to make time pass quickly, throwing the odd beet in the air and laughing as we’re asked to ‘settle down’; then, slowly giving in to the field giving in, and to my family’s ways for longer than we can say. We chat about school, what we know, who we’re going to be, and if it’s all the same to you, we learn that “being bush smart is different from city knowing”; that it has little to do with “needing filling of a lacanian lack” (Cole and O’Riley, cited in Doll & Gough, 2002, p. 147).

We’re working with beet on the roundabout; an irregular shaped field, the last before Mynydd Troed mountain officially begins. Why it’s called the roundabout, when it’s anything but round we don’t know. It’s always been like this. We’ve grown to understand the soil, where it yields a saleable crop, where knotted grasses thrive; but why there’s a strip of stony soil where nothing seems to flourish, we don’t know. ‘We planted trees along it a few years ago and they’re



struggling to take root'. 'Maybe, there was a stream there once?' 'Maybe. We'll have to wait and see what happens'.

Life is like picking beet, you just have to get into the rhythm of it, they say. Giving in some more to the monotony releases why's into cans. It's not so much about thinking. It's something quite different, working with movements of what is. The slowing down of time and entering into flow state can represent "a break with a 'natural' or non-examined attitude" (Depraz et al., p. 4), re-connecting ourselves with place in the very "way by which we were always there – by our own lived body" (Casey, 1997, p. 21). Listening to Autumn Gentian's reds on how to live in doubt and come to an understanding that everything in life is gain – transforming the 'don't knows' into challenging learners to find their own way. There are, after all, many ways to learning responsibility.

Picking and choosing which beet to save and which to discard is different again. 'The shops only want smooth rounded ones.' 'Put all the scraggy ones over here, we'll eat them.' The odd, queer looking beets are just as tasty, but people would sooner leave them on the shelves than take them home for tea. We twist the tops from beet heading for market as no one wants these either, for fear of getting poisoned by the oxalic acid in their veins. We eat them though, usually steamed with garlic and rolled with ricotta, at least during September and October. I know instinctively how the market's fears, and school's for that matter, don't always play out at home and how they often do; how if school knew, we already know about life and death, it could make a world of difference ... and if the pulling of beet, the twisting of their tops, their swinging into buckets and on into crates ... if these movements as they're held in our bodies were included in the curriculum, it might bring vitality to differences between paradigms.

I learned from home how the attention given to the unsellable beet offers a worldview as expansive as teachings in school. We place the beet on the earth for a day or two when it's dry; knowing that this somehow retains their purples, before layering them with straw and bringing them inside for the winter. Without wanting to create an idyllic picture, practices of being with, in this way, offer nourishing and intuitive ways to live contradictions. In fact, the two call to each other. They call with "a strong internal obviousness, antecedent to and qualified by a gradual process of filling-in which is a characteristic property of suspension" at the heart of abeyance (Depraz et al., p. 4). And, "whether we give this inwardness the name of feeling, receptiveness or response to stimuli, volition, or something else – it harbours, in some degree of awareness, the absolute interest of the organism in its own being and continuation" (Jonas, cited in Thompson, 2004, p. 383).

This feeling, however, was easily interrupted by my call of difference; struggling with what I perceived to be society's unquestioned acceptance that variations in people are not to be attended to in the same way as it is with beets. Growing up in a community given to honouring the sanctity of marriage was too much juxtaposition for my growing sense of abeyance to reconcile. So, tuning in with the land helped me relate with the luscious thrum of the world even though I often made the turn in relations of co-existent dissociation.

Buzzard soars above, effortlessly envisioning possibilities contained in the landscape below. Skylarks thrill high and clear, curving with the lilt and tilt of the land from where there inevitably arrives a peace, after a while of quiet. Initiated some days by a silent withdrawal from the world, then some days the quiet arrives unnoticed, especially with the Jays' singing their gentle, "oh isn't life a terrible thing, thank god", call of the cosmos (Thomas, p. 30).

