We live immersed in what appears to be a paradox between coherence and complexity. It is the gap between the modern presuppositions we largely live by and the emerging presuppositions we are testing which makes this seem chaotic. It is the pull of the individual and the collective and their multi-layered discourses.

Your role as a teacher, as the one who crafts the magic of knowing, is to be the auteur, the author, the director, the conductor, who understands where the students are situated and inspires them to levels of understanding where they become the experts. You need to be the listener and the one to guide constructively the path which knits emerging personal meaning with understanding and shared knowledge. The outcome will be a text which you have never read, a piece of music you have never heard, and a portrait you have never seen. This is the collective voice of common discourse, and it is limitless.

The groundwork for a common discourse, I suggest, lies in as-if-ing, making meaning of a series of multiple possibilities. Each of us has been brought up in a society with a set of relative presuppositions about the way things work and what things mean. We can acknowledge different voices by thinking of them as a series of small cautionary tales, related to us and by us about the way things might be.
Reframing Common Discourse
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INTRODUCTION

FIRST THOUGHTS

I see my writing and instruction as contributing to the fundamental notions of teaching, learning, and curriculum. I have argued that uncritical and traditional contextual and epistemological frameworks for education are at best, archaic, and at worst, artificial. From this perspective, it is clear that reducing teaching and learning to simple, non-interactive and unidirectional relationships between supposed cause and effect outcomes reduces the entire enterprise to something bordering on meaninglessness. I believe in the importance of other-awareness as well as self-awareness; the central nature of dialecticism in the business of schooling and perhaps most important, that learning and teaching require a social exchange dependent on real and significant relationships among all involved resulting from openness to and true acceptance of multiple ways of knowing.

Let me give you an overview of where this journey will take us. In the first chapter, I present you with some stories about how musicians, writers, and other thinkers see this. I also suggest that there is another way to think and write about this other than traditional explanatory language. To do this, I build upon how we can do research about schooling in a way that is consistent with the picture I am painting, referring to the philosophical school of phenomenology and to small theories, not grand narratives. My questions here are: If we are interested in lives in school why are we giving explanatory theories of social actions? Why don’t we concentrate on the small stories of teachers and learners and leave larger hypotheses to others? Why don’t we ask students and teachers what’s going on in their schools?

In chapter two, I discuss what constitutes a dividing line; a major theme in my personal and practical knowledge and also in many disciplines. My sense is that discourse is much more contextual and fragmented than scholars often realize. More often than not, high level research, research that seeks to provide explanatory theories and attribute linear cause and effect relationships, has become the voice of educational theory. Studies which adopt this methodology look for and find broad patterns from which they form general conclusions and then announce specific outcomes. This approach has merit but it fails to provide us with what is happening to individuals, and it is those individual stories that interest me. Like David Bloome and other mid-level researchers, I believe that we need to be concentrating on describing contexts and problems and providing opportunities for them to be discussed and negotiated. This is how I believe meaning and understanding are constructed.

In the third chapter, I reenact the power relationships between teachers and learners to make explicit their presuppositions and to chart out various ways of understanding in what I perceive as an “as-ifying” of the possibilities created in the fusion of teaching and learning. How we construct decisions about teaching and
learning in this fragmented and complex world of ours is a matter of fusion. It’s not just a matter of hard work or good luck. Formal schooling plays an important role in this. Many teachers come from middle class backgrounds and have middle class morals. Most curricula are written from this perspective. Until recently, only a few mavericks had clashed with this and they are counted amongst the dropouts. Today, Google, Twitter, and Facebook challenge this. New technology demands and assumes that we have the expertise to perform these functions. These machines are no longer options; they are utilities. How can we think of providing a fair and just education to all if the tools aren’t available to all? It’s not possible to issue enough “textbooks” to solve this problem, nor is the answer to be found in any “one size fits all” curriculum and assessment package. Do we sit by and watch from the sidelines as our cultural divide deepens and ignore the profound ethical issues? I don’t think we can.

In the fourth chapter, I describe what constitutes common discourse, how it is shaped, and how you can give it meaning in the classroom. I make specific references to real classroom situations as I am committed to the idea that theory and practice cannot be separated. This praxis of mine is founded on reflexive thought and I suggest to you that teaching and learning is contingent upon an on-going conversation with ourselves about what we do and why we do and did it. Despite our best efforts to restore order to the world, many decisions are made just-in-time. It might help us if we could think of our lives as a series of small stories based on who we are, where we come from, and our dreams. These cautionary tales may be closer to autobiography or fiction than they are to “fact.” I am not sure we can draw a straight line to separate these in real life. Often our informal discourses are loosely-sketched, well-intentioned thoughts but I believe they are often not causally related in the ordinary sense and fall outside of what can usually be called truth claims. Often they are thinking-in-action discourse situated in a world of possibility of what just might be the case. New learners read differently, work as groups not as individuals, and make short-term decisions in ways often considered intuitive. This is the discourse of our students. On the other hand, most of you consider facts and weigh opinions before you act. You often work alone with long range plans. This is the discourse of education. We need to fuse these two so that we can construct a true community of learners. Right now multiple discourses cross each other like shadows in the night. Teachers talk at students and students talk at teachers. This isn’t conversation and it doesn’t build understanding. What occurs is that the dominant forms of discourse slide up against those of the street and coerce students into complying. We do this in our classrooms through scripted lessons, drill and skill, and high stakes testing, and we do it in both implicit and explicit ways.

This leads to my thoughts of forging a common discourse and in the fifth chapter my primary focus is our diverse world and how that is played out in our classrooms. Our sense of democracy is inclusive and based upon legal rights. As a result, our schools are an often not so united but places and spaces where gender, race, ethnicity, age, and sexual preference all demand recognition. The questions here are: Can we do this in our classrooms, and if so how? What does it mean to be multicultural? What is interculturalism? How do we move from political statements to addressing
the real concerns about difference and diversity? Our schools are diverse in their populations but that does not imply that opportunity is equally shared in a just and open way. Could it be that we are still banking knowledge on the assumption that we just might need to recall it in the future? Shouldn’t we be linking knowledge of the past to the context of where our students are now? A democracy should balance imagination and certainty and my primary objective in chapter five is to work through these ideas.

So, here we go. I invite you to join me in this process and as always I value your feedback. Our ongoing conversations cause me to reflect on what I have written and they often drive me in new directions. You can reach me at bryant.griffith@tamucc.edu.
CHAPTER 1

IN SEARCH OF COMMON DISCOURSE

It was a cold night and I had been in a stuffy room listening to Richard Walsh, then professor of philosophy at Edinburgh University, talk about metaphysics. It was a good talk and the discussion lively, but I was tired. I’m not good late at night at the best of times. The host had invited me to accompany Walsh and as he drove back to his hotel, and in the process a discussion ensued that changed my life. Walsh, always the gracious scholar, listened quietly to my description of what I was working on in my doctoral dissertation. I had discovered R. G. Collingwood one day in the teacher’s lounge of the inner city high school where I was working. The book was *The Idea of History* and Collingwood’s description of the process of historical thought—what constitutes historical knowledge and how that knowledge is recovered—immediately struck me as being correct and even more importantly for me, it was the way I saw the process as well.

When I had finished, Walsh turned in his seat and asked me if I knew that he had been one of Collingwood’s students. In the next twenty minutes, or however long it took to drive to that hotel near the airport, my topic came to life. Collingwood’s writing became the cautionary narrative of an important thinker whose work, through circumstance and an early death, had been edited into a form Collingwood would have rejected. I had sensed this when reading both *An Autobiography* and the introductory section of *The Idea of History*, but had little more than an imaginative belief and certainly nothing that would be substantive enough for a dissertation. As we parted that night, Walsh asked if I had heard that all of Collingwood’s unpublished papers had been received at the Bodleian library in Oxford, mailed in plain brown paper and not catalogued. I might, he thought, be interested in pursuing this. The next year and a half were an adventure. I found enough grant money to get me to England and with the help of friends and faculty, like Dr. Ian Winchester, I obtained accommodations and access to the papers. Although I had experience in large research libraries I was not ready for the vastness of the Bodleian and its resources. I was permitted to read the papers in sets of folders, three at a time as I remember it, but not to copy or move any of the contents, which were mostly handwritten. It was an intellectual gold mine for a scholar. For me, the impact was the revelation that autobiographical writing was a powerful clue to an author’s meaning. Consequently, the fact that an executor could choose to select and present ideas as representative of a deceased writer, ideas that contradicted autobiographical claims, astounded me. I know now that the decoding of another’s thoughts is very much a part of academic discourse, in fact I see it as part of what Hannah Arendt called the human condition. It’s also the case that in the decades that followed autobiography, memoir and other forms of personal narrative have emerged as legitimate forms of academic writing.
As a young scholar, this opportunity became the foundation of my presuppositions. Collingwood’s conceptions of the nature of the human mind, the processes of re-enactment in the construction of what happened in the past, and the fusion of collapsing forms of thought into historical and philosophical thinking have had a profound effect on my praxis. However, it was not until I worked with Tony Adams of the University of Cambridge that I was able to place additional pieces in my epistemological puzzle. The pieces still missing for me in Collingwood’s writing were: the importance of language, a wider sense of text, and the multiplicity of discourse.

Collingwood wrote long before thinkers like Derrida and Rorty and the notion of deconstruction. Adams, however, had been working on language awareness, and in my time with him I began the process of contextualizing his insights and adopting his strong beliefs in Gramsci’s theory of praxis. As I began to grow intellectually I worked on the process of fusing Collingwood’s insights on personal knowledge with my expanded views of discourse and praxis, and this became real for me as I applied these ideas in my teaching.

My discussion with Walsh that cold Canadian night set off a chain of intellectual events that continue to cascade onward, in what might appear to an observer as a chaotic path, but in fact there is a trail that can be retrospectively traced; one that makes the most sense when viewed reflectively and one that is most significant when framed as a cautionary narrative. This is my story of as-ifing possibilities in the decentered and fragmented world of teaching and learning, as I consider the possibility of framing a common discourse. It is also the narrative of an outsider in many senses of the term.

My deconstruction and subsequent reconstruction are products of my life outside this country, as I was born and educated in Canada, as well as the mainstream of North American culture. The experience of leaving home without finishing high school and travelling widely under the guise of being a university student left me with a wide and deep understanding of many modes of discourse. The downside of this knowledge, though, has been a lifelong attempt to fuse meaning. So, the title of Reframing Common Discourse is not abstract for me but quite personal, written in a way that reflects both where I have been and where I hope to go in my theoretical views as well as in my practice.

My hope is that you will become part of this process by deconstructing my wide brushstrokes. I seek to discover a middle ground to express and critique what I write in a manner that invites you to consider my ideas and then to reconstruct them to make them fit your context. I don’t think of this as a singular action of deconstruction, as you might carry out consciously when you see a movie or read a poem on your own. Instead, I’m concerned with the conjoined interaction of teaching and learning. Teaching and learning are one entity for me, and it is the reflexion and the subsequent praxis which emerges that I am aiming to influence. Let’s see if I can do that.

MY PRAXIS AND DISCOURSE

For the past three years, I have been using my writing to explore issues of voice and the discourses of contemporary educational praxis within the context of historical
and philosophical self-knowing. As mentioned earlier, my intellectual roots are deeply grounded in Collingwood’s ideas on re-enactment and what I call the fusion of philosophical and historical thinking. Collingwood characterized the development of “mind” as an ongoing dialectic, one with no beginning and no end, where the outcome is a synthesis rather than a resolution and I have found this to be a powerful notion. When this is coupled with the concept of knowing about others by analogous reflection on how I myself come to act, this methodology provides me with multiple ways to make sense not only of the past, but also to make sense of the actions of those whom I call learners, those whom I interact with as I teach.

Collingwood, as are we all, was a person of his time, bound by his own set of historical presuppositions. Uncovering these, I am convinced, was the key to his ability to write what he did. This personal struggle, and it is a struggle of self identity, is played out today throughout the world and not just in a few select academic locations. Globalism is making it explicitly clear that this is at the least an historical, or relative, presupposition of our modern/postmodern world. As we redesign our world we may discover that our efforts are uncovering an absolute presupposition, but we need to wait for the judgment of history on that.

My narrative is embedded in the praxis of teaching. I have a deep personal understanding of the process of “knowing” in formal education. Recognizing this as my perspective, yet bounded by my experiences as a less-than-successful student, has been an important frame for me. So, too, is my journey through higher education. This success colors and shades the past and continually reframes my reflexion. Beside this stands music and literature, both powerful forces, always there to dazzle, irritate, and inspire. I have discovered the importance of these in my recent writing and by making these explicit I have come to recognize the complexity of our discourse. Therefore, I want to add the complexity of cultural narration to my epistemological luggage and argue that without it Collingwood’s work is incomplete.

All of this is a matter of praxis, a process of personal uncovering and internalizing and this brings me back to my attraction to the work of Collingwood. The turbulent times of Collingwood were no less secure than our own, but we no longer have the sense of personal identity that was afforded to some privileged people of the past. We live in a time of massive migration and upheaval that is at the same moment fragmented and torn. Our grand narrative has been ripped from us and in its place are numerous competing offerings, each demanding authentication.

My narrative is also embedded in my escape from solid middle class roots in Canada. It is a struggle, I recognize, that is framed from my perspective of being “outside” the margins of my context by virtue of illness and talent. I can understand the colonial/postcolonial passage of writers like V. S. Naipaul, Frantz Fanon, or Homi Bhabha, but I have a more difficult time with Canadian solitudes like Hugh MacLennan, John Gibbon, or even Leonard Cohen. I think Melville had it right. All of us need to leave that save harbor to find ourselves. I don’t believe I am alone in this. Naipaul voyaged to Oxford as did Bhabha. My voyage, both literally and figuratively, was to the South Pacific.
CHAPTER 1

REALITY AND NARRATIVE

There is something about creating epistemological gaps between sets of pre-suppositions that allows us to imagine ourselves in different sets of possibilities. The ways that this is done are limitless, the outcomes are not. Modern culture has tried to name and own this process, to categorize it and study it, but this attempt we now see has failed. The act of naming is not sufficient. Human action, discourse in its various forms, is necessary to complete the task but given the shifting sands of our time this in itself seems a dubious venture. Life is a narrative and our stories take the various forms of our discourse. Decoding those is the primary act of teaching and learning.

