At the Intersection of Selves and Subject
Exploring the Curricular Landscape of Identity
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At the Intersection of Selves and Subject: Exploring the Curricular Landscape of Identity aims to raise awareness of the inextricability of our teaching and learning selves and the subjects with whom and which we engage. By exploring identity at this intersection, we invite scholars and practitioners to reconceptualize relationships with students, curriculum, and their varied contexts. Our hope is to encourage authenticity, consciousness, and criticality that will foster more liberating ways of teaching and learning.

This collection will be useful for pre- and in-service teachers, teacher educators, and educational researchers. It is a valuable resource for teacher education courses such as Curriculum Studies, Reflexive Practice, Philosophy of Education, Sociology of Education, Teaching Methods, Current Issues in Education, Collaborative Inquiry, and Narrative Inquiry.

“At the Intersection of Selves and Subject lays bare the deepest under layers of the teacher self and subject with new energy. The sharing of reflexive inquiries in ethical self-consciousness liberates and unwraps queries into pedagogical practice. This is an important book for all educators, but especially for pre-service teachers as they consider or challenge the donning of teacher identity.” – Pauline Sameshima, Canada Research Chair in Arts Integrated Studies, Lakehead University, and Editor-in-Chief of the Journal of the Canadian Association for Curriculum Studies

“A pendant of images and texts, this collection is a dazzling display of Ellyn Lyle’s insight that “understanding self is a way to understand other and society.” That and other affirmations are depicted narratively and theoretically, across and within indigeneities, singular exceptional identities, and paradoxical and (inherently) political identities. This collection invites us to work from within to reconstruct the self professionally. This pulsating portrait of juxtapositions teaches transpositions and extricates intertextualities. Through resolve, we are preserving this fragile someday shared space for being. Open this book as entering one such space; study what this pendant refracts in you.” – William F. Pinar, Canada Research Chair, University of British Columbia, Vancouver

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At the Intersection of Selves and Subject
Bold Visions in Educational Research
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Books on teaching and learning to teach focus on any of the curriculum areas (e.g., literacy, science, mathematics, social science), in and out of school settings, and points along the age continuum (pre K to adult). The purpose of books on research methods in education is not to present generalized and abstract procedures but to show how research is undertaken, highlighting the particulars that pertain to a study. Each book brings to the foreground those details that must be considered at every step on the way to doing a good study. The goal is not to show how generalizable methods are but to present rich descriptions to show how research is enacted. The books focus on methodology, within a context of substantive results so that methods, theory, and the processes leading to empirical analyses and outcomes are juxtaposed. In this way method is not reified, but is explored within well-described contexts and the emergent research outcomes. Three illustrative examples of books are those that allow proponents of particular perspectives to interact and debate, comprehensive handbooks where leading scholars explore particular genres of inquiry in detail, and introductory texts to particular educational research methods/issues of interest to novice researchers.
At the Intersection of Selves and Subject

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Edited by

Ellyn Lyle
Yorkville University, New Brunswick, Canada

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PAULINE SAMESHIMA

FOREWORD

Those Blooming Identities, Who Are We Waiting for?

Shasta daisies radiate
I glow by the tree knowing
Father Christmas is coming tonight

Curriculum is “the site on which the generations struggle
to define themselves and the world …
an extraordinarily complicated conversation”¹
in a provocative weave of story and theory²

Our narratives speak to teaching and learning identities as lived curriculum.³
Fostering “self-descriptions” is one way to conceptualize professional identity.⁴
Intertextuality suggests an apparatus in which various signifying modalities
intersect and create a place where “enunciation and its denoted ‘object’
are never single, complete and identical to themselves, but always plural,
shattered, capable of being tabulated.”⁵

A pink sunrise ... flowers in the sky⁶
Ellyn’ looks longingly at the sandbox
where political and social grains construct selfhood
the dust blown effect⁷
conflates the stern nun’s muddlement

My Grade 1 teacher broke her leg on my first day of school. I am still haunted by
the sound of her pain and the powerlessness I remember. As a timid child with little
social interaction in 1970’s apartheid South Africa, I rarely spoke. I was enrolled
at St. Rose’s Convent because, with Chinese ancestry, I was not allowed to attend
public school in Johannesburg.

The land [is my] teacher.⁸
I modify existing landmarks, or create new landmarks
through my reconstruction of those initial landmark builds.
I do this by restorying experiences, telling the same story again
but with significant hindsight knowledge and within my current context.⁹
Sister Clare, carrying a heavy projector between the desks, tripped over a stray little brown cardboard school case—all of which were supposed to be tightly pressed against the sides of our individual wooden desks.\textsuperscript{11}

I remember time passing, my seat hard but slippery. All of us, hands primly folded in our laps—no one knew what to do, how to get help—were without courage to leave the room where our mothers left us.

*Thinking back through our mothers*
*and engaging with our identities in relation to the origin*
*are acts of love.*

*Love is a way to engage in this complicated conversation.*
*It is a means of running the course.*\textsuperscript{12}

*A lost story of ancestry*
*that keeps reinventing itself*
*through dreams, blood stream, bones, water,*\textsuperscript{13}
*multivocal nests of complicity and inheritance.*\textsuperscript{14}

Mom, I cannot endure this pain anymore. My brain nibbles my heart. I am sorry.\textsuperscript{15}

Was it the principal we ought to look for? Who would go? Who would get out of the safe desk to console the teacher on the floor? Silence, only a whimpering. Indecision.