Time again, Jays swoosh back and forth to an Oak tree – its curriculum, "rich, relational, recursive and rigorous" (Doll, 2012). They bury their acorns there, along with squirrels and mice



– knowing that nothing is given, everything is made together. This builds to a complex scene, a vision of Oak seen within lines of tension in its bark, exposing living tissues close to the surface and a criss-cross of branches shouldering the weight of the world – Its clear purpose appearing confused by multi-directional growth. Grounding the “wild profusion of existing things (Foucault, cited in Lather, 1996, p. 36) in the propriety of “foundational knowledge” – in order we learn from our inherent fissures, failures and refusals (Lather, p. 53).

Mynydd Troed holds itself tall too. Belonging neither in the Black Mountains nor the Brecon Beacons it rises with its arms apart, connecting ranges. Unlike the mountains just twelve miles to the North, it escaped the attention of the Anglo-Normans when the Wales-England border was being defined in 1536. The land was considered too rugged and so the dividing line fell east along the Wye Valley, leaving an extra hundred miles of hills and valleys for the native Celts, who were nevertheless bought under close supervision. The notion that the border separated “civility” from “savagery” is an enduring one say Rhys Morgan and Gerald Power (p. 105). They describe the area as a “land of peace” (p. 107), a “theoretical defence ... in a constant state of flux” (p. 121).

However, in many histories of Wales, with the Act of Union, the Marches were declared by the English government to be “obsolete” (p. 121). The “subdued Welsh Principality was theoretically absorbed into the English state and should have ceased to exist” (p. 121). In response, the “expansive nature of early modern Welsh identity combined to move the Marches into the collective imagination” (p. 118), and although the area has been largely ignored by historians, its reputation as a “zone of interaction” (p. 122) is alive today. To Francis Bacon, the word “March” was flexible and could be applied to the old Welsh Marches, the “Marches inward” and its English shires, the “Marches outwarde” (p. 111). To date, the area is “perceived as different” (p. 109), and its reputation as a region of cultural “degeneracy and sexual danger” has “lingered” long since John Milton noticed it in the nineteenth century (p. 117).

Given its history being “one of survival and transformation” (p. 120), being of curious dis-position, I look to school for questions left unanswered at home. I work hard at marching outwarde, reaching conclusions, and at eighteen, leave “all my cares and doubts to follow the homeless tide ... the stranger’s call” all the way to Northern Sotho, Southern Africa (Tagore, cited in Doll & Gough, p. 289). Traveling back and forth, roundabout the road of otherness for years; searching for ways to live inclusively. Gerald of Wales, an author in Medieval Times, also left, overwhelmed by being neither English nor Welsh and with “both peoples regard(ing) me as a stranger” (cited in Morgan and Power, p. 117).⁴

Unlike Gerald, I eventually journeyed into inner city London schools, and on, to the relative safety of radical pressure groups – save the beets, fighting for the rights of sexual minorities in cities like Bangalore. With time, while continuing to travel as R.S. Peters muses “with a different view” (cited in Doll, 1972, p. 318) I begin to create space for calm amidst crisis, accept limitations of self and re-settle with abeyance. As I learn to dance inward, the silence has at times, settled attention and naturally expanded “via a coupling with panoramic consciousness ... characterised by the letting go of voluntary searching and the embracing of a mode of receptivity that is typically lived as openness” (Depraz et al., p. 6).

Story two: The problem with Chembakolli

One listens and therefore learns, only in a state of silence, in which this whole background is in abeyance, is quiet; then, it seems to me, it is possible to communicate. (Jiddu Krishnamurti)



I greet the divine in you, which out of my being makes an open door. (Menna Elfyn)

The following story of abeyance is about a prolonged and unscheduled experience of waiting in an unfamiliar place. It begins with my experiences as a teacher educator guiding a professional development visit in southern India and describes events culminating in a redirection of attention from the exterior world to an interior one – a distancing from a worldly show to the mental, carrying this perceiving.

