Forum

Moving, Feeling, Desiring, Teaching

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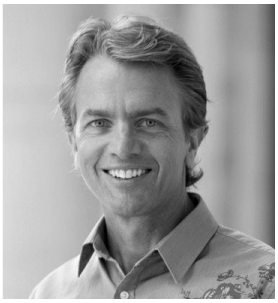

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In this set of essays, the authors argue for the importance of affect and emotion in literacy education, teacher education, and classroom life. In the introduction, Boldt describes the authors' shared belief in learning as happening within a landscape of relationships and emergent life in classrooms and beyond. The introduction makes clear that while the authors are writing from different intellectual traditions, they share a sense of anger about the fetishization of standardization, testing, and methods at the expense of ambiguity, improvisation, and unexpected, disruptive, and enlivening classroom relationships. In the first essay, Lewis demonstrates how emotion is regulated in a secondary English classroom and yet can never be fully regulated, giving rise to discomfort and to unexpected transformations of signs. In the second essay, Leander argues for a more emergent vision of lesson planning that begins with the body and its expression of energies and potentials in the present. In the final essay, Boldt urges that teachers be provided with opportunities to openly examine their negative emotional responses—including anxiety and, at times, aggression—to mismatches between children and what is required in a high-stakes environment. Throughout the essays, the authors enact rather than describe a Deleuzo-Guattarian perspective, laying their differences and their shared commitments side-by-side in the hope of creating for themselves and their readers new sets of relations and possibilities and, with those, the condition of potential for imagination and desire.

Introduction: Moving, Feeling, Desiring, Teaching

Gail Boldt

In an essay written shortly before her death, the French social theorist and early childhood researcher Liane Mozère (2014) joined a reflection on her long friendship with Félix Guattari and Gilles Deleuze with thoughts about teaching and learning in classrooms. For Mozère, because learning always addresses desire, it does not have to do with what happens when children master the official curriculum; rather, learning happens in moments that leak through curriculum when the children are able to snatch something that empowers their own "forces of life" (Mozère, 2014, p. 102). Although these are not the learning moments envisioned in planned curriculum, they are nevertheless intimately connected to the immediacy and the context of the classroom. Mozère compares this immediacy to learning to swim, when the swimmer is able to abandon what she knows about movement on land. The more the swimmer is able to immerse herself in the specificity of being in the water, the more she is able to increase the power of her actions. For Mozère, the ability to increase the power and intensity of our actions—always actions that speak to and from desire—is learning. This learning happens in classrooms all the time, just as it happens in every space of human occupation, and the curriculum may be part of what sets the stage for this learning, or it may interfere with the learning, or it may be irrelevant. But always part of the landscape of our learning, even if not obviously present, are others. "Private affairs merge with immediate, social and political issues. . . . We are always with others, even if this is not recognized" (Mozère, 2014, p. 103, citing Deleuze, 1990.)

For Mozère (2014), relationships are not themselves learning, but rather bring things to us that "read[y] us for illuminations and intensities of experience" (p. 100). Mozère describes her friendship with Guattari and Deleuze as an "aquarium" in which "words floated around" and a "jungle" in which "paths were discovered (p. 100)." She names the feeling of their being together—sharing meals, rowing on ponds, listening to music, playing cards, and talking—as something important that was always coming toward her, or in other words, as creating the conditions of potential which ignited desire and set the unique trajectories of learning into motion for each of them. "If it was not a teaching, or a learning pattern," Mozère says, "then it was obviously about another way of being in politics, and that is, in life" (p. 101).