*The past arrests me now.*\textsuperscript{16}
*Through her journey of currere,* [she] resolves
*to make her own “ethical conviction” in engaging with herself.*
*It seems to be a “mode of subjectivation” … that one freely relates to him- or herself,*
*and further, to others and the world … subjectivation of this kind [can been seen as]*
*the “aesthetics of existence,” an ethical practice of the self.*\textsuperscript{17}

*Nomad citizenship, which is akin to improvisational jazz,*
*where “coherence is generated internally and immanently,*
*from the bottom up, instead of being imposed in a top-down fashion.”*\textsuperscript{18}

*Nomads are moved by the immanent and affective relations between individual bodies and, thus, nomad citizenship is characterized by multiple and constantly shifting local and global social affiliations and the proliferation of immanent connections through porous borders and across difference.*\textsuperscript{19}

*Nomad citizenship has led us to view becoming-citizen as an undetermined, transformative process … produced through reading, reading the world, and reading self. … Thus becoming-citizen involves … “dis-identifications from dominant models of subject-formation [which] can be productive and creative events.”*\textsuperscript{20}
FOREWORD

Then Sister Clare’s wavering voice, directing Shereen to go to the Grade 2 class next door to get the teacher. We all already knew Shereen—her name, her jubilance, fearlessness, shamelessness. The irony was the “naughty” girl saved us all. It was probably her suitcase.

Professional identity shapes … teaching practices.21

The teacher identity is “relational, negotiated, constructed, enacted, transforming and transitional.”22

In identity formation, whether it is individual or group, there is the need for a point of comparison: an “I” compared to “you”; an “us” and not “them”; a “self” versus “Other.”23

Unavoidably steeped in the examination of US influence on Canadian education is the anxiety Canadians feel over cultural domination and an eventual loss of a unique national multicultural identity.24

Collective identity, which is different from an interpersonal identity that requires personalized bonds of attachment and a sense of belonging, resides in a “depersonalized sense of self, a shift toward the perception of self as an interchangeable exemplar of some social category and away from the perception of self as a unique person”25

“Dis-identification involves the loss of cherished habits of thought and representation, which can also produce fear, sense of insecurity and nostalgia.”

There is a real danger of a retreat into nationalism and conservatism or for self-interested forms of inaction to take hold. Becomings can get botched. Nonetheless, there also remains the potential for dis-identification to produce new forms of nomad-citizenship exceeding the nation-state, which may enable new visions of cosmopolitan community vital to living in a shared global future.26

None of us, on that first day, knew the Principal, Sister Anne, had an office under the main staircase, the hard steps where students would wait their turn—the same staircase Catherine and I did our secret pinkie promise every day on our way down after school.

Understanding Self is a way to understand Other and society.27

Identity is an ongoing project, most commonly an ongoing narrative project.28

“In telling our stories, we enlarge [the] storyline to incorporate and accept diversity and multiplicity without dilution and conformity.”29

Sister Anne had a strap. I heard the strap was many times worse than the meter stick I experienced in Standard 2 (Grade 4). We wore white dresses with green trim in summer and dark pinafores over ironed shirts and ties in winter. When we got the
stick, we would stand in a line and hold onto the bottom of our dresses as we bent over. I don’t remember why I was in trouble, but I was in a line of girls. Forgetting my sewing kit and kneeling for a 45-minute sewing period was more painful than the stick.

The subject is the inner life, the lived sense of ‘self’—however non-unitary, dispersed, and fragmented—that is associated with what has been given and what one has chosen, those circumstances of everyday life, those residues of trauma and of fantasy, from which one reconstructs a life.30

“In order to reap the disclosure that lies dormant within our curricular forms, we must claim them in our familiar daily experience and then estrange ourselves from them.”31

There’s no doubt that these memories, infused in my first six years of schooling in an all girls’ convent in Johannesburg, have indelibly rooted in my teaching selves.

In this world where the self-evident is not so evident there is a need for vulnerability.32
There is an intuitive sense that while opening up our vulnerability, we also bring strength to the work we do.33
The meaning of phenomena comes together not when a person can distil the thingness or the isness of thing, but meaning depends on the phenomena working on, even shaping, the identity of the person.34
We do not know our own souls, let alone the souls of others … There is a virgin forest in each; a snowfield where even the print of birds’ feet is unknown.35
Identity is the ongoing intrapsychic phenomenology of physiological self-organization, and emotional wellness derived from self-organized harmony in the smooth mitigation of “ideal, dreaded, and realistic self-attributes.”36
The reflectant mirror, if at odds with activated unconscious self-schemas, presses conflicted self-conscious self-appraisals and compromises coherence and a sense of a stable self.37
A strong sense of safety is particularly important for identity exploration among students.38

Wiebe (Chapter 8), in writing about breaking from metanarratives and an already constructed social imaginary, suggests from the work of Pinar (2004) that it is “ourselves who need to break.” The contemporary teacher project then is to reaggregate and break from our histories of learning so that we might wake to the ways we can deviate from reproducing the system we wish to change.
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What would it take to transform such a psychic milieu into one where subject-to-subject mutuality made recognition possible in a way to shift preoccupations with doing and being done into enactments of being and being well together? Benjamin writes of a fundamental paradox:

Only by asserting omnipotence may we discover the other as an outside center of experience. By destroying the [internal object] other, not literally but in fantasy, by absolutely asserting the self and negating the other’s separateness in our minds, we discover that the other is outside our mental powers. ... Winnicott’s concept can be seen as a paradigm for the ongoing oscillations between omnipotence and recognition throughout life ... [If however] a power struggle is inaugurated ... the outcome is a reversible cycle of doer and done to.39

We craft our own presentosa,
a visual representation of the relationship between identity and praxis40
to write counternarratives in juxtaposition “to the grand narratives of our times,” to play within “the interval between different cultures and languages, particularly” within and against colonial contexts, and to merge and blur “genres, texts and identities.”41

we flow
we flow in the belated river
already hooked on a line
we swim upstream
to loosen the pull
to go where we want
to interpret the world… to change it42

We take on the work of curriculum studies
by conceiving “emergence as the ongoing flow
of our awareness and appreciation of being-in-relation to others, the environment, the cosmos.43

Parker Palmer (in Lyle) and Rachel Remen (in Wiebe) write of wholeness and connectedness,
that in bringing the fullness together in our own lives, as educators,
we create spaces for others to become whole.