In Cormac McCarthy’s prize-winning 1994 novel, *The Crossing*, the character Billy Parham related his views on storytelling and what constitutes a story. It was both informative and cautionary when Billy said:

> Things separate from their stories have no meaning...When their meaning has become lost to us they no longer have even a name. The story on the other hand can never be lost from its place in the world for it is that place. And that is what was to be found here. The corridor. The tale. And like all corridos it ultimately told one story only, for there is only one to tell. (p. 142)

Likewise, the personal stories constructed by our students are their corridos. Each is a cautionary tale about the possibilities that occur in their lives. As such they must be authenticated by those of us who teach, by crossing the borders necessary to connect to their realities and their narratives. This means listening, decoding, considering, and reacting to their tales, their lives.

Our schools are often boring places to be. Both teachers and students are placed in colonial contexts and required to dance to others’ tunes. I believe that schooling has an obligation to the society that supports it, but that obligation must be a shared conversation where the needs of society are reflected in the historical past as well as the perceived future. Seldom have we been good at predicting those needs, so to cast them in stone and then drill and skill them is a certain recipe for a failed educational system and a culture at risk. A democracy should balance imagination and certainty. It is my objective later in this book to work through these ideas. Different ideas about reading, writing, teaching and learning have emerged and I want to draw these together and think about your shared responsibility. To what extent should we honor repetition, competition, and single achievement when both business and new learners increasingly rely on imagination, cooperation, and teams through the establishment of learning communities?

PUBLIC INTELLECTUALS

What can we do and where can we start? A good place to begin this exploration is to look at the various aspects of discourse in an attempt to forge a common form in a very special way. I am not seeking a universal, but rather I am laying out a shifting ground where discourse can be constructed and negotiated as an ongoing process; where meaning can be found. This method follows what has been called
speculative philosophy, and not surprisingly many of the sources I refer to are speculative thinkers. So, what is speculative philosophy and why and how do I believe it is helpful in a discussion of this kind?

Speculative philosophy aims to incorporate all our forms of experience into one epistemology or theory of knowledge. Alfred North Whitehead’s work is an example of this. His theory began with particular observation, then imaginative generalization, and returned to reflexive observation. Whitehead (1966) suggested that applicability, logical consistence, coherence, and adequacy were its presuppositions. This type of thinking is often found today in fields such as theoretical physics and the results are in the form of working hypotheses. I am thinking here of particle theory and quantum theory. The twentieth century philosopher of science and also a proponent of speculative thinking, Karl Popper, stressed the importance of the quality of falsifiability and revision inherent in this method.

The problem is that our world of teaching and learning often doesn’t conform to one where a single epistemological model applies. Our students are not trained thinkers in any one discipline and their discourses are a fusion of the street and formal discourses of organized society. Although Whitehead and Popper were in a different context, their aim of forming a common epistemology is worthy of pursuit if we recognize the shifting and fragmented nature of our modern/postmodern world. The curricula of teaching and learning, both explicit and implicit, often presuppose that students recognize and believe in a unified discourse, but I argue that we can’t take this for granted. At best our graduate students come to recognize the discourse of their field of study and they use it to communicate within that specific context. Many professors use that discourse as our common discourse, but that number is even smaller. The idea of a common, shared and recognized discourse is a chimera. If we take from speculative philosophy the idea of grounding our epistemology on experience and recognize that there are many types of experience to be acknowledged, then the task is clearer but no less difficult. That task is to constantly listen and negotiate how we teach, why we teach, and to open the door to shared meaning.

Here’s an insight to consider. In *The Age of the Unthinkable*, Joshua Cooper Ramo (2009) presented the argument that a new world order is emerging that “may become the most dramatic change in several centuries” (p. 8). This change is revolutionary and our institutions like schooling aren’t ready for it. Ramo’s book does not deal with education. His focus is on foreign policy but I’m suggesting that his idea has direct implications for how we teach and learn. It’s true that most of us grew up in more stable times, when policy outcomes could largely be predicted and where there seemed be a direct relationship between factors like hard work and success. Ramo says that’s over. That’s not news to any third grade teacher where I live. The high stakes testing that eight to eighteen year olds have to endure doesn’t adequately reflect the students’ abilities or inner drive, but it does shine a light on ethnicity as well as social and economic status.

Let me suggest that schooling, like international issues, is no longer a case of good planning where the skills outweigh the circumstances. The wisdom of elites, however defined, has failed us and the result for educators has been to put in place
an educational system that is both repressive and inept. It no longer matters what the intentions were because we have created a situation endemic to our society which tinkering can’t solve. In education, good testing won’t solve the problem of raising standards because we don’t agree on the bar or the definition of a standard. Increasingly our students, the new learners, come to school out of parental duty or obligation. We have ceased to be the place where foundations are laid and knowledge is uncovered. Perhaps more importantly, our educational system seems to have abandoned the task of promoting self-discovery.

Our world is increasingly complex and unpredictable. While the scientific community has grappled with this fragmentation and decentralization for close to a hundred years, social and economic policy is trapped in outdated presuppositions. It hasn’t been just the pure sciences either. What James Galbraith called the inexact science, economics, is in play as well. In 1974, Friedrich von Hayek won the Nobel Prize in that field and in his celebratory lecture “The Pretence of Knowledge” he argued that we risk both our standard of living and our place in the world if we continue to treat complex problems as if they could be solved with simplistic solutions. What a pity this lecture wasn’t taken more seriously.

Ramo (2009) suggested we act as revolutionaries. I like this idea, but let’s call it acting as public intellectuals. He stated:

If man is not to do more harm than good in his efforts to improve the social order, he will have to learn that in this, as in all other fields where essential complexity of an organized kind prevails, he cannot acquire the full knowledge which would make mastery of the events possible...the craftsman shapes his handiwork, but rather to cultivate growth by providing the appropriate environment, in the manner a gardener does for his plants. (p. 39)

I want us to re-imagine ourselves as individuals immersed in the praxis of teaching and learning. I want us to take on the challenges and to construct a form of common discourse which is constructed on an on-going basis, a process not a product. This discourse presupposes that the deep, reflective knowledge about ourselves that we have received in formal education can interact powerfully with the discourse and experience students bring to class, and this happens through imagination and personal narratives as well as other factors. Ramo wrote that government policy needs less reliance on ideas from big universities and big businesses, as the latter lack risk-taking. I think it’s more complex than that and that in America we have become complacent. Things have always worked out over time and risk-taking is, well, risky. It’s safer to stay in the middle. If you look at many of the real change ideas and change agents in the last two decades you will notice that they come from outside the established order.

There is a false dialectic at play here. I just don’t believe that it’s as simple as the big university or business versus the individual. I think a better explanation might be that our history has been about the fight of the individual versus the control of others. It’s the Horatio Alger myth. In other parts of the world segues are continually constructed and often in more highly structured societies than our own. The difference and the success lie in the ability to perceive the epistemological
gaps in any system. Creative people discover where new ideas can be nurtured and they inhabit those places. Sometimes these places are universities and sometimes they are companies, like Pixar.

In the past, the genius of America has been its collective ability to make these gaps transparent and accessible. Ramo seems to be telling us that we have become rigid in not only our thinking but in our rule-following behavior. Being a revolutionary isn’t such a bad thing in certain contexts and particular times. We live in one of those spaces right now and no one needs to be prompted more than educators. How often have you heard a teacher say, “I’d teach the right way if only I could.” A friend of mine, a superintendent, spends a lot of his time trying to free teachers of this often self-imposed burden and it’s not easy.

What we need to construct is a way to learn with and from each other without mimicry and forced compliance. I believe this will only happen when we think about community as a place where many individual voices can speak and be heard. In parts of Asia, people perceive the context of a picture or painting and derive their personal meaning including that context, as opposed to North Americans who perceive meaning based solely upon the focal object. This isn’t just about art, it’s about how we see the world and how we make meaning, and in this complex and diverse world it’s the shifting contexts that count.

IMAGINATIVE CONSTRUCTION

It is in this spirit that I write in what may seem like broad brushstrokes, but which are in fact the thoughtful processes of imaginative construction based on reason, historical thought, and experience. Whitehead stressed that all the metaphysical schemes are able to be revised. One of the first markers of that for me is the idea of imagination. For many decades, our educational system was based on the idea that we learn in a linear, analytical fashion. The English philosopher Herbert Spencer’s (1864) view that a child’s intellectual development parallels our own biological development has led to the view that the curriculum should be the setting in which to place the skills that are needed as children gradually grow to maturity and the skills that are of practical use in adult society. Spencer’s ideas were adopted by William James, John Dewey, G. Stanley Hall, Edward Thorndike, and even Jean Piaget. They form the basis of many of our presuppositions about how we think and what we teach.

The contemporary educational philosopher Kieran Egan (2002) disagreed with this set of presuppositions, arguing that the human mind does not mirror the development of the biological world. He posited that many of our children’s intellectual capacities reach their peak in their early years, for example, the ability to recognize and generate appropriate metaphors. His views on educational stages, or understandings, and imagination explored broader aims for education than skill-oriented instruction.

If we look at children’s imaginative lives, rather than their slowly-accumulating logico-mathematical skills, we do not see intellectual activity dominated by the concrete, the simple, the indefinite, and the empirical. Instead, what we see is the
development of storytelling. These are small personal narratives of lives imagined and of possibility. Stories serve several pedagogical ends. They strengthen memory and establish a sense of rhythm, which is the basis of poetry. This is why Egan claimed we all begin as poets. Narratives are also the stories of the mind. As we mature and grow older, we can recall events more easily if they are attached to vivid images and where distinction between good and evil are clearly drawn. Take, for example, the narratives of the characters in Star Wars or one of the most universal stories, Cinderella (Warnock, 1976). Egan argued that early childhood is the time when oral language needs to be emphasized. He claimed that young children are not “concrete thinkers” and made the case for “the primacy of the abstract” (Hayek, 1970) and for children’s ability to make sense of the concrete only to the degree that the concrete elements are tied to some affective abstraction (Egan, 1989). What we can do is reflect on these ideas as a way of thinking about thinking. If very young children learn about textuality and discourse what kind of educational context are we providing for them to enhance this?

It was Collingwood who discovered the almost universal appeal of the Cinderella story. The reason for this may well back up Egan’s claims. We presuppose that children understand the binary opposite relationships imbedded within the story. The point about the binary oppositions is that they provide immediate experiences for us to ground other experiences and upon which to build. So, said Egan, the presuppositions of much of our early school curricula, especially, are incorrect.

In The Arts as “the Basics” of Education, Egan (2009) wrote that contemporary educational practice has become a customer-oriented product, geared to “job-ready skills.” He’s right. What a mistake we have made by accepting this analogy as one of our presuppositions. In teaching and learning there are no such assurances. Education is not a buyers’ market in the same manner as purchasing a car. Yes, I can choose where I want to go for higher education, but there are no guarantees that I will be successful because I have paid my fees or tried my hardest. Teachers stand in a unique position where they must cajole, coax, and critique so that learners can become the best they can be. In K-12 education the analogy is even less applicable. Students are required to attend school by law and in most districts their school and teacher are not a matter of choice, nor are the subjects they take or the manner in which they are assessed.

This is hardly free market capitalism at work. Instead, this is an example of nineteenth century paternalism where the hope was to achieve a greater good. Let me suggest that instead we use an analogy of “service.” What we do is act in the service of others with the expectation that they will learn sets of skills that will enable them to act and think in ways that fit their worlds; and, since those worlds are changing so rapidly, these skills must include much more than simply rote memory.

HYBRIDITY OR FUSION

If we can’t predict the jobs ten years from now how can we define curricular content? This isn’t as hard as it sounds. The first component of curricula must be
an historical overview of the presuppositions of the major forms of thought. We need to describe to students how scientists have thought, and why, and in the process give them the tools they need to solve emerging problems. This doesn’t have to be on a just-in-case-I-need-to-know basis. In the beginning, it’s a matter of discovering the process, not the content. Those choices can be made with the students’ voices as more than mimicry and with good support. The second component of curricula would surely be the discourse of the arts.

Let’s look at the concepts of colonialism and postcolonialism next. This isn’t the intellectual jump you might think it is. Let me explain. Amit Chaudhuri (2009) argued that ours is not a world of hybridity or fusion. Instead his writing, like many of his contemporaries cascades back and forth between the margins, their borders and the center. Chaudhuri’s discourse is both musical and literary. He moves from the vernacular Indian language to English in such a way as to create a whole that is not so much the product of fragmented bits as it is a to juxtapose “specific elements to jostle, coexist and often conflict” (p. 19). In “New Left Review,” he argued that “discontinuities are as important to the formation of the modern imagination as collectives” (p. 1).

Chaudhuri said that the power struggles throughout the world which have been used to define literacy have spawned many exciting and often contradictory ideas. Labeling this struggle colonial or postcolonial has simplified the issue and marginalized its impact. Chaudhuri further explained:

If one were to map the strategic affinities of these writers, those terms would gradually lose their conceptual integrity; what might begin to appear (almost accidentally, as not every point of the map would be known to the other) is a sort of trade route of vernacular experimentation, a patois of the concrete, an effervescent cherishing of the idiosyncratic. If we were to trace the lines radiating from one writer or location to another on this map, we might, for instance, find that, often, a high degree of attention and erudition had been brought to bear upon the commonplace. (p. 1)

It is the robustness of this struggle and the process itself that Chaudhuri found significant. He felt that delineating difference of whatever type simplifies and misleads. I see it as a fallacy of modernism itself that labels can be applied and given meaning by so called experts from outside the margin. As an example, I can recall the historical period prior to the Renaissance being called the Dark Ages. The connotation of this is obvious; clearly nothing of significance occurred at that time. But who made that decision and compared to what was it made? Likewise, the colonial powers of the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries made similar assumptions about the cultures of non-western European countries.