Half-listening to a conversation between teachers in Bangalore Central Station, I look to *Mazus* flowers, suspending from brickwork on the opposite platform wall, a metre from the rail tracks. As soon as a train arrives, we lose sight of its beauty as people, their luggage and animals, embark and disembark. The sounds of chai-wallahs, fruit-vendors, porters fill the space, rushing on board to sell and jumping off again, sometimes as the train's leaving the station. The noises, smells and fears are foreign and familiar.

We've been sitting on our luggage, waiting for a train to Mysore for three hours. It's late leaving Chennai and hasn't caught up time. The sixteen teachers I'm with are calmer now. When we first heard of the delay it was upsetting for some and I was reminded that since meeting them at the airport three days ago, our itinerary has been revised over and over, with lost luggage, the closure of a Dream school we'd planned to visit, and now, a severely delayed train distracting our intended course.

Our goal is to reach Chembakolli, an Adivasi⁵ village well known to teachers, many of whom have been creating lesson plans on the area aimed at eight-year-old children in the UK, for a decade. This is their first visit to India and the unexpected and inconvenient nature of the wait is heightened by its strangeness. My discomfort relates to fulfilling a separate aim – the underlying reason for this journey is to trouble teachers' notions of development. We're to encounter people, places and issues with different views on life in order to address a concern that many primary school teachers in the UK teach Chembakolli as if it represents the whole of India. During the ten days before we reach our destination my role is to emphasise grey areas, and on arrival, to go on a long walk and an overnight stay in this remote place.

With time and an acceptance that there's little we can do about the situation, stress slowly dissipates into quiet. We reach for our cameras and notebooks with the intention of recording platform life, for people at home to see where we are. Eventually, these objects return to our bags and we simply sit and observe the nuances we're attending to – paint flaking from cement pillars, intense blues, ruby's, golden greens, vivid whites, sounds within sound and with letting go, a lulled hum of mind.

This process of tuning in with our surroundings resonates with Husserl's version of suspension as reflexive redirection referring to a switch from an object to an act; to what Piaget calls "making conscious", the redirection of attention away from aiming at a goal or from the perception of the effects of action towards the means by which such an action is performed, i.e. the psychological act which organizes and regulates the perceiving. The impetus for this conversion is multilayered and unknown, the "starting up process ... obscured by the fact that this beginning has already taken place for someone who uses it to describe this very same transition" (Depraz et al., p. 5). *Épochè* can arise in many ways, of which the following speak to teachers' experiences – through aesthetic surprise; the mediation of others (and in this situation, the mediation of events themselves), and / or through practices initiated by the individual.



In the past I've been fascinated with teacher responses, their coping mechanisms and presentations of change. Reactions to the harsh realities of poverty, to meeting countless parents whose children have been lost to trafficking, have largely been in keeping with what I need to hear – validating my sense of purpose with feedback like, “The experience was life-changing”, and offering false protection from the reality of global injustice. In waiting on the platform, I open myself slightly to question what might also be going on here. What exactly do I want to change in the teachers? Am I sure they are representing the whole in an obscure way? How do I know? I shift awkwardly on my luggage, trying to get comfortable, and somehow find my way on to the floor, sandals off, feet on cool concrete. Aware of my change in position, I glance around and notice a number of teachers already sitting like this. It seems we're being guided by the waiting, what John Dewey calls the “other mode of control”, where the guiding lies not unilaterally with the teacher nor with the students, but instead “resides in the nature of the situations themselves” (Doll, 2000, p. 71).

Waiting takes on the weight of karmic intervention. Being “beside itself in an empty space in which life unfolds” (Irwin & Springgay 2007, p. 71). What might the problem with Chembakolli really be about? I shift again. Someone's squeezing past us speaking English. ‘May I help you? Are you lost?’ ‘We're Ok thanks, our train is late.’ They move on and with a swish; rhythms of the station draw in. Groups of porters rise from shadows with the announcement of a new train's arrival; homing in on unsuspecting travellers who, more open than not, generously give in to their persistence. I'm wondering what the journeys mean to each passenger. A commute to or from work, a chase for wealth, family visit, re-union with a loved one, an auspicious or embarrassed return home. Trains fill with possibilities; of long periods of waiting and possibly, nothing – except for the something we are seeking being the same something that is seeking us.

