

At the Intersection of Selves and Subject

Exploring the Curricular Landscape of Identity

Ellyn Lyle (Ed.)



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At the Intersection of Selves and Subject

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At the Intersection of Selves and Subject

Exploring the Curricular Landscape of Identity

Edited by

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PAULINE SAMESHIMA

FOREWORD

Those Blooming Identities, Who Are We Waiting for?

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

Curriculum is “the site on which the generations struggle
to define themselves and the world ...

an extraordinarily complicated conversation”¹
*in a provocative weave of story and theory*²

*Our narratives speak to teaching and learning identities as lived curriculum.*³
Fostering “self-descriptions” is one way to conceptualize professional
*identity.*⁴

Intertextuality suggests an apparatus in which various signifying modalities
intersect and create a place where “enunciation and its denoted ‘object’
are never single, complete and identical to themselves, but always plural,
*shattered, capable of being tabulated.”*⁵

*A pink sunrise ... flowers in the sky*⁶
Ellyn⁷ looks longingly at the sandbox
where political and social grains construct selfhood
the dust blown effect⁸
conflates the *stern nun*’s muddlement

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

*The land [is my] teacher.*⁹
I modify existing landmarks, or create new landmarks
through my reconstruction of those initial landmark builds.
I do this by restorying experiences, telling the same story again
*but with significant hindsight knowledge and within my current context.*¹⁰

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Sister Clare, carrying a heavy projector between the desks, tripped over a stray little brown cardboard school case—all of which were supposed to be tightly pressed against the sides of our individual wooden desks.¹¹

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

*Thinking back through our mothers
and engaging with our identities in relation to the origin
are acts of love.
Love is a way to engage in this complicated conversation.
It is a means of running the course.¹²
A lost story of ancestry
that keeps reinventing itself
through dreams, blood stream, bones, water,¹³
multivocal nests of complicity and inheritance.¹⁴
Mom, I cannot endure this pain anymore. My brain nibbles my heart. I am
sorry.¹⁵*

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

*The past arrests me now.¹⁶
Through her journey of currere, [she] resolves
to make her own “ethical conviction” in engaging with herself.
It seems to be a “mode of subjectivation” ... that one freely relates to him- or
herself,
and further, to others and the world ... subjectivation of this kind [can be
seen as]
the “aesthetics of existence,” an ethical practice of the self.¹⁷
Nomad citizenship, which is akin to improvisational jazz,
where “coherence is generated internally and immanently,
from the bottom up, instead of being imposed in a top-down fashion.”¹⁸
Nomads are moved by the immanent and affective relations between individual
bodies and, thus, nomad citizenship is characterized by multiple and constantly
shifting local and global social affiliations and the proliferation of immanent
connections through porous borders and across difference.¹⁹
Nomad citizenship has led us to view becoming-citizen as an undetermined,
transformative process ... produced through reading, reading the world, and
reading self. ... Thus becoming-citizen involves ... “dis-identifications from
dominant models of subject-formation [which] can be productive and creative
events.”²⁰*

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

*Professional identity shapes ... teaching practices.*²¹

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

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

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

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

*“Dis-identification involves the loss of cherished habits of thought and representation, which can also produce fear, sense of insecurity and nostalgia.” There is a real danger of a retreat into nationalism and conservatism or for self-interested forms of inaction to take hold. Becomings can get botched. Nonetheless, there also remains the potential for dis-identification to produce new forms of nomad-citizenship exceeding the nation-state, which may enable new visions of cosmopolitan community vital to living in a shared global future.*²⁶

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

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

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

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

Sister Anne had a strap. I heard the strap was many times worse than the meter stick I experienced in Standard 2 (Grade 4). We wore white dresses with green trim in summer and dark pinafores over ironed shirts and ties in winter. When we got the

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stick, we would stand in a line and hold onto the bottom of our dresses as we bent over. I don't remember why I was in trouble, but I was in a line of girls. Forgetting my sewing kit and kneeling for a 45-minute sewing period was more painful than the stick.

