A Space to Learn

Amy R. Goods

The Graduate Center, City University of New York

How does access to this work benefit you? Let us know!

Follow this and additional works at: https://academicworks.cuny.edu/gc_etds

Part of the Accessibility Commons, Curriculum and Social Inquiry Commons, Educational Assessment, Evaluation, and Research Commons, Educational Methods Commons, Higher Education and Teaching Commons, Junior High, Intermediate, Middle School Education and Teaching Commons, Science and Mathematics Education Commons, Secondary Education Commons, Secondary Education and Teaching Commons, and the Special Education and Teaching Commons

Recommended Citation

https://academicworks.cuny.edu/gc_etds/3163

This Dissertation is brought to you by CUNY Academic Works. It has been accepted for inclusion in All Dissertations, Theses, and Capstone Projects by an authorized administrator of CUNY Academic Works. For more information, please contact deposit@gc.cuny.edu.
A Space to Learn

by

Amy Goods

This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Urban Education in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

Date

Kenneth Tobin
Chair of Examining Committee

Date

Wendy Luttrell
Executive Officer

Supervisory Committee:

Konstantinos Alexakos

Gillian Bayne

THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK
ABSTRACT

A SPACE TO LEARN

by

Amy Goods

Advisor: Kenneth Tobin

In this dissertation, I explore what it means to different people, in different places throughout life’s spectrum, to create a space to learn. This dissertation is a collection of work that I have written throughout my time at the CUNY Graduate Center. The chapters herein represent an arch of my learning over the past five years. The title, A Space to Learn, has multiple meanings. For one, writing this dissertation has provided me a space to explore and reflect on a variety of topics, ranging from memory loss, to teacher preparation programs, to eugenics and special education, to tracking and science education, to video analysis, polysemia, polyphonia, and learning from difference. In the process of writing this dissertation, I have had the opportunity to delve into and investigate many interests. Though the topics within might seem, on the surface, varying, once read together, I believe that clear perspectives on teaching and learning emerge.

Each chapter can stand alone, yet, when put together, themes of a structure | agency dialectic, reflexivity, and learning from experience emerge. Throughout this dissertation, I explore ways to navigate within social and culturally constructed structures that, at times, seem stifling, or downright oppressive. In some chapters, I look to break down the structure and remake it in a new image. In other chapters, I learn how to find some peace, as I learn how to enact some agency while operating from within.
Each chapter has an element of phenomenology, as the chapters have emerged from lived experiences and encounters. Each chapter also has elements of hermeneutics, as each chapter is each interpreted through my bricolage. As I attempt to uncover what is happening in the events described in this dissertation, I do my best to learn and change from what I am uncovering, in this way, the writing within is reflexive (Bourdieu, 1992).

In each chapter, I burrow further into a topic, carve out different approaches to teaching and learning, and explore intersections of experience, perspectives, and theory. I have changed as a result of writing this dissertation. In its whole, this dissertation has been a “space” for me to learn.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

In 2011, I started Graduate School in Secondary Education at Brooklyn College. In this program a group of researchers from the CUNY Graduate Center came to class, started video recording and invited us, the Graduate Students at Brooklyn College, to participate in research. In that semester, the walls between academia and me came crumbling down. Over time, I began to see myself as a researcher. I began to see that research did not exist in an ivory tower and could be found all around us. I am here, in part, because of Kenneth Tobin and Konstantinos Alexakos, and all of the welcoming researchers in that class.

A few years later, after graduating from Brooklyn College, I started working towards my PhD at the Graduate Center and during this time, so much changed. I became a mother to two beautiful children, Anna and Henry, who remind me every day to relish the small moments. I can’t say that they made my time at the Graduate Center easier, but they certainly made it more meaningful.

Trips to visit my family have always been a welcome reprieve. To John and Brittany, my brother and sister-in-law, thank you for always being around to “debate the universe” with me. Some of the things I write about and think about are topics that make many people uncomfortable. You were always open to talking and adding important insights. Thank you for that.

Invaluable in this process was my mother, who on a moment’s notice would take time from her busy life to drive over two hours and help with the kids. Her stories are my stories and they are a big part of this dissertation. Thank you.

Thank you to my squad, who have been a positive support system throughout this whole process. I always looked forward to getting together with you. It was one of the highlights of my week.
This dissertation is done in manuscript style and chapters two and three have previously been published. Thank you to the publisher Rotterdam: Sense for allowing me to use chapters two “The Possibilities of play, Understanding the transformative nature of play and exploring possible application for people with Alzheimer’s” (2016). Also, thank you to Cultural Studies of Science Education for the permission to republish chapter three “V-Note: A video analysis tool for teacher | researchers” (2019) for use in my dissertation.

Thank you to my committee. Kenneth Tobin, you have taught me of the importance of living my ontology. The research and theories that I have learned from you go beyond words on a page, they are now a way of life. Konstantinos Alexakos, from Brooklyn College to the Graduate Center, you have always been someone to give me a push when needed. Gillian Bayne, your gentle and kind guidance throughout this whole process has been invaluable.

And lastly, thank you to, Nick. From metalogues and proofreading, to caring for babies and dancing to old records, you are my partner in everything.
I should never be able to come to a conclusion. I should never be able to fulfil what is, I understand, the first duty of a lecturer - to hand you after an hour’s discourse a nugget of pure truth to wrap up between the pages of your notebook and keep on the mantelpiece forever. All I could do was to offer you an opinion upon one minor point…

-Virginia Woolf *A Room of One’s Own*, 1929, p. 2

I began with this quote from Virginia Woolf because she so eloquently says what I feel about the work I have done thus far at the Graduate Center. As my time at the Graduate Center is nearing a close, the biggest gift is that there is no conclusion. The work, the researching, the learning, growing, and changing is an ongoing process. It is this process that I have learned to honor and enjoy and struggle through. The end game is not one of discovering a universal truth, as it is my belief that really doesn't exist, but rather the purpose of this journey, to me, is to learn as much as I can.

The format for this dissertation is one of manuscript style. Chapters two, three, and four are pieces that I have written for publication throughout my time at the CUNY Graduate Center. All chapters carry with them a theme of reflexivity (Bourdieu, 1992). That is to say, through each chapter, I examine events, reflect and ruminate upon them, all the while weaving a theoretical web that I have spun throughout the last four years, but in truth, it is one I have been working on my whole life.

In the following pages, I attempt to make my ontological framework as open and transparent as possible. That is, because I believe that all we write, say, and do is an amalgamation of all our interactions and mediated by our experiences (Collins, 2005). These words on a page are a snapshot into who I was, who I am, and who I am in the process of becoming. All of these selves live in a multilectical dimension and are in a constant dialectical dance. Through writing these chapters I have learned and changed. In this way, my writing is a kind of pseudo-
autoethnography, because, although all chapters are not directly about me, each chapter is enmeshed in my lived experiences, situated in my ontology, epistemology, and axiology (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). I am central to the stories told within.

Chapter 1, *How I arrived here* is a sort of confessional tale (Van Maanen, 2011). It is an impressionistic autoethnography that is intended to expose my ontology (way of making meaning from the world), epistemology (theory of knowledge), and axiology (value system). In this chapter, I use narrative to explore my experiences and trace the roots of what has become my bricolage (theoretical framework). I explore the way that my experiences have influenced the my approach to dismantling systems of tracking science in a middle school curriculum.

The second chapter in this manuscript is entitled *The possibility of play: understanding the transformative nature of play and exploring possible applications for people with Alzheimer’s* (Goods, 2016). I wrote this chapter as I was first entering the program and as I was just beginning to assemble my theoretical bricolage. What I like about this piece is that it reveals much about me and my thinking before my mind became a web of theories and theorists. It is raw, emotional, and an impressionistic tale modeled after the work of John Van Maanen (2011). Through writing in narrative style, the chapter allowed for me to explore avenues that I may not have otherwise traversed, had I approached research in a more regimented or classical, positivist sense. Using narrative was fun, exciting, and cathartic. It lit a spark in me. I have since shared this work with many friends and family who are traveling down similar paths of memory loss with aging loved ones.

The impressionistic tale serves as a pseudo-autoethnography of my interactions with my father at the end of his life. This chapter plays like a movie in my mind; it is visceral, real, yet at the same time pixelated and abstracted. It is a collection of moments, memories, observations, and thoughts about how to make a bad situation a little better. It is a memory of one man, my
father, over a period of time and a look into the structures that intersect with my father’s loss of memory. It is only in hindsight that I see how writing this story is nestled in educative and catalytic elements of the Authenticity Criteria (as cited by Tobin, 2017). By telling one story, so that it may become the story of many, I hope that it has had made some positive change in those who have read it.

The third chapter is one that I wrote during the Spring of my third year at the CUNY Graduate Center. This chapter is one that I see as standing in contrast to my chapter on Alzheimer’s, The possibility of play. While the Alzheimer's chapter blurs many different events, this third chapter looks at an event with precision, as if refining a moment in time. Chapter three, entitled V-Note: A video analysis tool for teacher | researchers (2019) uses event-oriented inquiry (Tobin, 2017) and video analysis to investigate a moment in time of a class led by Ken Tobin at the CUNY Graduate Center. This chapter focuses on a twelve second pause in which no one spoke. The pause, though relatively short, felt to me as an eternity. I was curious to understand more about what was happening before, during, and after this pause, in order to illuminate more about the larger classroom interactions and dynamics. Using V-Note software as a research tool, I delve into a brief vignette and transcribe every word spoken. I then turn my attention and focus on my classmates in order to develop a better understanding of events. To do this, I employ the tenets of event oriented inquiry, “what is happening, why is it happening, and what else is there?” (Tobin, 2017). Classmates added to the discourse on the event, sharing their perspectives. What emerged was a description of an event full of contradictions. As we shared our contradictions as a class, more and more dialogue emerged. Through the shared investigation of events, I learned about the power of investigating the small moments and the transformative power of learning from difference.
This paper served as a learning experience in many ways. For one, I had the aim to share with others the potential of V-Note in education research by explaining the use case of reflexive practices through a software review. Since writing the chapter I have shared V-Note with students at Brooklyn College who are working on compiling video clips for the edTPA teacher certification process. Secondly, I used the vignette to better understand events in our graduate classroom, share what I have learned, and took time to learn from others. Furthermore, this paper has been published in the journal *Cultural Studies in Science Education*. This paper was the first I ever published in an academic journal, which in itself was a learning experience.

The fourth chapter is one that I co-authored with my partner, Nick. This chapter, entitled *Embracing polysemia and polyphonia through edTPA*, emerged based upon a conversation that Nick had with one of his coworkers, lamenting the relatively new implementations of teacher certification portfolio, the edTPA. Upon further research, we learned that the edTPA was conceived to be a qualitative measure of teacher readiness that involved submitting lesson plans, video recordings, and reflections to cooperating teachers and college professors. However, once for-profit test makers got their hands on the proposed portfolio, local boards of professionals in the field were replaced with an “objective” and disconnected panel for review. I was so saddened to learn of how this portfolio system was seized and co-opted by for-profit entities and metamorphosed from a series of teacher practices and reflections to yet another instrument of culturally devoid judgment and assessment. I was especially upset being that I had just wrapped up a paper on the transformative power of video recording in education, something that is central to the edTPA process. However, in talking to others, I found that I was not the only one that was saddened and upset. In this chapter, Nick and I asked a variety of stakeholders in the edTPA process (student teachers, new teachers, cooperating teachers, and professors) to write about their experiences with edTPA. We engage the stakeholders with a variety of heuristics
(Powietrzyńska, Tobin, & Alexakos, 2015) to get them thinking recursively and reflexively about their work in the edTPA. With their input, we rethink the potential of the edTPA and reimagine the edTPA as we wish it to be.

I decided to write the fifth chapter, *Radioactive Oatmeal*, as I looked over the dissertation and realized that I was lacking a piece on Special Education. Special Education is a large part of who I am and, I felt that a piece focusing on Special Education needed to be included. In this chapter I tell the stories of three historic institutions that served people labeled as having a disability. The stories of individuals in these institutions are used as an entry into examining the legacy of eugenics in school and in special education. This chapter aims to serve as a cautionary tale against the dangers of sorting, and exclusion in special education.

The sixth chapter begins with a metologue between, Krystal, a student at Brooklyn College and me. This student used the phrase, “space to learn” in class, and I was so taken by it, that I asked her if she would be willing to say more. What emerged was an exchange about “a space to learn” through email. This final chapter, or “bookend,” aims to tie all the chapters together as the metologue speaks to so many of the topics covered in this dissertation. As Krystal writes about her experiences as a student, she gives a powerful voice to the theories within and signals that the end of this dissertation is not the end to the conversation. The research continues in a recursive, yet ever expanding way.

Each chapter I have written thus far has served to expand my methodology and has layered and nuanced the researcher and scholar that I am in the process of becoming. Beginning with an impression of myself and the ones I love, each chapter builds off of the next, creating with them a bricolage of theories and methods. Through my time at the Graduate Center I have learned to use these theories and methods with increasing ease as I have found that they have slowly become a part of me. I cannot divorce what I have learned from the ins and outs of my daily life,
and I can say with confidence that I feel like a better person for having learned them. Central not just to each of the chapters, but to my own praxis, is the concept of reflexivity (Bourdieu, 1992). Reflexivity is more than reflection, it is reflection put into action. It is constantly assessing the situation while at the same time constantly revisiting and reinventing. It is never stagnant, always active and moving. This is who I am and who I aim to be as a researcher and scholar.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

**ABSTRACT** .......................................................................................................................... IV

**ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS** ....................................................................................................... VI

**PREFACE: ABOUT THIS DISSERTATION** ............................................................................. VIII

**TABLE OF CONTENTS** ....................................................................................................... XIV

**LIST OF FIGURES** ............................................................................................................. XVI

**CHAPTER 1. HOW I ARRIVED HERE: A STUDY OF SELF** ................................................... 1

  - ABSTRACT ................................................................................................................................ 1
  - SETTING A FOUNDATION .......................................................................................................... 1
  - MAKING MYSELF CLEAR .......................................................................................................... 4
  - FINDING A CHAIR .................................................................................................................... 7
  - TAKING A STAND ...................................................................................................................... 9
  - THEORIZING EXPERIENCE ...................................................................................................... 11
  - A BRICOLAGE TELLS A STORY TOO ...................................................................................... 12
  - MAKING A CHANGE .............................................................................................................. 12
  - EXPERIENCES SHAPE US, JUST AS WE SHAPE EXPERIENCES ........................................... 14

**A TRANSITION BETWEEN CHAPTERS: LA BARGE** .......................................................... 15

**CHAPTER 2. THE POSSIBILITY OF PLAY: UNDERSTANDING THE TRANSFORMATIVE NATURE OF PLAY AND EXPLORING POSSIBLE APPLICATION FOR PEOPLE WITH ALZHEIMER’S** ........... 17

  - ABSTRACT ................................................................................................................................ 17
  - A VISIT TO THE MEMORY LOSS UNIT .................................................................................... 18
  - METHODOLOGIES .................................................................................................................. 19
  - ALZHEIMER’S DISEASE .......................................................................................................... 20
  - PLAY AND MINDFULNESS ...................................................................................................... 22
  - PLAY AND EMOTIONS ............................................................................................................ 24
  - PLAY IN PRACTICE .................................................................................................................. 27

**A TRANSITION BETWEEN CHAPTERS: TEACHING AS A HEURISTIC** ................................ 31

**CHAPTER 3. V-NOTE: A VIDEO ANALYSIS TOOL FOR TEACHER | RESEARCHERS** ............... 33

  - ABSTRACT ................................................................................................................................ 33
  - SITUATING V-NOTE SOFTWARE IN ONE TEACHER | RESEARCHER’S BRICOLAGE .............. 33
  - THE V-NOTE BASICS – ALL ABOUT THE V-NOTE ................................................................. 38
  - POSSIBLE APPLICATIONS: HOW V-NOTE WAS USED FOR REFLECTION IN A GRADUATE LEVEL COURSE ........................................................................................................... 42
  - V-NOTE FOR TRANSFORMATION .......................................................................................... 51
  - POSSIBLE FUTURE APPLICATIONS IN TEACHING AND LEARNING .................................... 54

**CHAPTER 4. REIMAGINING THE EDTPA: EMBRACING POLYSEMIA AND POLYPHONIA THROUGH EDTPA** ......................................................................................................................... 56

  - ABSTRACT ................................................................................................................................ 56
  - TO BEGIN: A METALOGUE ...................................................................................................... 57
  - NOBODY IS PERFECT ................................................................................................................ 61
  - EDTPA BASICS ...................................................................................................................... 63
  - INSPIRATION AND MOTIVATION: EXPLORING OUR PROCESS ........................................ 65
  - A REIMAGINATION .................................................................................................................. 72
  - OPPORTUNITY EMERGES ...................................................................................................... 74
  - SOME ADDITIONAL VOICES: A LOOK AT RESPONSES FROM THE HEURISTIC .................. 75
    - Theres: First Year Teacher-Middle School General Music, Brooklyn, NY .......................... 77
    - Sarah: First Year Teacher-Elementary Strings, Long Island, NY ......................................... 77

xiv
LIST OF FIGURES

FIGURE 3.1. THE OPENING SCREEN OF V-NOTE................................................................. 39
FIGURE 3.2. CUSTOM LABELS AND COMBINED SEGMENTS IN MOVIE BUILDER. ................................................................. 40
FIGURE 3.3. TRANSCRIPTION MODE IS OPEN IN THE TOP RIGHT OF THE V-NOTE WINDOW WITH YELLOW LOOP BAR
highlighting section of video being transcribed................................................................. 42
FIGURE 3.4. DIALOGUE BETWEEN KEN AND PEARL ................................................................. 44
FIGURE 3.5 VISUALIZATION OF WHOLE CLASS CONTRIBUTIONS TWO (BEFORE V-NOTE INTERVENTION) ................................................................. 52
FIGURE 3.6. VISUALIZATION WHOLE CLASS OF CONTRIBUTIONS IN CLASS FOUR AFTER V-NOTE INTERVENTION................................. 53
FIGURE 4. 7. edTPA HEURISTIC................................................................................................................. 76
CHAPTER 1. HOW I ARRIVED HERE: A STUDY OF SELF

Abstract

This chapter serves as an introduction to who I am as a teacher and a researcher. In an impressionistic narrative form (Van Maanen, 2011), I explore how my past has influenced my approaches to research, teaching, and learning. These stories aim to illuminate my ontology and lay the foundation of my theoretical bricolage (Lévi-Strauss, 1966). This chapter, a pseudo-autoethnography, examines how events in my childhood have shaped who I am today. From elementary school, to learning to play the cello, to teaching middle school science in Brooklyn, NY, the reader is given a glimpse into how seemingly small events in a person’s life can have lasting effects.

Setting a Foundation

When I was in the third grade I fell on the playground and hit my head. I was okay, I don’t recall that it hurt all that much. But as head injuries go, there was quite a lot of blood. When my teacher saw my bloody head and growing shiner, I was whisked away in a flurry to the nurse's office, where I was administered gauze and an ice pack. My mother was called to pick me up and take me home. Up until this point, I had not shed a single tear. After all, it didn’t really hurt all that much. But when I heard the nurse on the phone with my mother, all the tears started flowing. I did not want to leave school, not even for a bloody head. I loved school.

The above anecdote is not a commentary on my home life or my mother. My mother is lovely. She was a daily fixture at my elementary school. She ran a computer club (back in the early 90s when not too many people were yet computer savvy), she always volunteered to be a chaperone and driver in our many school outings, she was a member of the PTA, led a weekly reading group, a weekly math group, and helped to organize the activities in yearly school events.
I still remember waiting for the bus on my first day of kindergarten with my mother and my 3-year-old brother. He wanted to come to school with me so badly that when the bus pulled around to pick me up, he hopped on too. I am not sure how it all transpired between the bus driver and my mother, but my brother ended up riding with me on the bus. We held hands all the way to school, while my mom followed behind the bus in our family station wagon. As I exited the bus with my brother, my mother was there waiting to pick him up. He did not want to leave. He could not wait to go to school and wanted to follow me into the classroom. Though he did not go that day, it is almost as if he did follow me in the classroom. For, every time my mother came to volunteer at the school, she brought my brother with her. He was there nearly every day until he was old enough to start school himself.

When I hit my head, I did not want to go home because I loved school so much. I was sad to leave, even for a few hours to mend a head.

I often think back to that public school and wonder what it was about it that made me so happy. Perhaps, for one, that my experience started there with a bus driver that was willing to take on one excited three-year-old and make his day. Perhaps it was the music, the poetry, the books, and the musty red cushions that we laid on as we read. Perhaps it was the nature hikes. Or, the time on a hike the class ran away screaming when our teacher pulled up some stinky skunk cabbage. Or, maybe it was the nature hike where we practiced walking heel-toe, heel-toe as quietly as we could so as not to disturb the wildlife. Perhaps my love of school came from all life that we let into our classroom. The doors were always open and the people from our community came and went, offering up their expertise. In the fourth grade, when the internet was a new phenomenon, we tracked and communicated with a group of scientists and explorers as they trekked to the North Pole. In first grade, we hatched a brood of ducklings from eggs. I recall how we kept a watchful eye on them from our giant classroom windows as they waddled around
their outdoor playpen and went swimming in their blue plastic kiddie pool. I still remember my
delight as we lined up for lunch and the ducks hopped the fence and lined up behind us,
following us to the cafeteria. I remember how my teacher laughed and let them follow. I
remember when I opened my lunchbox to find that my mother had placed two quarters in the
folds. I savor the taste of the crumbly, messy strawberry shortcake ice cream bar that I bought
with the money. I remember packing up my lunchbox and running outside for recess, climbing
the wooden play structure that my parents, with many other parents, had helped to build over the
summer. The playground was a treasure, complete with a wooden pirate ship and lookout, castle,
swings, passageways, bridges and a small, natural hill that was particularly good for rolling. My
favorite activity though, was spinning around and around on the tire swing until I was so dizzy I
could barely walk. The same tires that my friends and I scrubbed and hosed cleaned the summer
before in anticipation of them becoming a swing. I remember on the 100th day of school we each
had to bring in 100 of something. This same friend brought in 100 sprinkles. I remember how all
the 100 sprinkles fit in the palm of her hand. I was mesmerized about how a number that seemed
so big could look so small.

On a recent trip to my hometown I took my daughter to go play on the playground. They tore
down the wooden structures. The pirate ship, the castle, and the tire swing are all gone. In their
place is a plastic and metal climbing structure. Where there was once woodchips and dirt,
ground-up tires pave the ground. My daughter tripped and fell when playing, and the tires, like
sandpaper, scraped her knees.

My mother now works in a school instead of volunteering in one. She wears an ID badge at
all times and has a key card to get into school. It is always locked to protect against armed
intruders. On the 100th day of school, she told me that the teacher put on a video of a man doing
silly dances on YouTube while counting to 100. The class danced along. It made her sad. It makes me sad too.

**Making Myself Clear**

I love writing in narrative because I feel as though narrative allows me to paint a picture with words and create a visceral scene for the reader. It is my hope that there is a little piece, somewhere in what I write that resonates with the reader. Margaret Eisenhart (2009) introduced me to Sharan Merriam’s (1998) idea of “user generalizability.” That is, that a reader might pick up a study, read it, and find something within that rings true within them. It is my hope that as I write this story I am able to write in a way that draws your attention to thoughts and ideas that exist within. This is my story, with all my interpretations, my thoughts, and opinions, yet, it is my hope that parts of my story overlap with yours. I hope that in reading this, you find a piece of yourself inside.

To borrow a phrase from Virginia Woolf, “fiction here is likely to contain more truth than fact” (p. 6). Often times, I find that within a good story I can see pieces of myself. Other times, I find that a good story helps me to gain a deeper understanding of the world from the events within. Fiction, sometimes, has a way of getting to the crux of a matter more pointedly than if an author were to simply tell you the purpose of their writing. In this chapter, instead of telling you, I aim to show you.

In this chapter, I retell events in an impressionistic and narrative way (Van Maanen, 2011). The stories that I tell here are embedded in my mind. Like a movie clip played over and over again, I can envision each event unfolding. Yet, I am not completely sure that they are not fiction. I am okay with this, as I am really not sure that any event has any one factuality (Guba & Lincoln, 1987). Perspectives on events are saturated with culture and therefore highly interpretive. A cursory observation or retelling of the facts is nothing more than a thin
description. A thick description in interpretive ethnography involves an examination of the context in which the event is occurring (Geertz, 1973).

I want to pause here and define a few terms that I am using. For one, culture. I used to think of culture as something that was fixed. Culture, to me, used to be foreign, something that happened “over there.” I used to think that culture was something that a researcher could hold in theirs hands and study. However, that has all changed. I have learned to think of culture as dynamic, fluid, and ever changing (Sewell, 2005). When I think about culture I envision an amorphous blob. I imagine that if I tried to hold it in an outstretched hand, it would slip through my fingers like water. Culture is not fixed. Instead, it shifts and changes with every new situation.

Events, as defined by William Sewell (2005), are “unique and contingent happenings [that] are subject to the vagaries of human will” (p. 197). Events play out in peculiar ways as a variety of interactions contribute to a particular unfolding. I have found that when I attempt to investigate an event, I quickly become overwhelmed by immense amounts of intersections between individuals, past and present interactions, perspectives, fields, and places and objects where the event is occurring. I find that trying to unravel precisely what is happening and why it is happening becomes nearly impossible. There is no clear trajectory from point A to point B. There is no clear conclusion. Events are subjective, emergent, and contingent (Tobin, 2017a). In a different day, a different time, any event could have unfolded completely differently. To a different person, attending the same event, the interpretation could be completely different. This is why, at times, it is prudent to use event-oriented inquiry (Tobin, 2014b) and invite multiple perspectives (Tobin, 2006) when attempting to learn from events.