Do you recognize the parallels with much of contemporary educational theory and practice? How often does the teacher broadly categorize to simplify or drive home a point? How often do schools act as colonial masters in possession of the right answers and scornful of the discourse of their learners? In fact, what often happens in educational praxis is that the good ideas are often buried under the excuse of expediency. Like literary theory and practice, labels confuse and simplify
so that the essential dance of complexity is blurred and shunned. In our classrooms we need to be reminded that it is often the unspoken, the memory, or the gesture which reminds us of the complexity of discourse. Chaudhuri contemplated: “Perhaps these moments—essentially afterthoughts from itineraries that have almost been erased—may serve to mark the beginnings of an admittedly desultory enquiry” (p. 3). Perhaps it will be more than literary voices that are acknowledged in the process. Perhaps it is from the discourse of the street that common discourse will emerge.

As we each confront our colonial past and our postcolonial present let’s be mindful of the voices left unheard in the struggle to simplify those whom Chaudhuri called the “vanished cosmopolitanisms inner exiles” (p. 5). He tells us that we need to make this discourse visible. For teachers and other public intellectuals, being the outsider Chaudhuri described is a curious blend “of the awkward, the pedagogical, the pedantic, and, on the other, the anarchic and comic; in popular culture (Albert Einstein, Groucho) the two were often interchangeable” (p. 8). We need to reconstruct our discourse and bridge it to those with whom we teach and learn. One way might be the recall the gaps created in the 1960s and 1970s, when the old elites began to lose their intellectual hegemony, a time before a new empowered technological ruling class emerged. Our first bridge then is to render visible what has been less visible, and to reclaim Chaudhuri’s recognizable and unrecognizable cosmopolitan in our praxis. But let’s not despair. There are several narrative paths to consider as possible construction zones.

In the 1950s, English physicist and novelist C. P. Snow gave a lecture which became the now quite famous book *The Two Cultures*. Snow (1959) argued that two cultures existed in contemporary society, the scientific and the literary. Snow’s basic thesis was that the breakdown of communication between the sciences and the humanities (the “two cultures” of the title) was a major hindrance to solving the world’s problems. This was combined with some criticism of the British education system and some broad suggestions as to how to change it. He saw a divide between the scientific and humanistic disciplines that was reinforced by schoolings insistence on specialization. Snow identified what was really part of a larger issue about specialization and how it fits into the whole. He stated:

What is wanted is not to force potential physicists to read a bit of Dickens and potential literary critics to mug up some basic theorems. Instead, we need to encourage the growth of the intellectual equivalent of bilingualism, a capacity to attend to, learn from and eventually contribute to wider cultural conversations. This involves not only understanding how one’s own special area of study fits into a larger cultural whole, but also a recognition that tending to these larger questions is not some kind of off-duty voluntary work, but is an integral part of professional achievement in the given field. (p. vii)

Snow’s ideas are clearly dated; his view of science and the arts was formed at Cambridge in the 1930s. Any communication problem between the arts and the sciences is now subsumed by a much more general fragmentation of human learning, a fragmentation which is actively applauded by many, but nevertheless his comments on specialization in general, and education in particular are worthy of thought.
What has occurred since the publication of Snow’s lecture, and what makes it noteworthy for this book is how great the divide now is in these cultures. It is no longer just science versus literary discourse in America. It is also the complexity of the “other” and discourse itself.

In 1998, Stefan Collini wrote an informative new introduction to Snow’s *The Two Cultures*. He commented that Snow’s arguments had an enormous impact at the time but wondered if they still made sense. Snow’s background was in both science and literature and his personal values were grounded in what he perceived to the snobbish class-based exclusivity emanating from Cambridge and Oxford universities and the excitement of the emerging new sciences. I mention this to remind you of the power of our own relative presuppositions in forming our beliefs. Living under the mistaken belief that we don’t possess beliefs which are relative to ourselves has led us to believe that how things are today is how they always have been. Many history books have been constructed on this and it has given us a flawed sense of human action and causation. If instead we think reflexively, we come to think of ourselves in a process where we continuously interact with these presuppositions, questioning them and reflecting on them in terms our personal experiences. The result is what Collingwood called re-enactment and a realization that the notion of relativism is not quite as negative as it is often painted. If we are relative to “x,” that simply implies that we understand the relationship between experience and belief.

Collini says something similar when he stated that Snow’s greatest contribution has been to reveal that what separates types of thinking are particular problems, not truths. Snow’s great service remains that of encouraging us to see the divisions between disciplines as problems rather than eternal truths. Although the later years of schooling remain specialized, many teachers are making an effort to forge a common discourse in fields like physics and chemistry. This effort, to my mind, is just in its beginning.

**MUSIC AND ART**

Let’s look at that divide today and see if we can construct a common discourse in the process. Wynton Marsalis is a jazz musician. He has said that “music is the art of all the invisible things that are real.” Elliot Eisner wrote that art, emotion, and imagination help you think and understand the contexts of curricular materials and the events of everyday life. James Gee argued that students have integrated new technologies into the way they learn and they see a seamless fit between art, imagination, and the various discourses that frame their worlds.

So, what does this tell us about teaching and learning? The answer is that teaching and learning represent a nonlinear fusion of complexity and diversity. During most of the history of public education, the voice of education has been a dialectical dance of teacher and learner. In this book, I want to suggest to you that it is time to forge a common discourse, a discourse of historical knowing and self-reflexion, a discourse of curricular contexts as well as of the streets, and a discourse that includes the diversity of postcolonialism as well as of post-post-Fordism. This will
CHAPTER 1

be a fusion of fluidity, where boundaries are porous and where epistemological gaps create ongoing opportunities to safely re-imagine, conditionally, what the world might be for us “if” we could momentarily suspend the judgment of others. The role of teaching and learning here is fused. We listen, react, interface, guide, and cajole based on what we have experienced and we tell that in our stories. These are the metaphors of our lives and they give us the authenticity to meet students where they are, right now.

The story of education has been something of a fairy tale or a piece of science fiction writing that might read as follows: Once upon a time a brave people committed themselves to a society where everyone would receive free education to allow them to maximize their potential and fulfill their dreams to the best of their abilities. This is the story of that dream and what occurred along the way. In most stories like this the ending finds the hero or the evil force victorious. In the history of American education this hasn’t been the case. The story has been one of constantly shifting positions and interventions by groups who claim to speak for the needs of others. These groups include politicians, business, unions, parents, teachers, taxpayers, and very infrequently students.

We know that it’s time to stop this cycle and to write another narrative but we don’t seem to know how to do this. In this book I’m going to give you some ideas. These won’t take the form of a road map or a formula or even policy. Categories don’t exist for the voyage we are about to take because they imply an intended destination. In our world there are no safe harbors or sure bets. There can only be possibilities to think of and apply and these too can’t be universal but instead tied to individuals, place, and time. What I offer you is an incomplete set of thoughts and construction materials from which we can begin to construct an educational system which honors all of us. My ideas are based on the belief that there is not a line to be drawn between teaching and learning in today’s world and that is one of the themes of this book.

THE RE-ENACTMENT OF EDUCATION

Re-enactment has been defined as the process of enacting, acting, or performing again; to repeat the actions of an earlier incident or event. I claim that what goes on in the praxis of teaching and learning is a re-enactment similar to what historians do when they uncover the past. One of the best examples of this form of historiography is, as previously mentioned, the work of Collingwood, who asked: “What does it mean to understand historically?” I think that each time we encounter a student in a learning context we are asking a similar question. Our understanding, like the historian’s, differs from explanation in natural science because our understandings are not empirical hypotheses. We understand intentions and motives on the basis of the actions of students in order to make them intelligible.

I view teachers as public intellectuals, as individuals who reflect on what they say and do inside and outside of the classroom. I see teachers taking a stand on their praxis, walking the walk. This commitment has traditionally been attributed to people who are highly visible and whose actions have direct impact on public opinion.
To my mind, teachers fit this description perfectly; and it is remarkable how seldom this is recognized. Part of what is happening in this decentered and fractured world is that we, as a society, now perceive gaps in the narrative about who we are and our roles. These gaps present opportunities for us to rework our story and to let it be known that there are many small narratives that need to be voiced and heard in any effort to acknowledge diversity. This isn’t so much new as it is the fact that it can now be explicitly stated.

When Derrida and Rorty referred to the concept of deconstruction it was to a largely academic audience, but when the idea was placed in the context of school classrooms it became a methodology of self-expression where students were encouraged to construct their own meanings of what they read. The acknowledgement that students’ voices had worth in the classroom was an implicit and unexpected challenge to the content authority of the teacher. At least it often seemed that way to the public who believed that schooling had lost its direction and fallen in to a deep pit of relativism. Of course, this wasn’t the case. The vast majority of teachers realized that they possessed deep content knowledge about their teaching area. The real problem was how to resolve the issue of acknowledging that students brought lived experiences to class that needed to be woven into prescribed content. In other words, how is it possible to construct shared meaning and understanding when we presuppose that individual voices must be honored?

This is where re-enactment comes in. I don’t see why we can’t adapt Collingwood’s use of re-enactment and imagination to our own needs. Historians know about the past by rethinking the thoughts of others. My re-enactment theory is like Collingwood’s. The argument or theory is that although two people may have the same thought there is only one thought, since there is only one propositional content. Re-enactment is conceptual rather than methodological and ideas are best conceived of as qualitative rather than quantitative. Like Collingwood, I believe that to say I understand what another thinks I must suspend my own beliefs and temporarily adopt those of the other. Teachers, historians, in fact all of us, have to be aware that we don’t necessarily share the beliefs of others and that we may not be able to understand all of their actions. So re-enactment may not be an appropriate tool for coming to understand the motives and intentions of violent actions, or the beliefs of people of far different cultures than our own. I’ll get to this in a moment.

For the most part, finding meaning in the classroom is rational. Our educational discourses, however varied they may be, only become meaningful when they connect to what can be broadly called content. We might lament this but it is true. So there is a good possibility that in many cases teachers can get inside the heads of their students and vice versa. How does this work? First of all, this isn’t a magic trick. It calls for the use of imagination as Eisner has pointed out, the use of our imagination to think as-if I were that person and the imagination to construct the relative presuppositions that the person might use to make a belief or knowledge claim. Unlike the historian who is dealing with actors no longer on the stage, the teacher has the entire cast in front of him or her. Teachers also have the advantage of witnessing a series of preceding actions upon which to base their understanding.
However, the historian’s advantage is that the discourse he or she studies is quite often causally connected in particular ways that might resemble a Sherlock Holmes mystery. Employing the proper methodology is often the key in discovering what happened.

In the classroom, actions of all types collide and bounce off each other in what often appear to be unconnected series of events. At any given time three or more conversations can be occurring about some aspect of the lesson and they may or may not be connected to the others. In our diverse classrooms this discourse may be implicitly or explicitly related to the lived experiences that students bring with them. When this is overt then there is a possibility that we uncover meaning. Teachers need to also attend to gestures, tattoos, and other signifiers to make this happen. These are tools that are not always available to historians. This is matter of being aware that decoding is very much an integral part of being a teacher and it’s a matter of realizing that any decoding is at its best provisional because the uncovering of the artifacts necessary to understand the relative presuppositions of any student is anything but certain.

What this adds up to is teachers constructing cautionary tales to make provisional meaning of their students’ discourse. This first round of decoding is a re-enactment on the part of the teacher, and it needs to be emphasized that what teacher knowledge there is here is anything but certain. Therefore, the next step is reflexive. It’s not enough to re-enact the students’ discourse to discover their presuppositions. It’s also essential to be able to uncover why each of you thought as you did. For the teacher, this requires reflecting on your reflections and then engaging the students in conversation to share your reflexions and ideas. This interchange goes well beyond the dialectic. It’s a three-way conversation between two shared reflective discourses and the mind’s ability to construct on-going meaning. Let’s call this thinking about thinking, or metacognition. Let’s find examples of discourses to consider.

UNDERSTANDING

Malcolm Gladwell is the author of three noteworthy books: *Blink*, *The Tipping Point*, and most recently, *Outliers*. In each of these he presented us with a series of provocative ideas that should serve as a challenge to those of us who live and work in formal education. Each is an attempt to make us think about who are and how we interact with the world a little differently. In *Blink*, he described the power of intuition and suggested that it did not prevent us from also being rational. This point needs to be taken seriously. I recently overheard a teacher berating child for thinking in a particular way. Actually, the student had responded to test questions in narrative form instead of a simple “yes” or “no.” When I came upon the conversation, the teacher was telling the student to stop wasting her time and to do what she was told and nothing else. What the teacher missed was an opportunity to listen to the immediate intuitive reactions to the test questions, questions that the student felt needed more than a simple yes or no response.

In *The Tipping Point*, Gladwell (2000) presented ways of understanding rapid, deep change. He drew a somewhat disturbing parallel with infectious disease claiming
that like the social changes we are experiencing diseases act in unpredictable ways. Small outbreaks of disease like HIV can have massive and unforeseen consequences. Our belief in progress as defined by linear increment change tied to direct cause and effect theory has conditioned us to always expect the expected. So often that is not what we get and yet we continue to be amazed. I see the influence of imagination theory in *The Tipping Point*, particularly Daniel Goleman’s work on E.I. (Emotional Intelligence), but this text draws on a wide range of sources. Gladwell is right to have described it as an adventure story. I think it should appeal to teachers and learners. So much of what happens in the classroom is unexpected and it’s for that reason that schooling appears so chaotic. The fact is that schooling mirrors the chaotic, fragmented and creative nature of our society. It’s not that we have to give up and accept things as they are. We don’t and we shouldn’t, but we need to be able to understand.