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

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

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

*In this world where the self-evident is not so evident
there is a need for vulnerability.*³²

*There is an intuitive sense that while opening up our vulnerability,
we also bring strength to the work we do.*³³

*The meaning of phenomena comes together not when a person can distil
the thingness or the isness of thing, but meaning depends on the phenomena
working on, even shaping, the identity of the person.*³⁴

We do not know our own souls, let alone the souls of others ...

*There is a virgin forest in each;
a snowfield where even the print of birds' feet is unknown.*³⁵

*Identity is the ongoing intrapsychic phenomenology
of physiological self-organization,
and emotional wellness derived from self-organized harmony
in the smooth mitigation of*

*“ideal, dreaded, and realistic self-attributes”*³⁶

*The reflectant mirror; if at odds with activated unconscious self-schemas,
presses conflicted self-conscious self-appraisals and
compromises coherence and a sense of a stable self.*³⁷

*A strong sense of safety is particularly important
for identity exploration among students.*³⁸

Wiebe (Chapter 8), in writing about breaking from metanarratives and an already constructed social imaginary, suggests from the work of Pinar (2004) that it is “ourselves who need to break.” The contemporary teacher project then is to reaggregate and break from our histories of learning so that we might wake to the ways we can deviate from reproducing the system we wish to change.

What would it take to transform such a psychic milieu into one where subject-to-subject mutuality made recognition possible in a way to shift preoccupations with doing and being done to into enactments of being and being well together? Benjamin writes of a fundamental paradox:

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

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

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

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

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

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

NOTES

- ¹ Pinar et al. (1995, p. 848).
- ² Ellis and Bochner (2000, p. 713) in Lyle.
- ³ Badenhorst, Young, Xu, and McLeod, Materiality and Subjectivity.
- ⁴ Winslade (2002, p. 35) in Hill.
- ⁵ Kristeva (1984, pp. 59–60) in Abdul-Jabbar and Chopoidal.
- ⁶ Wiebe, Writing the Self through Haiku.
- ⁷ Lyle, Autoethnographic Approaches to an Identity Conscious Curriculum.
- ⁸ Aoki (1993, p. 260) in Lyle. Identity as effect.
- ⁹ Marom, Tensions and Intersection of Self and Subject.
- ¹⁰ Schlamb, On the Practice of Narrative Landmarking.
- ¹¹ See Badenhorst's (Ch. 4) narrative in Materiality and Subjectivity. Her experience of her desk and schooling in Johannesburg in the 1970s is familiar. I wonder if the familiarity is feigned by the knowledge of context for perhaps these memories are more universal than we acknowledge.
- ¹² Thomas, Wayfarers of the Inner Landscape.
- ¹³ Vaudrin-Charette, in Indigenizing Ivory Towers.
- ¹⁴ Jardine, A Hubris Hiding from its Nemesis.
- ¹⁵ Kim (2013, p. 1) in Jung.
- ¹⁶ Lee (participant) in Jung.
- ¹⁷ Rabinow (1997, p. xxxi) and Foucault (1983, p. 255) in Jung.
- ¹⁸ Holland (2011, p. 65) in Waterhouse and Masny.
- ¹⁹ Waterhouse and Masny, Rhizocurricular Process of Dis-Identification and Becoming Citizen.
- ²⁰ Braidotti (2010, p. 411) in Waterhouse and Masny.
- ²¹ Hill, Exploring the Curricular Possibilities of Pre-Service Teacher Professional Identity.
- ²² Miller (2008, p. 174) in Hill.
- ²³ Stonebanks referencing Said (1978), Multiculturalism and the Canadian Pre-Service Teacher.
- ²⁴ Stonebanks, Multiculturalism and the Canadian Pre-Service Teacher.
- ²⁵ Wetherell (1987, p. 50) in Jung.
- ²⁶ Waterhouse and Masny, Rhizocurricular Process of Dis-Identification and Becoming Citizen.
- ²⁷ Lyle, Autoethnographic Approaches to an Identity Conscious Curriculum.
- ²⁸ Goodson (2014, p. 4) in Thomas.
- ²⁹ Sameshima (2007, p. 288).
- ³⁰ Pinar (2009, p. 3) in Thomas/Jung.
- ³¹ Grumet (1978, p. 288).
- ³² Wiebe, Writing the Self through Haiku.
- ³³ Guiney Yallop and Binder, From the Edges of Lateness.
- ³⁴ Sean Wiebe, Writing the Self through Haiku.
- ³⁵ Woolf (2008, p. 104) in Thomas.
- ³⁶ Horowitz (2014, p. 56) in D'Amour and Markides.
- ³⁷ D'Amour and Markides, Identities of Exceptionality.
- ³⁸ Heffernan, Kaplan, Peterson, and Newton Jones, Integrating Identity Formation.
- ³⁹ Benjamin (1995, pp. 90–91) in D'Amour and Markides.
- ⁴⁰ Cho and Corkett, Presentosa Filigrana.
- ⁴¹ McGuire-Adams, Ng-A-Fook, Cheechoo, Vaudrin-Charette, and Brant, Indigenizing Ivory Towers.
- ⁴² Pinar (2009, p. 3) in Thomas.
- ⁴³ Doll and Trueit (2010, p. 175) in Thomas.
- ⁴⁴ Jardine, A Hubris Hiding from its Nemesis.
- ⁴⁵ Guiney Yallop and Binder, From the Edges of Lateness.