When researching and writing about people there are infinite possible outcomes that could have occurred in any given event. While history informs the present, it does not dictate it.
Agency, the ability to act freely and make one’s own choices, is always available. Agency works in tandem, in a dialectical relationship, with our interaction ritual chains (Collins, 2005). An individual’s actions are often mediated by structures of culture and society. People have agency, and, at the same time, this agency is imbedded with a network of norms that have been picked up by an individual overtime.

Individuals may be agentic, but this agency exists within a structure. This internalized structure is described by Pierre Bourdieu (1992) as habitus. Habitus is made by bumping up against structures that have been socially and culturally constructed. Habitus exists inward, it is eternalized, personal, unique. Yet, habitus is formed by outward interactions.

To elaborate on what I mean when I say that something is socially and culturally constructed, I use the example of school. Above I have described to you some experiences that I had in school. School is a physical place that was conceived of by people for educating people. The idea of constructing the school, the goings-on inside of the school, the purpose of the school were all conjured up by people. My experiences in school exist within a structure or framework that was, and is, collectively constructed. By attending school, there is a part of me that hooks into the collective consciousness of what it means to attend school. In my case, I went to school, I learned, I ate lunch, I played, and I bumped my head, all within the confines of both a physical structure and a mental one. While learning at school, I had many moments of agency, times where I enacted choice and power. However, in my case, these moments of agency often occurred within the larger structures of school.

Framing research with people in a sociocultural lens is enough to make one’s head spin. How can a lived experience be all at once so vivid, poignant, and real, yet at the same time be fabricated and up for interpretation? How is it that we can both shape events, while at the same time, events are shaping us?
Finding a Chair

When I was in the fifth grade I decided to play the cello. Really, I had first decided to play the flute, but I quickly discovered that joining band meant that I would have to march in town parades. I hated, and still to this day hate, marching bands. I am not entirely sure why I hate marching bands. Perhaps it’s the nationalism I associate with it? Or, what I find to be tediously dull music? Or, perhaps is because when I was five I had an unfortunate incident involving too much Capri Sun and an upset stomach when marching in a parade with the girl scouts? Anyway, I decided to play the cello because I figured that as long as I played an instrument that had to be played sitting down, no one could ever make me march in a parade again.

The problem was that I chose to start playing the cello in the fifth grade. In our school district, if you wanted to play a string instrument and join the orchestra, you were supposed to start in the fourth grade. By joining in the fifth grade, I was a year behind everyone else. I thought that I would be able to catch up, though. After all, I had been taking piano lessons, and I could read music. In the fifth grade, my parents rented me a cello from Sam Ash, and I joined the orchestra.

I sat in the back of the orchestra. Last chair. It turns out, piano lessons weren’t enough and I was pretty far behind the other children. I wasn’t very good but I kept at it. With my new rental cello, I could practice the music not just at school, but at home too. On top of practicing at home, the school formed lesson groups to work on our orchestra music. Mrs. Lamarck (a pseudonym), my orchestra teacher who played violin, set about teaching me to play the cello. I was put in a lesson group with two other students who struggled with their string instruments. I knew it was the lesson group for students who sucked at their instrument. I knew what sitting last chair meant. I didn’t mind all that much, after all, I liked playing the cello.
One day, in my lesson group with the two other students who struggled with their instrument, Mrs. Lamarck, the orchestra teacher told me that I, “should do the orchestra a favor and quit.” It had never before occurred to me that while I struggled to learn a new instrument, I was bringing other people down.

Despite Mrs. Lamarck’s protestations, I continued on with the cello through the fifth and sixth grades. In the seventh grade we moved to an upper middle school with a new orchestra teacher, Mr. Smith (a pseudonym). In the upper middle school there was a “select” orchestra of the best players that met afterschool. Everyone, coming up from sixth grade, even the other two string players in my struggling lesson group, signed up to audition. Except for me. I didn’t sign up to audition because I knew I was terrible. I sat last chair, I was in the sucky lesson group, and my teacher told me to quit. At this point, I wasn’t thinking about the select orchestra, I was debating quitting.

After playing for a few weeks in seventh grade, Mr. Smith, the seventh grade orchestra teacher, pulled me aside and asked me why I was not auditioning. He said that he noticed that I was the only student not auditioning. He said that he thought that I should give it a try. As the rest of the orchestra was tuning up, he asked me to play something for him. I didn’t recall what I played for him, but what I do remember was his smile after I finished playing. He said, “You got talent. It’s raw, but it’s talent.”

That evening, Mr. Smith called my parents and connected me with a cello teacher. He examined my cello and informed my parents that it was made of plywood and would not do. He then put my parents in contact with a local cello maker. We could not afford a new cello, the cello lessons alone were enough of a burden. However, despite seeing our old car pull into the drive way, Mr. Magbee (a pseudonym), the cello maker, let me take home three beautiful cellos to try out. Each one was worth substantially more than the car that drove them home.
Knowing full well that we really couldn’t afford a cello, I almost exclusively played, and fell in love with, the cheapest one. A beautiful German made number, it was a little beat up but played with a richness of tone that surprised me with every pull of the string. Mr. Magbee informed us that the cello was a fraction of the cost of the other two because it had been shot with a BB gun. I never, not to this day, know how or why my cello was shot with a gun, but I do know that the bullet only made its way through the soft spruce top of the cello. It never punctuated the hard maple back, and because of this, I believe it never had a large impact on the sound. Mr. Magbee told us that because of the bullet hole (that had been skillfully filled in) he could part with the cello for a fraction of its original price. My father worked out a payment plan for the cello and I baked Mr. Magbee a large, German chocolate cake.

I stuck with the cello. I worked with a lovely cello teacher who drilled, in the kindest way possible, all the basics. She taught me how to hold my bow the right way, how to keep my bow parallel to the bridge, my wrist flat, and my vibrato slow and strong. Half way through my seventh grade year, I auditioned for the select group, and I got in. By the eighth grade, I sat in the front row in the orchestra. In high school, I auditioned for one of the state’s most prestigious select orchestras for high school students. It was there that I met Nick, now my husband.

**Taking a Stand**

When I was teaching eighth grade in Brooklyn, my school wanted to offer Living Environment Regents, a high school level biology course to eighth grade students. In order to make the switch from the current eighth grade science curriculum to the Living Environment, there were many logistics to work out. Our school had ascribed to the New York City middle school science spiraling curriculum. This curriculum had a little bit of life science, earth science, and physical science spread out across sixth, seventh, and eighth grade. In the eighth grade, students typically had units in physics and astronomy, as well as biology. In order to offer Living
Environment and make sure that all students were still taught physics and astronomy, we had to do some maneuvering of the curriculum across all three grades.

Our science team, consisting of sixth, seventh, and eighth grade science teachers, met twice a month after school to come up with a plan as to how to best incorporate Living Environment regents in the eighth grade science curriculum. After much back and forth, the science team arrived at two different conclusions. Either we would condense the three years into two years for the “advanced” students and track right from the onslaught of middle school, or we would cut all biology from sixth and seventh grade curriculum and only track eighth grade. To determine who would make the cut for Living Environment, we would look at student performance. The indicators for performance that were selected were, an A average in science, high 3s and 4s on the state Math and ELA exams (top scores on a metric graded 1-4), and teacher recommendation.

Both of the proposed options involved tracking, so they were nonstarters for me.

I thought back to my time in orchestra. I remembered how I almost quit the cello. I recalled being a little behind everyone else, not knowing my instrument, and being taught by a teacher who played a completely different instrument than I. I remembered that I was told to sit in the back of the orchestra and I remembered how that felt. I then remembered how one teacher provided me with the tools that I needed to be successful. He was kind, patient, and cared. It made all the difference.

When our principal came and sat in on our meeting, I told my cello story. I told her, and my colleagues, that children become what we say they are. Children know when they are put into a low group. In middle school, so many of our students are forming their identities. I did not want any child to leave this school thinking that they were less than another child. I asked her to examine the math classes at our school, already tracked. I asked her to look at the color of the
skin of the students who were in the lower track. I told her that this new class was going to have a very similar system for sorting the students and that, I would be willing to bet, we will get a very similar result. I did not want to reproduce the past. If she wanted a new class, we should make a new class, one where everyone was invited.

The seventh grade teacher did not think my idea of offering Living Environment to everyone was a good one. There was too much content. She said the slow ones would hold everyone back. Your teacher rating is tied to your Regents test scores, do you really want students who are going to get low scores in your class? I have them now, I know they will struggle. You are setting them up to fail. What will trying and failing do to them?

**Theorizing Experience**

These science debates began just as I was entering into the program at the CUNY Graduate Center. At the time, I did not have much of a theoretical bricolage. My own experiences and observations were all that I had to guide me. Had I read Jeannie Oakes (1995), I would have had the data to back up my assertion about black and brown children being marginalized by tracking. Had I read Hugh Sackett (1987), I might have spoken up about *ethics of care* and doing the right thing by our students, not because of some outward measure, but because of what our situation calls for. Had I had a strong grasp on the history of tracking in our schools, I would have spoken up about the roots of biological determinism and talked about how *all* students have infinite potential (Stetsanko, 2017). I would have spoken about the lasting ripple effects of our actions (Roth & Tobin, 2002). I would have asked the committee to infuse some polyphonia and polysemia (Tobin, 2006) and speak to the students and parents to see how they felt about offering the Living Environment in eighth grade. I would have challenged the notion that students could not access the curriculum and I would have invited my colleagues to turn of the Living Environment curriculum on its head, reimagining it in an equitable way for our students.
Citing scholars such as Lev Vygotsky (1978) and John Dewey (1916/2004), I would reject the notion that we would be teaching our students only the content of an exam. Instead, I would embrace the idea that our students would be learning through experience. I would tell my team that students who struggled to access the curriculum through text would have other avenues to access the content. We would learn by playing and doing. We would learn through experience.

**A Bricolage Tells a Story Too**

It is curious what theories a person is drawn to. I have often wondered why I have included these specific theories in my bricolage. It is not as though these theories are ones that materialize when I need something to prove a point or back up a claim. These theories are much more than that, these theories are a part of me. My experiences have shaped not only how I think about the world, they have also shaped the theories that I have been drawn to.

I think that if I were to trace all of these theories to the root, I would find compassion at the core. I would find my deep yearning for students to love learning and want for all to leave school happy. So much of what I turn my attention to and write about is heartache. I suppose that I intend to use these theories to help myself and others find a bit of happiness and peace. I tell stories, and my bricolage tells stories too. The selection of each part of my bricolage was not accidental, it was shaped by my experiences. My theories and my experiences go hand-in-hand. In a way, the above theories and theorists, just like my experiences, have always been with me. I now have words to express them.

**Making a Change**

My principal listened to both arguments and in the end, decided to roll out the Living Environment to just sixty-four students in a class of nearly two hundred. She promised me that if all went well with the roll out, we would offer Living Environment to all students the following year. By testing measures, all did go well. All students passed the Living Environment Regents,
most with scores in the 90s range (near perfect). However, in the first week of school, I was inundated with angry parent emails wondering why their student was excluded. Students showed up to their non-Regents classes, sullen and defeated. As predicted, the Regents courses were mostly white students, save one student of color who was added to the roster in the first week of school after her father called the principal and pointed out that she had met all the criteria of being in the class. In all my years of teaching in Brooklyn, this year was one of the most difficult.

The next year, all students, regardless of race or disability, officially took the Living Environment Regents. I was so excited to offer the class to everyone. I was determined to make it so that the class was not about the test. The class was first and foremost a biology class. We were going to do a lot of really exciting and engaging science, with the Regents sprinkled within. I set about making the class as engaging as I could. We played RNA protein synthesis bingo. We extracted DNA from a strawberry, given only a few tools and no lab protocol. We learned about meiosis through studying the constructed nature of race. We found time to go on nature walks and learn about the trees on our block. We played tag to learn about transfer of energy through a food web. We learned about cell organelles through art, always diagraming with chalk on our giant lab tables. We took trips to Brooklyn Bridge Park where we cared for oysters, submitting data to the Army Corps of Engineers. After all of our hard work with the oysters, we would still find time to stop and sneak a slice of pizza on the way back to school. We cared for our school garden. Students helped with calendars, bulletin boards, chart paper, filing, and grading, all the while giving holistic feedback. Students helped each other after school. People came in to do labs (engineered bacteria to glow) and we went out into the community to visit college campuses and museums.
I tried to infuse the things that I loved about school into my classroom, and, for the most part, I think it worked. Everything was not perfect. Every day was not an adventure in experiential learning. However, I did try to infuse as much passion for science as I could into the lessons. In the end, ninety-six percent of our students passed the Living Environment and I think, I hope, that they enjoyed doing it.

Experiences Shape Us, Just As We Shape Experiences

I later spoke with the seventh grade teacher who was so against rolling out the Living Environment to everyone. As it turned out, the high school that she attended in the 1970s did some experimenting with de-tracking classes. She felt that the behavior of some of her classmates got in the way of learning. She did not want that to happen to our students. After speaking with her, I came to believe that she, too, was driven by compassion. However, she was coming from a different lived experience and therefore a different ontology, epistemology, and axiology than I. In speaking with her I realized how important it is to understand one’s own worldview, as it gives some insight into why it is that we may do the things that we do, and believe the things we believe. The whole experience made me think of the Authenticity Criteria for research (Tobin, 2019). I learned that I should not become entrenched in my own ideas about teaching and learning. Oncological authenticity, the ability to change and grow one’s ontology is so important. There is much to be learned from others. Listening and learning from others often gives nuance. It is through this experience that I realized that the theories and theorists that I am learning about are more than a bricolage, they are a way of being in | with the world.
A TRANSITION BETWEEN CHAPTERS: LA BARGE

Every day my father would drop me off at school saying, “Have a good day at the factory.” I would kiss him on the cheek, and swing shut the heavy door of our beige 1970s Chevy station wagon. In the mid-nineties, it was already an antique, and not in a good way. It smelled musty and the ceiling upholstery was tacked up in places. I remember how the drapes in the ceiling fabric would billow in the breeze when we opened the window on a hot summer day. I remember how my thighs would stick to the brown vinyl seats as we would sweat on road trips all along the eastern part of the United States. I remember too how one morning as we pulled up to school the lunch lady stepped out of her new Mercedes. I remember asking my father how it was that a lunch lady could afford a Mercedes. To which, he replied, “If it is important to you, you find a way of making it happen.”

The car was affectionately called la barge. My father said it translated to the boat. It doesn’t. La barge translates to the barge.

And so, every day, I rode in la barge to the factory.

Before I went to the factory, my day started at 5 am. My father and I would wake up, load up our dogs into the back of the car, and head to the woods for a walk. Here we would talk. He would tell me about Albania (he had some business dealings there- a casino I think), the Narragansett (he had some business dealings there too- also a Casino, I think), and sometimes stories of his adventures in Buffalo or Boston or San Francisco. I would mostly listen. He was a good storyteller.

After our walks, our dogs would hop up into la barge and we would head to the newspaper stand where my father would buy the New York Times, the Boston Globe, and the USA Today (for the sports). We would then walk next door to the donut shop where he would buy a coffee,
and occasionally a dozen donuts. He would always offer to purchase me a coffee as well, but my seven-year-old-self had not yet developed a taste for it.

We would then go home and stand on our heads—he said to get the blood flowing to our brains. He would make me a smoothie for breakfast. Worried that my seven-year-old vegetarian body was not getting enough protein, he would make me a smoothie with chocolate protein powder. God knows what went into those smoothies because they were putrid. I tried so hard to drink them, I really did. He would then sit at the kitchen table, reading his newspapers and drinking his coffee while I pretended to drink my smoothie. I would at some point devise a break-for-it and flush the contents of my cup down the toilet. I never wanted him to know how disgusting I found it.

I remember when our walks stopped. I was around thirteen years old. I had developed a taste for coffee, and I had some stories to tell. Only, he didn’t remember them. I was so frustrated and angry with him. How could he not remember?
CHAPTER 2. THE POSSIBILITY OF PLAY: UNDERSTANDING THE TRANSFORMATIVE NATURE OF PLAY AND EXPLORING POSSIBLE APPLICATION FOR PEOPLE WITH ALZHEIMER’S¹

Abstract

In this chapter I aim to explore the transformative power of play and the possibilities of encouraging play to empower people with Alzheimer’s disease and memory loss. I begin with a personal narrative involving a visit with my father. At the time of this visit, my father was in the advanced stages of Alzheimer’s disease and was residing in the memory loss unit of an adult day center. Questions about the possibilities of play as a modality for increasing autonomy and agency in people with Alzheimer’s disease and memory loss emerged as I spent time with my father and observed the actions of he and others with memory loss. In this chapter I begin to investigate the philosophy and role of play in society as I examine theories of play by scholars such as Lev Vygotsky and John Huizinga. These theories are tempered with my own impressionistic experiences and mindful observations while engaging in playful activities with people who have Alzheimer’s disease and memory loss.

¹ This chapter was previously published in: Goods, A. (2016). The possibility of play: understanding the transformative nature of play and exploring possible applications for people with Alzheimer’s. In M. Powietrzyńska & K. Tobin, (Eds.), Mindfulness and educating citizens for everyday life (pp.259-269). Rotterdam: Sense.
A Visit to the Memory Loss Unit

To visit the memory loss unit, I first had to check in with the guard; showing identification and signing the giant guest book located in the corner of the cold grey slab of the desk. I then walked down a long hallway past an abandoned café, an empty courtyard, and an extensive physical therapy room that seemed to be used on a day that I was not visiting. At the end of this long, pale, lavender hallway was an elevator that would jump to life as I entered the four-digit code that would take me to the fourth floor.

Upon arriving on the fourth floor, the doors of the elevator would open into a small pink room, on the walls a pixilated print of a painting of a field of flowers and a small house. Once the doors to the elevator closed, a four-digit code was entered again, opening a secured door into the memory loss unit.

The memory loss unit was set up like a hospital. The nurse’s station faced the elevator doors, and catty-cornered the two long, straight hallways with evenly spaced square bedrooms on each side. Each of the 24 bedrooms housed two identical beds, a bathroom, and an armoire to store personal belongings. Scattered about the bedrooms were personal effects that families had brought in; old black and white pictures of men in army uniforms, a wedding photo, a homemade quilt, a baseball cap.

The doors to the rooms remained open at all times, and, for the most part, all those who were able to be mobile did not spend much time in the rooms. The people of the memory loss community seemed to congregate about the common room across from the nursing station. There is where they ate their meals and generally sat and paced about.

Though nearly all the members of the memory loss unit tended to find their way to the common room, upon inspection, there seemed to be very little community interaction. People were talking and singing, though seemingly not to or with each other. Some were wandering
about, shuffling around the room in a pair of socks, seemingly looking for something they may have lost long ago.

At the time I arrived, lunch was being served. A cart was wheeled out, full of plates of ham sandwiches and bowls of cream of broccoli soup. The nurses began to help the residents find a seat in the common room to be served. A man walked up to a nurse. His face scrunched, his breathing heavy, he looked nervous. He said that he couldn’t eat; he did not have time, because the train is coming and he cannot be late for work. The nurse smiled and put her arm in his. She told him that the conductor radioed and the train is running late. He has time to eat before it comes. His face relaxed, seemingly relieved, he said, “ok,” and took a seat for lunch.

**Methodologies**

The extent of my understanding of people with memory loss living in nursing homes and rehabilitation communities goes deep, but is not wide. I write from my experiences and impressions as I try to empathize, identify with, and gain a deeper understanding of how my father was experiencing life while living with Alzheimer’s disease. My informal observations of the memory loss unit were gathered through conversations with my mother and observations of social interactions as I visited my father in the memory loss unit during the last three months of his life. I was so moved by what I saw when visiting that I felt an obligation to speak about the conditions in which people, human beings, were/are existing. As I spent more time around the retirement community, I was able to see beyond the pixilated pictures on the walls, the security desks, and the drab décor to see the random acts of compassion and truly mindful and playful interactions that seemed to be emerging organically between caretakers and people with memory loss. I began to wonder how adopting a framework of play might transform and improve the quality of life for both people with memory loss and their caretakers.
I am aware that there are limitations in my ideas about encouraging play in people with memory loss. Throughout my observations I was a transient visitor – an outsider, no video or audio recordings exist. I am reliant on my own memory and ontological framework. This is my own experience, an impressionistic tale, an amalgamation of many moments, strung together to create an image of a time past.

I aim to research play in people with Alzheimer’s memory loss using Guba and Lincoln’s Authenticity Criteria (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). I hope that through researching play I am able to infuse a little more joy into the lives of people that I research (ontological authenticity). I believe that play has the possibility to be a low-cost, low-stakes intervention that would benefit all participants. As caretakers of people with memory loss engage in positive and playful acts with the people they are caring for, they share an emotional reciprocity. I believe that it is through this positive emotional sharing that people with Alzheimer’s and memory loss and their caretakers can potentially increase agency and autonomy. Compassionate and mindful play has the possibility to transform and empower. Play with the kindest of intentions has the possibility to make all participants a little happier for having participated.

**Alzheimer’s Disease**

Alzheimer’s Disease is one of the most common forms of dementia and is characterized by memory loss that accelerates as a person ages. This memory loss typically begins in the middle to end of one’s life spectrum. Alzheimer’s is associated with certain physiological changes to the brain. Years before there are any clear symptoms of memory loss, plaques begin to develop between the neural connections within the brain. These plaques, made of a protein called beta-amyloid, begin to interfere with typical neural function in the brain, inhibiting neurons to make connections with each other. Additionally, a person with Alzheimer’s may have “tangles” throughout the brain. These “tangles” are made of a protein called tau that forms large fibrous
masses in the brain. The combination of beta-amyloid plaques and tau tangles results in neuron decay and death (Alzheimer’s Association, 2015). As a result, a person with Alzheimer’s loses memories, typically starting with short-term memory, progressing to loss of long-term embedded memory, and finally with memory of how to use one’s body.

In today’s society, loss of memory is often synonymous with loss of autonomy. In the case of my father, forgetting the placement of keys, phone numbers of friends, and the answers to the Sunday New York Times crossword puzzle soon progressed to forgetting where he lived, who his loved ones were, how to eat on his own, and where and when to go to the bathroom.

A quote from a recent article in the New York Times Magazine beautifully captures the progression of Alzheimer’s. “Others had stories like his, about people who watch their loved ones slip away, or people who go through the slipping away themselves, and are surprised to find a kind of grace in it: the Zen-like existence in an external now, the softening of hard edges, the glorification of simple pleasures (Marantz Henig, 2015).” This is how I would like to think it was for my father and is for many others living with memory loss.

I believe that in the first half of our lives, much of our time is spent looking forward, imagining, constructing and reconstructing life as we wish it to be. In comparison, a person at the end life may spend much time looking back into the past. In the case of my father, at least, much of his daily life seemed to be spent in another time. Past memories seemed to float in and out of his consciousness. At times, he seemed to be reliving aspects of his past, calling me by his sister’s name, listening to music from the fifties and asking young ladies to dance as if he was back in high school, looking for his briefcase and getting ready for work as if he still rode the train to New York City every day.

There were also times that my father seemed to be securely situated in the present, mindful of the minutia around him. There was a beautiful simplicity about these moments. A person who
had previously always seemed to be deep in thought, his mind always seeming to be going a million miles an hour and a thousand miles away, was now content to sit in the backyard, soaking in the sun, the smells, the flowers, and remarking on, “How amazing it all was.”

Though Alzheimer’s disease did expose his “soft edges,” our experiences and interactions with him were not always light-hearted. He would often get confused and disoriented. He would insist that the house that he was living in with my mother was not his home and demand to go home. If we told him that it was his home, he would become more agitated – violent even. So, we started to go along with him in whatever state of being he was in. Essentially, we began to play with him.

**Play and Mindfulness**

As I began to engage in research on play, defining and therefore identifying play became a challenge. Play, it seems, is an amorphous phenomenon that appears to shift shape depending upon who the participants of play are. The act of play has been described as engaging in make-believe scenarios such as playing house, or pretending to be police officers or firefighters. It has also been described as a game of tag, chess, soccer, or video games. Some view play as roughhousing with friends, climbing a tree, or building a sandcastle. Some see play in drawing a picture or writing a silly poem. Others experience play when betting on blackjack or dancing to music. To the participants, all are examples of play. Johan Huizinga (1980) writes, “The various answers they [participants] give tend rather to overlap than exclude one another” (p. 2). It is in this overlap that Huizinga begins to carve out the following epistemological framework of play.

First, play is a free and voluntary activity (Huizinga, 1980). This is not to say play is without rules. On the contrary, a framework of rules constructed by the participants binds most social play scenarios. The freedom of play does not come from an absence of rules, but rather lies in the joy of playing. It is in this joy that the participants find freedom.
Second, when engaging in play there is an absence of material consequences (Huizinga, 1980). In other words, a participant in play can construct a scenario, such as caring for a baby, and can experience emotions that go along with caring for a baby, as s/he engages in a creative and dynamic setting, exploring possibilities of action, without truly engaging in that action.

Third, the action of play may have a specific space, rules, and/or equipment (Huizinga, 1980). Take, for example, the man in the memory loss unit who did not want to eat lunch because he would be late for work. The nurse seamlessly entered into his constructed reality of the situation. She could have told him that he hadn’t worked in years and that he was in a unit for memory loss, but instead she met the man in the space that he had constructed, using the rules that he had put forth. Within that space she was able to guide him into eating a meal, calm him, and put him at ease.