Doors open for fractals of seconds and close again, hinting of times to follow. I'm in an alephical space⁶, where everything exists in the same place at the same time. What are you doing, a stranger in this place? I'm not a stranger. I'm not praying for a safe return home, I haven't just been imagining my *le creuset*, beets and lemon grass. With so many no's and a taste of hysteria, it appears the self I'm rejecting is evolving into a more forceful ego. Refusing full contact with intimacy, it's saying it likes to fit, to see itself replicated, achieve confirmation of its existence and importance. The teacher I've attempted to take out into the world, despite being challenged, has changed and yet, when under pressure defends itself. From what? All that we are not? I look to the group. Have I made a habit of generalising their experiences? Pursuing the goal of educating them in order to avoid turning away from the world myself?

There's a way in which the perceiver is the perceived; “the observer, the observed” (Krishnamurti); or as Bateson interprets, something which is “responsive to the pattern which connects” (1979, p.9). Acknowledging this brings attention to my breathing, core to the process of conversion. I sit and observe, engaging without doing anything other than being, creating a centering of attention so strong and immediate it feels hypnotic. Experiencing the lived body as a focal centre in this way is “psychic or spiritual” and refers to leaving “the world as an extension beyond the bounds of the body” (Depraz et al., p. 9).

The sun rises high; its shadows falling across the platform in black and white, interrupted by the ebb and flow of porters and passengers swaying back and forth, predictably so. *Mazus* stays still, interrupting distinctions with her subtle colours, and revealing the path to peace doesn't have to be a fight – just the art of cleansing what's superfluous.



Doors continue to open. I see truth and lies, people pushing to find seats on the same train that others calmly enter. Listen. There are “movements and countries and mazes and colours and dismays and rainbows ... tunes and wishes and flight and fall ... despairs”, fields of beet, *Mazus Japonicus* growing in cracks along station rafters (Thomas, 1954, p. 3). Its delicacy radiates into the world and its translunary sentiments – an herbal infusion to tone the system. The peddlers and porters notice. An old woman with a bowl passes by, offering a nod rather than asking for help; her gestures in keeping with her thoughts, suspending disbelief. In a fleeting moment I trust in the wait; submit to its “wrenching” (Depraz et al., p. 8), its mystery and let the experience speak for itself.

Doors open again. I’m showing teachers an old image designed to shake their assumptions. Although, we’re pausing, waiting for what seems an eon. Then, instead of the usual, ‘Who do you think took this picture and why?’ I feel fogginess, confusion, nothingness. Aware that I’m no longer experiencing the Self in the old “natural” way, I “sense form emerging up until the moment of brutally clear perception” (Depraz et al., p. 11). Someone asks, ‘Can we say this another way?’ ‘Are we talking about abeyance ... as it derives from ‘abeyd’, a form of abide?’ To abide means “to wait ... to remain, continue, in a place. To remain or continue in some state or action, to continue to be *something*”; “to stand firm, to hold to, to remain true to ...” (Merriam-Webster, 2012).

Out of nowhere, the station’s overhead speakers’ project – ‘Shatabti⁷ Express is arriving’. Its sky blue carriages slowly approach, revealing in bright red and green lettering, the ‘fastest train in India’. Our stirring attracts the attention of porters who crowd in. Since we know, now, they are nothing more than signs of where we have been, we settle in to hear what they have to say ...

Story three: One plus one equals three

A circle of sound, water and fire light on uncountable miles of mountains. (Gillian Clarke)

A play for voices. (Dylan Thomas)

With further suspension, the quality and tone of this story changes. Learning with abeyance passes from an inward direction of receptivity or attitude of listening, through gestures of “letting come” which “eminently involve action” (Depraz et al., p. 10). Situated in the University of British Columbia, Vancouver, having arrived here by train and by plane in a roundabout⁸ way, conversations, both imaginative and real, are suggestive of how receptivity to new ideas may emerge within the “enabling constraints” of classrooms (Sumara, Luce-Kapler & Iftody, 2008, p. 238), and of how suspension plays gesture toward worlds beyond.