I get retold and remade by that Raven’s wing-swooping overhead,
by my students’ suffering, my son’s ventures, my language,
my foolishness, even by the work of writing this.44
I say “Yes” to all of my identities.
Were you waiting for us?45
NOTES

2. Ellis and Bochner (2000, p. 713) in Lyle.
3. Badenhorst, Young, Xu, and McLeod, Materiality and Subjectivity.
6. Wiebe, Writing the Self through Haiku.
7. Lyle, Autoethnographic Approaches to an Identity Conscious Curriculum.
9. Marom, Tensions and Intersection of Self and Subject.
10. Schlamb, On the Practice of Narrative Landmarking.
11. See Badenhorst’s (Ch. 4) narrative in Materiality and Subjectivity. Her experience of her desk and schooling in Johannesburg in the 1970s is familiar. I wonder if the familiarity is feigned by the knowledge of context for perhaps these memories are more universal than we acknowledge.
13. Vaudrin-Charette, in Indigenizing Ivory Towers.
16. Lee (participant) in Jung.
21. Hill, Exploring the Curricular Possibilities of Pre-Service Teacher Professional Identity.
23. Stonebanks referencing Said (1978), Multiculturalism and the Canadian Pre-Service Teacher.
24. Stonebanks, Multiculturalism and the Canadian Pre-Service Teacher.
27. Lyle, Autoethnographic Approaches to an Identity Conscious Curriculum.
32. Wiebe, Writing the Self through Haiku.
33. Guiney Yallop and Binder, From the Edges of Lateness.
34. Sean Wiebe, Writing the Self through Haiku.
38. Heffernan, Kaplan, Peterson, and Newton Jones, Integrating Identity Formation.
42. Pinar (2009, p. 3) in Thomas.
43. Doll and Trueit (2010, p. 175) in Thomas.
45. Guiney Yallop and Binder, From the Edges of Lateness.
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REFERENCES
ELLYN LYLE

1. AUTOETHNOGRAPHIC APPROACHES TO AN IDENTITY CONSCIOUS CURRICULUM

INITIAL CURIOUSITY

My preoccupation with identity began as both a personal curiosity and a quest for community. Having spent the better part of four decades in the classroom, I have grown sensitive to experiences that marginalize the teaching and learning self. The first time I recall feeling subjugated in school was in kindergarten. My teacher, a well meaning but stern nun, had very particular notions about gender appropriate behaviour and used her position of power to begin acculturation with unsuspecting five year olds. Admittedly, I did not understand the scope and gravity of what was happening then. I only knew that girls were not permitted to play in the sandbox during free time. The sandbox and its Tonka trucks were the exclusive domain of boys; girls had to play house and then nap. While I was frustrated by the inequity and continued to advocate for equal rights during free play, I soon realized that boys were also restricted by specific rules. This became apparent to me when a young Asian boy in my class was physically reprimanded and verbally assaulted for coming to school wearing his mum’s red nail polish. I often wonder if we never saw him again because he was expelled, or if his parents rejected the rigid system and withdrew him. I remain hopeful it was the latter.

Bookending K-12 schooling, I once again found myself shut out. I was selecting courses for my final semester of high school and, having more credits than required to graduate with honours, I registered for an open course in agriculture (one that is neither academic nor general). My registration was rejected. I met with the principal and explained that growing up in a farming community created a tremendous respect for the land, which I regarded one of my earliest and wisest teachers. I also described how a course in agriculture supported my growing interest in the ways in which place and lived experience inform meaningful education. He was unmoved. I left feeling ashamed—shamed for having an agricultural background that was somehow regarded as less than, and ashamed of myself for capitulating. I recognize now that, while advisors may be well intended, their misguided coaching of academically gifted youth away from land-based studies marginalizes both the area of scholarship and the students interested in it.

Beginning to wake to the schooling machine, I eagerly approached university expecting a more liberating experience. Instead, I found an inherent distrust of the personal in favour the public without any consciousness of their connection
(Nias, 1996). Nonetheless, I slogged through disembodied, decontextualized, dehumanized approaches to teaching. Once the degree was conferred, I pursued a career in education hopeful that I might teach differently.

All of this is to say that I’ve long been compelled to raise awareness of the inextricability of our teaching and learning selves and the subjects with whom and which we engage. Recognizing the implications for identity, I hope making room for selfhood in studies will re/introduce authenticity and criticality to our practices. To this end, I propose autoethnography as uniquely positioned to explore the intersection of self and subject as well as point to curricular possibilities through which knowing self augments teaching and learning.

**AUTOETHNOGRAPHY**

Drawing on the work of Bochner and Ellis (2016), and Ellis, Adams, and Bochner (2011), I understand autoethnography not only as an approach to research and a mode of writing, but also as a way of knowing. That is to say that autoethnography is an epistemological endeavour (Agar, 2006; Greene, Skukauskaite, & Baker, 2016). Its way of helping us come to knowledge resides in its ongoing encouragement of interaction between personal and professional selves (Huang, 2015). This process is twofold: first, it encourages us to look outward and consider the social and cultural aspects of lived experience; and, second, it requires that we look inward at the *vulnerable self* in relation to its cultural context (Ellis & Bochner, 2000). Approaching inquiry from this perspective allows researchers to create space for the development of critical reflexivity where impressions of self can be understood in terms of social contexts (Hickey, 2016).

