Sounding Curriculum Voices

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Logopoeia: Sounding syncope, shadow, and spiritus in provoking curriculum
In the beginning was the Word.

Really?

In the beginning IS the word.

What is the sound of the word? What about images of sounds? What about our pre-linguistic, inchoate mutterings? Want to be reminded, you, who played with your own sounds in the dark of your cribs and caves?

[Reader makes early, a-linguistic sounds like a child exploring oral sound: Clicking, fricatives, rrrrrrr, growl, sigh, hmmmmm, whistle, birdsong, mmmmmmMMMMmmm, yodelish-two-note drop, howl, out-sighs, scream, drawing in of breath…intake…snort, laugh, cry, arghh! Sigh…ssssss, buzz, vzvzvzvzvzvz (like revving a car), blowing wind…love-sounds, gradually add interrogative sounds…Trumpet call. Sounding out: Da, pa, father, Ma…mum, mother,
Here, over here, in the curriculum. Bring your language; bring your mind, okay? Why? Because we still need to know more, know again. Curriculum is the place where we do educational housework in the cognitive and affective schema. You know, wash and wax ideas, scrub knowledge, sweep misunderstanding, vacuum logical fallacies, dust epistemologies. It’s gotta be done everyday, every lifetime, every generation.

Why? Because we need to learn more of our relationship of language to the earth. Why? Because we are in need of a better geology of thought…the planet is in trouble.

Yes, but we have to write essays. Good, those are the core samples we drill in the ore of human consciousness. Why? The intellect cries, and wants to know and wants to understand.

Metaphors, you want more metaphors? Fine, language is both vehicle and shelter. What are my intentions?

[Chuckle]: To move further up the evolutionary beach, I suppose.
Sometimes even to transcend the quotidian vicissitudes. Just for a rest, now and then, I like to hover and play and imagine, beyond my own, grounded existence. I am not just a “human-doing.” In human being, the outcomes are different.
Outcomes! Objectives? Intentions. What, here?
Yes, bring your conceptual lust, your intellectual desire, your knowing appetite. Bring your curiosities. Ask your questions.

Yes, I have a question: Why do you teach language arts?
[Sigh.] More metaphors, never enough metaphors: language is a temenos to hold difficult, beautiful, and transitory human thought, a crucible for knowledge, a double helix for human narrative. That very process of thinking makes light and offers guidance in the darkness. We keep losing our way.

Language can provide illumination sometimes, so we can play and learn and live our curriculum of being.

Okay, I get your intention to provoke curriculum. What dis/plays do you have? Sounds, images, words, artifacts.
Will there be activities?
Oh yes…there will be dancing, and there will, of course, be more questions, all kinds of questions.
What are we looking at?
Images. Poems. Texts. And what do you make of your seeing?
What do you hear? What melody do you listen for? What do you make of your hearing?

What do you smell and taste and touch, directly in your study of the literal world? That’s very dangerous you know. There will be questions. Really provoking questions.

You have to do exams…there is accountability you know. Standards. Outcomes, I said. There is a curriculum to cover. [Gesture of great quilt/blanket settling.]
But where does curriculum lie and why is it so cold that it needs to be covered? Can we provoke the curriculum lie?
We hope so.
How?

By questions. By sound. By image. By thoughtful language. By asking: what about the listening, what about the sound of questions, what about the music and rhythm, the melopoeia of curriculum in this complicated conversation that Pinar (2000: 30) urges globally and locally? What about the seeing, the images, the light, what about the phanopoeia? What about the language, the dance of the intellect, the heartful revelation-making, the soulful ancient apprehensive conceits, the logopoeia? What
about the spirit of us evident in artifacts of the imagination?

Something in us desires to know, desires syncope in the expected, desires shadow during daylight. Desires poeia as the world threatens to deconstruct itself. Desires inspiritus in the too-too solid (was that sullied) flesh? And we do seem to want uninterrupted clear breathing associated with inspiritus, but we lately seem to have difficulty breathing when it comes to curriculum.

