e-voking curriculum: from the heart we are moved

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I don’t invent things. I’ve become braver, thinking of my journey into the self like climbing down a well without a rope.
—Natahsa, Sajé

Last night I received an e-vite, an online invitation. Hesitating just long enough not to delete what I first thought was spam, I suddenly realized that I was being invited to a party. My first e-vite was not without reflection. Why had I not been in-vited? What is being lost if the e-vite inevitably(?) overtakes the in-vite as the preferred way to send out the call to friends to come and celebrate the holiday cheer? Will on-line dancing be permitted?

What is the relationship of ‘e’ to ‘i’?

Here at e.i. (i.e. Educational Insights) the letters ‘e’ and ‘i’ take on a special significance. Yes, we are an e-journal that is partly an e-zine. Yet, our space is located somewhere within the inter-net and we hope, with our offerings, to inspire in-sights. With this issue, e-voking curriculum, somewhere in the space between ‘e’ and ‘i,’ we, together, are e-vited (and in-vited) to be e-voked (and in-voked) to think anew about this messy term, curriculum.

What does it mean within our seeking to name curriculum to be e-voked rather than in-voked? Both concepts stem from the Latin, vocare, meaning “to call or summon,” as if suggesting that possibilities do exist that can stir us from the quotidian and somehow move us and make action our being. This root is common throughout the European languages. We see it most visibly in the Latin, hence, “vocal,” “voice,” and “vocation,” which signifies someone’s calling in life.

To be in-voked, not unlike being e-voked, also stems from vocare. If we
combine vocare with the prefix “in-,” we get “invocare,” meaning to call in. As well, the prefix “in-“ can mean over or upon. This gives us “invocatio,” which can mean either to call in or to call upon. This gives us our modern “invocation.” The ‘in’ when combined with vocare connotes our need of something more than ourselves. When in-voking, we appeal to external power, to a source that does not emanate from within. The slippery ‘e’ when combined with vocare means to call out or to call forth. This gives us our modern English “evocation,” with the technical/magical meaning of to call into manifestation, often connoting a calling forth that is more akin to the human–world of emotions and feelings, for these are what we most manifest.

In an increasingly techno–world which so often separates head from heart, mind from feeling, I savor the possibility of pausing momentarily, within this e-space, with an e-vocation. Could there be something within the e-pages of Educational Insights that is not just in-sightful (and, hopefully, e-vocative) but also e-motional? And here, I draw your attention to the “motion” of e-motional—moving from here to there, moving out and perhaps in again. From the heart we can be moved.

Forever (dis)inclined to Cartesian certainty, it seems that in education, we, as educators, continue to struggle against/have not been able to resist disembodied notions of mind and heart, still thinking of the mind and the heart as separate objectifying receptacles for receiving sensory experience. Perhaps an example from the classroom can illustrate how emotion may become lost through objectification. Like most teachers, I often dutifully design a curriculum lesson, mostly unaware of the subject/object duality that I continue to create by my Taylor-inspired desire to define objectives before entering the classroom. The difficulty is exactly with having “ends” in themselves—ends apart from students. To set ends down and call it curriculum “objectifies” anything that may have been revealed, and, alas, once the subject/object duality constrains curriculum, there is but slight possibility of “anything” being e-voked.

Chuang Tzu first expresses and protests this idea of “objectification” via pursuit: because the philosopher aims at achieving “the good” as object, he engages in a self-conscious and deliberate campaign to “do his duty” in the belief that this is right and therefore productive of happiness. He sees “happiness” and “the good” as “something to be attained,” and thus he places them outside him in the world of objects. In so doing, he becomes involved in a division from which there is no escape: between the present, in which he is not yet in possession of what he seeks, and the future in which he thinks he will have what he desires (Merton, 1988).

The whole concept of happiness and unhappiness, or for curriculum, that which is known or unknown, is drawn from a conceptual world that Chuang Tzu decries where subjects dominate objects. The more we seek
what can be known outside oneself as something to be acquired, the more we are faced with the necessity of discussing, studying, understanding, and analyzing the nature of what can be known, in other words, attaining knowledge by special, virtuous technique—method. If technique increases in value enough that knowledge is perceived as that which can only be obtained via specialized methods, delivered by others, the more we become involved in abstractions. And, the more we dwell in abstraction, the less relevant knowledge becomes to our pursuit. Finally, as it becomes less relevant, our hope of meaningful knowledge recedes further into the distance of abstraction, futurity, and un-attainability.