As Dowling (2006) points out, “reflexivity is a curious term with various meanings” (p. 7). At its most basic, it refers to the researcher’s consciousness of her role in and effect on various stages of inquiry. Pulling at these threads reveals how reflexivity also involves the researcher’s intimate connectedness to both the act of doing research and its eventual findings. Further, it has deep implications for “the political and social constructions that inform the research process” (p. 12). This conceptualization of reflexivity reaches beyond “a narcissistic self-check for bias conducted during the research process” (McCabe & Holmes, 2009, p. 1519) and extends reflexivity from the personal to the epistemological.

Like Stets and Burke (2012), I understand reflexivity as central to the process of negotiating selfhood, and selfhood as central to identity. Considered in the context of political and social constructions, we negotiate identity based on our interactions with society and its members. Fluid and dynamic, this process allows us to critique ourselves as we interact with others. As we move through life, we continually reconstruct our understandings of ourselves by reinterpreting our experiences from our new points of view (Bukor, 2011). Thus, identities can be understood as “fleeting, transitory phenomena created and re-created in response to relevant stimuli” (Jones, 2013, p. 762).
Epson (2013) reminds us that, as we negotiate our identities in response to our interactions, we construct identity in hindsight incorporating past and present understandings of self with our hopes for our future development. In this way, individual identity is an expression of the meaning that each of us attaches to ourselves and a reflection of the meaning that others attach to us. We are therefore engaged in an ongoing struggle to create a coherent sense of self within this shifting context as we construct, repair, maintain, and review our identities. (p. 231)

Through this process, reflexivity provides an avenue for critical researchers to engage in a constant de/re/construction of identity within various socio-cultural contexts (Daskalaki, Butler, & Petrovic, 2015). These embodied meanings support critical consciousness of self/other interactions as well as awareness of how self and self-in-relation impact writing and analysis (Bochner & Ellis, 2016; Daskalaki et al., 2015; Ellis et al., 2011). Any discussion of writing and analysis within autoethnographic approaches would be incomplete without some consideration of the narrative turn (Bruner, 1990; Mitchell, 1981; Polkinghorne, 1988).

The narrative turn resists empiricism’s unquenchable thirst for value neutrality and exposes how such pursuits perpetuate social injustice. Rather than mechanistic prediction and control, narrative seeks to infuse inquiry with humanness by prioritizing story and making central the importance of identity and lived experience in social science research (Blair, 2010; Bochner, 1997; Bochner & Ellis, 2016; Eisenbach, 2016). Said another way, we employ story to understand our experiences and construct our identities in relation to them.

Identity as a narrative construct holds that individuals develop identity through the process of incorporating their reassembled past, seeming present, and anticipated future into an internalized dynamically changing story of the self (Kraehe, 2015; McAdams, 2001, 2013). Rolling (2010) and Sachs (2005) echo this position in their claims that narrative processes are integral to the construction of identity because they allow us to story who we are, what has informed our development, and what is important to us. This conceptualization is further substantiated by the scholarship of Czarniawska (2004), Philpott (2011), and Said (2014) who present narrative as uniquely designed to help us experientially understand ourselves within society. Gee (2000–2001), Sfard and Prusak (2005), and Zembylas (2003, 2005) focus on the process of meaning making and position narrative as a powerful analytical tool in identity inquiries.

Narrative as an analytic tool is generally understood in one of at least two ways: narrative analysis privileges the storyteller and focuses on the function of the narrative; narratives-under-analysis privilege the analyst and focus on identifying patterns of perceptions, beliefs, and actions and then connects them to cultural norms and anomalies (Bochner & Riggs, 2014; Green, Skukauskaitė, & Baker, 2016). In identity-based inquiries, autoethnography blurs the boundary between storytelling and storyhearing (Huang, 2015; Maguire, 2006). The blurring is, in part, because
the writer and analyst are often one in the same and, in part, because “readers think with a story from within the framework of their own lives” (Bochner & Ellis, 2016, p. 219). As we think with the stories we encounter, we continually amend our understandings in concert with renegotiating identity.

IDENTITY

The existing literature tends to explore identity as it relates to society at large, or to group affiliation identifiable within that society. Identity as a personal construct is an integral basis of the self who engages in teaching and learning yet it remains in the periphery of discussions (Bochner, 1997; Eisenbach, 2016; Stets & Burke, 2012). Two seminal scholars defy this trend. For more than two decades Palmer has made self central in education arguing that reducing teaching to an exclusively intellectual practice relegates it to abstraction just the same as making it solely emotional renders it narcissistic:

Intellect, emotion, and spirit depend on each other for wholeness. They are interwoven in the human self and in education at its best, and we need to interweave them in our pedagogical discourse as well. (Palmer, n.d., p. 2)

He argues that good teachers weave together self, student, and subject to teach from an undivided place; doing so, he says, encourages in students, a “capacity for connectedness” (p. 3). This connectedness, though, is not easily attained for students or teachers. Exposing the personal in public contexts comes with vulnerability as it opens us up to speculation and judgment (Eisenbach, 2016). We also fear that it could turn against us so

we claim the inalienable right to separate the personal and the professional into airtight compartments…and keep the workplace conversation objective and external, finding it safer to talk about technique than about selfhood. (Palmer, n.d., p. 14)

Whyte (2001) shares Palmer’s commitment to whole human approaches to vocation when he reminds us that, “to have a firm persuasion in our work—to feel that what we do is right for ourselves and good for the world at exactly the same time—is one of the great triumphs of human existence” (p. 4). Drawing on ecologies of belonging, he says that the human soul finds courage in the difficult intimacies of negotiating identities at the boundaries between self, subject, and other, and challenges us to “see with the eyes of those who do not quite belong” (p. 172). There, in that space of fear, hope, wholeness, and unbelonging we will find more liberating approaches to teaching, learning, and being.