We want to be able to breathe new oxygen into fresh practices of learning and teaching and we keep getting interrupted in that quest. Perhaps, though, the interruptions are the curriculum. And we know that interruptions provoke us. Syncope is a word Rebecca noticed, and brought to us, one that helps with understanding the nature of interruption.

Recently I had a loss of consciousness. Literally. Stumbled and galumphed my way out of a Christmas Eve, candlelight service and collapsed on the concrete steps outside. I seem to have had a transient cerebral anemia. What I heard while drifting out of consciousness was a choir, a flight of singing high mellifluous notes. Logically it was a sounding from inside the cathedral in Victoria. But really, I was unable to determine which side of the mortal wall from whence the music came. Like the ones Rebecca describes in her exploration of melopoeia and writing, and Wendy alludes to in the co-dwelling of shadow and light, that recent physical syncope caused in me a deep reconsideration of the curriculum of being. In the days following such synapses, I reach for poetics as a helpful frame for understanding, and so I return as I consider the topic of sounding the curriculum. I reach for a particular kind of poetics in this conversation with Rebecca and Wendy and with you, the reader.

That poetics is logopoeia, the managing force in my own inner education, I suppose. Logopoeia manages my senses and opens the questions that arise from the
fire of my memory, perception and imagination. As always when I live with language, I want a narrative history of the word, want to follow it home and looks through its windows to catch glimpses of its etymology, phonology, syntax, semantics, and pragmatics as I build a relationship with it. My old studies of Latin, German, and French fail me with the meaning of logopoeia because I did not study Greek...so what does logopoeia mean? As I reach for dictionaries, I think logo...logos, hmm...something to do with the word or logic. I remember long ago reading something in Aristotle about logo poeia...and poeia...might that be about making, in a poetics? Of course that will have to do with sound and sense and image if we are brave enough to explore poetics, and startle ourselves with unexpected images here, in poetics of curriculum. (Of course, I think immediately of Huebner, and Eisner, Grumet and Greene, and so many others). But I interrupt myself.

Back to the word: two parts logo(s) and poeia.

*Logo*—this is a loan word to form compounds, from Greek *logos*.

*Logos*—1. the rational principle that governs and develops the universe. 2. Theological—the divine word or reason incarnate. 3. derived from Greek word, saying, speech, discourse, thought, proportion, ratio, reckoning akin to speak.

Oh fine. Like Carl Sagan is credited with his alleged saying, if you want to bake an apple pie from scratch, first you have to create the universe. If you want to sound the curriculum, you have to return to the beginning and we know: in the beginning was the word! In the dictionary just before *logos*, I find logomachy—a dispute about or concerning words...”a contention or debate marked by the reckless or incorrect use of words.” A cautionary definition.

Oh fine. Now there is a new logo-ethic quality required and how can I say anything?

Silence. Thought between the words. Back to de/fining.

In the dictionary, right under logos, appears the word *logotherapy*. Is that what we do in curriculum studies? *Logotherapy* is a “form of psychotherapy that stresses the non-medical aspect, as by finding for a patient the meaning and aim of existence as a human being.” Hmm. Yes, but there is the *poeia* part...turn from page 788 to 1024 in Random House Dictionary [isn’t that a great name for a publisher of words and definitions?]. I cannot find that root word except indirectly through the listed words “poem” and “poesy” and “poet” derived from Greek “to make.” *Logopoeia*: the act of attempting to make a “rational principle that governs and develops the universe, to make a divine word or reason incarnate.”

Etymology helps: *logopoeiea* is a fundamental aspect of curriculum: imagining making a better word, a better image, sound and way of being, a better world, where all have a right to be present and heard and learn, to be embodied and to dwell. I have in my dictionary search returned to the primal and difficult beginnings of being and the construction of the world that each soul makes in its brief hour on the living planetary stage.
Syncope. After having worked for more than twenty-five years in curriculum, formally and informally, consciously and unconsciously, I still look for what is beautiful and true and just and meaningful, for what is possible in the human enterprise. I ask: what DO I want to provoke in curriculum? After all this time and study and reading, what IS there to SOUND, or shall we just have tea together and look at the spring blossoms and smile and nod and watch the horizon and sing quietly, draw freely, read randomly?