In the above examples, play is described through a lens of positivity. Play, in the sense that I explain it in this chapter, exemplifies connectivity, interpersonal reciprocity of care, love, and compassion for the other. However, I feel it is important to note that play is not necessarily all of these things. Play has the capacity to be destructive and mean-spirited. The nature of a playful interaction is formed through the actions of the participants. As I examine play and its application with people with Alzheimer’s and memory loss, I choose to focus on play that is coming from a place of respect, care, and love; for I believe that in this type of play there are transformative possibilities in communicating and interacting with people with memory loss.

One of the challenges in researching play in people with memory loss is that an individual’s perception of play is contingent on how the individual is making meaning of the action in which s/he is participating. It is hard to say whether or not a person with memory loss is conscious of the construction of the rules in play. For example, a person with memory loss may really feel as though the baby doll that s/he is holding is her/his own child, or that if he stops to eat lunch that
he will truly be late for work. However, as the people with memory loss construct the rules, and as others (including caretakers) go along with these rules, I believe that the people with memory loss experience a sort of freedom to safely and happily exist in the reality that their mind and memories have created for them.

As a person interacts with another person with memory loss in a playful manner, s/he is acting with compassion. I believe that to truly engage in play, to slip into a constructed world of another human being, one must be deeply aware of the needs of the other. The person must be aware of his or her surroundings, of the scenarios put forth by another, and adapt her/his own interactions to meet the needs of the person with whom s/he is interacting. The person must be able to empathize. When slipping into a play mode, there is, for a moment, a lack of judgment, openness, and acceptance of the other. This, in its essence, is mindfulness.

**Play and Emotions**

Before my father needed the 24-hour care of an assisted living facility, he used to attend an adult day center. Every weekday morning a bus from the adult day center would come to pick up my father so that my mother could go to work without worrying about my father’s safety. Every day, my father would forget that he was leaving to go to the day-center and would not want to leave the house to get on the bus. My father would insist he was not going anywhere. Getting him out the door was a daily challenge.

One day the attendant from the adult day center had an idea. She walked into the house and gave my father a big kiss on the lips. This made him giggle. She said, “Come on Ed, it is time to go to work.” He immediately smiled and got on the bus. Once he was on the bus my father was quite amicable, telling the bus driver at every stop that he was, “doing an amazing job.”

The bus attendant could have walked through the door to my parents’ house and insisted that my father get on the bus. She could have yelled and demanded. She could have fought with him.
If she had done this, her negative outlook and demeanor could have spilled into the rest of the day, influencing all those around her. Instead, she chose to play with my father. She constructed a scenario that would entice him onto the bus with a smile. Her actions made both my father and her giggle. They boarded the bus arm in arm, a smile on both their faces, making everyone on the bus smile as well. Everyone involved was a little happier for having this interaction.

Jonathan Turner (2002) writes, “All face-to-face interacting is emotional. Natural Selection made humans emotional and […] emotional syntax is the primal and primary language of our species” (p. 231). With Alzheimer’s, a person slowly begins to lose language. With my father, words increasingly became difficult to articulate. Sentences became a jumble of non-sequitur nouns and verbs. Conversations fell by the wayside as they stopped to make sense, both for me and, it seems, for him. However, until the very end of his life, my father was able to respond to emotions. He was able to pick up on the vibe in the room. If we were sad, he too was sad. If we were happy, he too was happy. Holding his hand and a smile were the best ways to give life to his increasingly vacant demeanor. A giggle and a hug brought life to his face.

This emotional reciprocity is one of the reasons that I believe engaging in play with people with Alzheimer’s has the potential to be transformative. In this example, play is inherently fun. It makes us smile, laugh, and lighten our mood. Play, in turn, helps all those around us lighten as well. Because the attendant engaged in a playful scenario with my father, he was happy once he was on the bus and started to participate in the activities of the day. We saw this in the pictures my mother would receive via text message and email of my father joining in various activities; dancing, walking on the beach, enjoying coffee with friends, all with a big smile on his face. He was safer and happier at the adult day center than he was at home. This attendant’s act of play eased a confusing and difficult transition for him and ultimately made all participants’ days a little smoother.
The attendant’s interventions while assisting my father also gave my father the opportunity for my father to “become aware of the unaware” (Powietrzyńska, 2014). With a playful kiss, the attendant helped my father to conjure the joy that was within him and move forward to fully participate in the day’s activities. In that moment, I believe that the attendant helped my father to be mindful of his surroundings and awaken to the kindness and caring intentions of the people surrounding him.

We, as a family, learned from this interaction. As my father progressed deeper into Alzheimer’s, he would spend many nights pacing about the house insisting that we take him home. We would gently tell him that he was already home. This would make him more and more agitated. He would begin to curse us and yell that we needed to take him home. We in turn, would become upset because we felt as though no amount of reasoning could alleviate his stress about wanting to go home. We could not figure out where he thought home was. We felt that we could not take him where he needed to go.

Finally, we had an idea. We told my father that we were going to take him home. We walked him out to the car and got in. We turned on the car stereo to his favorite music, Bob Dylan, and drove around the block. My father at once began to relax. Five minutes later, we reentered the driveway to our home and got out of the car. We announced that we were home. My father thanked us for an “amazing job driving” and reentered the house, calm, relaxed, and happy.

We had just engaged in an act of play with my father. Together, we had constructed and defined the rules of the game (going for a ride around the block to our “home”), we used specific equipment (the car and music), and there was an absence of material consequences (we arrived back the very same place that we started, pretending it was a new place). We reacted to my father’s anguish and confusion with compassion. We slipped into his reality (that he was not, in fact, home) and, through being mindful of his needs, we together constructed a new reality in
which my father could find solace. In this act of playing with my father, existing in his constructed reality, we were able to connect with him and help him to be happy.

**Play in Practice**

In the Fall of 1981, Ellen Langer conducted a study in which eight men in their 70s went on a retreat to a monastery in New Hampshire. The monastery had been converted to appear as though it was 1959. Everything inside, the TVs, books, magazines, furniture, clothes, and eating utensils, were identical to objects that would have been present in 1959. The men staying at the monastery were expected to act as if it was 1959 and they were 20 years younger. What Langer found was that the men in the experience actually seemed to reverse some telltale signs of aging. In viewing before-and-after photos, independent interviewees actually thought that the men appeared younger. The men had increased manual dexterity, were more independent, and were happier (Langer, 2009).

Though I do not know if Langer herself would agree that the experience she created was an act of play, I believe it fits the criteria set forth above. The men voluntarily engaged in an activity that created/recreated new/old constructed reality. The participants were temporarily released from the consequence of aging as they allowed themselves to shift back into a time when they were much younger. The participants existed in a specific place, with specific objects and rules that assisted the men in shifting their ontological framework.

Lev Vygotsky has said that through play, a child becomes “a head taller than himself” (Vygotsky, 1978). This famous quote rests on Vygotsky’s assertion that through play a child is operating within his or her Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) and is therefore performing at a “higher level” than when not engaged in play. Were the men in Langer’s study performing at a “higher level” because they were engaging in a new/old constructed reality? Because they were, in a sense, playing?
I believe that the men in Langer’s study also experienced compassion through play. Through this study, Langer was able to empathize with the men, helping them to construct and exist in this world of the past and ultimately relieve some dis-ease of aging. The participants in the Langer study played that they were 20 years younger, and through this playing, the men were able to shed the constructed reality of aging and awaken to the possibilities of youth rediscovered.

What can this experiment tell us about the power of the mind? How did a shift in place and action contribute to a shift of the physiological signs of aging? Richard Davidson, a neuroscientist writes extensively about the way that the brain is constantly changing in response to experiences. The term that Davidson uses to define this phenomenon is “neuroplasticity” (Davidson, 2007).

Human beings have amazingly plastic brains. During our early childhood, we especially experience an explosion of neural activity. It is this explosion of neural activity that aids young children in acquiring vast amounts of language, dexterity, and allows for the acquisition of many cultural and developmental milestones in a relatively short amount of time (Wilson, 2013). Though this neural development may slow as we age, it does not have to limit our capacity to learn, grow, and experience new things. Tried and tested strategies used with developing children could potentially hold merit with adults.

We cannot and should not limit our ideas about human potential and possibility to the development of the brain during childhood. John Dewey (1916/2004) warns us of the dangers of ascribing to the idea that adulthood is the end of growth, writing:

The fulfillment of growing is taken to mean an accomplished growth: that is to say, an Ungrowth, something which is no longer growing. The futility of the assumption is seen in the fact that every adult resents the imputation of having no further possibilities of growth; and so far as he finds that they are closed to him mourns the fact as evidence of loss, instead of falling back on the achieved as adequate manifestation of power. Why an unequal measure for child and man? (p. 48).
A human being has the ability to learn, grow, and develop throughout one’s lifetime. However, it is the formation of the brain during childhood that has garnered much attention and curiosity throughout human history, prompting many cultures to adopt practices of teaching and learning during this time in various modalities throughout the world (Lave, 1996). Extensive research has been done on the effects of play on development in children. There are whole academic journals dedicated to the subject (e.g., The American Journal of Play) and many anthropologists, developmental psychologists, teachers, parents, principals, children, and zoologists all tout the benefits of play on development. But why is it that the examination of play and its potential benefits end in childhood. If play is so important to the development of children, then can the benefits of play also be beneficial to the development of adults?

In my mind, the term “development” goes hand in hand with “progress.” Progress is often defined as moving further, forwards (Merriam-Webster, 2015). It is difficult to think of someone in the throes of memory loss as moving forward, as progressing in a positive way. However, I believe that we need to shift the paradigm of how we think about aging. I believe that we can apply Vygotsky’s theory of ZPD to the people with Alzheimer’s / Memory loss if we shift the way we think about development and aging from palliative care to transformative action. In applying ZPD principles with people with Alzheimer’s / Memory loss, we are not limited to thinking about development as growing and learning to be an adult but may also consider development as including building social relationships, increasing mobility, increasing engagement with surroundings, and promoting a general feeling of happiness.

Play gives us purpose, through this purpose, people with Alzheimer’s gain agency. As a person progresses into Alzheimer’s s/he slowly loses her/his autonomy. Men or women who had previously spent their days working with their hands, solving problems, driving, cooking, and making their own decisions may all of a sudden find themselves emotionally and/or physically
trapped. When children play, they often play at being an “adult.” We can allow people with Alzheimer’s to do the same. Play in children aids in development. Perhaps by facilitating play in people with memory loss, we can actively engage their brain, and in consequence help them to develop in a positive way.

Langer observed increased mobility, increased engagement, and increased happiness with the participants of her 1981 study (Langer, 2009). I believe that if we actively engage in play as caretakers of people with Alzheimer’s / Memory loss, we will see marked improvements not only in the residents of memory loss units, but through emotional reciprocity and mindful interactions, we will see improvements of outlook in ourselves.

My mother used to say that in caring for my father, if we did not laugh we would cry. Just as caretakers have the ability to join in the constructed situations, caretakers also have the ability to participate in the construction of the pretend activity. I recall sitting around our kitchen table for dinner and my mother saying, “Watch this.” She turned to my father and began to laugh about nothing at all. My father too began to laugh heartily. In turn, all of us, sitting about the table began to laugh together. We shared an emotional reciprocity, an interconnectivity of feeling and being. In this interconnectivity, we had a choice. We had the power to enact happiness and playfulness, to be creative and imaginative in our interactions with others. In doing this, we entered into a sort of Möbius strip of positivity, love, and trust, transforming the outlooks of those around us. Through these interactions, we are able to elicit some happiness in what sometimes felt like bleak and sad times. When actively engaging in play and laughter, we as a family, were all better off for having participated.
A TRANSITION BETWEEN CHAPTERS: TEACHING AS A HEURISTIC

When I was a graduate student at Brooklyn College, Malgorzata Powietrzyńska, a PhD student at CUNY Graduate Center at the time, brought in a heuristic to share with the class. As I recall, the heuristic was about mindfulness. It was set up like a questionnaire, yet it wasn’t a questionnaire. Each criterion on the page was a statement followed by a number, 1 through 5. We were to read the statement, think about it, and assign a number to the statement. The number assigned was of little interest to Malgorzata, as the purpose of the heuristic was not to collect data, but rather to spark some inward dialogue— to make us aware of something that perhaps we were not aware of. It was a rating based upon intuition. As I read through the heuristic, reading and rating each criterion, I lingered on the words, ruminating and thinking about them. Through a flick of a pencil, marking down a 1, 5, or 3, certain criterion entered into my psyche and became a part of me. I thought about them long after leaving class.

In some ways, I see some overlap in the heuristic I did with Malgorzata in Brooklyn College and my own praxis as a teacher. Like the intuitive nature of a heuristic, I have found that there is a certain intuitive nature to my work as a teacher. With thousands of tiny, micro interactions throughout the day, for me, it would be difficult, if not impossible to think, ruminating and digest each one before acting. Like the criterion on the page, I react in the best way that I know how to react in that moment. In a different field, with different people, on a different day, or in a different mood, I might react completely differently. This is okay, as it is the nature of being in the world. Though, like the criteria of the heuristic, I often pick one of these little moments and ruminate and think on it. As I think on it, these little moments and interactions start to become part of my repertoire. Though each event is unique, there is sometimes some coherence, either thick or thin, between them. Through reflexivity I learn from these events as they become a part of me.
I read Malgorzata’s heuristic almost a decade ago, yet there are still criteria that stick with me. The heuristic was educative, as I learned and change because of having read it. A few of the criterion became a part of me. In the chapter before, I wrote of using play when interaction with my father and people with Alzheimer’s disease and memory loos. My father has passed, but the events and lessons learned remain, and I take them with me as I approach new interactions, fields, events, and situations. What I have learned from my father has become part of me and expanded my repertoire of action.

In the next chapter, I also explore events and interactions, yet in a different way. In this chapter, I use V-Note, a video analysis software, to examine an event at the CUNY Graduate Center. Through examining this event, only 12 seconds of silence, I learned just how complex unraveling an event with multiple participants can be. I learned here the difference between “thick” and “thin” coherence, as the more I employed event oriented inquiry and examined an event the more contradictions emerged. I shared a video of the event with the students of the class, and I think that we all internalized it in different ways. I wonder if it is possible that video acted like a heuristic for each one of us?
CHAPTER 3. V-NOTE: A VIDEO ANALYSIS TOOL FOR TEACHER | RESEARCHERS

Abstract

In the Fall of 2017, I was introduced to V-Note, a software tool for analyzing audio and video in the classroom. I quickly adapted to using V-Note in research as it is easy to navigate, widely accessible, and most necessary features are included for free. Through this paper, I explore some possible applications of V-Note in education research. I first begin by examining the theoretical perspectives through which I approach using V-Note as a research tool, such as the embrace of reflexivity, hermeneutic phenomenology, multilogicality, polysemia, and polyphonia. Using these theoretical perspectives, I utilize event oriented inquiry to investigate clips from a graduate level class with a special focus on quality of teaching and learning, emotions, and wait time between speakers. As I investigate video vignettes from our class using V-Note, I share these vignettes with class members and invite participants to reflect back upon events together. As we re-watch and analyze the events in the video using V-Note, we learn from each other and in turn, change our practices in the classroom.

Situating V-Note Software in One Teacher | Researcher’s Bricolage

Reflexivity (Bourdieu, 2013) is important, if not essential, when teaching to learn and learning to teach. The ability to circle back upon a phenomenon, observe it, dissect it, deconstruct and reconstruct it, contextualize and nuance it, has the potential to bring a wealth of new and illuminating knowledge to an event. In this way, a snapshot of a moment can be a

---


33
window into micro, meso, and macro fields of history that dialectically play with the present and future. From the acceleration of a heartbeat and the drop of blood oxygen level, to a sideways glance or utterance, to an eruption of chaos, the examination of all events may give careful observers a deeper understanding of the world around them, and therefore may inform and change their practices as they interact with the world.

In 2015, Konstantinos Alexakos published Being a teacher | researcher: A primer on doing authentic inquiry research on teaching and learning. In the title of the book, Alexakos chose to place the Sheffer stroke in between teacher and researcher to illustrate a dialectical relationship between being a teacher and a researcher. This dialectical relationship also highlights the importance of reflexive practices as a teacher | researcher. Teachers who engage in recursive and reflexive practices are constantly learning from their interactions in the classroom, and because of this, they are becoming better teachers. As teachers engage in this learning, they are researchers, and just as they are researchers, they are teachers. Research, in this sense, does not exist in ivory towers where academics hypothesize and test subjects, but rather is hermeneutic and phenomenological (Tobin, 2006) and based upon participation and lived experiences.

The lived experiences that researchers interact with do not occur in a vacuum. They are enmeshed with human interaction. Learning in a classroom with other people is an inherently social process as individuals share space and language. This shared language is deeper than spoken word as it encompasses body movements and proximity. The study of how people use this shared space is called proxemics. Careful observation of proxemics can illuminate what is unsaid by individuals and has the potential to bring to the forefront attitudes, values, and emotions about teaching and learning in the classroom.

Randall Collins (2005) has written extensively about how shared and reciprocal interactions create rituals that promote mutual emotions and common behaviors. A class acting in synchrony
can create entrainment as collective culture is generated. In this harmony, a teacher and learner might find peaks in mutual learning opportunities.

However, not all learning in the classroom happens in times of unity. Often, it is in struggle and discordance that learning occurs. The idea of learning from difference is one supported by Lev Vygotsky’s theory of Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) and scaffolding (1978). In ZPD, there is a difference between what students can do and know independently, what they can learn with some help, and what still lies beyond their reach. Students who receive appropriate scaffolding will continue to grow and learn, creating knowledge with the help of those around them. In this way, teaching and learning should embrace difference, conflict, and struggle, as it is in these places of uncertainty and discordance that learning occurs.

Skilled educators learn through interactions. They learn when it is appropriate to step in and provide scaffolding and when it is appropriate to step aside and let students struggle and figure it out on their own. They navigate these interactions moment by moment, and do not always make the right choice of how to react to a particular interaction. In my own experiences as a classroom teacher, I would often leave school playing the events of the day back again and again in my mind, ruminating upon the interactions and how I could have done better and if the actions that I took were the right actions to take. As the nature of the interactions color the way we teach and learn in the classroom, I often wonder how having access to video recordings could illuminate small nuances and intricacies in these interactions and better inform how we are as teachers and learners in the classroom.

As teachers spend the bulk of their day in face-to-face interactions, emotions also play an important role in promoting learning. Navigating the school day entails maneuvering through a cacophony of emotion-laden interactions and making in-the-moment judgements on how to respond within each of these interactions. The choices that teachers make while engaging with
others, can have profound and lasting effects. Like a ripple radiating from a stone thrown into a pond, these interactions expand outward. A word of encouragement or a smile has the potential to lift up a student and become a catalyst for great things to occur. A misplaced scowl and ill-conceived statement, whether intentional or not, has the potential to extinguish a passion or dream and change students’ outlooks and trajectory throughout their educational experience. Teachers’ emotional states often influence their emotional affect, and as a result of emotional resonance and contagion, their students’ learning may be impacted. Therefore, it is of utmost importance for teachers to see themselves as emotional beings and be aware of how their emotions, positive or negative, are cascading outward and impacting their daily interactions.

When doing any research, one may ask oneself why it is that they are examining and investigating the phenomena they have chosen. Perhaps it is curiosity. Perhaps it is a discrepant event, or perhaps it is even a moment of synchrony. No matter what the event, a teacher | researcher’s interest is mediated by the interplay of one’s own historical construct, which is mediated by one’s unique ontology, epistemology, and axiology. Each teacher | researcher’s unique individual constructs are also intertwined with the collective and influenced by all that is around them. This one-of-a-kind collective | individual dialectic creates a unique blend to event oriented inquiry (Tobin 2015).

Ultimately, in the decision the teacher | researcher makes to put words on a page and publish one’s findings, that researcher can only hope that others will read this work and learn from it. It is in this act that another voice and perspective is put out into the universe to become part of an ongoing dialogue on teaching and learning. Each voice and interpretation is valued and valuable and adds to the polyphonia, polysemy, and multilogicality (Tobin 2006) that enrich the field of educational research.
When attempting to embrace polyphonia, polysemy, multilogicality, hermeneutic, and phenomenological research there are tools that teacher | researchers may want to use. One such tool may be a video recorder. The recordings used in this article were made during a PhD level class in Teaching and Learning at the CUNY Graduate Center. As with emergent research, it is difficult, if not impossible, to predict when an event that piques curiosity in researchers might occur. In this class, the video was nearly always recording. Because of the pervasive nature of video recording, overtime, participants seem to become more at ease with being videotaped. An IRB approval was obtained for the class, and any classroom participant was encouraged to explore and research classroom events taking on the role of teacher | research | student | learner. The video recordings of the class were uploaded to a shared Google Docs document where all participants could view them. This not only encouraged research but also helped students to catch-up on material when class was missed.

Recently, Ken Tobin, the CUNY Graduate Center professor leading the Teaching and Learning in Urban Settings class at the CUNY Graduate Center, introduced me to V-Note, a video analysis tool that could be used when researching video and audio. He encouraged me to try out the V-Note software when viewing class video in order to identify events that may be of interest to study. I was immediately impressed by the ease of use of V-Note as well as the potential to use V-Note as a tool in hermeneutic and phenomenological research. In this chapter, I provide a basic how-to guide and introduction to V-Note software and put the software to use in a preliminary study based on events identified in our Teaching and Learning in Urban Settings class. My hope is to illustrate both the basics on how to use V-Note and how V-Note may be a tool for reflexive pedagogical practices.
The V-Note Basics – All About the V-Note

V-Note is an audio and video analysis software available for free download from v-note.org. Conceptualized by educator-researcher Brandon Emig (Penn State), the software has potential for use not only in education research, but also in sports, medicine, legal work, teacher training, and a variety of other research fields (V-Note 2018). V-Note software creates a platform that encourages deep analysis and collaboration using video. Users can upload a video file and can create labels with one click, transcribe audio, draw on videos, do statistical analysis and export data to a variety of programs such as Excel®, or SPSS®. The software works on a variety of platforms including Mac, Windows, and IOS. V-note also supports a variety of movie files H.264, .mp4, .mov, .m4v, WebM (VP8), and .wma and is 95% accurate in synchronizing audio recordings using an external microphone and video camera when recording. As a researcher who considers herself to have moderate computer skills, I find the ease of use of V-Note to be the most striking. All controls seem to be intuitive and as I dig deeper into analysis, I find that I uncover more and more useful features as I need them.

One such feature is the ability to share projects. In the free V-Note software, all users have the ability to publish and share their video using product key. This free feature allows for unlimited streaming of files that are stored on the V-Note Cloud as long as they are up to one-half an hour in length. Premium upgrades allow for greater cloud storage. Pricing packages can be found at https://v-note.org/price). The ability to share projects using V-Note can be important when engaging in research that embraces polysemeia, many ways of knowing, and polyphonia, many voices, as the researchers are able to easily incorporate the thoughts and input of many into one project. The researcher has the option of inviting participants with a uniquely generated link in order to add to existing analysis or simply view the work. The sharing of video can also be used in publication, so readers can not only engage with analysis via screenshots and
transcriptions, but can also watch videos further adding to the nuance and understanding of analyzed events.

To begin to use V-note, audio and video clips can be uploaded as easily as dragging and dropping the file into the V-Note browser. Once a video or audio clip is uploaded, it automatically begins to play, populating waveforms of the audio track below. If a teacher | researcher would like to play back a video or audio recording, simply double-click on the video viewer to enable the video to enter full screen. One of the aspects of V-Note that I find so appealing is that as events in the video or audio emerge warranting further investigation, there are readily available tools at the user’s disposal to take a deeper look at what is happening.

For example, in the Labels section of the browser, beneath the Waveforms, simple single strokes from keys can delineate events of interest. Users may choose either to use the default key strokes such as A for label 1, B for label 2, etc., or to reassign the key strokes by double-clicking on the letter and typing the letter of their choice. As evidenced in images 1 and 2 the label may also be renamed by double-clicking and typing in the desired label name. When an event occurs, that a teacher | researcher is interested in highlighting, they need only strike a key to make a notation in the labeling section. Once the notation begins, a colored bar populates the event track from the duration of the event until the key is struck again. For example, in Image 2, the blue bar represents when Ken is speaking, the red bar when Pearl is speaking, and the yellow bar when there is silence.
Figure 3. 1. The Opening screen of V-Note

Figure 3. 2. Custom labels and combined segments in Movie Builder.

After labeling, a teacher | researcher may want to study the selected events more carefully.

To do this, the teacher | researcher may turn to the Movie Builder located at the bottom of the V-Note window. Movie Builder isolates the tracks of each assigned label and combines them into
one movie. The Movie Builder feature also makes it is possible to export this video/audio. This can be especially useful when isolating selections that the teacher | researcher hopes to study more in depth, creating highlight reels, and/or sectioning out smaller segments of a larger video or audio recording.

In my own research, I have found the addition of transcripts in V-Note to be especially helpful. To activate Transcript Mode,” one simply clicks on the speech bubble icon on the grey menu bar on the right-hand side of the V-Note window as in figure 3. Once in Transcript Mode, click on the first icon on the top toolbar above the transcript window. This will enable transcription and a translucent yellow bar will appear over the waveforms and label section of the viewer. This yellow bar is a “loop” that will allow the audio/video that is contained in this loop to be played again and again for easier transcription. The default loop length is 5 seconds, however, the length can be adjusted in the “looping settings” section that appears under the transcription toolbar. I also found it helpful to increase the Time Scale on the bottom right of the window. This allows the teacher | researcher to have a more in-depth view of utterances in the waveform track.