Curricular Possibilities

Recognizing the humanness in teaching and learning and dedicating ourselves to its place in the curriculum “[disturbs] the landscape that privileges curriculum-as-plan”
Approaching teaching through the gateway of curriculum-as-plan is not easily resisted. Even attempts to incorporate identities as lived curricula is a process often “imbued with the planners’ orientations to the world, which inevitably include their own interests and assumptions about ways of knowing and about how teachers and students are to be understood” (p. 258). The conceptualization of identity as presence resides in modernity’s brokered power relations and, thus, precludes meaningful critical interrogation. As an alternative to privileging identity as presence, Aoki recommends conceptualizing identity as effect. From this space, we are challenged to see identity as something that is dynamically in development rather than a form already fashioned. “According to this understanding, our identities as teachers or curriculum supervisors are not so much in our presences; rather, our identities…are ongoing effects of our becomings in difference” (p. 260).

Aoki’s position is supported in the more recent work of Kamonos-Gamelin (2005) who insists a “teacher’s role is not to replicate suffocating conditions that stunt self-awareness and self-knowledge, but to set up conditions that will inspire, that will literally give breath to students’ visions of themselves as ‘knowers’” (p. 187). Similarly, MacKenzie (2011) advocates for embracing “the ambiguity of be(com)ing teacher” so that we are able to “find ourselves amidst a pedagogical chaos and…a possibility for praxis with/in this space of be(com)ing” (p. 68). Said another way, embracing this “terrain of uncertainty, we may further find sel(f)ves and other with/in experience” (p. 72).

The curricular possibilities at the intersection of student, self, and subject reside in the unwavering conviction that teaching and learning are most meaningful there. Autoethnography privileges:

...meanings rather than facts, readings rather than observations, and interpretations rather than findings. Autoethnography gives up any illusion of producing an unmediated mirroring of reality. Instead, it acknowledges that all attempts to speak for, write about, or represent human lives are partial, situated, and mediated. (Bochner & Ellis, 2016, pp. 239–240)

Sometimes referred to as a blurred genre, autoethnography offers a lot of “potential for opening real or imagined spaces and textual possibilities” (Maguire, 2006, p. 10). Some of this potential is found in approaching curriculum from a learner-centred perspective that privileges lived experiences of the students (Cleveland-Innes & Emes, 2005). In prioritizing lived experience, identity is central as we move from “planning for teaching in favour of designing for learning” (Cleveland-Innes & Emes, 2005, p. 91).

Drawing on the work of Baxter Magdola and Chickering and Reisser, Cleveland-Innes and Emes (2005) propose four curricular commitments to assist teachers who are eager to embrace a new approach: make content relevant to backgrounds and experiences; allow for significant divergent experiences among learners; create encounters with diverse perspectives to challenge existing beliefs and assumptions; and foster space for students to incorporate diverse value orientations.
Understanding self is a way to understand other and society. Autoethnography functions as a narrative that critiques the situatedness in this attempt at understanding. As personal texts imbued with socio-political assumptions, autoethnographic narratives provide an opportunity for critical interrogations of self with the aim of deepened consciousness. (Hickey, 2016) Thus, the utility of this approach resides in its ability to invite each other to view the world from our various perspectives. In creating resonance, we provoke others to see through our experiences and reflect critically on their own. In entering into each other’s worlds, “we actively engage in dialogue regarding the social and moral implications of perspectives” (Bochner & Ellis, 2016, p. 72).

It must be noted, though, that “for the most part, fundamental change has been shunned; universities have opted for cosmetic surgery, taking a nip here and a tuck there, when major reconstruction is required” (Cleveland-Innes & Emes, 2005, p. 89). Some of the resistance resides in empiricism’s continuing hold on what is deemed valid knowledge. Some, though, is born of the tendency of particular autoethnographic inquiries to evidence self-occupation in favour of broader socio-political possibilities.

Ellis and Bochner (2000) remind us that “a good ethnography is not simply a confessional tale of self-renewal, it is a provocative weave of story and theory” (p. 713) with implications for improved cultural understanding and more just social conditions.

REFERENCES
AUTOETHNOGRAPHIC APPROACHES TO AN IDENTITY CONSCIOUS CURRICULUM


Why do the ideas of multiplicity, diversity, and the arising recognition of a “multifariousness of voices” (Gadamer, 1989, p. 285) persistently resolve themselves into talk of multiple identities? Identity has the potential to become sealed off, separate, and proffered as self-determining and self-defining independently of any other. Can we not be diverse and interdependent without imagining diversity as a splay of separate identities related somehow only post hoc? Affirmations of identity have the potential to make all our relations seem “revocable and provisional” (Gray, 2001, p. 36). It has the potential to be an ecological disaster.

Couldn’t our diversity be articulated by complex networks of dependent co-arising causes, conditions, interactions, mutual formations, interdependencies, kinships, and inhabitations, one story inculcated in the other, one voice aroused in the midst of the wide breaths of the Earth, human and more-than-human? I get retold and remade by that Raven’s wing-swooping overhead, by my students’ suffering, my son’s ventures, my language, my foolishness, even by the work of writing this.

In all this unsteady swirl of relations and dependent co-arisings, what is the attraction of identity and what does it satisfy?

SECTION TWO


Day to day, we mostly experience these matters fluidly unless and until threat, anger, regret, revenge, suasion, power, violence, and the like arise. Then there is retraction, figurative or literal wall building, intent on protecting and codifying (and, often, exaggerating, purifying, and clarifying) this hard won identity from contaminating interlopers. This movement of retraction occurs no matter the difference between real and perceived threats.
SECTION THREE

Once started, [wars]...tend to take on a life of their own. Identities which had previously been multiple and casual become focused and hardened [and ensuing conflicts] are appropriately termed “identity wars.” As violence increases, the initial issues at stake tend to get redefined more exclusively as “us” against “them” and group cohesion and commitment are enhanced. Civilization consciousness strengthens in relations to other identities. A “hate dynamic” emerges in which mutual fears, distrust, and hatred feed on each other. Each side dramatizes and magnifies the distinction between the forces of virtue and the forces of evil and eventually attempts to transform this distinction into the ultimate distinction between the quick and the dead. (Huntington, 2003, p. 266)

The mere existence of an alternative mode of being, the presence of which exemplifies that different identities are possible and thus denaturalizes the claim of a particular identity to be the true identity, is sometimes enough to produce the understanding of a threat. [President Bush, in his “with us or with the terrorists” speech (Bush, 2010) has] manifestly linked American identity to danger (Campbell, 1998, p. 3).