Whether avoiding obstacles or racing to a finish line, Aoki (1991) warns us not to think of curriculum as only movements forward. With educational buzzwords like economic progress, technological advancement, and future planning, how well, I wonder, have we heeded Aoki? Educational mission statements around the land continue to assert that education is future oriented, that “good education” advances the course, the currere. Have we, in our zeal for Olympian-driven metaphors, mistaken Pinar’s and Grumet’s original intent? We ought not, in my mind, limit the letter ‘e’ to a future-oriented technological signification, conceiving the future as an extension of the present—in capable of imagining curriculum as anything more than the mere solution or outcome of our present desire. Perhaps instead of thinking of curriculum as moving around a course—the image of an athlete running round the four hundred meter track comes to mind, as well as the obstacles that one might face with a putter and golf ball—we might instead reflect on the movement inherent in e-motion.

From the heart, we are moved.

What dangers lurk, I wonder, if we, as a society, as educators, limit the letter ‘e’ to a future-oriented technological signification, conceiving the future as an extension of the present? Are we becoming incapable of imagining curriculum as anything more than the mere solution or outcome of our present desire and limited projections into a world that is as yet unfolding within our presence? This past spring, in a poem I wrote for poet Carl Leggo, I question that very hollowness that lies within the pursuit of “knowledge,” with a hope to e-voke e-motions that are perhaps less “preoccupied” with numbers and future calculations.

The numbers I remember

My dad said
7 is God’s number
that 40 is for
the end of the world
and the number of temptation
my other dad
wore the number 20
when playing baseball
(that’s .5 of temptation)
or half way to hell
on that baseball team
was a man who
wore number 69
my mom said
that was disgusting
my favorite number was 29
Ken Dryden wore that number
I was a goalie too
my friends liked the number 99
or the number 10
10 was the best
number in school
all the good boys
and girls got 10
10:30 in Newfoundland

Numbers don’t seem
so important now
being a good boy
even less so

The numbers ruling my life
now so much more strange

2 for the number of kids
1 dog (I meant 1 god)
7 for getting up
5 for going home
20 for a movie
200 for a ticket to watch hockey
2000 for season’s tickets
20000 for a down payment
2000000 for a mortgage
20000000 needed in an RRSP
200000000 the recommended liability
2000000000 my chances of catching SARS
20000000000 the amount the national debt increases every 20 minutes
200000000000 the planet’s sustainable population
2000000000000000000 Bill Gates

The problem with numbers
is no one knows
what they really mean
the denominators lie
underneath each number
veiled in the promise
of normalcy
ooof meaning
ooof standards
ooof grades
oooodf importance
oooodf of value

I think it’s silly
all these 0’s around
adding value
looking so much like o’s
the empty letter
the one we see right through
the bull’s eye for boys
sledding down hill
and the call of poets
with long memories.

Relevance, what matters to my living reality, brings me back to e-motion. In all of my movements from here to there, moving out and in, which ones matter? I know that my curricular motion to the future is but an illusion if understood as all that is “new and improved” (and available online). I am painfully aware that too often my motions in the present lack illumination, that my e-vocations to rationality have a kind of hollowness when I grasp uncritically for an empirical, fundamentalist assurance that comes from I know not where. So, in listening to Aoki, I seek to remember the richness of dwelling in-between, noting that the motion of e-motion is often in-ward, in-voked, ‘e’ and ‘i’ not ‘e’ or ‘i.’

Caputo, in On Religion, appears to understand how to dwell in the space between ‘e’ and ‘i.’ He writes: “The love of God is my north star, but it only provides me with a starting point, not a finish, a first word, not a last. Everything depends on the follow through” (Caputo, 2001). Caputo is hesitant. What interests me is why he seems to be holding something back; he fails to portray assurance—that hollow e-vocation to rationality. He writes to rewrite and to consider again other possibilities. For him, there is always only the beginning. The plot does not move on, only it moves:

“Faith is always—and this is its condition—faith without faith, faith that needs to be sustained from moment to moment, from decision to decision, by the renewal, reinvention, and repetition of faith.
which is—if I may say so continually exposed to discontinuity. Faith is always inhabited by unfaith, which is why the prayer in the New Testament makes such perfect sense, “Lord, I do believe, help my unbelief “ (Mark 9:24). For my faith cannot be insulated from unbelief; it is co-constituted by unbelief, which is why faith is faith and not knowledge. For I do not know what I love when I love my God. Not that I do not love God, for that is not a matter of knowing, but that I am always asking who or what the God that I love is.”