Drawn to the expansive energy of the Pacific West Coast, after twenty years in the field of social justice education, I find myself a student in a classroom... about to encounter a fundamental paradox. The land on which the classroom is constructed is unceded Musqueam Territory. Again, what am I, a privileged stranger, doing in this place?

In class, we continue reading, “A DJ named Spooky juxtaposes Duchamp with Fanon, Nietzsche with Philip Glass, haiku with jazz, inspired by ‘theories of excess and creative misreading’” (Pinar, 2009, p. 154). This “‘strategy of juxtaposition’, Janet Miller and her colleagues suggest, ‘is one that invites inconsistencies, ambiguities, ambivalence, and foregrounds the fact that there will always be ‘unspoken themes’ that cannot or will not be



interrogated. Radhakrishnan employs juxtaposition – whether systems of thought or of individuals – to forefront the ‘complex, contradictory and unpredictable relationships between the places people inhabit and the spaces where they think. In Pasolinian terms, the juxtaposition of languages where reality is differentially represented discloses the real ... beyond the confines of language, so that reality is no longer symbolised but is purely itself ... Abrogating a simplistic narrativism that fails to appreciate narrative’s genesis in self-difference and conflict” (Britzman and Gilbert, quoted in Pinar, 2009, p. 154).

I sink into a chair. Traversing empty space, trusting awareness will emerge from within this tension; between what Depraz calls, a “supported act of attention and an immediate non-filling” (Depraz et al., p. 10). Turning to the window, I see Caitrin ferch Glyndwr, calling through winter rains. Osmosis between life and art can be dangerous.

Then, one of the students in the seminar I’m attending offers, ‘In art, we’re always juxtaposing difference. That’s what we do. Letting two separates come together as paradox.’

Like the alchemists motto, *solve et coagula*, meaning separate and come together.

They’re no longer two are they? When they come together, they create a third space.

Where, one plus one equals three?

I encountered the equation, ‘one plus one equals three’ in a different class⁹ this term, where pragmatism, post modernism and complexity theory were “accented by dynamic processes of ‘equilibrium-disequilibrium-re-equilibrium’” (Doll, cited by Pinar in Trueit, 2012); and where a focused and open curriculum emerged in fascinating ways.

Passages between one and one and three were met with doors, walls and borders, and concepts of threshold, pivotal in transitioning between “foreign and domestic worlds ... Therefore to cross the threshold is to unite oneself with a new world” (van Gennep in Casey, 1997, p. 39).

Amidst the rain, I hear someone say, ‘They like beet in Red Deer, Alberta too’.

I’m sorry?

Don’t be. This process is complementary. Complaining and controlling equals two. They come with worrying about an outcome, and can have a deadening effect on conversations, making the end goal predictable and repetitious – giving in to the pressure of needing an answer, wrapping up a conversation, filling its empty spaces with identifications, categories and fixed solutions. Whereas, minimising complaining brings out difference, creating conditions for voices within systems to rise.

Can you say more about Red Deer?

If you were to draw a straight line between Fort Edmonton and Fort Calgary, Red Deer is about midway. Sugar beet is grown intensively in man-fields besides Red Deer River. These wide stony marshes or shallows known as the Old Red Deer Crossing, Waskasoo Seepee in Cree, cross an ancient trail connecting Montana and northern Alberta. Some of the first British traders thought the Wapiti Elk in the area were a type of European Red Deer and gave the crossing its official name. The fur traders’ confusion is surprising, however, as Wapiti (*Cervus Canadensis*) are different from European Elk (*Alces Alces*).

“A programme I’ve been working with”, adds a classmate “offers a real-life example of how to ... transform the public conversation about education. Participants from throughout Alberta shared different perspectives on how to address educational reform. A participant from Red Deer recently said, ‘A school of sardines is the same size as the whale. When four or five



sardines change direction, the whole school will change. If we continue to talk about this, sooner or later we can change the direction of education too”.