SECTION FOUR

We all know, in varying degrees and in various ways, that language has a life and sway of its own. Despite well-intended attempts to say, “That’s not what I meant,” the words I’ve used have sometimes ended up meaning more or different than I meant to mean, and that excess has been a repeated locale of my own humiliation and regret. Sometimes this excess can be a great teacher. I’ve found myself unwittingly dragged into old, buried implications and arguments, old relations, forgotten inheritances, suppressed lies, new electric charges of insight and uprising, and tangled, unintended duplicities from which “That’s not what I meant” provided little rescue or relief. And as with my words, so too my life is often shaped “beyond my wanting and doing” (Gadamer, 1989, p. xxviii), too long lost, just out of sight of awareness, as if every turn of a corner occludes the corner now behind my back.

You’re never too old to be humiliated.

I want, here, to meditate on some of the hidden, unintended excess of identity, a word full of echoes, a word with its own life and times. Samuel Huntington (2003) and David Campbell (1998) provide hints about how threat, danger, embattlement, can cause the hardening and reification of identity—witness, for example, Donald Trump’s recent wall bragging under the guise of fever dreams of rapists and murderers.

My concern, simply put, is that threat, danger, the pursuit of safety, hardening, and reification might be an unintended part of the very lure of identity itself, its hidden nemesis. It is imagined that if only identity could be pinned down once and for all,
peace would reign (and this uttered with no real consciousness of how pinning down is already an act of war).

Edward Said (2001) pointedly critiqued Samuel Huntington’s conclusions regarding clashes of civilizations, but, I believe, something was overlooked:

Huntington … wants to make “identities” into what they are not: shut-down, sealed-off entities that have been purged of the myriad currents and counter currents that animate human history, and that over centuries have made it possible for that history not only to contain wars of religion and imperial conquest, but also to be one of exchange, cross-fertilization and sharing. This far less visible history is ignored in the rush to highlight the ludicrously compressed and constructed warfare that “the clash of civilizations” argues is the reality. (p. 3)

I suggest that Huntington is not saying that identities are hard and fast (and therefore that the subsequent clashes are “the [inevitable] reality”. He is pointing out something easy to miss: “left in peace” (Illich, 1992, p. 16), differences and kinships and interdependencies flourish and “flower” (p. 17). Under threat, they tend to harden, thus occluding a “far less visible history” (Said, 2001, p. 3) of interdependence and interrelatedness, casualness and multiplicity, openness, porousness, vulnerability, susceptibility. He is pointing to a mechanism (an affliction, Buddhists might call it) that gets hidden once identity becomes hardened and reified. And this even though, perhaps especially when, the resorted-to relief is multiple identities.

Glimpsing this mechanism of threat-based retraction into hardened identity helps me glimpse how identity can be both the effect and the cause of a sort of war consciousness. It is not only what arises under threat; it is what, once arisen, needs protection from threat.

Such retraction into separate identities is an act, oddly, of self-clarification and simplification and has been offered as a benign means of understanding my self and my place in the world out from under various silencing hegemonies. However, no doubt, arises my recent, all-too-familiar grief over how making people feel threatened can be manipulated and utilized politically as a form of social control, of marketing technique, of spinning a web to a hidden profit.

That is why the most chilling phrase in Huntington’s description is “once started.” “Once started,” it becomes almost too late to think about identity and how others might appear. If we feel threatened, they then have to have a hardened identity, too—a clear one, a declarable one, an exaggerated one, an exaggerated monster to befit our own threatened, thus exaggerated and retracted, identity: Muslim Intruders, Gay Activists, Environmental Crazies:

In light of the seemingly secured enclosures of threat-induced identities, any suggestion of boundaries being in any way overridden or “permeable” (Smith, 2006, p. 77) becomes understandable only as a security threat. Surveillance, paranoia, border patrols, increased accountability and monitoring, become the
order of the day as bi-products of the now-purified “identity” of “us” being increasingly susceptible to “contamination” by “them.” Threat produces a situation where the very casualness and multiplicity of day-to-day situations of everyday life becomes identifiable as the cause of threat. (Jardine, Naqvi, Jardine, & Zaidi, 2012, p. 30–31)

In light of hardened identity, any suggestion of fluidity, casualness, multiplicity, porosity, diversity, sustainability, and interdependence can become experienced as the source of threat, however much they are proffered as its relief.

Perhaps even worse for us in the orbit of education, it becomes almost too late to think about identity because thinking itself becomes cast as a cause of threat. Opening identity to thinking and interpretation and to all its casual and multiple interdependencies seems like a breach, a threat, leading, of course, to increased vigilance and hardening:

Wanting to know something more than the simplistic, threat-induced clarities about this “us” and “them” become [considered] egregious [or unpatriotic, or at least suspicious]. Knowledge and its pursuit [which explores those less visible interdependencies that hardening has occluded] become experienced as a threat to security (see David G. Smith’s [2006] brilliant “Enfraudening in the Public Sphere” for more on this point and its telling consequences for pedagogy). (Jardine, Naqvi, Jardine, & Zaidi, 2012, p. 31–32)

This all has the potential to set pedagogy itself on the road to a state of “perpetual war” (Postel & Drury, 2003) constituted by paranoia, accountability, and surveillance. Pedagogy, too, retracts under threat and starts to fall under terrible and atrophying auspices for knowledge and its cultivation.