In *Outliers*, Gladwell (2009) addressed the very nature of learning itself. In this text, Gladwell informed us that success is a group project not simply the product of one’s own endeavors. We ought to consider this when constructing our learning objectives and our assessments. For the most part we only honor individual effort but in reality success at any level is the result of many voices and the lessons imbedded in the personal narratives of the people we encounter. Gladwell argued that if we want to increase our graduating rates we will require, from a larger and larger percentage of our work force, the ability to engage in relatively complicated analytical and cognitive tasks. So it’s not that we’re going to need more geniuses, but the 50th percentile is going to have to be better educated than they are now. We’re going to have to graduate more people from high school who have completed advanced math, is one very simple way of putting it.

In teaching, the implications are even more profound. Gladwell repeatedly mentioned the “10,000-Hour Rule” claiming that the key to success in any field is simply a matter of practicing a specific task for a total of 10,000 hours, as real success requires enormous amounts of time. Although he cites example after example to support this, we as a society are wedded to the myth of instant success and the lack of responsibility. You may often feel disempowered by the rules that decide the way you teach and what you teach, but here is an area where you can have a direct and significant impact. Do you recall the 2007 movie based on Erin Gruwell’s (1999) book, *The Freedom Writers Diary*? As a first year teacher she was able to have a deep and significant impact on the lives of her inner city students through personal narratives and reflection. Without abandoning the same curricular materials and tests she made life-altering changes; but as Gladwell explains it is not a matter of luck, it’s the result of the concerted hard work of many.

I’ve spent the last few pages in a linear discussion about discourse and learning. I think that it’s crucial that I mention that life is not generally like that. In fact, more often than not our lives appear chaotic and fractured. It might appear that only with the good graces of hindsight and history that we can trace a pattern but that’s not so either. Life is a mix of talent, chance, hard work, and mentoring. All of these factors fuse in their own way to become our narratives.
The way that we approach teaching says a lot about how we learn and how we value the opinions of others. Often teachers are linear thinkers who have been successful by following instructions. They know how to manipulate printed text well. They also deeply care about social and economic issues. But too often their views are rooted in the belief that there is only one type of text and one sense of causality. Too often other texts, such as music and visual arts are pushed to the side in favor of drill and skill in teaching, learning, and assessment.

I think the human portrait is much different than the image which is often portrayed to our students. Think about the impact of Howard Gardner’s work in multiple intelligences. A single book has opened the door for many students to be acknowledged for their individual gifts and this single book has encouraged the construction of bridges between Snow’s conception of two cultures to the benefit of all. Likewise, many teachers have discovered their own voices embedded in a form other than the scientific/mathematical paradigm.

Gardner described five minds for the future: disciplined, synthesizing, creating, respectful, and ethical. He laid these out in a 2006 book by the same name. It’s not a matter for us to possess all of these, but rather that we come to understand that the five strands continuously interact in our world and not always in a cooperative manner. Our curricula need to reflect this. You can’t develop all of these minds in every single person. It is our particular society which decides what we should be emphasizing. For example, Gardner pointed out that some Asian countries overemphasized discipline at the expense of creativity. Each person needs to figure out the right blend of these minds.

It’s not as simple as it sounds. Try sitting your students down in front of a computer at school and telling them to go ahead and learn because that’s what they do when they aren’t in your class. Try telling the musical mind to go to the music room and work it out. So, what is wrong here? The answer is that we aren’t talking in the same language. Well, that’s not accurate, but it’s the answer you will get. It may be English you are speaking but it’s not a common discourse recognized by your students. I’m afraid that I can’t send you the solution in an email attachment with this discourse. That’s not how you acquire it. Common discourse is forged in the praxis of teaching and learning, as well as in the multiple possibilities that can be negotiated in that process. Let’s go back to Marsalis as an example.

When he was learning to play trumpet he followed Gladwell’s 10,000 hour model. Gladwell quoted him as saying:

I practiced every day. I went about seven years without missing a day of practice. I had a very strict schedule that I would follow, and I would not go to sleep until I had practiced all the stuff I had to practice. If I had a job from like 10:00 to 1:00 or 2:00, I would still practice. I made sure that I would get all the work done, so I wanted to play and be good. You have to really want to be good. More than anything I wanted to be able to play and that’s what motivated me. (2002, p. 2)

It wasn’t only his drive to succeed but the fact that he hung out with older, more experienced musicians to uncover the history of jazz that allowed him to find his
place and his voice. What he was doing was forging a common musical discourse, one that he could take to the concert hall or into a classroom. This voice, or what Gardner would call “mind,” has striking resemblances to some of the five factors he listed. In fact, I see Marsalis’s development as a personal progression through these five minds to a point where he emerges as a unique individual, but one who is able to understand the other sense of mind. Good teachers are like this in their own ways.

Learning is horizontal, not vertical or linear. Hard work alone does not yield success. Marsalis stated:

Music and art are about something human, so you have to meet people, and know something about what is going on in the world. You can’t just come out and know about the practice room. You have to know about something. You know, go out with your girlfriend, and go get something to eat, go to a movie, and have a conversation. Listen to what somebody is telling you. You know, learn somebody else’s life story. Peep them out. Don’t just think about yourself all the time. (p. 2)

In his article, “The Music is the Message,” Dean Pawliw (2002) explained that both Marshall McLuhan and Harold Innis believed that oral communication, “[f]ostered community and involvement” (p. 1). Pawliw believed that space biased media like print is more limiting and has a relatively short life span. In contrast, time biased media, like speech, is more enduring. McLuhan argued that content is not the message. Instead, it is the medium that is the message. To illustrate the point, he posited:

It is not the television (TV) commercial that is the message, but the fact that this type of commercial is only available on TV and cannot exist - in the way it does - without the medium of TV. This preordained shape is the message, rather than the commercial being the message. (p. 3)

McLuhan also devised the theory of every medium being either hot—like high definition and non-participatory mediums such as radio or film—or cool—for example, mediums such as TV and the Internet. It is no longer a news flash that emerging forms of media are derived from the existing forms, or that they are hot (non-participatory) or cool (participatory). However, what is interesting here, in the context of this book, are the implications for the construction of a common discourse.

Pawliw’s interest was to trace McLuhan’s ideas to jazz and jazz improvisation. Let’s follow this and then circle back to teaching and learning. Music is based in the oral or auditory/acoustic tradition and jazz can be compared to speech in that the ideas presented are often pre-contrived.

[A] lot of times what jazz performers bring to the performance is all worked out and often very pre-existent and is a set of formulas the way, say, epic poetry works, or these packaged little phrases they just plug in... There’s a lot of pre-composed stuff in the improvisations. (Pawliw, 2002, p. 4)
Like speech, jazz ideas are learned by the musician who imitates what he or she hears other musicians doing. “When you learned to speak, you learned at first by listening to others and imitating them. Gradually, you became aware of grammar, and eventually the grammar was codified for you in English classes” (p. 4). People learned from recordings. And their ability to hear a solo as many times as you want was really influential in how people learned the music. They transcribed or stole the improvisations of the great jazz musicians on record. They played it over and over again until they learned the whole thing. Therefore, jazz and speech share the same ideas of grammar, or rules, and of being learned.

However, just as jazz can be viewed as a time biased medium by McLuhan, it could also be considered to be a space biased medium. A common practice in jazz music is to alter the way a tune is played with every performance. A player may choose to vary a melody by adding or deleting notes, or phrasing it in a different manner than the last time he or she played that tune. The player may also choose to play the song in a different key, substitute chords not used in the original composition, or apply chord alterations. Pawliw explained that “alterations to a chord are often considered merely color tones that do not affect the basic function of a chord, and improvisers are free to make their own alternations to the basic chord” (p. 1). The music bursts out and is gone instantaneously. However, like grammar is applied to speech, there are applicable rules in the performance of jazz. This musical grammar can—as in speech—be misused and still be understood. Innis said that, “stable societies were able to achieve a balance between time and space biased communications” (p. 3). I believe that jazz achieves this balance as well, because jazz crosses time like speech, but it exists in space due to the rules that govern improvisation. This creates the balance necessary for jazz to be successful over the long run.

McLuhan’s concept of hot and cool mediums also applies to jazz. Jazz can be a cool medium or a hot one, depending on the listener. The more advanced the awareness and education level a person has, the more that person can be involved in the music. If you’ve haven’t ever heard a song like “Bye, Bye, Blackbird,” then you don’t know what’s going on when the artist is improvising. Watching jazz musicians perform live also necessitates a higher participation level. More senses are triggered. In addition to just hearing the music, the audience is watching, feeling the vibrations from the instruments or p.a. system, and sharing the experience with other audience members. For performers, the medium becomes even hotter yet. Due to improvisation, jazz musicians must pay careful attention to each other in order to follow progressions properly. Therefore, improvisation, rules, format, and awareness levels of performance cement the idea of jazz as a medium. In education, we are late to “discover” that these same ideas apply. Teaching and learning are both hot and cold simultaneously.
I was rigorously trained to research and write as an historian. As an undergraduate I took courses in just about everything from physics, geology, and oceanography to French, English literature, psychology, history, and philosophy. I now realize that I settled in history because of the narrative element, and by that I mean the epistemological manner that personal knowledge and language interact with other types of actions that are commonly referred to as historical facts. In high school, history was attractive because I absorbed it. My memory was razor sharp and I wove the past into a series of personal stories. These were my facts. As an undergraduate, I found the same attraction in the study of English literature but my writing strayed into the first person and the conditional.

Deconstruction was not in vogue at that point, at least not for undergraduates, and I wasn’t good at towing the line so I returned to a field where I could find some intellectual space, and that space for me was intellectual and social history. In the 1970s and 1980s these two were exploding with new ideas. The concept of great theory, grand narrative as it is often called, was being challenged and universities like Cambridge, as well as my own, were cracking the presuppositional barriers. The stories of women and children, the small voices of past events, were being unwrapped as wondrous presents for my mind. My subsequent discovery of the writing of Robin George Collingwood and the clash between his published and unpublished works was my invitation to this dance, and as I centered this in my practice as a teacher the two came together.

My second undergraduate degree was in philosophy. Thinking in this way taught me the value of words and clarity, as well as what constitutes proof. However, as a graduate student in philosophy I quickly discovered that the nature of what I now call discourse is very different from one field to another. My papers in philosophy were criticized for using historical discourse. By that I mean that my questions were asked from the perspective of an historian of ideas and not an analytical philosopher. I assumed that I could be decoded and could in turn decode philosophical discourse at this level, but it was and is a difficult task. This discovery was important for me because I realized that my thinking was situated in the epistemological gaps I had created in my wide scope of learning and experience. Further, it became more and more apparent to me that it was a matter of all the forms of discourse coming into play in this process. Learning, I was discovering, was a matter of colonization and I needed to learn the rules in order to question its presuppositions.

As both an undergraduate and graduate student I wrote long papers in the styles of empirical, intellectual and social history. In that process I developed a great love for the past. I read voraciously and memorized in my own way that past which was taught. Although I was not a talented writer, I came to know and appreciate
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historiography when placed in the context of Collingwood. I began to question the entire basis of my methodological presuppositions and it was only natural that in this process I reached across epistemological borders. The borderlands between these were often very real. Historians did things one way while philosophers another and philosophers saw the craft of history in a different light than the one I had learned. More than that, nationalism and colonialism were significant factors in the definition of meaning.

THE NATURE OF BORDERS

The issue of what constitutes a dividing line is a major theme in my personal and practical knowledge and also in many disciplines. I’ve traced some of own wandering down this trail and I now want to broaden it even further by focusing on several aspects of the meaning of “border” as it applies to our ability to construct a common discourse in our understanding of the praxis of teaching and learning. My sense is that discourse is much more contextual and fragmented than scholars often realize. More often than not high level researchers, that is researchers who seek to provide explanatory theories and attribute linear cause and effect relationships, have become the voice of educational theory. Studies which adopt this methodology look for and find broad patterns from which they form general conclusions and then announce specific outcomes. This approach has merit but it fails to provide what is happening to individuals, and it is those individual stories that interest me. Like David Bloome and other mid-level researchers, I believe that we need to be concentrating on describing contexts and problems and providing opportunities for them to be discussed and negotiated. This is how I believe meaning and understanding are constructed.

So, how can I bring this together for you? Let me begin by contextualizing what might be signified by the concept of “border” and how I want to differ from that path and why. It’s true that borders have historically been dividing lines but that’s trivial. While borders are vague and undetermined places they can also become paradoxical spaces as the world itself is not linear but fragmented and decentered. It is this paradoxical nature that needs to be clarified if we are to understand how a common discourse might be constructed and what it might look like.

AS-IF CONDITIONALS

Let me suggest a way that we can clear this up. If we think of our narratives as as-if conditional statements about our world, they become more than passive, they become cautionary statements which position us in a world of multiple possibilities. Our discourses are then multi-textual, multi-pedagogical tales about the variety of ways the world, in our case the world of teaching and learning, might be right now. In schooling, our conception of boundaries and borders must not be drawn without some thought. Difference should not be regarded as a set of intellectual presuppositions. Once again, let me state that boundaries are as much metaphysical as they are epistemological. They are drawn from the inside out for a myriad of reasons. Some of these are historical, for example, the role of the learner as someone in
deference to a teacher; some are cultural, for example, that people of a certain race or gender may not be as good of students as others. This equation is complex, as we all realize. How and what we acknowledge in our classrooms works both ways.