We're not speaking about something explanatory here. Questions about changing direction, life and death are deeply connected to questions of subjectivity and how we can be or become a subject of action and responsibility.

With the death of the subject, “it is possible to speak the truth about a subject” (Biesta cited in Winter, 2011, p. 537).

Transformation is only possible through participating together in societal renewal. It's vital to create distances between self and self, self and Other, Other and Others, “like fire sparks” (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, p.xii), so when we are called to participate “it matters that I am I” (Biesta cited in Winter, 2011, p. 539). This arises from the new situations we find ourselves in, as “we are irreplaceable in our responsibility for the other” (p. 539).

Education can do little to bring this about, but it can prevent “irreplaceable uniqueness” from arising by eradicating risk, putting up fences, installing high-rises... It can be very oppressive. For free to arise, it's necessary to “slacken the intentional threads which attach us to the world” (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, p.xii), disrupt fixed conceptions of self, Others, plans and intentions, and create spaces for bringing lived experience into the classroom. This process is not simply a question of noticing paradoxes between oppressed and oppressor, being deep inside or existing out there. Educators have a double responsibility towards individuals, including those who can't achieve, and the maintenance of spaces, including indefinable spaces, in which free can arise.

How so?

We can play paradox and its sense of difference, without surrendering to the self or to the global. Free is not about synthesis (Britzman in Pinar, 2009, p. 154). It's connected with being in the tension of uncertainty and unpredictability; moving with and against the current. Like, swimming in a wave that's forming a crest and yielding back into darkness, lifting again, and yielding; a sense of patterning rising towards a sense of patterning, progressively moving forward.

How much difference to keep dynamism?

“Not One, Not Two” (Varela, 1999b).

“A sense of control based on *just the right amount* of disturbance” (Doll, 2000, p. 70).

Three perhaps ... “Three, no more no less” as De La Soul sing, “is the magic number”.

Like the monkey climbing out of the well – three steps up, two down, three up ...

What happens to the monkey?

It was on the verge of falling. When it gets closer to the light, it somehow transcends itself, defies old patterning and rises out of the well.

At a social level there has to be trust, working together and respect for life to arise, continual dialogue, experimentation with “every combination possible” (Whitehead, 1967, p.2), a willingness to suspend disbelief, plus some provocation, playful and personalised.

Might tilting our heads back a little help a little? Might it heighten listening and observation and create an “open or floating attention, without grasping at something”? (Depraz et al., p. 12).

“Dancing the patterns that connect takes us ... into an erotics of life (which) I am defining quite gently and generously as the mystery and desire for life” (Rose, 2003, p. 7).

Fear not, “proliferation ... is its own containment” (Lather, p. 43).



Juxtaposing comments and gestures in conversations, for example, creates “split spaces among contiguous, perhaps dissonant, elements of difference enabling [students] to breathe – no airtight argument here – by positioning elements in [what Aoki calls] creative tensionality” (cited by Pinar in Pinar and Irwin, 2003, p.154). Interactions can emphasise each other, collapse together, imply links that may not exist ... deal mixed messages with mixed messages, beautiful confusions of “message and meta-message” (Bateson, 1962, p. 154). This may arise verbally and non-verbally, consciously and unconsciously, with simultaneous changes in posture, gesture, breathing – “in rhythm, amplitude and localization – mimicry, micro-movements ... the epi-verbal ... semantic choices and ... para-verbal” variations of intonation.

With too much resonance, however, it may be appropriate to tighten suspenders and experience more tension. So, they’re taut enough to hold a bridge – “a bridge which is not a bridge” (Aoki, 2003, p. 228). Like walking “on the rickety bridge between self and other – not the attempt to arrive at one side or the other... always suspended performance – in the classroom, in the political field, in relation to one another and to ourselves” (Felman, cited in Ellsworth, 1997, p. 37). Tightened suspenders shatter the illusion that arriving at one side or the other of the bridge would “end the movement, solidify and fix the teacher and the student ... into the selfsame” (p. 163).