Once the researcher is ready to write a transcription, the teacher | researcher inputs the speaker name and the text spoken into the transcription mode matrix. The inputted text displays on the movie viewer screen for the assigned duration. In the instance displayed in Figure 3, the duration of the utterances 4 second, the speaker is Ken and the Text is, “I think you were going to say something a bit earlier, [weren't you? Yeah].” Once the text is typed in the transcript window, it also appears as captions in the viewer. To end the transcription of an individual utterance, the researcher simply clicks the text bubble with the three lines and moves the yellow loopbox using the arrows in order to continue transcribing text.
Possible Applications: How V-Note Was Used for Reflection in a Graduate Level Course

Early in the Spring 2018 semester, Ken Tobin invited me to coteach with him in the *Teaching and Learning in Urban Settings* class I was taking at the CUNY Graduate Center. As part of coteaching, we would introduce my classmates to the V-Note software. I jumped on this opportunity because I felt that leading the class would illuminate more about the software and could serve as a catalyst to further this very paper. In order to prepare, I watched a video recording of the previous class, from which I was absent and set about using V-Note with the goal of identifying a few events through which I could analyze prosody, speech, and proxemics, space. In reviewing the video, an event involving an exchange between Ken and Pearl a student emerged as being especially salient. In the following exchange, Ken and Pearl discuss an assigned reading on metalogues (Bateson 1975). The transcript is as follows. It should be noted...
that this transcript was easily exported from V-Note to excel, where it was then inserted into this chapter.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Speaker</th>
<th>Start</th>
<th>End</th>
<th>Speech</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ken</td>
<td>00:00.295</td>
<td>00:03.295</td>
<td>I think you were going to say something a bit earlier, [weren't you? Yeah].</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pearl</td>
<td>00:02.470</td>
<td>00:06.470</td>
<td>Yeah, it just seemed, uh, very philosophical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pearl</td>
<td>00:06.470</td>
<td>00:11.470</td>
<td>that it was just a discussion of sharing perspective and ideas, because</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pearl</td>
<td>00:10.781</td>
<td>00:16.781</td>
<td>they never or there were very few consensus, consensuses? reached?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pearl</td>
<td>00:17.000</td>
<td>00:22.000</td>
<td>and, uh, every time a question was posted or, um, restated, um</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pearl</td>
<td>00:22.000</td>
<td>00:24.000</td>
<td>but it was elevated,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pearl</td>
<td>00:23.508</td>
<td>00:26.508</td>
<td>that they did go down a couple of wormholes, but</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pearl</td>
<td>00:26.578</td>
<td>00:32.578</td>
<td>with no real answers, ah, so it seemed a lot like a philosophical debate. [voice gets softer and fades away]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ken</td>
<td>00:32.555</td>
<td>00:36.555</td>
<td>Well there is no surprise there, right, with the guys involved</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ken</td>
<td>00:37.059</td>
<td>00:40.059</td>
<td>so I think that's a good point and I thank you for it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------</td>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ken</td>
<td>00:40.929</td>
<td>00:47.929</td>
<td>Cause obviously it depends on who you are and what your intentions are in having the metalogue in the first place</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ken</td>
<td>00:48.075</td>
<td>00:52.075</td>
<td>[...] uh, yeah, the wormholes, I like that. Hah.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>00:52.925</td>
<td>01:04.925</td>
<td>[Silence]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ken</td>
<td>01:05.1</td>
<td>01:15.105</td>
<td>Ok. So metalogue is a tool that you may use in your writing. It’s a tool</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 3.4. Dialogue between Ken and Pearl*

I selected this minute and fifteen second clip because at 52s of the exchange there is a pause in conversation that lasts for 12 seconds. To many, 12 seconds may not feel like a lengthy pause, however, in my experiences in graduate level classes, most conversation often ebbs and flows with little more than a fraction of a second, or at most a few seconds between utterances. While watching the video the length of the pause felt awkward and strange and left me wondering about why such a pause occurred. Since I was not in class during this time, I decided to share the pause with the class and get their immediate responses and thoughts on the pause. In the interest of pursuing hermeneutic and phenomenological research I asked, “What was happening? Why did it happen? What else is there?” I had some of my own ideas as to why such a pause occurred, however, I wanted to speak with my classmates to uncover more about the pause. During third class, we used V-Note to watch together the short one-minute vignette of the dialogue between Ken and Pearl that also contained the 12 second pause. We discussed the pause and found that,
when watching the replay of the video, many of my classmates were as surprised as me to witness the 12-second pause. As a class, we discussed the pause. After class, a few participants shared with me their thoughts while watching the vignette. They are as follows:

Elizabeth’s Response

Recently after one of Ken’s classes, Amy, one of our class members, used the V-Note application to review and reflect upon the teaching and learning of the previous class. While reviewing the video recording, she was particularly perplexed by a 12-second pause time or dead-time which occurred after Ken’s and Pearl’s discussion on metalogues. This large pause time or “disruptive event,” according to Sewell, between Pearl and Ken, was not noticeable during the class. However, it was only after Amy pointed it out during the coteaching with Ken in the following class, that we were made aware of it. Of course, my coparticipants and I were just as mystified as Amy to understand what happened and why it happened. In addition, I wanted to discover what else was happening. Amy revealed that this discrepant event was very unusual for a doctoral class, because most participants are generally eager to participate in class discussions. Ken emphasizes that during a discrepant event or contradiction, transformation of knowledge often takes place. Therefore, this was an opportunity in which participants may learn from each other’s ontologies.

Each participant’s ontology was unique as to why there was a 12-second pause time. It seems to me that the dialogue between Pearl and Ken appears to be a private one. Both Ken and Pearl were facing each other while maintaining eye contact, and Pearl spoke in a low voice. Hence, I got the impression that this communication was exclusive. These two were locked in a dialogue in their own personal space, while the rest of participants watched from a distance. With this in mind, after Ken had responded to Pearl’s articulate analysis of metalogues, I was waiting to hear how Pearl would respond. The dialogue between Ken and Pearl appears to be discreet. In retrospect, I did not wish to join in the dialogue between the two participants, in fear of wrongly interpreting metalogues. The readings that were given of metalogues were extremely philosophical and profound, and personally I did not think I connected with that topic. It should also be noted that this was the second week of the class and most of the participants were strangers, and probably, like myself, were fearful of being judged as unintelligent if my
understanding of metalogues was not similar to the rest of the participants. The following ontologies, such as the assumed exclusive dialogue between Pearl and Ken, not connecting with the topic of metalogues, and the fear of being judged are my reasons for not participating in the dialogue immediately after Ken’s and Pearl’s dialogue, thus contributing to the 12-seconds pause time.

I was so grateful that Elizabeth chose to share her reflections after watching the exchange between Ken and Pearl and the subsequent 12 second pause because through this sharing, Elizabeth uncovered aspects of teaching and learning in our class that I feel are important to address and could have easily been overlooked had we not had the opportunity to reflect using V-Note. For example, Elizabeth speaks about her reluctance to speak, feeling that, “the dialogue between Pearl and Ken appears to be a private one. Both Ken and Pearl were facing each other while maintaining eye contact, and Pearl spoke in a low voice. Hence, I got the impression that this communication was exclusive. These two were locked in a dialogue in their own personal space, while the rest of participants watched from a distance.”

I found this assessment of the exchange to be very interesting because I suppose that I had never considered that others might consider a verbal exchange during a whole class discussion to be exclusive or exclusionary. As a teacher | learner, this revelation taught me of the importance of making conscientious efforts to bring others into group conversations. However, I still struggle with how is the best way to do so. Should I invite students in by name? Should I look around the room and notice who seems ready to speak? If certain students seem always ready to speak, how is it that I can make speech and sharing in a class equitable?

Elizabeth also shared an important point that may lead to a deeper understanding of the event. This was only that the event occurred, “second week of the class and most of the participants were strangers, and probably, like myself, were fearful of being judged as
unintelligent if my understanding of metalogues was not similar to the rest of the participants.”

This is a point that I found to be especially salient because of my own research interests in emotional climates in class. We are all emotional beings. Our emotions are saturated with an intersection of our biology, history, social, and cultural lived experiences. Additionally, we have certain affective tendencies (habits of emoting, i.e., emotional resting state) that are nuanced by core affect (how we are feeling at any one particular moment), and influenced by an interaction or episode that results in a particular outcome (Schutz, Aultman, & Williams-Johnson, 2009).

The personal nature of emotions, along with the dialectical relationship that the self has with the surrounding world, makes research on emotions difficult because the factors that influence any given emotional episode can be exponential. Although research on emotions can be challenging, it is ultimately very important. It is especially salient when looking at teacher emotions in urban settings, as issues of teacher burnout, retention, student graduation rates, and achievement are at the forefront of urban education today.

Led by Ken Tobin at the CUNY Graduate Center and in Australia, in the past five years there has been an increase in literature on the effects of emotions on teaching and learning as well as on overall wellness. These studies have ranged from examining heart rates and emotions while teaching and learning about race (Amat, Zapata, Alexakos, Pride, Paylor-Smith, & Hernandez, 2016), initiating mindfulness practices in order to understand emotions in a teacher preparation program (Powietrzyńska & Gangji, 2016) understanding how negative emotions can affect both health and teaching and learning in an urban high school science classroom (Tobin & Llena, 2014). These studies have largely focused on event oriented inquiry, analyzing emotions in micro and meso interactions by observing heart rate and blood oxygen levels, proxemics, prosody, and cogenerative dialogues. Coupled with an Authentic Inquiry Framework (as cited in Tobin & Richie, 2012), many of these studies have used breathing, cogenerative dialogues,
meditation, and mindfulness in order to ameliorate some of the negative physiological effects of teaching and learning in urban settings. These studies have been transformative for many of those who have participated in them, as adopting the tenets of Authentic Inquiry entails that all participants are better off for having participated in the study. In knowing many people who have been involved in these studies, I can say with confidence that through these studies, many people have adopted strategies and gained skills to ameliorate negative emotions and feel better suited to tackle difficult teaching situations.

Often, a teacher might consciously or subconsciously tailor interactions based upon who is participating in the interaction. These interactions may also be influenced by core affect and/or outside forces such as a negative experience on the subway that day or a disagreement one had outside of school. Reflexive and reflective teachers may seek to learn from these interactions and shift the nature of our exchanges based upon perceived intrapersonal reactions. The ability to shift the emotional energy of an interaction, should the energy by perceived as negative or harmful, can be difficult and it is a skill that comes with practice, patience, awareness, and time. With this skill, teachers have the ability to enact powerful and meaningful learning opportunities and change within their students.

A doctoral level class is not devoid of these emotions. Feelings of insecurity can permeate the classroom at all instructional levels. As a researcher, I am interested in learning more about what a teacher | learner can do to ameliorate these negative feelings and promote sharing in the classroom.

Earlier, I asked questions as to uncover the best approach to actively include all classmates in a discussion. I worried that in this exchange between Ken and Pearl, my classmates were not engaged in the discussion and that the 12 second lapse in conversation was inherently negative.
However, after watching the vignette with the class, Pearl shared this reflection with me and it reshaped how I thought of the event.

Pearl’s Response:

As a professional, I was familiar with the concepts of tones and patterns of speech and body language in public speaking, but I was not aware of the implications of those conceptions (which I've come to know as prosody and proxemics) in teaching and learning. Participating in the Teaching and Learning in Urban Settings course and the subsequent review and dissection of the video recording were vastly different experiences. V-Note is a wonderful tool to make such assessments.

During the class, there was no sense that the delay/pause in the discussion had stretched for 12 seconds or that Ken or the remainder of the class may have appeared disengaged. On the contrary, while I as a student was speaking, all classmates within my view appeared to be devoting their attention to the statements and appeared to be reflecting upon that statement at its conclusion. The silence that followed was more glaring to watch than it was to experience and in that silence is also a form of communication. What was being conveyed during the 12-second pause in fact remains a mystery.

This episode has brought about a new awareness/ mindfulness in teacher/ student engagement and will allow me to consider the perceptions of wait times in future exchanges.

While Pearl was speaking, she said that she has the impression that, “During the class there was no sense that the delay/pause in the discussion had stretched for 12 seconds or that Ken or the remainder of the class may have appeared disengaged. On the contrary, while I was speaking, all classmates within my view appeared to be devoting their attention to the statements and appeared to be reflecting upon that statement at its conclusion.” While my initial response to viewing the 12 second pause was one of concern, perhaps it ought not to be. Were our classmates, in fact, engaged?

When Pearl was speaking, Ken and the majority of the class did physically face Pearl, seeming to give her their attention. Though they were not speaking, this proxemics of their bodies seemed to indicate that they were following the conversation and were engaged in what was going on. As a special educator, I identified with what Pearl was saying about proxemics and engagement. Often, in K-12 classrooms, teachers are evaluated on student participation and
engagement (Danielson, 2013). According to the Danielson rubric of teacher evaluation (2013), we are told that participation looks “active” with “passive” learning being less than satisfactory or “developing.” However, as Pearl points out in her reflection, she perceived her classmates to be engaged. Could it be that I, as a teacher | researcher, was imposing my own biases on what I believed that teaching and learning should look like in the classroom? Had I let my own biases shade my interpretation of the events?

The short answer to this is, but of course! It is impossible for a researcher to divorce one’s own bias, ontology, axiology, and epistemology from research. Pure objectivism does not exist! Likewise, it is just as difficult for teachers and administrators to remove themselves from their predetermined notion of what teaching and learning should look like and be open to multilogicality. As a result, dominant forces still dictate hegemonic structures of teaching and learning. Posters for Sit-up, Lean Forward, Ask and Answer Questions, Nod your head, Track the Speaker (SLANT) strategies line the walls of many a K-12 classroom and teachers are evaluated by criteria that insist that students fit a predetermined mold of good classroom learning. This top-down approach to teaching and learning does little to incorporate the needs and wants of our students. Is it possible that students are engaged and learning if they are silent? Is it possible that in this silence compilation and growth is occurring?

Tobin writes of the importance of passivity in a dialectical relationship with structures and agency when learning (2015b). Just as we actively construct our understanding through being agentic and doing, so at the same time we must be receptive and open to letting new understandings wash over us in passive waves. In this passivity, we learn by being in | with others as we open ourselves up to learning from the environment around us.

As Pearl points out, she felt that her classmates, “appeared to be devoting their attention to the statements and appeared to be reflecting upon that statement at its conclusion.” This is a
perfect example of passivity. Perhaps I was wrong to view the 12 second pause as a negative issue.

Pearl writes, “The silence that followed was more glaring to watch than it was to experience and in that silence is also a form of communication.” These words by Pearl bring to mind the writings of Hugh Sckett (1987) in which Sckett challenges predominant ways of evaluating teaching and learning. Sckett postulates that educators often focus too much on techniques and methods and should instead view teaching and learning through moral obligations and contextually situated events. Through the lens of methods and techniques, a 12 second pause in a conversation may seem like poor teaching. However, when the event is viewed within context, praxis, and theory of agency| structure |passivity, alternative and at times, discordant understandings of the event emerge. This is all part of the process of incorporating many voices and ways of knowing into shaping understanding. As more and more thoughts and perspectives are added, a richer and narrative of events emerges. This event may never reach consensus- and this is okay. Consensus is not the goal.

Perhaps what is most salient to me in Pearl’s response is her statement, “What was being conveyed during the 12-second pause in fact remains a mystery.” I cannot ever really truly know what was happening during that 12 second pause. Nor, do I believe that any of my classmates could ever truly know or recall all that unfolded in that short vignette. V-Note, in my opinion, is not a tool to uncover or truly know anything. Rather, it is a tool for learning and for growth. It is a tool for collaboration and growth. Knowing is less important than transforming.

V-Note for Transformation

After watching the vignette together, I made clear to my classmates that I had viewed the 12 second pause as negative. I later learned that not all of my classmates shared the same opinion of the pause. Like a heuristic of thought, I learned about the positives of wait time from my
classmates, and in turn, I believe that they may have internalized my negative view of the pause. While participating in, and watching the following classes, I had the impression that overall participation of individuals in whole class conversations had increased when wait time between participants had decreased. While I am cautious in making the claim that watching the vignette together and discussing it had a direct impact on participation, I do believe that it played a part. Curious to learn more, I turned to V-Note to see if I could reveal more about classroom participation before we watched the vignette of the 12 second pause in V-Note and after we watched the vignette. I reexamined the video recording of class two (before V-Note) and class four (after V-Note). I noticed that there seemed to be an increase in participation in class four. To quantify this, I coded each participant and made note of the number and duration of each utterance of my classmates.

![Figure 3. 5 Visualization of Whole Class Contributions Two (Before V-Note intervention)](image-url)
Figure 3. 6. Visualization Whole Class of Contributions in Class Four After V-Note intervention

In class two Ken spoke for over one-and-a-half-hours of the total two-hour class time. There were often pauses between contributions lasting many seconds. Using the Movie builder feature of V-Note to compile all contributions by classmates during whole group discussion in class two, as a whole, students collectively contributed for just over ten minutes of total class time.

In comparison, in class four, Ken spoke for just over twenty-six minutes of the one hour recording and students participated for over thirty-minutes of class time, with much overlap in their sharing and less silence between contributions.

Through labeling in V-Note, the teacher | researcher is provided with an elegant and clear data visualization. This data visualization has provided the information needed to illustrate an increase in participation from class two to class four. I am cautious to note that watching the V-Note vignette together and discussing it as a class was the clear and apparent cause of this increase in contributions in the class, however, I do believe that it played an important part.

After reading Elizabeth’s response I re-watched the short vignette containing Ken and Pearl’s exchange and, in my initial reaction, this action by Ken added to the discordance felt by the 12 second pause because it seemed that he was scanning the room to look for individuals who may want to participate in the discussion. As Ken scanned the room, a few of the participants looked
down, away from his gaze. As we watched the vignette together a week after the event occurred, as a researcher, I was not so interested in why students looked away, as I believe that if I asked research participants a week later as to what they were thinking during a 12 second time period that happened a week ago, they would give me all sorts of answers, though I do not think they would be reliable. Rather, I was interested in showing our classmates that they did look away. I was hoping that by watching the video, participants might choose to embrace moments like the one on the vignette, take chances, and participate.

I do not think it would be fair to attribute all increased participation strictly to V-Note and our discussion surrounding the 12 second pause. As pointed out by Elizabeth, over the next few weeks, my classmates seemed to become more comfortable with each other. Increased familiarity with each other, the materials, the environment may have also played a part in the decrease of pauses and increase of participation in the discussion. Additionally, a variety of other factors impossible to measure such as what happened before class in participant’s personal lives, or personal affect, all have the potential to influence the emotional climate of the classroom. However, there is still the possibility that V-Note had an impact, and with that possibility come possibility for transformation.

Possible Future Applications in Teaching and Learning

What I learned through looking at this one-minute clip is that there is a trove of information that can be uncovered in the minutia. Reviewing this video clip using V-Note with the class provided an opportunity for reflection that allowed for a rich dialogue about what it means to be a participant and teacher | learner in a classroom. Not only did our collective examination of the video clip spark conversation and clarify our own roles in the classroom, it also provided entry into deepening modes of analysis using prosody and proxemics. Throughout this paper, material from a one-minute exchange provided enough fodder to elicit variety of teaching and learning
responses. V-Note proved to be an illuminating tool for analysis in the classroom. The exchange took up little more than a minute in a class that lasted for two hours. Yet, using V-Note to examine a minute in time revealed so much about our class.

As a student at the Graduate Center, I have had the opportunity to work with current and prospective undergraduate and graduate teachers at Brooklyn College. A requirement of teacher certification in New York State, prospective teachers must record themselves teaching and submit the recording and a reflection as part of the EdTPA. As I have been using V-Note in my research, I have also been thinking about introducing the software to my students at Brooklyn College to use in the EdTPA certification process. I hope to show students at Brooklyn College that the possibilities of V-Note go beyond a tool for video research analysis as have the possibility to be transformative as a reflective tool when vignettes are brought back to participants for reflection. Hopefully, in this way teacher | researchers can use V-Note as a tool for transformation.
CHAPTER 4. REIMAGINING THE EDTPA: EMBRACING POLYSEMIA AND POLYPHONIA THROUGH EDTPA

Abstract

In this chapter, we explore how we have used video recording as a reflexive and transformative teaching tool. We aim to demonstrate how video has been used to promote the integration of polyphonia (many voices) and polysema (many ways of knowing) and inform our praxis in environments of teaching and learning. We then juxtapose our experiences with those of prospective teachers preparing video recordings for the edTPA New York State teacher certification process. We take the stance that video recording and reflection have the potential to be transformative for participants. However, in working with individuals involved with the edTPA, we have found that their experience using video recording has fallen short of transformation. Through heuristics, we incorporate the voices of educators, researchers, professors, and prospective teachers to better understand how the video portion of the edTPA is perceived and used by educators. Together, we reimagine the video component of the edTPA to be a tool not just for judgment and assessment, but of reflexivity.

This chapter is co-authored by Amy Goods (CUNY Graduate Center) and Nicholas Catino (CUNY Graduate Center)
To Begin: A Metologue

Amy: This paper emerged from a conversation that I had with my partner, Nicholas, about the edTPA process. Nicholas had come home from work and knowing that I had just completed a journal article about the use of V-Note (2018), a video analysis software used as a reflexive tool in teaching, learning, and research, he asked me if I knew anything about the video component of the edTPA process. He mentioned that his colleagues were lamenting the process but, based upon the research that I was working on, he thought that the video component of the edTPA should be a positive and informative experience.

Nicholas: A student teacher in the office had just exasperatedly sighed that she was done with edTPA and I was simply not expecting that kind of emotion. It was clear there was a lot of pent up, personal frustration with the process and I thought Amy’s idea of further investigating it was a good one. I set out to contact newly-minted teachers who passed through my school and recently completed the edTPA, but Amy had the great idea of including other voices as well.

Amy: Incorporating other voices is so important in research. Not only to nuance what we are learning, but also because when we dialogue with other people new understandings emerge. One way of incorporating dialogue and nuance is to coauthor a paper. This is one of the reasons that I am excited to be writing this chapter with you. As we each write and add to this chapter, it grows and emerges in unexpected ways.

I am also excited to write this chapter with you because I think the chapter plays off of our relative strengths. As a doctoral student finishing my third year, I am feeling particularly confident in my theoretical frameworks. Since our son was born a few weeks ago, I have taken a
step back from teaching to spend time with our children. While this has given me time to immerse myself in reading, I am feeling somewhat disconnected from the field of teaching. You are still very much in the field and have the access and trust of your colleagues and are able to easily incorporate their voices into our work.

Both the coauthoring and the incorporation of the voices of your colleagues contributes to research that feels like a cogenerative dialogue. Cogenerative dialogues (Tobin, 2014a) create spaces for participants to investigate a phenomenon and speak freely to other participants about this investigation in order to gain a better understanding and learn from each other. The goal of our chapter is to make the edTPA experience more meaningful for participants while also encouraging them to let their perspectives be heard. What we are finding is that there is some universal discontent that the participants have with the edTPA process, yet the exact issue with the process differs depending upon the lived experience of the participant. We are learning from each other’s experiences while weaving them together in a form of prose.

**Nicholas:** It is certainly advantageous for me to be in a public school with so many student teachers and to have all of these resources available to me. I also get the feeling of a cogen when I write with you because as we share the same document, I step into the paper, read what you wrote, and get new ideas of where to turn or what to uncover. It’s rather exciting.

**Amy:** As we began working on the paper as coauthors, the issue of voice emerged. There are some things that we need to say in our own voices, especially when I am writing about my experiences and you are writing about your experiences. Some thoughts and experiences we share together. In these instances, we use the pronoun “we” to convey our thoughts. However,
we were unsure of how to address jumping between the perspectives of “I” and “we” throughout this chapter. Our professor, Ken Tobin, suggested that we try to begin our paper with a metalogue in order to make sense of our form and his idea seemed to be a perfect solution to our problem. A metalogue is a way of conveying a back-and-forth in text and is a research method that I first learned about while studying at the Graduate Center, through reading the work of Gregory Bateson. In the opening to *Ecology of the Mind* (1974), Bateson defines metalogues as, “a conversation about some problematic subject,” saying, “This conversation should be such that not only do the participants discuss the problem, but the structure of the conversation as a whole is relevant to the same subject” (p. 2). Voice, whether it be mine, Nicholas’s, or one of the research participants, is of central importance in our chapter. Yet, how voice is incorporated into our writing also became something we struggled with as writers. Beginning the paper with a metalogue became a way to address not only the issue of voice, but also to give us a space to examine and play with our own positionality when writing. Throughout the body of this paper, as we switch voices between you (Nicholas) and me (Amy), we will put our name in parentheses, in order make it clear to the reader whose perspective they are reading.

**Nicholas:** We try to make these transitions clear but I agree that it is important to differentiate whose *I* we are talking about. Our unique lived experiences inform our stories. When I talk to my colleagues at work, or student teachers I know, my history with that person informs their interaction with me. What surprised me was how eager everyone was to share their stories. Even the people with whom I had never interacted. The invariable response was something along the lines of, “You’re writing about edTPA? Oh, I have *a lot* to say about that…” and then the stories would just pour out. Weaving your and my voice throughout the paper is one way to co-write, and I enjoyed writing within that conversational structure.
Amy: I love the idea of a metalogue because a metalogue is a conversation that explains and expands upon our structure and form of the paper. The use of metalogue fits beautifully in our chapter because I think our chapter reads like a conversation, first between the two of us (Amy and Nicholas) and then with the heuristic participants as they later join our conversation.