Tradition may define the expected role that teachers play and their ability to define and enforce the role of students, but tradition itself doesn’t act as the sufficient condition. William Doll’s (1993) work has reminded us that both contingency and uncertainty play important roles in the way that we draw lines of difference. Another factor is the increasing role that uncertainty plays. As our world shifts in seemingly chaotic ways, the manner in which boundaries are drawn and how permeable they are is under constant review. For example, what counts as being a gifted student or a student at-risk? Any serious answer to this question can’t be a simple quantitative response because the question is rooted in the dual perception of the teacher and the learner. Bhabha argued that this often leads to conflicting borderlines which challenge our views. We know this to be true. The question is: What do we do about it? Are we trapped in a paradigm of opposing opposites?

Is schooling always by definition going to be a battlefield? It might be, but I can see no reason why this has to be the case. The great advantage we now possess is the ability to access, synthesize, and think about incorporating the ideas of significant thinkers into what we do as we teach and learn. Educational praxis, I believe, can help collapse these boundaries by making explicit our discourse and acting out our intentions by acknowledging the differences we encounter.

Unlike a win or lose enterprise with points scored, awarded, or deducted, ethnography is the process of becoming aware of the unique historical conditions under which we live as teachers. This “becoming” is itself the acknowledgement that many teachers and learners are liminal individuals who knowingly place themselves outside of the mainstream in order to be able to affect change. In order to do this, we must challenge the boundaries set by tradition and question their worthiness in our classrooms.

PRESENCING

We teach students to speak and write in an active voice and to avoid the passive voice. While this has its place, it is not always reflective of our world. In a growing number of contexts the passive voice has become an accurate reflection of our experiences. This is Heidegger’s concept of “presencing.” I want to draw your attention to the word “presencing,” as Bhabha has told us that much of what we think about is based in the future, but if we “presence” that then as-ifing conditional narratives become an action and a positioning process. Let’s make this explicit. If one says, “My teacher failed me this term,” this would be a traditional statement using the passive voice. The teacher is the person performing the action and I am being acted upon. I am passive and my voice is not heard. On the other hand, if I say “I failed this term,” it is an example of the active voice. In the first case, an action is being done to me. In the second, I am doing the acting. The active voice is stronger because I am in charge of what happens to me and what I do. I am in control and my discourse reflects that. Increasingly, this boundary blurs as our discourse is more
open to different interpretations. In fact, this distinction itself is often lost. It just isn’t clear to many of us, nor is it clear that there is a difference or what the difference in voice means.

So, what are borders? Is there a contextual difference, or do the word and the concept of border stand alone in their meaning? Thinkers like Anzaldúa (1990) viewed mixing as an opportunity to shift the very way we see and act and develop a “tolerance for contradictions, a tolerance for ambiguity,” and “a pluralistic mode of operating.” Not all peoples or positions view themselves this way, so our discourses may mislead or misrepresent our social realities. Let’s look at the case of Canada. Unlike the United States and Mexico where borders have a history of military occupation and resistance, Canada has adopted a different sense of what is a border, one which is evolving out of historical interpretation, with deep historical roots in the British experience of losing its thirteen North American colonies. From its inception Canada was established as two distinct societies, each with its own legal code and language but the praxis of this has not been clearly defined. As a consequence, this marriage has not been smooth. These cultural narrations are often much more like solitudes than they are the narrative of one nation. Often this is a process of threat and negotiation driven by ongoing economic, political, and religious tensions but above all it is linguistic. Quebec defines itself in matters on language. English signs are not permitted on stores and language laws are signifiers of the borderlands. These are not negotiable or open to negotiation. Provincial borders are markers of difference much like the Roman “limes” or border fortresses of the Romans. Neither was a function of or invitation to hybridity. Quebec continues to define itself as a separate state.

Canada is an example of how the definition of what we often take to be a well-understood word, border, is used in a much different way and this usage has also been defined other ways in other countries. Quebecers see the border as a firm line of otherness and of exclusion. There is little accommodation for difference. Instead, there is an offer to be accepted on the terms Quebec chooses. Of course this simplifies what it is an intriguing historical experiment and one which the post-modernist Jean Francois Lyotard viewed as bound to fail. Yes, there are examples of hybridity and mixing but in very unique ways and that leads me to my point that it is misleading to assume that borders can be characterized in generalities. Even the idea of code switching is relative to place. Canadians are bilingual but the French language that is taught and used in all but Quebec is Parisian French while the Quebec French is Normandy. Inside Canada, Parisian French is widely considered more cultured and Normandy French more of a peasant language and its speakers more peasant. Code switching, more often than not, occurs when there is some level of equality and acceptance. Canadian history bears witness to the ongoing attempts to colonize Quebec culture and its language and to render it a type of Disneyland, a quaint and safe reminder of the past. Instead, Quebec’s nationalism has taken the concept of discourse in a direction where actions define who one is. There is little room for negotiation or the desire for assimilation. Code switching in Quebec is not a display of communicative competence, unless in the case of business. Socially and often academically, code switching is matter of offense. In English Canada, on the
other hand, it is true to say that there are situations in which bilingual people switch codes by intentionally using the other language. The clash of the border of these two realities presents serious problems for any argument for border hybridity as having international or transnational applications.

When Carlos Velez-Ibanez (1996) introduced the concept of culture bumping as crucial to understanding how cultural identities in border communities are formed in his book *Border Visions*, there was the implication that the meaning of border was explicit. I don’t believe this is always the case. Discourse, like all of experience, is personal and not easily generalized. It is true that discourse changes as it interacts with other discourse but the manner, shape and process differ with place and history and in the process with personal and shared identities.

**AS-IFING BORDERLANDS**

My point is that even in what appears to be the most straightforward discussion of “border” there is fragmentation and the de-centering of position. I doubt this chaos is new but it is explicit thanks to concepts such as deconstruction. As teachers and learners we are discovering that we inhabit a place where meaning is often fluid and decentered. Our conclusions are tentative and offered as cautionary narratives with the implicit warning attached to them of “as-if.” So much of what we say, hear, and do is conditionally based on the individual meanings we construct, not on broad generalizations. It is true that this is the discourse of contemporary media, as Innis and McLuhan have argued, but I suggest that few of your students are being massaged by it any more than a horror movie. They know that discourse is multileveled and that meaning is constructed for the here and now. They also know that personal experience is valued more highly in our day-to-day discourse than is explanation.

I believe that concepts such as discourse have historical roots, presuppositions which determine their meaning. Thinkers like Homi Bhabha (2000) in *Nation and Narration* have made this point in the analysis of colonialism and post-colonialism. His interstices or “in-betweenness,” what I have called epistemological gaps, provide opportunities for the many diverse experiences that comprise all the possibilities inherent in the concept of discourse. It is at the borders of discourse, in the gaps that exist between forms, which new cultural forms may develop.

This is what I take away from Lyotard. Postmodernism rejects that notion that the way we construct the world is linear, rational and dialectic. I see us as occupying the gap between modernism and postmodernism. Our schools act as-if things could be put right with drill and skill and an explanation of how to make things work. Who is to blame when they don’t? I think the answer lies in accepting a different approach, one that has been described as action research.

**BORDERS, FRONTIER, BORDURE**

I want to draw your attention to a number of methodological concerns which in my mind play into this discussion, among them the diversity of methodological tools available to the researcher. The method one uses is in many ways a determiner of
one’s results. Let me give you an example. Under NCLB, schools were informed that they would be assessed solely on grades from standardized tests in reading and mathematics instruction. As a direct consequence, classroom time shifted to meet these priorities. Research validating this approach also increased. The result has been the abandonment of the American presupposition of a well-rounded education. It also has entailed that personal health and other related social and economic factors have been rejected as affecting performance.

Campbell’s law says that anytime a narrow set of indicators is applied to assessment the result is corruption. Our current educational assessment is an example. If it’s only test scores that count then educators will skew instruction to favor that and that means more time for reading and math and less time for other things. Many of you reading this book come from contexts where you adjust quickly and continuously to new situations, work in teams, collaborate and negotiate outcomes; yet we teach in a top-down, teacher-centered manner using scripted lessons and defined outcomes. This may not be a factor in your personal lives because you take home with you your own model of thinking and not the one you teach students. What about those children who don’t have the opportunity to realize the complex and often fragmented nature of our world? You may see meaning as a process of negotiation, but you might teach that meaning is derived from memorization and rule following, a one-size-fits-all approach.

I am going to argue that much of this is due to the way we have painted our research about children and the world. It’s more than a matter of testing and assessment for me. It’s really grounded in our discourse and the boundaries we construct. I have argued elsewhere that boundaries and discourse itself are porous and historical. The way we use all the forms of text available to us defines the meaning we construct. As the list of emerging new technologies grows ever longer it makes it much more difficult to define one way of reading, writing, thinking, or being. It means that our curricula and our instruction need to become less static and more open to diversity and change. Did you know that many schools in this country have a mobility rate higher than 100%? That means that more than 100% of the students will move to another school in a year. How is it possible then to plan a year as if students were receiving continuous instruction? If we make broad generalizations about students and the way they learn, it can be argued that tests that meet these criteria can be constructed and success and failure defined in these terms. On the other hand, if we attend to the small, cautionary tales of our students lives we construct a different picture. It’s this picture I want to sketch for you.

ACTION RESEARCH

The philosopher and educator Stephen Toulmin (1990) argued that human actions are a process of interactions between theory, social interplay, and the individual’s role in which no intellectual can be separated from their social context. If we framed a lot more of our educational research using this model the results would be significant. If we believe our research about human interactions should be action research, then the questions we pose ought to be about how the individual
is affected by societal factors. This is what is reflected in the discourse of mid-level researchers like David Bloome.

Action research provides an escape route for us, an alternate routing on the road to understanding ourselves as simultaneously situated teachers and learners. Action research studies how theory can impact individuals situated within schools and calls on us to adopt an approach which is both more hermeneutic and anthropological and which rejects universal theories. When I refer to hermeneutics I am thinking about approaching research in a way that is interpretative and one that encompasses all types of text, presuppositions, the meaning and philosophy of language, and semiotics. The writing of Gadamer and Ricouer are significant here. The anthropological influence emanates from social anthropology which studies how humans behave in social groups. Social anthropology investigates long-term actions using the methods of field study and participant observation. In educational research this is commonly described as ethnography. The work of Geertz, Kress, and Mills are informative for educational researchers here.

In broad terms, action research represents the work of researchers who for almost a century have studied how people interact individually and in groups in areas like culture, art and education. It is well-suited for the description of human action I give in this book because of its breadth and grounding in praxis. In order to conduct action research one needs to understand the workplace, in our context, schools, and the obvious choice of the researcher then is the teacher. Bill Pinar makes much the same case in his writing saying we need to take back the curriculum and think of it as a historical text. Action research to my mind presents us with the possibility to renegotiate the boundaries of our discourse. These borders need to be seen as more fluid and as being in process. When we conduct and research we ought to think of teachers and students as narrators having significant stories and not “others” who fall into large generalized categories. Action theory also allows the teacher researcher to lay claim to possess teacher knowledge whereas high level theory and research values the transmission and inculcation of facts, a process characterized by Paulo Freire as the banking model.

Educators have been aware of action research but they often dismiss it as too narrow. Recent work by Gustavsen (2008) gives new promise. He suggested that action researchers need to network across boundaries instead of simply focusing their research inside single units, such as a school. He has also called for a broadening of the research network itself to include both local and regional participants so that a general view, not based on deduction but on observation and dialogue, could be constructed. The growth of such a system would present a challenge to the dominant research paradigm and have significant impact on the way we evaluate and assess. This is also a shift to a more pluralist interpretation of human action and one that Gustavsen noted has implications for shared democratic action in which a common discourse might be constructed.

Educational research and its methodology need to be reminded that it is what happens in actual classrooms to actual children and their teachers that is of crucial importance and action research can help us in our borderlands. Gustavsen argued that action research opens the door to the possibility of a society where people can
freely discuss topics such as what a better education and a better world might be. This is a process Gustavsen described as transcending the notion of critical theory to critical practice, and for me the scaffolding to construct this presupposes some form of common discourse.

If we take the research expressions of a phenomenological perspective to cover the efforts to build strong and close links between theory and practice, these expressions constitute the main area of theoretical development in action research; notions such as grounded theory, the reflective practitioner, and the researcher willing to learn by doing. The main background is the need for action research to turn local and explore in depth the ways and means of relating to specific local situations.

CULTURAL MUDDLES

How might we think about epistemology and methodology if our world is fluid, complex and often chaotic? Let’s think about what Gregory Bateson (1972) said in his book *Steps to an Ecology of Mind*, “People spend a lot of time tidying things, but they never seem to spend time muddling them. Things just seem to get in a muddle by themselves. And then people have to tidy them up again” (p. 3). What if our students are truly acting as–if their worlds are de-centered and fragmented and as-if this action was not directly causal or dialectic, but a series on on-going possibilities? These are my muddles. What Margaret Eisenhart (2009) called confusing situations. The three muddles that concerned Eisenhart as an educational ethnographer were “the meaning of ‘culture,’ the enthusiasm (or not) for ethnography; and the researcher’s responsibility to those she writes about and hopes to help” (p. 16). I don’t describe myself as an educational ethnographer although I would argue that I generally see the world that way. As you must know by this point, my methodological presuppositions are historical and based in the work of thinkers like Collingwood and Schama; but Eisenhart’s analysis is well worth considering before we move on because it has such broad implications. I also see connections to my own work and I want to make these connections so that you may consider them as you construct your own web of beliefs.

The concept of culture has consumed us in the last century and it is welcoming to read that someone defines it in terms of images and not just written text. I think a friendly amendment to this would be to add that culture, like any concept that deals with human action, should be thought of in all forms of textuality and particularly the wide meaning of discourse that I employ in my writing. Discourse slips and slides through history. Our understanding of what we intend to say and understand isn’t just a matter of sentence structure or consulting a dictionary. It’s historical as I’ve tried to point out in my example of the borderlands between Quebec and the rest of Canada.