Because we do not know, we are, in other words, to be in the process of answering, to be in life-long pursuit of study because there is no “answer” as noun but only “to answer” as verb. I am “answering” the quest-ion of e-vocation. And the quest and the answering are the same. To be answering is to be on a quest, to be living by faith, to be e-voked by curriculum.

Having seen the third installation of The Matrix film series just last week, a faint realization begins to dawn. Meaning in time and space is not created by the accumulated achievements of our efforts. What we do is only meaningful within a whole that is our becoming within the larger mystery that is not yet known. Thus, even when curriculum is meaningful, it cannot be the ultimate source of meaning. We need to be reminded that time is not a medium at our disposal, but that we are subordinate to the co-evolving structures that emerge through time and change.

The action of in-voking meaning in curriculum is an imposing one because it reminds us of what we can usually forget—namely, that meaning reveals itself in the movements of the mysterious. Without spiritual flexibility and understanding of our complicity, there is no possibility of gaining the intellectual flexibility that opens possibility. Through e-vocation, we in-voke the possibility of change. What we admit when in-voking is that we are not complete, or in other words, in complete control—to in-voke is to ask for help. I contend that it is only when we sense the transcendent is it possible to ask about the meaning of curriculum. And even in a society that has largely lost that sense of what meaning is beyond immediate gratifications, we still possess the trace expectation that compels us to wonder about the whole.

I seek to remember that we are part of a cosmos whose cycles include and embrace our existence. Our mastery is a limited purview over the domains that the order of the cosmos permits. We are not absolute. We are not in charge. It is the rumble of time itself that eventually rolls over us, and if we want to live we must accommodate ourselves to its inexorable rhythm. We do not find, but are found. Stephen Goulding (1997) reminds us that history is what makes us. Without a transcendent meaning, the whole is empty. I hope that we can remain susceptible to
such an awe and understand the proportions of the cosmos
overshadowing us.

*Am I too naïve to hope that an educational “awe” is possible?*

My thoughts on in-voking seem to contradict my thoughts on being e-voked, and they would, if it were not for Aoki: I can hear his e-vocation, “Not *either/or* but *both/and*.” Somehow, like the medieval invocations of spirit, both the inward movement of e-voke and the external recognition of in-voke are needed. Frozen in time, the tension between ‘e’ and ‘i’ cannot unfold its creative dynamic. To be e-evoked, at the very least—despite single-minded curricular efforts to evacuate e-motional experience from learning—means that we cannot escape the certainty that we live in an experiential world. And, to in-voke, is an admittance that we live within the story of time and space that becomes meaningful by our recognition of a shared meaning external to ourselves. Leggo explains this as receiving the world with fresh perceptions and acute awareness through both felt and imagined understandings (Leggo, 2002).

This recognition is not unlike the conclusion Daley and I come to in our introduction to “Ways of Being In Research” (emphasis added), an earlier issue of *Educational Insights*. At that time we were e-voking words that in-couraged readers to be *in* the research and to be changed *by* it (Daley & Wiebe, 2002). We continue to hope that our culture might be enriched by cultivating in curriculum a more external “aesthetic sensibility” while simultaneously opening our hearts to an “embodied awareness” of wonderment and attunement (Garoian, 1999).

To use an analogy from the *Matrix*, to be e-voked is like the inner code that pervades in-voking—that is the dwelling between ‘e’ and ‘i.’

**I need to dance more often**

the master
the one I know
I need to think
I’m in control
this is what makes
me grow
to know that
maybe I can
let go of diaper days

I’m sure it is all
pretending anyway
I haven’t heard
any different
I haven’t been in the woods
that long
and the trees are already
burning

so quickly it changed
yesterday it mattered
why not today
is it that tenuous
am I that vulnerable
open to every whim
of emotion

can these days
be escaped
somehow loosed
from the wrists
let out the air
and rise up with the hiss
looking down
looking away

can I be so spent
so stuck
so recluse
and unwoven

References


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