Writing this shared essay on affect, emotion, and movement gave us—the three authors—a renewed condition of potential for imagination and desire. We have been friends for many years, and the vagaries of our lives bring us into and out of collaboration. To borrow from Mozère, even when it is not obvious or immediately recognized, we are deeply ingrained in one another's landscapes of affect, learning, and teaching. Importantly, however, our collaboration does not give rise to a single program or road map, nor even to a single focus. Looking across these three essays, readers will find that we view these topics through different theoretical lenses, which lead to differences in the ways we think about affect (the

registration on the body of being affected by something, whether consciously or unconsciously) and emotion (the meaning we attribute to affect). These are differences we consider felicitous. As Mozère describes, while learning is always done in the landscape of others, it is also singular in that we each uniquely articulate learning through our own experiences and commitments. We each must answer to our own desire. Rather than imagining that we best serve ourselves or our readers by articulating a unified version of what a focus on affect and emotion might mean for literacy education, teacher education, or classroom life, we draw from the Deleuzo-Guattarian perspective that laying our differences side-by-side creates a new set of relations and possibilities. This has certainly been our experience of collaboration over many years.

And yet, there are commonalities in our work. We share the belief that, as teachers, it is vitally important that we recognize what is perhaps the greatest resource of teaching—that things rarely go as planned. Refusing, as Kevin describes, to "evacuat[e] classrooms as places where life happens as a site of multiple possibilities," we are all passionately committed to the simple fact that it is in that very happening of life that learning, as Mozère defines it, sometimes happens. We believe in the life-giving potential of allowing ourselves to be disrupted and moved into uncertainty by the intensities of the children/youth/teacher education students in front of us. And, we are all angry about the ongoing attack on teachers and students and the fetishization of standardization, testing, and methods at the expense of ambiguity, improvisation, and enlivening classroom relationships.

We hope that across both our differences in foci and our shared sources of passion, readers will find something that ignites their own conditions of possibility. We cannot tell our colleagues—teachers and teacher educators—what will bring life to their practices. We can only testify that relationships matter, that life matters, and that our teaching must speak to our desire and must respect and be responsive to the power of our students' desires.

Essay 1: Mobilizing Emotion in Secondary English

Cynthia Lewis

I will discuss two ways of theorizing emotion that should have implications for secondary English teacher education: (1) emotion as regulated and (2) emotion as mediated action. Regulation and action cannot be separated in practice, of course, since regulation requires action, but I separate them here in order to consider some ways that emotion functions in school and what this might mean for teachers and teacher educators. This essay assumes that central to the subject of *English* is the meaning-making work of interpreting and transforming signs. But signs are comprised of more than the literary and nonfiction texts in English classrooms. Signs also include the constructs—such as race and gender—that mediate *life* in the classroom, including interactional dynamics, embodied meanings, and textual practices.

Emotion as Regulated

School is an institution in which some emotions (e.g., empathy or enthusiasm) are viewed as acceptable whereas other emotions (e.g., anger) are not. In this sense, emotion in school, as Eagleton (1985–1986) argued decades ago, is under surveillance, with texts as "moral technologies" (p. 97) meant to evoke in students the correct, desirable emotions that serve as a sign of refinement and culture. Given that one historical function of schooling has been to produce particular kinds of citizens—with emotional dispositions as part and parcel—education requires acceptable ways of "doing emotion" (Micceche, 2004).

A colleague and I (Lewis & Tierney, 2011, 2013) began to theorize emotion in particular ways when we saw how it was mobilized in a diverse classroom that focused on documentary film analysis and production. The kind of person the teacher sought to produce was one who was passionate about social critique. She wanted her students to know their voices mattered, and making documentary films was a way to meet the English standards while at the same time using their voices and artistic expression to potentially create change.

In social spaces, signs are mediated by particular emotions and desires, as in this excerpt of the teacher speaking to her students on behalf of filmmakers:

> We [filmmakers] want everybody to see this movie and feel what we feel and to get angry, to get upset, and to get depressed. And then, to maybe do something. . . . Why are you making the film you are gonna make? Is there some voice that you have? Is there some teaching you can do? Is there some power you can take?

The teacher, here, has foregrounded particular signs (films related to community activism) rather than others, sending a message to students about the kind of meaning-making she values.