In *Nation and Narration*, Bhabha described how his colonialist experiences forged his thinking. This insightful piece of work was more than personal. Its effect on professional thinkers has been as dramatic as Fanon’s (1967) *The Wretched of the Earth* was on his generation. Fanon’s writing on culture connects and makes explicit issues of race, otherness and resistance. Bhabha has carved out a definition
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of culture grounded in a different level of consciousness, one grounded in an outright rejection of colonial methods of mimicry and surveillance. Bhabha’s rejection of the colonial grand narrative handed to him as a given was more than an act of defiance. It became an act of framing a post-colonial epistemology. This way of thinking about self is historically based and personal. I am who I am because of my historicity but I, by an act of will, can become free through reflexion and praxis.

It is a little known fact that Cambridge anthropologists of Collingwood’s time were inspired by his later work. The unpublished manuscripts housed in the Bodleian Library at Oxford attest to this. So, it comes as no surprise to me that in social anthropology meanings are constantly being rethought. Eisenhart’s work is significant as she saw this as being the case in educational anthropology as well (see also Spindler, 1955). She pointed out that, “This is the case in educational research too, where culture may mean one thing to bilingual educators, another thing to educational anthropologists, and something else to ethnic scholars or cognitive psychologists” (p. 17). The concept of culture is being used here as a tool, an idea “to think with,” in much the same way as many historians use their terminology.

I would like to expand this even further and suggest that the understandings we construct are more widely complex that just between bilingual educators and anthropologists. We know that our discourses vary between the “street” and “school” but his is only one other level. In reality, new technologies like Twitter have made it possible for us each to construct our discourse on a daily basis. I can blog or text to the universe in the belief that someone will decode my discourse enough to begin a negotiated conversation. This presents a whole new world of possible meanings for us and particularly if we want to grapple with ideas like culture in a fixed or static way, as-if they could be defined in space and time in an explanatory paradigm. In education we call this the written curriculum and outcome or results-based education. Students know this and act on it. Teachers know it too but choose not to acknowledge it. If this is true they do so at their peril, at the risk of becoming redundant and meaningless.

POST-FORDISM

Not everyone reads the world the way this book represents it. Let us look at post-Fordism as an example. Fordism is the precursor of post-Fordism and it is a manifestation of positivist thinking, taking its name from the production techniques developed by Henry Ford. It presupposes economies of scale and supply driven production; that is, the more that can be supplied, the lower the cost to the consumer, who will then purchase what is produced. Semi-skilled workers in an assembly line produce the goods. The workers in turn are protected by trade unions and state intervention. Thus the states’ role in a capitalist economy was established as the worker, through unionization, and the supplier and consumer, through the system of supply and demand, are protected. As the economy followed Ford’s lead the welfare state was born.

Public education followed the Fordist model. Schools were organized into grades with defined learning expectations and outcomes. Teachers were certified to provide
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quality assurance as children were required by law to attend schooling. This system worked as long as the graduates of public education became consumers and adhered to the presuppositions of modernism, especially the idea of progress and consumption. The entire system was also predicated on one form of textuality, the written text. It was essential to Fordism that workers follow instructions to keep the wheels of industry moving smoothly; therefore more traditional forms of understanding such as oral histories were shunned. The public was encouraged to read narratives which reflected modernist goals and to stay away from the bottomless pit of relativism as found in autobiographies. It was felt that knowledgeable people were those who read the appropriate texts and followed a canon which was largely European, white, and male. Of course these views were not held nor widely promoted by institutions of higher learning and an increasingly wider gap grew between the literacy haves, those who discern their own meanings of text and the have-nots, those who were not privileged to receive such an education.

In the late 1970s there was a growing concern that Fordism was in crisis (Jessop, 2000). The causes appeared to be the development of new modes of production and consumption and new information technologies fused with the emerging global economy. The welfare state had also become a nightmare, amassing enormous debts and national deficits. The traditional Keynesian strategies of intervention failed to alleviate the problems and high unemployment and deficits threatened to uncouple the social and economic policies of modern capitalism (Mishra, 1977). What emerged was post-Fordism, which can be defined as just-in-time economics. Post-Fordism is based upon a flexible production process and flexible workers where mass production is replaced by production on demand. No longer is it always possible to buy what you want off the shelf. Products are distributed “just-in-time” to meet the consumer demand. Workers, once protected by unions and government now had to adapt to a new sense of flexibility. In a post-Fordist economy companies no longer plan long term, they act as quickly as possible to fill emerging market demands. Instead of local economies, post-Fordism is based upon meeting worldwide demands. Therefore, it is worldwide consumption that matters and defines jobs and wages. Under post-Fordism management is leaner and more flexible and success is defined in terms of responsiveness to customers.

In the post-Fordist world traditional schooling fails because it is not flexible. In many contemporary schools every minute of the day is taken up in a series of highly structured drill and skill routines. Post-Fordists believe that students spend far too much time on theory rather than practice. Implicit in this attack on modern education is a questioning of the value of many academic disciplines. For example, if practice is a present problem that is unrelated to the past, of what value is the study of history? Likewise, if literacy calls for complex levels of interaction between the reader and the text, why learn literary theory? As I stated earlier, why not equate literacy to phonics?

When one couples this with the development of information technology, learners become consumers and education becomes a ticket to a flexible job market where the worker is offered no tenure and no assurances of job protection. In this post-Fordist world learning becomes a matter of reading the text to get on with the job.
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To a modernist this seems to be similar to learning how to understand a car manual or install a new electronic device in their home; and it is. In the post-Fordist world there just isn’t any time or need for the intricacies and intellectual interlacing of ideas. There is no clean break between Fordism and post-Fordism. They are separate but not distinct and the fluidity of our world ensures this. I chose Gustavsen’s writing on action research because it reflected an important point. His work is grounded in the workplace not schools but the on-going process of changes in migration, wealth, work, and leisure. Eisenhart’s writing informed us that some educational researchers recognize those wider implications. Teachers and learners too, like workers in another real world, see some changes. Teachers and learners are no longer distinct from each other. Classrooms are also places of facilitating and encouraging, not simply exercises in memorizing. Places and spaces where students construct and where answers are not fixed but multiple possibilities to be considered in a specific context.

TIDYING UP

This isn’t as simple as it may appear because we have come to realize through the examples of quantum physics that thinking isn’t always linear. Indeterminacy and uncertainty are mere hiccups on the radar screen of positivism when compared with string theory. Then when you couple with this scientists willing to pose multiple theories as possibilities you begin to realize that we are in a paradigm shift. Kuhn explained that these dramatic shifts in our presuppositions occur over time and my view is that the events in physics at the turn of the twentieth century were the first recognizable signs that this shift was beginning. Throughout the last one hundred years fracturing has occurred in many fields outside the sciences. The fine arts are a clear indication of this as modernism gave way to cubism, music confronts atonality, literary criticism grapples with deconstruction, and history addresses narrative and autobiography. This list is not intended to be inclusive but simply to point out the scope and breadth of this process. My writing fuses with this. I find myself immersed in both modern and postmodern contexts and this is the problem for education. The lines blur between observer and participant, between teacher and learner, and so on. In the same way in matters of methodology, things become less clear. Eisenhart (2009) pointed out:

As long as the ethnographic writer’s focus was on recurrent, broad patterns in the lives and actions of a group, and as long as the writer’s political commitments were clear, recommendations about change were possible (though sometimes problematic) based on the patterns and the implications of one’s commitments. But as soon as multiple and often competing voices must be represented within a group, the situation becomes more complicated. (p. 22)

Tidying up, like breaking up (my apologies to Neil Sedaka) is very hard to do. I want to suggest that the uncertainty about the status and meaning of culture are outcomes of this paradigm shift and have contributed to our confusion. We can pose that we have a clear sense of culture, and we can carry out research based on this, but in the end is this any different than the presuppositions of other types of methodology?
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WHOSE VOICE COUNTS?

How should we deal with differences and whose voice really counts? Historiography can help us here but I need to remind you again this won’t be tidy either. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries European history was often written from what was called the “Whig perspective,” which meant that a particular group of men, similarly educated and socially placed, constructed the progress of Europe, named eras and prescribed causal connections to make the pattern fit. This seemed to work well until historians like Christopher Hill argued that there was another way to trace what happened in the past. Hill was a Marxist and his work followed the lives and events of men and women in their day to day lives. The driving force behind change in his case was economics, not politics or religion. Following Hill were social historians, under the influence of Peter Laslett. These thinkers dug out the artifacts of the past to uncover the stories of people and from them we heard tales of women and children, forgotten or neglected players in the story of history. These accounts were based on written records but also on narratives and so the field of autobiography emerged. In each of these cases the question of voice emerged. Whose story and who is the storyteller? The result has been similar to what is happening in other areas and that is an agreement to disagree. There is often no consensus about what counts as evidence or fact nor a “right” methodology. It’s not tidy.

For Eisenhart, ethnographers of education usually have wanted to do more with their knowledge than think about it. Educational ethnographies are often practical and their purpose is to improve things; this research is often driven by the belief that intervention is justified. If we now place this well meaning work in the context I have sketched you will quickly see how messy it becomes. This is a major muddle. Eisenhart suggested we have some responsibility as educational ethnographers when she said, “I can’t help feeling that I have some responsibility to speak about what I think would be best in circumstances about which I have some special knowledge” (p. 17).

RESPONSIBILITIES AND OBLIGATIONS

Perhaps we should turn to teachers and learners, together, to work this out. We are familiar with the discourses of difference, with multiple and diverse perspectives. As Tom Schwandt (1994) argued, educators should be: “actively debating and exchanging points of view with our informants … placing our ideas on a par with theirs, testing them not against predetermined standards of rationality but against the immediate exigencies of life” (p. 132). I think we can begin such a project by thinking about what a common discourse might be. The English language, in particular, has the quality of fluidity. It is always in the process of becoming and far too often in our search for a common curriculum we have tried to pretend that this process has a “real” end. By a real end I mean that the process actually has run its course and that meaning is fixed. We can play this language game and in fact it is useful as a construct to determine meaning. After all if all meaning floats then we are condemned to absolute relativism, and for me that’s not a real alternative.
Let me reconstruct this argument in such a way as to skirt the dilemma. I have argued that the dialectic is a propositional structure in much the same way the Copernican principle or Newtonian physics can be used to make sense of a set of preconceived facts. They are true because they were the best theoretical fit for their paradigm. That’s not as radical as it may sound. The point is that scientific explanations are as much historical as anything else. The debates over quantum theory have made this explicit, especially when coupled by the discourse speed brought about by technologies like the internet. Discourse has become a matter of public debate. It’s not a matter of a few subject specialists determining right or wrong, the field is now open to photo journalism, blogs, and gossip. As language is fluid so is meaning and in the process ideas migrate across borders.

A context like this is both complex and chaotic if viewed through a traditional dialectical lens. I see this occurring when, for example, teachers and learners presuppose that understanding is horizontal not vertical, ongoing and indeterminate in its outcome. It’s only when we attempt to straighten out the curve in the road that we get into trouble. Let’s go back to quantum physics where at least two opposing theories can stand side by side or let’s think about how a language arts teacher can agree that her class can construct multiple meanings for Coleridge’s “Kubla Khan.” We only run off the road when we want to test for the “right” interpretation or when someone declares himself an expert with the single right answer.

TRIALECTICS

As these ideas progressed through time, they changed in particular ways. One of these paths has been characterized as the dialectical process. The dialectical process with which we are most familiar was formalized by the nineteenth century philosopher Hegel but it dates back to the Greeks. It has three constituent parts and they function in this way: if, for example, you examine the idea that the history of humanity is largely written by Eurocentric males, and if that idea is then signified as being a true representation, that idea could be called a thesis. To oppose this idea, and to argue that the story of western civilization is in fact the collection of all the stories of the people, is to form an antithesis. Eventually, a synthesis emerges from the conflict of these two broad ideas and a new thesis emerges. This is dialectical thinking, and the map of the mind in this account is called the history of western civilization. Its story, or History, is called the grand narrative. This dialectical pattern is based on the supposition that progress occurs because ideas are directly opposed to one another.

If the Hegelian dialectic of history is correct, can there be more than one explanation? The supposition of a grand narrative to be the sub-text of the dialectic served to answer that question. By uniting all actions in one particular way, order was given to the history of ideas. Ideas could and did compete but historical periods were often divided arbitrarily on the basis the paradigm or main idea, for example, The Renaissance, The Reformation, or The Modern Era. The difficulty is that this order is not representational of the world in which we live. Hegel’s dialectic as it is commonly used can be a guide but it is not a map.
Throughout the formal study of the history of ideas Hegel’s dialectical model has been used to provide meaning and to help define key words and concepts for us such as “progress.” In all cases the Hegelian study of history has been based on rational thought connected by cause and effects relationships. We might be hard pressed to disagree with this. How can else can we know about past actions if they aren’t based on rational thought? This of course has led to the belief that there is a grand narrative to be discovered.

In *The Idea of History*, Collingwood (1946) observed that these “ideas” not only made a framework for nature, they also made a framework for history,

where human actions in which man expressed his thoughts, had the general outlines of its structure laid down for it in advance by the conditions under which the thinking activity, mind, alone can exist....Thus logic is the key to history, in the sense that men’s thoughts and actions, as studies by history, follow a pattern, which is the colored version of the pattern logic has drawn in black and white. (p. 124)

Collingwood said that we had distorted the notion of reality. In history and philosophy, “facts” are arrived at inferentially, “by a process of interpreting data according to a complicated system of rules and assumptions. A theory of historical knowledge would discover what these rules and assumptions are, and would ask how far they are necessary and legitimate” (p. 133).

It is important to note this process is based upon a definition of reflection that entails our ability to know ourselves by making what was implicit explicit and through the application of analogy. As I come to know myself I can know about others by assuming that they act in a similar way that I do. Knowing that the past is based upon a similar assumption, I ask questions about the past that have particular interest to me and therefore my knowledge of the past is relative. It is relative, however, only within the context set by historical or relative presuppositions which characterize the period in which we live. Kuhn has called this a paradigm. The dialectic represents the way in which the mind ought to work just as much as the empirical dialectic makes certain other assumptions such as the Western European notion of cause and effect to explain all human actions.