Nicholas: I also think it’s important to keep the spirit of dialogue and conversation when talking about edTPA. The impetus of this paper was one of video editing and reflexivity, but as we began to research and write, I began to feel invested in trying to make the system better! Now that this requirement has been the law of the land for a few years, it is important to hear the voices of those who have lived through it. Are there areas of improvement and room for growth? After talking with so many of our teaching peers, it seems that the opportunity for using video reflexively is a missed one. I was struck by the passion and emotion displayed by these new teachers and I wonder if the creators/managers of edTPA are aware that these sentiments exist. I would hope they are invested in removing obstacles on the road to certification.

Amy: I also feel like this paper serves many purposes. For one, we are curious about learning how to make the edTPA more meaningful for participants. For another, as doctoral students we want to experiment with different forms of research, such as metalogues and heuristics.

Nicholas: Or to address the issue of voice for the co-authors. The ability to respond in the moment to problematic themes is a very important, living and breathing part of conversation and that is one strength of a metalogue. Including this metalogue in the beginning of our paper may
serve to set the tone of the conversation and encourage open dialogue around some of the issues we raise.

**Amy:** I could not agree more! I also think that this metalogue shows the messiness that is often hidden by academia when publishing research and I think that this is a good segue to our next section of the paper.

**Nobody Is Perfect**

The more you expose yourself, the greater the chances of benefiting from the discussion and the more constructive and good willed, I am sure, the criticisms and advice you will receive. The most efficient ways of wiping out errors as well as the terrors that are often at their root, is to be able to laugh about them together, which as you will discover, will happen quite often… (Bourdieu, 1992, p. 219)

How many times I (Amy) have sought to be the “perfect” teacher. How many times I have stood before the classroom, an administrator with a clipboard and a pen perched in the corner of the room, making note of my every move, word, and action. How many times I have run through the proverbial checklist of whatever metric I was being evaluated on. How many times I have wished and hoped that the “cut-up” didn’t “cut-up,” that the students were quiet and listened today, of all days, as I mentally checked my lesson against the multiple criteria of “good” teaching that I was being evaluated on. How many times did I put up a front for the powers-to-be, to show them that I exemplified the perfect teacher and could score high on the scorecard. In these instances, how little my administration actually learned about the way my students and I teach and learn in the classroom.

We chose to begin with the quote from Bourdieu’s Paris Workshop (1992), because it exemplifies so much of what we feel is wrong with teacher evaluation in New York City schools. From the beginnings of teachers’ careers, teachers are encouraged to put on a facade of
perfection. This facade begins with the certification process and continues onward with rubrics and outside “objective” and “low-inference” evaluations performed by administrators that float in and out of classrooms passing judgment upon what they see.

Teaching and learning is deeply contextual. Learning to teach is an ongoing and dynamic process, that is deeply situated in the social cultural realm. Teaching and learning shifts shape as the participants and fields in which teaching and learning occur change. In our own research, we have found video recording of teaching to be an illuminating and helpful tool when learning to teach. It has served as a tool for not just evaluation, but also for discovery. As part of this discovery, we employ event-oriented inquiry (Tobin, 2014b), where we shared a video recording of teaching and learning with participants (other students and a teacher who were recorded) and encouraged reflection and dialogue with these participants. We often begin this dialogue by asking, “What is happening? Why is it happening? What else is there?” (Tobin, 2015). Through inviting all participants to share their perspectives and voices, we create emerging understandings and elicit polyphonia and polysemia that in turn, uncover incredibly rich and diverse perspectives on teaching and learning events.

Encouraging the reflection of multiple participants on an event through video provides both nuance and depth to the emerging understanding of the event. However, we can imagine how differing perspectives, when attempting to grade a vignette using an “objective” rubric, can be problematic. This is largely because our own ontologies, epistemologies, axiologies, and egos get in the way. Our perception of events is vastly different based upon how we are situated in the world. When multiple voices are included in teaching and learning, this adds nuance. When one voice is given preference or privilege, this has the potential to silence and isolate others and, in the case of the edTPA, may result (and has resulted!) in prospective teachers with radically different ontologies, epistemologies, and axiologies being denied entry into the classroom.
This denial of teacher certification is issued when an individual passes judgment upon another individual. Unfortunately, judgment has become part of the culture of many public schools. As educators, we are often asked to pass judgment on our students in the form of assessments and grades, just as judgment is passed on us as educators. All too often, these judgments become a kind of identifier. This judgment is used to sort or measure the potential of individuals. These judgments are worn as badges or as scarlet letters and can seep into our very beings. However, if we begin to see this judgment as saturated with an individual’s positionality, we can begin to see that this judgment is not objective, but rather completely and utterly subjective. As we think about judgments as being purely subjective and influenced by positionality, then these finite judgments based on a pass-or-fail rubric like the edTPA become not a tool of assessment but a weapon of hegemony.

**EdTPA Basics**

In order to become a certified teacher in New York State one must complete content-oriented exams and a performance-based assessment entitled the edTPA. As part of this portfolio, teacher candidates submit artifacts and written commentaries which are then evaluated by third parties, graded and scored based upon multiple rubrics. Each area of certification has its own passing score determined by the state in which the edTPA is administered. This score determines whether or not they continue on their chosen path to become a certified teacher able to teach in New York’s public schools.

Previously in New York State, new teachers were required to pass three assessments in order to obtain an initial certification: Assessment of Teaching Skills-Written, Liberal Arts and Sciences Test (LAST), and a Content Specialty Test. As part of a $10 million Race to the Top investment, new certification exams were created. This updated certification requirement again consists of three assessments: edTPA, Educating All Students, and Revised Content Specialty
Test. (These three new assessments initially included an Academic Literacy Skills Test, but this was removed upon recommendation from the New York Regents Board, citing the fear that the cost and number of tests were too demanding.) Notably, the cost for taking the edTPA in New York State is $300. This is in addition to the fees for the required certification exams which include $92 for Educator All Students (EAS) and at least $132 for respective Content Specialty Tests (CST). Vouchers for students who need financial assistance may be provided, however, they must be purchased from Pearson by the student’s education preparation program, putting further pressure on programs that are already strapped for funds. In addition to the onerous testing fees, the requirement to complete multiple unpaid hours both observing and student teaching in a classroom is in itself a form of lost income for those who need to financially support themselves through school. These issues are becoming pervasive in teacher preparation as eighteen states, including New York, currently use edTPA as a requirement for teacher certification, and more states are expected to join the edTPA network in the near future.

In order to submit a complete edTPA, candidates are required to submit a portfolio comprised of three components, or tasks: Planning for Instruction and Assessment, Instructing and Engaging Students in Learning, and Assessing Student Learning. The first task affords the candidate the opportunity to provide plans for instruction and highlight the rationale and justification for including them. The second task is the video recording segment comprised of one to two video clips of teacher-student interaction, including timestamps and video commentary. The third task is the reflection segment analyzing one assessment which highlights trends in student performance, student work samples, evidence of feedback to students, and more (Stanford Center for Assessment, Learning, & Equity, 2017). There are content-specific handbooks available for each certification area, which serve to further nuance the licensure
requirements. Each portfolio is structured and scored through the lens of the three major tasks: planning, instruction, and assessment.

The edTPA portfolio is graded based on performance standards predetermined by a committee of educators. This committee included 19 higher education and P-12 educators nominated by Deans of Schools of Education, NYSUT, and Superintendents and School Building Leaders. Two performance standards were chosen. Level I- the minimum level of knowledge, skills and abilities a teacher needs in order to be competent in the classroom and positively contribute to student learning. Level II- The mastery of skills, knowledge and abilities necessary for effective teaching (EngageNY, 2013, p. 16).

Those student teachers who fail the exam have two avenues to choose from. They can choose to retake the exam at a cost of $300 or they may appeal to a nine-member panel through a Multiple Measures Review Process. Previously, there was a safety net allowing failing applicants to take and pass the ATS-W, a $200 written exam no longer required, but offered by New York State. This was implemented out of concerns that the lack of data to norm the test invalidated the passing test scores, but has since been phased out.

**Inspiration and Motivation: Exploring Our Process**

We are witnessing much ferment and enthusiasm as novel ideas, exciting discoveries, and innovative methodologies are emerging and flourish across a variety of approaches that explore the effects of culture and society on human development. These new and innovative approaches are often underwritten by a common commitment to social justice and equity (these approaches will be termed sociocultural herein for lack of a better unifying term). On the other hand, it is impossible not to notice a rising tide, indeed a tsunami, of starkly mechanistic views that reduce human development (more boldly now than at any other time in recent history) to processes in the brain rigidly constrained by genetic blueprints passed on to contemporary humans from the dawn of the evolution. (Stetsenko, 2011, p. 165 )

Our interest in learning about EdTPA stems from our lived experiences as teacher and researchers. I (Amy) became a certified teacher in New York State before the implementation of
EdTPA. While I have not had to experience the process of compiling and passing the EdTPA for myself, I have worked with individuals who have gone through the process. Through being a cooperating classroom teacher who hosted student teachers, as well as a being a college level educator of current and future teachers, I have seen firsthand the stress that many prospective teachers feel. A good number have been overwhelmed and exasperated by the process. Wanting to support my students, I am interested in learning more about the EdTPA process. Namely, I am very interested in the video and reflection components, as these aspects of the EdTPA, at least on the surface, seem to align with some of the research on video analysis at Brooklyn College and the Graduate Center.

While I (Nicholas) was obtaining my Master’s degree in music education in 2011, I volunteered to participate in a field test of the Teacher Performance Assessment for Initial Certification (NYSTCE). This updated teacher certification process became known as edTPA and was developed through a collaboration between the New York City Department of Education and NCS Pearson, Inc. While my portfolio was not tied to my state certification, I completed the same requirements as current New York State teacher candidates. I created videos of my teaching in the classroom, submitted my writing samples, highlighted my theoretical reasoning, and created unit lesson plans. The strengths I found in the process lay in the reflection on my teaching practices, and engaging in conversation with other educators in a reflective way. Seeing how the edTPA is currently interpreted in education preparedness programs concerns me. At the time, my teacher certification did not hinge on others’ evaluation of my work. It was personal and therefore, I found the experience of reflecting valuable. This is why I feel that there seems to be the potential for a positive impact in promoting reflexivity among young and impressionable teachers through video reflection and analysis. It is clear that this outcome is not coming to fruition through the current systems in place. According to our conversations with
stakeholders at a few higher education institutions, the emphasis on edTPA in its current incarnation creates ripples of discontent among this community. Some schools have created dedicated edTPA classes where an intensive study of rubrics, requirements, and coaching is implemented, in order to allow students to effectively pass edTPA. However, I wonder how these classes could be taking away from valuable time in which that candidate could be developing theoretical frameworks, building content knowledge, and exploring praxis. While I see some value in the exercise included in the edTPA, I am concerned about unintended consequences surrounding the edTPA, specifically as it relates to who gets in and who gets left at the gate.

Adam Kuranishi and Celia Oyler (2017) highlight the story of a graduate of Teachers College who failed his New York State edTPA portfolio. The paper takes a close look at the requirements for Special Education licensure and wonders if the requirements privilege a specific way of knowing (white, middle-class norms) that marginalizes teachers of color and those who have a theoretical teaching philosophy based around Universal Design Learning and culturally responsive curriculum. The profiled candidate was revered by his students and made such an impression on the building principal that she hired him after his student-teaching was completed. The edTPA portfolio was subsequently analyzed by the education professionals and seasoned edTPA scorers. All parties involved disagreed with the failing grade.

Theresa Gurl et al. (2016) cast a critical eye on the implementation of the edTPA, specifically as it relates to the intersection of professionalization, policy, performance assessment, and privatization within the context of current educational systems and accountability. The authors raise concerns about validity and reliability of the assessment, and the decontextualization of the classroom in the portfolio. A locally-based system of accountability allows for more flexibility in viewing the teacher on different days and different
settings, while providing a fundamentally stronger context of the students, the school environment, and the teacher’s relation to them both. The publication also highlights the private industry profiteering that occurs in educational policy markets. Pearson, for example, profits from public education policies it helped mandate, giving this private company massive power over the public education system, what children learn in school, how they are tested, and how their teachers are rated.

However, I found it interesting to learn, that the edTPA was not conceived as a standardized, money making, portfolio system. In 2009, United States Education Secretary Arne Duncan gave a speech announcing the edTPA. In it, he says, “One of the most promising initiatives to date is the development of the first nationally accessible assessment of teacher candidate readiness. Under this performance-based assessment, supervising teachers and faculty would evaluate student teachers in the classroom” (Gurl et al., 2016, p. 126). This got me to wonder, is there a way that we can take back our agency and reclaim the edTPA as a reflexive tool for learning instead of a weapon of hegemony?

When I (Amy) first researched edTPA, my initial reaction was that a portfolio requirement for certification felt appropriate, as it is reasonable to assume that future teachers should be able to write a cohesive unit plan, voice their theoretical frameworks and reflect upon their own teaching practice. I also felt that such a qualitative portfolio component has the potential to offer a more nuanced picture of a future teacher in the classroom than a standardized exam. In the edTPA I saw the potential for reflexivity and growth as prospective teachers gained skills to develop and reflect on their praxis. However, as we began to learn more about the edTPA, how it was being implemented, and how students who we conversed with view the certification, my opinions on the topic began to shift.
Of particular interest to me was video recording and reflection. Video recording and reflection is a large part of the research that is encouraged through our program at the Graduate Center and at Brooklyn College. It would seem that the portfolio component would help to offset the state-required written exams for teacher certification and create a more holistic snapshot of a candidate's readiness for the classroom. The written reflection component is also a skill that future teachers can take with them into the classroom. If this portfolio and rubric portion of the edTPA is meant to give a holistic representation of the candidate and should be part of best teaching practice, then why do participants of the process feel as though it is “stressful” and “unnecessary”? Surely the edTPA is not meant to elicit these emotions from its candidates. Is this the intended use of the portfolio? Is the edTPA helping pedagogy, or is it just another onerous requirement?

When I (Amy) read Anna Stetsenko’s words above, I am reminded how alive and well positivism is in the field of teaching and learning. Despite gains in socio-cultural theories and education research, there seems to be this pull towards reductionist mechanistic view of teaching and learning. We can see this in the standardization of the edTPA portfolio as a potentially transformative practice of video recording that has been coopted by Pearson, a for-profit company.

I am also reminded of the need to nuance our critique of edTPA. While this paper is critical of the edTPA process, there are, no doubt, positive aspects of the edTPA, as there have also been individuals who have participated in and completed the edTPA and have had positive experiences. The teaching methods included in the edTPA rubric have been researched and have been found to be effective for certain teachers in certain fields and some participants may find value in participating in the edTPA. As Anna Stetsenko points out in the above quote, we are indeed learning so much about teaching and learning, and we know that our approaches to
working with students have shown some improvements since the inception of public schools. We aim to caution against a mechanistic and reductionist view of teaching and learning. We aim to do so in a way that gives voice to those who have experienced the edTPA process and exposes the process, its imperfections and messiness. We want to show the positive aspects of the edTPA, along with the aspects that we feel need work, in order to make the process better for our teachers and our students. As we “elicit discoveries” and “innovative methodologies,” we aim to take a sociocultural approach. That is, it is our aim that the methods and methodology of video reflexivity are firmly rooted and contextualized. We offer, herein, a path that may have the potential to make the edTPA a more valuable experience. We have arrived on this path based upon our own experiences in our own contexts. We fully acknowledge that others may have other paths in their own contexts and we welcome a dialogue. We believe that by opening up and exposing the edTPA process that we might learn something about how to make it better.

In the edTPA Cooperating Teacher handbook, the process of completing the edTPA is intended to “encourage feedback and self-reflection that nurtures professional growth and preparation for classroom instruction” (Stanford Center for Assessment, Learning, & Equity, 2016, p. 2). The edTPA requirement has the potential to fill a qualitative void in the teacher certification process. When thinking of desirable qualities in a teacher, a good number of them are difficult to discern from a teacher’s answer on a test, which make the safety-net ATS-W examination pathway so baffling. Teaching is a living, breathing, profession that exists among and between people. We argue that reflexivity is one of the most important traits a quality teacher can possess. More importantly, reflexivity is something that can be learned and practiced.

Including other voices (polyphonia) in this process serves to promote different perspectives and can spark conversations on what transpired or what opportunities were missed. One voice that cannot be dismissed or left out of this conversation is the voice of the student. As teachers,
we tend to have an expectation of a lesson that we hold as an ideal in our minds. This expectation has the potential to cloud our lived experience in the classroom, perhaps affecting our interpretation of events that transpired. By including many voices into the conversation (students, teachers, administrators, or paraprofessionals in the room) we can get a more complete, less biased picture painted of the lesson. Through conversations with students, teachers can offer value and respect to the voice of community members that are so often quantified and marginalized in educational practices.

In the field test of the edTPA, designed by Evaluations Systems Group of Pearson, the intentions and objectives of the parent company were in no way hidden from view. Student teachers were required to create data-driven lesson plans that intentionally focused on assessment that measure student learning outcomes. The field test is saturated with language based around assessments and data and the candidates are clearly and overtly instructed to incorporate assessment in the instruction. Part Three, the reflection section, is full of writing prompts and sentence starters which steer the author away from reflective thinking and toward thinking that justifies decisions made.

Even the performance standards that the teacher candidates are graded on exist upon a lofty and narrow minded ideal of a teacher that is not helpful to perpetuate. In the official student support document, candidates are told, “Perfection is not expected” (Stanford Center for Assessment, Learning, & Equity, 2017, p. 7). This sentiment belies other comments integrated into edTPA support documents that we have highlighted. The highest level awarded to a submission of an edTPA portfolio is Level II. The committee of educators determined that a teacher candidate can demonstrate, in a 2-10-minute video clip, “The mastery of skills, knowledge and abilities necessary for effective teaching.” (EngageNY, 2013, p. 16). In actuality, the overwhelming number of teachers that we have spoken with agree that it takes at least a few
years in the classroom before any sort of phrase such as “mastery of abilities” comes into focus as a self-descriptor. To intimate that this sort of standard or ideal can or should exist in a teacher-candidate who has not yet experienced a classroom of their own is dangerous and promotes stress. We argue that the focus should instead be on a growth-mindset. One that affords errors, mentorship, and space for conversation, reflection, and reflexivity.

A Reimagination

You will then see in a state that one may call “becoming,” that is muddled, cloudy, works that you usually see only in their finished state. Homo academicus relishes the finished. Like the pompier (academic) painters, he or she likes to make the strokes of the brush, the touching and retouching disappear from his works. I have at times, felt a great anguish after I discovered that painters such as Couture, who was Manet’s master, had left behind magnificent sketches, very close to impressionist painting - which constructed itself against pompier painting - and that they had often “spoiled,” in a sense, these works by outing the finishing touches stipulated by the ethic of work well done and well polished whose expression can be found in the Academic aesthetic. (Bourdieu, 1992, p. 219)

As we begin to reimagine teaching and learning through the theories of Pierre Bourdieu (1992) we find that these judgments, assessments, and grades should not define teaching and learning. Rather, teaching and learning can be conceptualized by the act of becoming. Becoming is the dynamic, dialectic and recursive dance that we perform as we interact with the world. It is in the act of becoming that we grow and learn. Using assessment to appraise where we are at any given moment as we grow and learn helps us to understand where we need to go, but it is only a small part of the process. It is not the assessment itself, but rather what we do with that assessment that is important. How we adapt and interact with our students and each other based upon ongoing assessments is where we find potential as educators and researchers. When we focus on becoming rather than on the external criteria of what “good” teaching and learning is perceived to be, we open ourselves to our infinite potential. We allow ourselves to become
agentic actors firmly situated in the here and now. It is here that reflexivity and transformation lives.

Unfortunately, finite assessment, not ongoing reflexivity, permeates nearly all aspects of what it means to be a teacher. Reflexivity (Bourdieu, 1992), more than a reflection, is a reflection put into action. As teachers and researchers, we are constantly assessing our surroundings. Assessment is the measurement of the situation being observed. The term “assessment” arises again and again in teacher preparation programs, exams and in the edTPA. If assessment is synonymous with measurement, the natural next question to ask is, “what is the tool that we are using for measurement?”

Hugh Sockett (1987) writes, on the subject of assessment in teaching, “to understand and to assess a practice (as involving standards of excellence and obedience to rules as well as to the achievement of desirable ends), and to understand the integrity of individuals who carry out that practice, there is required an institution which embodies that distinctive tradition and virtue of that practice” (p. 213). Assessment is saturated with the ontologies, epistemologies, and ontologies of those who designed the assessment. It is no wonder then, that an assessment of exemplary teaching designed in collaboration with an assessment organization is going to focus on an assessment element of teaching and learning. While assessment of students is certainly an aspect of teaching, it is only a part of what happens in a classroom.

We argue that there is a benefit to both the teachers and the students if we shift focus of edTPA away from assessment and move towards reflexivity. In a reflexive approach to teaching and learning, the teacher is constantly assessing the situation while at the same time, revisiting and reinventing the metric that the teacher uses based upon the fields, participants, and situations that arise. One way to do this is for teachers to take on a role as not just a teacher, but also a researcher.
During our time as teachers, graduate students, cooperating teachers and educators of current and future teachers, the line between teacher and researcher and learner has been blurred. We have learned to constantly reflect upon our own practices in the classroom, to ruminate upon our actions and interactions, and adjust our practices to fit the situation. These reflective and reflexive actions have us existing within a beautiful teacher and researcher dialectic. In his research, Konstantinos Alexakos (2015) has represented this dialectic by using a Sheffer stroke between teacher | researcher. In this paper, we chose to do the same. The reflective actions of the teacher | researcher also require the teacher | researcher to take on the humble position of a student, learning from discrepant events, contradictions, difference, and other individuals. Opening oneself up to being a student is part of the teacher | researcher dialectic. We expand upon Alexakos’s use of the Sheffer stroke to illustrate the dialectic between student and teacher and researcher. We take the stance that to be reflexive, the student | teachers, who are completing the edTPA, need to simultaneously take on the role of student and teacher in order to learn and grow. We examine theories that frame our approach to using video recording as a tool in the classroom. We then look at how video recordings are used in the edTPA certification process and explore ways that educators can reimagine the video component of the edTPA and use the assessment to help their praxis as educators.

**Opportunity Emerges**

edTPA misses the potential for video reflection and teacher growth opportunity. In the Analysis and Reflection component of edTPA, student | teachers are asked to reflect upon their video recordings, through the lens of student learning outcomes. They are encouraged to cite specific evidence from the lesson or an assessment delivered to analyze its effectiveness. The reflection component instructs teachers to comment on how they promoted student learning and to describe one change to their planning or teaching that would improve the lesson’s
effectiveness the next time they teach it. Pointedly, there is no space afforded to include the voice of the students.

Reflection of one’s video recorded lessons provides an opportunity to closely look at interactions between and among the students while obtaining a clear-eyed perception of the teacher in these interactions. What was overlooked? Were student voices respected? Did body language and tone of voice promote a nurturing environment? Was student body language misinterpreted? Analyzing video recordings of a teacher in the classroom reveals much that escapes one’s attention in the moment. Talking about these moments with others, particularly with people in the room, responding to them, and adjusting one’s practice can make video recording an incredibly fruitful venture in personal growth and teacher development.

The wording used in the edTPA is based on data, assessment, and the idea that the effectiveness of a teacher is derived from a “correct” lesson plan. There is no talk of ethics in the classroom, tone of voice, respect, embracing and encouraging many perspectives, or promoting agency of students. The dynamic of a teacher in the classroom is inherently one of power. In order to create and sustain a nurturing classroom environment, a teacher must be aware of the dynamics of the room and how their actions are interpreted.

**Some Additional Voices: A Look at Responses from the Heuristic**

We developed a short heuristic to aid in reflection of the edTPA process and to spark conversation. As part of the heuristic, we encouraged research participants to write comments and reflections on the edTPA process. Heuristics are a tool used in research that both uncovers participants feelings about a topic and also helps the participant to become aware of the unaware (Powietrzyńska, Tobin, & Alexakos, 2015). By asking participants to reflect on certain criteria in the heuristic, it is our hope that the some of the issues raised in the heuristic will seep into the participants’ minds and have a positive impact upon their actions. We wrote our heuristic on
edTPA to coax out responses and also with the hopes that participants might start to conceptualize video recording for use in their own practice.

The participants from the New York metro area who volunteered to help with our research were invited to participate because of their proximity to us and the exam. Three participants have completed the edTPA within the past few years and two are professors at a New York university. All five participants were eager to share their opinions and thoughts. This theme of emotional resonance was par for the course, because every person we contacted about our topic was excited and animated. The heuristic section of this paper, the voice of the author belongs to Nicholas because participants were chosen due to proximity to him. We have changed the names of participants in the spirit of anonymity.

Here is a heuristic to help you reflect upon your experience with the edTPA. Please select from the range 1 (disagree) through 5 (agree) and include any thoughts that come to mind.

I found the edTPA process helpful in informing my practice as a teacher.

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

Comments:

I found value in videotaping my lessons and reflecting upon them.

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

Comments:

I can identify educational theories that give value to edTPA.

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

Comments:

I felt my cooperating teachers were well informed and supportive throughout the edTPA process.

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

Comments:

I felt my professors were well informed and supportive throughout the edTPA process.