But something in me does want more, because as Wendy says there is a more-ness to the world.

As I write this, I remember a few days ago, a thirteen-year-old girl sat amid half a dozen women scholars at a pot-luck supper and just said out of the blue: “What is the point of everything? I mean you are born, you go to school, you get married and have kids, [I live in Alberta: those are the options] you get old, you die? Does it matter having lived? So to keep happy I keep busy and think of other unimportant things.”

Her simple sentences unnerved me. Obviously I have thought of this question many ways as I am sure we all have, but to have it stated so succinctly by someone so young and already uninterested in the curriculum of being was a shock, a syncope, a sudden noticing of her poor curriculum. I wanted to answer her questions, to share with her my life in poetics, phenomenology, hermeneutics, narrative, but I said nothing—while pondering deeply about how to connect through curriculum in community, through relationships. Questions of meaning sound and echo and reverberate into the conversations of curriculum. What sounds, what images, what language can now grow in the middle so that we can dwell together?

That is what we have to learn: how to dwell together. If we cannot find a way, then all is lost...politically, culturally, relationally, existentially. I do not know about you, but I feel urgency in finding some of those answers, futilely wanting others to give me texts to study that will help with all of this. Yet what I seek is within the texts of sound and image and language created between and among us that we must study together. And there, present within the Alberta curriculum guides of language arts, the objective of learning to dwell together is alluded to in principle: #1 and #5 General Outcomes English Language Arts state that “students will listen, speak, read, write, view, and represent to explore thoughts, ideas, feelings, and experiences and to respect, support, and collaborate with others.” (Italics added).

That means we cannot afford to spend our whole lives in the luxury of selfish indulgence, amusing ourselves like disillusioned thirteen-year-olds, thinking about other unimportant things in a refusal to know. Jung spoke of the evil of the refusal to know and its terrible cost, to individuals and to communities local and global. I agree with the Czech playwright, Vaclav Havel, once dissident and then president who, I think, prevented Czechoslovakia from following the blood-bath path of the old Yugoslavia. In an address in Washington, DC (February 21, 1990) he said: “If the hope of the world lies in human consciousness, then it is obvious that
intellectuals cannot avoid forever assuming their share of responsibility for the world and hiding their distaste for politics beneath an alleged need for independence” [Havel, 1997:19]. He inspires me when he says: “History has accelerated. I believe that, once again, it will be the human spirit that will notice this acceleration, give it a name, and transform those words into deeds.” Havel is passionate in his focus on human curriculum: “Without a global revolution in the sphere of human consciousness nothing will change for the better, ecologically, socially, demographically, politically, economically, multiculturally, ethically” (op.cit.). In this age of personal interests, I think we are in desperate need of a new **logopoeia** in all curricula, one where we put our heads together, use our languaging intellects, and make something good of our being here together.

Smith also speaks of the need of learning to live together in the house of being, which is language itself (Smith, 1983a, cited in Pinar et al. 1995: 421). Smith and Heidegger remind us that language is where we live. Their words perpetually provoke a mindfulness about how we talk about curriculum and how we “allow the voice of language itself to speak through us” (422) by speaking authentically. **There** is a challenge in this increased sophistication of bureaucracy and techno-speak and return to commodification of human resources.

But Aoki (1993a) calls our easy blame on bureaucracy into question. He “locates the problem of curriculum design in poetical, not bureaucratic, language.” He calls for a language to be “one that grows in the middle” (422). That call still holds.

But that middle is in jeopardy. If there are multiple political and economic syncopes in image, in sound, in work, in the poetics of curriculum, then the middle can be ellipsed, left out, and I do believe that continues to happen. The dark side of syncope is that it can invite erasure, as it has recently with boards and divisions focusing on grades and competitions. In the name of (what some might call) fascist efficiency of learning for high performance on standardized tests, there is deep threat to the fertile middle. If the middle, that process of sounding things out, of sounding the depths and visions, is the dwelling place in learning, then losing it is a serious matter. Instead, we want to provoke those quick political directive statements of outcomes and “cut to the chase” conceptions of evaluation, and like Aoki, call for more dwelling in the middle, through making images, and sounds, and words together with our embodied intellects. It may be in these syncopes of **melopoeia**, **phanopoeia**, and **logopoeia** that we really start to learn.