We are living in the gap of a modernist/postmodernist world and we often assume that discourse and understanding are based upon our ability to know ourselves and by analogy others. If there are multiple forms of discourse both inside and outside schooling then the process of education might be thought of as an on-going reflexive process of discovery of the essence of mind as expressed in some form of common discourse in which the outcome could only be the latest expression of our ideas about how we think. In this way, we could image that our use of language floats but for this to work it has to have explicit meaning and has to be negotiated in a never-ending process. The dialectic must be recast.

On this account, a *trialectic* becomes an ongoing expression of the synthesis of opposites, where reflexion is a third and pivotal component. Actions and resolutions of the past would not be rejected outright but would be incorporated into a form of
the present so that the past and present merge, not because of a force of nature, but because they represent reflections on language, science, or history, for example. In each case, these narratives are cautionary tales imbedded in the relative historical presuppositions of the time and place, that is, they reflect how people thought about the world as—if they were snapshots, not generalized theory. This is what drives this process and what differentiates it from the traditional dialectic.

In a trialectic process, the three forces are continuously and simultaneously acting on each other and there is no fixed synthesis point. There isn’t a single mixed type since this is a work in process. New ideas are introduced and others are clarified as we reflect on human experience. Built into the trialectic process is the necessity to include and clarify. This is essential because understanding is historical. Our personal presuppositions, those ideas we choose to focus on to construct our beliefs, need to be tested against an historical context. It is here that Collingwood’s sense of re-enactment is crucial. Thinking about the past is an epistemological exercise in which we act as-if we were in a particular past. We can make this leap. Asking what happened in the past is predetermined by the questions we ask. If those are “why” questions we will most likely be dealing with cautionary tales about why x and y acted as they did. The result of this exercise is to uncover the way that I think and form questions. In the process, I discover that the only knowledge I can have about the past are analogies based on how my own mind works. There are several presuppositions at play here. One is that this is reflexive. I am thinking about the way I think. A second is that this is an ongoing process of inclusion, interaction, and clarification. A third presupposition is that the entire process is grounded in many possible interpretations of the cautionary narratives of individual lives. While this is relative it is not free floating but related to time and place, which means I should be able to state and defend those presuppositions that form my web of belief. They may be true for me if I act on them but it doesn’t mean they are right. The trialectic is the tool, an ongoing process, which attempts to make the implicit explicit and to transform personal presuppositions into absolute presuppositions. But because this is pure fluidity, with constant fluctuations between cautionary tales and rational linear theory, the process is never complete. Even if it was possible to construct an absolute set it would be culturally relative and again open to inclusion, reflective interaction, and clarification. We are constantly shifting between both integration and disintegration connecting points, and both influence us, and we can take traits of both simultaneously. Our task of uncovering a common discourse therefore takes on unique dimensions. We aren’t looking for fixed meanings but for a kind of Wikipedia-style understanding. We aren’t looking for a single form of discourse but a type of fluidity where multiple possibilities can be acknowledged and negotiated.

If we are interested in forging a common discourse of the type I am suggesting we ought to think about questioning either/or resolutions when it comes to human action. We should also think of this as a messy, fractured, de-centered and on-going process, one which mirrors our experiences and which provides opportunities to safely and critically explore various possibilities. A common discourse could be constructed on this basis.
THEORETICAL IMPLICATIONS

By claiming to be a theorist, you say little about what your interests and materials are, only how you approach them. Bauerlein (2005) viewed theory as having “no material coherence, only an attitude” (p. 132). However, our ability to access new technologies has made it clear that the small stories, the cautionary tales of our lives, have come to be a part of how we form our presuppositions. Gramsci’s (1971) conception of the relationship between thinking (theory) and doing (practice), what he called *praxis*, makes it transparent that the two are distinct but not separate parts of our minds. Constructing both meaning and understanding has become an exercise in democratization. Information technology has given us tools to construct personal meaning often without a wide context. The dialectical model presents us with a narrow field with all the parameters in place. All we really have to do is fill in the blanks. Today, understanding anyone is a matter of acknowledging his or her personal cautionary tale. What is missing from this may be any critical discussion of its merit and that is a problem if we don’t want to sink into absolute relativism. I will address this important issue in later section. All meaning is tied in some way to both personal meaning and universals but there is a necessary link to the normal notion of causality. As people as-if their discourse they create gaps and these provide us opportunities to construct possibilities and to explore the world in a reflective and reflexive process. It is the forging of commonalities such as the deconstruction of the difference between teaching and learning that allows us to reconstruct concepts such as “theory.” In this process we also enter a world where schooling, if it is to have any relevance at all, is more than drill and skill or simply-constructed analogies. This sense of common discourse creates an entirely new set of possibilities for us. It is one where concepts such as community and connectedness become as important as those which establish truth claims. In this postmodern world learners and teachers work collaboratively to discover how it is possible to be with others as-if they know what it means to be thoughtful and tactful in this decentered world.

In short, this presents us with the possibility to construct a community of diverse learners by creating, listening, and critically reflecting on our as–if stories about the world. Importantly, the as-ifing of our narratives allows us to escape the modernist dilemma of the use of analogy to uncover the ways that others think and for us to uncover meaning. By as-ifing narratives we pose the possibility of constructing meaning, rather than imposing it. Instead of making the assumption that the explicit presuppositions, or underlying ideas, of a time can be uncovered by rational thinking, as-ifing presupposes that knowing about the world is a process of mediated construction of coming to know about ourselves and our horizons.

Gadamer (1985) claimed that thinking is a process of living in the world in order to create and recover individual meaning and understanding. For him, understanding becomes a process that is productive. In hermeneutics, the field be more or less created, the vehicle to acknowledge questions originates with the knower. If Gadamer is correct, our discourse should be a process of constantly exchanging cautionary tales, free from prior theoretical constraints. In hermeneutics this process is holistic. Actions must be made problematic and open to any number of possible solutions. Hermeneutics seems to be one way for us to work through the decision-making
process that leads to action. According to Guba and Lincoln (1989), “truth is a matter of consensus among informed and sophisticated constructors, not correspondence with an objective reality” (p. 44). This is part of the groundwork for a common discourse. I continue to suggest that the answer lies in as-ifing, making meaning and understanding a series of multiple possibilities. Each of us has been brought up in society with a set of relative presuppositions about the way things work and what things mean. This net of presuppositions acts as a filter setting the limits of social knowledge, ideas, and ideals and of what is and what is not possible.

In education we frame each and every human mind we teach, and because all the ideas in the world can’t be taught in our classrooms we as teachers and citizens take on the responsibility of selecting which facts to teach and which to leave out. If we choose only those presuppositions that frame us then we put in peril a hermeneutic process in our classrooms. On the other hand, if we open up our curricula to all ideas the result would be chaos. A careful reading of Gadamer and many of the other thinkers you will encounter in this book raises the possibility that all is not lost.

Cautionary tales, conversations between teachers and learners about the possibility of how facts and ideas can be understood, can work if they are consistent with the frame of knowledge and values in the minds of our students. This is the process we are seeking to establish and the type of understanding that we are attempting to describe.

A hermeneutic inquiry is not only an object of investigation, but is also a type of inquiry which can produce what Gadamer (1977) has called “an inexhaustible source of possibilities of meaning” (p. xix). For our purposes this is significant because it introduces the teacher to the possibility that there may be more than one interpretation of the way in which his or her lessons are being understood. It also introduces to the learner the possibility that there may be more than one correct way to interpret what is being taught. In both teaching and learning the hermeneutic approach is constructed as a negotiated conversation that results in a variety of possible outcomes not a single textbook style response. Thus, the hermeneutic position is transformative and the goal is self-actualization for both teacher and learners.

Instead of a set of given procedures, things can be negotiated and developed. This is a messy process but it doesn’t mean a free-for-all. What it entails is the recognition of the other as a participant and a willingness to listen to why a certain student believes what he or she believes. The stated reasons for any belief structure are yours, as the teacher, to work with. Asking “why” questions allows you to construct bridges of understanding individually and collectively so that teacher and students come to know what is needed to pass the test and why as well, for example, how the information helps them with the picture of understanding the world that they are continually deconstructing and reconstructing.

As we move away from defining issues in terms of categories like class or gender, we become aware of the others who inhabit the gaps outside the traditional boundaries of the modern world. I have tried to make this point in my descriptions of a boundary as not that at which something stops but, as the Greeks recognized, the boundary is that from which something begins its presencing.
In *The Location of Culture*, Bhabha (1994) explained that we locate culture in the borderlands between a series of “post” prefixes. I think that he is correct in this view, although I see us as also in a fragmented shift between modernism and those “pre” conditions. It is this confusion that leads to our inability to come to epistemological terms with educational theory. We haven’t really relinquished our hold on self, progress, and all those other linear delineations. We also haven’t come to grips, although we are trying ever so hard, with concepts like other, discourse, and liminality. As educators, we are intertwined like helix, praxis-based teachers and learners. We have a special opportunity to make an immense impact on our times. We are the front line. We have always dealt with theoretical issues, such as: What does it mean to learn? How do we assess? However, these aren’t theoretical any more. Who our students are, how they portray their lives, in what manner, and in what text are real questions. These are questions of praxis for every teacher today. Attempting to get this straight and making it explicit isn’t just a personal matter.

Locating culture, in particular our educational culture is a concept with which we are all too familiar. NCLB and its predecessors all inhabit this land, as do our yearly plans. What Bhabha (1990) explained is that this is a border “in the moment of transit where space and time cross to produce complex figures of difference and identity, past and present, inside and outside, inclusion and exclusion” (p. 304). It is this gap that is troubling to us as teachers and to our students as well. If it were only theoretical, then it could be dealt with as we deal with a great many theoretical problems. Look at how we have handled global warming, for example. But it is not theoretical. Teachers and learners live with this disconnect in an as-if world of many possibilities. This can and does produce uncertainty.

Bhabha wanted us to think of this in terms of the borderlines of the “in-between” spaces. It is in these gaps that it is possible to be innovative teachers and learners by providing a safe harbor to listen, collaborate, and craft cautionary tales about our lives and the possibilities for a shared future. Our answers will come from our lives in schools as we recognize, intersect, and overlap our differences. This is a collective enterprise, Bhabha informed us, of liminal peoples in the process of constructing “communitas.”

If we truly want our educational system to work, we must recognize this “borderline” as both an epistemological and metaphysical concept. In some cases, like the Berlin Wall or the Rubicon River, borders are symbolic of political intent. In other cases, like the border between Canada and the United States, the border is more of a geographical marker. Inside Canada, though, borders signify non-negotiable difference. There are historical reasons for this. Let me present two different examples to illustrate this point. In south Texas the border with Mexico is sometimes described in association with Bourdieu’s conception of hybridity. This view sees borders as places where people, languages and ideas are in mix, producing newer forms of discourses. Historically, this use has been tied to colonial vocabulary and remains a matter of positionality and identity. So, for example, Hadrian’s Wall is positioned in such a way as to define the citizenship of peoples and even their formal discourse. The positionality of the Berlin Wall serves to define two distinct political and
economic views of history. Throughout Western history borders have been defined in this manner by intellectuals but it is fair to say that in many cases positionality has not worked and that borders have been more or less porous. The reason for this may be fairly straightforward. Positionality, and much of the discourse developed to characterize what occurs along borders, was constructed in the nineteenth century, the age of European empire building. The German attempt to forge a national discourse is an example. It was based on myth and fairy tales intended to forge a particular type of national character. Much of our perception of border reality comes from the discourse of colonizer and colonized. But is this too simplistic?

FLUIDITY IN DISCOURSE

Renee Green’s (2006) writing can be linked to this discussion as a kind of bridge. Green remarked, “My work has a lot to do with a kind of fluidity, a movement back and forth, not making a claim to any specific or essential way of being” (p. 2). Green’s comments on the need to understand difference as identities that “split” and are in the act of being articulated into a collective body is a good one for us to consider here. If we become explicit examples of this fluidity, we will be able to acknowledge different ritual discourses by coming to see our world as one of multiple possibilities.

Step outside yourself and your context as a teacher and try to get a sense of your ritual discourse. Try to encourage your students to do the same. This begins with shared conversations and listening to the small voices and cautionary tales of those with whom we work and play, and it opens up the possibility of us asking questions about difference and boundaries like: What is the difference between teaching and learning? We’ll find that our categories are often not as fixed or certain or as necessary as we once believed.

Green allowed us to understand that educational community is constructed when both teachers and learners reach out to understand the presuppositions of those with whom they are conversing. One way of doing this is to be explicit about our methodology for understanding the whole person. Our mosaic of understanding isn’t just based on the factors of gender, sexual orientation, race, color, or creed. It’s also based on discourse and ritual. This type of understanding is deeply rooted in the historical moment in which we live. We belong, yet don’t belong. We live in those in-between gaps that liminals have traditionally inhabited; yet at the same time, we are well-educated professionals.

Our liminalness is bestowed on us by the very nature of what we try to do and that is to construct a learning community in such a way as to acknowledge the diverse stories that enter our lives. We can learn from thinkers like Green, Fanon, and Bhabha that the lessons learned by oppressed peoples in other parts of the world and our own backyard also have application to our own context. The world has come to our classrooms in more ways than we often realize.

This liminal space presents an opportunity to construct meaningful conversation, those small but essential personal narratives that we construct to make sense of ourselves, others, and our world, and those as-if moments act as a series of cautionary
tales, possibilities about what might be happening and how and why we might act. They aren’t defining moments. This is liminality in process. These gaps are also presuppositional possibilities that can serve to question hierarchy. In this way, both teachers and learners set themselves apart from standard practice. They step back, question, and reassess both their positions.