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

Comments:

Figure 4. 7. edTPA Heuristic
Therese: First Year Teacher-Middle School General Music, Brooklyn, NY

I (Nicholas) welcomed Therese into my classroom as a second semester student | teacher just as she was getting ready to submit her edTPA for review. In the time since her edTPA was completed and accepted, Therese has completed her first year in the field as a teacher. She began by working as a music teacher in an elementary charter school in Brooklyn, NY. She left that position after three months when supervisors told her she was no longer needed in the music classroom and that she had been reassigned as a second grade classroom teacher. Rather than taking a position that Therese did not feel prepared for, she put in her letter of resignation. She was one of twelve teachers to resign from that school within the first three months of the school year. She is currently working as a long term substitute teacher in Long Island. Responding to our heuristic, Therese remarked that she did not find much value in reflection component of the edTPA because she felt she was submitting video recordings for evaluation and not for self-reflection. She wrote, “The edTPA helps enforce ‘reflecting’ on lessons after they have been taught, but the need to use language specific to EdTPA takes away from the teaching because we get so nervous that we won’t phrase something with the highest grade used on a rubric.” This valid student | teacher emotion is one unintended consequence of a system whose emphasis is heavily reliant upon outside observers who do not have the luxury of contextualizing a video clip within the classroom it was created. The result of this is that the edTPA participants are performing the act of teaching for a removed and veiled evaluator instead of being in | with their students and doing what is best for them.

Sarah: First Year Teacher-Elementary Strings, Long Island, NY

Sarah was referred to me (Nicholas) by a colleague who worked with her in a high school music classroom where Sarah was a student | teacher. Like Therese, Sarah had successfully completed and submitted her edTPA with a passing result. When Sarah responded to our edTPA
heuristic, she had just finished her first year teaching elementary music. Unlike Therese, she was able to complete the school year in her certification field while working in a Long Island public school.

In her comments, Sarah remarked on the rigidity of the video recording, saying, “When we create the three to five lesson unit, we are expected to stay within a certain time frame and stay true to our lessons, but outside of EdTPA, we are allowed to stray from the lesson if it enables the students to further their learning and ask questions.” We learn that Sarah views this video-recording as a placeholder for an outside observer interloping into their classroom, holding all the power and attempting to be pleased. She even admits that more meaningful learning takes place once the cameras are turned off. If the effect of the edTPA requirement is an inauthentic lesson being acted out in the classroom, merely placating the arbiters of certification, then an accurate representation of the student | teacher is not being attained. Trying to be the perfect teacher in the presence of an adjudicator is not and should not be the goal of an edTPA portfolio.

Sarah’s response demonstrated that a habit of recording and reflecting upon lessons taught was not always cultivated in the edTPA portfolio. She found value in the act of reflecting upon lessons, but found that once the necessary requirement was met, i.e., the three-minute video clip was recorded, there was no continuation of practice. As mentioned earlier, in the edTPA Cooperating Teacher Handbook, the self-stated goal of edTPA is to “encourage feedback and self-reflection that nurtures professional growth and preparation for classroom instruction” (Stanford Center for Assessment, Learning, & Equity, 2016, p. 2). In Sarah’s experience, this goal was not nurtured. Instead, edTPA became a means to an end: certification. We may ask ourselves, what more can be done to encourage a meaningful and lasting use of video based reflection and reflexivity?
Our heuristic included a question related to the value in videotaping lessons and reflecting about them. Sarah responded positively to this question and seemed to embrace the theory behind reflecting upon practice through videotaping. Sarah responded,

This was definitely the most useful part of edTPA. Being forced to watch videos of yourself teaching and reflect on them is so healthy as an educator and is something we should all do more often. I wish there was more of this, though. Only being able to submit and reflect on two ten-minute clips felt so small compared to all of the other components. I also think edTPA could benefit from having more opportunity to be constructive in the personal reflection. So much of this reflection is spent PROVING what was done right instead of REFLECTING on what could’ve been better. As a new and upcoming teacher, it was difficult to identify and prove all the things I was doing right when all I really wanted to do was work through all the things I was doing wrong.

Sarah’s response to this question shines a light on the lack of meaningful embrace of video reflexivity as a cornerstone of edTPA. In our conversations with educators in the field of higher-education, the heuristics received from our five participants, and our own personal experiences, the emphasis on video-reflection is minimal. The lasting impact of the edTPA among the teachers-in-training seems to avoid mention of reflection or the use of video for continual growth. Instead, it appears to occupy a moment in time, a snapshot assessment in which a teacher proves their mastery and knowledge of a topic. We argue that the New York State certification process should embody teacher traits of reflexivity, growth and the idea that classroom experience and the context of each new group of students yield mastery. A new teacher should not be expected to achieve this mastery before ever setting foot in their own classroom. Rather, an open-minded individual who can learn from others and their own mistakes is the kind of classroom learning that edTPA should help cultivate.
Christopher: College Professor of Undergraduate Education, New York State

Christopher has full professorship in music performance at his college and an adjunct appointment in the school of education. He has been working in this capacity with undergraduate education students for the past 16 years. His institution offers two seminars dedicated to decoding the paperwork, understanding video logistics and verbiage of the rubrics, etc. in order to shepherd every student through the process of completing edTPA. It is his belief that the sheer magnitude of assigned work adds stress to the meaningful, yet incredibly time consuming task of learning within their teaching placements.

Christopher believes that edTPA encourages young student teachers to demonstrate their mastery and sees this as a pedagogically inappropriate educational assessment. In responding to our heuristic, Christopher expands on this,

From what I’ve read of the requirements and prompts, edTPA is asking very high-level, reflective questions of students who have little to no practical experience doing what it is they are being asked to reflect upon. The format clearly seems to assume a prerequisite general grasp of everyday classroom management and efficient and effective lesson planning (which the students are really working through during their first placement). It takes this as the point of departure, as though these students have been teaching one to three years, rather than one to three weeks. As an assessment tool, edTPA seems to be aimed at the graduate student rather than the undergraduate.

Christopher takes the stance that edTPA rubric is better suited to individuals who have spent more time in their field. He argues that students need more time to grow into their roles as teachers. While this “high-level” teaching is something that students can and should aspire to, there could be more value for undergraduates if they were afforded the opportunity to grow, learn from their mistakes, and begin to embrace open mindedness and adaptability within the classroom.
Ashley: High School Teacher and College Professor of Education, New York State

Ashley has 21 years of experience in the classroom as a public school teacher across two states. Recently, she began teaching a philosophy of education class at the college level to graduate students. Her experience and opinions of edTPA arise out of her interactions with the student teachers she mentors and her graduate students. In responding to our heuristic and in conversations about edTPA, Ashley is concerned that the student teachers do not have enough classroom experience to justify the tasks asked of them. She also believes that the edTPA is not a good metric to determine the efficacy of a teacher. Ashley writes,

edTPA requires student teachers to demonstrate and reflect on teaching even though they don't even have a schema for most of what they are being asked to write about because they just don't have enough experience on which to base their critiques. This is glaringly clear to me because I have student teachers who have "done" edTPA and come to me still not knowing how to teach. So edTPA is not a magic portal/constructivist path into reflective practices that make for better teaching. It is merely another snapshot.

Ashley adds that some of the tasks of the edTPA necessitate certain skills or abilities that may not play a part in successful and thoughtful teaching. Prospective teachers who might have different axiologies, epistemologies, and ontologies may be denied entry to the teaching field. Ashley has seen that successful completion of the edTPA is not an indicator of thoughtful and effective classroom teaching.

I've seen excellent teachers who can deliver high quality instruction not be able to shine through their writing. I've seen struggling teachers who are expert writers express detailed written reflection and still not be able to connect with students in the classroom. And I've heard both of these types of students worry aloud about their video editing skills and whether or not their video clips reflect the entirety of their pedagogical growth.
Ashley believes that, because most of her student teachers complete their edTPA within their first semester of student teaching, it seems discordant to demonstrate “mastery” with such limited classroom experience. Because the edTPA was such a time-consuming process, most of her students dedicated a good amount of their planning time finishing their portfolio, when they should have been focused on planning and instruction for their current teaching placement. Furthermore, the growth and understanding of teaching in the classroom gleaned from another semester of student teaching was not reflected or documented in their edTPA submission.

**Derrick: Third-Year Teacher-Social Studies, Transplant from Texas**

Derrick recently moved to New York State after obtaining his teaching degree in Texas, which did not require the edTPA at the time. Many teacher certification programs support student teachers through to completion of the edTPA exam by providing classes, guided rubric study, and mentorship. Derrick’s experience was one of isolation and confusion in trying to navigate these uncharted waters without the safety net of his peers and professors. The only way for him to gain access to the requirements, test study guides, and practice tests was to register for the exam ($300). He said he felt so overwhelmed by the sheer amount of work required by this test that he became resigned to failing. He heard from his friends that if you numerically fail the edTPA, meeting all requirements on the rubric but with minimal effort, there is a safety exam you can take ($200), which has a much higher rate of passing. Derrick’s resignation seeped its way into his writing, and as he made his way through the 30-plus pages of required writing, he failed to view it in a meaningful light, feeling as though he was merely “dumping words on the page.” In an ironic twist, he passed the portfolio and became a certified teacher. Derrick relayed a story about a friend of his who nearly quit his career path after being overwhelmed by the process.
When thinking back upon the video recording and reflection section of the edTPA, Derrick commented, “The video is prescriptive. They want you to fit the mold of their idea of a teacher and you are not reflecting on an authentic version of yourself.” Derrick spoke of how much time and focus he spent on the video documenting the required content vocabulary, language operators and specific rubric-based requirements. He felt this was not an authentic version of himself or of any teacher. He felt pressured to manufacture a teaching scenario that was inorganic and not indicative of his regular teaching style. Furthermore, he bemoaned the fact that if his video did not capture his students using specific wording or vocabulary in the lesson, he could not write about it. This led to him trying to squeeze as many rubric based items within his video to maximize his potential scoring elements.

When writing his video reflection, Derrick felt like he was justifying his decisions, his planning process, his educational theories and his lesson plans. It did not feel reflective to him. He spoke of sentence starters and writing prompts which shaped his answers and led him away from a metacognitive, reflective analysis. A prescriptive reflection that did not reflect.

The experience of this young man from Texas, who did not have the support system that in-state students have, highlights a different perspective. While we think of teaching as a living, breathing, evolving and reflexive craft, the current implementation of edTPA seems to encourage a vision of teacher as master of knowledge, ready to demonstrate skills before entering a classroom. The opportunity is here to mold young teachers in the art of reflexivity, open mindedness, willingness to change and adapt to situations, willingness to embrace difference and many voices (polyphonia), and willingness to look at one’s teaching in a thoughtful and critical way.

Recalling Bourdieu's theory of becoming, teaching is a living, breathing, continually changing state of being and learning. That is why we value reflexivity, and argue that instilling
this ideal in the minds of young educators is important. If this becomes the norm for new teacher training, these educators will be able to respond and adapt to any environment they teach in.

**Common Frustration**

One area of commonality between all of our participants was the feeling that the technical hurdles of recording, editing, transcribing, and uploading the video component was a frustrating aspect. The candidates are encouraged to transcribe conversations that might be difficult to discern, edit video clips to the proper length, and even compress videos to meet the website’s particular file size limit. It is not easy to navigate these technical challenges and our participants put a lot of effort and frustration into this component.

One current teacher remarked, “I’ve heard students worry aloud about their video editing skills and whether or not their video clips reflect the entirety of their pedagogical growth.” He continued with, “Audio is a concern for people. If the mic doesn’t capture it, you can’t write about it.” One of our college professors remarked, “Teachers are on their own editing their own videos, file uploads, compressing videos, storage concerns.”

Navigating the digital requirements and electronic trends necessitate a continually changing and adaptive mindset. I (Nicholas) have professional experience working in IT as a helpdesk technician and I have reconciled with how quickly my knowledge has become outdated. It is not difficult to imagine student | teachers becoming overwhelmed with the technical requirements of the edTPA, or, as our transplant from Texas demonstrated, a student | teacher without the proper supports becoming exasperated with the lack of technical support.

**Video Analysis for Transformation**

The past few pages of this chapter have provided as a space for participants to air their grievances with the edTPA. We felt that it was important to give voice to the lived experiences of individuals that have gone through the process of completing edTPA as well as individuals
who have mentor student | teachers in completing the edTPA. After hearing the concerns of the educators, we felt that we had to address some of the issues and offer possible solutions. We felt that this was particularly important in certain areas where the participants’ concerns with edTPA overlapped.

I (Amy) had used video in my teaching practice and had felt that it had value. It saddened me to learn that so many individuals were having negative experiences with the video component and I wanted to share my own positive experiences while using video editing software (V-Note) and video for reflexivity.

Earlier in the Spring 2018 semester, I was reviewing a video of a class at the CUNY Graduate Center when I noticed a curious event. In the middle of a conversation on metalogues, a 12-second pause occurred in which no one in the class spoke. Twelve-seconds may not sound as though it is a particularly long pause, yet when watching the video, the silence was striking. Encouraged by our Professor, Ken Tobin, I replayed a video clip containing the 12-second pause to our class and talked about the event as a group. I had my own opinions as to what was happening, and, what I quickly learned, was that other participants had differing opinions as to what was happening. Whereas I viewed the lapse in conversations as a negative, others in the class viewed it in a neutral or even a positive light. One class member expressed that she did not find the pause to be remarkable. Another expressed that she thought the pause provided was ample time to ruminate and reflect, and that despite not speaking, the class members were actively engaged. Listening to and learning from my classmates helped me to gain a better understanding of the event and helped my writing on the subject to gain nuance through the incorporation of polyphony and polysemy. In addition, through sharing the event with my classmates, reflexivity emerged. Through actively talking about the event, the subsequent dialogues within our class were altered.
After showing the clip and having a conversation about the pause, I noticed an increase in participation. To quantify this, I used V-Note, a free video analysis software, to code the amount and duration of utterances of class members in the following classes. What I found was that after our conversation both the amount and the duration of talk time of each of the class members increased (Goods, 2019). It would be impossible to fully attribute the increase in participation to the viewing and discussion surrounding the 12-second pause, yet, it would also be impossible to say that the viewing and discussion had no effect on the discourse in the classroom.

In this one instance, we were able to have tactile benefits from sharing our research and video vignette. By sharing the clip with the class, another dimension of growth was added. This dimension was reflexive in that it potentially altered future conversation. Furthermore, it was situated in our lived experience and emerged organically through a dialogue of respect for participants as researchers. I know that I learned from watching the video and speaking with classmates and I believe that my classmates learned as well. When I was watching the video and found the clip, I did not set out looking for anything in particular. I was not driven by a rubric of what teaching should look like. Instead, I found an event that piqued my curiosity. I wanted to know more about what was happening and why it was happening and to discover more about this. To that end, I turned to the participants in the event.

As we wrote above, some of the largest opportunities for growth occur when we are open to learning from our perceived mistakes. I saw the lull in conversation as a negative. Had this happened in a video submitted for edTPA, this pause may have been counted against the teacher as a lapse in student engagement. However, as I began to investigate what was happening in this event, not only did I learn from it, but the participants in the class did as well.
A Path Forward through Bourdieu

After digesting the dialogues and conversations with edTPA stakeholders, and ruminating upon its implementation, we believe teachers and students alike would benefit from an edTPA based on a growth model that focuses on self-reflection instead of proving one’s expertise. It seems inauthentic, as one participant put it, and quite absurd to expect young student | teachers to have to demonstrate “mastery” in the classroom with zero years of experience. Language such as mastery should be removed from the edTPA.

Bourdieu writes of hidden sketches showing mistakes beneath “well done and well polished” works of art. There is so much value in learning through doing and we believe that concept applies to the teaching profession. The act of becoming a teacher is a process of criticism, dialogue, responding to assessments and embracing difference. An edTPA more focused on reflexivity as opposed to proving one’s mastery would certainly be a step in the right direction.

Each participant we spoke with found inherent value in reflective teaching. When we introduced Bourdieu’s theory of reflexivity, it was universally admired and valued. Each participant then commented that the edTPA process did not reflect this value. They all viewed their required video response task as justification masquerading as reflection. There is an incongruity between the self-stated goal to “encourage feedback and self-reflection that nurtures professional growth and preparation for classroom instruction” (Stanford Center for Assessment, Learning, & Equity, 2016, p. 2) and the actual tasks required of student | teachers. This we view as the biggest shortcoming of edTPA. Tilt this incongruity in favor of reflexivity, and we help mitigate some very negative thoughts in the minds of new teachers. Homo academicus relishes the finished. If we begin to view student | teachers as growing beings in a state of becoming, as opposed to ye who shall attain mastery, we will have made progress.
REVISITING AND REVISING: ADDING NUANCE THROUGH METALOGUE

Abstract

In the months between writing this chapter and the publication of *Embracing Polysema and Polyphonia through the EdTPA*, I revisited the chapter and wanted to add further nuance to our writing. To do this, I created a fictional dialogue between myself and Pearson. This dialogue is a metalogue that highlights our dueling ontologies. Based upon my experiences reading Pearson’s publications, taking exams developed by Pearson, and interacting with individuals who are employees of Pearson, I write what I imagine our dueling ontologies to be. This metalogue is based upon my impressions of Pearson, which is, in no doubt, colored by my own viewpoints on testing. Writing this metalogue felt a little like playing chess with myself as I tried to conjure up counter arguments for my own beliefs and assertions. Writing the metalogue was fun, and I hope that that comes through as you read this piece.

A Fictional Metalogue with Pearson

Amy: After writing the paper on embracing polyphonia and polysema in edTPA, I thought I ought to take my own advice and enter into a metalogue with Pearson about the edTPA process. Much of Nicholas’ and my paper pushed back upon the approach that Pearson takes when implementing the edTPA. It is only fair that I give space to nuance our argument with the perspectives of Pearson.

Pearson: Thank you for including me.

Amy: You are most welcome. I look forward to speaking with you.
Pearson: In the paper you and Nicholas argue that reflexivity is an important component in the edTPA and that this component is largely missing from the edTPA in the current form. You view the video recording component of the edTPA to be an area where reflexivity can be applied. I argue, however, that there is reflexivity in the edTPA. We ask candidates to reflect back upon the video and submit these reflections. Isn’t that reflexivity?

Amy: Not quite. Reflexivity (Bourdieu, 1992) is reflection put into action. It is circular and dialectic and embedded in human structures of interaction. Think of reflexivity as a cause and effect loop that is deeply situated in each individual setting or “field.” Reflexivity takes into account the sociocultural nature of school and schooling and aims to put emergent and contingent interactions and reflections and actions as central to the ever-developing understandings of what is happening. In this way, reflexivity is hermeneutic and phenomenological.

A major concern about the reflection component of the edTPA is that it is evaluated by individuals removed from the field in which the observation is occurring. These individuals may be lacking context.

Pearson: I assure you that those who are evaluating the candidate are reputable educators with strong pedagogical experience. They are trained in how to be objective evaluators.

Amy: Herein lies my issue with the term “objective”- it is impossible to be objective. Maxine Greene tackled the idea of objectivity in Postmodernism and the Crisis of Representation (1994). Events, interactions, even our perceptions of objects are absorbed and embodied through our
sensory apparatus. The world around us is constructed upon our interpretations through our senses. As we describe the world and make sense of the world, we are limited by our construction. Everything is interpretive- especially grades and rubrics. I think we could benefit from embracing the interpretive nature of evaluation (Guba, Lincoln, & Lynham, 2011). When acting as gatekeepers of who is able to become a certified teacher and who will be denied entry into the schools, attempting to be objective may not be the best route. Instead, perhaps the process might benefit from being highly contextualized. A highly contextualized approach may allow for our own constructions of the world to shift and change as we learn and take in new information.

**Pearson:** I take issue with a highly contextualized approach. For one, how can we ensure that all prospective teachers are being held to high standards? If different teacher preparation programs have different standards, it is the students that will suffer. By creating the uniform edTPA exam, we are holding all programs and future teachers to high standards.

**Amy:** I believe in high standards. I cannot argue with that. However, I pose to you, whose high standards are we implementing?

**Pearson:** The EdTPA assessment is data driven and based upon teacher best practices.

**Amy:** Once again, whose *best practices*. Hugh Sackett (1987) pushed back on this notion when he advocated that teachers pursue *ethical practices* instead of predetermined *best practices*. Through *ethical practices* teachers may be able to more freely practice reflexivity and respond to the needs of the specific students in their schools and classrooms.
Pearson: Ethics are highly personal.

Amy: That is my point exactly.

Pearson: What if a teacher has amoral ethics?

Amy: What if a test company has amoral ethics? Why don’t you trust us?

Pearson: There are many bad teachers out there....

Amy: ….and there are many, many wonderful teachers, schools, and administrators. I might argue that we have tried testing culture and it has not worked. By your metrics, low income schools and schools with predominantly students of color are still struggling to make adequate gains. In education terms, this lack of progress has been named an “achievement gap.” Why does the achievement gap exist? How do we fix it?

Pearson: I believe that we fix it by holding all teachers to the highest of standards. That way all students will have equitable access to high quality teaching.

Amy: So, just to clarify, you think that a major cause of the “achievement gap” is teachers?

Pearson: I just believe that we need to normalize the standard of excellence so that no bad apples spoil the bunch.
Amy: I posit that the edTPA is in effect deprofessionalizing the teaching force, all the way from higher education teacher preparation down to the interactions of students and teachers in the field. In effect, it seems that you are saying that you do not trust teacher preparation programs to graduate successful teachers unless they are forced to meet certain standards on an exam.

Pearson: I believe that our tests and the edTPA push programs to graduate higher quality teachers.

Amy: I find the word “high quality” to be problematic. It is a word much like “achievement gap.” It is a word that is saturated with meaning. When I hear “high quality,” I think of metrics and rubrics. When I hear “achievement gap,” I think of low income students and students of color. Let’s be real, those words are really euphemisms for other things.

Pearson: [....]

Amy: The outcomes for the edTPA differ greatly from college to college. It seems that education schools that serve lower income students and students of color are not getting the same results on the exam.

Pearson: On the contrary, “differences by demographic group were small; women generally scored higher than men, and suburban teachers on average scored higher than teachers in other teaching contexts. Taken together, demographic variables such as gender, ethnicity, teaching placement context, education level and primary language explained approximately 3.8% of the
total variance in edTPA scores. This result highlights that demographic factors account for a very small portion of the variables that contribute to how a candidate scores on edTPA. In other words, a candidate’s demographic characteristics alone are a poor predictor of edTPA performance or readiness to teach. The finding further supports the conclusion that while some statistically significant differences exist between subgroups, 96% of the explanation for that performance can be attributed to other non-demographic factors.” (Bradley, 2017)

Amy: Interesting. I would love to see the data.

Pearson: That is confidential and privileged.

Amy: Why? I do not think you made up your findings, but I do think that there are many ways to interpret data. The different interpretations have to do with one’s ontology. For example, some might say that schools that perform below average on the edTPA and standardized tests are schools that do not have access to ample resources. This may be true in some cases. However, I find that I cannot apply market-based logics alone to explain the achievement gap. The achievement gap is an intersection of so many things, and, I believe that the achievement gap is perpetuated by a belief that assessments and standards are objective and not socially constructed. When the socially constructed nature of exams is acknowledged, one can begin to uncover how exams such as the edTPA may fit into a paradigm of colonialism and neoliberalism (Tuck & Gorlewska, 2015).

Pearson: “Spelman College Education Department (serving Spelman and Morehouse College students) has a 90 percent first-attempt pass rate for Elementary Education and Secondary Math
and Social Studies. Said Valeisha Ellis, professor at Spelman College. “Professionally, I attribute the edTPA success to Spelman’s rigorous admission policy. In addition, the faculty have intentionally incorporated the key elements of edTPA throughout the program, so that candidates have had several opportunities to practice and reflect on the high-leverage practices that we want our candidates to demonstrate prior to graduation. Lastly, Spelman has a strong historical tradition that requires all undergraduate students to conduct research during their junior and senior years. Spelman has a strong focus on culturally responsive pedagogy and advocacy that enhances our candidates’ capacity to be problem solvers and provide positive solutions to the issues that face the local school systems. edTPA gives them the opportunity to demonstrate that capacity” (Bradley, 2017).

**Amy:** That is a really nice story. I like stories because they nuance data. As you know from being in the business of data, one story does not paint a full picture. I am interested in studying the data as well as the stories. There are teacher preparation programs that serve lower income students of color that do well on the edTPA, and there are teacher preparation programs that serve low income students of color that do not do well on the edTPA (Board of Regents, 2015). I began to ask myself, “Why?” The answers may be found in the teacher preparation programs themselves. The schools that have students that do well have courses that are aligned to support the edTPA process. They have courses which are essentially *test prep.* I argue that these courses take away from valuable time that future teachers could be developing theoretical frameworks, developing content knowledge, and becoming well versed in research methods.
Pearson: A well aligned curriculum does not need a class that teaches to the test. edTPA simply serves as a way to allow candidates to demonstrate their readiness to enter a classroom and to become the teacher of record. Candidates are asked to:

- Develop a lesson
- Plan instruction
- Videotape themselves teaching 3-5 consecutive lessons (referred to as learning segments)
- Assess and analyze student achievement
- Reflect and comment on their practice (New York State Office of Higher Education, 2015)

Amy: On the surface, this is great. But, why do you need fifteen through eighteen rubrics to assess this? Why can’t schools have local control of this? If schools had local control, they could weave this into the curriculum with ease. However, when students must produce a standardized product, one assessed on fifteen through eighteen rubrics and with booklets in excess of sixty pages explaining the process, one typically needs help deciphering this.