Syncope also may be a necessary obsession (Sullivan, 2001) where we notice our breath and talk, representation and word. That very concentration calls for moving breath from an unconscious to a conscious cognitive act. Thought—logos—does that. Likewise, I hope we can interrupt our automatic everyday talk and thought and work in curriculum to open awareness and responsibility about other ways of being and dwelling in curriculum.

We play and risk and talk about three ways of provoking curriculum, rooted in traditions of poetry from Aristotle to Ezra Pound to Luce-Kapler, Donawa, and voices and our students. We hope for synopes, shadows, and language to provoke...
and balance for more meaningful dwelling.

Canadian writer Timothy Findley (1990) inspires too toward a more meaningful dwelling:

I know that human imagination can save us: save the human race and save all the rest of what is alive and save this place—the earth—that is itself alive. Imagination is our greatest gift…if you can imagine harmony, you can achieve it. Harmony, after all, can be well defined as an absence of cruelty. If I am a hiding place for monsters—and I am—then I can also be a hiding place for harmony. At least, I can imagine such a thing. (300)

Whether or not you agree with Findley about the power of imagination and harmony, one of the tools I suggest we may use to understand and provoke curriculum and to labour in it, is the imaginative logopoeia, the poetics of our embodied intellects.

Stuck for answers in the sounding of the call for a poetics of language and intellect, along with melopoeia and phanopoeia, I want to ask each of you about your own poetics of curricula. Are there words for, do you have, a quantum, durable, light, and essential poetics of curriculum studies that nourishes life while it also teaches? Can we talk about such poetic in the earthy and practical patter of “common people”? Can we talk of books and bread, of syncopes and openings, of inner interruptions and outer margins at sites of contingency and possibility? Can we, as Antoinette Oberg often says, enlarge the boundaries of discourse about this?

Perhaps there will always be a requiem for lost curriculum. But along with logopoeia, please let Rebecca’s work with melopoeia and Wendy’s with phanopoeia also open ways for us to think and talk about other necessary things that have been shunted aside and now need to be sounded. Curriculum studies can be a provocative site for language and thought, music and voice, image and light to sound the human consciousness, so we are able to breathe, dwell, and even be inspired, amid the great difficulty of Being.

**I, Aging Curricular Icarus**

What, too near the sun, good friend?
Fingertips are not enough to hold melted wings
Insubstantial air of outcomes,
hard water of evaluations, no flight-thermal for wings.
What was it you were flying toward, good soul?
What now, as we plunge head-first into the sea of curriculum?
Well, unpack image and fantasize phanopoeia
fold sound, but mind the melopoeia or you might bump your head,
Search new horizon, new thresholds; imagine logopoeia.
I wonder, Jane Hirshfield, if hope is the hardest love we carry.
Regard nearby faces for other reflections of being:
sound the work of the heart,
sound the word of connection amid fear and syncope.
Against hermeneut’s geo-ethical narratives all unraveled,
sound an educaritas.[ii]
—Leah Fowler, February, 2003

**Resources**

Alberta Language Arts Curriculum Guides and Program of Studies, 2002.


transcendent: The collected essays of Dwayne. E. Huebner. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum. [I have cited Dwayne Huebner from course readings and discussions offered during a doctoral seminar he taught at the University of Victoria, summer, 1998. The 1999 date refers to the subsequent publication of the course readings by Lawrence Erlbaum.]


**About the Author:**
Leah Fowler, Ph. D., teaches undergraduate pre-service teachers and graduate students at The University of Lethbridge in Alberta. Her research and writing focuses on difficulty in teaching and narrative research methods in curriculum studies and language arts. Her new book (in review) is called *A Curriculum of Difficulty: Stories and Narrative Analysis in Educational Research*.

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[ii] Educaritas: a term I have coined to speak of a particular kind of love of, and in, education that has to do with care, an ethical stewardship, and responsible and imaginative attention to learning, to teaching, and to curriculum studies.