Yet, as Ellsworth (2005) argues, media texts set "representations into motion across emergent contexts and into event potentials," resulting in "new alignments" and "unexpected intensities" (p. 127). Throughout the year, as students took up the expectation to engage passionately with ideas and communities in making documentaries, "unexpected intensities," including anger, occasionally surfaced when students talked about race and gender, as they often did in this classroom. Boler (1999) addresses this issue, encouraging educators to understand that anger may be tied up with the fear of loss, such as the possibility of losing personal or cultural identities.

My point is that no matter the nature of the class—in this case a class that fully engaged students in passionate examination of complex identities, communities, and ideas—particular dispositions and attendant emotions will be promoted over others (Thein, Sloan, & Guise, in press). In this class, passion was required by the ethos of the class, but it was not expected to reach the intensity of anger. Anger, it was understood, should be channeled into ideas and action. But as any savvy educator knows, the regulation of emotion doesn't always result in emotions that

can be regulated because (e)motion is often actively in motion. The next section develops this idea and its implications.

Emotion as Mediated Action

Drawing on theories and methods of mediated discourse—discourse in action—from the work of Scollon (2001) and Norris and Jones (2005), I view emotion as an *action* that involves social actors and mediating signs such as language, texts, bodies (gestures), objects, and space. In examining how emotion functioned in the classroom we studied, we used the term *mobilized* to refer to actions that involved movement. We sought to understand the geography of emotion through its space-time relations to other objects and texts in activity (Leander & Lovvorn, 2006). Particularly important is the concept of linkage across space-time scales that include the histories of participation within and outside the context where the mediated action occurs. This concept is important because it connects emotion to a linked chain of mediated actions that are important for teachers and researchers to consider.

Emotion can rarely be fully regulated by teachers, not only because students' fears and needs are material and embodied, but also because emotions are *not* anchored. Rather, emotions are mediated by objects, bodies, and signs, and circulate as an emotional economy that mobilizes alliances and differences (Ahmed, 2004). For example, a visiting photographer showed the class a photograph he had taken of a White couple standing in front of their small-town home beside a Black lawn jockey, which they had purchased because they felt this was a way of offering their adopted African American son an artifact with which to identify. One student, Vanessa, was angry that other students did not understand the demeaning history of lawn jockeys and, instead, were sympathetic with the parents. In this example of mobilized emotion, the text (photo and lawn jockey) became an "object of feeling" (Ahmed, 2004, p. 91). Emotion, then—Vanessa's anger and her classmates' responses—circulated in ways that produced identities and transformed signs (e.g., Vanessa was already seen as someone who was strident about race, and this action thickened her identity). However, the discussion about the lawn jockey was wide-ranging and shifting. Vanessa's anger was not the sole emotion circulating in the room, nor was it her only response to the photograph. Emotion was in motion throughout the discussion, at times mobilizing empathy toward the absent son or the parents, or mobilizing alliances and differences among the students. The discussion was characterized by what might have seemed an uncomfortable excess of emotion to an onlooker (say, a principal doing a performance evaluation), and yet was dialogic in ways that led to thoughtful transformations of signs—the photograph, language, and the sign of race.

Emotion and Teacher Education

How can these theories of emotion as regulation and mediated action be reconciled and leveraged for English teacher education? Regulation suggests stasis, whereas action involves movement. Understanding how schools regulate emotion and dispositions to produce conformity is one important aspect of the hidden cur-

riculum that is part of most teacher education programs. It is less typical, however, for teacher education programs to examine how progressive or critical pedagogies also regulate emotions, promoting those that are desired (e.g., passion) over others. Yet, doing so would most likely help future teachers think about the emotional dispositions that their pedagogies demand (Thein et al., in press).