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ELLYN LYLE

1. AUTOETHNOGRAPHIC APPROACHES TO AN IDENTITY CONSCIOUS CURRICULUM

INITIAL CURIOSITY

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

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

Beginning to wake to the schooling machine, I eagerly approached university expecting a more liberating experience. Instead, I found an inherent distrust of the personal in favour the public without any consciousness of their connection

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(Nias, 1996). Nonetheless, I slogged through disembodied, decontextualized, dehumanized approaches to teaching. Once the degree was conferred, I pursued a career in education hopeful that I might teach differently.

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

AUTOETHNOGRAPHY

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

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

Like Stets and Burke (2012), I understand reflexivity as central to the process of negotiating selfhood, and selfhood as central to identity. Considered in the context of political and social constructions, we negotiate identity based on our interactions with society and its members. Fluid and dynamic, this process allows us to critique ourselves as we interact with others. As we move through life, we continually reconstruct our understandings of ourselves by reinterpreting our experiences from our new points of view (Bukor, 2011). Thus, identities can be understood as "fleeting, transitory phenomena created and re-created in response to relevant stimuli" (Jones, 2013, p. 762).

Epson (2013) reminds us that, as we negotiate our identities in response to our interactions, we construct identity in hindsight incorporating past and present understandings of self with our hopes for our future development. In this way,

individual identity is an expression of the meaning that each of us attaches to ourselves and a reflection of the meaning that others attach to us. We are therefore engaged in an ongoing struggle to create a coherent sense of self within this shifting context as we construct, repair, maintain, and review our identities. (p. 231)

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

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

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

Narrative as an analytic tool is generally understood in one of at least two ways: *narrative analysis* privileges the storyteller and focuses on the function of the narrative; *narratives-under-analysis* privilege the analyst and focus on identifying patterns of perceptions, beliefs, and actions and then connects them to cultural norms and anomalies (Bochner & Riggs, 2014; Green, Skukauskaite, & Baker, 2016). In identity-based inquiries, autoethnography blurs the boundary between *storytelling* and *storyhearing* (Huang, 2015; Maguire, 2006). The blurring is, in part, because

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the writer and analyst are often one in the same and, in part, because “readers *think with a story* from within the framework of their own lives” (Bochner & Ellis, 2016, p. 219). As we think with the stories we encounter, we continually amend our understandings in concert with renegotiating identity.

IDENTITY

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

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

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

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

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

Curricular Possibilities

Recognizing the humanness in teaching and learning and dedicating ourselves to its place in the curriculum “[disturbs] the landscape that privileges curriculum-as-plan”