It’s difficult for ego to survive in the middle of bridges, on the borders of fields, thresholds of ambiguity, doubt, and fluidity. Paradoxes manifest as generative here, with multiple layers of ecology unfolding simultaneously as “dawn inches up” and “owl flies home past Bethesda to a chapel in an oak” (Thomas, 1954, p. 22). Oak also knows the strength of its weakness; its tincture, a renewal for those who keep on going, seeking responsibilities to test endurance, ignoring signs to reappraise... reposition...

Remembering to surrender to the vast field of not-knowing is a relational event, in between conditions of possibility and impossibility. A situation from which many voices interact – peoples, animals, plants, stones, rivers... – in language plays that bring musicality, rhythm and vitality to learning, destabilizing self as stable and transforming relations.

“we help trees grow by exhaling a hundred times as much carbon dioxide as we inhale and this carbon dioxide comes from the plants’ bodies too perhaps through their spirits their communication systems the trees in turn help us by providing oxygen it’s because of plants and algae that there is usable molecular oxygen that fires life” (conversation with Peter Cole)

“Teaching [then] becomes less about transmission than it does a form of ‘journeying with others on a path of learning engagement and personal transformation’. Linking knowing to listening to experience recasts teaching as feeling ... to feel a situation, to ‘sense’ it at a ‘pre-conscious’ level, then to intuit its possibilities and parameters” (Doll, cited by Pinar in Trueit, 2012).

In ethical obligations, such as these, “to respect the absolute, unknowable other ... an absolutely different other, an unrecognizable other, an Other irreducibly different from myself” (Readings cited in Ellsworth, 1997, p. 163) it is possible to revitalize the indefinable, by naming it if you like, and by gesturing toward worlds of the unsaid and the spaces around these worlds.

Notes

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² “There was no real border between Wales and England in the Medieval period, and the Marches were considered an ill-defined and contested frontier zone” (Morgan and Power, 2009, p. 105).

³ The preposition, ‘like’, is often used at the end of sentences as a way of creating unsaid relationships with other words. It is short for, ‘like, you know what I mean’.

⁴ The image of the Marches as a “source of degeneracy” is demonstrated by Lord Mortimer’s alleged emasculation at the hands of Owain Glyndwr’s daughter, Caitrin, in Shakespeare’s Henry IV Part 1 (Morgan and Powers, 2009, p. 116). Interestingly, this refers to the Battle of *Bryn Glas* (referred to in English as the Battle of Pilleth, although *Bryn Glas* translates to green or blue hill). The battle took place on 22 June 1402 between the towns of Knighton and Presteigne in Powys, on land, which exists today as a field on Pilleth Farm – where my grandmother and father were raised, until eviction in the 1950s by a returning landlord.

⁵ Adivasi people are eight percent of India’s population. A Chembakolli Elder said that being considered *Janglis*, Adivasi people were left to the remote forests and hills. Unlike Dalit communities, they were kept away from the world and its caste system, and have been able to hold on to their dignity and ways of being (conversation, 2007).

⁶ Alephical spaces move with traditional phenomenological conceptions of third space, as “forgotten spaces lingering within the etymology of words we hold dear” (Irwin on Aoki in Pinar and Irwin, 2003, p. xx). They also situate who we are within multiple “movements among layers of difference ... in open landscape(s) of possibility” (Pinar on Aoki in Pinar and Irwin, 2003, p. 24).

⁷ Shatabdi Express travels on the South Indian Railway network, originally created by the British in colonial times. It returns to its station of origin the same day.

⁸ Since writing the first draft of this paper, I’ve learned that the ‘roundabout’ field in story one, was named by my parents. They said, “It was probably never meant to be a field, but we did what we could to get by”.

⁹ ‘Curriculum Inquiry: Pragmatism, Post-Modernism, Complexity Theory’ was co-taught in 2012 by Dr. Wm. Doll & Dr. Donna Trueit at the University of British Columbia, Vancouver.

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