In our research, we have found that when the circulation of emotion is over-regulated, opportunities for learning can be limited. Zembylas (2007) argues, "a new approach to passion in education is required for transformative politics to reach its potential" (p. 147). Current practices in teacher education run counter to this approach, however, in promoting a binary between rational discourse and emotion and by insisting on techniques or "best practices" at the expense of productive ambiguity. To the contrary, we have found that emotion and ambiguity leverage the academic practice of transforming texts and signs that is at the center of what we call learning in English/language arts.

Essay 2: Educational Design Is Out of Time

Kevin Leander

Perhaps nothing is more basic to teacher education programs and practices than lesson planning. Lesson planning often treats future classes as if they are scientific experiments of a particular schooled version of science and the "scientific method." Lesson plans list background ideas, contexts, objectives, procedures, materials, and assessment evidence (or tools), much like schooled laboratory write-ups. The rationalistic design process of creating the plan, enacting the plan, and assessing outcomes is seen as the hallmark of becoming prepared for the work of teaching as rational, scientific, measurable, and portable from one classroom to another, one abstract space to another. Development in teacher education moves from planning short things (a mini-lesson) to planning long things (a unit). The curriculum unit, a collection of thematically linked lesson plans, shows mastery over time. Yet, to transform the practice of education, the problem to consider is not only how much to plan and for whom, but also what our own planning regimes do to the quality of presence and experience in school.

The special violence of our current obsession with planning brings about three forms of disappearance in the drive to rationally control time: the disappearance of emergence, the disappearance of actual children in relationship, and the disappearance of affect as produced over, and often against, rationality. As Gail and I have written elsewhere (Leander & Boldt, 2013), informed by theorists such as Deleuze and Guattari (1987) and Massumi (2002), if we begin not with rational plans but with the body, we begin an expression of energies and potentials in the present. The quality of emergent time is one of fluidity, of surprise, of movements of the body punctuated by rest and focused reflection; this is the quality of the ebbs and flows of energy of the body in inter-action with other bodies. This is the quality of discussions that break into laughter or performances, of story readings that break into life story-tellings and paintings—anywhere there is a break that cannot be anticipated in a priori rationales for why we will spend an hour or day

in school. If the day's activity could readily be recorded for the student who was absent, then it's likely that nothing emergent happened.

And yet, non-emergence is the teacher consciousness we strive to produce in much of teacher formation. For example, in the *Understanding by Design* formulation of planning (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005), the description of "backward design" involves developing a Learning Plan (Stage 3) based on Desired Results (Stage 1) and Evidence (Stage 2). This appears to be educational planning as entrepreneurial product design. The questions we are to ask about "desired results" include issues of transfer, of meaning-making, of "essential questions," and of "knowledge and skill." Once these types of "desired results" and pieces of associated evidence for them are assembled, the design thinking goes, the path forward will become clear. The teacher plan must envision student subjects-as-products before engaging them.

Further, in such planning out of time, lesson plans are often written for unnamed "students." Teacher education programs then are pressed to address a problem that they have created: how to "adapt" or "adjust" a priori plans to children with different needs, cultures, races, or backgrounds. The disappearance of children in relationship with the teacher and with one another is, at its base, a fundamental cost of time control, in that the identification of children as distinct individual subjects, with capacities that are specified and arrayed, is seen as the front and back end of the plan.

A third disappearance—the disappearance of affect—is being approached from many different angles through an important body of work on affect and emotion beyond education and gradually growing within it (Gregg & Seigworth, 2010; Hollett & Ehret, 2014; Lemke, 2013). Deleuze and Guattari (1987) discuss principles of connection and heterogeneity among assemblages of different sorts, including signs ("assemblages of enunciation") and bodies of all types, including material bodies ("machinic bodies"). They also describe how "semiotic chains of every nature" are formed by connections among things of different phenomenological status (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 7). The gap between the discursive and the nondiscursive is bridged by force, which Deleuze describes as a productive movement toward the formation of new multiplicities (Massumi, 2002).