Furthermore, New York State only field tested the edTPA in 2012 for one year (Greenblatt & O'Hara, 2015). It had a rapid roll out to teacher preparation programs and many programs were not prepared to support students in completing the edTPA. The first cohort was basically set up to fail.

Pearson: The roll out was not perfect, but it did change the preparation programs for the better. Change is not always easy, and with a quick roll out, teacher preparation programs needed to
make rapid changes to their programs. We argue that these changes benefited future teachers and students as the norms and standards put forth in the edTPA are best practices.

Amy: Here we go with best practices again…. Was it the best practice when you rolled out the edTPA without proper field testing? Perhaps you should hold yourself to the same standards that you hold our teachers and teacher preparation programs to. But, I feel like we are going in circles. One place we haven’t been is how you are profiting from the testing. How is your stock doing?

Pearson: On last check the markets have been strong.

Amy: Who are you loyal to, your stockholders or our communities?

Pearson: When the communities do well, our stocks do well. We aren’t just in testing, we also make educational software. The market dictates our success and the market is all encompassing.

Amy: Enough said.
A TRANSITION BETWEEN CHAPTERS: WHAT IS MISSING?

Literally, there is no area of Western and increasingly international society that is free from the damage caused by a distorted politics of knowledge. This issue should be on the front burner of our consciousness, a central part of any curriculum, and a subject discussed and debated in the political process. Yet, it seems strange to many individuals to raise these issues, as the purpose of say, becoming educated, is to simply commit knowledge to our mental filing cabinets. The idea that a central purpose of a democratic curriculum might involve exploring where knowledge comes from, the rules of its production, and the ways we can assess its quality and the purposes of its production often doesn’t resonate with individuals living in an era of standardized tests and student/school rankings.


As I was putting the final touches on my dissertation, I found that a piece of me was missing from these pages. Special education is a big part of who I am as a teacher. In the next chapter, *Radioactive Oatmeal*, I aim to put some of my thoughts on special education down on the page.

As a special educator, I have helped parents through the special education referral process, the writing of Individualized Education Plans (IEP), and the navigating of a sea of services and accommodations and modifications. The process of being labelled as a student with special needs (depending upon the perceived difficulty) is one that often involves many tests and procedures, such as academic testing performed by a psychologist, medical referrals, and/or evaluations by a variety of professionals including, but not limited to physical therapist, occupational therapists, and speech pathologists. Normed intelligence scales, exams, and measurements are all part of the process. I have often wondered about who makes these scales and measurements and how is it that schools seemingly universally accept these scales as a best practice?

From the previous chapter on the edTPA, to the special education process an policies, the issue of metrics emerged. If metrics used to sort students are manmade, they are therefore saturated with ontologies, epistemologies, and axiologies. These exams are not objective science,
because that, in my opinion, does not exist. If the exams are not objective, but laden with values and beliefs, than whose values and beliefs are represented by the exams?

Asking these questions led me to the story of Freddie Boyce. Freddie’s story is one that I first heard when teaching in the Boston area, and it is a story that I have carried close throughout my career as a special educator. I believe that Freddie’s story needs to be told so that everyone who hears it can learn from it. I have learned from it and it is my hope that in reading Freddie’s story, certain practices of testing, sorting, and marginalizing in school will be illuminated and interrogated. I tell Freddie’s story so that we can learn from it and do our best to make sure the violence of the past is not repeated.
CHAPTER 5. RADIOACTIVE OATMEAL

Abstract

America has a dark history of embracing eugenics. In the nineteenth and twentieth century, prominent scholars, educators, activists, doctors, and scientists subscribed to the pseudoscience of eugenics. As a result, hundreds of thousands of human beings were violently and systematically marginalized, tortured, and abused. During this time, individuals perceived to have disabilities were oftentimes denied an education and institutionalized. Instruments of measurement and sorting were created by the architects of the eugenics movement in order to cast aside people perceived by them to be unworthy of humane treatment. Overtime, the term “eugenics” fell out of vogue in the field of education, however, the mechanisms of sorting and marginalizing students continue to proliferate within schools. Despite laws that mandate inclusion, the underlying system of normative testing, tracking, and sorting conceived and implemented in schools during the eugenics movement remain. I argue that not enough has been done to actively dismantle the legacy of eugenics in our schools. I have found that in looking backwards and critically examining the history of eugenics in our own communities, the structures of oppression are made visible. It is my hope that by making these instruments of oppression visible, we can remake schooling in the image of equity.

Radioactive Oatmeal

As a young boy, Freddie Boyce was fed radioactive oatmeal. He did not know he was eating radioactive oatmeal. No one told him. He was a ward of the state of Massachusetts, placed in the Fernald State School for the Feeble Minded. At the age of seven, in the year of 1949, Freddie Boyce had landed in an institution that would deny him a proper education, abuse and beat him, force him to work hard labor, and run experiments on him. He was fed the radioactive oatmeal in a special “science club” at the Fernald State School. When he joined the science club, scientists
at Quaker Oats and MIT rewarded Freddie with trips out of the institution, gifts such as Mickey Mouse watches, and tickets to see the Boston Red Sox play baseball at Fenway Park (Boissoneault, 2017). The scientists gave these nefarious gifts to children cast aside and marginalized by society. These scientists experimented on Freddie Boyce and other children using flawed theories of evolution and the pseudoscience of eugenics to justify their actions. Under the tenets of the American eugenics movement, children like Freddie Boyce were degrading and denigrating the gene pool of the human race.

Freddie Boyce was not the only child that was tortured under the guise of science and progress in the eugenics movement. Through the 1970s, more than 250,000 children were separated from their families, forced to live in squalid institutions, and even sterilized (D’Antonio, 2004). Radioactive oatmeal was just one instance of thousands.

Hegemony is internalized oppression that has been accepted because “it is just the way things are”. Hegemony is everywhere. What makes hegemony so dangerous is, that often times, it is so difficult to see. Sometimes, hegemony is invisible to those who are living within its confines.

Freddie Boyce became a ward of the state of Massachusetts in 1941 at eight months old. His newly-widowed, young mother had left Freddie and his two-year-old brother alone in their Boston tenement apartment. A neighbor called the police when she heard the boys crying. The police knocked down the door, took Freddie and his brother, and placed them in separate foster care homes. Freddy never saw his brother again.

Until the age of seven, Freddie bounced around from foster home to foster home. He learned to make himself as small as possible, trying not to be seen or heard. As a toddler, he learned to sit incredibly still, unmoving for hours. When he was placed at a new foster home two days after
Christmas in 1946, the foster mother noticed his stillness and smallness, his lack of words, and thought that there might be something wrong with him. His new foster mother sent him to a doctor who told her that Freddie was capable of talking, but was reluctant to do so. He told the foster mother that Freddie would, “grow out of it” and, “that he was a normal boy” (D’Antonio, 2004, p. 24). The foster mother and social workers who worked on Freddie’s case refused to accept the doctor’s assessment and sent him with a “state lady” for testing at a state school for the “retarded” in Wrentham, Massachusetts. Over two days, five-year-old Freddie was given an intelligence test, administered by multiple people, where he was asked to define words such as “timid” and “tame” and was asked to do a variety of tasks with crayons and pencils, despite the fact that he had never before used a crayon or pencil in his life. With all the strangers coming and going and all the new questions and tasks, Freddie became overwhelmed and began to cling to the only constant, the state lady. In his file, this “behavior” was noted as “regressed” and “immature” (p. 25). Freddie was given an IQ score of 65 and labeled “feeble minded.”

Freddie’s new diagnosis coupled with his new foster caretaker’s dislike of school-aged children, led his case workers to recommend that Freddie be sent to a state school for “retarded children.” Such schools, however, had no vacancy at this time and Freddie instead landed in his seventh foster home in six years. This home would end up being the first place that Freddie ever felt loved. It would be the last true home he ever lived in as a child.

In 1947, Freddie went to live with Ms. Bond, an old widow who owned a farm in Merrimac, Massachusetts. No longer able to run a farm on her own, she turned to a new crop: raising foster boys. She earned $20 a month for each of the boys she took in, income which she needed. But the children were more than the sum of their funds to her. Ms. Bond was strict, but she loved the boys. The boys, mostly from poor, squalid, tenement buildings, loved Ms. Bond and the fruits that the farm had to offer. They would play together in the orchards, climbing trees and snacking
on cherries and apples and plums. She would feed them ice cream every Sunday and make a point of celebrating each boy’s birthday. She sent the boys to church on Sundays and enrolled them in public school. She repeatedly reminded the boys that they were, “equals of every child in town” (p. 26).

However, six weeks after enrolling the boys in public schools, the school board voted to permanently bar Ms. Bond’s boys from attending public school in Merrimac. The school board informed Ms. Bond that since the boys were state wards and not residents of Merrimac, the school had no obligation to educate them. Plus, since so many of the boys had not previously attended school, they would need lengthy and expensive interventions beyond what the school could provide. The school board recommended that the boys be educated in a city, rather than in Merrimac.

Ms. Bond made appeals to the state, all of which went nowhere. Instead of school, the boys spent their days playing in the orchards. When the weather turned cold, Ms. Bond would light a fire and pull out puzzles and crayons for the boys. Freddie Boyce remembers these times fondly.

One morning, in March of 1949, the boys awoke without the familiar smell of percolating coffee on the stove. Instead of the footsteps of Ms. Bond coming to wake them up, there was silence. One of the boys went to check on Ms. Bond and found her unwell. The police were called. An ambulance and social workers arrived. The boys were told that Ms. Bond was dead. Their things were packed up in paper bags and they were taken away.

Ms. Bond’s boys were all sent different ways. Freddie never saw any of the boys who lived with him at Ms. Bond’s house ever again. Freddie was profoundly sad; but he did his best to hide his intense sadness about Ms. Bond’s death from his new foster family. At night, he would often wake up drenched in tears.
Freddie’s new foster placement was short lived. In April of 1949, a state lady came and packed up Freddie’s things in the all-too-familiar brown paper bag and took him to a courthouse in Boston. His birth mother was summoned to the courthouse, but she did not come. Freddie Boyce, at the age of seven, stood alone before a court as a psychiatrist explained that Freddie had a mild level of retardation, “feeblemindedness” he called it, and should be placed in a state school. No one spoke for Freddie Boyce as the judge signed paperwork sentencing Freddie to an indefinite term at a state school.

Hegemony does not have to be invisible. Hegemony does not have to be normal. Expose it.

In 1960, years after the secret science club, Freddie got out of the Fernald State School. He was eighteen. He had spent the last eleven years at a school, and, through no fault of his own, he could not read or write. Once released, Freddie joined a carnival, he taught himself to read and write, and saved up for a home. He got married, though his relationship did not last long. (He attributed this to his own difficulties with “intimate relationships”) (Allen, 2006). In 1993, when a librarian at Fernald School found an old ledger outlining the experiments done to the boys by Quaker oats and MIT, she called the Boston Globe. The story was explosive. A Congressional inquiry was launched. There was a lawsuit in which the members of the Fernald secret science club were awarded 3 million dollars (about 50,000 dollars to each participant).

Freddie died of colon cancer in 2006. In the years before he died, he had become an avid reader of Stephen Hawking and would talk about the mysteries of the cosmos to anyone who would listen. He had reconnected with many of his scattered siblings. He had made peace with his mother, who had 15 children taken away from her and lost to the foster care system. He did not hold any bitterness for the individuals who had mistreated him, thinking that they were all “victims of ignorance and impossible working conditions” (Marquard, 2006). He was, however, holding out for an apology from the State of Massachusetts. He never got one. As he lay in a
coma, Freddie did, however, receive a letter from Gerald J. Morrissey Jr., commissioner of the Massachusetts State Department of Retardation. The letter read, “Under the current standards, the department has determined that you are not a person with mental retardation” (Marquard, 2006). His brother read the letter aloud to Freddie as he lay in the coma. His brother then placed the letter prominently in the front of Freddie’s permanent record. The same record that had followed him from foster home to foster home and stayed with him throughout his time at Fernald State School.

**The Legacy of Eugenics and Sorting**

How did Freddie Boyce, a ward of the state that was supposed to protect him, a typically developing and able bodied person, end up being labeled as feeble-minded and condemned to live out his formative years in an institution? The answer to this may lie in a tangled mess of intersections of science, policy, politics, economics, religion, individual and collective actions.

Throughout white American history there has often been an ethos, a rationale, or force that drives forward systematic public education. With early colonial settlers, a driving force behind education was often to promote religious Christian doctrine (Tyack, 1974). At this time, the primary focus of colonial-era schools was to teach individuals to read the Bible in an effort to imbue morality. With the American Revolution, leaders such as Thomas Jefferson and James Madison became embroiled in debates about who would control the government. From these debates, emerged the idea of a school to educate the masses (i.e., white men) in order to create a more informed citizenry (Kaestle, 1983). In the beginning of the 19th century, the industrial era emerged and the economy of America shifted from agrarian to industrial and urban. Shortly thereafter, responding to an influx of mostly Eastern and Southern European immigrants, the schools began to rapidly expand in order to “Americanize” these students and prepare them for assimilation into the new industrial economy (Tyack, 1974). In the 1950s, in response to
America’s Cold War in Russia, schools were incentivized by national security and began pushing initiatives in science and math. During this era, increased globalization of the economy and competition over technological advances were a driving force for curriculum design in schools (Kliebard, 2004).

Throughout American history, the purpose of school has often been shaped by an intersection of historical events and influenced by social and cultural phenomenon. With the advent of centralized systems of control, beginning with Horace Mann’s Common School vision in the 19th century, and to the current appointment of Besty DeVos, daughter and wife of corporate billionaires, to Federal Secretary of Education (Cain, 2018), the policies of education have largely been dominated by powerful and wealthy stakeholders. These powerful stakeholders have wielded great influence and have imposed their epistemological perspectives on the masses (Kincheloe, 2008).

The imposition of epistemological perspectives was made easier by the application of principals of Taylorism in schools by John Franklin Bobbitt, a professor at University of Chicago from 1909-1941 (Au, 2011). Taylorism, a theory developed in the late 19th century by Frederick Taylor, a mechanical engineer, uses analysis of data to improve labor outcomes. Bobbitt (1912) applied these theories of Taylorism to managing urban schools, calling for “scientific management” of schools. Bobbitt made the case that this efficiency was needed in order to ensure proper funding, since the immigrants did not pay enough taxes to sustain schools without it (p. 259).

The education of children in American schools has been influenced by the concept of investment and return (Spring, 2008). In early America, this investment and return was largely a religious one. In the days of the revolution, this investment and return was political. In the industrial revolution, this investment and return was economic. With the influx of immigrants of
the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, this investment and return was economically and socially motivated. In the cold war, this investment and return was economic and political.

On the heels of a shifting and changing American economy in the nineteenth century, a scientific paradigm shift (Kuhn, 1973) was underway. Charles Darwin published *On The Origin of Species* (2009) in 1859 which mainstreamed ideas of evolution and natural selection. Soon, biological determinism, the idea that people have innate predilections and that their fate is sealed by their genes and biological attributes, slithered its way into the structures of schooling.

Biological determinism has its roots in the pseudoscience of eugenics that was once embraced by many (and is still embraced by some) throughout America (Harmon, 2009). Darwin’s theories of evolution were contorted by England’s Sir Francis Galton and applied to humans. Many well-to-do Americans in the United States aligned themselves with the teachings of Galton, and organizations such as the Carnegie Institution and the Rockefeller Foundation started to pour money into eugenics research. Using these funds, Charles Davenport opened up the Eugenics Record Office (ERO) in Cold Spring Harbor, New York (later renamed Cold Spring Harbor Laboratories), where Davenport collected data on people, and used this data to advocate for the creation of an elite race. During this time, eugenics organizations, such as the American Breeders Association (ABA) and American Eugenics Society (AES) formed. Prominent eugenicists of such societies staffed and led universities, influencing minds of students for generations to come (Allen, 1986). One such professor was Edward Thorndike, the one-time head of the American Psychological Society, behaviorist, and long-term professor at Columbia’s Teachers College from 1899 until his death in 1949. During his tenure at Teachers College, Thorndike published 50 books and wrote over 450 articles. He contributed to the development of the first national intelligence test in 1917 and had a great impact on establishing normative testing in schools (Stoskopf, 2002). Throughout his time at Teachers College,
Thorndike maintained his beliefs of the mechanisms of eugenics, writing as late as 1940, "By selective breeding supported by a suitable environment we can have a world in which all men will equal the top ten percent of present men. One sure service of the able and good is to beget and rear offspring. One sure service (almost the only one) which the inferior and vicious can perform is to prevent their genes from survival" (p. 957).

The term, eugenics, fell out of vogue with many in America in the 1940s with the rise of Hitler and the publicized atrocities of World War II, but the mechanisms remained. As such, biological determinism is still alive and thriving in schools. We see it in legislation such as No Child Left Behind (NCBL) (2001) and Race to the Top (RttT) (2008) policies that link school funding to “performance,” the incessant normative testing, the way teachers and students are evaluated, curriculum design, and embedded in words commonly used in education, such as “excellence,” “standards,” “low-performing,” and “achievement gap” (Stetsenko, 2017).

The increasing standardization of schools raises the question, whose knowledge is being privileged and why? Joe Kincheloe (2008) problematizes Western, positivist ideas of what constitutes knowledge drawing a connection between Eurocentrism, colonialism and Western dominant epistemological systems based in science. Kincheloe uses the acronym FIDUROD (Formal, Intractable, Decontextualized, Universalistic, Reductionist, and One Dimensional) to describe issues with standardized exams and normative testing. Instead of deeply contextualizing and valuing indigenous and localized knowledge, embracing and learning from difference, American educational systems that buy into the top-down epistemology may be complicit in explicitly and implicitly marginalizing people who have differing ways of being in the world.

The sorting and testing of today has parallels in the eugenics movements of the past. Using eugenics, school became a place to sort students and skim the ones that rose to the top, the cream-of-the-crop, and cast aside those who were deemed to not have value. The action of
sorting and skimming is embedded in our nation’s history. By design, many schools sort, acculturize, and marginalize people who do not fit a mold. Schools did this at the turn of the twentieth century with eugenics and social efficacy and they continue to do this now NCLB and normative testing. In a way, the ugly, discriminatory practices of eugenics established systems and practices that were easily coopted by the for-profit, corporate interests to infiltrate schools. Though the rationale behind the sorting and skimming might have changed, the systems remain relatively the same. Since the systems already existed, it was easy for cooperate interest to create policy and slither their way in.

Borrowing theories from Freire (1978), Kincheloe (2008) writes of radical love, and makes the case that it is difficult to find a praxis of radical love within the FIDURODian construct. When examining practices in schools, I believe that it is important to ask, “Is this practice done with love and compassion.” I wonder if Bobbitt’s application of efficiency models where people are reduced down to little more than numbers, and Thorndike’s application of eugenics in testing practices in schools would stand up to the test of love and compassion. I posit, that perhaps if some of the social workers, judges, psychiatrists rejected FIDUROD and embraced radical love, that Freddie Boyce’s story may have been very different. Instead of love, compassion, and equity, many of the individuals around Freddie believed in the “truth” of science and eugenics. Without radical love, too many schools have become one of indoctrination and competition—a “survival of the fittest.”

Of course, there are and have always been schools that maintain some form of autonomy and agency and do not fall victim to the sorting and testing. I have visited schools that have been able to find loopholes in the system, ways around the accountability measures of NCLB and RTTT. There is hope. And, part of that hope lays in the learning from and acknowledging the past so that we can deconstruct it and understand it so that we can remake our future in equity.
This sorting and filtering of students has led American schools down a dangerous path. A path that has led to the disregard for human life, as those deemed not worthy of an education were cast aside. Freddie Boyce was just one example of one life affected by these policies, but there were many more throughout American history. One such institution, cast in the mold of systematic sorting and eugenics, was Willowbrook.

Willowbrook

To say that Willowbrook Institution was horrific would not do justice to the children, men, and women who were forced to call this place home. At its peak enrollment in 1969, Willowbrook held 6,200 people, 2,200 more people than the institution was built to house (National Council on Disability, 2015). The people who called Willowbrook home came from all walks of life. Some were children with Down syndrome or cerebral palsy, some were adults injured in accidents, some, like Freddie Boyce, were wards of the states. All were human beings.

William Bronson first walked through the halls of Willowbrook in 1970 (Pelka, 2012). Bronson, the grand-nephew of Leon Trotsky, had accepted a job as physician in Willowbrook after being ousted from Menninger Institute in Topeka, Kansas for attempting to organize the lowest paid workers. He had come to New York to provide medical care at a clinic run by the Black Panthers, but needing to feed his family, he accepted the only paying job that he could find. He became a physician at the Willowbrook Institution.

Bronson was shocked by what he found within the walls of Willowbrook. Bronson described the outside of Willowbrook as being “something out of a nineteenth-century pastoral painting,” but what was happening inside was, “towering misery, humiliation, and violence” (Pelka, 2012, p. 175).

At first, Bronson was stationed in the children’s wing. He remarked that the children, “were all ambulatory, and they were all more capable, more mentally competent” (p. 177). He recalls of
the children’s hall, “No programming going on, the most token schooling happening, no support or continuity for the schooling. The minute the kid reaches beyond school age, they go deeper into the institution. No school, no future, no exit. They’ve got to die to get out’” (p. 175).

Always short on supplies, Bronson would badger administrators for materials such as sutures and soap. Tired of his badgering, in an effort to force Bronson out, the Willowbrook administration transferred him out of the children’s wing and deeper into the institution, into a hall of adults.

Bronson oversaw a ward of two-hundred people equally contained in four rooms of fifty. Severely understaffed, Bronson worked with one nurse in the morning, one in the evening, and no nurse overnight. There were just two ward workers on duty at any given time. These workers were tasked with assisting all two hundred people with bathing and personal care. The result was two hundred people in hospital gowns (easier to help dress in gowns than to help dress in clothes) that lived in complete squalor. Human excrement covered the floors, and to clean the waste, the ward workers used vats of undiluted Pine-sol, which they dumped in gallons on the floor. The smell of Pine-sol and human waste was pervasive.

The residents at Willowbrook were heavily sedated. The institution did this so that two workers could at all times “handle” two hundred souls doing nothing all day long. After sedation, on cold days, the residents of Willowbrook would drag themselves to the radiators, and pile up on top of one another attracted to the heaters for their warmth. The large radiators, covered by sheet metal, would grow extremely hot. As the residents laid across each other in drugged-out and sedated piles, they would burn themselves, both from the hot metal plates over the heater and the thick gummy Pine-Sol chemicals on the floor. They would move only when the drugs wore off enough to become aware of their flesh burning.
Bronson spent most of his time just trying to remedy the ailments caused by the institution itself. He treated infections from the burns. He ordered rare antibiotics to treat the onslaught of parasites and worms. He treated the hepatitis A that was intentionally given to the patients as part of an experiment in the 1950s and never properly treated (Robinson & Unruh, 2008). He kept extensive notes on all his patients, making copies to bring home with him just in case they were destroyed. He began contacting parents of children to alert them to what was happening at Willowbrook. He filed grievances with the state, with the intent of exposing the atrocities at Willowbrook, all of which were denied. Bronson recalled his time at Willowbrook writing, “There was just wretchedness and suffering and insanity and inhumanity. Short of Dachau, or a concentration camp in Germany where they were actually burning people every day- they didn’t have to burn people here. They needed to keep them alive because they needed to make money off them” (Pelka, 2012, p. 180).

Over time, the atrocities at Willowbrook were exposed. Parents and relatives of the people housed in Willowbrook banded together to form a class action lawsuit to improve conditions in the facility. As a result of their efforts, in 1975, a Willowbrook Consent Decree went into effect. This decree included provisions for active representation for individuals at Willowbrook, case management services, community inclusion, guidelines for establishing a “home-like environment,” limited the number of individuals housed at Willowbrook, and established provisions for ongoing monitoring of compliance with the decree (Office for People with Developmental Disabilities, 2018). Ultimately, the state made a decision to close the institution. The last resident left Willowbrook in 1987.

**Legislating Inclusion**

By 1918, most states in the union had compulsory education laws, yet by and large, when students with special needs attempted to attend public school, schools found ways to exclude
them (Yell, Rogers, & Rogers, 1998). As per the 10th Amendment of the United States Constitution, matters of schooling were mostly left to the states. Brown v. Board of Education (1954) was a landmark case that opened the door to disability rights because it made the right to an education a federal matter. In the Brown v. Board of Education ruling, Chief Justice Warren (1954) wrote, “In these days, it is doubtful that any child may reasonably be expected to succeed in life if he is denied the opportunity of an education.” Despite this ruling, in 1958, the Supreme Court of Illinois in in Department of Public Welfare v. Haas, held that the compulsory education laws did not apply to the “feebleminded,” reasoning that they are unable to reap the benefits of a good education because they were “mentally deficient.” Throughout the country, disability advocates battled for equal opportunities in courts, often escalating court cases to the Federal level. In 1972, a class-action lawsuit, Mills v. Board of Education, was filed in the District of Columbia Federal Court. The lawsuit was brought by seven parents of students with disabilities. The students with disabilities had a variety of diagnoses, including hyperactivity, epilepsy, behavior problems, learning disabilities, and physical impairment. The seven individuals named in the class-action lawsuit represented 18,000 children who had been denied a public education. The parents won the lawsuit and this action became the framework for the 1975 law, Educating All Handicapped Children Act (EAHCA).