I love the poorly educated (Associated Press, 2016).

This story is an old one—clear and brazenly declared identifiers, simple and easy and unequivocal, get identified with the nature of knowledge itself. Asking after occluded dependencies and relations just blurs what is in reality clear and distinct.

To know is to identify, codify, and harden into self-containment.

To know a thing is to portion it off from everything else, every contaminating relation. It is to place it under regimes of surveillance and accountability and manageability that know no sway or forgiveness. Zero tolerance. On this basis, to know, then, is to brazenly trumpet without hesitancy or affection:

An adequate knowledge is thoroughly clear knowledge, where confusion is no longer possible, where the reduction to marks and moments of marks (requisita) can be manager to the end. (Heidegger, 1978, p. 62)

Identity is inherently monotheistic, then? The One True God of my own sovereign person, people, land, faith?

In this light, the urge towards multiple identities can become like a panoply of multiple self-identical gods perpetually warring.

SECTION FIVE

Identity: Latin *identitas*, points to “sameness, oneness, state of being the same,” (On-Line Etymological Dictionary). Under (real or perceived) threat we, understandably and often with good warrant, tend to retract into barricaded protectiveness. A terrible irony here is that the outcome of an occasioned and warranted retraction becomes *ontologized*. What is in fact an *outcome* of threat is posited as the way things *really are*: each culture, each person, each gender, each bird species, each bird pair, the tree each bird sits on…each *is* separate and independently existing. Any relations become understood as subsequent to this ontological reality presumed and formulated under threat.

The affirmation of multiple identities is certainly comprehensible as a consequence of threats of silencing singularity and exclusion and regimes of violence. But what if the consequent affirmation of one’s own identity in opposition to that singularity takes on precisely the error of that which it is trying to overcome? What if it is precisely the affirmation of identity that is the core of exclusion, the root of war? What if our casual and multiple selves could be “left in peace,” and thus not compelled with the same urgency towards the seemingly, relatively safe harbours of identity? This, to reiterate Illich (1992), is a far less visible history:

War, which makes cultures alike, is all too often used by historians as the framework or skeleton of their narratives. The peaceful enjoyment of [that which is not under threat, embattled] is left in a zone of deep shadow. (p. 19)

As Tsong-kha-pa (2002) says of essence, so too with identity: “It is a concealer” (p. 208). What if the pursuit of identity itself is the root affliction, the root error, and carries with it, however multiplied, singularity and silence and ecological disaster?

SECTION SIX

This link between identity and threat, identity and reification, identity and the subsequent suffering of border breaches, links, too, to my interest in Buddhism and its meditations on the self and its ways:

The true mode of being of a thing as it is in itself, is selfless, for its self cannot be a self-identity in the sense of a substance. Indeed, this true mode must include a complete negation of such self-identity. (Nishitani, 1982, p. 117)

In Buddhist thought, this selflessness is not just a selflessness of things, but of my own very self which experiences such things, the very selves of my students, our
work, our topics of consideration, our multiplicity and diversity. These words, this breath, the fall air with flecks of snow, September 21, 2016, early morning.

Much of Buddhist thinking and practice is directed towards how, under afflictions such threat, fear, anger, worry about the future, my sense of self becomes reified and that self then reifies the world into securable objects that it can control, predict, and safely and predictably manipulate. This is why the core of Buddhist thinking speaks about the suffering that arises from a misplaced and reified and false sense of self-existence (Sanskrit: \textit{svabhava}). Buddhism speaks of things and selves being empty (Sanskrit: \textit{shunya}) of self-existence, and, instead, being dependently co-arising (Sanskrit: \textit{pratitya-samutpada}). Buddhism makes an ontological claim counter to the claims of separate identities: things are all their relations. It speaks directly against the long inheritance of identity and substance that cascades back through Rene Descartes’ \textit{Meditations on First Philosophy}, to Aquinas, to Aristotle’s \textit{Metaphysics}: “a substance is that which requires nothing except itself in order to exist” (Descartes, 1955, p. 255). In this Western lineage of identity, and “on behalf of the truth of things,” we must “break things apart until they will break no further” (Jardine, 2012, p. 86).

“The concept of substance [and its consort, identity] is inadequate [and there is] a radical challenge of thought implicit in this inadequacy” (Gadamer, 1989, p. 242). There is a forceful experience that comes from stepping away from this spellbinding lure of identity. Here, then, too, is the urging in Buddhism, one that has a great kinship to current ecological urgings, that every phenomena requires everything else in order to be what it truly is:

When we see a phenomenon and clearly understand that the very existence of it is completely dependent on other phenomena, inseparably related to them, then at that time our mind is holding the view of dependent arising. There is no phenomenon [no self, no thing, no breath, no gesture, no language, no culture, no Raven] which exists independently of others. The only way phenomena do exist is as interdependently arising. To realize the full import of dependent-arising, namely that all phenomena are empty of inherent existence [empty of a self-contained, self-determining, exclusionary “identity”] is an extremely forceful experience that reorients one in the very depths of ones being and bestows peace. (Lobsang, 2005, p. 51)

Again, there is an irony that must be repeatedly noted. Overcoming “the syndrome of grasping at a self-nature” (Tsong-kha-pa, 2005, p. 182) must be accomplished through the pursuit of peace (meditative practices as well as the pursuit of wisdom that studies our arising circumstances in all their dependently co-arising detail) and what then arises \textit{bestows} peace. As with what appears inside the circle of threat-retraction-hardening-increased threat, inside this Buddhist sway (as, I suggest, in the sway of ecological awareness and hermeneutic pursuits), peace is both cause and effect, both “the path and the goal” (Gadamer, 1989, p. 180).
SECTION SEVEN

To what profit is maintaining a sense of threat and the disturbing of the peace with the promise of walled-off safety? It is beyond doubt that this threat-mechanism often inculcates itself into market logic. “Buy this (idea, thing) and things will be fine” is the language of marketing. And, of course, we are witnessing this in the current American election cycle, how incendiary, threatening, clear and provocative images and ideas and promises trump complexity, subtlety, and thoughtfulness to the advantage of the one seeking power over us. Make no mistake. It is explicit and it is deliberate.