This vision of connection and heterogeneity places "materials" in a very different relation to bodies and to the emergent qualities of life than does a prescriptive version of "tools and materials" as used in most planning models. In the latter, the material world is imagined as being apart from the human world. What we need for the next activity can be fully known apart from that activity-in-process (e.g., if we know the desired outcomes, the tools also become obvious a priori). However, from a perspective on affect and emergence, humans are not merely "using" materials in mediated activity; rather, humans and materials enter into affective relationships and intensities, the nature of which is often not prescribed. Foldings of the human and non-human are constant and complicated; people "use" things and things "use" people, and these movements and relations can be rife with affective movements (e.g., Ehret & Hollett, 2013).

Of course, some degree of planning is necessary in teaching, or in knowing how to proceed as a new teacher with 30 children waiting for some action. Still,

how might we initiate a kind of tectonic shift to new movements of emergent bodies, engaging in affectively charged relationships? For children to learn from the actual *presence* of adults, new and experienced teachers alike need more than new designs, plans, or materials. Teachers need new ways of being in time with children. Where to look?

When I watch improvisational theater, I am astounded by how smart people are. I am astounded by the stories that are created in sketches, where pickles and garbage trucks and family feuds are thrown up in relation and emerge together. Last semester, I was a student in a short course in improvisation, and I was surprised at how hard it was for my overly planful consciousness. It was a tectonic shift toward learning-in-time, a shift that forced presence. In reflecting on that experience, I often thought about contrasting moments of my history as a student, in which I was mostly present outside of class and lost heart or body once class started. Could teacher education programs teach presence? Could we juxtapose a classic like *Free Play* (Nachmanovitch, 1991) with the required text on lesson or unit planning?

Improvisation has a social resonance with school in that no one is skillful at improvisation by her- or himself. Rather, the ontological condition of improvisation is a form of "being with." Being with, of course, also means being with others who are also emergent in these relations; if one begins a sketch with the ship captain, she or he may well turn out to be a shoe salesman by the end of the sketch. Whereas the soul of representational, rationalistic frameworks is typically *either/or,* the soul of improvisation is *and/and.* Do we want an education that responds to the emergence of ideas, of myriad different identities, of life itself? Perhaps the most common mindset and bodyset for improvisation is to act as if radically different realities that seem incommensurate are, in all possibility, filled with potential in their juxtaposition. Planning and unplanning . . . *and/and.* Education as a site for possibility, in a world of moving spaces.

Essay 3: Anxiety and Aggression in Difficult Times

Gail Boldt

In her psychoanalytic study of practices of education that act as defenses against anxiety, Deborah Britzman (2006) points to the adult's anxious drive to educate—to cure the child's ignorance and to adjust the child to reality—as the very thing that can shut down children's thinking. She suggests that in education, we often work to avoid the anxious feelings produced by children's desires to learn about things and in ways that are not part of the official curriculum. The sense of crisis that currently pervades many early childhood and elementary classrooms creates and exacerbates intense anxiety for teachers and frequently sets in motion changes that move children further from the questions and modes of learning that fuel their engagement (Boldt, 2006). Faced with potentially dire consequences for low test scores, administrators push standardized academic curriculum into primary grades and preschools and look for early identification of and intervention into any sign of difficulty or difference with the routines and expectations of an increasingly narrow and prescribed perspective on what it means to do school.

In our current research, Joe Valente and I are looking at the frustrations and anxieties of teachers working in inclusive preschools with children with identified disabilities (Boldt & Valente, 2014). At an inclusive preschool in Paris, the director described the decision to have the children change classrooms, peer groups, teachers, and activities several times during the day as a way to protect children whose disabilities might be challenging to others. The concern was that if they were together too long, adults and peers might begin to find these children unbearable. Neither the use of the term *unbearable* to talk about a child who is labeled as having a disability, nor the idea that it is the child who is burdened by the teacher's struggle with difference, is common in the discourses we usually hear. The more typical discourses are celebratory and romantic (e.g., "I love working with these special children") and simultaneously diagnostic and medicalized, carrying the assumption of necessary intervention and correction. These perspectives, however, pay little attention to the taxing nature of the work for teachers who are not in control of many of the demands that are made upon them for what they are supposed to turn the children into. When confronted with a child whose differences challenge what the teacher wants or needs from the child, it is easy to become frustrated with the child and imagine that it is the child who is the problem.