EAHCA mandated that children with disabilities have the right to a free and appropriate education, due process (including parental involvement), non-discriminatory testing, evaluation, and placement procedures, and that students be educated in the least restrictive environment (LRE). EAHCA also established the mandate for students with disabilities to have Individualized Education Plans (IEPs). IEPs provide legal documentation of a service delivery plan for students with special needs. This service delivery includes learning goals and objectives, programing, and accommodations that the school will provide for the student with an IEP.
In 1990, EAHCA was renamed Individuals with Disabilities in Education Act (IDEA). This change also coincided with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) (1990) that prohibits discrimination of individuals with disabilities in all areas of life. This law requires equal employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities (Title I), nondiscrimination on the basis of disability in state and local government services (Title II), nondiscrimination on the basis of disability through public accommodations and within commercial facilities (Title III), and guarantees telecommunication accessibility regulated by the Federal Communication Commission. The latter requires telephone and Internet companies to provide services that allow individuals with hearing and speech disabilities to communicate over the telephone. This title also requires closed captioning of federally funded public service announcements and is regulated by the Federal Communication Commission.

A major takeaway from disability legislation is the notion of Least Restrictive Environment (LRE). LRE mandates that students with disabilities be educated “to the maximum extent appropriate, with nondisabled peers” (IDEA, 2007). LRE became the basis for inclusion and school programs that situated special educators with general educators and students with disabilities in classes with their nondisabled peers.

**Are Disabilities Socially and Culturally Constructed**

When viewing an event through a sociocultural lens, there is an aim to uncover the intersections of social and cultural phenomena and the underlying structures that influence the events. When I think of something being socially and culturally constructed, I conjure up an image of a skyscraper. I imagine the planning that went on before the building of the structure began. I envision an architect. I visualize the architect’s blueprints and see how each piece of rebar and metal was placed on the structure with intentionality and precision. I also see the
landscape on which the structure was built, the way the ground supports and provides the foundation for such a structure.

Sewell (2005) writes of structure as “a powerful, pervasive, and constitutive metaphor in the human sciences (and for that matter in the natural sciences). Structure signifies the stable principle of order that underlies the surface multiplicity of phenomena. It represents one of the major striving of the sciences: the attempt to reduce the apparent chaos of the world to relatively simple or comprehensible models or rules. Events, which are turbulent and chaotic are conventionally contrasted to structure and they tend to be denigrated in the comparison” (pp. 198-199).

I use the word structure to describe what I see as dominant and pervasive systems of schooling, however, the term itself is reductionist. There are many complex interplays between individuals, objects, places, thoughts and ideas, language, body language, and interactions, all of which cannot be reduced to fit into solid, unmoving structure. Yet, as I attempt to describe issues of disability in schools, I see all at once larger macro systems of oppression influencing individuals in lived experience on micro and meso levels. In a crisis of representation (Greene, 1994), I make a conscientious choice to reduce and generalize the chaos of human experience in an attempt to make meaning from the chaos.

In research, while we illuminate we also obscure (Tobin, 2008) I acknowledge that distilling school into one dominant structure influenced by eugenics and biological determinism ignores all the agentic moments of individuals as they exist within, bend, or even break the structures. Yet, when I tell the story of Freddie Boyce, I feel that it is worthy of an investigation as to how and why such institutions exist. I want to understand how individuals, historical events, culture, and society all intertwine to produce spaces where people are so violently mistreated. Sewell (2005) notes, ‘humans, unlike planet, galaxies, or subatomic particles, are capable of assessing the
structures in which they exist and of acting with imperfectly predictable consequences- in ways that change them” (p. 89). In this way, the research on this page is sociocultural in nature as I am attempting to make sense of how an intersection of events shaped the current system of special education. Who are the architects of the systems that oppress? As an educator, what is my role in dismantling this? How can I expose the structures and act in ways to change them?

So many aspects of the structure of schools were built to sort and marginalize. Many teachers may be unknowingly complicit in it. Jeanie Oakes, Amy Stuart Wells, and Makeba Jones (1997) write about how the idea of fixed intelligence has become so entrenched in some teachers’ psyches that they see failed detracking attempts as the fault of the student instead of the fault of the school system. Teachers who adhere to the idea of fixed intelligence often view their systems of measurement, grades, tests, as absolute tests of intelligence. These teachers often fail to realize the socially and culturally constructed nature of what they teach and how they teach it. Exposing teachers to sociocultural approaches may be a way to combat this.

When viewing America’s system of schooling through a sociocultural lens, the intersectionality of numerous aspects of the human experience (for example, race, economics, parent education, gender, politics, location, sexual orientation) mediate and nuance the experiences of individual’s experience in school. These experiences are not supposed to influence one’s referral for special education services, but all too often, they do (Artiles, Kozleski, Trent, Osher, & Ortiz, 2010). Embedded in our structures of schooling are positivistic notions that when students fail to make adequate gains in school, something must be wrong with the student. I want to turn this notion on its head.

No doubt, a struggling student may be in need of interventions and extra help from the school. This same student and may also be diagnosed with a disability, and be entitled to special education services. It is vital that this student receive these services and the special attention,
modifications, and accommodations that the student needs, as this is essential to beginning to create equity in the classroom. However, to truly create an equitable environment, I posit that educators would benefit from also taking a long hard look at their own practices to see if there are barriers that are blocking student access to full participation in school. Rather than viewing the disability through a lens that marginalizes those who do not perform (Kliewer & Fitzgerald, 2001), students and teachers might try a multilectic and phenomenological approach (Fellner, 2014). This approach takes into account not only the dominant structures of school and schooling but also the many unique mitigating factors that contribute to barriers a student may face when in school. With the rejection of top-down, positivistic, racist practices and an embrace of culturally sustaining pedagogies (Paris & Alim, 2017) that reimagine school structures through a sociocultural lens, school may become a place of growing equity.

Learning about our history leads to an understanding of how eugenics has influenced structures of schooling. Knowing our history exposes how these structures of schooling have marginalized and stigmatized students who do not fit into the vision of the architects of the system. By and large, structures of schooling, physical buildings, and the objects within, standards, testing, the way teaching and learning, curricula, has largely been modeled in a one-size-fits-all way. This one-size-fits-all approach does not fit all. It was made intentionally to weed out those who don’t fit the mold. If schools are going to be truly inclusive systems of school and schooling needs to be reimagined in the lens of equity.

**Nuancing inclusion: The Cotting School**

When I was an undergraduate learning about the fight for inclusion of students with disabilities in schools, I thought for sure that when I graduated, I would find a position in a public school and work to facilitate the inclusion of students with disabilities into the classroom with their peers. Instead, I landed at the Cotting School. The Cotting School is a private school
for students with exceptional needs in Lexington, MA. Many of the students who attended the Cotting School had medical needs that exceeded the resources that public schools could offer. A full-time doctor and nursing staff were stationed at Cotting School. There was an extensive physical and occupational therapy room that serviced wheelchairs and orthotics. There was full time staff of speech and language pathologists, trained in the use of augmentative communication devices. There were three teachers in every classroom with class sizes capped at twelve. There was dance, music, physical education, a prom, ski trips, and a school play. Here, I learned a new meaning of inclusion and least restrictive environment. Here, at the Cotting School, for the first time, many students with disabilities felt fully included in school.

The Cotting School (formally the Industrial School for Crippled and Deformed Children), is an institution steeped in history. The Cotting School was founded in 1893 by Augustus Thorndike and Edward Bradford, two orthopedic surgeons from the Boston Children’s Hospital who had seen firsthand how children with physical challenges were denied entry into school (Manzo & Peters, 2008). The two men founded a private school in which students did not have to pay tuition, the Industrial School for Crippled and Deformed Children, to serve children with physical disabilities who were not at the time attending school. It was the first day school in American of its’ kind.

When the school first opened at the turn of the twentieth century, most of the students had been injured in industrial accidents. Thorndike and Bradford would drive a bus around Boston to collect the children from their homes, often carrying those who were unable to move on their own out of their homes onto the bus. While at school, the students would learn reading, writing, arithmetic, and history. The students would also receive services and accommodations with nurses and staff creating orthopedic devices to help students become more independent. Boys
and girls, white students and students of color were all educated together at Cotting. They even had a women’s basketball team in 1929, long before Title 9.

The Cotting School nuanced my ideas on special education. I learned that there is no one-size-fits all approach to teaching students with exceptional needs. Here was a separate facility that was serving students in a better way than their public schools were. For many of the students at the Cotting School, being in a community with other students who used wheelchairs, or feeding tubes, or augmentative communication devices meant that they fit in completely and were therefore, fully included.

**Infinite Potential**

In a recent gathering of minds at the CUNY Graduate Center, Anna Stetsenko, a professor at the University, gave a talk on the *infinite potential in all people*. She called it a *radical* idea. I have been thinking on this. *Infinite potential* is *limitless*. Yes. I believe it to be true. I want it to be true. Yet, why does the process of schooling not feel limitless for all?

Stetsenko (2017) points out that the idea of access for all and equity in education is multifaceted and complex. Structures of school and schooling are embedded with oppressive systems. Issues of race, socio-economics, disability, gender, politics, sexual orientation, and class permeate schooling in America. These issues are real for all those who live them, yet at the same time, they do not have to be. Race, socio-economics, disability, gender, politics, sexual orientation, and class are all socially and culturally constructed labels. Humans made these labels, we can unmake them.

Our school systems still adhere to systems of marginalization that are imbued with the historic infiltration of ideas of biological determinism. Historically, this biological determinism has resulted in the violence towards humans and the creation of institutions such as the Fernald School and Willowbrook. These institutions are examples of extreme instances of
marginalization and violence in our history and are shocking, to say the least. Also concerning is 
the devious way that these mechanisms of sorting, devised by eugenicists of the past, have 
shaped schooling in America. We see the dismantling of eugenics in the legislation of EAHCA, 
IDEA, and ADA. Yet, we see the legacy of eugenics in laws such as No Child Left Behind 
(NCLB) (2001) and Race to the Top (2009).

With these contradictory educational policies’ dueling ontologies, remnants of biological 
determinism is still thriving in schools. Stetsenko (2017) argues that words like “equality” have 
been almost completely removed from the lexicon of school policy makers. This is a shame, 
because we have been sorting and testing our children for years. This testing has not resulted in a 
more equitable education, rather, it has resulted in quite the opposite. The “achievement gap” 
still exists. If testing culture is viewed through a lens of eugenics, then the “achievement gap” 
will always exist. After all, these standardized tests were, by design, intended to sort students. As 
long as the culture of testing and sorting remains, so will the legacy of eugenics.

There has always been an ethos, a rational for how we teach and learn. Right now, our world 
is teetering on a precipice. Technology is rapidly changing. Economies are once again being 
remade. Climate change is threatening life on this planet. Predetermined and fixed ideas of 
intelligence will give us more of the same, more of the past. We do not need more of the past. If 
we are to survive, thrive, and evolve, we should loosen ourselves from the idea of a fixed 
trajectory of learning. We should open our minds to the infinite possibilities of each person and 
the creativity that lives within.

I told the stories of radioactive oatmeal, Freddie Boyce, and the Fernald School, and Bronson 
and Willowbrook in order with hope of illustrating what a slippery slope we traverse when we 
sort human beings. Laws have been established to protect civil rights of students (Brown v. 
Board of Ed. IDEA ADA), and however well intentioned, laws have also been enacted that give
merit to ideas of tracking and accountability (NCLB and Race to the top) of students. The former demands inclusion and equity, the latter strips it away. If our classrooms, schools, and teachers will bend town equity, the first step in dismantling, I believe, is to face our history head on.

Making our History Visible

As I walk among higher education institutions in New York, I see the ghosts of our past. The physical buildings that I work in were once places where atrocities of the eugenics movement took place. More often than not, students move in and out of these buildings with little mention of the past. The collective memory of events being erased and forgotten. I wish it wasn’t so.

The Willowbrook Campus was bought by City College and now is home to the College of Staten Island. While teaching at Brooklyn College, I led a class on special education, multilingual education, and culturally sustaining pedagogy for future general education teachers. We began the class with the history of special education and inclusion in the United States. As part of this investigation, we learned about Willowbrook. Invariably, every year, a few students had graduated from College of Staten Island. They looked over the pictures of Willowbrook in disbelief and horror. They had no idea. They wished they knew.

At Teachers College, Thorndike Hall sits prominently in the middle of the campus. In an ironic twist of fate, this hall currently houses Teacher’s College office of Disabilities Studies and office for Services for Deaf and Hard of Hearing. At a recent meeting, I asked students of disability studies at Teachers College if they knew who Thorndike was. They did not. I briefly told them some history and invited them to look up his writing. They said they wish they knew.

As I write this chapter, an article came out in the New York Times titled, “Lab Cuts Ties to Geneticist for Comment about Race” (Harmon, 2019). James D. Watson, of Watson and Crick double helix DNA fame, has been dismissed from Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory's on the basis of his racist remarks. The same Cold Spring Harbor that I would bring my eighth-grade students
to visit and run electrophoresis gels and DNA experiments. The same Cold Spring Harbor that was once the Eugenics Record Office.

If we are ever going to remake schools in the vein of equity, education requires a rejection of a one-size-fits-all approach and an embrace of ever-shifting, unbounded, and overlapping ideas about learning. Sometimes that means bending the structures of school and schooling to match each student’s unique bent. This is why I especially love working in the field of special education— it has the potential to be subversive, transformative, and healing as we deconstruct oppressive and marginalizing aspects of schooling and remake them as stakeholders want/need/think they should be.

Hegemony is one of those words that once you learn it, changes you. That is because once you become aware of hegemony you see it everywhere. Hegemony deals with systems of oppression that are so entrenched within structures of society that these systems are almost normalized. People cannot be reduced down to a stat or a number. No matter how test companies and administrations try to develop one, it is my deep-seated belief there is no one method for “effective” teaching. Teaching requires nuance and a compassion for others.

For now, it seems as though Thorndike and his contemporaries won because educators have not taken the time to adequately dismantle their policies. However, if when talking to other educators we keep talking about our history, if we keep exposing the past, we have a chance. There are more chapters to write. There are more stories to tell. Change is inevitable if we work for it.
A TRANSITION BETWEEN CHAPTERS: THE BOARDERLANDS

There is a space where pragmatism and critical consciousness collide. Sometimes, I think I live in this space, constantly wrestling with dismantling and exposing a hegemonic system while still working with in and benefiting from this system. I recall a conversation that I had with another educator when we were talking about the oppressive nature of testing and sorting. She said to me, “My students need to do well on these exams. My students need jobs.”

That to me is the difficultly— the conflict within— when it comes to critical pedagogy. I write this now finishing my dissertation for my PhD in Urban Education. I have benefited immensely from the system that I so openly criticize. There is immense privilege in this. I have job prospects. I have an education. Soon, I will have the highest degree in the land. The system has worked for me.

And so, I walk a tight rope with my students. I want to expose the hegemony, but at the same time, I want them to thrive. Being that I primarily work with students in teacher education, this thriving often means that they might also want to explore the borderlands between critical consciousness and pragmatism.

But at the forefront of exploring and exposing, teaching and learning through a critical lens, are issues of ontology. I am mindful that there are those who believe in the exams, the testing, the sorting. While I think of structures of sorting and testing in schools, I see the hegemony and the marginalization of so many people. I want to challenge the neoliberal, positivistic schooling empire, tear down the structures and remake it with equity in mind. However, I have found that there are others that see this structure and system of testing and sorting in education and want to use the structure, to climb upon it in order to reach the “American Dream”. For some of these people, playing by the rules of game, no matter who designed it, is a pathway to prosperity. Perhaps buying into a testing culture and playing by the rules is a form of hegemony, perhaps it
is not. It is difficult to be critical and not to judge. I am working on that. However, what I do know is that there are many different ontologies and I have learned that this is okay. There is no one universal “truth” and there is much to be learned from difference. There is a certain nuance learned by existing in the borderlands.

In this final chapter of my dissertation, Krystal, an educator pursuing her undergraduate degree in elementary education at Brooklyn College, shared with me some of her thoughts on being educated in k-12 schools as well as in higher educator institutions. What she said resonated with me as there was some overlap in our ontological perspectives on school and schooling. She spoke of top-down initiatives in many educational, from which she felt lacked student voice. Krystal thought deeply not just of her school work, but of students and her community, and she asked questions challenging the status quo. In some ways, I think I was drawn to her commentary because I saw parts of me in it.
CHAPTER 6. A SPACE TO LEARN

Amy Goods
CUNY Graduate Center

Krystal Baptiste
Brooklyn College

Abstract

This chapter begins with a metologue (Bateson, 1978) between a former student, Krystal, and me. Krystal is studying to be an elementary school teacher and hopes to teach in Brooklyn someday very soon. Krystal and I met in my Fall 2018 Environmental Science course at Brooklyn College. This metologue was initiated the January after the Fall semester and emerged from a conversation that Krystal and I had in class about what it means to have a space to learn.

A Space to Learn

Amy: In class last semester we talked about the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (Masson-Delmotte et. Al, 2018) report as a class. All throughout our discussion, I could hear you sighing. When the class began to do their group work, I wanted to check in with you to see if you were okay. We started to talk and you said a phrase, "space to learn.” I remember thinking at the time that the idea of "space to learn" was such an interesting one. I am wondering if you could say more about that?

---

4 This Chapter is cowritten by Amy Goods (CUNY Graduate Center) an Krystal Baptiste (Brooklyn Collge)
Krystal: Yes! Having a full-time job, and taking four classes is a lot in one semester. The reason I used the words “space to learn” is due to the amount of work that needs to be learned for each course. There is a difference between retaining information and learning for that moment. As an undergrad in the field of education, I should be preserving all the works given for my future teaching.

Amy: As a student, teacher, and mother of two toddlers, I totally get it. One of my graduate school classes had 1,000 pages of reading a week. At the time, the reading felt completely overwhelming. I did the reading, but I found that I did not have time to digest and really understand what I had read. However, in the following years, I found myself going back to some of the texts, rereading them, and using them in my work. In the end, I was grateful to be introduced to these texts because, though I could not see it at the time, I found them to be really useful in my work in the years to come. I think that the issue of depth and breadth is one that many teachers and students struggle with. And, I think that everyone deals with it in their own way, in their own time. I wonder, how can we make the space for individuals to have the time to reflect and internalize knowledge in their own way? Reflection is a deeply personal thing that is difficult to quantify. I wonder to what extent that the edTPA, grades, and the standardization of teaching has influenced how teachers and students reflect upon what they learned?

Krystal: I am happy you're able to relate. I believe this is why it is essential for teachers to have an open discussion with their students, as a class and individually. Creating such an atmosphere will bring forth communication and understanding of what to expect, and better preparation. Asking students what they hope to take away from a class will set the standards for both parties.
One way we can make reflecting better is by using an exit slip, which we had in your class. In the three to four years that I have been in college, last semester was the first time I learned about and participated in an exit slip. You allow your students to ask a question and reflected on today's lesson. Your class was one of my favorite courses. Why? Because you allow your students to express their feelings, and you took the time to listen and adjust your teaching accordingly. Something so simple can open the space for students to learn, retain, and reflect.

Before continuing, I want to explain my perspective of how I view “space to learn.” When I think of such, I think about time and how precious it is to have that little bit of time to process what's taking place. Not every student can think in that very moment. Some students need the space to feel. Which is why I believe that having space to learn is essential. The way we are learning to teach students as young as prek-12, adults need the same as well.

Amy: The concepts that you write about, remind me so much of constructivist educational theorists that I admire. Students, everyone really, need time to construct their own knowledge systems. Lev Vygotsky (1978) theorized about social constructivist learning, that is, learning through and building off of social interactions. John Dewey (1916/2004), writes about the importance of situating learning within meaningful, lived experiences. I see all these theories in what you wrote. When you talk about the need for students to have a space to feel, it makes me wonder that if when we feel something, there may be an element of remembering experiences, and connecting with them, and building new understandings off of them.

I feel as though it is difficult to talk about constructivism, the building of knowledge systems, without addressing the concept of passivity (Roth, 2007). Passivity, as I understand it, is the idea that you don’t know what you don’t know. Decontextualized learning tasks can seem meaningless because it is not built upon prior experience. But as one becomes aware of how to use what they
have learned in a meaningful way, new avenues of thinking and learning are potentially opened. All too often, there are assumptions about what is known by students. When students reflect, they have the space to make some of their own connections in ways that are meaningful for them. I suppose the exit ticket was intended as a space for reflection, but it was also a way for me to find out from you what the most salient parts of the lesson were. This gave me an idea as to what was piquing the class’s interest and adjust the lesson accordingly.

Passivity goes hand-in-hand with the idea of agency. When I think of agency, I think of being active and doing. If we think on something long enough, new connections may emerge. I think that through reflection, we sometimes are able to become aware of the unaware, make new connections, and these new connections are agentic because they are actively created and they are yours. When I say that they are yours, I mean that they are built on your unique experiences and because of this, these thoughts belong to you. When you share your thoughts, I am able to learn from your unique perspectives.

This is part of why I am so enjoying writing this metalogue with you. Your writings help me to expand my own thinking. When you write something, and send it to me, I read it almost immediately, but I don't always respond right away. Instead, I mull it over and think on it. I take time as a space to learn. I make connections with something that I have experienced in order to make meaning from what you said. I enjoy having the space to mull it over and feel. I come to different thoughts that way.

So much of what schooling has become is proving that we have learned instead of trusting that we are learning. There are timelines and standards, grades and deadlines. Meaningful learning doesn't always happen just because there is a deadline.

Your comments about expressing feelings remind me of an opinion piece in the New York Times that a friend of mine just sent me. It is about how students learn from people they love and
who love them (Brooks, 2019). It seems so obvious—yet I have found that it is not something that is often talked about in teacher preparation programs. So much changes from year to year in the teaching profession. Standards change, policies change, tests change, things like the edTPA change. But, if every day, a teacher walks into the classroom and acts with ethics of care for their students (Sockett, 1987), I really believe that they will do right by them no matter what new policy comes their way. In the same vein, if a teacher shows compassion for a student, then a student will often time respond by showing that same care. bell hooks wrote in Teaching to Transgress (1994), “As a classroom community, our capacity to generate excitement is deeply affected by our interest in one another, in hearing one another’s voices, in recognizing one another’s presence” (p. 8). Wouldn't it be wonderful if all teachers could create this space?

Krystal: I am happy that you mentioned “proving that we have learned instead of trusting that we are learning.” This is something that I am experiencing. I have to look within and believe in what I am studying and try to understand why I am studying these works.

Absolutely, creating an environment that is nurturing to students will result in the same in return; the energy that a teacher gives out to students will be reciprocated. Even the most troubled student looks for compassion. I believe that a teacher has to have a love for teaching students to start each day with a smile, even when the day before may have been rough. Creating such space not only helps students academically, but it also helps emotionally, mentally, and sometimes physically. The atmosphere of having this type of classroom feel will have students open to learning, and students will feel welcome within such space. Students yearn for teachers with excellent characteristics, who are compassionate, engaging, respectful, culturally sensitive, etc. Teachers of such keep their students in mind, and most important they think of ways of improving themselves and their students, no matter the changes that come their way. If every
teacher had such ethics not only will our students be better off, but we will be creating a more favorable environment for our community.

“Imagine if schools actually helped kids identify their strengths by exploring their talents from a young age and growing their skills over the twelve years instead of letting them follow the same routine like sheep and leaving them confused in their life after graduation.”
(Tallie Dar, 2018)

One day I came across this quote on social media, and it resonates within me. I saved it, and from time to time I will read it. I cannot help but wish that this were the path of the school system. Understanding that we all learn differently and have our own area of strengths. Why can't this be the type of space that is created in the DOE?

Amy: I love that you are talking about compassion. I believe that compassion is one of the most important aspects of teaching because if a teacher is coming from a place of compassion, they will always try to do right by their students. They may not always do right, but they will always be trying.

In a recent exchange between a few educators, a discussion emerged about what Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy (CSP) (Paris & Alim, 2017) looks like in a classroom. CSP is a term that I think people throw around without interrogating what it really means. All too often, when asked about CSP, teachers talk about integrating rap music or scientists and mathematicians from a certain culture, as if putting posters of people of color on the walls is going to somehow level the playing field. It is nice and a good first step, but not enough.

I think CSP is more like what you described in your responses. CSP “create[s] spaces for students and teachers to reject the assimilationist drive of hegemonic institutions, but they also center organic cultural and linguistic forms in inorganic spaces, linking the social world beyond
the school walls to the practices of teaching and learning, wherever they occur” (Paris & Alim, 2017 p. 167). I think we need to do more of this. I think we need to look critically at schools and ask ourselves if the spaces that we are creating are spaces where teaching and learning is happening in an equitable way. To do this, I think we need to radically listen to each other. We need to a react and change, learn and grow through our discussions. To me, this means acknowledging the fluid nature of culture and not being deterministic with the practices in our classroom.

Knowledge cannot be poured into a student as if they are an empty cup. Teaching is much more than bestowing facts and tidbits of information on students. It is getting to know them, caring for them, and responding to them. The teaching you describe, is dialectical, both the teacher and the student are learning from each other and taking cues from each other. This is the way I think it should be.

Krystal, I cannot thank you enough for agreeing to do this metalogue with me. At times, the field of education can feel pretty bleak, but this conversation gives me hope. I am supposed to end this dissertation with future implications for the work. You are the future. The way you think about teaching and learning in a critical way. The way you question. The way you want to treat your students. The way you wish to understand them, and teach them with compassion and care. This, you, are what I hope for the future of education. Thank you.
REFERENCES


Boissoneault, Lorraine. “A spoonful of sugar helps the radioactive oatmeal go down.” Smithsonian.com, Smithsonian Institution, 8 Mar. 2017,


Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 1990. 20 U.S.C 1401 et seq.


http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s11422-008-9109-x


https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-007-4360-1_8