Of course, in educational praxis this is always in flux. As liminal teachers, we acknowledge the permeability of the boundaries society has constructed but at the same time it is our role to help our students understand why they exist. Here is a further step of our liminality which may be unique. We have to transcend our own liminality so learners can realize theirs. This task didn’t seem so daunting in the modern world we are emerging from, where there was a list of beliefs that were taken to be certain and could be framed as our presuppositions. These, in a large part, defined our role as the transmitters of knowledge necessary to sustain society.

Once science acknowledged the uncertainty principle almost one hundred years ago, we began to deconstruct text and nothing was certain or clear anymore. It is this uncertainty that makes a teaching career very difficult for many people. Bhabha, Green, and many of the others I refer to in this chapter wrote about post-colonialism and internationalism in relation to literature. Even though this is a very vibrant discussion, what I am trying to do is lay down some parallel tracks for us. I think that the insights from authors who have been classified as colonials bear a striking resemblance to the relationship that we have had in formal education between teachers and students. I suggest that this is breaking down because of several factors which are at play simultaneously. First, the modern era is morphing into another era. Slowly but surely, as Kuhn has described in his work, we are changing the presuppositions upon which we base the way we see and make sense of the world. Right now, we seem to be between two paradigms and as teachers and learners this alone causes great confusion. We ask questions like: What counts as a fact? What is right and wrong? There are no definitive answers.

The second factor is that we are living in a global community. Our classrooms are full of difference. Some of this difference emanates from the acknowledgement of gender, race, and sexual preference but some also comes from other parts of the world where people are struggling to be free. These forces and others are at play in our schools. Americans don’t appear to be as concerned with post-colonial categorization as Canadians. English speaking Canadians define themselves in post-colonial terms, as not being British or not being American. Although this may not be our discourse, it is a factor we need to acknowledge. Our students come from everywhere.

A third factor is the emergence of students and teachers as liminals. Fanon (1967) and Bhabha (1994) can and do trace this line of thinking to Marxism and post-Marxism, and I don’t dispute this in other parts of the world. In North America, there has been a different set of ideas at work. Historically, we weren’t Marxist nor Freudian oriented. Instead, we are pragmatic, capitalistic, and creative. We want things to work and we often don’t care how. We want, desperately, to be happy in the present without much reflection and to live very well. Above all, we tend to be self-centered. We began this way as colonists. We prize our independence of action
and association. We live for the present, not the past and not the future. The future will somehow take care of itself. As we move out of the modernist paradigm, these presuppositions are no longer as clear to us. 9/11 made it clear that, like it or not, we are not alone in the world. It is upon us and with us. As a result, the voices that Fanon called the disposed are more than just academic discourse.

These are the voices of our classrooms and their concerns are quickly becoming our own. Sometimes this is out of self-interest, but increasingly it is because we are listening to these discourses. Teachers and learners need to become attuned to this. It is a factor in constructing our learning community in a unique and creative way. What does it mean to mimic someone? Usually, we use this term to refer to the way a child mimics or copies the actions or words of an adult. When it is used in adult discourse, it is often used in a derogatory way. For example, if an adult mimics his or her boss it is often an act of defiance or belittlement. Said, Bhabha, and others who wrote about the narrational borderlands used the term mimic as a way of describing a search for identity within the context of colonialism. In this chapter, I have been trying, in what I hope is not a heavy handed way, to draw parallels between these thinkers and our world of teaching and learning. Specifically, I suggest that both teachers and learners belong to what can be called liminal peoples. Both are in the process of becoming a part of, and at the same time alienated from, the mainstream of their culture. Both teachers and learners also share with these thinkers the concept of living on a borderline and its consequences.

My view is that there is some merit to seeing ourselves as being in a postcolonial struggle, but in a different way. For teachers and learners, this is a struggle which is centered in the way we conceive, use, and understand all the multiplicities of discourse and textuality. Ritual discourse, as I use it here, is an important part of that. Ritual discourse provides the opportunity to acknowledge the discourse of others, of liminals, to invite them into our world of curriculum possibilities as-if their discourse is as worthy of consideration as ours or any others.

Mimicry has come to describe the ambivalent relationship between the colonizer and the colonized. When colonial discourse encourages the colonized subject to “mimic” the colonizer, by adopting the colonizer’s cultural habits, assumptions, institutions and values, the result is never a simple reproduction of those traits. Instead, the result is a blurred, threatening replica of the original (Ashcroft, Griffiths, & Tiffin, 1990). Unfortunately, the history of Western education has often been about mimicry as much as it has been about freedom. Curriculum theorists have espoused the view that the aim of education has been and should be to pass on the best values and truths of a society in an effort to sustain those traditions.

I am an historian and philosopher by training, and I have argued that knowing about the past is the key to knowing about ourselves. Collingwood argued that there are facts about the past, but they are mostly the evidence we choose to build our case. A wise historian examines that evidence thoroughly and is always aware that new evidence may come to light to change his conclusions. Let’s apply this line of thinking to curriculum theory. Our world is changing at a rapid pace. Our ideas about what it means to educate and be educated are also changing. As we swing from pole to pole in our seemingly on-going curriculum wars in an effort to satisfy our
culture’s needs, we often appear to the public as having no real position, no real
theory, no real practice. In reaction to this knee-jerk quasi-theoretical position, I want
to suggest that an answer lies in acknowledging those stories that emerge in our
classrooms from all sides. We can’t do this if we tell our students to merely mimic
our voices.

Mimicry can only be an ironic compromise between a teacher and learner. The
discourse can never be quite the same. The discourse of a mimicking learner can
never measure up to the discourse of the teacher. As a Canadian student, I was all
too painfully aware that we colonials could never quite measure up to the constructed
reality of the motherland. At that time it was England who controlled our discourse
and set the standards. Why did we learn Parisian French and not the Normandy
French that was spoken in Quebec?

The danger inherent in mimicry is that it produces an identity which is not quite
the same as the colonizer (Ashcroft, Griffiths, & Tiffin, 1990). Bhabha (1994) adapted
the term ambivalence in his description of the relationship between the colonizer
and the colonized and the complex mixture of attraction and repulsion characterized
by that relationship. Ambivalence proposes that complicity and resistance exist in
an oscillating relation within the colonial subject. Colonial discourse wants compliant
subjects to reproduce its culture, to “mimic” the colonizer. However, more often than
not the result is never very far from mockery (Ashcroft, Griffiths, & Tiffin 1990).

Today, it is the United States that controls much of the world’s discourse.
Students from Canada and other parts of the world are often treated as colonialists
and others, as Bhabha pointed out, but our concern is with the world of discourse
that appears in our classroom. The real global community isn’t just economic or
political. It is just as much, or more so, educational. Knowing this provides us with
the opportunity of turning mimicry into personal, constructive, and critical discourse.

There is a political side to this as with all educational debates at some level, and
it isn’t about political parties. It is what Timothy Brennan (1990) has called a
“longing for form.” The birth of nationalism and other ideologies created the need
for a sense of continuity. Historically, this had to be invented. Both of the ancient
civilizations realized this. Herodotus, Livy, Polybius, and Tacitus are examples.
These historians introduced new rituals and myths, as well as forms of discourse
to establish their states. America is no different in this regard. We too have our
myths, as Johnny Appleseed, our rituals, as saluting the flag and stating the pledge,
our symbols, and our own particular discourse. Listen to any speaker at a political
party convention and you can pick it up. These trappings of who we are, where we
come from, and what we stand for are our markers.

Education has its own set of myths, rituals, and discourse. Each is rooted in a
partially constructed past and each is a necessary connection to our present. As with
nationalism, our set of markers is based in part on mimicry. We memorize the pledge,
the states’ names, and so on as examples of our being part of the larger national state.
In education, we do much the same thing with the formalities of our day. We ingrain
it with mimicry, sometimes in the form of rote-memory testing, skill and drill, and
in other cases by explicit expressions of ritual discourse. Once the world became
a polyglot, it became more difficult to accomplish this type of indoctrination.
METHODOLOGICAL CONCERNS

We can see how difficult this is in our educational system and in society in general. This discriminacy was first pointed out by Bakhtin (1986) in the study of the novel. The term he used to describe this was heteroglossia and it occurs when different forms of language clash with the formal, established national discourse. When this occurs, as it did in the nineteenth and twentieth century, the possibility of a grand narrative vanished. In education, the same pattern has occurred.

Our grand discourse has been deconstructed, and although formal national discourse attempts to stitch it back together again with efforts like NCLB, just like Humpty Dumpty it just can’t be put together again in the same way. By loosening our hold on mimicry, we encourage that trend. We encourage the invention of new words, and new technologies to expand our possibilities as humans in a democracy. As a consequence, we are constantly at war with this dialectic.

Surveillance implies a teacher or learner who views others in such a way as to fix their identity. Do we do this in our daily practice? Some do. It is a way of establishing an ideology and of oppressing, and it is important for us to remember that this can be done by either teacher or learner. Foucault (1965), in *Discipline and Punish*, described the importance of the introduction of surveillance into the prison system by means of a circular prison divided into individual cells, all of which could be observed from a single vantage point. In contexts such as these, individuals are always under surveillance and therefore must always act as if they are. The discipline that results from this reinforces the dominant metaphor, rituals, myths, and discourse. As we teach and learn, we need to think seriously about what Foucault has written. Our schools often closely resemble prisons in their architecture. Do we regard them as such or is this a pragmatic way of controlling the thoughts and actions of those who dwell in them? I believe that architectural form is a necessary but not sufficient condition. Let’s turn surveillance into communitas, communities built on the acknowledgement of cautionary tales.

Terry Eagleton (1993) argued that the role of the cultural critic is to reconnect the symbolic to the political. I’d like to add to that by claiming that the role of the teacher/learner is to reconnect ritual, symbol, and myth to meaningful discourse. In this way, we can expunge mimicry from our cultural narratives. Like Eagleton, I base this on the ideas of Habermas (1973) and on a process regulated by reason, but one which acknowledges the gaps which provide for our curriculum of possibilities. One way of making this happen is to ensure that multiculturalism is rooted in the multiple layers of discourse and that this reflects us and our students. Frontiers close a nation to protect it and to define it, as I have mentioned, but they also serve to open a nation to other nations (Bennington, 1990). Frontiers necessitate that the nation recognize that other nations exist and that they have some sort of relationship to them. This is instructive for those of us who are teachers and learners. Let’s make our frontiers so porous that our ritual, myths, and stories must be acknowledged in a constructive and reasonable way. This, as always, entails our being historically aware of the story of education and of the shifting presuppositions that underlie our liminal lives.

We have to do more than what Bhabha characterized as pretending to be real to prepare ourselves for life. We must transcend Fanon’s double vision of ambivalent
mimicry of colonial discourse. What we need to construct is a discourse where “not quite like me” becomes “This sounds like you. Let’s talk about this.” Joep Leerssen (2007) in *National Thought In Europe: A Cultural History* asked how it was that Jacob Grimm, a professor of linguistics and a collector of fairy tales, was able to address the German National Assembly in 1848 on matters such as unification, civil rights, and a constitution. It appears that Grimm was there to speak for his image of Deutschland, one he had constructed in his mind and one based on his idea of the cultural superiority he read into his country’s myths and tales. Grimm gave a nationalistic discourse intended to serve as the cultural narration for his nation. Leerssen traced this process to the present day, describing its disputed linguistic boundaries and other factors. His work fits nicely into that of the authors we have examined in this chapter, as well as Eric Hobsbawm’s (1983) collection *The Invention of Tradition* and Benedict Anderson’s (1991) *Imagined Communities*.

Leerssen argued that nationalist identification did not happen until it was labeled. In other words, Germans did not know they were Germans until they were identified as such. Conversely, we could argue that the opposite occurs; others don’t view themselves as others until they are labeled. One wonders if Hitler realized the power of this. Nationalism, tribalism, and community are often imposed for the sake of nurturing a sense of the belonging and of establishing boundaries to keep others out.

In our schools, this powerful concept can be used to exclude and punish or to acknowledge and accept. Discourse, ritual, and myth have that power. Just as they can be used to mimic, they can used to exclude. Leerssen described how literature can be used to define and give foothold to “national thought.” The possession of an ancient epoch has served nationalist causes over the centuries for good and for ill. In the process, it has nurtured the feelings of alienation, isolation, oppression, and otherness of which Bhabha referred. These sentiments can also apply to our structure of formal education unless we attend to them carefully.

Language and nationality are factors which give ownership and identity. We can identify an accent, a selection of vocabulary, or phraseology and allow it to be exclusionary. Our linguistic boundaries, however, are not as clear. Even if we consult a map for clarity, it is not always apparent where languages fuse with each other. The same is true of our classroom discourse. We need to remember that our classrooms are full of fused boundaries where the realities of the world of language clash with the strictures of the world of politics. It is no longer obvious what it means to be educated or to speak like or look like and educated person. It once was, or we thought it was, when educational discourse was centered on the presuppositions of colonialism, mimicry, and surveillance.

For Leerssen, the solution lies in what he called “heteronomy.” It means living together instead of separating out. Let’s borrow this conception. In a postmodern world, distinctions in any area are constructions and not realities. Discourse is one of the tools for constructing education. As I have pointed out previously, different discourses are used by the dominant groups in education for a number of reasons. Sometimes the reason is explicitly ideological and sometimes it is not, but in almost every case it has to do with power.
Interest in permeable boundaries, multiple influences, dispersed networks, connections across multi-leveled and multilayered sites, and improvised responses means that educational researchers should be exploring ways to expand their reach beyond traditional methods. We must be alert to possibilities for travel across sites and groups, to methods of data collection and analysis from other disciplines, to new ways of learning about and representing diversity as well as commonality, and to ways of exploring connections within and across sites (Eisenhart, 1999). In our enthusiasm for new research tools in education, we must pay attention not only to traditional strengths but also to the challenges of accessing contemporary educational situations of interest, and we must be ready to include new methods that promise to fill some of the holes left by the old.