The Parisian director went on to argue that the difficulties, complexities, and indeed, the assumed differences exist not in the individuals involved but in the social-relational contexts that set up binary norms of success/failure. The director told us that what was essential for her was:

> a spontaneous adaptation and a spontaneous reflection about particularities thought of as problematic by most people but that are not necessarily more complicated than other problems not labeled as a disability. And for us disability is . . . a swerve, an interesting swerve. It necessarily . . . re-interrogates our values.

The director of this preschool believed that a great strength in her preschool was that the children were constantly different from what the teachers desired or the education system demanded. She told us that the value of difference is the potential emergence of new subjectivities that allow both the teachers and the children to become capable of doing or thinking something different than they could before, which she believed to be as valuable as any preexisting standard or curricular goal. In other words, the limitations that would be read as a lack or deficit in the children if a set of standards were given the final word are instead understood as the limitations of the standards—be they the teachers' standards or those of the system.

The fundamental questions raised by a child who is not able to live up to the standards of a given teacher or high-stakes system of accountability can be painful to face. What are the meanings and potentials of the life of a child in a classroom who has been deemed a potential failure, who is a threat to the teacher's positive evaluation and even livelihood? When either teachers or children are assaulted by standards that position them as failures, psychoanalytically we might call this

aggression *counter-transference.* Clinically, counter-transference occurs when a client's words or behavior arouse the therapist's feelings of anxiety and urgency and can lead the therapist to abandon the effort to understand the client on her or his own terms, instead reading the client through the terms that are most familiar, comfortable, or compelling for the therapist's own desires and needs. Psychoanalytic therapists train to work productively with counter-transference, to recognize when it is happening, and to understand the client better from it, so they do not enact their anxieties and aggressions on the client.

Cynical, self-interested economic and political forces at work in education today institutionalize aggression against teachers and children. They make teaching a profession in which anxiety competes with and often defeats the pleasures and challenges of creating life-giving communities with our students. In turn, as teachers we are not trained to be aware of, interrogate, and then work productively with our anxieties, including our sense of urgency that we must intervene and "fix" children.

How do we, as teachers, remain open and attentive to the children whose learning needs are different from that which is pressed upon us either by the policies of our districts and states or by our own desires to produce certain kinds of students and not others? In the grips of these anxieties, the common defense is to transfer difference, often construed as failure or resistance, out of the context and relationship and into the other, the child, where it cannot implicate us. When asked how they dealt with the temptations to take their frustrations and anxieties out on the children, the Parisian preschool teachers reported that they simply say to their colleagues, "I need a break from this. Can you take over?" The school was structured to allow for this kind of teacher movement. In weekly staff meetings, teachers and administrators deliberately worked to develop the trust and professional respect that allowed them to talk openly about and learn from their bad classroom moments.

To escape the repetitive impasses that can be so deeply in play when we imagine that disability and difference lie in the child rather than in contexts and relationships, we need to attend to our anxieties. Our negative affective responses to children we experience as challenging are largely out of our control, largely beyond the reach of our political convictions, and can be contagious. We need opportunities and structures that allow us to actively think about and make a resource out of the knowledge that can be gained from recognizing and working with our counter-transferences to the children whose differences are difficult to reconcile with our contemporary educational regimes. While this clearly will not solve the impossible problem posed by the child who cannot or will not produce the test results that are demanded, it may give us a chance to think about how to be a teacher in a relationship with the child who is in front of us.

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