Inciting a sense of threat and the subsequent clear declarations of identification is profitable independent of the truth of the claim being made and its warrant. Its warrant is the profitability that flows from its assertion.

This may seem far from the realm of schools and issues of curriculum or classroom practice. So, well, brace yourself and be glad that this was finally said out loud to all those who, under threat, revert to sure-fire, colour-coded developmental readers and on-line reading packages to sure-fire guarantee, against threats of illiteracy, the cultivation of reading skills in the worried and hurried children of worried and hurried parents. Again, make no mistake. It is explicit and it is deliberate:

I … offer this, from Kevin O’Leary. It is cited from the Canadian Broadcasting Company’s series “Dragon’s Den.” O’Leary has more recently been seen on the American TV show “Shark Tank.” He is affiliated with The Learning Company, currently owned by Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, one of North America’s largest providers of various packaged educational products and “learn to read” series such as Carmen Sandiego and Reader Rabbit:

I’m all for children, but I want to make a buck. I am “Carmen Sandiego.” I am “Reader Rabbit.” People will do anything for their children to help them in math and reading scores. I made a fortune just servicing that market. I love the terror in a mother’s heart when she sees her child fall behind in reading. I made a fortune from that. (O’Leary 2012; Jardine, 2016, p. 161–162).

SECTION EIGHT

Because this [sense of enclosed and embattled identity] causes living beings to be confused in their view of the actual state of things, it is a delusion; ignorance mistakenly superimposes upon things an essence that they do not have. It is constituted so as to block perception of their nature. It is a concealer. (Tsong-kha-pa, 2002, p. 208)

In Buddhist thought and practice, things, selves, persons, trees, languages, bloodlines, students, teachers, books, literacy, schools, are considered to be “empty of self-existence (svabhavasunya)” (Tsong-kha-pa, 2000, p. 24), “empty of having

These things don’t then disappear. They reappear now out from the boundaries of self-containment. Far less visible histories and relation appear. Living fields of circumstance, hope, desire, suppression, marginalization, causes, conditions, ancestries, bloodlines and ecosystems of relations. “We are not attempting to get rid of [these things], only of the idea of [them] as self-existent” (Lobsang, 2006, p. 49). “Those objects that appear…do not stop appearing, but the concepts [e.g. “substance,” or “identity” or other reifications] that take them as having any true existence subside” (Patrul, 1998, p. 252). Things, selves, persons, trees, and all, all exist in relations of interdependence and mutual formation. Thus “dependent-arising is the meaning of emptiness” (Tsong-kha-pa, 2002, p. 133).

Only once these multiple mutual inhabitations start to appear (this “far less visible history”) is there any hope, I suggest, of their repair and reconciliation. In all this, “identity” has the potential to be a concealer, and simply reverting to “multiple identities” does not relieve this concealment but risks maintaining and simply proliferating and scattering this concealment.

SECTION NINE

If identity has the potential to be a concealer, so, too, then, does difference if it arises as the counterpoint of identity. Difference carries with it the seeds of the same error. It, too, can be a source of suffering. We are not just different than each other. That won’t do either. That pine tree over there exudes the oxygen that lets me utter, “I am.” And it is not just my revocable and provisional relation, but is what my flesh and breath truly are. This is why ecological portends lead to such trauma and grief. Difference, as much as identity, is not adequate to the fullness of our existence. “We are always already everywhere inhabited by the Other in the context of the fully real” (Smith, 2006, p. xxiv). Thus:

One of the great and necessary intellectual challenges is to recover the ‘lost’ dependencies of so much of our coveted traditions, because without such work we become forgetful … and end up behaving in ways that assume that Others don’t matter to who we think we are. That kind of assumption involves a hubris hiding from its nemesis, as 9/11 serves in reminder. (Smith, 2006, p. 40)

The real challenge is to face the truth that no one tradition [let alone no one person] can say everything that needs to be said about the full expression of human experience in the world and that what the global community requires more than anything else is mutual recognition of the various poverties of every tradition. The search to cure the poverty of one’s own tradition works in all directions at once (Smith, 2006).
The search to cure the poverty of my own identity might require letting go of the haven of identity itself, instead of simply proliferating it. It might require feeling the full pull of my own breath and blood in the suffering of the world, akin to Thich Nhat Hahn’s invocation (David Suzuki Foundation, 2011), hands trembling:

*Thich Nhat Hahn: People who know what is happening but … cannot do anything, there are so many of them, there are so many of them, because they have despair in them. (David Suzuki Foundation, 2011)*

No reversion to self-protective self-identity will save me or any of us, here.

A POSTSCRIPT

I consider these meditations on identity to be full of questions that are both unanswerable and fully charged and re-charged. Who answers this question, whose answers are not allowed as part of that answer, the pressing character of this question, when it arises, why and to what end, the value of it, the stake had in it…all this and more is part of that charge.

I am white, male, blue-eyed, English speaking, well-off, straight, rather rich and comfortable and, for now, healthy. These are no longer precisely exact identifiers, but rather multivocal nests of complicity and inheritance, a task of understanding to be undertaken, over and over again. But it is here that the dance of hubris/nemesis can rise up all over again. All this is easy for me to say because I do not feel, and am not, especially embattled.

So, if I may, let this chapter stand as a confession, a lamentation, an admission of my own poverty and the suffering it has caused.

And perhaps a hesitating glimpse born of grief.

REFERENCES


